

CHAPTER VIII. In Which Michael Finsbury Enjoys a Holiday

Punctually at eight o'clock next morning the lawyer rattled (according to previous appointment) on the studio door. He found the artist sadly altered for the worse--bleached, bloodshot, and chalky--a man upon wires, the tail of his haggard eye still wandering to the closet. Nor was the professor of drawing less inclined to wonder at his friend. Michael was usually attired in the height of fashion, with a certain mercantile brilliancy best described perhaps as stylish; nor could anything be said against him, as a rule, but that he looked a trifle too like a wedding guest to be quite a gentleman. Today he had fallen altogether from these heights. He wore a flannel shirt of washed-out shepherd's tartan, and a suit of reddish tweeds, of the colour known to tailors as 'heather mixture'; his neckcloth was black, and tied loosely in a sailor's knot; a rusty ulster partly concealed these advantages; and his feet were shod with rough walking boots. His hat was an old soft felt, which he removed with a flourish as he entered.

'Here I am, William Dent!' he cried, and drawing from his pocket two little wisps of reddish hair, he held them to his cheeks like sidewhiskers and danced about the studio with the filmy graces of a ballet-girl.

Pitman laughed sadly. 'I should never have known you,' said he.

'Nor were you intended to,' returned Michael, replacing his false

whiskers in his pocket. 'Now we must overhaul you and your wardrobe, and disguise you up to the nines.'

'Disguise!' cried the artist. 'Must I indeed disguise myself. Has it come to that?'

'My dear creature,' returned his companion, 'disguise is the spice of life. What is life, passionately exclaimed a French philosopher, without the pleasures of disguise? I don't say it's always good taste, and I know it's unprofessional; but what's the odds, downhearted drawing-master? It has to be. We have to leave a false impression on the minds of many persons, and in particular on the mind of Mr Gideon Forsyth--the young gentleman I know by sight--if he should have the bad taste to be at home.'

'If he be at home?' faltered the artist. 'That would be the end of all.'

'Won't matter a d--,' returned Michael airily. 'Let me see your clothes, and I'll make a new man of you in a jiffy.'

In the bedroom, to which he was at once conducted, Michael examined Pitman's poor and scanty wardrobe with a humorous eye, picked out a short jacket of black alpaca, and presently added to that a pair of summer trousers which somehow took his fancy as incongruous. Then, with the garments in his hand, he scrutinized the artist closely.

'I don't like that clerical collar,' he remarked. 'Have you nothing else?'

The professor of drawing pondered for a moment, and then brightened; 'I have a pair of low-necked shirts,' he said, 'that I used to wear in Paris as a student. They are rather loud.'

'The very thing!' ejaculated Michael. 'You'll look perfectly beastly. Here are spats, too,' he continued, drawing forth a pair of those offensive little gaiters. 'Must have spats! And now you jump into these, and whistle a tune at the window for (say) three-quarters of an hour. After that you can rejoin me on the field of glory.'

So saying, Michael returned to the studio. It was the morning of the easterly gale; the wind blew shrilly among the statues in the garden, and drove the rain upon the skylight in the studio ceiling; and at about the same moment of the time when Morris attacked the hundredth version of his uncle's signature in Bloomsbury, Michael, in Chelsea, began to rip the wires out of the Broadwood grand.

Three-quarters of an hour later Pitman was admitted, to find the closet-door standing open, the closet untenanted, and the piano discreetly shut.

'It's a remarkably heavy instrument,' observed Michael, and turned to consider his friend's disguise. 'You must shave off that beard of

yours,' he said.

'My beard!' cried Pitman. 'I cannot shave my beard. I cannot tamper with my appearance--my principals would object. They hold very strong views as to the appearance of the professors--young ladies are considered so romantic. My beard was regarded as quite a feature when I went about the place. It was regarded,' said the artist, with rising colour, 'it was regarded as unbecoming.'

'You can let it grow again,' returned Michael, 'and then you'll be so precious ugly that they'll raise your salary.'

'But I don't want to be ugly,' cried the artist.

'Don't be an ass,' said Michael, who hated beards and was delighted to destroy one. 'Off with it like a man!'

'Of course, if you insist,' said Pitman; and then he sighed, fetched some hot water from the kitchen, and setting a glass upon his easel, first clipped his beard with scissors and then shaved his chin. He could not conceal from himself, as he regarded the result, that his last claims to manhood had been sacrificed, but Michael seemed delighted.

'A new man, I declare!' he cried. 'When I give you the windowglass spectacles I have in my pocket, you'll be the beau-ideal of a French commercial traveller.'

Pitman did not reply, but continued to gaze disconsolately on his image in the glass.

'Do you know,' asked Michael, 'what the Governor of South Carolina said to the Governor of North Carolina? "It's a long time between drinks," observed that powerful thinker; and if you will put your hand into the top left-hand pocket of my ulster, I have an impression you will find a flask of brandy. Thank you, Pitman,' he added, as he filled out a glass for each. 'Now you will give me news of this.'

The artist reached out his hand for the water-jug, but Michael arrested the movement.

'Not if you went upon your knees!' he cried. 'This is the finest liqueur brandy in Great Britain.'

Pitman put his lips to it, set it down again, and sighed.

'Well, I must say you're the poorest companion for a holiday!' cried Michael. 'If that's all you know of brandy, you shall have no more of it; and while I finish the flask, you may as well begin business. Come to think of it,' he broke off, 'I have made an abominable error: you should have ordered the cart before you were disguised. Why, Pitman, what the devil's the use of you? why couldn't you have reminded me of that?'

'I never even knew there was a cart to be ordered,' said the artist.

'But I can take off the disguise again,' he suggested eagerly.

'You would find it rather a bother to put on your beard,' observed the lawyer. 'No, it's a false step; the sort of thing that hangs people,' he continued, with eminent cheerfulness, as he sipped his brandy; 'and it can't be retraced now. Off to the mews with you, make all the arrangements; they're to take the piano from here, cart it to Victoria, and dispatch it thence by rail to Cannon Street, to lie till called for in the name of Fortune du Boisgobey.'

'Isn't that rather an awkward name?' pleaded Pitman.

'Awkward?' cried Michael scornfully. 'It would hang us both! Brown is both safer and easier to pronounce. Call it Brown.'

'I wish,' said Pitman, 'for my sake, I wish you wouldn't talk so much of hanging.'

'Talking about it's nothing, my boy!' returned Michael. 'But take your hat and be off, and mind and pay everything beforehand.'

Left to himself, the lawyer turned his attention for some time exclusively to the liqueur brandy, and his spirits, which had been pretty fair all morning, now prodigiously rose. He proceeded to adjust

his whiskers finally before the glass. 'Devilish rich,' he remarked, as he contemplated his reflection. 'I look like a purser's mate.' And at that moment the window-glass spectacles (which he had hitherto destined for Pitman) flashed into his mind; he put them on, and fell in love with the effect. 'Just what I required,' he said. 'I wonder what I look like now? A humorous novelist, I should think,' and he began to practise divers characters of walk, naming them to himself as--he proceeded. 'Walk of a humorous novelist--but that would require an umbrella. Walk of a purser's mate. Walk of an Australian colonist revisiting the scenes of childhood. Walk of Sepoy colonel, ditto, ditto. And in the midst of the Sepoy colonel (which was an excellent assumption, although inconsistent with the style of his make-up), his eye lighted on the piano. This instrument was made to lock both at the top and at the keyboard, but the key of the latter had been mislaid. Michael opened it and ran his fingers over the dumb keys. 'Fine instrument--full, rich tone,' he observed, and he drew in a seat.

When Mr Pitman returned to the studio, he was appalled to observe his guide, philosopher, and friend performing miracles of execution on the silent grand.

'Heaven help me!' thought the little man, 'I fear he has been drinking! Mr Finsbury,' he said aloud; and Michael, without rising, turned upon him a countenance somewhat flushed, encircled with the bush of the red whiskers, and bestridden by the spectacles. 'Capriccio in B-flat on the departure of a friend,' said he, continuing his noiseless evolutions.

Indignation awoke in the mind of Pitman. 'Those spectacles were to be mine,' he cried. 'They are an essential part of my disguise.'

'I am going to wear them myself,' replied Michael; and he added, with some show of truth, 'There would be a devil of a lot of suspicion aroused if we both wore spectacles.'

'O, well,' said the assenting Pitman, 'I rather counted on them; but of course, if you insist. And at any rate, here is the cart at the door.'

While the men were at work, Michael concealed himself in the closet among the debris of the barrel and the wires of the piano; and as soon as the coast was clear the pair sallied forth by the lane, jumped into a hansom in the King's Road, and were driven rapidly toward town. It was still cold and raw and boisterous; the rain beat strongly in their faces, but Michael refused to have the glass let down; he had now suddenly donned the character of cicerone, and pointed out and lucidly commented on the sights of London, as they drove. 'My dear fellow,' he said, 'you don't seem to know anything of your native city. Suppose we visited the Tower? No? Well, perhaps it's a trifle out of our way. But, anyway--Here, cabby, drive round by Trafalgar Square!' And on that historic battlefield he insisted on drawing up, while he criticized the statues and gave the artist many curious details (quite new to history) of the lives of the celebrated men they represented.

It would be difficult to express what Pitman suffered in the cab: cold, wet, terror in the capital degree, a grounded distrust of the commander under whom he served, a sense of imprudency in the matter of the low-necked shirt, a bitter sense of the decline and fall involved in the deprivation of his beard, all these were among the ingredients of the bowl. To reach the restaurant, for which they were deviously steering, was the first relief. To hear Michael bespeak a private room was a second and a still greater. Nor, as they mounted the stair under the guidance of an unintelligible alien, did he fail to note with gratitude the fewness of the persons present, or the still more cheering fact that the greater part of these were exiles from the land of France. It was thus a blessed thought that none of them would be connected with the Seminary; for even the French professor, though admittedly a Papist, he could scarce imagine frequenting so rakish an establishment.

The alien introduced them into a small bare room with a single table, a sofa, and a dwarfish fire; and Michael called promptly for more coals and a couple of brandies and sodas.

'O, no,' said Pitman, 'surely not--no more to drink.'

'I don't know what you would be at,' said Michael plaintively. 'It's positively necessary to do something; and one shouldn't smoke before meals I thought that was understood. You seem to have no idea of hygiene.' And he compared his watch with the clock upon the chimney-piece.

Pitman fell into bitter musing; here he was, ridiculously shorn, absurdly disguised, in the company of a drunken man in spectacles, and waiting for a champagne luncheon in a restaurant painfully foreign. What would his principals think, if they could see him? What if they knew his tragic and deceitful errand?

From these reflections he was aroused by the entrance of the alien with the brandies and sodas. Michael took one and bade the waiter pass the other to his friend.

Pitman waved it from him with his hand. 'Don't let me lose all self-respect,' he said.

'Anything to oblige a friend,' returned Michael. 'But I'm not going to drink alone. Here,' he added to the waiter, 'you take it.' And, then, touching glasses, 'The health of Mr Gideon Forsyth,' said he.

'Meestare Gidden Borsye,' replied the waiter, and he tossed off the liquor in four gulps.

'Have another?' said Michael, with undisguised interest. 'I never saw a man drink faster. It restores one's confidence in the human race.'

But the waiter excused himself politely, and, assisted by some one from without, began to bring in lunch.

Michael made an excellent meal, which he washed down with a bottle of Heidsieck's dry monopole. As for the artist, he was far too uneasy to eat, and his companion flatly refused to let him share in the champagne unless he did.

'One of us must stay sober,' remarked the lawyer, 'and I won't give you champagne on the strength of a leg of grouse. I have to be cautious,' he added confidentially. 'One drunken man, excellent business--two drunken men, all my eye.'

On the production of coffee and departure of the waiter, Michael might have been observed to make portentous efforts after gravity of mien. He looked his friend in the face (one eye perhaps a trifle off), and addressed him thickly but severely.

'Enough of this fooling,' was his not inappropriate exordium. 'To business. Mark me closely. I am an Australian. My name is John Dickson, though you mightn't think it from my unassuming appearance. You will be relieved to hear that I am rich, sir, very rich. You can't go into this sort of thing too thoroughly, Pitman; the whole secret is preparation, and I can get up my biography from the beginning, and I could tell it you now, only I have forgotten it.'

'Perhaps I'm stupid--' began Pitman.

'That's it!' cried Michael. 'Very stupid; but rich too--richer than I am. I thought you would enjoy it, Pitman, so I've arranged that you were to be literally wallowing in wealth. But then, on the other hand, you're only an American, and a maker of india-rubber overshoes at that. And the worst of it is--why should I conceal it from you?--the worst of it is that you're called Ezra Thomas. Now,' said Michael, with a really appalling seriousness of manner, 'tell me who we are.'

The unfortunate little man was cross-examined till he knew these facts by heart.

'There!' cried the lawyer. 'Our plans are laid. Thoroughly consistent--that's the great thing.'

'But I don't understand,' objected Pitman.

'O, you'll understand right enough when it comes to the point,' said Michael, rising.

'There doesn't seem any story to it,' said the artist.

'We can invent one as we go along,' returned the lawyer.

'But I can't invent,' protested Pitman. 'I never could invent in all my life.'

'You'll find you'll have to, my boy,' was Michael's easy comment, and he began calling for the waiter, with whom he at once resumed a sparkling conversation.

It was a downcast little man that followed him. 'Of course he is very clever, but can I trust him in such a state?' he asked himself. And when they were once more in a hansom, he took heart of grace.

'Don't you think,' he faltered, 'it would be wiser, considering all things, to put this business off?'

'Put off till tomorrow what can be done today?' cried Michael, with indignation. 'Never heard of such a thing! Cheer up, it's all right, go in and win--there's a lion-hearted Pitman!'

At Cannon Street they enquired for Mr Brown's piano, which had duly arrived, drove thence to a neighbouring mews, where they contracted for a cart, and while that was being got ready, took shelter in the harness-room beside the stove. Here the lawyer presently toppled against the wall and fell into a gentle slumber; so that Pitman found himself launched on his own resources in the midst of several staring loafers, such as love to spend unprofitable days about a stable. 'Rough day, sir,' observed one. 'Do you go far?'

'Yes, it's a--rather a rough day,' said the artist; and then, feeling that he must change the conversation, 'My friend is an Australian; he is

very impulsive,' he added.

'An Australian?' said another. 'I've a brother myself in Melbourne. Does your friend come from that way at all?'

'No, not exactly,' replied the artist, whose ideas of the geography of New Holland were a little scattered. 'He lives immensely far inland, and is very rich.'

The loafers gazed with great respect upon the slumbering colonist.

'Well,' remarked the second speaker, 'it's a mighty big place, is Australia. Do you come from thereaway too?'

'No, I do not,' said Pitman. 'I do not, and I don't want to,' he added irritably. And then, feeling some diversion needful, he fell upon Michael and shook him up.

'Hullo,' said the lawyer, 'what's wrong?'

'The cart is nearly ready,' said Pitman sternly. 'I will not allow you to sleep.'

'All right--no offence, old man,' replied Michael, yawning. 'A little sleep never did anybody any harm; I feel comparatively sober now. But what's all the hurry?' he added, looking round him glassily. 'I don't

see the cart, and I've forgotten where we left the piano.'

What more the lawyer might have said, in the confidence of the moment, is with Pitman a matter of tremulous conjecture to this day; but by the most blessed circumstance the cart was then announced, and Michael must bend the forces of his mind to the more difficult task of rising.

'Of course you'll drive,' he remarked to his companion, as he clambered on the vehicle.

'I drive!' cried Pitman. 'I never did such a thing in my life. I cannot drive.'

'Very well,' responded Michael with entire composure, 'neither can I see. But just as you like. Anything to oblige a friend.'

A glimpse of the ostler's darkening countenance decided Pitman. 'All right,' he said desperately, 'you drive. I'll tell you where to go.'

On Michael in the character of charioteer (since this is not intended to be a novel of adventure) it would be superfluous to dwell at length. Pitman, as he sat holding on and gasping counsels, sole witness of this singular feat, knew not whether most to admire the driver's valour or his undeserved good fortune. But the latter at least prevailed, the cart reached Cannon Street without disaster; and Mr Brown's piano was speedily and cleverly got on board.

'Well, sir,' said the leading porter, smiling as he mentally reckoned up a handful of loose silver, 'that's a mortal heavy piano.'

'It's the richness of the tone,' returned Michael, as he drove away.

It was but a little distance in the rain, which now fell thick and quiet, to the neighbourhood of Mr Gideon Forsyth's chambers in the Temple. There, in a deserted by-street, Michael drew up the horses and gave them in charge to a blighted shoe-black; and the pair descending from the cart, whereon they had figured so incongruously, set forth on foot for the decisive scene of their adventure. For the first time Michael displayed a shadow of uneasiness.

'Are my whiskers right?' he asked. 'It would be the devil and all if I was spotted.'

'They are perfectly in their place,' returned Pitman, with scant attention. 'But is my disguise equally effective? There is nothing more likely than that I should meet some of my patrons.'

'O, nobody could tell you without your beard,' said Michael. 'All you have to do is to remember to speak slow; you speak through your nose already.'

'I only hope the young man won't be at home,' sighed Pitman.

'And I only hope he'll be alone,' returned the lawyer. 'It will save a precious sight of manoeuvring.'

And sure enough, when they had knocked at the door, Gideon admitted them

in person to a room, warmed by a moderate fire, framed nearly to the roof in works connected with the bench of British Themis, and offering, except in one particular, eloquent testimony to the legal zeal of the proprietor. The one particular was the chimney-piece, which displayed a varied assortment of pipes, tobacco, cigar-boxes, and yellow-backed French novels.

'Mr Forsyth, I believe?' It was Michael who thus opened the engagement. 'We have come to trouble you with a piece of business. I fear it's scarcely professional--'

'I am afraid I ought to be instructed through a solicitor,' replied Gideon.

'Well, well, you shall name your own, and the whole affair can be put on a more regular footing tomorrow,' replied Michael, taking a chair and motioning Pitman to do the same. 'But you see we didn't know any solicitors; we did happen to know of you, and time presses.'

'May I enquire, gentlemen,' asked Gideon, 'to whom it was I am indebted

for a recommendation?'

'You may enquire,' returned the lawyer, with a foolish laugh; 'but I was invited not to tell you--till the thing was done.'

'My uncle, no doubt,' was the barrister's conclusion.

'My name is John Dickson,' continued Michael; 'a pretty well-known name in Ballarat; and my friend here is Mr Ezra Thomas, of the United States of America, a wealthy manufacturer of india-rubber overshoes.'

'Stop one moment till I make a note of that,' said Gideon; any one might have supposed he was an old practitioner.

'Perhaps you wouldn't mind my smoking a cigar?' asked Michael. He had pulled himself together for the entrance; now again there began to settle on his mind clouds of irresponsible humour and incipient slumber; and he hoped (as so many have hoped in the like case) that a cigar would clear him.

'Oh, certainly,' cried Gideon blandly. 'Try one of mine; I can confidently recommend them.' And he handed the box to his client.

'In case I don't make myself perfectly clear,' observed the Australian, 'it's perhaps best to tell you candidly that I've been lunching. It's a thing that may happen to any one.'

'O, certainly,' replied the affable barrister. 'But please be under no sense of hurry. I can give you,' he added, thoughtfully consulting his watch--'yes, I can give you the whole afternoon.'

'The business that brings me here,' resumed the Australian with gusto, 'is devilish delicate, I can tell you. My friend Mr Thomas, being an American of Portuguese extraction, unacquainted with our habits, and a wealthy manufacturer of Broadwood pianos--'

'Broadwood pianos?' cried Gideon, with some surprise. 'Dear me, do I understand Mr Thomas to be a member of the firm?'

'O, pirated Broadwoods,' returned Michael. 'My friend's the American Broadwood.'

'But I understood you to say,' objected Gideon, 'I certainly have it so in my notes--that your friend was a manufacturer of india--rubber overshoes.'

'I know it's confusing at first,' said the Australian, with a beaming smile. 'But he--in short, he combines the two professions. And many others besides--many, many, many others,' repeated Mr Dickson, with drunken solemnity. 'Mr Thomas's cotton-mills are one of the sights of Tallahassee; Mr Thomas's tobacco-mills are the pride of Richmond, Va.; in short, he's one of my oldest friends, Mr Forsyth, and I lay his case

before you with emotion.'

The barrister looked at Mr Thomas and was agreeably prepossessed by his open although nervous countenance, and the simplicity and timidity of his manner. 'What a people are these Americans!' he thought. 'Look at this nervous, weedy, simple little bird in a lownecked shirt, and think of him wielding and directing interests so extended and seemingly incongruous! 'But had we not better,' he observed aloud, 'had we not perhaps better approach the facts?'

'Man of business, I perceive, sir!' said the Australian. 'Let's approach the facts. It's a breach of promise case.'

The unhappy artist was so unprepared for this view of his position that he could scarce suppress a cry.

'Dear me,' said Gideon, 'they are apt to be very troublesome. Tell me everything about it,' he added kindly; 'if you require my assistance, conceal nothing.'

'You tell him,' said Michael, feeling, apparently, that he had done his share. 'My friend will tell you all about it,' he added to Gideon, with a yawn. 'Excuse my closing my eyes a moment; I've been sitting up with a sick friend.'

Pitman gazed blankly about the room; rage and despair seethed in his

innocent spirit; thoughts of flight, thoughts even of suicide, came and went before him; and still the barrister patiently waited, and still the artist groped in vain for any form of words, however insignificant.

'It's a breach of promise case,' he said at last, in a low voice. 'I--I am threatened with a breach of promise case.' Here, in desperate quest of inspiration, he made a clutch at his beard; his fingers closed upon the unfamiliar smoothness of a shaven chin; and with that, hope and courage (if such expressions could ever have been appropriate in the case of Pitman) conjointly fled. He shook Michael roughly. 'Wake up!' he cried, with genuine irritation in his tones. 'I cannot do it, and you know I can't.'

'You must excuse my friend,' said Michael; 'he's no hand as a narrator of stirring incident. The case is simple,' he went on. 'My friend is a man of very strong passions, and accustomed to a simple, patriarchal style of life. You see the thing from here: unfortunate visit to Europe, followed by unfortunate acquaintance with sham foreign count, who has a lovely daughter. Mr Thomas was quite carried away; he proposed, he was accepted, and he wrote--wrote in a style which I am sure he must regret today. If these letters are produced in court, sir, Mr Thomas's character is gone.'

'Am I to understand--' began Gideon.

'My dear sir,' said the Australian emphatically, 'it isn't possible to

understand unless you saw them.'

'That is a painful circumstance,' said Gideon; he glanced pityingly in the direction of the culprit, and, observing on his countenance every mark of confusion, pityingly withdrew his eyes.

'And that would be nothing,' continued Mr Dickson sternly, 'but I wish--I wish from my heart, sir, I could say that Mr Thomas's hands were clean. He has no excuse; for he was engaged at the time--and is still engaged--to the belle of Constantinople, Ga. My friend's conduct was unworthy of the brutes that perish.'

'Ga.?' repeated Gideon enquiringly.

'A contraction in current use,' said Michael. 'Ga. for Georgia, in The same way as Co. for Company.'

'I was aware it was sometimes so written,' returned the barrister, 'but not that it was so pronounced.'

'Fact, I assure you,' said Michael. 'You now see for yourself, sir, that if this unhappy person is to be saved, some devilish sharp practice will be needed. There's money, and no desire to spare it. Mr Thomas could write a cheque tomorrow for a hundred thousand. And, Mr Forsyth, there's better than money. The foreign count--Count Tarnow, he calls himself--was formerly a tobacconist in Bayswater, and passed under

the humble but expressive name of Schmidt; his daughter--if she is his daughter--there's another point--make a note of that, Mr Forsyth--his daughter at that time actually served in the shop--and she now proposes to marry a man of the eminence of Mr Thomas! Now do you see our game? We

know they contemplate a move; and we wish to forestall 'em. Down you go to Hampton Court, where they live, and threaten, or bribe, or both, until you get the letters; if you can't, God help us, we must go to court and Thomas must be exposed. I'll be done with him for one,' added the unchivalrous friend.

'There seem some elements of success,' said Gideon. 'Was Schmidt at all known to the police?'

'We hope so,' said Michael. 'We have every ground to think so. Mark the neighbourhood--Bayswater! Doesn't Bayswater occur to you as very suggestive?'

For perhaps the sixth time during this remarkable interview, Gideon wondered if he were not becoming light-headed. 'I suppose it's just because he has been lurching,' he thought; and then added aloud, 'To what figure may I go?'

'Perhaps five thousand would be enough for today,' said Michael. 'And now, sir, do not let me detain you any longer; the afternoon wears on; there are plenty of trains to Hampton Court; and I needn't try to

describe to you the impatience of my friend. Here is a five-pound note for current expenses; and here is the address.' And Michael began to write, paused, tore up the paper, and put the pieces in his pocket. 'I will dictate,' he said, 'my writing is so uncertain.'

Gideon took down the address, 'Count Tarnow, Kurnaul Villa, Hampton Court.' Then he wrote something else on a sheet of paper. 'You said you had not chosen a solicitor,' he said. 'For a case of this sort, here is the best man in London.' And he handed the paper to Michael.

'God bless me!' ejaculated Michael, as he read his own address.

'O, I daresay you have seen his name connected with some rather painful cases,' said Gideon. 'But he is himself a perfectly honest man, and his capacity is recognized. And now, gentlemen, it only remains for me to ask where I shall communicate with you.'

'The Langham, of course,' returned Michael. 'Till tonight.'

'Till tonight,' replied Gideon, smiling. 'I suppose I may knock you up at a late hour?'

'Any hour, any hour,' cried the vanishing solicitor.

'Now there's a young fellow with a head upon his shoulders,' he said to Pitman, as soon as they were in the street.

Pitman was indistinctly heard to murmur, 'Perfect fool.'

'Not a bit of him,' returned Michael. 'He knows who's the best solicitor in London, and it's not every man can say the same. But, I say, didn't I pitch it in hot?'

Pitman returned no answer.

'Hullo!' said the lawyer, pausing, 'what's wrong with the long-suffering Pitman?'

'You had no right to speak of me as you did,' the artist broke out; 'your language was perfectly unjustifiable; you have wounded me deeply.'

'I never said a word about you,' replied Michael. 'I spoke of Ezra Thomas; and do please remember that there's no such party.'

'It's just as hard to bear,' said the artist.

But by this time they had reached the corner of the by-street; and there was the faithful shoeblick, standing by the horses' heads with a splendid assumption of dignity; and there was the piano, figuring forlorn upon the cart, while the rain beat upon its unprotected sides and trickled down its elegantly varnished legs.

The shoeblick was again put in requisition to bring five or six strong fellows from the neighbouring public-house; and the last battle of the campaign opened. It is probable that Mr Gideon Forsyth had not yet taken his seat in the train for Hampton Court, before Michael opened the door of the chambers, and the grunting porters deposited the Broadwood grand in the middle of the floor.

'And now,' said the lawyer, after he had sent the men about their business, 'one more precaution. We must leave him the key of the piano, and we must contrive that he shall find it. Let me see.' And he built a square tower of cigars upon the top of the instrument, and dropped the key into the middle.

'Poor young man,' said the artist, as they descended the stairs.

'He is in a devil of a position,' assented Michael drily. 'It'll brace him up.'

'And that reminds me,' observed the excellent Pitman, 'that I fear I displayed a most ungrateful temper. I had no right, I see, to resent expressions, wounding as they were, which were in no sense directed.'

'That's all right,' cried Michael, getting on the cart. 'Not a word more, Pitman. Very proper feeling on your part; no man of self-respect can stand by and hear his alias insulted.'

The rain had now ceased, Michael was fairly sober, the body had been disposed of, and the friends were reconciled. The return to the mews was therefore (in comparison with previous stages of the day's adventures) quite a holiday outing; and when they had returned the cart and walked forth again from the stable-yard, unchallenged, and even unsuspected, Pitman drew a deep breath of joy. 'And now,' he said, 'we can go home.'

'Pitman,' said the lawyer, stopping short, 'your recklessness fills me with concern. What! we have been wet through the greater part of the day, and you propose, in cold blood, to go home! No, sir--hot Scotch.'

And taking his friend's arm he led him sternly towards the nearest public-house. Nor was Pitman (I regret to say) wholly unwilling. Now that peace was restored and the body gone, a certain innocent skittishness began to appear in the manners of the artist; and when he touched his steaming glass to Michael's, he giggled aloud like a venturesome schoolgirl at a picnic.