

## CHAPTER XIX. TRAVELS WITH A SHYSTER.

The absorbing and disastrous adventure of the Flying Scud was now quite ended; we had dashed into these deep waters and we had escaped again to starve, we had been ruined and were saved, had quarrelled and made up; there remained nothing but to sing Te Deum, draw a line, and begin on a fresh page of my unwritten diary. I do not pretend that I recovered all I had lost with Mamie; it would have been more than I had merited; and I had certainly been more uncommunicative than became either the partner or the friend. But she accepted the position handsomely; and during the week that I now passed with them, both she and Jim had the grace to spare me questions. It was to Calistoga that we went; there was some rumour of a Napa land-boom at the moment, the possibility of stir attracted Jim, and he informed me he would find a certain joy in looking on, much as Napoleon on St. Helena took a pleasure to read military works. The field of his ambition was quite closed; he was done with action; and looked forward to a ranch in a mountain dingle, a patch of corn, a pair of kine, a leisurely and contemplative age in the green shade of forests. "Just let me get down on my back in a hayfield," said he, "and you'll find there's no more snap to me than that much putty."

And for two days the perfervid being actually rested. The third, he was observed in consultation with the local editor, and owned he was in two minds about purchasing the press and paper. "It's a kind of a hold for

an idle man," he said, pleadingly; "and if the section was to open up the way it ought to, there might be dollars in the thing." On the fourth day he was gone till dinner-time alone; on the fifth we made a long picnic drive to the fresh field of enterprise; and the sixth was passed entirely in the preparation of prospectuses. The pioneer of McBride City was already upright and self-reliant as of yore; the fire rekindled in his eye, the ring restored to his voice; a charger sniffing battle and saying ha-ha, among the spears. On the seventh morning we signed a deed of partnership, for Jim would not accept a dollar of my money otherwise; and having once more engaged myself--or that mortal part of me, my purse--among the wheels of his machinery, I returned alone to San Francisco and took quarters in the Palace Hotel.

The same night I had Nares to dinner. His sunburnt face, his queer and personal strain of talk, recalled days that were scarce over and that seemed already distant. Through the music of the band outside, and the chink and clatter of the dining-room, it seemed to me as if I heard the foaming of the surf and the voices of the sea-birds about Midway Island. The bruises on our hands were not yet healed; and there we sat, waited on by elaborate darkies, eating pompano and drinking iced champagne.

"Think of our dinners on the Norah, captain, and then oblige me by looking round the room for contrast."

He took the scene in slowly. "Yes, it is like a dream," he said: "like as if the darkies were really about as big as dimes; and a great big

scuttle might open up there, and Johnson stick in a great big head and shoulders, and cry, 'Eight bells!'--and the whole thing vanish."

"Well, it's the other thing that has done that," I replied. "It's all bygone now, all dead and buried. Amen! say I."

"I don't know that, Mr. Dodd; and to tell you the fact, I don't believe it," said Nares. "There's more Flying Scud in the oven; and the baker's name, I take it, is Bellairs. He tackled me the day we came in: sort of a raze of poor old humanity--jury clothes--full new suit of pimples: knew him at once from your description. I let him pump me till I saw his game. He knows a good deal that we don't know, a good deal that we do, and suspects the balance. There's trouble brewing for somebody."

I was surprised I had not thought of this before. Bellairs had been behind the scenes; he had known Dickson; he knew the flight of the crew; it was hardly possible but what he should suspect; it was certain if he suspected, that he would seek to trade on the suspicion. And sure enough, I was not yet dressed the next morning ere the lawyer was knocking at my door. I let him in, for I was curious; and he, after some ambiguous prolegomena, roundly proposed I should go shares with him.

"Shares in what?" I inquired.

"If you will allow me to clothe my idea in a somewhat vulgar form," said he, "I might ask you, did you go to Midway for your health?"

"I don't know that I did," I replied.

"Similarly, Mr. Dodd, you may be sure I would never have taken the present step without influential grounds," pursued the lawyer.

"Intrusion is foreign to my character. But you and I, sir, are engaged on the same ends. If we can continue to work the thing in company, I place at your disposal my knowledge of the law and a considerable practice in delicate negotiations similar to this. Should you refuse to consent, you might find in me a formidable and"--he hesitated--"and to my own regret, perhaps a dangerous competitor."

"Did you get this by heart?" I asked, genially.

"I advise YOU to!" he said, with a sudden sparkle of temper and menace, instantly gone, instantly succeeded by fresh cringing. "I assure you, sir, I arrive in the character of a friend; and I believe you underestimate my information. If I may instance an example, I am acquainted to the last dime with what you made (or rather lost), and I know you have since cashed a considerable draft on London."

"What do you infer?" I asked.

"I know where that draft came from," he cried, wincing back like one who has greatly dared, and instantly regrets the venture.

"So?" said I.

"You forget I was Mr. Dickson's confidential agent," he explained. "You had his address, Mr. Dodd. We were the only two that he communicated with in San Francisco. You see my deductions are quite obvious: you see how open and frank I deal with you, as I should wish to do with any gentleman with whom I was conjoined in business. You see how much I know; and it can scarcely escape your strong common-sense, how much better it would be if I knew all. You cannot hope to get rid of me at this time of day, I have my place in the affair, I cannot be shaken off; I am, if you will excuse a rather technical pleasantry, an encumbrance on the estate. The actual harm I can do, I leave you to value for yourself. But without going so far, Mr. Dodd, and without in any way inconveniencing myself, I could make things very uncomfortable. For instance, Mr. Pinkerton's liquidation. You and I know, sir--and you better than I--on what a large fund you draw. Is Mr. Pinkerton in the thing at all? It was you only who knew the address, and you were concealing it. Suppose I should communicate with Mr. Pinkerton----"

"Look here!" I interrupted, "communicate with him (if you will permit me to clothe my idea in a vulgar shape) till you are blue in the face. There is only one person with whom I refuse to allow you to communicate further, and that is myself. Good morning."

He could not conceal his rage, disappointment, and surprise; and in the passage (I have no doubt) was shaken by St. Vitus.

I was disgusted by this interview; it struck me hard to be suspected on all hands, and to hear again from this trafficker what I had heard already from Jim's wife; and yet my strongest impression was different and might rather be described as an impersonal fear. There was something against nature in the man's craven impudence; it was as though a lamb had butted me; such daring at the hands of such a dastard, implied unchangeable resolve, a great pressure of necessity, and powerful means. I thought of the unknown Carthew, and it sickened me to see this ferret on his trail.

Upon inquiry I found the lawyer was but just disbarred for some malpractice; and the discovery added excessively to my disquiet. Here was a rascal without money or the means of making it, thrust out of the doors of his own trade, publicly shamed, and doubtless in a deuce of a bad temper with the universe. Here, on the other hand, was a man with a secret; rich, terrified, practically in hiding; who had been willing to pay ten thousand pounds for the bones of the Flying Scud. I slipped insensibly into a mental alliance with the victim; the business weighed on me; all day long, I was wondering how much the lawyer knew, how much he guessed, and when he would open his attack.

Some of these problems are unsolved to this day; others were soon made clear. Where he got Carthew's name is still a mystery; perhaps some sailor on the Tempest, perhaps my own sea-lawyer served him for a tool; but I was actually at his elbow when he learned the address. It fell

so. One evening, when I had an engagement and was killing time until the hour, I chanced to walk in the court of the hotel while the band played. The place was bright as day with the electric light; and I recognised, at some distance among the loiterers, the person of Bellairs in talk with a gentleman whose face appeared familiar. It was certainly some one I had seen, and seen recently; but who or where, I knew not. A porter standing hard by, gave me the necessary hint. The stranger was an English navy man, invalided home from Honolulu, where he had left his ship; indeed, it was only from the change of clothes and the effects of sickness, that I had not immediately recognised my friend and correspondent, Lieutenant Sebright.

The conjunction of these planets seeming ominous, I drew near; but it seemed Bellairs had done his business; he vanished in the crowd, and I found my officer alone.

"Do you know whom you have been talking to, Mr. Sebright?" I began.

"No," said he; "I don't know him from Adam. Anything wrong?"

"He is a disreputable lawyer, recently disbarred," said I. "I wish I had seen you in time. I trust you told him nothing about Carthew?"

He flushed to his ears. "I'm awfully sorry," he said. "He seemed civil, and I wanted to get rid of him. It was only the address he asked."

"And you gave it?" I cried.

"I'm really awfully sorry," said Sebright. "I'm afraid I did."

"God forgive you!" was my only comment, and I turned my back upon the blunderer.

The fat was in the fire now: Bellairs had the address, and I was the more deceived or Carthew would have news of him. So strong was this impression, and so painful, that the next morning I had the curiosity to pay the lawyer's den a visit. An old woman was scrubbing the stair, and the board was down.

"Lawyer Bellairs?" said the old woman. "Gone East this morning. There's Lawyer Dean next block up."

I did not trouble Lawyer Dean, but walked slowly back to my hotel, ruminating as I went. The image of the old woman washing that desecrated stair had struck my fancy; it seemed that all the water-supply of the city and all the soap in the State would scarce suffice to cleanse it, it had been so long a clearing-house of dingy secrets and a factory of sordid fraud. And now the corner was untenanted; some judge, like a careful housewife, had knocked down the web, and the bloated spider was scuttling elsewhere after new victims. I had of late (as I have said) insensibly taken sides with Carthew; now when his enemy was at his heels, my interest grew more warm; and I began to wonder if I could not



help. The drama of the Flying Scud was entering on a new phase. It had been singular from the first: it promised an extraordinary conclusion; and I, who had paid so much to learn the beginning, might pay a little more and see the end. I lingered in San Francisco, indemnifying myself after the hardships of the cruise, spending money, regretting it, continually promising departure for the morrow. Why not go indeed, and keep a watch upon Bellairs? If I missed him, there was no harm done, I was the nearer Paris. If I found and kept his trail, it was hard if I could not put some stick in his machinery, and at the worst I could promise myself interesting scenes and revelations.

In such a mixed humour, I made up what it pleases me to call my mind, and once more involved myself in the story of Carthew and the Flying Scud. The same night I wrote a letter of farewell to Jim, and one of anxious warning to Dr. Urquart begging him to set Carthew on his guard; the morrow saw me in the ferry-boat; and ten days later, I was walking the hurricane deck on the City of Denver. By that time my mind was pretty much made down again, its natural condition: I told myself that I was bound for Paris or Fontainebleau to resume the study of the arts; and I thought no more of Carthew or Bellairs, or only to smile at my own fondness. The one I could not serve, even if I wanted; the other I had no means of finding, even if I could have at all influenced him after he was found.

And for all that, I was close on the heels of an absurd adventure. My neighbour at table that evening was a 'Frisco man whom I knew slightly.

I found he had crossed the plains two days in front of me, and this was the first steamer that had left New York for Europe since his arrival. Two days before me meant a day before Bellairs; and dinner was scarce done before I was closeted with the purser.

"Bellairs?" he repeated. "Not in the saloon, I am sure. He may be in the second class. The lists are not made out, but--Hullo! 'Harry D. Bellairs?' That the name? He's there right enough."

And the next morning I saw him on the forward deck, sitting in a chair, a book in his hand, a shabby puma skin rug about his knees: the picture of respectable decay. Off and on, I kept him in my eye. He read a good deal, he stood and looked upon the sea, he talked occasionally with his neighbours, and once when a child fell he picked it up and soothed it. I damned him in my heart; the book, which I was sure he did not read--the sea, to which I was ready to take oath he was indifferent--the child, whom I was certain he would as lieve have tossed overboard--all seemed to me elements in a theatrical performance; and I made no doubt he was already nosing after the secrets of his fellow-passengers. I took no pains to conceal myself, my scorn for the creature being as strong as my disgust. But he never looked my way, and it was night before I learned he had observed me.

I was smoking by the engine-room door, for the air was a little sharp, when a voice rose close beside me in the darkness.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Dodd," it said.

"That you, Bellairs?" I replied.

"A single word, sir. Your presence on this ship has no connection with our interview?" he asked. "You have no idea, Mr. Dodd, of returning upon your determination?"

"None," said I; and then, seeing he still lingered, I was polite enough to add "Good evening;" at which he sighed and went away.

The next day, he was there again with the chair and the puma skin; read his book and looked at the sea with the same constancy; and though there was no child to be picked up, I observed him to attend repeatedly on a sick woman. Nothing fosters suspicion like the act of watching; a man spied upon can hardly blow his nose but we accuse him of designs; and I took an early opportunity to go forward and see the woman for myself. She was poor, elderly, and painfully plain; I stood abashed at the sight, felt I owed Bellairs amends for the injustice of my thoughts, and seeing him standing by the rail in his usual attitude of contemplation, walked up and addressed him by name.

"You seem very fond of the sea," said I.

"I may really call it a passion, Mr. Dodd," he replied. "And the tall

cataract haunted me like a passion," he quoted. "I never weary of the sea, sir. This is my first ocean voyage. I find it a glorious experience." And once more my disbarred lawyer dropped into poetry: "Roll on, thou deep and dark blue ocean, roll!"

Though I had learned the piece in my reading-book at school, I came into the world a little too late on the one hand--and I daresay a little too early on the other--to think much of Byron; and the sonorous verse, prodigiously well delivered, struck me with surprise.

"You are fond of poetry, too?" I asked.

"I am a great reader," he replied. "At one time I had begun to amass quite a small but well selected library; and when that was scattered, I still managed to preserve a few volumes--chiefly of pieces designed for recitation--which have been my travelling companions."

"Is that one of them?" I asked, pointing to the volume in his hand.

"No, sir," he replied, showing me a translation of the *Sorrows of Werther*, "that is a novel I picked up some time ago. It has afforded me great pleasure, though immoral."

"O, immoral!" cried I, indignant as usual at any complication of art and ethics.

"Surely you cannot deny that, sir--if you know the book," he said. "The passion is illicit, although certainly drawn with a good deal of pathos. It is not a work one could possibly put into the hands of a lady; which is to be regretted on all accounts, for I do not know how it may strike you; but it seems to me--as a depiction, if I make myself clear--to rise high above its compeers--even famous compeers. Even in Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, or Hawthorne, the sentiment of love appears to me to be frequently done less justice to."

"You are expressing a very general opinion," said I.

"Is that so, indeed, sir?" he exclaimed, with unmistakable excitement. "Is the book well known? and who was GO-EATH? I am interested in that, because upon the title-page the usual initials are omitted, and it runs simply 'by GO-EATH.' Was he an author of distinction? Has he written other works?"

Such was our first interview, the first of many; and in all he showed the same attractive qualities and defects. His taste for literature was native and unaffected; his sentimentality, although extreme and a thought ridiculous, was plainly genuine. I wondered at my own innocent wonder. I knew that Homer nodded, that Caesar had compiled a jest-book, that Turner lived by preference the life of Puggy Booth, that Shelley made paper boats, and Wordsworth wore green spectacles! and with all this mass of evidence before me, I had expected Bellairs to be entirely

of one piece, subdued to what he worked in, a spy all through. As I abominated the man's trade, so I had expected to detest the man himself; and behold, I liked him. Poor devil! he was essentially a man on wires, all sensibility and tremor, brimful of a cheap poetry, not without parts, quite without courage. His boldness was despair; the gulf behind him thrust him on; he was one of those who might commit a murder rather than confess the theft of a postage-stamp. I was sure that his coming interview with Carthew rode his imagination like a nightmare; when the thought crossed his mind, I used to think I knew of it, and that the qualm appeared in his face visibly. Yet he would never flinch: necessity stalking at his back, famine (his old pursuer) talking in his ear; and I used to wonder whether I most admired, or most despised, this quivering heroism for evil. The image that occurred to me after his visit was just; I had been butted by a lamb; and the phase of life that I was now studying might be called the Revolt of a Sheep.

It could be said of him that he had learned in sorrow what he taught in song--or wrong; and his life was that of one of his victims. He was born in the back parts of the State of New York; his father a farmer, who became subsequently bankrupt and went West. The lawyer and money-lender who had ruined this poor family seems to have conceived in the end a feeling of remorse; he turned the father out indeed, but he offered, in compensation, to charge himself with one of the sons: and Harry, the fifth child and already sickly, was chosen to be left behind. He made himself useful in the office; picked up the scattered rudiments of an

education; read right and left; attended and debated at the Young Men's Christian Association; and in all his early years, was the model for a good story-book. His landlady's daughter was his bane. He showed me her photograph; she was a big, handsome, dashing, dressy, vulgar hussy, without character, without tenderness, without mind, and (as the result proved) without virtue. The sickly and timid boy was in the house; he was handy; when she was otherwise unoccupied, she used and played with him: Romeo and Cressida; till in that dreary life of a poor boy in a country town, she grew to be the light of his days and the subject of his dreams. He worked hard, like Jacob, for a wife; he surpassed his patron in sharp practice; he was made head clerk; and the same night, encouraged by a hundred freedoms, depressed by the sense of his youth and his infirmities, he offered marriage and was received with laughter. Not a year had passed, before his master, conscious of growing infirmities, took him for a partner; he proposed again; he was accepted; led two years of troubled married life; and awoke one morning to find his wife had run away with a dashing drummer, and had left him heavily in debt. The debt, and not the drummer, was supposed to be the cause of the hegira; she had concealed her liabilities, they were on the point of bursting forth, she was weary of Bellairs; and she took the drummer as she might have taken a cab. The blow disabled her husband, his partner was dead; he was now alone in the business, for which he was no longer fit; the debts hampered him; bankruptcy followed; and he fled from city to city, falling daily into lower practice. It is to be considered that he had been taught, and had learned as a delightful duty, a kind of business whose highest merit is to escape the commentaries of the bench:

that of the usurious lawyer in a county town. With this training, he was now shot, a penniless stranger, into the deeper gulfs of cities; and the result is scarce a thing to be surprised at.

"Have you heard of your wife again?" I asked.

He displayed a pitiful agitation. "I am afraid you will think ill of me," he said.

"Have you taken her back?" I asked.

"No, sir. I trust I have too much self-respect," he answered, "and, at least, I was never tempted. She won't come, she dislikes, she seems to have conceived a positive distaste for me, and yet I was considered an indulgent husband."

"You are still in relations, then?" I asked.

"I place myself in your hands, Mr. Dodd," he replied. "The world is very hard; I have found it bitter hard myself--bitter hard to live. How much worse for a woman, and one who has placed herself (by her own misconduct, I am far from denying that) in so unfortunate a position!"

"In short, you support her?" I suggested.



"I cannot deny it. I practically do," he admitted. "It has been a mill-stone round my neck. But I think she is grateful. You can see for yourself."

He handed me a letter in a sprawling, ignorant hand, but written with violet ink on fine, pink paper with a monogram. It was very foolishly expressed, and I thought (except for a few obvious cajoleries) very heartless and greedy in meaning. The writer said she had been sick, which I disbelieved; declared the last remittance was all gone in doctor's bills, for which I took the liberty of substituting dress, drink, and monograms; and prayed for an increase, which I could only hope had been denied her.

"I think she is really grateful?" he asked, with some eagerness, as I returned it.

"I daresay," said I. "Has she any claim on you?"

"O no, sir. I divorced her," he replied. "I have a very strong sense of self-respect in such matters, and I divorced her immediately."

"What sort of life is she leading now?" I asked.

"I will not deceive you, Mr. Dodd. I do not know, I make a point of not knowing; it appears more dignified. I have been very harshly criticised," he added, sighing.

It will be seen that I had fallen into an ignominious intimacy with the man I had gone out to thwart. My pity for the creature, his admiration for myself, his pleasure in my society, which was clearly unassumed, were the bonds with which I was fettered; perhaps I should add, in honesty, my own ill-regulated interest in the phases of life and human character. The fact is (at least) that we spent hours together daily, and that I was nearly as much on the forward deck as in the saloon. Yet all the while I could never forget he was a shabby trickster, embarked that very moment in a dirty enterprise. I used to tell myself at first that our acquaintance was a stroke of art, and that I was somehow fortifying Carthew. I told myself, I say; but I was no such fool as to believe it, even then. In these circumstances I displayed the two chief qualities of my character on the largest scale--my helplessness and my instinctive love of procrastination--and fell upon a course of action so ridiculous that I blush when I recall it.

We reached Liverpool one forenoon, the rain falling thickly and insidiously on the filthy town. I had no plans, beyond a sensible unwillingness to let my rascal escape; and I ended by going to the same inn with him, dining with him, walking with him in the wet streets, and hearing with him in a penny gaff that venerable piece, \_The Ticket-of-Leave Man\_. It was one of his first visits to a theatre, against which places of entertainment he had a strong prejudice; and his innocent, pompous talk, innocent old quotations, and innocent reverence for the character of Hawkshaw delighted me beyond relief. In charity to

myself, I dwell upon and perhaps exaggerate my pleasures. I have need of all conceivable excuses, when I confess that I went to bed without one word upon the matter of Carthew, but not without having covenanted with my rascal for a visit to Chester the next day. At Chester we did the Cathedral, walked on the walls, discussed Shakespeare and the musical glasses--and made a fresh engagement for the morrow. I do not know, and I am glad to have forgotten, how long these travels were continued. We visited at least, by singular zigzags, Stratford, Warwick, Coventry, Gloucester, Bristol, Bath, and Wells. At each stage we spoke dutifully of the scene and its associations; I sketched, the Shyster spouted poetry and copied epitaphs. Who could doubt we were the usual Americans, travelling with a design of self-improvement? Who was to guess that one was a blackmailer, trembling to approach the scene of action--the other a helpless, amateur detective, waiting on events?

It is unnecessary to remark that none occurred, or none the least suitable with my design of protecting Carthew. Two trifles, indeed, completed though they scarcely changed my conception of the Shyster. The first was observed in Gloucester, where we spent Sunday, and I proposed we should hear service in the cathedral. To my surprise, the creature had an ISM of his own, to which he was loyal; and he left me to go alone to the cathedral--or perhaps not to go at all--and stole off down a deserted alley to some Bethel or Ebenezer of the proper shade. When we met again at lunch, I rallied him, and he grew restive.

"You need employ no circumlocutions with me, Mr. Dodd," he said

suddenly. "You regard my behaviour from an unfavourable point of view: you regard me, I much fear, as hypocritical."

I was somewhat confused by the attack. "You know what I think of your trade," I replied, lamely and coarsely.

"Excuse me, if I seem to press the subject," he continued, "but if you think my life erroneous, would you have me neglect the means of grace? Because you consider me in the wrong on one point, would you have me place myself on the wrong in all? Surely, sir, the church is for the sinner."

"Did you ask a blessing on your present enterprise?" I sneered.

He had a bad attack of St. Vitus, his face was changed, and his eyes flashed. "I will tell you what I did!" he cried. "I prayed for an unfortunate man and a wretched woman whom he tries to support."

I cannot pretend that I found any repartee.

The second incident was at Bristol, where I lost sight of my gentleman some hours. From this eclipse, he returned to me with thick speech, wandering footsteps, and a back all whitened with plaster. I had half expected, yet I could have wept to see it. All disabilities were piled on that weak back--domestic misfortune, nervous disease, a displeasing exterior, empty pockets, and the slavery of vice.

I will never deny that our prolonged conjunction was the result of double cowardice. Each was afraid to leave the other, each was afraid to speak, or knew not what to say. Save for my ill-judged allusion at Gloucester, the subject uppermost in both our minds was buried. Carthew, Stallbridge-le-Carthew, Stallbridge-Minster--which we had long since (and severally) identified to be the nearest station--even the name of Dorsetshire was studiously avoided. And yet we were making progress all the time, tacking across broad England like an unweatherly vessel on a wind; approaching our destination, not openly, but by a sort of flying sap. And at length, I can scarce tell how, we were set down by a dilatory butt-end of local train on the untenanted platform of Stallbridge-Minster.

The town was ancient and compact: a domino of tiled houses and walled gardens, dwarfed by the disproportionate bigness of the church. From the midst of the thoroughfare which divided it in half, fields and trees were visible at either end; and through the sally-port of every street, there flowed in from the country a silent invasion of green grass. Bees and birds appeared to make the majority of the inhabitants; every garden had its row of hives, the eaves of every house were plastered with the nests of swallows, and the pinnacles of the church were flickered about all day long by a multitude of wings. The town was of Roman foundation; and as I looked out that afternoon from the low windows of the inn, I should scarce have been surprised to see a centurion coming up the street with a fatigue draft of legionaries. In short,

Stallbridge-Minster was one of those towns which appear to be maintained by England for the instruction and delight of the American rambler; to which he seems guided by an instinct not less surprising than the setter's; and which he visits and quits with equal enthusiasm.

I was not at all in the humour of the tourist. I had wasted weeks of time and accomplished nothing; we were on the eve of the engagement, and I had neither plans nor allies. I had thrust myself into the trade of private providence and amateur detective; I was spending money and I was reaping disgrace. All the time, I kept telling myself that I must at least speak; that this ignominious silence should have been broken long ago, and must be broken now. I should have broken it when he first proposed to come to Stallbridge-Minster; I should have broken it in the train; I should break it there and then, on the inn doorstep, as the omnibus rolled off. I turned toward him at the thought; he seemed to wince, the words died on my lips, and I proposed instead that we should visit the Minster.

While we were engaged upon this duty, it came on to rain in a manner worthy of the tropics. The vault reverberated; every gargoyle instantly poured its full discharge; we waded back to the inn, ankle-deep in impromptu brooks; and the rest of the afternoon sat weatherbound, hearkening to the sonorous deluge. For two hours I talked of indifferent matters, laboriously feeding the conversation; for two hours my mind was quite made up to do my duty instantly--and at each particular instant I postponed it till the next. To screw up my faltering courage, I

called at dinner for some sparkling wine. It proved when it came to be detestable; I could not put it to my lips; and Bellairs, who had as much palate as a weevil, was left to finish it himself. Doubtless the wine flushed him; doubtless he may have observed my embarrassment of the afternoon; doubtless he was conscious that we were approaching a crisis, and that that evening, if I did not join with him, I must declare myself an open enemy. At least he fled. Dinner was done; this was the time when I had bound myself to break my silence; no more delays were to be allowed, no more excuses received. I went upstairs after some tobacco; which I felt to be a mere necessity in the circumstances; and when I returned, the man was gone. The waiter told me he had left the house.

The rain still plumped, like a vast shower-bath, over the deserted town. The night was dark and windless: the street lit glimmeringly from end to end, lamps, house windows, and the reflections in the rain-pools all contributing. From a public-house on the other side of the way, I heard a harp twang and a doleful voice upraised in the "Larboard Watch," "The Anchor's Weighed," and other naval ditties. Where had my Shyster wandered? In all likelihood to that lyrical tavern; there was no choice of diversion; in comparison with Stallbridge-Minster on a rainy night, a sheepfold would seem gay.

Again I passed in review the points of my interview, on which I was always constantly resolved so long as my adversary was absent from the scene: and again they struck me as inadequate. From this dispiriting exercise I turned to the native amusements of the inn coffee-room, and

studied for some time the mezzotints that frowned upon the wall. The railway guide, after showing me how soon I could leave Stallbridge and how quickly I could reach Paris, failed to hold my attention. An illustrated advertisement book of hotels brought me very low indeed; and when it came to the local paper, I could have wept. At this point, I found a passing solace in a copy of Whittaker's Almanac, and obtained in fifty minutes more information than I have yet been able to use.

Then a fresh apprehension assailed me. Suppose Bellairs had given me the slip? suppose he was now rolling on the road to Stallbridge-le-Carthew? or perhaps there already and laying before a very white-faced auditor his threats and propositions? A hasty person might have instantly pursued. Whatever I am, I am not hasty, and I was aware of three grave objections. In the first place, I could not be certain that Bellairs was gone. In the second, I had no taste whatever for a long drive at that hour of the night and in so merciless a rain. In the third, I had no idea how I was to get admitted if I went, and no idea what I should say if I got admitted. "In short," I concluded, "the whole situation is the merest farce. You have thrust yourself in where you had no business and have no power. You would be quite as useful in San Francisco; far happier in Paris; and being (by the wrath of God) at Stallbridge-Minster, the wisest thing is to go quietly to bed." On the way to my room, I saw (in a flash) that which I ought to have done long ago, and which it was now too late to think of--written to Carthew, I mean, detailing the facts and describing Bellairs, letting him defend himself if he were able, and giving him time to flee if he were not.



It was the last blow to my self-respect; and I flung myself into my bed with contumely.

I have no guess what hour it was, when I was wakened by the entrance of Bellairs carrying a candle. He had been drunk, for he was bedaubed with mire from head to foot; but he was now sober and under the empire of some violent emotion which he controlled with difficulty. He trembled visibly; and more than once, during the interview which followed, tears suddenly and silently overflowed his cheeks.

"I have to ask your pardon, sir, for this untimely visit," he said.

"I make no defence, I have no excuse, I have disgraced myself, I am properly punished; I appear before you to appeal to you in mercy for the most trifling aid or, God help me! I fear I may go mad."

"What on earth is wrong?" I asked.

"I have been robbed," he said. "I have no defence to offer; it was of my own fault, I am properly punished."

"But, gracious goodness me!" I cried, "who is there to rob you in a place like this?"

"I can form no opinion," he replied. "I have no idea. I was lying in a ditch inanimate. This is a degrading confession, sir; I can only say in self-defence that perhaps (in your good nature) you have made yourself

partly responsible for my shame. I am not used to these rich wines."

"In what form was your money? Perhaps it may be traced," I suggested.

"It was in English sovereigns. I changed it in New York; I got very good exchange," he said, and then, with a momentary outbreak, "God in heaven, how I toiled for it!" he cried.

"That doesn't sound encouraging," said I. "It may be worth while to apply to the police, but it doesn't sound a hopeful case."

"And I have no hope in that direction," said Bellairs. "My hopes, Mr. Dodd, are all fixed upon yourself. I could easily convince you that a small, a very small advance, would be in the nature of an excellent investment; but I prefer to rely on your humanity. Our acquaintance began on an unusual footing; but you have now known me for some time, we have been some time--I was going to say we had been almost intimate. Under the impulse of instinctive sympathy, I have bared my heart to you, Mr. Dodd, as I have done to few; and I believe--I trust--I may say that I feel sure--you heard me with a kindly sentiment. This is what brings me to your side at this most inexcusable hour. But put yourself in my place--how could I sleep--how could I dream of sleeping, in this blackness of remorse and despair? There was a friend at hand--so I ventured to think of you; it was instinctive; I fled to your side, as the drowning man clutches at a straw. These expressions are not exaggerated, they scarcely serve to express the agitation of my mind.

And think, sir, how easily you can restore me to hope and, I may say, to reason. A small loan, which shall be faithfully repaid. Five hundred dollars would be ample." He watched me with burning eyes. "Four hundred would do. I believe, Mr. Dodd, that I could manage with economy on two."

"And then you will repay me out of Carthew's pocket?" I said. "I am much obliged. But I will tell you what I will do: I will see you on board a steamer, pay your fare through to San Francisco, and place fifty dollars in the purser's hands, to be given you in New York."

He drank in my words; his face represented an ecstasy of cunning thought. I could read there, plain as print, that he but thought to overreach me.

"And what am I to do in 'Frisco?" he asked. "I am disbarred, I have no trade, I cannot dig, to beg----" he paused in the citation. "And you know that I am not alone," he added, "others depend upon me."

"I will write to Pinkerton," I returned. "I feel sure he can help you to some employment, and in the meantime, and for three months after your arrival, he shall pay to yourself personally, on the first and the fifteenth, twenty-five dollars."

"Mr. Dodd, I scarce believe you can be serious in this offer," he replied. "Have you forgotten the circumstances of the case? Do you know these people are the magnates of the section? They were spoken of

to-night in the saloon; their wealth must amount to many millions of dollars in real estate alone; their house is one of the sights of the locality, and you offer me a bribe of a few hundred!"

"I offer you no bribe, Mr. Bellairs, I give you alms," I returned. "I will do nothing to forward you in your hateful business; yet I would not willingly have you starve."

"Give me a hundred dollars then, and be done with it," he cried.

"I will do what I have said, and neither more nor less," said I.

"Take care," he cried. "You are playing a fool's game; you are making an enemy for nothing; you will gain nothing by this, I warn you of it!" And then with one of his changes, "Seventy dollars--only seventy--in mercy, Mr. Dodd, in common charity. Don't dash the bowl from my lips! You have a kindly heart. Think of my position, remember my unhappy wife."

"You should have thought of her before," said I. "I have made my offer, and I wish to sleep."

"Is that your last word, sir? Pray consider; pray weigh both sides: my misery, your own danger. I warn you--I beseech you; measure it well before you answer," so he half pleaded, half threatened me, with clasped hands.

"My first word, and my last," said I.

The change upon the man was shocking. In the storm of anger that now shook him, the lees of his intoxication rose again to the surface; his face was deformed, his words insane with fury; his pantomime excessive in itself, was distorted by an access of St. Vitus.

"You will perhaps allow me to inform you of my cold opinion," he began, apparently self-possessed, truly bursting with rage: "when I am a glorified saint, I shall see you howling for a drop of water and exult to see you. That your last word! Take it in your face, you spy, you false friend, you fat hypocrite! I defy, I defy and despise and spit upon you! I'm on the trail, his trail or yours, I smell blood, I'll follow it on my hands and knees, I'll starve to follow it! I'll hunt you down, hunt you, hunt you down! If I were strong, I'd tear your vitals out, here in this room--tear them out--I'd tear them out! Damn, damn, damn! You think me weak! I can bite, bite to the blood, bite you, hurt you, disgrace you ..."

He was thus incoherently raging, when the scene was interrupted by the arrival of the landlord and inn servants in various degrees of deshabile, and to them I gave my temporary lunatic in charge.

"Take him to his room," I said, "he's only drunk."

These were my words; but I knew better. After all my study of Mr.

Bellairs, one discovery had been reserved for the last moment: that of his latent and essential madness.