

A LOAN OF HALF-ORPHANS.

A NARRATIVE IN TWO PARTS. PART I.

By Thomas A. Janvier, author of "Color Studies," "An Embassy to Provence," etc., etc.

I.

SHOWING HOW A BENEVOLENT LADY DEVOTED HERSELF TO AMELIORATING THE CONDITION OF HALF-ORPHANED CHILDREN AND DESTITUTE CATS.



Philanthropic matters — being easily started, but stopped only with great difficulty — Mrs. Haverwood bore a close resemblance to a lady-like middle-aged locomotive with an inadequate brake. Philanthropy was more than a hobby with Mrs. Haverwood; it was a passion. To say that her bonnets had to be specially bulged out in order to accommodate her organ of benevolence would be, of course, extravagant; but to say that the considerable circle of her friends had to bulge out in all directions, and usually in a hurry, to make room for her frequent and violent benevolent eccentricities would not be extravagant at all; it would be literally, and in many cases annoyingly, true.

At the period of her life to which attention here is directed, Mrs. Haverwood's dominant benevolence, if I may so phrase it, was the amelioration of the condition of half-orphaned children in the city of New York. A person of a less resolutely philanthropic temperament would have been satisfied to pool her good intentions toward half-orphans with one or another of the charitable institutions designed, directly or incidentally, for their benefit already in existence. But that sort of an arrangement did not suit Mrs. Haverwood at all. Not only in her dealings with half-orphans, but in her dealings with affairs generally, she wanted — if I may be permitted the use of a bucolic metaphor — a ten-acre lot in which she could flourish around and kick up her heels. In other words, she had a will of her own and liked to do things in her own way. In her experimental stage of benevolence she had allied herself at one time or another with very many of the charitable institutions of New York; but, as her experience grew, she gradually had relinquished them all: on the ground that every one of them was managed by a set of stubborn and unreasonable people whose natural tendency was to do everything wrong, and who obstinately refused to permit her to set them right.

I may add that, in addition to resigning from these several charitable societies because of the pig-headedness of their respective members,

Mrs. Haverwood would have resigned, on similar grounds, had this been practicable without creating a scandal, from the society of her husband. Possibly because he realized the strain of the situation, — and if he did not it was not because of lack of opportunity, — Mr. Haverwood most considerably relieved it by retiring, with a discreet complaisance by no means in keeping with his normal character, not only from his home, but from his planet, to another, and presumably a better, world. He probably felt certain that, temporarily, at least, — that is to say, until such time as Mrs. Haverwood should join him there, — it would be a quieter world, anyway.

It is only just to Mr. Haverwood's memory, however, to interpolate here the statement that, while he certainly was extremely positive in most of his opinions and acts, it was only in the line of his dominant hobby that he was an aggressive man. His hobby was the commendable one of desiring to pose as a patron of art; and the pertinent fact may be added that some of — indeed, most of — the art which he patronized was as queer as it possibly could be. But it would be very unfair to blame him for his artistic shortcomings. He was a product of his times: the period immediately preceding the development of the Hudson River School, when every New Yorker who aspired to high social position had to own enough old masters, in very gorgeous frames, to fill a picture-gallery of reasonable size. Because of this necessity, Mr. Haverwood built a more than reasonably large picture-gallery and stocked it with magnificently framed old masters — every one of which had faded almost to the vanishing point, and was as brown as a bun. To accompany him to this apartment, after one of his own heavy dinners, when he was all aglow with the factitious benevolence derived from his own Sillery, and there to hear him descant upon the merits of these immortal works, was decidedly better than going to the play. His untimely death was a bitter blow to the picture-dealers — even if it did result in giving his widow absolute freedom, and absolute control of one of the biggest and soundest fortunes in New York.

Being thus disengaged from both domestic and extraneous entangling alliances, and having the command of practically unlimited money, Mrs. Haverwood was in the position, as it were, to take what she wanted from the pack and to go it alone. And then it was, to pursue the simile, that she took half-orphans from the pack, and devoted herself to the amelioration of their con-

dition with all the energy of her very energetic body and soul.

That this benevolent lady entertained the most positive views in regard to the way in which a half-orphan's condition ought to be ameliorated, and that these views were utterly unlike anybody else's views on the same subject, are inferential truths which scarcely need to be stated in set terms; and because this was her attitude, and also because she was sick and tired of struggling constantly against stupid opposition, she adopted the radical course toward half-orphans of founding an institution for their succor, in the management of which she united in her own person all the functions of president and secretary and treasurer and board of advisory trustees. With a commendable desire to perpetuate in connection with so notable a charity the memory of her lamented husband (who, in point of fact, always had fought shy of charities; who, for some unknown reason, had manifested a peculiar antipathy toward half-orphans; and whose detestation of cats frequently was avowed in violent terms), Mrs. Haverwood gave to her institution the name of the John L. Haverwood Female Half-Orphanage and Destitute Cat Home.

The destitute cats were an after-thought. Mrs. Haverwood was quite devoted to cats, and since she was starting a charitable institution, as she very sensibly put it, there was no reason why she should not give the cats a show; and the more, she reasoned, because the scraps remaining after feeding sixteen half-orphans easily would suffice for the sustenance of thirty-two cats. The whole number of half-orphans that she had in view was twenty-four; and the whole number of cats was to be forty-eight; but her plan provided for harboring the half-orphans in relays of eight in her own home—where their condition was to be ameliorated by training them in the ways of domestic service—and for harboring a proportional number of cats with them. One of her objects being to inculcate among her human beneficiaries the habit of kindness toward the lower animals, each half-orphan was made responsible for the well-being of two destitute cats; and as each relay came from the institution to her private residence, the sixteen cats pertaining to that particular relay came with it.

Expense being a matter of secondary consideration with Mrs. Haverwood, she had caused to be constructed for this transportation service a vehicle, resembling a small omnibus, especially adapted to its needs. On the two inside longitudinal seats sat the eight neatly-uniformed half-orphans; while outside, firmly secured on the roof by a simple system of bolts and catches, the sixteen cages containing the sixteen cats were arranged (like the oars of a Roman galley) in a

double bank. Even in New York, where queer sights on the street are not unusual, this vehicle always attracted a good deal of attention as it made its weekly trips back and forth between Mrs. Haverwood's private residence and the John L. Haverwood Female Half-Orphanage and Destitute Cat Home.

II.

TELLING HOW MRS. HAVERWOOD TIRED OF HER CATS AND HALF-ORPHANS AND DECIDED TO THROW THEM OVERBOARD.

THAT the estimable founder of this excellent charity would continue for any considerable period of time to take an interest in it was not expected by even the most sanguine among her intimate friends. Mrs. Haverwood believed firmly that the spice of charity was variety, and she governed herself by this belief. Like a stout, but benevolent, butterfly she fluttered happily from one to another project for the alleviation of human misery; took a turn, as occasion offered, at reforming different breeds of heathen; and always was ready at a moment's notice to join any society for the suppression of any really interesting variety of vice.

In the course of a year or so, therefore, quite as a matter of course, half-orphans began to pall upon Mrs. Haverwood, and destitute cats to lose their charm: under which changed conditions she rejoiced rather than lamented when, for family reasons, sixteen of her twenty-four female half-orphans suddenly were reclaimed by their several remaining parents; and she even beheld with composure the outbreak of a fatal distemper among the destitute cats, by which two thirds of them were hurried prematurely into unwept graves. This rather startling shrinkage in both lines of inmates occurred in the early springtime, and Mrs. Haverwood almost came to the determination then and there to kill the remaining cats, send the remaining half-orphans packing back to their relatives, rent the half-orphanage, and so—in not much more than an eye-twinkle—bring her venture in this particular sort of charity definitely to an end.

Had it been possible to dismember and to obliterate her institution in fact as easily as in thought, it unquestionably would have disappeared without another moment of delay. But Mrs. Haverwood found that getting rid of her half-orphans would involve so much correspondence with their respective fathers or mothers, that to enter upon it at that time would keep her for half the summer in town. Therefore it was—all her plans having been made for a summer in Europe—that she conceived the project of transferring the eight half-orphans and the sixteen destitute cats still remaining on the foundation to her own home, thus enabling her to

discharge the matron and to close the half-orphanage; with the corollary project of offering for the summer the free use of her home, and the free usufruct of the half-orphans to carry on its domestic service, together with the supplies necessary for the maintenance of so large a household, to young Mr. and Mrs. Ridley Cranmer Latimer: in whom she had just begun to take a benevolent interest, and for whom, therefore, she could not do too much.

The arrangement thus outlined, Mrs. Haverwood perceived, would save in her own pocket a very considerable sum of money; would confer a substantial benefit upon two deserving young people; would continue to the latest possible moment the training of her charges in the ways of domestic servitude; and, finally, would enable her to arrange matters by letter with her half-orphans' whole parents in such a way that she could get rid of the entire bothersome business on the very moment of her return.

On the other hand, when this handsome offer of free lodging and board and service was made to Mr. and Mrs. Ridley Cranmer Latimer, these young people accepted the benefits tendered to them with a grateful alacrity; at least, to be quite accurate, Mrs. Latimer came forward briskly with her gratitude, while Mr. Latimer followed more temperately in her impetuous wake. The offer, truly, was made most opportunely. They had been married only a couple of months, and Mr. Latimer—who was an assistant designer to a firm of silversmiths—had taken his annual holiday of a fortnight in order to go upon his wedding journey. It was impossible, therefore, for him to have another holiday that summer; and what they had expected to do, until Mrs. Haverwood made them this liberal tender of her half-orphans and her home, was to board at a farmhouse in the Hackensack Valley—whence Mr. Latimer would come into town to his work every day. Mrs. Haverwood's plan was so much better than their plan, and she was so careful to make plain to them that they really would be doing her a great service if they would keep the house going, and so keep the half-orphans going too, that the upshot of the matter was their acceptance of her offer in the same spirit of frank friendliness in which it was made.

"I shall not burden you with many directions, my dear," Mrs. Haverwood said to Mrs. Latimer in the course of the talk which they had together when the matter finally was arranged. "In dealing with my charges my method is a very simple one: I am careful to select for the performance of each household task a half-orphan of a suitable age and degree of intelligence; and then, to give them that confidence in themselves which can be created only by encouraging them in self-resource and self-reliance,

I leave them to perform the task entirely in their own way. When it is completed I commend them or reprove them, as the case may be. This, I am confident, is the only rational method of instruction. All that I ask is that you exactly adhere to it."

"And when they are bad," Mrs. Latimer asked a little anxiously, "what do you do to them?"

"When verbal reproof is inadequate," replied Mrs. Haverwood, "I administer to them, in accordance with the gravity of the offense, one of the three punishments which the remaining parent of each of my charges has agreed to sanction, and which the rules of the half-orphanage prescribe. For light offenses, they are compelled to stand upon one leg, with the other leg projecting in front of them as nearly as possible in a straight line, for a length of time commensurate with the extent of the offense. As this attitude involves a considerable muscular strain, they are permitted to change from one leg to the other at intervals of one minute and a half. The children themselves," continued Mrs. Haverwood, "have given to this form of correction the name of 'going legetty'; and I confess," she added with a kindly smile, "I have fallen into the way of using that name for it myself. As I have said, it is only a punishment for offenses of a trifling sort; but for such, I assure you, it works admirably well."

"And when things get more serious what do you do?" Mrs. Latimer inquired with a good deal of interest.

"The second and more severe punishment," Mrs. Haverwood answered, "is what we call—using the children's name again—'all-four-ing.' In this case the culprit is compelled to go down on all fours, and to remain in that position for a period to be determined, as in 'going legetty,' by the gravity of the offense."

"But what do you do when they are really seriously bad—bad enough, I mean, to be regularly spanked if they were n't half-orphans, and could n't be?"

"Then," said Mrs. Haverwood, sternly, "they are bagged!"

"Bagged?" repeated Mrs. Latimer, in a tone of interrogation, "I don't quite understand."

"No, I suppose not. The punishment is an unusual one, but we find that it works to a charm. It consists simply in compelling the offender to get into a stout bag,—we have bags of various sizes, of course, to fit any size of half-orphan,—which then is tied closely around her neck with her arms inside. The bag is of such ample dimensions that she can raise her hand to her head in case her nose tickles or a fly bothers her, but the hand still remains within the covering. Even the small-

est of my charges feels keenly the ridicule which is the dominant quality in this form of punishment; and the larger girls—we have had several of sixteen and seventeen, you know—never have had to be bagged more than once.”

“I should think not!” exclaimed Mrs. Latimer, feelingly.

“And in inflicting any of these punishments, my dear,” Mrs. Haverwood said in conclusion, “you will do well to make them as public as possible. It is my custom, and I advise you to follow it, to punish in the drawing-room; then, if any one happens to call, the culprit suffers the additional mortification of being exhibited ‘going legetty,’ or ‘all-fouring,’ or ‘bagged,’ as the case may be, to a total stranger. The discipline, I assure you, is most salutary.”

“And what about the cats?” Mrs. Latimer asked.

Mrs. Haverwood smiled pleasantly as she answered: “Ah, there you will have no trouble at all. All that you will have to do is to see that each half-orphan feeds her two cats regularly and not too abundantly, and that they have ample liberty in the house and yard.”

III.

EXHIBITING MRS. LATIMER'S FIRST ACTUAL DEALINGS WITH HALF-ORPHANS AND CATS, AND HER INCIDENT MISERY.

At ten o'clock of a June Wednesday morning—that is to say, coincident with the departure of Mrs. Haverwood for the steamer, which was to start at noon—Mrs. Latimer took over the entire establishment, and formally assumed the tripartite duties of her domestic, semi-parental, and feline trust; and before eleven o'clock of that same June Wednesday morning she began to realize with a good deal of emphasis that in thus endeavoring to run a cat-encumbered house by half-orphan power she had accepted a contract of rather appalling size. By six o'clock, when her husband came home to dinner, she realized the extent of her contract so fully that her very strongest desire was to abandon it altogether; but by that time the party of the first part, Mrs. Haverwood, was racing along well to the eastward of Fire Island (with the feeling that her interior department was traveling with even greater rapidity by a different conveyance), and the relinquishment of the trust was impossible.

“You see, Ridley,” Mrs. Latimer said,—and it was a very great comfort after such a day to be able to tell about it, and to be sure of sympathy,—“you see, the trouble is that it seemed simple before I began, but that instead of being simple, it's all as mixed up as it possibly can be!”

“How was it simple, and why is it mixed up?” Mr. Latimer asked, at the same time set-

ting her more comfortably upon his knee and kissing her—which affectionate encouragement caused her to give a little restful sigh of happiness, and to reply in much more spirited tones:

“What was simple, you dear boy, was Mrs. Haverwood's rule as to how I was to manage the half-orphans and the cats; and what is so dreadfully mixed up is what happens when I try to put this rule into practice. She said, you know, that the cats simply were to be fed regularly and given ample liberty in the house and yard, and that when I wanted anything done all I had to do was to pick out a half-orphan ‘of a suitable age and degree of intelligence,’—those were her very words,—and then to let the half-orphan go ahead and do it in her own way. That sounds simple enough, does n't it?”

“Yes,” Mr. Latimer answered; “it certainly does. It seems to me that even I could keep a house that way.”

“Suppose you try!” said Mrs. Latimer, with a touch of bitterness in her voice. “Oh, I don't want to be cross,” she went on repentantly; “but if only you knew the bothers I have been through with to-day, Ridley dear! Where the hitch comes in is in making both ends of Mrs. Haverwood's rule about the half-orphans apply. ‘Suitable age and degree of intelligence’ was what she said. Now, since you think it's so easy, tell me how old a girl you would set to such a piece of work, for instance, as cleaning the knives?”

“Why, quite a little girl ought to do that sort of thing, I should think,” Mr. Latimer replied considerably; “one about eight or ten years old. If I had a half-orphan of about that age in stock, that is the age that I should use.”

“Yes, that's just what I thought too. Well, Polly Carroon is just nine years old,—I have all their names and ages, and the addresses of their people, you know, in the list that Mrs. Haverwood left with me,—and so I set Polly at the knives. But what the list does n't say anything about is their intelligences. Polly, I don't think has any intelligence at all. Just as Mrs. Haverwood told me to, I let her go at her work without any directions beyond telling her to take the knife-board out of the kitchen so that she would n't be in our way. And then things got to going so badly that I forgot all about her, and it was n't until we wanted the knives for lunch that I went to hunt her up. And where do you suppose that child was?”

Polly Carroon's whereabouts evidently being extraordinary, Mr. Latimer declined to venture even a guess.

“In the drawing-room, with the knife-board on one of the blue satin sofas, and bath-brick dust scattered everywhere! She had cleaned just one knife, and then she had got her two especial cats for company, and had gone to one of the

front windows to look out into the street — and there she was ! ”

“ And what did you do ? ” Mr. Latimer asked, with a show of serious interest that was very creditable to him.

“ I all-foured her, of course ; but all-fouring her for the rest of her life won't get the iron-rust out of that sofa, and what Mrs. Haverwood will say about it I 'm sure I don't know.

“ But I give you just this one instance, Ridley dear, to show you how very hard it is going to be to make Mrs. Haverwood's rules work out in practice. Age and intelligence don't go in couples at all ; and leaving the children to do things in their own way may teach them self-reliance, but it is certain to make a mess.”

“ And do you mean to say that things have been going wrong like that all day, you poor child ? ”

“ Oh, that little trouble does n't really count. I spoke of it because it happened to be the first. Some of the things really were dreadful — like the way Susan Poundweight almost killed herself when I set her to washing the back-kitchen windows. Susan is one of the biggest, you know — she 's nearly seventeen, and quite pretty — so I thought that she would do to wash windows very well. I asked her if she knew how to sit outside on the sill, and she said she did ; and then I told her to go ahead. And then the first thing I knew I heard a dreadful scream, and I saw her legs rising up in the air inside the kitchen, and the rest of her going down backward outside, and I just had time to rush to the window and get hold of one of her feet as she was beginning to slide away. Fortunately, all of the half-orphans, except Polly Carroon, happened to be in the kitchen, and I made them all catch hold of her, three to each leg, and hold her with all their strength until I could get out into the back yard and grab her by the shoulders ; and then we all let her slide gently down to the ground. If I had started her at washing upstairs windows,” Mrs. Latimer added solemnly, “ Susan Poundweight would have been by this time a dead girl ! ”

“ It looks as if none of them had any intelligence at all — as if they 'd got nothing but age,” Mr. Latimer observed.

“ You won't say that when I tell you about Jane Spicer,” Mrs. Latimer answered. “ She has n't any size at all — at least none worth speaking about, considering that she 's over thirteen years old — but she 's got enough intelligence to supply all the half-orphans in the house if she only could divide it up and pass it around. And the coolness and presence of mind of that mite really are wonderful ! Just listen to the way she straightened out the worst tangle of trouble I got into all day.

“ A couple of hours or so ago, when we were

beginning to get ready for dinner, things all of a sudden went as wrong as they possibly could go. I had sent Sally Tribbles down cellar to the ice-chest for the meat,— Sally is a big stout girl nearly fourteen,— and somehow or another in coming up-stairs she had managed to stumble over one of the cats and had gone down backward with the joint flying right over her head into the ash-bin ; and I 'd just caught Biddy O'Dowd — she 's an untidy little thing — wiping out the soup-tureen with the hand-towel ; and the two little Wells girls, the twins, you know, Xenophona and Sophonisba, had got scalded both at once — they do everything together that way — while they were trying to fill the tea-kettle ; and Martha Skeat had just shaved off the ends of three of her fingers with the potato slicer ; and in the very moment that I turned my back on the kitchen table to tie up Martha's hand, three of the cats were up off the floor like a flash,— the cats are everywhere, Ridley, they make me perfectly desperate ! — and were eating the croquettes that I had just finished making up into forms.” Mrs. Latimer's voice broke a little as she recalled that culminating moment of agony, and Mr. Latimer had to kiss her repeatedly before she could go on.

“ Well, just as everything was in that awful way, Jane Spicer came into the kitchen,— I had sent her to get something from the store-room,— and the way that that child took in the whole situation at a glance, and then instantly began to make everything go right, was nothing short of a miracle ! She whisked the cats off the table and away from the croquettes as she ran across to the sink where the twins were howling together at the tops of their voices, and when she found what was the matter with them she was in and out of the store-room like a flash and had them sitting on the floor in one corner with their scalded hands in the starch-box — they are dreadful little objects now, for they got the powdered starch all over themselves. Then she dashed down cellar to Sally, and picked her and the beef out of the ash-bin,— you must n't mind about the beef, dear ; I washed it most carefully myself, and ashes are clean, anyway,— and brought them both up to the kitchen. Sally was n't a bit hurt, but she had the most shocking head you ever saw ; her hair full of ashes and all over cobwebs. And then, with the utmost coolness and presence of mind, Jane collected the cobwebs from Sally's head and gave them to me to bind on Martha's cut fingers, because cobwebs, she said, stopped bleeding better than anything else in the world. It was wonderful, Ridley, simply wonderful, the way that child attended to everything in just the right way — and Susan Poundweight, who is big enough to make two of her, all the while

standing stock still, like the sleepy goose that she is, and never raising a hand.

"It did seem as if this dreadful day never would come to an end, Ridley dear," Mrs. Latimer said in conclusion. "But it has ended at last, and you have come home, and now I can't have any more serious worries, I'm sure."

Mrs. Latimer's statement that the day had come to an end at six o'clock in the evening obviously was as loosely inaccurate as her assertion that she would have no more serious worries was a presumptuous essay in personal prophecy. But Mr. Latimer, who yearned over her as she told him her tale of woe, did not attempt to correct either of these errors although he perceived them both. On the contrary, rather did he endeavor to encourage her in her belief that this weary day was ended with its third quarter, and that in his sheltering arms she had found a secure haven of rest.

And, really, from the moment that Mr. Latimer crossed the threshold things went so swimmingly that Mrs. Latimer's right to rate herself as a prophetess seemed to be above dispute. Their dinner, served to a charm by the super-intelligent Jane Spicer, was quite the merriest dinner that ever they had eaten: for, after all, with every allowance for drawbacks, there was a good deal to exhilarate them in thus finding themselves in absolute possession of a large and luxuriously appointed dwelling, with a train of eight half-orphans ready (in theory, at least) to obey with a sparkling alacrity their lightest or their most severe commands.

After such a desperate sort of a day, Mrs. Latimer was glad to go very early to bed; but Mr. Latimer, whose day had not been desperate, was disposed to begin to get the good of his kingdom by sitting, for a couple of hours or so, in one of the vastly comfortable chairs in the library while he read the new magazine that he had brought home with him and smoked a refreshing cigar.

But in taking this pleasure which he had promised himself, Mr. Latimer was not betrayed by the zest of it into inconsiderate selfishness. Before he entered upon his own enjoyment, he attended punctually to certain matters which he knew were necessary to his wife's happiness—that is to say, he looked at the kitchen fire; tried the fastenings of all the doors and windows; went down cellar and made sure that there were no live-coals in the ash-bin, and that the plate covering the coal-hole was secure; and, finally, went up into the cock-loft and examined the bolts of the scuttle. It is but just to add that, in taking these several precautions, Mr. Latimer consulted not only his wife's comfort but his own—in view of the highly probable possibility that she might wake up at three or four o'clock in the morning and demand from him instant

and accurate information touching one or another of these points of danger, on the ground that she smelled smoke or heard a burglar. Smelling smoke and hearing a burglar were two things which Mrs. Latimer did with an energy and an inopportuneness that Mr. Latimer—although his knowledge of these peculiar traits was but two months old—already was disposed to regard as excessive.

He returned from his tour of inspection just as she had got to bed, and—after lighting and placing by the bed-head the dark lantern which she had bought that very day to the end that they might the better protect the valuable property confided to their care—he made his report as he sat beside her holding her hand. The smell of the Japan varnish on the new lantern was very strong indeed; but Mrs. Latimer, when he commented unfavorably upon this smell, declared that he would find it delightful if he would only think, as she did, that it was oriental incense, and that they were in some very far Eastern shrine.

Knowing that one of her greatest pleasures was to talk herself to sleep, he sat quietly beside her while she talked for a while about the journey that they hoped to make some day to Japan and India; and then on and on about anything that happened to come into her head until the animation in her voice gave way to a delicious drowsiness, her words came slowly and with less and less connection, and at last she gave a little sigh of satisfied weariness and so dropped away softly into sleep. When her breathing became long and regular, assuring him that her sleep was sound, he drew his hand very gently away from hers,—which resisted the withdrawal by little instinctive clutches, as the wakeful body tried to signal to the sleeping spirit that he was going away,—and so, on tip-toe, went softly out of the room. Even at a much later period of his married life—when he was getting, indeed, to be quite gray and elderly—Mr. Latimer still found in this little ritual of slumber a certain quality which touched and thrilled him with a tenderness so searching that his love was almost pain.

IV.

TELLING HOW MRS. LATIMER WAS AROUSED FROM HER SLEEP BY THE SOUND OF STRANGE VOICES, AND WHAT SHE DID ABOUT IT.

THE library to which Mr. Latimer retired—a large, gravely luxurious room in the rear of the house, with three back windows opening toward the south, and with two side windows (over the picture-gallery) opening toward the west—was on the same floor, the second, with their bedroom. On the floor immediately above, so that help would be near in case any-

thing went wrong, were the eight half-orphans—three of whom slept in the front room and four in the back room; while Susan Poundweight, in consideration of her age and size, had the hall-room to herself. The cats were provided with sixteen cushioned boxes in the rear cellar—whence a cat-hole gave access to the back yard, and so enabled them, at their pleasure, to take the air. To prevent their escape, and as a safeguard to their morals, the yard was roofed over with a netting of wire.

Having earned by his several acts of considerate kindness an unqualified right to seek his own happiness in his own way, Mr. Latimer, upon betaking himself to the library, both sought and found it in the conjunction of himself and his cigar and magazine and vastly easy chair in that delightful book-room which for the time being was all his own. So keen, indeed, was his enjoyment of this heretofore untasted combination of luxuries, that he was rather more than half disposed to believe that he was the victim of a momentarily agreeable but ultimately bitterly disappointing dream.

But this super-refined psychologic doubt increased rather than diminished his pleasure, and for an hour or more he continued to read and to smoke with an unruffled satisfaction; save that once, fancying that he heard a slight rustling in the passage and the soft tread of unshod feet, he was disturbed by the fear—which investigation proved to be groundless—that Mrs. Latimer had forsaken her bed and her slumber to seek his protection in some sudden exigency of fright. But at the end of this reposeful period, suddenly, he truly was aroused by hearing his name called in a penetrating sibilant whisper, and then by seeing his wife standing in the doorway,—like a singularly attractive semaphore clad in white, and with touzled golden hair,—pointing the bull's-eye lantern at him with one hand and with the other beckoning him to come to her at once. Upon beholding this engaging apparition, he naturally fell a prey to the emotion of very lively alarm. With a cry of anxious affection he sprang from his chair, and in two steps was across the room and had Mrs. Latimer, lantern and all, tight in his arms.

"My darling!" he cried, "what is it? Are you ill?"

"H-s-s-s-h!" Mrs. Latimer answered in a guardedly low tone which quivered with repressed excitement. "H-s-s-s-h! Don't speak out loud, and do what I ask you quickly and silently. Get your revolver, and then we will go down-stairs together. There's a burglar in the house!"

Mr. Latimer's clasp upon Mrs. Latimer's person relaxed instantly; the eager look upon his face gave place to a look of bored annoyance; and in a perfectly calm voice he replied:

"Oh, is that all! I thought that there really was something wrong. You'd better get back to bed now—you'll catch cold."

"Don't, *don't* take it that way, Ridley. I implore you not to take it that way. I heard him most distinctly, I assure you."

"Yes, yes, I know," Mr. Latimer answered, a little petulantly, "but remember how very often you've heard him before, and what a lot of time I've wasted in hunting for him without finding him, or anything remotely like him. Come, now, be a good child," his voice became tender again, "and let me put you back in bed. If it was anything at all that you heard, you know, it was only the cats. Indeed, you'll get a bad cold if you stay around in the night air like this."

"Ridley!" exclaimed Mrs. Latimer, in a whisper that had a righteously incensed tone, "do you mean to tell me that I cannot tell a burglar from a cat?"

"Frankly," replied Mr. Latimer, "I don't think you can. I don't mean to say, of course," he continued, "that if a real burglar and a real cat came and stood right up in front of you together, in broad daylight, you could n't tell which was which—under those circumstances I do believe that you could tell them apart. But I do mean to say, and I speak from experience, that when it comes to telling burglars from cats at night, and by their voices only, you're bound to get them mixed every time."

"I never, *never* shall forget these bitterly cruel words—the first cruel words you ever have said to me, Ridley," Mrs. Latimer answered in a broken whisper that was more than half a sob. "But this is not the time," she continued, tragically, "to consider my own personal misery. Just now the property for which we are responsible is in danger; probably a portion of it already has been removed. You doubt my word, and you treat me as though I were but a foolish child,—no, don't try to kiss me: all that is at an end,—and I must waste precious time in arguing with you before you will believe that what I tell you is true. But if it must be, it must—so be good enough to listen to me carefully, and be good enough to believe"—this with much scorn and bitterness—"that I am *not* altogether a fool, and that I *am* telling you the truth."

"What happened was precisely this: I waked up suddenly,—aroused, I suppose, by an instinctive knowledge that danger was near,—and the first thing I knew I was sitting straight up in bed, listening with all my ears. At first I did n't hear anything at all. And then in a moment I heard most distinctly the tread of his bare feet—though he may have had on stockings—coming down the stairs from the third floor. He must have gone up without arousing me; and, of course, when he found

only the half-orphans up there, he came right down again. And then—just as I was expecting to see the door open stealthily, and the awful creature come into the room—I heard him stepping softly along the passage and keeping on down-stairs; and then, a minute later, I heard him talking to his confederate through the front-kitchen windows. His confederate is a woman, I distinctly perceived that one of the voices was a woman's voice.

"And now," concluded Mrs. Latimer, still speaking in a stony whisper, "I have told you all; and I am quite willing, since you desire it, to go back to bed, and there await my doom. I do not doubt that in the morning, supposing you survive me, you will find me lying there murdered; and all of Mrs. Haverwood's silver and most of her other valuable possessions will be gone. It is very, very cruel of you, Ridley, to treat me in this way. But in the presence of impending death I cannot be harsh with you, as you are with me. Remember, Ridley, when all is over, that I did love you with all my heart," and with these words Mrs. Latimer's voice went beyond tremulousness into the inarticulate region of sobs.

His wife's great earnestness, and the unusual circumstantiality of her narrative, combined to convince Mr. Latimer that for once, perhaps, her burglar was not made absolutely out of the whole cloth; and he was the more strengthened in this belief by suddenly remembering, as she spoke of the noises which she had heard, that he also had heard, or had fancied that he heard, footsteps in the passage but a little while before. Under these circumstances, while still leaning decidedly to the cat hypothesis, he was willing to admit that the asserted burglar was not absolutely impossible, and that the case was one which reasonably might be investigated. Moved by which considerations, he answered:

"Well, since you're so dead sure about it this time, I'll take a look for him anyway. Now come back to bed, and then I'll go gunning for him down-stairs."

"Without me?" demanded Mrs. Latimer in a most resolute whisper. "Indeed you won't do anything of the kind. I'm going with you, of course!"

Of burglars in the bush, Mrs. Latimer had a most lively horror; but when it came to burglars in the hand, and that hand her husband's, her fear was cast out by her love.

"Come!" she said, detaching herself from Mr. Latimer's arms, and making a heroic gesture with the lantern. "Come! If necessary, we will perish together; but, whatever may be my fate later, you shall not die in the basement alone."

"Oh, rubbish!" exclaimed Mr. Ridley testily, "we're not going to perish together, nor on the instalment plan either. Anyhow, you can't go

down-stairs looking like that to meet a strange burglar. What are you thinking of; and what, I should like to know, would he think of you?"

"Oh!" said Mrs. Latimer, blushing like a delightful rose, "I did n't think—with a burglar, you know—it's—it's different, don't you see?"

"No," replied Mr. Latimer, with a great show of righteous severity, "I don't see. Even if he is a burglar, he is a man, all the same; and there's nothing about his profession—as there is about the profession of medicine, for instance—to give him special privileges. Really, I am ashamed of you! If you absolutely insist upon going down-stairs with me to receive him,—and I must say that I think you are over-punctilious in the matter: he certainly must be a total stranger to us, and obviously comes without an introduction,—at least do up your hair and put on your slippers and a wrapper."

The utterance of these sentiments of commonplace propriety in an entirely commonplace tone had the effect of putting the burglar at a different angle of Mrs. Latimer's mental vision, and, in spite of herself, her dread of him very sensibly decreased.

"Please hold the lantern—I'll only be a minute," she said, forgetting to whisper, and speaking, such is the force of association of ideas, in precisely the tone that she would have employed had any ordinary caller been waiting for her down-stairs.

"All right. There's not the least hurry, you know," Mr. Latimer answered; and his wholly matter-of-fact words and manner tended so much the more to bring Mrs. Latimer down from the high level of tragedy to the plane of every-day life that she went to the glass to do up her hair quite with her usual deliberation, and with her mind mainly occupied in deciding which of her two pretty wrappers she should put on.

V.

TELLING OF MR. LATIMER'S VAIN SEARCH FOR A BURGLAR, AND OF SUSAN POUNDWEIGHT'S EXTRAORDINARY BRAVERY.

THIS was Mr. Latimer's opportunity, and he promptly made use of it. Closing the slide of the lantern, that he might not be betrayed by the brilliant stream of light from the bull's-eye, and kicking off his slippers, that his steps might be noiseless, he stole softly down-stairs; and was fairly in the basement before Mrs. Latimer had much more than made a beginning at her hair.

In spite of his caution, he did not think that the chances in favor of his meeting a burglar were large. What he expected to meet was cats; and his intentions toward the cat or cats responsible for putting his wife into such a state of alarm, and for spoiling his own calm enjoy-

ment of his book and cigar, were not at all the sort of intentions proper to the acting head of a destitute-cat home.

And yet, convinced though Mr. Latimer was that he had come, as usual, upon a sleeveless errand, he certainly did have — as he tiptoed along the passage to the front kitchen — a curiously strong feeling that somebody was close beside him there in the dark. This feeling was instinctive rather than reasoning; but it was so overpowering that he actually backed up against the wall, and held his breath while he listened intently for some definitely convincing sound. On the score of prudence, he kept the lantern covered. The burglar, if there were a burglar, might have slipped away to either end of the long passage; and to let off the lantern in the wrong direction — thereby indicating his own whereabouts some seconds in advance of discovering the whereabouts of the intruder — might be productive of consequences of the most awkward kind. Many years before, when he was quite a little boy, some one had told him a story about a man who had killed a burglar by emptying a revolver into the darkness immediately behind the glare of a bull's-eye lantern — on the logical assumption that that was where the burglar ought to be. In the present instance, as he perceived with a rather chilling clearness, the conditions would be reversed but the principle would remain unchanged.

However, during the half minute or so that he thus stood rigid against the wall, the silence was absolute; and then, convinced that his instincts had got mixed with his imagination, and that the burglar was just as unreal as all the rest of Mrs. Latimer's burglars had been, he went on to the kitchen in a more rational frame of mind. The condition of the kitchen tended to restore his belief that the state of affairs in every way was normal. The locks and bolts of the doors, the fastenings over the window-sashes, the massive iron bars outside the windows — all were precisely as he had left them only a couple of hours before. Obviously, Mrs. Latimer's convincingly circumstantial statement had not even a cat back of it — the whole of it had come straight out of a dream.

And then, at the very moment that he had arrived at this quieting but not precisely soothing conclusion, there rang out upon the silence of the night a shrill scream of terror, which was followed in the same instant by another shrill scream of terror in a slightly different key, and simultaneously with this last came the sound as of two bodies — one rather heavier than the other — falling on the floor above!

Although Mr. Latimer never before had heard Mrs. Latimer's voice thus loudly raised and all a-thrill with fear, he knew very well that one of these screams of terror came from her. From

whom the other scream came he did not stop to consider — as the dreadful thought flashed through his mind that a burglar really had got past him in the dark, and that his defenseless wife was at the mercy of the ruffian in the regions above. Acting on the most natural impulse, the moment that this horrible possibility occurred to him he went up the kitchen stairs three steps at a time.

As he rounded into the hall above, he heard a sound of gasping breathing that seemed to come from near the foot of the front stairs; and when, reaching the spot, he brought his lantern to bear upon it, the sight that he beheld — while instantly abating his feeling of dread — filled him with a very lively surprise. There, seated upon the floor, with her legs sticking straight out in front of her, was Mrs. Latimer. Directly facing her, also seated upon the floor and also with straight-extended legs — the two evidently having collided in the dark and then fallen backward — was a pretty young girl, rather inclining to stoutness, whose neat gray frock and neat blue-and-white checked apron implied that she was one of their own half-orphans: an implication that was confirmed into a certainty, in the moment that the light from the bull's-eye lantern flashed upon her, by Mrs. Latimer's exclaiming:

"Why, Susan Poundweight! I thought you were a burglar! What *are* you doing here?"

"Oh, ma'am," answered the young person, "when you came bumping into me that way, and we both went down kerflump, I thought *you* were a burglar, and that I'd got to my last hour! And truly, ma'am, there is one down-stairs — for I heard him sort of snorking with his breath, and I know he a-most caught me, when I was down there a minute ago."

"No," put in Mr. Latimer, "that was n't a burglar; that was me. I was sure I heard somebody; and so it was you, was it? And what were you doing down in the basement at twelve o'clock at night, I'd like to know?"

"If — if you please, sir," Susan answered, arising briskly, but speaking with a strangely marked hesitation, and getting very red as she spoke, "I — I thought I heard a noise."

"Well, and what if you did hear a noise?"

"Why, sir, I thought that — that mebbe I'd better go down and see what it was."

"Faithful girl!" exclaimed Mrs. Latimer, before Mr. Latimer could reply to this avowal. "Just think of it, Ridley! She thought she heard a burglar, and her sense of duty made her peril her life by going down into that utter darkness to confront that great danger alone! Susan, I am proud of you! You are the very bravest girl I ever knew!"

"Oh, it was n't nothin', ma'am," Susan answered in still more constrained tones. "I did n't — I did n't know for sure that it was a

burglar. You see it might 'a' been the—the cats. And anyhow, ma'am, I 'm given to walkin' in my sleep."

In delivering this disjointed and also incongruous explanation, Susan Poundweight addressed the darkness behind the blazing bull's-eye, while she herself stood in the center of the circle of brilliant light, and looked very much like a blushing half-orphan projected from a magic-lantern upon a screen. These conditions were not favorable to self-possession; yet even when due allowance was made for them, and also for the strain due to the very unusual circumstances of the situation as a whole, it did seem to Mr. Latimer that her contradictory statements were so curious, and that her embarrassment was so much in excess of its apparent causes, that some additional disturbing element remained to be revealed.

When they got up-stairs again, and Susan had been sent off once more to bed, he exhibited to Mrs. Latimer this application of astronomical principles to domestic affairs; and he added that he considered Susan's conduct to be very suspicious indeed. But Mrs. Latimer would have none of his domesticated astronomy; and she resented his suspicions in energetic terms.

"I am ashamed of you, Ridley," she said warmly; "I am thoroughly ashamed of you! Susan has done a very noble and heroic act, and you are treating her as though you had caught her trying to make off with the spoons."

"No, I 'm not sure that she was after the spoons, exactly," Mr. Latimer answered, "but I do think that she was after something or another that she 'd better not have been. You must keep a sharp eye on that young woman. Unless we are very careful she certainly will get us into some sort of a scrape."

"Scrape, indeed!" responded Mrs. Latimer, indignantly. "Your suspicions are as ungenerous as they are utterly unjust. Instead of her getting us into scrapes, I consider that it is an honor to live in the same house with her. Really, Ridley, we must stop talking about her, or I shall get seriously angry with you. You see, nothing that you possibly can say can change my convictions. Susan Poundweight has shown herself nobly true to her duty, and the bravest of the brave. If ever there was one, she is a heroine. She deserves the Victoria Cross."

VI.

TREATING OF MRS. LATIMER'S LONGING FOR ORIENTAL TRAVEL, AND EXHIBITING HER ABILITY TO CHANGE FANCIES INTO FACTS.

As has been inferred, perhaps, from some of the facts already stated, Mrs. Latimer's disposition reasonably might be termed imaginative. That this romantic quality had its practical

drawbacks, no one was more ready to admit than Mr. Latimer—whose experiences in consequence of it at times were very intense indeed. To be cautiously but firmly awakened at two o'clock in the morning, and then hurriedly despatched upon a reconnoissance along such remote frontier passes as the kitchen windows or the scuttle in the roof,—to make sure that marauding parties were not pouring in through those exposed openings,—he found decidedly wearing; and scarcely less wearing did he find what he very offensively styled the smoke-smelling act: to perform which he usually was aroused just as he was dropping off into his first sleep, and was sent flying downstairs in search of a fire in either the kitchen or the laundry, with supplementary instructions—should these apartments prove to be in their normal state of non-combustion—to keep on to the cellar and make sure that there was not an incipient conflagration in the ash-bin.

But Mrs. Latimer's imagination also had its good side. As has been exhibited, she was quite capable of exalting the smell of scorching Japan-varnish, consequent to the lighting of a new lantern, into an odor of incense burning in an Oriental shrine; and of continuing along the line of fancy thus indicated by imagining that she and Mr. Latimer were visiting not only that particular shrine but various adjacent places of interest in the far East.

This longing for Oriental travel was, indeed, Mrs. Latimer's most vigorously ridden hobby. When the circumstances would permit it, her intention was that they should go upon a long Eastern journey: visiting all the lands mentioned in the Arabian Nights, and conducting themselves, generally, like a prince and princess got at large from that delectable storehouse of romance. Pending their departure upon this expedition, she insisted that they should anticipate its delights by assuming that they actually were traveling in the Orient, and by fancying the adventures of one sort or another which were befalling them by the way.

In order to give a still livelier air of realism to her system of imaginary travel—and especially to brace up the imagination of Mr. Latimer, whose faculty for etherealizing himself into an astral shape and then going off with it was not large—Mrs. Latimer very ingeniously contrived, out of cheese-cloth, costumes of an Oriental sort for them to wear while taking their mental jaunts. These garments, very vivid in hue, were patterned after the woodcuts in an old edition of the "Arabian Nights"; and their enthusiastic maker, while not contending that as costumes they were critically correct, insisted that they were near enough to the right thing to help along the illusion tremendously.

"When you actually are dressed like the pic-

ture of the African Magician, you know, Ridley dear," she said very earnestly, "it is impossible for you not to feel like him — even if African magicians in real life are dressed totally differently: and for you to feel like him is all we want. With a true African feeling like that inside of you, everything that we are talking about instantly becomes entirely real. Indeed, the turban alone, with its queer little point coming up in the middle, is enough to make you feel that you are thousands of miles away in a very foreign land."

But even with the assistance of the costumes, Mrs. Latimer had difficulty in imagining, and still more difficulty in making Mr. Latimer imagine, some of the situations which were most after her own heart. The apartment in Irving Place which they had inhabited since their marriage consisted only of a little sitting-room, with a still smaller adjoining bedroom; and, excellent though her powers of mental fabrication unquestionably were, Mrs. Latimer found the strain rather excessive when it came to converting these contracted quarters into, for instance, the palace inhabited by the Prince of the Black Isles. Mr. Latimer, being confronted with this situation, squarely refused to meet it. The best that he could do, he said, was to imagine that the Prince of the Black Isles had rented his palace furnished for the season, and had taken lodgings for himself on Irving Place in the city of New York. Of course, this would not answer at all. As Mrs. Latimer pointed out, they were pursuing the fancy that they were traveling in the East, not that Eastern people were paying them visits in their own home; and the upshot of the matter was that they had to abandon their trip to the Black Isles and take a fresh start in another direction.

As in the case of the palace, so in a dozen other ways were they brought up constantly in the midst of their fancings with a round turn — such as a papered ceiling intervening when they wanted to contemplate the moon and stars, or a conspicuous absence of slaves when they clapped their hands.

One of the principal reasons, therefore, why Mrs. Latimer had been eager to accept the loan of Mrs. Haverwood's half-orphans and home was the large opportunity which these possessions would afford for making their fanciful life in the Orient more real. At a stroke they would possess a very good imitation of a palace; eight slaves in the persons of the eight half-orphans to come in response to hand-clapping; and, best of all, absolutely unrestricted access to a roof on which they could sit and look at the moon and stars, if they wanted to, through the whole night long.

Being come into her kingdom, Mrs. Latimer found the roof part of it, at least, all that her fancy had pictured and that her heart had de-

sired. Nor was her enjoyment of the romantic pleasure which the roof afforded her appreciably diminished by the fact that in order to attain it they were compelled to overcome certain obstacles of a material and unromantic sort.

"I know perfectly well, Ridley dear," she said, in the course of their first ascent to the housetop, "that when the Caliph of Bagdad went on the roof of his palace with his wife —"

"Wives," interpolated Mr. Latimer.

"If you don't mind, Ridley dear, I prefer to speak of them in the singular. Customs are different in the Orient; but I am sure that their little collection of wives is just as dear to them — to the nice ones, that is — as one wife is to nice husbands here."

Mr. Latimer did not venture any reply to this handsome profession of faith in the existence of a collective monogamous sentiment among the better classes of polygamists, and Mrs. Latimer continued: "Of course I know that when the Caliph of Bagdad and his wife went on the roof of their palace, — to enjoy the coolness of the night and the beauty of the heavens, just as we are now, — they did n't have to climb up a horrid little ladder, and then go creeping across a smelly cockloft, and he did not have to pull her up through the scuttle by her hands as you pull me."

"No," responded Mr. Latimer, "I don't believe he did. Indeed, I don't believe he could. Pulling you up, you see, is easy enough, for there 's only one of you to pull. But if you were the kind of wife the Caliph of Bagdad had, — in any number of parts, like a subscription book, — I 'd get completely tired out long before I 'd hauled you all up here: to say nothing of the fact that you would n't all be up before it would be time to begin to pass you down. Of course the Caliph did n't manage things that way. What he did, I suppose, — with him, of course, expense was no consideration, — was to put in a big elevator and bring her up a dozen at a time."

"Please don't spoil the romance of it all, Ridley dear, by talking that way — and about elevators, too! How many times must I tell you that the palaces, and the dwellings generally, in the Orient are only one, or at most two, stories high? In such a building an elevator would be an absurdity. But what I am trying to tell you, dearest, is that while the Caliph of Bagdad and his wife did n't have to get on their roof in the uncomfortable way that we do, they could n't have had a nicer time after they got there than we are having now."

"On that," answered Mr. Latimer, feelingly, "I am betting high. Indeed," he continued, "I am willing to bet that they did n't have as good a time. How could he manage, for instance, I should like to know, about putting

his head in her lap—when there was just one of him and half an acre more or less of her? Our little plan lays the Caliph's out cold—and, if you don't mind, I'll take off my turban; it's rather in the way."

Perhaps it was just as well that Mr. and Mrs. Latimer's immediate neighbors did not also frequent the housetops, for the effect produced by these young people as they wandered about their roof in the moonlight, clad in loose and flowing draperies which had uncommonly the look of nightgowns, was decidedly queer. And it was a good deal queerer when Mrs. Latimer succeeded in putting the half-orphans into garments of the same Far-Eastern sort, and got them upon the roof in the capacity of slaves.

Mrs. Latimer's first intention had been to maintain the slave fiction continuously by dressing the half-orphans always in Oriental garb. But on more mature reflection she decided that this plan, attractive though it was, must be abandoned. On the score of ethics, she feared that the laying aside of Mrs. Haverwood's uniform dress might have a subversive effect upon the system of half-orphanly training which that excellent woman had devised; and even more to the purpose was the fact that the half-orphans themselves absolutely refused to accept as a chronic garb what Martha Skeat described, disparagingly, as "floppy heathen cloze." Susan Poundweight was still more emphatic, protesting earnestly that if ever she knew that anybody was lookin' at her when she had on things like them loose pants, she'd have a fit and then die.

Being thus unable and unwilling to carry out her plan in its entirety, Mrs. Latimer compromised matters by decreeing that the Eastern dress should be worn only on Mondays; which day was to be known as Arabian Nights day in the household calendar. All the younger children, delighting in the fun of dressing up in queer clothes, of course approved of this arrangement rapturously; and even the elder girls—including Susan Poundweight, who was not ill-natured, though she was as pig-headed as she possibly could be—came into it with a fairly good grace. That the masquerading tended to excite mutinously high spirits among the masqueraders was undeniable, and Mrs. Latimer presently found that things always went more violently wrong on Monday, that is to say, on Arabian Nights day, than on any other day in the week.

VII.

TELLING HOW SUSAN POUNDWEIGHT WRECKED THE PLUMBING AND WAS SUSPECTED OF MYSTERIOUS MISDEEDS.

As the summer slowly moved onward, Mrs. Latimer perceived, with an ever-increasing clearness, that she was carrying a good deal

more of a load of half-orphans than her shoulders were strong enough to bear. All that sustained her was the knowledge that relief was certain at a fixed and not distant point of time. From Mrs. Haverwood there came a letter, about the middle of August, stating that she had arranged with all the surviving parents of her charges to meet her in New York on the day succeeding her return, and then to take them instantly and forever off her hands. But for this cheering light at the end of her dark vista, Mrs. Latimer was of the opinion—as she many times confided to Mr. Latimer—that she necessarily must go wild.

Yet, with a single exception, her half-orphanly tribulations were of a petty sort; mere gnat-stings of trouble which would have been supported easily had they not gathered about her in so dense a swarm. The serious exception to this rule of trivialities was Susan Poundweight. In a purely material way Susan's awkwardness and carelessness were productive of a good deal of annoyance. Her faculty for breaking things was quite phenomenal; and more than phenomenal in that her destructiveness was confined exclusively to the gas- and water-system of the house, and always was of such a nature as to require the immediate presence of a plumber in order to set it right. Advice and correction were thrown away on her. After Mrs. Latimer had shown her exactly how to use the faucets of the kitchen sink,—this was after she had broken one of them off,—she went right ahead in her slap-dash way, and within seven weeks had broken off one or the other of those faucets no less than five times. On top of all this, she broke the sink itself twice by dropping into it first a flat-iron and then a large iron pot; she wrenched off, in some unaccountable way, no less than three gas-brackets; she managed repeatedly to deposit obstructing substances in the waste-pipes of the permanent wash-tubs, and she even contrived to let a heavy gridiron fall in such a malignant fashion that it punched a hole in the big copper boiler beside the kitchen range.

When these catastrophes occurred, Susan always was dreadfully cut up about them, and accepted, with a pathetic penitence, her merited reproof. She always went herself post-haste for the plumber, and usually brought him back with her; and she even insisted—all the while blushing, and evidently very much ashamed of herself—on doing what she could, by holding the candle for him and handing him his tools, to help him repair the wreck which she had caused. He was quite a young plumber, just starting in business, and Mrs. Latimer was both surprised and delighted by the exceeding smallness of his bills. Another thing that surprised Mrs. Latimer in this connection, though it was

some little time before she noticed it, was the odd coincidence that never on Arabian Nights days did the plumbing sustain the smallest injury at Susan Poundweight's devastating hands.

Annoying though these aqueous and gaseous mischances undoubtedly were, however, they were but trifling matters in comparison with the really serious anxiety which Susan Poundweight caused (or was suspected of causing) in another and a much more perplexing way. The strange conduct of this young woman in the depths of the first night which she and Mrs. Latimer had passed together under the same roof never had been adequately explained. Neither of the three explanations, advanced hurriedly and inconsiderately at the moment, had been justified by the subsequent course of events. Mr. Latimer's explanation, that Susan had designs upon the spoons, had been disproved again and again as time went on by conclusive evidence that Susan was as honest as the sun; Mrs. Latimer's explanation, that Susan had gone down heroically to confront a burglar alone, and to capture him single-handed, had been disproved not less conclusively by repeated demonstrations of the fact that Susan was a pleasingly plump but entirely arrant coward; and as to Susan's own confused and contradictory explanation, that she was walking in her sleep, and had come down-stairs because she had heard a noise, its absolute absurdity was obvious from the start.

Yet, vexatious though it had been at the time, this unaccountable venture in nocturnal perambulation would have passed quietly into the realm of oblivion but for Mrs. Latimer's uneasy feeling that Susan's jaunts by night—in what obviously was a condition of dangerously wide-awake somnambulism—still went on. Of course, had she possessed positive knowledge in the premises she would have charged Susan squarely with the sin of misapplied migratory vigilance, and issue would have been joined. But she did not possess positive knowledge. All that she had to go upon certainly was a mass of indirect evidence of a suspicious but not demonstrating sort. Repeatedly she had been aroused from sleep as though by some slight but sudden noise. In almost every instance the noise had ceased before she had become sufficiently wide-awake to tell, with any degree of certainty, whence it came. Once, however, she fancied that she had heard a slight creaking of the stairs; again,—this was one warm night when the door leading into the passage was open,—that she had heard the faint sound of soft footsteps; and on several occasions it had seemed to her that the door of an upper room had been very cautiously opened or closed.

In the earlier stages of these manifestations, Mrs. Latimer regularly woke up Mr. Latimer,

and sent him cantering off into the lower or upper regions of the house—according to her fancied location of the fancied sound—to find out what was going wrong. But as the result of these expeditions invariably was to find that everything was going right, Mr. Latimer more and more resented being despatched upon such bootless errands; and on several occasions—by this time having been almost half a year married—he pained Mrs. Latimer deeply by the reprehensible hesitation that he manifested in getting out of bed, and still more pained her, on his return from hunting her supposititious sounds and smells, by denouncing in a brief but exceedingly forcible commination service of his own devising these acoustic myths and phantom odors of her mind.

It was because the alarming sounds continued without any alarming consequences, such as the murder of herself and Mr. Latimer and the disappearance of the plate, that Mrs. Latimer very unwillingly abandoned her burglar theory and took up in a tentative way the theory that, inasmuch as Susan Poundweight had been at the bottom of one nocturnal disturbance, she might be at the bottom of them all. But why Susan Poundweight thus should go careering around the house at night—supposing, that is, that she did career—was nothing less than an impenetrable mystery. Somnambulism would not account for it, for somnambulism was a product of the imagination, and Susan Poundweight was as conspicuously lacking in that refined mental attribute as Mrs. Latimer was conspicuously over-endowed with it. Nor was it reasonable to suppose that a person of Susan's dull nature would keep awake during the period divinely set apart for slumber save under stress of some motive of such exceptional energy that traces of it would be manifest, also, during the day; but during her waking hours—save for her continued demolition of the plumbing—Susan was as placid as a windless day in June.

In short, the situation was such that Mrs. Latimer could make neither head nor tail of it. Nor was Mr. Latimer able to give her any rational assistance when she exhibited to him her mystery for solution. All that Mr. Latimer did in the premises was to advance the inadequate and brutal opinion that, inasmuch as all the noises on which Mrs. Latimer rested her scheme of bewildering wonderment undoubtedly were the pure creations of her own fancy, there was no mystery to solve. Actually, of course, Mr. Latimer went off on this tack because he could not solve the problem either—as Mrs. Latimer promptly pointed out to him, with the comment (matrimony already had taught her something) that to do that “was so like a man!”

(To be concluded in the next number.)

Thomas A. Janvier.

A LOAN OF HALF-ORPHANS.

A NARRATIVE IN TWO PARTS. PART II.

By Thomas A. Janvier, author of "Color Studies," "An Embassy to Provence," etc., etc.

I.

TREATING OF MRS. LATIMER'S GLOOMY FOREBODINGS, AND OF MR. LATIMER'S HIGH RESOLVE.



PHILOSOPHERS and others have observed with interest that even the gentlest of women will rise to valorous heights of combative endeavor rather than submit tamely to being placed in the wrong. Mrs. Latimer was no exception to this rule; indeed, it is not going too far to say that her disposition to maintain the doctrine of feminine infallibility, with especial reference to the incarnation of that dogma in herself, was rather unusually strong.

Naturally, therefore, when Mr. Latimer had the temerity to assert that the nocturnal noises which occasioned her so much uneasiness had no existence outside of her own fancy, all her latent fighting spirit was aroused. In order to prove that she was in the right, she would have braved a whole arena-full of assorted wild beasts with Early Christian equanimity, and her strongest wish was that something convincingly desperate—even, if necessary, the sacrifice of her own life—would happen in a hurry: to the end that Mr. Latimer, simultaneously losing her and getting the worst of the argument, might be confounded and utterly cast down.

Her desire for haste in the production of this decisive catastrophe was due to the fact that Mrs. Haverwood's home-coming—the time for which had almost arrived—would be the signal for them to vacate that lady's home; with which departure, of course, every possibility of proving that the noises were not the creation of her own fancy would be gone. And she knew (although so young a bride, she already had learned a few of the eternal truths of matrimony) that Mr. Latimer then would be in a position to say things at her to the end of their married days.

Therefore did it seem to Mrs. Latimer as though the stars in their courses were fighting against her when what she believed would be her last night in Mrs. Haverwood's mansion came to a tranquil ending, and the mystery still remained unsolved. This was the night of Saturday, October 2; and Mrs. Haverwood, if her

steamer came in on time, was due to arrive on Sunday, October 3. Postal cards already had come from the remaining parents of several of the half-orphans, announcing their intention to keep the appointment which Mrs. Haverwood had made with them, by letter, for Monday, October 4; and one parent actually had arrived in person. This was Mrs. Poundweight, who proved to be a most spirited young widow, of not a day over five-and-thirty, clad with a vehement gaiety which threw the historically brilliant costume of the Queen of Sheba—especially in view of the facts that that royal personage was not a widow and the mother of a nearly grown up daughter—completely into the shade. Oddly enough, Mrs. Poundweight had come in ahead of schedule time, not because she was at all in a hurry to clasp again her daughter to her heart, but because she wanted to make arrangements for transferring Susan directly to another half-orphan home. This was a matter, of course, in which Mrs. Latimer could not take any action; she could only advise the Widow Poundweight to call, in company with the other parents, on Monday morning at eleven o'clock; the day and hour which Mrs. Haverwood had named. Finally, Mr. Latimer had reengaged their old apartment in Irving Place, and had sent thither all their luggage save a hand-bag in which were necessaries for the night. If for any reason Mrs. Haverwood failed to arrive on time, they would continue in charge of her eccentric household for the brief period that her coming might be delayed. If she did arrive on time, they had only to pick up the hand-bag, and—leaving their palace and also their load of half-orphans and cats forever behind them—come down-town to their own modest quarters on a Madison Avenue car.

In point of fact, Mrs. Haverwood did not arrive on time. On Saturday morning an easterly gale of unusual severity set in, and through Saturday night and Sunday and Sunday night this gale continued with a constantly increasing violence. Mr. Latimer—who had designed a silver-plated table-service for one of the big transatlantic liners—knew a good deal about ships and storms and that sort of thing, and he said on Saturday evening that if the gale held, the *Cantabria*, the steamer on which Mrs. Haverwood was returning, would

have to stand out to sea, and certainly could not come into port before Monday. As the gale did hold, this presumably was what the *Cantabria* did; at any rate, she did not come across the bar on Sunday, nor could any news of her having been signaled be obtained at her dock.

In the sober facts of this situation there was no cause for serious alarm. But Mrs. Latimer, by touching up the facts with her imagination, succeeded by noon on Sunday in wrecking the *Cantabria* on the Jersey coast; and by dinner-time she had Mrs. Haverwood washed ashore with seaweed in her hair, and with exanimate accessories of the most heartrending character. Having thus created a situation that entirely justified worrying, Mrs. Latimer proceeded to worry over it in a gyratory fashion—that is to say, working around in a circle and so coming again and again to the same dismal possibilities—that nearly drove Mr. Latimer wild. The most dismal of these possibilities—and the one, of course, to which she came back most frequently—was that as the result of Mrs. Haverwood's untoward decease they would be saddled with the care of the sixteen cats and the eight half-orphans for the remainder of their lives.

In combating this absurd position Mr. Latimer's rational statement and logical deduction alike were wasted. At the best of times cold facts and colder logic were little to Mrs. Latimer's liking; but when she fairly was under the domination of an imaginary woe her attitude toward these bases of reason in the human understanding was that of absolute disdain. It was a waste of words, therefore, for Mr. Latimer to assure her—on the impossible supposition that they would succeed to the administration of a private charity in which they had absolutely no inheritable right—that all the cats, even though they had nine lives apiece to start with, certainly would be dead in a few years' time; and that in a similarly short period all the half-orphans would be women grown. Mrs. Latimer did not attempt to deny these assertions, but when they were made she shifted her ground to lamentations over Mrs. Haverwood's damply tragic fate; and then—just as Mr. Latimer, shifting his sphere of cheery encouragement, had landed Mrs. Haverwood safely from a life-boat, or had brought her triumphantly through the breakers by means of a breeches-buoy—back she would come again to the incubus of cats and half-orphans which was destined to weigh upon them until it brought down their prematurely gray hairs in sorrow to the grave.

What with the somber weather without, and Mrs. Latimer's blood-curdling forebodings within, Mr. Latimer was driven almost to de-

spair. He was naturally a cheerful young man, and to have horrors fired at him this way at point-blank range was calculated, he felt, if persisted in, to make him old before his time. Moreover, the intense unreasonableness of it all vexed him beyond words—at least, beyond words that he could use without being very impolite indeed. Therefore,—much as he usually enjoyed Mrs. Latimer's society, and fond as he usually was of the sound of her voice,—he was most sincerely thankful when at last the coming of bedtime brought a promise of temporary relief.

That the relief would be only temporary Mr. Latimer very well knew. Experience had taught him that when Mrs. Latimer got into one of these wrought-up moods he could count as certainly upon her smelling smoke, or hearing a burglar, or both, at various periods in the night as he could count upon the sunrise of the following day. However, he was a little wrought-up himself—and his very last conscious act of volition before he dropped off to sleep was most highly to resolve that Mrs. Latimer might smell smoke in every room in the house; and might hear burglars from the cellar to the roof, inclusive, without his budging one inch from his bed to investigate her alleged igneous and latrocinate phenomena. This smoke-smelling and burglar-hearing nonsense, he decided in his sleepy wrath, had gone far enough. The time had come for calling a halt.

II.

HOW MRS. LATIMER, EXPOSING HERSELF TO ASSASSINATION, CAUGHT A PAIR OF LOVERS KISSING THROUGH THE BARS.

HER head being full of grizzly phantasms, and her heart of dark forebodings of a dismal future crowded to repletion with recalcitrant half-orphans and unnecessary cats, Mrs. Latimer did not easily get to sleep; and when she did get to sleep it was only to continue in a still more startling fashion the same gloom-stricken train of thought in her dreams.

Out of this troubled and fitful slumber she wakened suddenly, and with the feeling of having heard a strange and affrighting sound; but whether the sound had been a reality or a part of a dream she could not tell. Outside, the easterly storm still continued with great violence, the rain falling heavily, and the wind surging in angry gusts which came with a roar and passed away with a moaning wail like the cry of a lost sinful soul. Instantly the thought occurred to her of the *Cantabria* crashing to fragments upon the Jersey sands; with the sequent thought of poor Mrs. Haverwood tossing about in the breakers with unbecoming seaweed tangled in her hair. She would have

got along to all the rest of the horrors in her cycle of dreary thoughts but that there came just then one of those curious lulls of a few seconds of absolute silence in the storm; and while this lull lasted she was convinced that she heard, through the partly opened front window, the sound of a man's voice speaking in a guardedly low tone. In an instant her memory flashed back to the precisely similar occurrence on the first night that they had dwelt in Mrs. Haverwood's marble halls; and in another instant she was shaking Mr. Latimer vigorously in order to get him awake.

Mr. Latimer did not waken easily, and his first sleepy words showed that the high resolve which he had taken as a sort of moral night-cap still held firm.

"No," he said, "I *don't* smell smoke, and I don't believe you do either. Let me alone!"

"Ridley! Ridley dear!" Mrs. Latimer cried in her low but intense tones. "It is n't smoke. Wake up!"

"I won't," replied Mr. Latimer, resolutely, and turned over on his other side.

"But you must; I tell you you *must* wake up, Ridley! There 's the same burglar down-stairs that we heard the very first night we came here — away back in last June."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Latimer, drowsily; and then slowly, and more and more drowsily, added: "He simply can't have been there all this time, you know. We could n't have boarded and lodged him all summer, without knowing that he was there."

The last word or two of this utterance scarcely was articulate, and as Mr. Latimer ceased speaking, his deep and regular breathing gave proof that he had surrendered himself again to sleep.

Times and seasons there were in Mrs. Latimer's life when dove-like gentleness and sweetness were her dominant characteristics; but the moment when Mr. Latimer, for the first time wholly revolting against her authority, rolled over and went to sleep that way — leaving behind him so bitter a legacy of derisive words — was not a time and season of this sort. So lively was her resentment that, had she not been in a recumbent position, she certainly would have danced with rage. What she actually did do, after a moment or so of reflection, — turning rather white, and her hands and feet going rather cold as she did it, — was to get right up out of bed, slip on a wrapper and her slippers, take the dark lantern from its accustomed place on the table by the bedside, and, thus accoutered, resolutely set off down-stairs to investigate the dangerous situation to its most perilous depths. At that moment there was not in her mind a trace of the Susan Poundweight hypothesis; what she confidently expected to

encounter was a murderous burglar, or gang of burglars, who would assist her to round on the rebellious Mr. Latimer by slaying her on sight. Thrills of deliciously sorrowful joy shot through her as she thought how, in the morning, Jane Spicer — it would certainly be Jane, and she knew precisely how Jane would make the announcement — would knock at the door of his chamber, and would say respectfully: "If you please, sir, Mrs. Latimer is in the front kitchen, a-welterin' in her gore!"

Although in so fine a glow of righteous resentment, Mrs. Latimer did not dash recklessly upon the violent death which she fully believed was lurking in wait for her in the lower regions of the house. With the lantern tight-closed, that not a ray of light from the bull's-eye might betray her presence, she tiptoed down-stairs with as cautious a silence as though she herself was the burglar of whom she was in search. Even without regard to the deadly peril upon which she thus cautiously was precipitating herself, there was a strong element of the horrible to one of her highly imaginative temperament, in thus stealing down the dark stairways, and along the dark passages, in the depths of that wildly tempestuous night. All the more did the moanings and wailings of the wind sound to her like the cries of lost souls in agony; and she also found a painfully close resemblance to the hissings of serpents (which reptilian sibilation, by the way, she never actually had heard) in the seething downpour of the rain. On the last stairway, leading to the basement, she shifted the ground of her imaginative horrors to the region of Wagnerian grand opera, and so came to the kitchen-door in the key of the *Walpurgis Night*.

Even as she advanced along the passage, she was confident that she heard the sound of voices, and as she opened the kitchen-door this sound became unmistakably the murmur of a conversation carried on in low and very earnest tones. The kitchen was inky dark; but the sound obviously came from the farther side of the room — the side toward the street — and the sharp puff of cold air which blew in her face as she unlatched the door was evidence that one of the windows was open. The faint light from a distant street lamp made the windows slightly luminous, so that the tracery of the sashes and of the heavy outer grating of iron bars was distinguishable; and against one of them there was vaguely outlined a mass of blackness that was strongly suggestive of two human forms.

In the instant of these several discoveries, Mrs. Latimer felt that at last she had got hold of the mystery which had vexed and perplexed her all summer long; and, such is the contradictoriness of human nature, and so promptly does satisfaction merge itself in satiety, that her

strongest desire in that same instant was to let go of it with all possible speed. Somehow—now that she actually possessed the desired opportunity for self-immolation—there was a decided weakening of her resolve to cast herself, as it were, to the lions in order to confound Mr. Latimer's incredulity, and to establish her own creed. On the other hand, failing this simple and heroic method of dealing with the situation, the only other reasonable course open to her was the equally simple but not at all heroic one of running away.

It is unnecessary to speculate as to which of these courses Mrs. Latimer would have adopted, inasmuch as modifying conditions arose which resulted in her rejecting them both. In the critical moment that she stood hesitating, with her hand upon the door-knob, the murmur of conversation ceased, and she fancied that the heads of the figures, looming against the dim light, came closely together; and then, most unmistakably, above the sound of moaning wind and hissing rain, came in quick succession the sound of a series of those honest kisses, as hearty as they are innocent, which are described most accurately by the honest old word "buss."

Even had Mrs. Latimer been in the habit of arriving at conclusions by the slow process of ratiocination, she would not have lost much time in deciding that in the presence of so much frank love-making she was in no peril of her life. Being accustomed, however, to get at results by the far quicker process of intuition, she discharged all fear from her soul at the sound of the second kiss; and by the seventh—the volley was fired with great rapidity—she had brought her lantern to bear, and had shot back the slide. And then, revealed in the circle of light, she saw Susan Poundweight and the young plumber kissing each other as hard as ever they could kiss through the iron bars.

Of the three persons who simultaneously shared this curiously complete surprise, the person who showed to the least advantage was the plumber. Mrs. Latimer, who, being hidden behind the glare of the lantern, really did not show at all, stood her ground with a dignified firmness; and Susan Poundweight, though turning a flaming crimson, manifested a dogged disposition to fight for her love-making rights with a stolid energy that was in keeping with her stolid but by no means weak nature, and with her slow habit of mind. But the plumber very obviously was scared almost out of his seven senses, and but for Susan's firm restraining grip upon him through the bars most certainly would have run away.

"Don't you budge, John," said Susan, stoutly. "You ain't doin' any harm, an' he ain't goin' t' hurt you."

"You wicked girl!" cried Mrs. Latimer,

hotly. "Now I know why you broke the plumbing all over the house."

"Oh, I did n't know it was you, ma'am!" Susan answered with a little gasp, and her vivid crimson changed to a pasty paleness. In her sudden rush of emotion her clutch upon the plumber relaxed, and that young man—to his shame be it spoken—twitched his arm away from her nerveless grasp, and disappeared instantly into the stormy darkness of the night.

To be deserted by a plumber under circumstances so delicately critical would have caused a young woman of less stable temperament to collapse immediately; but Susan Poundweight,—having a backbone that in the matter of toughness would compare favorably with the yew long-bow of her Saxon ancestors,—so far from collapsing because of the plumber's ignoble defection, rallied gallantly her forces for the fray.

"I ain't a wicked girl!" she said resolutely. "I did break them things, and I did it a-purpose—'cause it was 'most the only way me an' John could get a chance to lay eyes on each other. But John he made th' bills jus' as little as he dared, for fear o' your ketchin' on t' what we was up to; an' he 's kep' a stric' account of every cent every one o' them breaks cost, an' as soon 's we 're married we 're goin' to pay it all back, fair an' square." Susan paused for a moment, and then, with much less confidence and in decidedly apologetic tones, she added: "John he ought n't to a-run off that way. He was n't doin' anythin' he had n't a perfec' right to,—we bein' promised,—but someways, I s'pose, he can't help it, for he ain't got th' spunk of a cat. Now that 's the whole story. And I ain't a wicked girl, and I ain't done nothin' I 'm ashamed of—or nothin', I guess, you would n't 'a' done too if you 'd been in my shoes. So, there!"

Had Susan presented this combined Declaration of Independence and Bill of Rights on the night when Mrs. Latimer first caught her vigilant (yet knew not that her vigil was for the sweet sake of Love) the chances are that the outcome of the situation would have been all that any brace of lovers reasonably could have asked. And even had the discovery come only one night earlier,—that is to say, ere Mr. Latimer had flung to the breeze his rebel flag,—Mrs. Latimer's disposition toward the young people, when she had recovered a little from the first shock of her surprise, probably would have been that of rather effusive friendliness. But if ever Love shamefully neglected his duty, it was in permitting the twist of ill-fortune by which Susan's passion for the plumber was discovered on this most ill-starred night of all the nights in the year: when Mrs. Latimer's honeymoon, which, for some little time past, had

been dropping rather rapidly toward the horizon, at last had set luridly in storm-clouds of wrath. Because of this conjunction of malignant astral principles, and with all the bitterness of her bitter mood upon her, Mrs. Latimer spoke; and her words, temporarily, at least, were the words of doom.

"Susan Poundweight," she said in tones of great severity, "it is useless for you to try to brazen this matter out by denying your wickedness. You have been wicked in every possible way. The injury that you have done to Mrs. Haverwood's property is almost the same thing as stealing. For months you have lived a life of deception that has been one long acted lie. Nothing could be worse than your conduct has been. And you have done all this wickedness"—Mrs. Latimer's tone here became very bitter—"for the sake of a man who deserts you at the very first sign of danger and trouble, and who certainly,"—here Mrs. Latimer's tone not only was bitter, but her utterance was broken by half-hysterical sobs,—"who certainly will not be half a year married to you—if ever you are so unfortunate as to marry him at all—before his love for you will have disappeared utterly, and only his cruel selfishness will remain. O Susan, Susan! believe me, no man is worthy of a woman's love! Take warning by—I mean, be warned in time by me!"

At the beginning of this address, during that portion of it which was charged with condemnation of herself, Susan listened in stolid silence; but as it shifted into vilification, and that vilification of her lover, she bristled, and was about to speak with a good deal of energy, when its sudden ending in what evidently was most earnest exhortation and warning so changed its whole complexion that she was brought completely to a stand. In the moment or two of silence which therefore ensued, Mrs. Latimer a little recovered her composure; and so was able to add to her judicial review of the crime a tentative sentence of the criminal at the bar.

"It is useless, Susan," she said coldly, "to discuss this matter now. If Mrs. Haverwood, whose kindness you have repaid with such horrid ingratitude, has not perished at sea in this dreadful storm, she probably will return to-morrow; in any event, your mother will certainly be here. To them I shall leave the painful duty of inflicting upon you a punishment severe enough to be in keeping with your crime. But it is my intention, Susan,"—here Mrs. Latimer paused as though putting on the black cap,—"that when Mrs. Haverwood comes she shall be made aware of my horror of your outrageous conduct by finding you—bagged.

"Now, close the window, and go immediately to your room, and to bed. I will not mock you by wishing you a good-night."

Consistency not being, perhaps, the most conspicuous jewel in Mrs. Latimer's crown of perfect womanhood, she did not adopt the Roman-matron policy of severity that might have been expected of her when she returned to her bed-chamber, and there found the rebellious Mr. Latimer—whom, but a moment before, she had been lashing so savagely over the back of the evanescent plumber—still flying, in a passive fashion, his flag of successful rebellion by continuing to sleep the sleep of the unjust.

Having gone down-stairs resolved to welter in her own gore in Mrs. Haverwood's kitchen for the express purpose of making her husband uncomfortable, and then having come up-stairs again in such an anticlimax sort of way,—neither with her shield, nor upon it; and absolutely hale and goreless,—Mrs. Latimer certainly would have preserved the unities of the situation had she stuck a knife into Mr. Latimer, or set fire to the house. Failing to engage in consistent action of so radical a sort, the very least that was to be expected of her was absolute silence toward Mr. Latimer that night, and in the morning—in the event of her speaking to him at all—a cold and bare statement of the events which had taken place during his guilty sleep.

But what Mrs. Latimer actually did—so far from slaying Mr. Latimer, or making him the central feature of a conflagration, or ignoring him by going to sleep in dignified silence—was to nudge him gently into wakefulness, and to say with persuasive eagerness: "Ridley! Ridley dear! You really *must* rouse up and listen. I've got the most delightful thing to tell you that you ever heard!" And then she went ahead under high pressure, and with energetic diffuseness told him the whole story from beginning to end.

By the time that Mrs. Latimer had finished her story-telling it was too late to go all the way back to Mr. Latimer's misconduct and make a regular quarrel out of it. Indeed, not being at all a malice-bearing sort of a person, by that time she had so far completed her moral change of front that she had forgiven him his crime, and even, in a feminine way, had forgotten it: that is to say, she had dropped it down into one of the remote chambers of her mind, where (stored like fixed ammunition) it would remain until his commission of some other crime should induce its sudden production and vigorous use as an instrument of castigation and reproof. To all intents and purposes, however, he was entirely restored to her good graces, and even to her affection: for what young woman of romantic and imaginative temperament could tell the story of such a tender, yet mettlesome, attachment as was this of Susan's and the plumber's,—of faucets broken and gas-brackets shattered to

gain a soulful glance; of wash-tubs wrecked to win a loving word; of trysts by night, and kisses 'twixt iron bars,— and not, in telling it, herself thrill all responsive to the soft phrase of love? Certainly not a young woman in the least like Mrs. Latimer; and by the time that she had talked the matter all out, and was ready to go to sleep (which was some little time after Mr. Latimer was quite ready to have her go), her disposition toward her husband was that of the most commendably tender affection; while her feeling toward Susan Poundweight had changed from bowls and bowstrings to an earnest desire to help put up the banns.

III.

EXHIBITING MRS. LATIMER'S CHANGE TO A KINDLIER MOOD, AND EXPLAINING SUSAN POUNDWEIGHT'S WILLINGNESS TO BE BAGGED.

THE morning following this tempestuous and generally thrilling night was such an outburst of brilliant sunshine as comes only in New York in October, and even then only on the heels of an easterly storm. To be melancholy in such an atmosphere simply was impossible. With a long swing of her mental pendulum, Mrs. Latimer swung all the way across from almost despairing despondency to an entirely exultant joy — and so came down to breakfast in the spirit of a very pretty and ladylike giantess refreshed with a dry atmospheric champagne.

Under these spirited conditions all her dark phantoms of the night were banished, and only agreeable concepts found place in her mind. She no longer pictured Mrs. Haverwood as tossing about in the breakers on a sandy coast with an agonized face and her hair tangled with seaweed, but as driving up to the front-door of her own house in a two-horse carriage with her face all over smiles, and on her head the very latest thing in the way of a Paris bonnet. As to Susan Poundweight, Mrs. Latimer's intention was to seize upon the very first favorable moment after Mrs. Haverwood's arrival to plead that young person's and the plumber's cause. Even toward the plumber — who, assuredly, had been as conspicuously ungentle as a plumber possibly could be — her feeling was so amiable that she made a dozen excuses in her own mind for the white-feathery fashion in which he had stopped kissing Susan and had run away into hiding in the depths of the darkness and storm.

Being Monday, all the half-orphans had put on, as usual, their Arabian Nights garments — with the usual result of giving to the whole house a sort of exotic Bagdadish flavor that was very curious indeed. Had Mrs. Latimer been consulted in advance in regard to this particular Arabian Nights day, she probably would

have decided that it should pass unobserved. She had not received — indeed, she had not even asked — Mrs. Haverwood's permission thus to substitute during one day in each week, pseudo-Oriental garments for the regular half-orphan uniform; and to have her unauthorized innovation sprung upon the authoritative head of the institution by thus suddenly exhibiting to her all the half-orphans clad in the habiliments of the Far East would not be, she was disposed to believe, quite the best way of presenting this particular chapter in her account of her stewardship. On the other hand, Mrs. Latimer was a young woman with a good deal of character, and among the most commendable of her characteristics was that of having the courage of her convictions. Therefore she decided that since the children simply were acting in accordance with the rule which she herself had promulgated she would not weakly bend to mere expediency by traversing her own commands. Whatever might come of it, this Arabian Nights day should be dealt with in the customary fashion; and thereby would she, in her customary fashion, stand to her guns.

This same stern strain in Mrs. Latimer's nature disposed her to temper her really friendly disposition toward Susan Poundweight with what would have the appearance of being a just severity. In her wrathful haste she had decreed that Susan should pay for her stolen kisses — not stolen from the plumber, of course, for he gave them with the utmost freedom — by being bagged. Now, in her leisure, and without any wrath at all, she decided that this decree must be executed. But in adopting a course apparently so harsh, she was swayed by considerations slightly Machiavelian. The information that she had to impart to Susan's two guardians — the one natural, the other acquired — in regard to Susan's highly irregular conduct, was not of a sort to be instantly well received. To kiss a plumber under any circumstances would have been an act of questionable propriety; but to win opportunities for such kisses by deliberately wrecking Mrs. Haverwood's plumbing, and to create opportunities of a like nature by secretly meeting the plumber in the watches of the night, was to adopt a line of conduct to which the term propriety could not be applied in any way at all. Of course, from a mere worldly point of view, the redeeming feature of the case was the brilliant result which Susan seemed to be in a fair way to compass by these rather shady means. So far as material prosperity was concerned, it was evident that no more royal road to fortune than that of marrying a plumber could by any possibility be devised.

With a nice appreciation of the bearing upon each other of these several facts, Mrs. Latimer's

Machiavelian plan was to present Susan to Mrs. Haverwood and to the Widow Poundweight in the guise of a criminal who had committed a very serious crime; and then to outflank her own position by stating the details in apparent substantiation of this sweeping assertion in such a way as to show that Susan was guilty of only a few slight indiscretions — a little unconventionality in regard to receiving callers, a little carelessness in her handling of the gas- and water-fixtures — such as might have been committed by the most proper young woman in the world in love with a plumber and blinded by her love. Having got the matter on this favorable basis, Mrs. Latimer's intention was to dilate upon the position of easy affluence to which an alliance with a plumber necessarily would raise Susan in the course of but a very few years; and, finally, to clinch things by adding — this argument being intended to touch up Mrs. Haverwood on the side of her practical benevolence — that all the rest of the half-orphans might be provided for in the same magnificent manner as they arrived at maturity by marrying them off to Susan's husband's professional friends. To Mrs. Latimer's sanguine nature it seemed that such a presentation of the case as this would be could not fail to lead directly to the happiest results.

The very corner-stone of her plan, of course, was that Susan actually should be in the bag when Mrs. Haverwood and the Widow Poundweight arrived — and her plan almost went to pieces, therefore, because Susan vigorously protested against having anything to do with laying a corner-stone of this sort. As to making her understand the subtle spirit of the situation thus to be created, Mrs. Latimer knew that it was hopeless and did not attempt it. Instead, she made an appeal to her on personal grounds: representing that she, Mrs. Latimer, would be held to a strict account by Mrs. Haverwood for permitting one of the half-orphans to fall in love with a plumber, and for his and love's sake to smash the plumbing all over the house, and that only by exhibiting the culprit disgracefully bagged could her own skirts be cleared.

The concept thus presented for Susan's consideration was one which her rather dull mind could grasp easily, and it also was one which appealed forcibly to her natural sense of justice. Moreover, she too — like her mistress — had a strong character, and the courage of her convictions; of which convictions, just then, her devotion to her plumber was dominant over all. Therefore, without any farther argument, yielding to Mrs. Latimer's appeal, she poked one red-trousered leg after the other carefully into the bag which that lady held open for her; herself assisted in pulling it up snugly

around her plump person, and then meekly drew her arms inside while Mrs. Latimer hauled the drawing-strings taut around her neck and tied them beneath her chin. The bag was so loosely large that even Susan's abundant person did not nearly fill it; and, being made of a dark material, it greatly emphasized the effect of her rather absurdly big turban, and rather absurdly long white veil. Indeed, when the bagging was completed, the effect produced by her remarkably pretty face thus exhibited surmounting a curiously bunched and bundled figure, and overcast by a veil and turban of excessive size, was such as to suggest to the casual observer (had any such there been) some extravagant variety of mushroom gone wrong in its lower parts.

In order to demonstrate to Mrs. Haverwood that the extreme penalty for evil-doing had been imposed, Mrs. Latimer had decreed that Susan's bagging should take place in the drawing-room; and that there, in her bagged condition, she should await the return of her benefactress, whose plumbing she had outraged, and whose confidence she had betrayed. But Susan — fearing keenly the arrival of some chance caller — begged so hard for a change of venue, that Mrs. Latimer finally relented and agreed that the bagging should take place among the black-and-tan old masters in the picture-gallery. In this dismal, and also doubtful, society, therefore, at half after ten o'clock in the morning, Susan's investiture was completed, and she was left standing beneath a most melancholy Niobe, — herself as melancholy, but from a different cause, — officially and formally bagged.

IV.

SETTING FORTH THE WIDOW POUNDWEIGHT'S PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE IN THE MATTER OF MATRIMONY.

ALMOST in the moment that it was urged, the reasonableness of Susan's protest against being bagged in the drawing-room was justified. Mrs. Latimer scarcely had left the picture-gallery when two rings came in quick succession at the front-door bell, and a minute later, — the door being opened by Martha Skeat, who had been detailed for the day to this service, with orders to wear her regular half-orphan uniform, — Susan's mother, the Widow Poundweight, and Susan's lover, the young plumber, came in together. As the event proved, their coming together was a pure accident, and neither of them had the least notion as to who the other was. On this occasion the widow looked even more like a tulip-bed gone adrift with a milliner's shop than on the occasion of her first visit; and her mood, evi-

dently, was as gay as her gown. The plumber, however, was somber in both his demeanor and his dress. He was clad in what evidently was his very best suit of black clothes,—the solemnity of which was a little relieved by a lilac-and-red necktie,—and he had the desperate, unflinching look of a plumber whose purpose it was either to do or to die.

Each of these persons asked Mrs. Latimer for a private interview; and as the simplest way of harmonizing their slightly conflicting requests she begged the plumber to wait in the drawing-room, while she gave the Widow Poundweight a hearing in the library up-stairs. The plumber politely acceded to this arrangement, but detained Mrs. Latimer alone for a moment while he whispered to her in hoarse, determined tones: "I want to speak to you about Miss Sue, ma'am. And — and" — here he had to give a gulp before he could continue — "and I ought n't to have run away last night. I want to say that, too." In delivering himself of this brave utterance he grew desperately red and perspired freely, but he obviously was very much more comfortable when he fairly had got it off his mind.

That a serious purpose underlay the Widow Poundweight's gay exterior was made manifest the moment that she was seated with Mrs. Latimer in the library — when she began to explain that she had presented herself in advance of the appointed time expressly that she might have a little talk about Susan before the other folks came; and by her then going on with an urgent request that Mrs. Latimer would use her good offices with Mrs. Haverwood to forward her, Mrs. Poundweight's, project for Susan's prompt translation to another half-orphan home.

"For as to Sue's livin' with me," said the Widow Poundweight in conclusion, and in most earnest tones, "that she sha'n't! I've had enough of her an' her stubborn ways. I'm more 'n willin' t' pay for her keep — it 's not my fault I'm not payin' for 't now; I wanted to, but Mrs. Haverwood she had her own notions, an' would n't let me — and I'll give security that if she gets sick or anything, I'll see she 's looked after and all th' bills paid. But have her around at home I won't. She 's a dose. An' she 'd be more of a dose, I guess, to" — At this point in her discourse the widow checked herself abruptly, manifested an air of curious embarrassment, and then added slowly, and in quite a different tone, "She 'd bother some other folks more 'n she would me."

Until thus partly halted by what evidently was some sort of stumbling-block, the widow had gone along at such a hand-gallop of talk that Mrs. Latimer had not been able to slip in a word even edgewise. But she was quick

to take advantage of the opportunity thus given her to speak, and quite in the guise of an advocate pleading a cause before a stern court did she present to Susan's mother the facts of Susan's and the plumber's romantic love.

But the court thus appealed to was anything but stern. Even Mrs. Latimer — anxious though she was to gain a verdict in Susan's favor — was quite shocked by its over-lenience. Actually, the Widow Poundweight scarcely had heard more than the barest outline of the facts before she not only gave her cordial approval to the love-affair, but manifested a disposition to hurry the lovers along to a marriage at absolutely lightning speed.

"This is Monday," said Susan's too-acquiescent parent, "and I've got t' get back home by Friday night. Wednesday 's as late as we can make it — for me to get off Thursday, you know — and Sue and I 'll have t' everlastin'ly hustle t' get things fixed so 's she can be married then. There ain't a single minute t' be wasted, Mrs. Latimer; and I guess if you don't mind I 'd better see her right off so 's we can begin t' settle what we've got t' do."

The exceeding abruptness of this program quite took Mrs. Latimer's breath away. "Oh!" she exclaimed anxiously, "you can't be in earnest, Mrs. Poundweight! Susan could n't possibly get married that way. It would n't — it would n't be respectable."

"Why not? I was married that way — and I'm respectable, I guess!" and the Widow Poundweight put her hands on her hips and turned out her elbows and looked at Mrs. Latimer hard.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," Mrs. Latimer answered in a good deal of confusion. "I did n't mean that, of course. But you must have been a good deal older than Susan, and —"

"I mus' n't 'a' been anything of th' kind!" cut in Mrs. Poundweight, peremptorily. "I was younger. I was n't seventeen, an' Sue 's past. I guess I don't look so awful old, do I?"

"No, no, of course not. You look very young indeed — quite young enough to be Susan's sister. But what I meant was that of course your father and mother knew all about your being engaged —"

"Not much they did n't! Do you think I was goin' t' be fool enough t' give myself away like that? How was I t' know that anything was comin' of it?"

"Well, at least," continued Mrs. Latimer, clinging desperately to her position of conventional propriety, which each moment was weakened by the very unconventional facts educed against it by the Widow Poundweight from the storehouse of her own eccentric life, "at least you were engaged for a good while, and knew

each other very well, and you 'd talked over your plans, and —"

"Now, stop right there! We had n't done nothin' o'th' sort. What happened was just this: I met Poundweight at the Amalgamated Glass Blowers' picnic, an' we had seven dances together. He ast me in th' second dance if I 'd marry him. That was too sudden, and I told him he 'd got more brass than brains, and I would n't. He kep' on askin' me at each dance, and I kep' on sayin' no. When we was dancin' th' last dance, he wanted t' know if I was th' kind that was n't satisfied unless they kep' a man danglin' all his life at their heels before they 'd give him yes; an' he went right on an' said he wa' n't th' kind that 'u'd dangle that way. You see, he always was a tony, overbearin' sort of a man.

"Well, when he said so sharp that he was n't th' danglin' kind, I begun t' think he had his good points, and I weakened. Says I: 'Well, this time, just for a change, I won't say no. But not sayin' no ain't th' same as sayin' yes,' says I, 'an' don't you forget it!'; an' just about that time th' dance was over, an' we all started off for home. He kep' along with me. I was with my sister an' her husband; an' he never let up about gettin' married all th' way. Talk about Sue's bein' stubborn an' set in her ways, you ought to 'a' seen her father—an' that 's where she gets it from! When that man's mind was made up a thing had got t' be done—why, got to be done it had! Sayin' no t' him was no more use than sayin' boo t' the moon. An' so, he bein' set on my givin' him yes, he was boun' t' get it—an' he did get it when he was standin' at th' door sayin' good night."

"O-o-o-h!" exclaimed Mrs. Latimer. "You don't really mean to say that you were engaged to be married that way—all in an hour?"

Mrs. Poundweight bridled a little. "Of course we was n't engaged in an hour. What d' you take me for? It was n't four in the afternoon when we had our first dance together, and 't was goin' on ten at night when I give him his yes. Of course it was n't an hour—it was a'most six."

Mrs. Latimer did not venture any answer. She maintained a horrified silence, while the Widow Poundweight continued: "An' then, when I 'd give him his inch, of course he wanted his ell straight off. Nothin' was goin' t' satisfy him but gettin' married right away th' next evenin'. But I was n't th' sort t' rush things like that, an' so I give him t' understand plain. I told him if he wanted me he 'd got to wait."

"And how long did you make him wait?" Mrs. Latimer asked.

"Better 'n a week," the widow answered complacently.

Mrs. Latimer, who was genuinely shocked, could only gasp.

"Now, them 's just th' cold facts about Sue's father and me; an' why she need want any more time 'n we did I don't see. Anyhow, from what you say, it seems she 's been keepin' company with this young man ever sence last June. If that ain't long enough, I 'd like t' know what is? It 's longer, I know, than I could stand with any one man, unless I way was married fast t' him an' could n't get away."

By this time Mrs. Latimer had recovered from her shock sufficiently to speak. "Did—did your marriage turn out well? Were you—were you happy?" she asked.

"Oh, I guess ours was about th' average," Mrs. Poundweight answered, in an off-hand way. "You 're married yourself, so you must know how that sort o' thing goes. We had our troubles same as folks in general. But it turned out well enough," she continued, with a self-conscious air, and even blushing a little, "for me t' be willin' t' give a second man a show."

"You mean that you are going to be married again, Mrs. Poundweight?"

"That 's just th' size of it," the widow answered. "An' that 's why I wanted t' get Sue fixed in some other home or asylum or somethin'. *He* never would get along with her. She 's got her father's mastersome ways an' she 's just as stubborn as a mule. But if she 's goin' t' be married herself that lets me out, an' I 've nothin' more t' say. It 's heaps th' best thing she can do.

"An' now, Mrs. Latimer, Sue an' me must settle with a rush what we 've got t' do—for between now an' day after to-morrow ain't no time at all. I must get a-hold of her right off. Whereabouts, ma'am, in this big house, is she likely to be?"

V.

NARRATING THE DEADLY PERIL OF POLLY CARROON AND TELLING OF MRS. HAVERWOOD'S STARTLING HOME-COMING.

WHILE this conversation went forward, Mrs. Latimer had been seated near one of the side windows, the outlook of which was upon the roof of the picture-gallery—and the sight which she beheld through that window at the precise moment when the Widow Poundweight made inquiry as to Susan's whereabouts was such that, instead of answering, she sprang from her seat with the horrified exclamation: "Oh! oh! oh! She certainly will fall and be killed!" And even the Widow Poundweight, who was not at all a nervous person, could not repress a small shriek on her own account when, having bounced out of her chair and across to the win-

dow, she perceived the cause of Mrs. Latimer's alarm.

The late Mr. Haverwood's equipment of eccentric opinions upon a working majority of conceivable subjects had been almost as complete as the similar equipment with which his widow continued to be endowed. One of his notions had been that the best light for a collection of very black and smoky old masters was that derived from a high skylight having a sharp pitch; and as his plans always were realized with a good deal of emphasis, the skylight at which Mrs. Latimer and the Widow Poundweight were looking at that potentially fatal moment was about as high and about as steep as a skylight well could be — indeed, had Mr. Haverwood's views been less extreme, or less emphatically realized, the horrifying situation then existing never could have come about.

Seated on the apex of this ill-conceived structure, at the end most remote from their point of view, was a gray cat in the act of bending down and comfortably washing her left shoulder-blade — in which placid spectacle there was no cause for emotion of a distressing kind. But a very keen note of tragedy was supplied by a small human figure — that is to say, by Polly Carroon, wearing her Arabian Nights costume — in a position of such extreme peril that a rescue seemed to be beyond the pale of hope.

Evidently having scrambled to the top of the skylight in pursuit of her beloved cat, and evidently having been overtaken by a sudden panic sense of the danger of her position, Polly was clinging to the ridge-pole in a huddled bunch of entirely abject fright. It was painfully clear that at any moment she might let go, and so slide down the steep slope of glass with such an impetus as to carry her across the roof of the picture-gallery and onward to the ground; and it also was an apparent possibility that in her unreasoning fear she might take to kicking, and so kick her way through the skylight and down into the picture-gallery below. In any event, her case appeared to be quite desperate — and all the more horrible, as it seemed to Mrs. Latimer, because of the comical figure that she cut, perched up there in her loose trousers of bright green and loose jacket of purple, and with her turban all cocked over on one side.

Fortunately, Mrs. Latimer had a good deal of presence of mind. Instead of opening the window and calling to Polly — with the probable result of startling the child into letting go her hold — she dashed to the door and thence, with the Widow Poundweight close at her heels, to the landing half-way down the stairs from which a window opened upon the picture-gallery roof. Yet quick though Mrs. Latimer was in executing this movement, another rescue-party got in ahead of her, and when she arrived

at the scene of action she found the situation materially improved. The rescuers were Polly's fellow half-orphans, all of whom, excepting Susan Poundweight, were congregated upon the roof under the intelligent leadership of Jane Spicer; and as they all, excepting Martha Skeat, were clad in their Arabian Nights costumes, the spectacle which they presented to the crowd rapidly forming in the street below was very brilliant indeed.

With her customary readiness in resource, Jane Spicer had brought with her a long-handled window-mop, and her first concern had been to put the brush end of this serviceable utensil under Polly's dangling feet, while she herself held the handle firmly braced against the roof. With this substantial support beneath her, Polly, temporarily, was entirely safe. As a further measure of precaution, however, Jane had despatched the twins and Biddy O'Dowd to bring pillows to place upon the roof in case by any accident Polly should fetch away. The actual work of rescue had been intrusted by this small commander-in-chief to the biggest girls of the party, Martha Skeat and Sally Tribbles, the first of whom had just succeeded in boosting the second up the wooden end-supports of the skylight to its peak at the moment that Mrs. Latimer and the Widow Poundweight arrived upon the scene. As Sally got safely into position — with one red-trousered leg hanging down on each side of the ridge-pole in vivid relief against the pale-green glass, and with her yellow-jacketed body and white-turbaned head standing out against the sky — there came up from the crowd in the street an encouraging cheer; and a breathless minute later, during which she worked her way slowly along the ridge-pole, the cheering became quite frantic as she caught Polly beneath the shoulders and lifted her into absolute safety, astride of the ridge-pole in front of herself.

And then, somehow, her natural tendency toward ill-luck getting the better of her, in the act of recovering her balance after this exertion, Sally Tribbles managed to kick both legs almost simultaneously through the skylight; and then her loose Turkish trousers somehow got caught on the jagged points of glass: and there she was — anchored hard and fast! She was perfectly safe, of course, and so was Polly Carroon; but the net result of the rescue, up to that point, was that two people were stuck fast on the peak of the skylight instead of one. The cat, the original cause of the trouble, early in the proceedings had jumped down from her perch and had returned by the open window into the house.

The element of danger having been eliminated from the situation, the crowd was disposed to regard the whole performance — the bril-

liantly Oriental half-orphans together with Mrs. Latimer and the Widow Poundweight grouped upon the roof, with the color-note repeated at a still higher level by Sally Tribbles and Polly Carroon astride of the skylight — as nothing less than a broad farce; because of which view of the matter came guying cries of: “Put up a couple more of the monkeys on the trapeze,” “Don’t them she circus-riders know they ought n’t to ride man-fashion?” “Let the red-legged bird in the tree-top give us a song!” — and so on, until Mrs. Latimer fairly grew dizzy and faint with vexation and shame. And then, above all this chatter and laughter, a strong voice called out: “I ’m comin’ t’ you, Sal. Don’t you be afeard!” To which Sally replied stoutly: “I ain’t afeard, father. Come right along!”

Two minutes later, the crowd broke into fresh cheering as Mr. Tribbles, who was a large man with an old-fashioned wooden leg, appeared upon the roof (Martha having run down to the front door and let him in), followed by Mrs. Spicer and Mrs. Wells and Bridget O’Dowd, who for some time had been ringing in vain, and by Mrs. Skeat and Mrs. Carroon, who at that very moment had arrived. Upon seeing her offspring in what seemed to her to be so dreadful a position, Mrs. Carroon shrieked aloud. Mr. Tribbles did not shriek. In a straightforward, sensible way, he stumped along the roof until he came directly beneath where his daughter was seated; then he leaned carefully against the skylight with his hands extended, and told Sally to begin the rescue by sliding Polly down into his arms.

But the cheer that was beginning to rise from the crowd in celebration of the success of this intelligent manœuver never came to anything. It died away in a murmur of pained surprise — as the section of glass against which Mr. Tribbles was leaning gave way suddenly and a portion of his large person disappeared into the cleft. That he was caught in the iron framework of the skylight was obvious instantly; and when, in the violence of his struggles, he kicked off his wooden leg — which crashed through the next section, and so went down into the picture-gallery — it became evident that he was likely to stay caught, and there went up from the crowd a sympathetic groan.

Fortunately for Mr. Tribbles — and fortunately also for his daughter and for Polly Carroon — an excitable person in the crowd had dashed away some minutes earlier searching for a policeman and crying fire. What was still more fortunate, and even miraculous, this person actually had found what he was looking for; and the policeman so discovered — greatly disconcerted by the unnaturalness of the encounter — had turned in a fire-call without stopping to assure himself that there really was a fire.

Therefore it came to pass that not more than a minute after Mr. Tribbles had done for himself, by kicking off his wooden leg and sending it crashing through the skylight, there was a clanging of gongs up the street and down the street; the sound of galloping hoofs; the sight of dense masses of black smoke approaching rapidly — and almost before these several phenomena could be discriminately apprehended, three fire-engines were smoking and puffing in front of the house; three lines of hose had been made fast to the engines and three hose-carriages were dashing away to the nearest hydrants; and then a hook-and-ladder truck came around the corner with a jangling roar. Two minutes later, twenty policemen were on the ground; the crowd was driven back; fire-lines were stretched, and every suitable preparation was made for extinguishing a conflagration quite as unreal as any of the series which Mr. Latimer had been called upon to investigate under stress of Mrs. Latimer’s imaginative fears.

However, a part of this anti-pyrotechnic outfit could be, and instantly was, most usefully employed. In a trice the firemen had their ladders all over the picture-gallery, and in another trice they had extracted Mr. Tribbles — making a dreadful wreck of the skylight with their axes while doing it; and then they made still more of a wreck in order to get Sally’s legs loose; and then they gallantly rescued from her perch on the ridge-pole that stout young person and Polly Carroon with her — while the crowd cheered, and the other firemen cheered, and even the twenty policemen cheered too!

It was precisely at this thrilling instant that a carriage, with a steamer-trunk and many bags and wraps upon it, drove past the fire-lines, — after pausing for a moment of parley, — and stopped at the front door. Out of the carriage stepped Mr. Latimer, who, checking his very natural impulse to dash into the house to find out what in the world was the matter, turned and politely assisted Mrs. Haverwood to alight, and then gave her a steady arm.

His tender of support was timely. The unfortunate lady looked at the fire-engines, and at the wrecked skylight, and at the array of fire-ladders, with very earnest and woeful gaze; but still more earnestly and woefully did she look at the thronged roof of the picture-gallery, which presented to her agonized observation at that moment a spectacle as harrowing as it was unaccountably strange. Standing well forward, upheld by a fireman on each side of him, was a one-legged man. Beyond this, in his then position, inexplicable uniped, was a considerable group of women huddled together by the window opening from the stairs. Clustered about the broken skylight, holding or leaning upon the axes with which they had broken it,

were a dozen or more firemen — and all over everything were her own half-orphans, clad (with but a single exception) in such strange and such violently colored Oriental garments that each individual half-orphan seemed to her startled soul to be the very quintessence of a horrifying dream. Under these keenly perturbing circumstances scant cause is there for surprise that Mrs. Haverwood, overcome by the sudden and violent onrush of painful emotions, clung to Mr. Latimer's arm almost convulsively, and gave utterance to a dismal groan.

VI.

SHOWING HOW THE COMMOTION UPON THE
HOUSETOP MADE PLAIN TO THE PLUMBER
THE PATH OF LOVE.

IT is one thing for a young plumber to put on his best black clothes with the intention of doing or dying in them, and so going instantly and elately (as circumstances may determine) to his do or his death. But it is quite another thing when deterrent conditions intervene to check his advance along either of these heroic lines and to enforce upon him a season of dull inactivity during which his lofty purpose may weaken and insidiously waste away.

The case of Susan's plumber during his temporary stagnation in Mrs. Haverwood's drawing-room afforded a pointed comment upon the foregoing somber text. Being left to his own devices while Mrs. Latimer was closeted with the Widow Poundweight in the library, he was pulled up short on the very brink of the matrimonial precipice over which he had determined to cast himself, and so was given a fatal moment of time in which his courage might ooze away. He had come to the house with the full intention of asking for Susan as a necessity, and of demanding her as a right; of making a clean breast about the wilfully broken plumbing, and of stating (as Susan already had stated, though he did not know it) his honorable intention to pay back every cent that had been paid him for repairs — of protesting, in short, that he was all for love and the world well lost.

But avowals of so resolute a sort, culminating in a protest like that, must spring from a strongly throbbing heart; and the longer that the plumber was left alone in the drawing-room the less strongly did his heart throb and the more wretchedly nervous did he become. But for the effrontery which was a part of his professional equipment — the quality that later was to aid him in building up a princely fortune by enabling him to insist calmly upon the justice of the most outrageous of bills — he certainly would have made a break for the door and so fairly have run away. As it was, he walked hurriedly about the large room like some im-

prisoned wild animal; the while pushing and pulling the furniture from place to place with such reckless violence and haste that even an adept in permutation — which is the arithmetical rule of ascertaining how many ways any given number of numbers of things may be varied in their relative positions — would have been puzzled in attempting to reduce him and the chairs and the tables to any intelligible result.

Being thus deeply engrossed in the conflict waging in his own breast between his courage and his love, the plumber did not for some little time pay any attention to a growing volume of unusual sounds — of hurrying footsteps on the floor above and on the stairs, of buzzing voices, of trampling on the picture-gallery roof — which would have informed him, had he been less preoccupied, that some unusual commotion had broken forth. Not, indeed, until Sally Tribbles kicked her legs through the skylight, did he become aroused to the disturbed domestic conditions; and even then it was not the sound of the breaking glass which seriously startled him, but the sound of his own Susan's voice raised into a shrill scream of alarm. It was the instinct of love which enabled the plumber to recognize Susan's voice at such high pressure; and the like instinct — combined with knowledge of the locality gained while mending one of the gas-brackets which she had broken — enabled him to tell whence it came. Instantly, at that sound, his waning courage again waxed full and strong; and again the determination to do or die for his Susan's sake thrilled through every fiber of his being from his once more heroic soul. Therefore, with a rapidity that no one who ever has watched a plumber at work would have believed possible, he sprang toward the heavy folding-doors and dashed them open (with such force that they rebounded and closed again behind him) just as Sally's second leg came through the skylight, and just as Susan uttered a second piercing scream.

But on the threshold of the picture-gallery, looking in wonder at the figure before him, the plumber stopped short, and seemed to be in a fair way to turn into stone — as though there suddenly had been sprung upon him a modified version of the Gorgon's head; the modification consisting in the substitution of a turban and veil for serpents, and in producing the effect of disassociation from a body by the simple expedient of inclosing the body in a large loose bag. In the self-same pregnant moment, Susan — as she saw her lover and perceived her petrefactive effect upon him — forgot all about the fright into which she had been thrown by the showing down upon her of broken glass, and by the terrifying (because essentially abnormal) spectacle of a pair of Turkish-trousered legs unrelated to any visible body waving wildly above

her in the air, and burst into an agony of blushes and of tears.

Of course no young man of spirit—in the whole range of young manhood, from plumbers up to princes—could behold a spectacle of that tenderly moving sort without instantly endeavoring, bag or no bag, to administer consolation of a suitable sort in a suitable way. The bag did, indeed, seriously complicate matters—for Susan's sense of duty was so strong that she absolutely refused to permit the plumber even to loosen the strings, let alone to unbag her; but a bag, after all, is a trifling barrier to set up against that masterpassion which laughs at locksmiths, and defies lightly the stoutest bolts and bars. And so, although neither of them could have defined accurately the meaning of the word romance, Susan and her plumber came nearer that day than in any other day in all their lives to realizing a romantic climax: as they sat on a sofa at the remote end of the picture-gallery (in order to be as far as possible out of range of the skylight battery), and drew closer and closer together as the need for the exertion of manly strength for the protection of womanly weakness momentarily was increased by the increasing turmoil on the roof above them and in the street, and by the increasingly hot fire to which they were exposed.

The fact may be added that the manly protection thus demanded was given with extreme willingness, and with the cumulative intensity of geometrical progression. At the moment when Mr. Tribbles partly came through the skylight, the plumber moved along the sofa close to Susan, and sought to reassure her by holding her hand in his. When Mr. Tribbles kicked off his leg, and it came crashing through the glass and down to the floor close beside them with a bang, he took possession of her other hand. When the fire-engines arrived, making a tremendous and quite inexplicable disturbance of a very terrifying sort, he snuggled Susan well against his shoulder. When the firemen released Mr. Tribbles from his awkward position by smashing in the skylight all around him with their axes, and sending a perfect storm of broken glass down into the picture-gallery, the plumber—making a very accurate guess as to whereabouts in the bag he would find it—slid a sustaining arm around Susan's substantial waist. When there came that final series of crashes above them, with its consequent vitreous tempest around them, incident to the loosening and extraction of Sally Tribbles's legs, he fairly got both arms around her and squeezed hard!

And even when the commotion gradually subsided, the plausible possibility that at any moment it might begin again gave the happy plumber a reasonable excuse for continuing to hold his happy Susan close clasped within the

gallant shelter of his arms. As for Susan, her love was too sincere to be veiled by idle coyness. Frankly—so far, at least, as she could manage it with her hands inside the bag—she clasped her arms about her plumber's neck, and in a sweet rapture of loving tenderness rested her turbaned head against his loyal heart.

VII.

PRESENTING A HAPPY CLIMAX IN WHICH THE PLUMBER COMES OUT STRONG.

IT is not surprising that Mrs. Haverwood, getting her feet once more upon her native heath, and finding it in such a mess, should have been both shocked and pained. Any male house-owner would have been upset by finding on returning from Europe—or, for that matter, on returning from anywhere—the street in front of his house full of steam fire-engines, apparently hard at work, the house itself festooned with red ladders and decorated with blue-uniformed firemen, the fire-lines up and manned by policemen; by finding, in brief, every proof short of flame and smoke pouring out of the front windows, that his house was in course of burning down. And if, in addition to being a house-owner, the returning traveler had been the founder of a female half-orphanage, and had returned to find his female half-orphans not only arrayed in Far-Eastern garments of extraordinary shapes, and vivid hues, but actually congregated upon a portion of the roof which should have sheltered them, and there mingled with a mixed company of total strangers, of whom the most conspicuous figure was a one-legged man held steadily on his one leg by two obliging firemen—any male, and, therefore, still more any female, house-owner and philanthropist unquestionably would have been justified under conditions of such extreme irritation in deliberately and definitely going wild. Indeed, later, in thinking the whole matter over calmly, Mrs. Haverwood never was able to understand why she did not go wild on the spot; for her rapidly formulated theory in solution of the situation was that Mrs. Latimer and all the half-orphans had gone crazy together, and that among them they had set fire to the house.

In direct proportion, therefore, to the extreme depression of her spirits caused by her leap to the conception of this most untoward confirmation of mental and physical calamities, was the exaltation of her spirits caused by the entirely sane appearance of Mrs. Latimer, at the top of the front steps; and by that lady's reassuring announcement that there was n't any fire, and that, excepting the demolition of the skylight, no harm had been done at all.

In making this announcement, Mrs. Latimer

had displayed an admirable presence of mind. From her commanding position on the roof she had seen the carriage with the steamer-trunk on the box coming up the street; rightly had inferred that Mrs. Haverwood was inside the carriage, and would be greatly disturbed by finding a storm of such apparent severity central over her own home, and so had dashed down-stairs in order to impart on the very threshold her cheering news.

In Mrs. Latimer's wake, finding fresh cause for excitement in the return of their benefactress, the half-orphans came trooping down-stairs too: all of them, excepting Martha Skeat, very brilliant in their Arabian Nights costumes, and with their turbans every which way. Behind them, more sedately,—again with an exception, for the Widow Poundweight would not have been sedate even at her own funeral,—came Susan's blithe mother, in company with Mrs. Spicer and Mrs. Skeat and Mrs. Wells and Bridget O'Dowd and Mrs. Carroon. And finally, in the rear of the procession, came the two obliging firemen carrying Mr. Tribbles—who, of course, until his wooden leg should be in place again, could not walk.

Mrs. Haverwood, entering from the front door with Mr. and Mrs. Latimer, and encountering the leading files of half-orphans at the foot of the stairs, put herself at the head of the column; wheeled it into the drawing-room, and herself crossed that apartment—being desirous of finding out quickly what damage had been done to the old masters—directly to the picture-gallery door. Out in the street the fire-engines still were puffing and snorting loudly, and from the street came also the confused murmur of the voices of the crowd; which noises, penetrating freely through the broken skylight, were amply sufficient in the picture-gallery to drown all other sounds. There was a moment's delay before the doors could be opened—the lock having caught when they banged together—and this halt gave time for the rear-guard of parents to enter the drawing-room; and the firemen were glad enough to get a chance to rest themselves by standing Mr. Tribbles on his own one leg, and propping him against the wall. And then, Jane Spicer having overcome the difficulty about the lock, she and Martha Skeat, tugging together, shot the doors back suddenly, and the whole picture-gallery in an instant was disclosed to view: a foreground littered thickly with broken glass; in the middle distance Mr. Tribbles's wooden leg; and in the background, affectionately mingled upon the sofa, the plumber, in his seemly suit of black, and Susan Poundweight in her turban and her bag.

From the walls the black-and-tan old masters looked down in envious wonder upon this most tender and moving living picture—the

crisp realism of which threw their faded and muzzy ideality hopelessly into the shade. As for the living spectators, their interjectional comments ranged across the whole social gamut of expressions of wonder—from the seemly "Good gracious!" of Mrs. Haverwood down to the unseemly, and also ungrammatical, asseveration of the two firemen that they "be dam!"

But Susan faltered not, nor did the plumber quail. Bravely they stood up together; and the plumber, putting his arm around that portion of the bag in which he had ascertained by experiment Susan's waist was to be found, resolutely, and none the less resolutely because a little irrelevantly, informed the several members of the company that he was ready for 'em, and that he dared 'em to come on.

And then it was that the Widow Poundweight, recognizing the sterling qualities of her daughter's lover, cried out admiringly: "He'll do Sue. *That* young man has sand!"

VIII.

STATING BRIEFLY THE HAPPINESS WHICH ACCRUED TO HUMANITY FROM MRS. HAVERWOOD'S PHILANTHROPIC SCHEME.

WHILE Susan and her mother were soothing the plumber, and while Mr. Tribbles, with the assistance of the firemen, was putting on his leg, Mrs. Haverwood rapidly carried into execution her prearranged plan for the disruption of the composite benevolent institution which her impulsive generosity had created, and which her bounty so munificently had sustained.

Formally she took over from Mrs. Latimer the eight half-orphans and the sixteen cats (these latter being produced in their cages), and, so to speak, receipted for their return to her in good condition. She even went a step farther, in that—passing over the little matter of the Arabian Nights costume, and the start that seeing the half-orphans thus clad and on the roof had given her—she complimented Mrs. Latimer handsomely upon her discharge of her trust. Then, with a characteristic expedition, she handed over the several half-orphans to their respective parents—save Susan Poundweight, whose mother preferred that she should be turned over directly to the plumber; and, indeed, the plumber was in such a state that nothing else would have satisfied him. Finally, she gave orders for despatching fourteen of the sixteen cats—Polly Carroon being permitted to take her two cats home with her—to a benevolent maiden lady, living near Patchogue, Long Island, with whom arrangement had been made by letter to this end.

So well was this campaign of disorganization planned, and with such dashing energy was it executed, that within one hour and twenty min-

utes from the moment of Mrs. Haverwood's arrival at her front door every half-orphan and cat had been swept away from her premises; Mr. and Mrs. Latimer — the latter feeling as though she had escaped from under a crushing burden of thousands of tons — were on their way down-town in a Madison Avenue car; and every vestige of the John L. Haverwood Female Half-Orphanage and Destitute Cat Home was effaced absolutely and forever from the earth.

As an experiment in applied philanthropy, Mrs. Haverwood unwillingly admitted, though

only to herself, that her scheme for the amelioration of the condition of half-orphaned children, and, at the same time, for making cats more comfortable, had been a failure. But even Mrs. Latimer — whose prejudices in the other direction, incident to her frequent strained personal relations with both classes of Mrs. Haverwood's beneficiaries, were very strong indeed — most willingly admitted, thinking of the joy that it had brought to Susan Poundweight and to the plumber, that as a contribution to the sum of human happiness Mrs. Haverwood's experiment had been a pronounced success.

THE END.

Thomas A. Janvier.

ICEBERGS.

THEY come again, those monsters of the sea,
 The north wind's brood, the children of the cold,
 Long lapped and cradled in white winter's fold,
 As worlds are cradled in eternity;
 Lulled by the storm, the Arctic's euphony,
 Launched in hoarse thunder from a mountain mold
 Upon the sea the viking sailed of old,
 They come, the fleet of death, in spring set free.
 Strange as the product of some other sphere,
 The huge imaginings the frost has wrought,
 Out of the land of the White Bear emerge;
 Seeking the sunlight, from creation's verge
 Southward they wander, silent as a thought,
 And in the Gulf-stream drown and disappear.

W. P. Foster.

[BEGUN IN DECEMBER, 1893.]

PUDD'NHEAD WILSON.

A TALE BY MARK TWAIN.

EVEN the clearest and most perfect circumstantial evidence is likely to be at fault, after all, and therefore ought to be received with great caution. Take the case of any pencil, sharpened by any woman: if you have witnesses, you will find she did it with a knife; but if you take simply the aspect of the pencil, you will say she did it with her teeth. — *Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar.*

CHAPTER XX.



HE weeks dragged along, no friend visiting the jailed twins but their counsel and Aunt Patsy Cooper, and the day of trial came at last — the heaviest day in Wilson's life; for with all his tireless diligence he had discovered no sign or trace of the missing confederate. "Confederate" was the term he had long ago privately accepted for that person — not as being unquestionably the right term, but as being at

least possibly the right one, though he was never able to understand why the twins did not vanish and escape, as the confederate had done, instead of remaining by the murdered man and getting caught there.

The court-house was crowded, of course, and would remain so to the finish, for not only in the town itself, but in the country for miles around, the trial was the one topic of conversation among the people. Mrs. Pratt, in deep mourning, and Tom with a weed on his hat, had seats near Pembroke Howard, the public prosecutor, and back of them sat a great array of