

light, as their own happy thoughts might then be traversing the years to come, and making them all years of brightness. So they passed away into the shadow, and were gone. It was only a burst of light that had been so radiant. The room darkened as they went out, and the sun was clouded over.

"Am I right, Esther?" said my Guardian, when they were gone.

He who was so good and wise, to ask *me* whether he was right!

"Rick may gain, out of this, the quality he wants. Wants, at the core of so much that is good!" said Mr. Jarndyce, shaking his head. "I have said nothing to Ada, Esther. She has her friend and counselor always near." And he laid his hand lovingly upon my head.

I could not help showing that I was a little moved, though I did all I could to conceal it.

"Tut tut!" said he. "But we must take care, too, that our little woman's life is not all consumed in care for others."

"Care? My dear Guardian, I believe I am the happiest creature in the world!"

"I believe so too," said he. "But some one may find out, what Esther never will—that the little woman is to be held in remembrance above all other people!"

I have omitted to mention in its place, that there was some one else at the family dinner party. It was not a lady. It was a gentleman. It was a gentleman of a dark complexion—a young surgeon. He was rather reserved, but I thought him very sensible and agreeable. At least, Ada asked me if I did not, and I said yes.

THE COUNTER-STROKE.

JUST after breakfast one fine spring morning in 1837, an advertisement in the *Times* for a curate caught and fixed my attention. The salary was sufficiently remunerative for a bachelor, and the parish, as I personally knew, one of the most pleasantly situated in all Somersetshire. Having said that, the reader will readily understand that it could not have been a hundred miles from Taunton. I instantly wrote, inclosing testimonials, with which the Rev. Mr. Townley, the rector, was so entirely satisfied, that the return-post brought me a positive engagement, unclogged with the slightest objection to one or two subsidiary items I had stipulated for, and accompanied by an invitation to make the rectory my home till I could conveniently suit myself elsewhere. This was both kind and handsome; and the next day but one I took coach, with a light heart, for my new destination. It thus happened that I became acquainted, and in some degree mixed up, with the train of events it is my present purpose to relate.

The rector I found to be a stout, portly gentleman, whose years already reached to between sixty and seventy. So many winters, although they had plentifully besprinkled his hair with gray, shone out with ruddy brightness in his still handsome face, and keen, kindly, bright-

hazel eyes; and his voice, hearty and ringing, had not as yet one quaver of age in it. I met him at breakfast on the morning after my arrival, and his reception of me was most friendly. We had spoken together but for a few minutes, when one of the French windows, that led from the breakfast-room into a shrubbery and flower-garden, gently opened and admitted a lady, just then, as I afterward learned, in her nineteenth spring. I use this term almost unconsciously, for I can not even now, in the glowing summer of her life, dissociate her image from that season of youth and joyousness. She was introduced to me, with old-fashioned simplicity, as "My grand-daughter, Agnes Townley." It is difficult to look at beauty through other men's eyes, and, in the present instance, I feel that I should fail miserably in the endeavor to stamp upon this blank, dead paper, any adequate idea of the fresh loveliness, the rose-bud beauty of that young girl. I will merely say, that her perfectly Grecian head, wreathed with wavy *bandeaux* of bright hair, undulating with golden light, vividly brought to my mind Raphael's halo-tinted portraits of the Virgin—with this difference, that in place of the holy calm and resignation of the painting, there was in Agnes Townley, a sparkling youth and life, that even amid the heat and glare of a crowded ball-room, or of a theatre, irresistibly suggested and recalled the freshness and perfume of the morning—of a cloudless, rosy morning of May. And, far higher charm than feature-beauty, however exquisite, a sweetness of disposition, a kind gentleness of mind and temper, was evinced in every line of her face, in every accent of the low-pitched, silver voice, that breathed through lips made only to smile.

Let me own, that I was greatly struck by so remarkable a combination of rare endowments; and this, I think, the sharp-eyed rector must have perceived, or he might not, perhaps, have been so immediately communicative with respect to the near prospects of his idolized grandchild, as he was the moment the young lady, after presiding at the breakfast-table, had withdrawn.

"We shall have gay doings, Mr. Tyrrel, at the rectory shortly," he said. "Next Monday three weeks will, with the blessing of God, be Agnes Townley's wedding-day."

"Wedding-day!"

"Yes," rejoined the rector, turning toward and examining some flowers which Miss Townley had brought in and placed on the table. "Yes, it has been for some time settled that Agnes shall on that day be united in holy wedlock to Mr. Arbuthnot."

"Mr. Arbuthnot, of Elm Park?"

"A great match, is it not, in a worldly point of view?" replied Mr. Townley, with a pleasant smile at the tone of my exclamation. "And much better than that: Robert Arbuthnot is a young man of a high and noble nature, as well as devotedly attached to Agnes. He will, I doubt not, prove in every respect a husband de-

serving and worthy of her; and that from the lips of a doting old grandpapa must be esteemed high praise. You will see him presently."

I did see him often, and quite agreed in the rector's estimate of his future grandson-in-law. I have not frequently seen a finer-looking young man—his age was twenty-six; and certainly one of a more honorable and kindly spirit, of a more genial temper than he, has never come within my observation. He had drawn a great prize in the matrimonial lottery, and, I felt, deserved his high fortune.

They were married at the time agreed upon, and the day was kept not only at Elm Park, and in its neighborhood, but throughout "our" parish, as a general holiday. And, strangely enough—at least I have never met with another instance of the kind—it was held by our entire female community, high as well as low, that the match was a perfectly equal one, notwithstanding that wealth and high worldly position were entirely on the bridegroom's side. In fact, that nobody less in the social scale than the representative of an old territorial family ought, in the nature of things, to have aspired to the hand of Agnes Townley, appeared to have been a foregone conclusion with every body. This will give the reader a truer and more vivid impression of the bride, than any words or colors I might use.

The days, weeks, months of wedded life flew over Mr. and Mrs. Arbuthnot without a cloud, save a few dark but transitory ones which I saw now and then flit over the husband's countenance as the time when he should become a father drew near, and came to be more and more spoken of. "I should not survive her," said Mr. Arbuthnot, one day in reply to a chance observation of the rector's, "nor indeed desire to do so." The gray-headed man seized and warily pressed the husband's hand, and tears of sympathy filled his eyes; yet did he, nevertheless, as in duty bound, utter grave words on the sinfulness of despair under any circumstances, and the duty, in all trials, however heavy, of patient submission to the will of God. But the venerable gentleman spoke in a hoarse and broken voice, and it was easy to see he *felt* with Mr. Arbuthnot that the reality of an event, the bare possibility of which shook them so terribly, were a cross too heavy for human strength to bear and live.

It was of course decided that the expected heir or heiress should be intrusted to a wet-nurse, and a Mrs. Danby, the wife of a miller living not very far from the rectory, was engaged for that purpose. I had frequently seen the woman; and her name, as the rector and I were one evening gossiping over our tea, on some subject or other that I forgot, came up.

"A likely person," I remarked; "healthy, very good-looking, and one might make oath, a true-hearted creature. But there is withal a timidity; a frightenedness in her manner at times, which, if I may hazard a perhaps uncharitable conjecture, speaks ill for that smart husband of hers."

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"You have hit the mark precisely, my dear sir. Danby is a sorry fellow, and a domestic tyrant to boot. His wife, who is really a good, but meek-hearted person, lived with us once. How old do you suppose her to be?"

"Five-and-twenty perhaps."

"Six years more than that. She has a son of the name of Harper by a former marriage, who is in his tenth year. Anne wasn't a widow long. Danby was caught by her good looks, and she by the bait of a well-provided home. Unless, however, her husband gives up his corn speculations, she will not, I think, have that much longer."

"Corn speculations! Surely Danby has no means adequate to indulgence in such a game as that!"

"Not he. But about two years ago he bought, on credit, I believe, a considerable quantity of wheat, and prices happening to fly suddenly up just then, he made a large profit. This has quite turned his head, which, by-the-by, was never, as Cockneys say, quite rightly screwed on." The announcement of a visitor interrupted any thing further the rector might have had to say, and I soon afterward went home.

A sad accident occurred about a month subsequent to the foregoing conversation. The rector was out riding upon a usually quiet horse, which all at once took it into its head to shy at a scarecrow it must have seen a score of times, and thereby threw its rider. Help was fortunately at hand, and the reverend gentleman was instantly conveyed home, when it was found that his left thigh was broken. Thanks, however, to his temperate habits, it was before long authoritatively pronounced that, although it would be a considerable time before he was released from confinement, it was not probable that the lusty winter of his life would be shortened by what had happened. Unfortunately, the accident threatened to have evil consequences in another quarter. Immediately after it occurred, one Matthews, a busy, thick-headed lout of a butcher, rode furiously off to Elm Park with the news. Mrs. Arbuthnot, who daily looked to be confined, was walking with her husband upon the lawn in front of the house, when the great burly blockhead rode up, and blurted out that the rector had been thrown from his horse, and it was feared killed!

The shock of such an announcement was of course overwhelming. A few hours afterward, Mrs. Arbuthnot gave birth to a healthy male-child; but the young mother's life, assailed by fever, was for many days utterly despaired of—for weeks held to tremble so evenly in the balance, that the slightest adverse circumstance might in a moment turn the scale deathward. At length the black horizon that seemed to encompass us so hopelessly, lightened, and afforded the lover-husband a glimpse and hope of his vanished and well-nigh despaired of Eden. The promise was fulfilled. I was in the library with Mr. Arbuthnot, awaiting the physician's morning report, very anxiously expected at the rectory, when

Dr. Lindley entered the apartment in evidently cheerful mood.

"You have been causelessly alarmed," he said. "There is no fear whatever of a relapse. Weakness only remains, and that we shall slowly, perhaps, but certainly remove."

A gleam of lightning seemed to flash over Mr. Arbuthnot's expressive countenance. "Blessed be God!" he exclaimed. "And how," he added, "shall we manage respecting the child? She asks for it incessantly."

Mr. Arbuthnot's infant son, I should state, had been consigned immediately after its birth to the care of Mrs. Danby, who had herself been confined, also with a boy, about a fortnight previously. Scarlatina being prevalent in the neighborhood, Mrs. Danby was hurried away with the two children to a place near Bath, almost before she was able to bear the journey. Mr. Arbuthnot had not left his wife for an hour, and consequently had only seen his child for a few minutes just after it was born.

"With respect to the child," replied Dr. Lindley, "I am of opinion that Mrs. Arbuthnot may see it in a day or two. Say the third day from this, if all goes well. I think we may venture so far; but I will be present, for any untoward agitation might be perhaps instantly fatal." This point provisionally settled, we all three went our several ways: I to cheer the still suffering rector with the good news.

The next day but one, Mr. Arbuthnot was in exuberant spirits. "Dr. Lindley's report is even more favorable than we had anticipated," he said; "and I start to-morrow morning, to bring Mrs. Danby and the child—" The postman's subdued but unmistakable knock interrupted him. "The nurse," he added, "is very attentive and punctual. She writes almost every day." A servant entered with a salver heaped with letters. Mr. Arbuthnot tossed them over eagerly, and seizing one, after glancing at the post-mark, tore it eagerly open, muttering as he did so, "It is not the usual handwriting; but from her, no doubt—" "Merciful God!" I impulsively exclaimed, as I suddenly lifted my eyes to his. "What is the matter?" A mortal pallor had spread over Mr. Arbuthnot's before animated features, and he was glaring at the letter in his hand as if a basilisk had suddenly confronted him. Another moment, and the muscles of his frame appeared to give way suddenly, and he dropped heavily into the easy-chair from which he had risen to take the letters. I was terribly alarmed, and first loosening his neckerchief, for he seemed choking, I said: "Let me call some one;" and I turned to reach the bell, when he instantly seized my arms, and held me with a grip of iron. "No—no—no!" he hoarsely gasped; "water—water!" There was fortunately some on a side table. I handed it to him, and he drank eagerly. It appeared to revive him a little. He thrust the crumpled letter into his pocket, and said in a low, quick whisper: "There is some one coming! Not a word, remember—not a word!" At the same time, he wheeled his

chair half round, so that his back should be toward the servant we heard approaching.

"I am sent, sir," said Mrs. Arbuthnot's maid, "to ask if the post has arrived?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Arbuthnot, with wonderful mastery of his voice. "Tell your mistress I shall be with her almost immediately, and that her—her son is quite well."

"Mr. Tyrrel," he continued, as soon as the servant was out of hearing, "there is, I think a liqueur-stand on the sideboard in the large dining-room. Would you have the kindness to bring it me, unobserved—mind that—unobserved by any one?"

I did as he requested; and the instant I placed the liqueur-frame before him, he seized the brandy *carafe*, and drank with fierce eagerness. "For goodness' sake," I exclaimed, "consider what you are about, Mr. Arbuthnot; you will make yourself ill."

"No, no," he answered, after finishing his draught. "It seems scarcely stronger than water. But I—I am better now. It was a sudden spasm of the heart; that's all. The letter," he added, after a long and painful pause, during which he eyed me, I thought, with a kind of suspicion—"the letter you saw me open just now, comes from a relative, an aunt, who is ill, very ill, and wishes to see me instantly. You understand?"

I *did* understand, or at least I feared that I did too well. I, however, bowed acquiescence; and he presently rose from his chair, and strode about the apartment in great agitation, until his wife's bedroom bell rang. He then stopped suddenly short, shook himself, and looked anxiously at the reflection of his flushed and varying countenance in the magnificent chimney-glass.

"I do not look, I think—or, at least shall not, in a darkened room—odder, more out of the way—that is, more agitated—than one might, that one *must* appear after hearing of the dangerous illness of—of—an aunt?"

"You look better, sir, than you did a while since."

"Yes, yes; much better, much better. I am glad to hear you say so. That was my wife's bell. She is anxious, no doubt, to see me."

He left the apartment; was gone perhaps ten minutes; and when he returned, was a thought less nervous than before. I rose to go. "Give my respects," he said, "to the good rector; and as an especial favor," he added, with strong emphasis, "let me ask of you not to mention to a living soul that you saw me so unmanned as I was just now; that I swallowed brandy. It would appear so strange, so weak, so ridiculous."

I promised not to do so, and almost immediately left the house, very painfully affected. His son was, I concluded, either dead or dying, and he was thus bewilderedly casting about for means of keeping the terrible, perhaps fatal tidings, from his wife. I afterward heard that he left Elm Park in a post-chaise, about two hours after I came away, unattended by a single servant!

He was gone three clear days only, at the end of which he returned with Mrs. Danby and—his

son—in florid health, too, and one of the finest babies of its age—about nine weeks only—I had ever seen. Thus vanished the air-drawn Doubting Castle and Giant Despair which I had so hastily conjured up! The cause assigned by Mr. Arbuthnot for the agitation I had witnessed, was doubtless the true one; and yet, and the thought haunted me for months, years afterward, he opened only *one* letter that morning, and had sent a message to his wife that the child was well.

Mrs. Danby remained at the Park till the little Robert was weaned, and was then dismissed very munificently rewarded. Year after year rolled away without bringing Mr. and Mrs. Arbuthnot any additional little ones, and no one, therefore, could feel surprised at the enthusiastic love of the delighted mother for her handsome, nobly-promising boy. But that which did astonish me, though no one else, for it seemed that I alone noticed it, was a strange defect of character which began to develop itself in Mr. Arbuthnot. He was positively jealous of his wife's affection for their own child! Many and many a time have I remarked, when he thought himself unobserved, an expression of intense pain flash from his fine, expressive eyes, at any more than usually fervent manifestation of the young mother's gushing love for her first and only born! It was altogether a mystery to me, and I as much as possible forbore to dwell upon the subject.

Nine years passed away without bringing any material change to the parties involved in this narrative, except those which time brings ordinarily in his train. Young Robert Arbuthnot was a healthy, tall, fine-looking lad of his age; and his great-grandpapa, the rector, though not suffering under any actual physical or mental infirmity, had reached a time of life when the announcement that the golden bowl is broken, or the silver cord is loosed, may indeed be quick and sudden, but scarcely unexpected. Things had gone well, too, with the nurse, Mrs. Danby, and her husband; well, at least, after a fashion. The speculative miller must have made good use of the gift to his wife for her care of little Arbuthnot, for he had built a genteel house near the mill, always rode a valuable horse, kept, it was said, a capital table; and all this, as it seemed, by his clever speculations in corn and flour, for the ordinary business of the mill was almost entirely neglected. He had no children of his own, but he had apparently taken, with much cordiality, to his step-son, a fine lad, now about eighteen years of age. This greatly grieved the boy's mother, who dreaded above all things that her son should contract the evil, dissolute habits of his father-in-law. Latterly, she had become extremely solicitous to procure the lad a permanent situation abroad, and this Mr. Arbuthnot had promised should be effected at the earliest opportunity.

Thus stood affairs on the 16th of October, 1846. Mr. Arbuthnot was temporarily absent in Ireland, where he possessed large property, and was making personal inquiries as to the extent of the

potato-rot, not long before announced. The morning's post had brought a letter to his wife, with the intelligence that he should reach home that very evening; and as the rectory was on the direct road to Elm Park, and her husband would be sure to pull up there, Mrs. Arbuthnot came with her son to pass the afternoon there, and in some slight degree anticipate her husband's arrival.

About three o'clock, a chief-clerk of one of the Taunton banks rode up in a gig to the rectory, and asked to see the Rev. Mr. Townley, on pressing and important business. He was ushered into the library, where the rector and I were at the moment rather busily engaged. The clerk said he had been to Elm Park, but not finding either Mr. Arbuthnot or his lady there, he had thought that perhaps the Rev. Mr. Townley might be able to pronounce upon the genuineness of a check for £300, purporting to be drawn on the Taunton Bank by Mr. Arbuthnot, and which Danby the miller had obtained cash for at Bath. He further added, that the bank had refused payment and detained the check, believing it to be a forgery.

"A forgery!" exclaimed the rector, after merely glancing at the document. "No question that it is, and a very clumsily executed one, too. Besides, Mr. Arbuthnot is not yet returned from Ireland."

This was sufficient; and the messenger, with many apologies for his intrusion, withdrew, and hastened back to Taunton. We were still talking over this sad affair, although some hours had elapsed since the clerk's departure—in fact, candles had been brought in, and we were every moment expecting Mr. Arbuthnot—when the sound of a horse at a hasty gallop was heard approaching, and presently the pale and haggard face of Danby shot by the window at which the rector and myself were standing. The gate-bell was rung almost immediately afterward, and but a brief interval passed before "Mr. Danby" was announced to be in waiting. The servant had hardly gained the passage with leave to show him in, when the impatient visitor rushed rudely into the room in a state of great, and it seemed angry excitement.

"What, sir, is the meaning of this ill-mannered intrusion?" demanded the rector, sternly.

"You have pronounced the check I paid away at Bath to be a forgery; and the officers are, I am told, already at my heels. Mr. Arbuthnot, unfortunately, is not at home, and I am come, therefore, to seek shelter with you."

"Shelter with me, sir!" exclaimed the indignant rector, moving, as he spoke, toward the bell. "Out of my house you shall go this instant."

The fellow placed his hand upon the reverend gentleman's arm, and looked with his bloodshot eyes keenly in his face.

"Don't!" said Danby; "don't, for the sake of yourself and yours! Don't! I warn you; or, if you like the phrase better, don't, for the sake of me and mine."

"Yours, fellow! Your wife, whom you have so long held in cruel bondage through her fears for her son, has at last shaken off that chain. James Harper sailed two days ago from Portsmouth for Bombay. I sent her the news two hours since."

"Ha! is that indeed so?" cried Danby, with an irrepressible start of alarm. "Why, then—But no matter: here, luckily, comes Mrs. Arbuthnot and her son. All's right! She will, I know, stand bail for me, and, if need be, acknowledge the genuineness of her husband's check."

The fellow's insolence was becoming unbearable, and I was about to seize and thrust him forcibly from the apartment, when the sound of wheels was heard outside. "Hold! one moment," he cried with fierce vehemence. "That is probably the officers: I must be brief, then, and to the purpose. Pray, madam, do not leave the room for your own sake: as for you, young sir, I command you to remain!"

"What! what does he mean!" exclaimed Mrs. Arbuthnot bewilderedly, and at the same time clasping her son—who gazed on Danby with kindled eyes, and angry boyish defiance—tightly to her side. Did the man's strange words give form and significance to some dark, shadowy, indistinct doubt that had previously haunted her at times? I judged so. The rector appeared similarly confused and shaken, and had sunk nerveless and terrified upon a sofa.

"You guess dimly, I see, at what I have to say," resumed Danby with a malignant sneer. "Well, hear it, then, once for all, and then, if you will, give me up to the officers. Some years ago," he continued, coldly and steadily—"some years ago, a woman, a nurse, was placed in charge of two infant children, both boys: one of these was her own; the other was the son of rich, proud parents. The woman's husband was a gay, jolly fellow, who much preferred spending money to earning it, and just then it happened that he was more than usually hard up. One afternoon, on visiting his wife, who had removed to a distance, he found that the rich man's child had sickened of the small-pox, and that there was no chance of its recovery. A letter containing the sad news was on a table, which he, the husband, took the liberty to open and read. After some reflection, suggested by what he had heard of the lady-mother's state of mind, he re-copied the letter, for the sake of embodying in it a certain suggestion. That letter was duly posted, and the next day brought the rich man almost in a state of distraction; but his chief and mastering terror was lest the mother of the already dead infant should hear, in her then precarious state, of what had happened. The tidings, he was sure, would kill her. Seeing this, the cunning husband of the nurse suggested that, for the present, his—the cunning one's—child might be taken to the lady as her own, and that the truth could be revealed when she was strong enough to bear it. The rich man fell into the artful trap, and that which the husband of the nurse had speculated upon, came to pass even

beyond his hopes. The lady grew to idolize her fancied child—she has, fortunately, had no other—and now, I think, it would really kill her to part with him. The rich man could not find it in his heart to undeceive his wife—every year it became more difficult, more impossible to do so; and very generously, I must say, has he paid in purse for the forbearance of the nurse's husband. Well now, then, to sum up: the nurse was Mrs. Danby; the rich, weak husband, Mr. Arbuthnot; the substituted child, that handsome boy, *my son!*"

A wild scream from Mrs. Arbuthnot broke the dread silence which had accompanied this frightful revelation, echoed by an agonized cry, half tenderness, half rage, from her husband, who had entered the room unobserved, and now clasped her passionately in his arms. The carriage-wheels we had heard were his. It was long before I could recall with calmness the tumult, terror, and confusion of that scene. Mr. Arbuthnot strove to bear his wife from the apartment, but she would not be forced away, and kept imploring with frenzied vehemence that Robert—that her boy should not be taken from her.

"I have no wish to do so—far from it," said Danby, with gleeful exultation. "Only folk must be reasonable, and not threaten their friends with the hulks—"

"Give him any thing, any thing!" broke in the unhappy lady. "O Robert! Robert!" she added with a renewed burst of hysterical grief, "how could you deceive me so?"

"I have been punished, Agnes," he answered in a husky, broken voice, "for my well-intending but criminal weakness; cruelly punished by the ever-present consciousness that this discovery must one day or other be surely made. What do you want?" he after awhile added with recovering firmness, addressing Danby.

"The acknowledgment of the little bit of paper in dispute, of course; and say a genuine one to the same amount."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Mrs. Arbuthnot, still wildly sobbing, and holding the terrified boy still strained in her embrace, as if she feared he might be wrenched from her by force. "Any thing—pay him any thing!"

At this moment, chancing to look toward the door of the apartment, I saw that it was partially opened, and that Danby's wife was listening there. What might that mean? But what of helpful meaning in such a case could it have?

"Be it so, love," said Mr. Arbuthnot, soothingly. "Danby, call to-morrow at the Park. And now, begone at once."

"I was thinking," resumed the rascal with swelling audacity, "that we might as well at the same time come to some permanent arrangement upon black and white. But never mind: I can always put the screw on; unless, indeed, you get tired of the young gentleman, and in that case, I doubt not, he will prove a dutiful and affectionate son—Ah, devil! What do you here? Begone, or I'll murder you! Begone, do you hear!"

His wife had entered, and silently confronted him. "Your threats, evil man," replied the woman quietly, "have no terrors for me now. My son is beyond your reach. Oh, Mrs. Arbuthnot," she added, turning toward and addressing that lady, "believe not—"

Her husband sprang at her with the bound of a panther. "Silence! Go home, or I'll strangle!" His own utterance was arrested by the fierce grasp of Mr. Arbuthnot, who seized him by the throat, and hurled him to the further end of the room. "Speak on, woman; and quick! quick! What have you to say?"

"That your son, dearest lady," she answered, throwing herself at Mrs. Arbuthnot's feet, "is as truly your own child as ever son born of woman!"

That shout of half-fearful triumph seems even now as I write to ring in my ears! I *felt* that the woman's words were words of truth, but I could not see distinctly: the room whirled round, and the lights danced before my eyes, but I could hear through all the choking ecstasy of the mother, and the fury of the baffled felon.

"The letter," continued Mrs. Danby, "which my husband found and opened, would have informed you, sir, of the swiftly approaching death of my child, and that yours had been carefully kept beyond the reach of contagion. The letter you received was written without my knowledge or consent. True it is that, terrified by my husband's threats, and in some measure reconciled to the wicked imposition by knowing that, after all, the right child would be in his right place, I afterward lent myself to Danby's evil purposes. But I chiefly feared for my son, whom I fully believed he would not have scrupled to make away with in revenge for my exposing his profitable fraud. I have sinned; I can hardly hope to be forgiven, but I have now told the sacred truth."

All this was uttered by the repentant woman, but at the time it was almost wholly unheard by those most interested in the statement. They only comprehended that they were saved—that the child was theirs in very truth. Great, abundant, but for the moment, bewildering joy! Mr. Arbuthnot—his beautiful young wife—her own true boy (how could she for a moment have doubted that he was her own true boy!—you might read that thought through all her tears, thickly as they fell)—the aged and half-stunned rector, while yet Mrs. Danby was speaking, were exclaiming, sobbing in each other's arms, ay, and praising God too, with broken voices and incoherent words it may be, but certainly with fervent, pious, grateful hearts.

When we had time to look about us, it was found that the felon had disappeared—escaped. It was well, perhaps, that he had; better, that he has not been heard of since.

PHILOSOPHY OF LAUGHTER.

FROM the time of King Solomon downward, laughter has been the subject of pretty general abuse. Even the laughers themselves some-

times vituperate the cachinnation they indulge in, and many of them

"Laugh in such a sort,
As if they mocked themselves, and scorned the spirit
That could be moved to laugh at any thing"

The general notion is, that laughter is childish, and unworthy the gravity of adult life. Grown men, we say, have more to do than to laugh; and the wiser sort of them leave such an unseemly contortion of the muscles to babes and blockheads.

We have a suspicion that there is something wrong here—that the world is mistaken not only in its reasonings, but its facts. To assign laughter to an early period of life, is to go contrary to observation and experience. There is not so grave an animal in this world as the human baby. It will weep, when it has got the length of tears, by the pailful; it will clench its fists, distort its face into a hideous expression of anguish, and scream itself into convulsions. It has not yet come up to a laugh. The little savage must be educated by circumstances, and tamed by the contact of civilization, before it rises to the greater functions of its being. Nay, we have sometimes received the idea from its choked and tuneless screams, that *they* were imperfect attempts at laughter. It feels enjoyment as well as pain, but has only one way of expressing both.

Then, look at the baby, when it has turned into a little boy or girl, and come up in some degree to the cachinnation. The laughter is still only rudimental: it is not genuine laughter. It expresses triumph, scorn, passion—any thing but a feeling of natural amusement. It is provoked by misfortune, by bodily infirmities, by the writhings of agonized animals; and it indicates either a sense of power or a selfish feeling of exemption from suffering. The "light-hearted laugh of children!" What a mistake! Observe the gravity of their sports. They are masters or mistresses, with the care of a family upon their hands; and they take especial delight in correcting their children with severity. They are washerwomen, housemaids, cooks, soldiers, policemen, postmen; coach, horsemen, and horses, by turns; and in all these characters they scour, sweep, fry, fight, pursue, carry, whirl, ride, and are ridden, without changing a muscle.

At the games of the young people there is much shouting, argument, vituperation—but no laughter. A game is a serious business with a boy, and he derives from it excitement, but no amusement. If he laughs at all, it is at something quite distinct from the purpose of the sport; for instance, when one of his comrades has his nose broken by the ball, or when the feet of another make off from him on the ice, and he comes down upon his back like a thunder-bolt. On such occasions, the laugh of a boy puts us in mind of the laugh of a hyæna: it is, in fact, the broken, asthmatic roar of a beast of prey.

It would thus appear that the common charge brought against laughter, of being something