CHAPTER XIV.

IMPRISONMENT.

Author's imprisonment.—Curious specimen of a jailer, an under-jailer, and an under-jailer's wife.—Mr. Holme Sumner.—Conversion of a room in a prison into a fairy bower.—Author's visitors.—A heart-rending spectacle.—Felons and debtors.—Restoration to Freedom.

We parted in hackney-coaches to our respective abodes, accompanied by two tipstaves apiece.

They prepared me for a singular character in my jailer. His name was Ives. I was told he was a very self-willed personage, not the more accommodating for being in a bad state of health; and that he called everybody Mister. "In short," said one of the tipstaves, "he is one as may be led, but he'll never be druv."

The sight of the prison-gate and the high wall was a dreary business. I thought of my horseback and the down of Brighton; but congratulated myself, at all events, that I had come thither with a good conscience. After waiting in the prison-yard as long as
if it had been the anteroom of a minister, I was ushered into the presence of the great man. He was in his parlour, which was decently furnished, and had a basin of broth before him, which he quitted on my appearance, and rose with much solemnity to meet me. He seemed about fifty years of age. He had a white night-cap on, as if he was going to be hung, and a great red face, which looked ready to burst with blood. Indeed, he was not allowed by his physician to speak in a tone above a whisper.

The first thing which this dignified person said was, "Mister, I'd ha' given a matter of a hundred pounds, that you had not come to this place—a hundred pounds!" The emphasis which he had laid on the word "hundred" was ominous.

I forgot what I answered. I endeavoured, to make the best of the matter; but he recurred over and over again to the hundred pounds; and said he wondered, for his part, what the Government meant by sending me there, for the prison was not a prison fit for a gentleman. He often repeated this opinion afterwards, adding, with a peculiar nod of his head, and "Mister, they knows it."

I said, that if a gentleman deserved to be sent to prison, he ought not to be treated with a greater nicety than any one else: upon which he corrected me, observing very properly (though, as the phrase
is, it was one word for the gentleman and two for the letter of prison-lodgings), that a person who had been used to a better mode of living than "low people," was not treated with the same justice, if forced to lodge exactly as they did.

I told him his observation was very true; which gave him a favourable opinion of my understanding: for I had many occasions of remarking, that he looked upon nobody as his superior, speaking even of the members of the royal family as persons whom he knew very well, and whom he estimated no more than became him. One royal duke had lunched in his parlour, and another he had laid under some polite obligation. "They knows me," said he, "very well, Mister; and, Mister, I knows them." This concluding sentence he uttered with great particularity and precision.

He was not proof, however, against a Greek Pindar, which he happened to light upon one day among my books. Its unintelligible character gave him a notion that he had got somebody to deal with who might really know something which he did not. Perhaps the gilt leaves and red morocco binding had their share in the magic. The upshot was, that he always showed himself anxious to appear well with me, as a clever fellow, treating me with great civility on all occasions but one, when I made him very angry by disappointing him in a money amount.
The Pindar was a mystery that staggered him. I remember very well, that giving me a long account one day of something connected with his business, he happened to catch with his eye the shelf that contained it, and whether he saw it or not, abruptly finished by observing, "But, Mister, you knows all these things as well as I do."

Upon the whole, my new acquaintance was as strange a person as I ever met with. A total want of education, together with a certain vulgar acuteness, conspired to render him insolent and pedantic. Disease sharpened his tendency to fits of passion, which threatened to suffocate him; and then in his intervals of better health he would issue forth, with his cock-up-nose and his hat on one side, as great a fop as a jockey. I remember his coming to my rooms, about the middle of my imprisonment, as if on purpose to insult over my ill health with the contrast of his convalescence, putting his arms in a gay manner a-kimbo, and telling me I should never live to go out, whereas he was riding about as stout as ever, and had just been in the country. He died before I left prison.

The word jail, in deference to the way in which it is sometimes spelt, this accomplished individual pronounced gole; and Mr. Brougham he always spoke of as Mr. Bruffam. He one day apologized for this mode of pronunciation, or rather gave a specimen of
vanity and self-will, which will show the reader
the high notions a jailer may entertain of himself.
"I find," said he, "that they calls him Broom; but,
Mister" (assuming a look from which there was to
be no appeal), "I calls him Bruffam!"

Finding that my host did not think the prison fit
for me, I asked if he could let me have an apartment
in his house. He pronounced it impossible; which
was a trick to enhance the price. I could not make
an offer to please him; and he stood out so long,
and, as he thought, so cunningly, that he subse-
quently overreached himself by his trickery; as the
reader will see. His object was to keep me among
the prisoners, till he could at once sicken me of the
place, and get the permission of the magistrates to
receive me into his house; which was a thing he
reckoned upon as a certainty. He thus hoped to
secure himself in all quarters; for his vanity was
almost as strong as his avarice. He was equally
fond of getting money in private, and of the appro-
bation of the great men whom he had to deal with in
public; and it so happened, that there had been no
prisoner, above the poorest condition, before my
arrival, with the exception of Colonel Despard.
From abusing the prison, he then suddenly fell to
speaking well of it, or rather of the room occupied
by the colonel; and said, that another corresponding
with it would make me a capital apartment. "To
be sure,” said he, “there is nothing but bare walls, and I have no bed to put in it.” I replied, that of course I should not be hindered from having my own bed from home. He said, “No; and if it rains,” observed he, “you have only to put up with want of light for a time.” “What!” exclaimed I, “are there no windows?” “Windows, Mister!” cried he; “no windows in a prison of this sort; no glass, Mister: but excellent shutters.”

It was finally agreed, that I should sleep for a night or two in a garret of the jailer’s house, till my bed could be got ready in the prison and the windows glazed. A dreary evening followed, which, however, let me completely into the man’s character, and showed him in a variety of lights, some ludicrous, and others as melancholy. There was a full-length portrait in the room, of a little girl, dizzened out in her best. This, he told me, was his daughter, whom he had disinherited for her disobedience. I tried to suggest a few reflections, capable of doing her service; but disobedience, I found, was an offence doubly irritating to his nature, on account of his sovereign habits as a jailer; and seeing his irritability likely to inflame the plethora of his countenance, I desisted. Though not allowed to speak above a whisper, he was extremely willing to talk; but at an early hour I pleaded my own state of health, and retired to bed.

On taking possession of my garret, I was treated
with a piece of delicacy, which I never should have thought of finding in a prison. When I first entered its walls, I had been received by the under-jailer, a man who seemed an epitome of all that was forbidding in his office. He was short and very thick, had a hook nose, a great severe countenance, and a bunch of keys hanging on his arm. A friend stopped short at sight of him, and said in a melancholy tone, 'And this is the jailer!'

Honest old Cave! thine outside would have been unworthy of thee, if upon further acquaintance I had not found it a very hearty outside,—ay, and in my eyes, a very good-looking one, and as fit to contain the milk of human-kindness that was in thee, as the husk of a cocoa. To show by one specimen the character of this man,—I could never prevail on him to accept any acknowledgment of his kindness, greater than a set of tea-things, and a piece or two of old furniture which I could not well carry away. I had, indeed, the pleasure of leaving him in possession of a room which I had papered; but this was a thing unexpected, and which neither of us had supposed could be done. Had I been a prince, I would have forced on him a pension; being a journalist, I made him accept an Examiner weekly, which he lived for some years to relish his Sunday pipe with.

This man, in the interval between my arrival and introduction to the head-jailer, had found means to
give me farther information respecting my condition, and to express the interest he took in it. I thought little of his offers at the time. He behaved with the greatest air of deference to his principal; moving as fast as his body would allow him, to execute his least intimation; and holding the candle to him while he read, with an obsequious zeal. But he had spoken to his wife about me, and his wife I found to be as great a curiosity as himself. Both were more like the romantic jailers drawn in some of our modern plays, than real Horsemonger-lane palpabilities. The wife, in her person, was as light and fragile as the husband was sturdy. She had the nerves of a fine lady, and yet went through the most unpleasant duties with the patience of a martyr. Her voice and look seemed to plead for a softness like their own, as if a loud reply would have shattered her. Ill health had made her a Methodist, but this did not hinder her from sympathizing with an invalid who was none, or from loving a husband who was as little of a saint as need be. Upon the whole, such an extraordinary couple, so apparently unsuitable, and yet so fitted for one another; so apparently vulgar on one side, and yet so naturally delicate on both; so misplaced in their situation, and yet for the good of others so admirably put there, I have never met with before or since.

It was the business of this woman to lock me up
in my garret; but she did it so softly the first night, that I knew nothing of the matter. The night following, I thought I heard a gentle tampering with the lock. I tried it, and found it fastened. She heard me as she was going down-stairs, and said the next day, "Ah, sir, I thought I should have turned the key so as for you not to hear it; but I found you did." The whole conduct of this couple towards us, from first to last, was of a piece with this singular delicacy.

My bed was shortly put up, and I slept in my new room. It was on an upper story, and stood in a corner of the quadrangle, on the right hand as you enter the prison-gate. The windows (which had now been accommodated with glass, in addition to their "excellent shutters") were high up, and barred; but the room was large and airy, and there was a fireplace. It was intended to be a common room for the prisoners on that story; but the cells were then empty. The cells were ranged on either side of the arcade, of which the story is formed, and the room opened at the end of it. At night-time the door was locked; then another on the top of the staircase, then another on the middle of the staircase, then a fourth at the bottom, a fifth that shut up the little yard belonging to that quarter, and how many more, before you got out of the gates, I forget: but I do not exaggerate when I say there were ten or eleven.
The first night I slept there, I listened to them, one after the other, till the weaker part of my heart died within me. Every fresh turning of the key seemed a malignant insult to my love of liberty. I was alone, and away from my family; I, who to this day have never slept from home above a dozen weeks in my life. Furthermore, the reader will bear in mind that I was ill. With a great flow of natural spirits, I was subject to fits of nervousness, which had latterly taken a more continued shape. I felt one of them coming on, and having learned to anticipate and break the force of it by exercise, I took a stout walk by pacing backwards and forwards for the space of three hours. This threw me into a state in which rest, for rest's sake, became pleasant. I got hastily into bed, and slept without a dream till morning.

By the way, I never dreamt of prison but twice all the time I was there, and my dream was the same on both occasions. I fancied I was at the theatre, and that the whole house looked at me in surprise, as much as to say, "How could he get out of prison?"

I saw my wife for a few minutes after I entered the jail, but she was not allowed on that day to stop longer. The next day she was with me for some hours. To say that she never reproached me for these and the like taxes upon our family prospects, is to say little. A world of comfort for me
was in her face. There is a note in the fifth volume of my Spenser, which I was then reading, in these words:—"February 4th, 1813." The line to which it refers is this:—

"Much dearer be the things which come through hard distresse."

I now applied to the magistrates for permission to have my wife and children constantly with me, which was granted. Not so my request to move into the jailer's house. Mr. Holme Sumner, on occasion of a petition from a subsequent prisoner, told the House of Commons that my room had a view over the Surrey hills, and that I was very well content with it. I could not feel obliged to him for this postliminious piece of enjoyment, especially when I remembered that he had done all in his power to prevent my removal out of the room, precisely (as it appeared to us), because it looked upon nothing but the felons, and because I was not contented. In fact, you could not see out of the windows at all, without getting on a chair; and then, all that you saw, was the miserable men whose chains had been clanking from daylight. The perpetual sound of these chains wore upon my spirits in a manner to which my state of health allowed me reasonably to object. The yard, also, in which I took exercise, was very small. The jailer proposed that I should be allowed to occupy apart-
ments in his house, and walk occasionally in the prison garden; adding, that I should certainly die if I did not; and his opinion was seconded by that of the medical man. Mine host was sincere in this, if in nothing else. Telling us, one day, how warmly he had put it to the magistrates, and how he insisted that I should not survive, he turned round upon me, and, to the doctor's astonishment, added, "Nor, Mister, will you." I believe it was the opinion of many; but Mr. Holme Sumner argued otherwise; perhaps from his own sensations, which were sufficiently iron. Perhaps he concluded, also, like a proper old Tory, that if I did not think fit to flatter the magistrates a little, and play the courtier, my wants could not be very great. At all events, he came up one day with the rest of them, and after bowing to my wife, and piteously pinching the cheek of an infant in her arms, went down and did all he could to prevent our being comfortably situated.

The doctor then proposed that I should be removed into the prison infirmary; and this proposal was granted. Infirmary had, I confess, an awkward sound, even to my ears. I fancied a room shared with other sick persons, not the best fitted for companions; but the good-natured doctor (his name was Dixon) undeceived me. The infirmary was divided into four wards, with as many small rooms attached to them. The two upper wards were occupied, but
the two on the floor had never been used: and one of these, not very providently (for I had not yet learned to think of money) I turned into a noble room. I papered the walls with a trellis of roses; I had the ceiling coloured with clouds and sky; the barred windows I screened with Venetian blinds; and when my bookcases were set up with their busts, and flowers and a pianoforte made their appearance, perhaps there was not a handsomer room on that side the water. I took a pleasure, when a stranger knocked at the door, to see him come in and stare about him. The surprise on issuing from the Borough, and passing through the avenues of a jail, was dramatic. Charles Lamb declared there was no other such room, except in a fairy tale.

But I possessed another surprise; which was a garden. There was a little yard outside the room, railed off from another belonging to the neighbouring ward. This yard I shut in with green palings, adorned it with a trellis, bordered it with a thick bed of earth from a nursery, and even contrived to have a grass-plot. The earth I filled with flowers and young trees. There was an apple-tree, from which we managed to get a pudding the second year. As to my flowers, they were allowed to be perfect. Thomas Moore, who came to see me with Lord Byron, told me he had seen no such heart's-ease. I bought the Parnaso Italiano while in prison, and
used often to think of a passage in it, while looking at this miniature piece of horticulture:—

"Mio picciol orto,
A me sci vigna, e campo, e selva, e prato."

BALDI.

"My little garden,
To me thou’rt vineyard, field, and meadow, and wood."

Here I wrote and read in fine weather, sometimes under an awning. In autumn, my trellises were hung with scarlet runners, which added to the flowery investment. I used to shut my eyes in my arm-chair, and affect to think myself hundreds of miles off.

But my triumph was in issuing forth of a morning. A wicket out of the garden led into the large one belonging to the prison. The latter was only for vegetables; but it contained a cherry-tree, which I saw twice in Blossom. I parcelled out the ground in my imagination into favourite districts. I made a point of dressing myself as if for a long walk; and then, putting on my gloves, and taking my book under my arm, stepped forth, requesting my wife not to wait dinner if I was too late. My eldest little boy, to whom Lamb addressed some charming verses on the occasion, was my constant companion, and we used to play all sorts of juvenile games together. It was, probably, in dreaming of one of these games (but the words had a more touching effect on my
car) that he exclaimed one night in his sleep, "No: I'm not lost; I'm found." Neither he nor I were very strong at that time; but I have lived to see him a man of forty; and wherever he is found, a generous hand and a great understanding will be found together.

I entered prison the 3rd of February 1813, and removed to my new apartments the 16th of March, happy to get out of the noise of the chains. When I sat amidst my books, and saw the imaginary sky overhead, and my paper roses about me, I drank in the quiet at my ears, as if they were thirsty. The little room was my bed-room. I afterwards made the two rooms change characters, when my wife lay in. Permission for her continuance with me at that period was easily obtained of the magistrates, among whom a new-comer made his appearance. This was another good-natured man, Lord Leslie, afterwards Earl of Rothes.* He heard me with kindness; and his actions did not belie his countenance. My eldest girl (now, alas! no more) was born in prison. She was beautiful, and for the greatest part of an existence of thirty years, she was happy. She was christened Mary after my mother, and Florimel after one of Spenser's heroines. But Mary we

* George William, twelfth earl of that name. He died a few years afterwards.
called her. Never shall I forget my sensations when she came into the world; for I was obliged to play the physician myself, the hour having taken us by surprise. But her mother found many unexpected comforts; and during the whole time of her confinement, which happened to be in very fine weather, the garden door was set open, and she looked upon trees and flowers. A thousand recollections rise within me at every fresh period of my imprisonment, such as I cannot trust myself with dwelling upon.

These rooms, and the visits of my friends, were the bright side of my captivity. I read verses without end, and wrote almost as many. I had also the pleasure of hearing that my brother had found comfortable rooms in Coldbath-fields, and a host who really deserved that name as much as a jailer could. The first year of my imprisonment was a long pull up-hill; but never was metaphor so literally verified, as by the sensation at the turning of the second. In the first year, all the prospect was that of the one coming: in the second, the days began to be scored off, like those of children at school preparing for a holiday. When I was fairly settled in my new apartments, the jailer could hardly give sufficient vent to his spleen at my having escaped his clutches, his astonishment was so great. Besides, though I treated him handsomely, he had a little lurking fear
of the *Examiner* upon him; so he contented himself with getting as much out of me as he could, and boasting of the grand room which he would fain have prevented my enjoying.

My friends were allowed to be with me till ten o'clock at night, when the under-turnkey, a young man with his lantern, and much ambitious gentility of deportment, came to see them out. I believe we scattered an urbanity about the prison, till then unknown. Even William Hazlitt, who there first did me the honour of a visit, would stand interchanging amenities at the threshold, which I had great difficulty in making him pass. I know not which kept his hat off with the greater pertinacity of deference, I to the diffident cutter-up of Tory dukes and kings, or he to the amazing prisoner and invalid who issued out of a bower of roses. There came my old friends and school-fellows, Pitman, whose wit and animal spirits still keep him alive; Mitchell, who translated Aristophanes; and Barnes, who always reminded me of Fielding. It was he that introduced me to the late Mr. Thomas Alsager, the kindest of neighbours, a man of business, who contrived to be a scholar and a musician. He loved his leisure, and yet would start up at a moment's notice to do the least of a prisoner's biddings.

My now old friend, Cowden Clarke, with his ever young and wise heart, was good enough to be his
own introducer, paving his way, like a proper investor of prisons, with baskets of fruit.

The Lambs came to comfort me in all weathers, hail or sunshine, in daylight and in darkness, even in the dreadful frost and snow of the beginning of 1814.

My physician, curiously enough, was Dr. Knighton (afterwards Sir William), who had lately become physician to the prince. He, therefore, could not, in decency, visit me under the circumstances, though he did again afterwards, never failing in the delicacies due either to his great friend or to his small. Meantime, another of his friends, the late estimable Dr. Gooch, came to me as his substitute, and he came often.

Great disappointment and exceeding viciousness may talk as they please of the badness of human nature. For my part, I am now in my sixty-fifth year, and I have seen a good deal of the world, the dark side as well as the light, and I say that human nature is a very good and kindly thing, and capable of all sorts of virtues. Art thou not a refutation of all that can be said against it, excellent Sir John Swinburne? another friend whom I made in prison, and who subsequently cheered some of my greatest passes of adversity.

To evils I have owed some of my greatest blessings. It was imprisonment that brought me ac-
quainted with my friend of friends, Shelley. I had seen little of him before; but he wrote to me, making me a princely offer, which at that time I stood in no need of.

Some other persons, not at all known to us, offered to raise money enough to pay the fine of 1,000l. We declined it, with proper thanks; and it became us to do so. But, as far as my own feelings were concerned, I have no merit; for I was destitute, at that time, of even a proper instinct with regard to money. It was not long afterwards that I was forced to call upon friendship for its assistance; and nobly (as I shall show by-and-by) was it afforded me!

To some other friends, near and dear, I may not even return thanks in this place for a thousand nameless attentions, which they make it a business of their existence to bestow on those they love. I might as soon thank my own heart. But one or two others, whom I have not seen for years, and who by some possibility (if, indeed, they ever think it worth their while to fancy anything on the subject) might suppose themselves forgotten, I may be suffered to remind of the pleasure they gave me. M. S., who afterwards saw us so often near London, has long, I hope, been enjoying the tranquillity he so richly deserved; and so, I trust, is C. S., whose face, or rather something like it (for it was not easy to
match her own), I continually met with afterwards in the land of her ancestors. Her veil, and her baskets of flowers, used to come through the portal, like light.

I must not omit the honour of a visit from the venerable Bentham, who was justly said to unite the wisdom of a sage with the simplicity of a child. He found me playing at battledore, in which he took a part, and, with his usual eye towards improvement, suggested an amendment in the constitution of shuttlecocks. I remember the surprise of the governor at his local knowledge and his vivacity. "Why, Mister," said he, "his eye is everywhere at once."

All these comforts were embittered by unceasing ill-health, and by certain melancholy reveries, which the nature of the place did not help to diminish. During the first six weeks, the sound of the felons' chains, mixed with what I took for horrid excrations or despairing laughter, was never out of my ears. When I went into the infirmary, which stood between the jail and the prison walls, gallowses were occasionally put in order by the side of my windows, and afterwards set up over the prison gates, where they remained visible. The keeper one day, with an air of mystery, took me into the upper ward, for the purpose, he said, of gratifying me with a view of the country from the roof. Some-
thing prevented his showing me this; but the spectacle he did show me I shall never forget. It was a stout country girl, sitting in an absorbed manner, her eyes fixed on the fire. She was handsome, and had a little hectic spot in either cheek, the effect of some gnawing emotion. He told me, in a whisper, that she was there for the murder of her bastard child. I could have knocked the fellow down for his unfeelingness in making a show of her; but, after all, she did not see us. She heeded us not. There was no object before her, but what produced the spot in her cheek. The gallows, on which she was executed, must have been brought out within her hearing;—but perhaps she heard that as little.

To relieve the reader's feelings, I will here give him another instance of the delicacy of my friend the under-jailer. He always used to carry up her food to this poor girl himself; because, as he said, he did not think it a fit task for younger men.

This was a melancholy case. In general, the crimes were not of such a staggering description, nor did the criminals appear to take their situation to heart. I found by degrees, that fortune showed fairer play than I had supposed to all classes of men, and that those who seemed to have most reason to be miserable, were not always so. Their criminality was generally proportioned to their want of thought. My friend Cave, who had become a philosopher by
the force of his situation, said to me one day, when
a new batch of criminals came in, "Poor ignorant
wretches, sir!" At evening, when they went to
bed, I used to stand in the prison garden, listening
to the cheerful songs with which the felons enter-
tained one another. The beaters of hemp were a
still merrier race. Doubtless the good hours and
simple fare of the prison contributed to make the
blood of its inmates run better, particularly those
who were forced to take exercise. At last, I used
to pity the debtors more than the criminals; yet
even the debtors had their gay parties and jolly
songs. Many a time (for they were my neighbours)
have I heard them roar out the old ballad in Beau-
mont and Fletcher:—

"He that drinks, and goes to bed sober,
Falls as the leaves do, and dies in October."

To say the truth, there was an obstreperousness in
their mirth, that looked more melancholy than the
thoughtlessness of the lighter-feeding felons.

On the 3rd of February 1815, I was free. When
my family, the preceding summer, had been obliged
to go down to Brighton for their health, I felt ready
to dash my head against the wall, at not being able
to follow them. I would sometimes sit in my chair,
with this thought upon me, till the agony of my im-
patience burst out at every pore. I would not speak
of it, if it did not enable me to show how this kind of suffering may be borne, and in what sort of way it terminates. I learnt to prevent it by violent exercise. All fits of nervousness ought to be anticipated as much as possible with exercise. Indeed, a proper healthy mode of life would save most people from these effeminate ills, and most likely cure even their inheritors.

It was now thought that I should dart out of my cage like a bird, and feel no end in the delight of ranging. But partly from ill-health, and partly from habit, the day of my liberation brought a good deal of pain with it. An illness of a long standing, which required very different treatment, had by this time been burnt in upon me by the iron that enters into the soul of the captive, wrap it in flowers as he may; and I am ashamed to say, that after stopping a little at the house of my friend Alsager, I had not the courage to continue looking at the shoals of people passing to and fro, as the coach drove up the Strand. The whole business of life seemed a hideous impertinence. The first pleasant sensation I experienced was when the coach turned into the New Road, and I beheld the old hills of my affection standing where they used to do, and breathing me a welcome.

It was very slowly that I recovered anything like a sensation of health. The bitterest evil I suffered
was in consequence of having been confined so long in one spot. The habit stuck to me on my return home, in a very extraordinary manner, and made, I fear, some of my friends think me ungrateful. They did me an injustice; but it was their fault; nor could I wish them the bitter experience which alone makes us acquainted with the existence of strange things. This weakness I outlived; but I have never thoroughly recovered the shock given my constitution. My natural spirits, however, have always struggled hard to see me reasonably treated. Many things give me exquisite pleasure, which seem to affect other men in a very minor degree; and I enjoyed, after all, such happy moments with my friends, even in prison, that in the midst of the beautiful climate which I afterwards visited, I was sometimes in doubt whether I would not rather have been in jail than in Italy.