SEAFORED is a charmingly quiet little seaside resort on the south coast. It is almost an ideal spot for a rest. I had left the train at Newhaven and walked along the somewhat rough beach for about an hour when the little village came into sight. It was my first visit to Seaforid, and I had come down with the anticipation of spending a few hours with the veteran balloonist, Henry Coxwell. The only address I had was that of “Henry Coxwell, Seaforid.” Just as I was leaving the beach, I beckoned a little girl and inquired of her whether she knew where a gentleman of the name of Coxwell lived. She looked up, and, without answering my question, she pointed her finger in the direction of a house, where stood a tall, well-knit figure an old man with grey beard, and a skull cap on his head; a black velvet waistcoat—such a black velvet waistcoat!—and a frock-coat.

He seemed to know that I was asking for him. He waved his hand towards me, beckoning me to come on, and in a very few seconds that hand was holding mine. It was Mr. Coxwell himself, who had been watching for my arrival.

“It blows cold over the Downs, eh?” he said. “Come in. This is a lovely spot; just suits me. Why, do you know, from my window on a bright day, I can see the grand stand on the race-course over the Downs.” Then, tapping me on the shoulder, the veteran made that always welcome and suggestive remark, “Now, what about lunch?”

And what a charming little lunch it was! No servant—it was her day out, and I was glad to learn that, although I was coming, a thoughtful master had not upset the arrangements for her occasional visit to Newhaven.

But we had somebody to wait upon us. It was an old ex-coastguardman, and a very good and kind fellow he was. It was he who cooked the delicious Southdown mutton, and watched the saucepan to see that the potatoes did not get watery; it was he who laid the table and looked after our wants. A fine, stalwart, strapping man, though he must be fifty if a day, was Mr. Pride, with his pea-jacket and top-boots, his ruddy face and twinkling eyes. Mr. Coxwell told me what a willing help Mr. Pride was; and the old coastguardman sang out: “Oh, yes; I always have to and help a ship in distress.”

The table was cleared. The Southdown mutton disappeared, and the fresh-pulled celery was a thing of the past; and then the old coastguardman came in with the glasses.

“You see, sir,” he said, turning to me by way of explanation, “directly we have finished dinner on board ship we pipe the grog.”

“Aye, aye,” said Mr. Coxwell.

So we lit up our pipes, and we “piped the grog,” and we chatted together till the sun set over the Downs.

I have seldom listened to a more delightful story of child-life than that told to me by Mr. Coxwell that wintry afternoon. He was born at Wouldham Castle, near Rochester, on March 2nd, 1819.

The little fellow’s father was a naval officer; and he was only two years old when he left the parsonage where he was...
born, and went with his father on board H.M.S. Colossus; and the veteran, as he puffs away at his pipe, almost remembers with a shiver how he used to be ducked into the water from the stage alongside the old "74."

One has not been sitting and chatting long with Mr. Coxwell before one is impressed with his marvellous memory for detail, especially in respect to matters associated with his schooldays. He drew a vivid picture of the manner in which they used to lash the soldiers with the cat in those old times, when the drums and the fifes used to play in order to drown the cries of the unfortunate fellow, who was secured to the red-painted triangle.

Little Coxwell was a plucky lad. He and his brother once stood up before a big bully, three times their united size, and fought him to the bitter end, because he had said an unkind word against their father.

The first balloon he ever saw was that used by Mr. Green in an ascent when he passed over Chatham Dockyard. It was no difficult matter to realize the picture which the Grand Old Man of ballooning drew of himself, as a little fellow hurrying along over the fields, with a huge spy-glass, some 16 in. round by 2½ ft. long, almost as big as himself, under his arm, anxious to get a good view. This was in 1828, and it was not long after that he made his first balloon himself. He started by making little parachutes.

"You know," said Mr. Coxwell, "they used to go up in a strong wind, instead of coming down in

one; we used to work them by contrary effect in those days.

"I may just mention that since the descents of Professor Baldwin a few years ago at the Alexandra Palace, it has generally been supposed that parachuting is practically new. Of course this is not so, as descents by parachute were made early in the present century.

"My little parachutes used to take me half an hour to make, and I have

known them go up a thousand feet. Then, from parachutes I got to making paper balloons. My first one was a fire balloon; it caught alight. My second attempt, however, was all right. I sent it up from a sheltered spot at the back of our stable. This balloon was about three or four feet in diameter, made of paper and varnished to hold gas.

"On leaving Chatham I went to school
at Camberwell, and I used to watch Green make his ascents from the Surrey Zoological Gardens. I used to get up in a big tree, and deliver a sort of little lecture from it to my schoolfellows below as to exactly what was happening to the balloon; and as I used to sit on one of the branches my feelings even then were that I wished some day to take up this study myself, though I never had any idea of taking it professionally.

"I had a great ambition to go up with Green. Curiously enough, although I knew him well, he would never take me. I think he used to regard me as rather a dangerous young man. He once said, 'There is something about that young Coxwell's eyes which tells me that he wants to get all the information from me that he can, and then turn his knowledge to ulterior motives. I would not take him up for love or money.' He used to charge £5 for an ascent; and I have known occasions when, rather than take me when his car was not full, he would carry up a milkman or a policeman.

"My father died when I was thirteen. He had broken three ribs in boarding a Spanish ship in the time of Nelson, and I do not think he ever really recovered from this. By this time, I had changed a blue jacket for a black coat, and the question arose as to what I should become. One of my sisters suggested I would make a good clergyman, but I fear this did not meet with my approval. All that time I was endeavouring to find out what I could about ballooning. I talked of nothing else but balloons, and I think I may say that even at this age I was fairly well up in the science of aerostation.

"It was about this time that a remarkably large balloon was built by Messrs. Gye and Hughes, after the plans of Mr. Green. I was to have started for Amsterdam to take up a position as a merchant's clerk, but I made up my mind to see the ascent of this balloon first. You may imagine what it was like, when I tell you that thirty-six policemen were placed around the balloon during its inflation; forty-one iron staves of 56lb. each were attached to the cordage; and even after the policemen had been compelled to put their staves through the meshes to save their hands being cut by the cords, other persons had to be called in to assist. It was a magnificent sight when that balloon went up, and I was anything but content the next morning, after having seen it, to trip off to Amsterdam to try my hand at clerking."

Mr. Coxwell went to Amsterdam, still suffering from balloon fever. The counting-house, however, did not agree with him, and when his brother one day put into his hand a paper containing the account of Mr. Green's trip across the Channel in a balloon from Vauxhall, his enthusiasm was again stirred up.

He only remained a short time in Holland, after which he returned to London and began to study dentistry. "You know," said Mr. Coxwell, "that I am a dentist still,
and it was sometimes very amusing, when I used to make my ascents from the Crystal Palace, to have a patient call on me at my house in Tottenham to have a tooth drawn, and ask if I were in; and then, on my arrival, staring at me with amazement and astonishment: ‘Why, I saw you go up in the sky last night! Are you really Mr. Coxwell?’ And I can assure you that it frequently took me some time to convince my visitors that I was really one and the same man.

“My first trip in a balloon was made with Mr. Hampton from the White Conduit Gardens, Pentonville, on Monday, August 19th, 1844. I assumed the name of ‘Wells,’ in order that I might not give too much anxiety to my friends. This was my first real ascent, and we descended in a meadow belonging to Mr. Augustin Rust, at East Ham Hall. And what a sensation it was. You are up, up, up, almost before you can realize it! You do not appear to move, but seem to remain perfectly stationary; and as you are seated in the air, the panorama of Nature which is opened out to you is positively indescribable. You watch the green fields, and the church spires, and the houses all becoming smaller and smaller. They seem to be going away from you while you sit and gaze at them, lost in wonderment.

“Here, just look at this!” and the veteran shouts out to the old coast-guardsmen, “Pride, heave to with the atlas!” “Aye! Aye! Mr. Coxwell!” “Now, there is no getting away from that!” says the veteran, pointing to the map. “There you have the highest mountains in the world; there is Everest, 29,000ft. But see that little balloon above the topmost peak; look at it, sir—37,000ft. That was the biggest ascent I ever made, and the greatest height ever attained by any balloonist!” “That is what I call rising a bit in the world, eh, sir!” said the old coast-guardsmen. “Ah,” said Mr. Coxwell, “but unfortunately in this case you have to come down in the world again.”

Mr. Coxwell assured me that he had so studied the matter before making this great ascent that he was almost prepared for each phase of the many great changes involved in passing from a dense to a lighter atmosphere, up to an elevation where the pressure is so extremely reduced that, even at such a height as this, the clouds were so few that he and his companion, Mr. Glaisher, had magnificent views of villages and towns—in fact, a little world seemed to lie beneath them. “Indeed,” he remarked, “once in passing over Birmingham at a height of six miles, the atmosphere was so clear that the smoke was to be seen coming out of the chimney-pots.”

He told me a somewhat interesting story of how the balloonist is regarded by a spectator on terra firma. “We were coming back from an ascent near Birmingham,” he said, “when we descended near a railway station. The station master came up to us. ‘Are you the gent who went up a few hours ago, sir?’ he asked. ‘Yes,’ I answered. ‘Well,’ he said, ‘it is very curious, but a toy balloon passed over here about the size of my hat about half a mile high soon after you left.’ ‘Oh, that was not a toy balloon,’ I assured him, ‘it was myself and Mr. Glaisher, and at the moment you saw us we were six miles high!’ It seemed rather curious to me, because the balloon which appeared a toy one to the station-master contained from 90,000 to 100,000 cubic feet of gas, and was 85ft. in height and 56ft. in diameter.

“Pride, heave to with the cigars!” The old man puffed away contemplatively for a few moments, then, suddenly turning to me, said:—

“I will tell you about the most perilous ascent I ever made. It was in 1847, when
we went up from the Vauxhall Gardens in a balloon with over 60lb. weight of fireworks. Albert Smith, who at that time had started *The Man in the Moon* as a rival to *Punch*, for which periodical the late George Augustus Sala was busily engaged in making engravings, accompanied me with two other gentlemen. Yes; July 7th, 1847. Just before the ascent was made a storm was brewing, and the manager of the gardens queried as to whether it would be safe to make the voyage. I had never made a night ascent before, but on being appealed to, I decided to go. Up we went, discharging the rockets and the Roman candles as we ascended. Suddenly the storm burst out in all its fury. We were 4,000 ft. above the surface of the earth. The balloon was rising higher and higher, when all at once a flash of lightning disclosed the fact that the balloon had rent fully 100 ft., and we were falling headlong right over the West end of London.

“For a moment I scarcely knew what to do, but soon collecting my thoughts, I flew up to the hoop of the balloon, and cut the line that connects the safety valve to the lower part of the balloon, so that as the gas escaped the lower hemisphere formed a sort of parachute.” (See frontispiece.) “I am thankful to say that the balloon fell in the neighbourhood of Picadilly, the network being caught up by some scaffold poles, which broke the force of the collision. I was the only one hurt, and that by a bystander, from whom I received a cut in the hand when he was trying to extract us from the network.

“Albert Smith, who, by-thy-bye, it might interest you to know was a dentist like myself, behaved splendidly—he never uttered a word, never showed a sign of fear. I venture to think he really did not know the danger in which he was placed. Aye, such danger that it was a thousand to one against our ever escaping with our lives.”

The mention of the late George Augustus Sala’s name by Mr. Coxwell naturally led us both to become reminiscent, as readers of *The Strand Magazine* will possibly remember that I gave an account of a long talk I had with that great journalist some two and a half years ago. Mr. Coxwell stated that Sala knew more about ballooning than any writer he ever met. He made a study of it when he was a boy, and he had a touch of balloon fever before he was twenty. It is interesting to chronicle the fact that the lectures which the great Gale gave on ballooning were all written by Sala. Sala only went up in a balloon once, and that was in 1851, from Kensington Gore, with a man named Chamberlain. The balloon burst and came down with a run; and ever after that, whenever Sala had the chance, notwithstanding the great love he had for ballooning, he always wrote characterizing that pursuit as dangerous unless skilfully managed.

After Mr. Coxwell’s adventure with Mr. Albert Smith, it was suggested that he ought to own a balloon of his own. He refused for some time, saying that his family would strongly object to his becoming a professional.

However, in 1848, he became the director of a balloon, which he christened the “Sylph”; and he made his first ascent as a professional on April 10th of that year. I gathered the interesting information from the veteran that the “Sylph,” with three other gentlemen and himself, would weigh 1,254 lb., comprising balloon, netting and car, 400 lb.; the voyagers, 612 lb.; grappling and rope gear, 52 lb.; coats, instruments, etc., 36 lb.; and balloon, 160 lb.

It was also in this year that Mr. Coxwell fulfilled numerous engagements in Belgium. He used to illustrate in Brussels the bombardment of a city, and the detonators which he threw out from his balloon made a noise equal to a nine-pounder.
He visited the principal towns in Germany and Bohemia, including a trip to the Field of Waterloo. In a volume of his reminiscences which Mr. Coxwell handed to me, the author gives a very vivid description of his impressions of the Field of Waterloo as seen from a balloon.

A balloon view of Waterloo, with the surrounding country and bold activities, fails entirely to convey the martial associations which those noted Belgian plains would be expected to arouse.

We felt hardly reconciled to the fact that on that cluster of fields, which looked so rural and cultivated, the fate of Europe had been decided in so great a sanguinary contest.

As our survey happened to be made in the same month as that on which the memorable battle was fought, the general appearances of Nature could not have been very dissimilar to what they were on June 17th, 1815, just when the British infantry lay on the rising ground near the village, and the cavalry rested in those hollows in the rear.

It is true we gazed upon the landscape which was comparatively tame when unoccupied by the arms of Wellington, Blücher, and Napoleon.

An aerial view at that distance would have indeed been a sight worth seeing. But the mere bird's-eye view of the same was somewhat disappointing.

Could we have seen the down-trodden corn and rye, the clouds of smoke, the prancing horses and helmeted riders, the splendid French columns imperiously advancing against the solid squares of red—could we have heard the din and roar of musketry and cannon, and the wild hurrah of the last grand charge, then indeed the scene would have appeared fresh and imposing. Our bird's-eye view of Waterloo, so far from being lively and soul-stirring, was rather of a philosophic and contemplative character.

One could not pass over the ruins of Hougomont, or the farm-house of La Haye Saint, without thinking of the dust and ashes of countrymen and foes which were scattered in profusion; when we recollected that on the small surface of two square miles 50,000 men and horses were ascertainment to be lying, we can form some idea of the uttering crops which presented themselves to our view.

The sun had just set on the peaceful plains in rosy and majestic grandeur. The glorious King of Day declined also on June 18th, thirty-three years before we passed over in a balloon. But how different the scene!

On that evening after the battle, when the cries of the wounded filled the air, as the roar of artillery ceased, and as night approached, the earth was red-dyed and sodden; but on this, inviting cheers of welcome came to us on all sides, and at Waterloo we met with a most friendly reception.

It was delightful to hear the veteran reading out his account of this unique visit to Waterloo. It was an impressive little picture—the sun setting over the sea, and casting its dying beams upon the face of the grand old balloonist, and the coastguards man standing there close at hand. The old guardsman could only shout out an enthusiastic "Hear! hear!" and bring his fist down upon the table, which made the sea-shells rattle in a corner near the window.

Then the veteran, after he had once more reviewed the hour he had spent over that ever-famous battlefield, crossed the room, and opened the door and looked out quietly upon the sea, as though watching it all again.

"Now, then," he said, "heave to, we must not get sentimental. Pass the tobacco-box, Pride." "Aye, aye, sir," and the tobacco-box was piped, or rather the tobacco that was in it.

"I returned to England," continued Mr. Coxwell, "from Germany, in 1851, at the end of the Great Exhibition. They told me the Exhibition was over, and I had come too late. 'Have I?' I said; 'you shall see my name going up three times a week next year'; and I can assure you my promise came true. Early in the season, about Whit-Sunday, Mr. Goulston had made a very fine new silk balloon, but he was unfortunately killed in the first ascent of it. This ascent occurred from Cremorne Gardens. The proprietor telegraphed to me to know if I would go up in Goulston's balloon in the very car in which he lost his life. I went down to inspect the balloon, and said: 'I shall have no objection whatever.' But I had a shock, too. I remember just at this moment that when I looked into that car I saw some of
poor Goulston's brains which they had failed to take away. I took up one of Goulston's men to take charge of the necessary property. I went up about a mile. This was noised abroad, and engagements quickly followed.

"One of the four places I used to go up from was the 'Eagle,' in the City Road. I remember an ascent I once made with old Conquest, the father of the present George demanded £2 for the damage we had done. We had a long argument with him, and I offered him a glass of wine, which he refused. Of course, we had not done a shilling’s worth of damage to his hedge. He made a tremendous row, and while he was nosing, I quietly asked a bystander to bring in the grappling iron out of the hedge, and, to their utter astonishment, sailed merrily away!"

**"I OFFERED HIM A GLASS OF WINE."**

Conquest. It was his birthday, and so we determined to commemorate it in the air—Mr. Conquest, myself, and Mr. John Allan. We took up some champagne with us. We had so arranged our trip that we should return to the 'Eagle,' and appear on the stage of a theatre before the audience after our aerial flight. We descended at a spot near Barnet. The grappling gear lodged in a hedge, and a number of people were standing near. A tall, gaunt Yorkshireman, with a long, heavy stick, rushed up to us with a number of his fellow-labourers, and

Mr. Cowell made his first appearance at the Crystal Palace in 1859, whilst his last ascent took place in 1885, when his balloon sailed round the city and suburbs of York.

So many ascents has this born balloonist made that he is practically unable to chronicle them all. His line, holding the grappling iron, has been caught in a log by a passing fishing-boat, swaying the balloon to and fro to the extreme danger of its occupant. He has ascended before Her Majesty and the late Prince Consort in a balloon which for this occasion he christened "Queen" at Leamington.
Mr. Coxwell is not likely to forget the somewhat sensational experiences connected with this ascent. He had arranged to make captive ascents as the Queen and Prince Consort came past in their carriage during their progress through Warwickshire. This was done, and afterwards the balloon was held down to have a fresh supply of gas to enable it to make a final ascent in the evening. During that time a fresh breeze had sprung up, and the ascending power of the balloon was so much less than he had expected, that he had to ascend alone. The balloon struck against the spire of a church about 100 yards from the gardens whence the ascent was made. He flew to the hoop in order to look up the neck of the balloon to make sure the silk was not torn. It seemed all right. He sailed away for twenty miles, coming down in a most remote district in the neighbourhood of Chester-ton.

"The point is this," said Mr. Coxwell, when speaking of this incident, "that the weather cock of that church had been taken off a day or two previous for regilding. Had it not been taken down, my balloon would have struck the steeple in such a position that it would have been rent by the weather cock from top to bottom."

Mr. Coxwell made many important surveys for the British Association; and he merrily referred to the notions of a late Professor, who had an idea of his own for ascending six miles in an old balloon, which he had picked up at Cremorne Gardens. Mr. Coxwell, at his own expense, built a balloon and materially assisted the British Association in their scientific work.

As far back as 1854 Mr. Coxwell demonstrated in public a new plan of signalling in the air for use in time of war. One of the newspapers of that time, after describing the aeronaut's venture, goes on to explain as follows:

"The aeronaught, who set in operation once more his signals, was well understood in the working of these by those who were in possession of the key to them; and they resemble somewhat those which were formerly used on the roof of the Admiralty. When he had reached a considerable altitude he liberated a number of pigeons which, he said, were usually auxiliaries for warfare. The idea is ingenious, and we must admit that the signals were worked with much dexterity."

His first real ascent in a military balloon was made in 1863, and, curiously enough, a canvas of the picture of this ascent forms the blind of the principal room of the veteran's cottage at Seaford. This room is on a level with the highway, and for some time Mr. Coxwell was annoyed by people coming and looking into his room, knowing
that it was the famous balloonist who lived there. The window is a large one, and the canvas just covers it up entirely, so at night Mr. Coxwell sits quietly within doors, and £500; now you can make them of muslin at a cost of from £150 to £200. I do not think it will ever become fashionable. Ballooning is really an art. People look up at a

chatting away with a friend, always having before him a view of his ascent from Thornhill, at Aldershot.

Before leaving Mr. Coxwell I asked if he considered ballooning would ever become popular or a fashionable pastime. "Well," he said, "ballooning is remarkably popular to-day to a certain extent, as it is now more used for acrobatic purposes and fancy acts. A balloon is a costly affair. When I was a young man they used to be made of expensive silk, and a good balloon would cost balloon and think how easy it must be to sail along at the rate of eighty miles an hour, which I have done in my day. Then the great risk has always to be considered; and although people nowadays will risk anything to be fashionable, I do not think they will go as far as ballooning. But here is a curious fact: ballooning is of value for some pulmonary complaints—people who suffer from asthma. You see, you get into such pure air, and I know I always felt better after an ascent!"
Rodney Stone.

By A. Conan Doyle.

CHAPTER III.

THE PLAY-ACTRESS OF ANSTEY CROSS.

I have told you something about Friar’s Oak, and about the life that we led there. Now that my memory goes back to the old place it would gladly linger, for every thread which I draw from the skein of the past brings out half-a-dozen others that were entangled with it. I was in two minds when I began whether I had enough in me to make a book of, and now I know that I could write one about Friar’s Oak alone, and the folk whom I knew in my childhood. They were hard and uncomely, some of them, I doubt not; and yet, seen through the golden haze of time, they all seem sweet and lovable. There was our good vicar, Mr. Jefferson, who loved the whole world save only Mr. Slack, the Baptist minister of Clayton, and there was kindly Mr. Slack, who was all men’s brother save only of Mr. Jefferson, the vicar of Friar’s Oak. Then there was Monsieur Rudin, the French Royalist refugee who lived over on the Pangdean road, and who, when the news of a victory came in, was convulsed with joy because we had beaten Buonaparte, and shaken with rage because we had beaten the French, so that after the Nile he wept for a whole day out of delight and then for another one out of fury, alternating clapping his hands and stamping his feet. Well I remember his thin, upright figure and the way in which he javelined twirled his little cane, for cold and hunger could not cast him down, though we knew that he had his share of both. Yet he was so proud and had such a grand manner of talking, that no one dared to offer him a cloak or a meal. I can see his face now, with a flush over each craggy cheek-bone when the butcher made him the present of some ribs of beef. He could not but take it, and yet whilst he was walking off he threw a proud glance over his shoulder at the butcher, and he said, “Monsieur, I have a dog!” Yet it was Monsieur Rudin and not his dog who looked plumper for a week to come.

Then I remember Mr. Paterson, the farmer, who was what you would now call a Radical, though at that time some called him a Priestleyite, and some a Foxite, and nearly everybody a traitor. It certainly seemed to me at the time to be very wicked that a man should look glum when he heard of a British victory; and when they burned his straw image at the gate of his farm, Roy Jim and I were among those who lent a hand. But we were bound to confess that he was game, though he might be a traitor, for down he came, striding into the midst of us with his brown coat and his buckled shoes, and the fire beating upon his grim, schoolmaster face. My word, how he rated us, and how glad we were at last to sneak quietly away.

“You livers of a lie!” said he. “You and those like you have been preaching peace for hitherto two thousand years, and cutting threats the whole time. If the money that is lost in taking French lives were spent in saving English ones, you would have more right to burn candles in your windows. Who are you that dare to come here to insult a law-abiding man?”

“We are the people of England!” cried young Master Ovington, the son of the Tory Squire.

“You! you horse-racing, cock-fighting ne’er-do-wells! Do you presume to talk for the people of England? They are a deep, strong, silent stream, and you are the scum, the bubbles, the poor, silly froth that floats upon the surface.”

We thought him very wicked then, but, looking back, I am not sure that we were not very wicked ourselves.

And then there were the smugglers! The Downs swarmed with them, for since there might be no lawful trade betwixt France and England, it had all to run in that channel. I have been up on St. John’s Common upon a dark night, and, lying among the bracken, I have seen as many as seventy mules and a man at the head of each go fitfully past me as silently as fish in a stream. Not one of them but bore its two ankers of the right French cognac, or its bale of silk of Lyons and lace of Valenciennes. I knew Dan...
Scales, the head of them, and I knew Tom Hislop, the riding officer, and I remember the night they met.

"Do you fight, Dan?" asked Tom.

"Yes, Tom; thou must fight for it."

On which Tom drew his pistol, and blew Dan’s brains out.

"It was a sad thing to do," he said afterwards, "but I knew Dan was too good a man for me, for we tried it out before."

It was Tom who paid a poet from Brighton to write the lines for the tombstone, which we all thought were very true and good, beginning:—

Alas! Swift flew the fatal lead
Which pierced through the young man’s head.
He instant fell, resigned his breath,
And closed his languid eyes in death.

There was more of it, and I daresay it is all still to be read in Pat- cham Churchyard.

One day, about the time of our Cliffe Royal adventure, I was seated in the cottage looking round at the curios which my father had fastened on to the walls, and wishing, like the lazy lad that I was, that Mr. Lilly had died before ever he wrote his Latin grammar, when my mother, who was sitting knitting in the window, gave a little cry of surprise.

"Good gracious!" she cried. "What a vulgar-looking woman!"

It was so rare to hear my mother say a hard word against anybody (unless it were General Buonaparte) that I was across the room and at the window in a jump. A pony-chaise was coming slowly down the village street, and in it was the queerest-looking person that I had ever seen. She was very stout, with a face that was of so dark a red that it shaded away into purple over the nose and cheeks. She wore a great hat with a white curling ostrich feather, and from under its brim her two bold, black eyes stared out with a look of anger and defiance as if to tell the folk that she thought less of them than they could do of her. She had some sort of scarlet pelisse with white swansdown about her neck, and she held the reins slack in her hands, while the pony wandered from side to side of the road as the fancy took him. Each time the chaise swayed, her head with the great hat swayed also, so that sometimes we saw the crown of it and sometimes the brim.

"What a dreadful sight!" cried my mother.

"What is amiss with her, mother?"

"Heaven forgive me if I misjudge her, Rodney, but I think that the unfortunate woman has been drinking."

"Why," I cried, "she has pulled the chaise
up at the smithy. I'll find out all the news for you"; and, catching up my cap, away I scampered.

Champion Harrison had been shoewing a horse at the forge door, and when I got into the street I could see him with the creature's hoof still under his arm, and the rasp in his hand, kneeling down amid the white parings. The woman was beckoning him from the chaise, and he staring up at her with the queenest expression upon his face. Presently he threw down his rasp and went across to

She looked at Jim, and I never saw such eyes in a human head, so large, and black, and wonderful. Boy as I was, I knew that, in spite of that bloated face, this woman had once been very beautiful. She put out a hand, with all the fingers going as if she were playing on the harpsichord, and she touched Jim on the shoulder.

"I hope, I hope you're well," she stammered.

"Very well, ma'am," said Jim, staring from her to his uncle.

her, standing by the wheel and shaking his head as he talked to her. For my part, I slipped into the smithy, where Boy Jim was finishing the shoe, and I watched the neatness of his work and the deft way in which he turned up the culkens. When he had done with it he carried it out, and there was the strange woman still talking with his uncle.

"Is that he?" I heard her ask.

Champion Harrison nodded.

"And happy too?"

"Yes, ma'am, I thank you."

"Nothing that you crave for?"

"Why, no, ma'am, I have all that I lack."

"That will do, Jim," said his uncle, in a stern voice. "Blow up the forge again, for that shoe wants reheating."

But it seemed as if the woman had something else that she would say, for she was angry that he should be sent away. Her
RODNEY STONE. 135

eyes gleamed, and her head tossed, while the smith with his two big hands outspread seemed to be soothing her as best he could. For a long time they whispered until at last she seemed to be satisfied.

"To morrow, then?" she cried loud out.

"To-morrow," he answered.

"You keep your word and I'll keep mine," said she, and dropped the lash on the pony's back. The smith stood with the rasp in his hand, looking after her until she was just a little red spot on the white road. Then he turned, and I never saw his face so grave.

"Jim," said he, "that's Miss Hinton, who has come to live at The Maples, out Anstey Cross way. She's taken a kind of a fancy to you, Jim, and maybe she can help you on a bit. I promised her that you would go over and see her to-morrow."

"I don't want her help, uncle, and I don't want to see her."

"But I've promised, Jim, and you wouldn't make me out a liar. She does but want to talk with you, for it is a lonely life she leads."

"What would she want to talk with such as me about?"

"Why, I cannot say that, but she seemed very set upon it, and women have their fancies. There's young Master Stone here who wouldn't refuse to go and see a good lady, I'll warrant, if he thought he might better his fortune by doing so."

"Well, uncle, I'll go if Roddy Stone will go with me," said Jim.

"Of course he'll go. Won't you, Master Rodney?"

So it ended in my saying "yes," and back I went with all my news to my mother, who dearly loved a little bit of gossip. She shook her head when she heard where I was going, but she did not say nay, and so it was settled.

It was a good four miles of a walk, but when we reached it you would not wish to see a more cozy little house : all honeysuckle and creepers, with a wooden porch and lattice windows. A common-looking woman opened the door for us.

"Miss Hinton cannot see you," said she.

"But she asked us to come," said Jim.

"I can't help that," cried the woman, in a rude voice. "I tell you that she can't see you."

We stood irresolute for a minute.

"Maybe you would just tell her I am here," said Jim, at last.

"Tell her! How am I to tell her when she couldn't so much as hear a pistol in her ears? Try and tell her yourself, if you have a mind to."

She threw open a door as she spoke, and there, in a reclining chair at the further end of the room, we caught a glimpse of a figure all lumped together, huge and shapeless, with tails of black hair hanging down. The sound of dreadful, swine-like breathing tell upon our ears. It was but a glance, and then we were off hot-foot for home. As for me, I was so young that I was not sure whether this was funny or terrible; but when I looked at Jim to see how he took it, he was looking quite white and ill.

"You'll not tell anyone, Roddy," said he.

"Not unless it's my mother."

"I won't even tell my uncle. I'll say she was ill, the poor lady! It's enough that we should have seen her in her shame, without its being the gossip of the village. It makes me feel sick and heavy at heart."

"She was so yesterday, Jim."

"Was she? I never marked it. But I know that she has kind eyes and a kind heart, for I saw the one in the other when she looked at me. Maybe it's the want of a friend that has driven her to this."

It blighted his spirits for days, and when it had all gone from my mind it was brought back to me by his manner. But it was not to be our last memory of the lady with the scarlet pelisse, for before the week was out Jim came round to ask me if I would again go up with him.

"My uncle has had a letter," said he.

"She would speak with me, and I would be easier if you came with me, Rod."

For me it was only a pleasure outing, but I could see, as we drew near the house, that Jim was troubling in his mind lest we should find that things were amiss. His fears were soon set at rest, however, for we had scarcely clicked the garden gate before the woman was out of the door of the cottage and running down the path to meet us. She was so strange a figure, with some sort of purple wrapper on, and her big, flushed face smiling out of it, that I might, if I had been alone, have taken to my heels at the sight of her. Even Jim stopped for a moment as if he were not very sure of himself, but her hearty ways soon set us at our ease.

"It is indeed good of you to come and see an old, lonely woman," said she, "and I owe you an apology that I should give you a fruitless journey on Tuesday, but in a sense you were yourselves the cause of it, since the thought of your coming had excited me, and any excitement throws me into a nervous
fever. My poor nerves! You can see yourselves how they serve me."

She held out her twitching hands as she spoke. Then she passed one of them through Jim's arm, and walked with him up the path.

"You must let me know you, and know you well," said she. "Your uncle and aunt are quite old acquaintances of mine, and though you cannot remember me, I have held you in my arms when you were an infant. Tell me, little man," she added, turning to me, "what do you call your friend?"

"Boy Jim, ma'am," said I.

"Then if you will not think me forward, I will call you Boy Jim also. We elderly people have our privileges, you know. And now you shall come in with me, and we will take a dish of tea together."

She led the way into a cosy room, the same which we had caught a glimpse of when last we came and there, in the middle, was a table with white, napery, and shining glass, and gleaming china, and red-checked apples piled upon a centredish, and a great plateful of smoking muffins which the cross-faced maid had just carried in. You can think that we did justice to all the good things, and Miss Hinton would ever keep pressing us to pass our cup and to fill our plate. Twice during our meal she rose from her chair and withdrew into a cupboard at the end of the room, and each time I saw Jim's face cloud, for we heard a gentle clink of glass against glass.

"Come now, little man," said she to me, when the table had been cleared. "Why are you looking round so much?"

"Because there are so many pretty things upon the walls."

"And which do you think the prettiest of them?"

"Why, that!" said I, pointing to a picture which hung opposite to me. It was of a tall and slender girl, with the rosiest cheeks and the tenderest eyes — so daintily dressed, too, that I had never seen anything more perfect. She had a posy of flowers in her hand and another one was lying upon the planks of wood upon which she was standing.

"Oh, that's the prettiest, is it?" said she, laughing. "Well, now, walk up to it, and let us hear what is writ beneath it."

I did as she asked, and read out: "Miss Polly Hinton, as Peggy, in 'The Country Wife,' played for her benefit at the Haymarket Theatre, September 14th, 1782."

"It's a play-actress," said I.

"Oh, you rude little boy, to say it in such a tone," said she, "as if a play-actress wasn't as good as anyone else. Why, 'twas but the other day that the Duke of Clarence, who may come to call himself King of England, married Mrs. Jordan, who was herself only a play-actress. And whom think you that this one is?"

She stood under the picture with her arms folded across her great body, and her big, black eyes looking from one to the other of us.

"Why, where are your eyes?" she cried at last. "I was Miss Polly Hinton of the Haymarket Theatre. And perhaps you never heard the name before?"

We were compelled to confess that we never had. And the very name of play-actress had filled us both with a kind of vague horror, like the country-bred folk that we were. To us they were a class apart, to be hinted at rather than named, with the
wrath of the Almighty hanging over them like a thundercloud. Indeed, His judgments seemed to be in visible operation before us when we looked upon what this woman was, and what she had been.

"Well," said she, laughing like one who is hurt, "you have no cause to say anything, for I read on your faces what you have been taught to think of me. So this is the upbringer that you have had, Jim, to think evil of that which you do not understand! I wish you had been in the theatre that very night with Prince Florizel and four Dukes in the boxes, and all the wits and macaronis of London rising at me in the pit. If Lord Avon had not given me a cast in his carriage, I had never got my flowers back to my lodgings in York Street, Westminster. And now two little country lads are sitting in judgment upon me!"

Jim's pride brought a flush on to his cheeks, for he did not like to be called a country lad or to have it supposed that he was so far behind the grand folk in London.

"I have never been inside a play-house," said he: "I know nothing of them."

"Nor I either."

"Well," said she, "I am not in voice, and it is ill to play in a little room with but two to listen, but you must conceive me to be the Queen of the Peruvians, who is exhorting her countrymen to rise up against the Spaniards who are oppressing them."

And straightway that coarse, swollen woman became a queen, the grandest, haughtiest queen that you could dream of, and she turned upon us with such words of fire, such lightning eyes and sweeping of her white hand, that she held us spellbound in our chairs. Her voice was soft, and sweet, and persuasive at the first, but louder it rang and louder as it spoke of wrongs and freedom and the joys of death in a good cause, until it thrilled into my very soul, and I asked nothing more than to run out of the cottage and to die then and there in the cause of my country. And then in an instant she changed. She was a poor woman now, who had lost her only child and who was bewailing it. Her voice was full of tears, and what she said was so simple, so true, that we both seemed to see the dead babe stretched there on the carpet before us, and we could have joined in with words of pity and of grief. And then, before our cheeks were dry, she was back into her old self again.

"How like you that, then?" she cried.

"That was my way in the days when Sally Siddons would turn green at the name of Polly Hinton. It's a fine play, is 'Pizarro.'"

"And who wrote it, ma'am?"

"Who wrote it? I never heard. What matter who did the writing of it! But there are some great lipes for one who knows how they should be spoken."

"And you play no longer, ma'am?"

"No, Jim, I left the beards when—when I was weary of them. But my heart goes back to them sometimes. It seems to me there is no smell like that of the hot oil in the footlights and of the oranges in the pit. But you are sad, Jim."

"It was but the thought of that poor woman and her child."

"Tut, never think about her! I will soon wipe her from your mind. This is Miss Priscilla Tomboy, from 'The Romp.' You must conceive that the mother is speaking, and that the forward young ninny is answering."

And she began a scene between the two of them, so exact in voice and manner that it seemed to us as if there were really two folk before us: the stern old mother with her hand up like an ear trumpet, and her flouncing, bouncing daughter. Her great figure danced about with a wonderful lightness, and she tossed her head and pouted her lips as she answered back to the old, bent figure that addressed her. Jim and I had forgotten our tears, and we had held our ribs before she came to the end of it.

"That is better," said she, smiling at our laughter. "I would not have you go back to Friar's Oak with long faces, or maybe they would not let you come to me again."

She vanished into her cupboard, and came out with a bottle and glass which she placed upon the table.

"You are too young for strong waters," she said, "but this talking gives one a dryness, and . . ."

Then it was that Boy Jim did a wonderful thing. He rose from his chair and he laid his hand upon the bottle.

"Don't!" said he.

She looked him in the face, and I can still see those black eyes of hers softening before his gaze.

"Am I to have none?"

"Please, don't."

With a quick movement she wrested the bottle out of his hand and raised it up so that for a moment it entered my head that she was about to drink it off. Then she flung it through the open lattice, and we heard the crash of it on the path outside.

"There, Jim!" said she: "does that satisfy you? It's long since anyone cared whether I drank or no."
"You are too good and kind for that," said he.

"Good!" she cried. "Well, I love that you should think me so. And it would make you happier if I kept from the brandy, Jim? Well, then, I'll make you a promise if you'll make me one in return."

"What's that, miss?"

"No drop shall pass my lips, Jim, if you will swear, wet or shine, blow or snow, to come up here twice in every week that I may see you and speak with you, for, indeed, there are times when I am very lonesome."

So the promise was made, and very faith fully did Jim keep it, for many a time when I have wanted him to go fishing or rabbit snaring, he has remembered that it was his day for Miss Hinton, and has tramped off to Anstey Cross. At first I think that she found her share of the bargain hard to keep, and I have seen Jim come back with a black face on him as if things were going amiss. But after a time the fight was won, as all fights are won if one does but fight long enough, and in the year before my father came back Miss Hinton had become another woman. And it was not her ways only, but herself as well, for from being the person that I have described, she became in one twelve-month as fine a looking lady as there was in the whole country side. Jim was prouder of it by far than of anything he had had a hand in in his life, but it was only to me that he ever spoke about it, for he had that tenderness towards her that one has for those whom one has helped. And she helped him also, for by her talk of the world and of what she had seen, she took his mind away from the Sussex country side and prepared it for a broader life beyond. So matters stood between them at the time when peace was made and my father came home from the sea.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PEACE OF AMIENS.

Many a woman's knee was on the ground, and many a woman's soul spent itself in joy and thankfulness when the news came with the fall of the leaf in 1861 that the preliminaries of peace had been settled. All England waved her gladness by day and twinkled it by night. Even in little Friar's Oak we had our flags flying bravely, and a candle in
every window, with a big G.R. guttering in the wind over the door of the inn. Folk were weary of the war, for we had been at it for eight years, taking Holland, and Spain, and France each in turn and all together. All that we had learned during that time was that our little army was no match for the French on land, and that our large navy was more than a match for them upon the water. We had gained some credit, which we were sorely in need of after the American business; and a few Colonies, which were welcome also for the same reason, but our debt had gone on rising and our consols sinking, until even Pitt stood aghast. Still, if we had known that there never could be peace between Napoleon and ourselves, and that this was only the end of a round and not of the battle, we should have been better advised had we fought it out without a break. As it was, the French got back the 20,000 good seamen whom we had captured, and a fine dance they led us with their Boulogne flotillas and fleets of invasion before we were able to catch them again. My father, as I remember him best, was a tough, strong little man, of no great breadth, but solid and well put together. His face was burned of a reddish colour, as bright as a flower-pot, and in spite of his age (for he was only forty at the time of which I speak) it was shot with lines which deepened if he were in any way perturbed, so that I have seen him turn on the instant from a youngish man to an elderly. His eyes especially were meshed round with wrinkles, as is natural for one who had puckered them all his life in facing foul wind and bitter weather. These eyes were, perhaps, his strangest feature, for they were of a very clear and beautiful blue, which shone the brighter out of that ruddy setting. By nature he must have been a fair-skinned man, for his upper brow, where his hat came over it, was as white as mine, and his close-cropped hair was tawny.

He had served, as he was proud to say, in the last of our ships which had been chased out of the Mediterranean in '97, and in the first which had re-entered it in '98. He was under Miller, as third lieutenant of the Themis, when our fleet, like a pack of eager foxhounds in a covert, was dashing from Sicily to Syria and back again to Naples, trying to pick up the lost scent. With the same good fighting man he served at the Nile, where the men of his command sponged and rammed and trained until, when the last tricolour had come down, they hove up the sheet anchor and fell dead asleep upon the top of each other under the capstan bars. Then, as a second lieutenant, he was in one of those grim three-deckers with powder-blackened hulls and crimson scupper-holes, their spare cables tied round their keels and over their bulwarks to hold them together, which carried the news into the Bay of Naples. From thence, as a reward for his services, he was transferred as first lieutenant to the Aurora frigate, engaged in cutting off supplies from Genoa, and in her he still remained until long after peace was declared.

How well I can remember his homcoming! Though it is now eight-and-forty years ago, it is clearer to me than the doings of last week, for the memory of an old man is like one of those glasses which shows out
what is at a distance and blurs all that is near.

My mother had been in a tremble ever since the first rumour of the preliminaries came to our ears, for she knew that he might come as soon as his message. She said little, but she saddened my life by insisting that I should be for ever clean and tidy. With every rumble of wheels, too, her eyes would glance towards the door and her hands steal up to smooth her pretty black hair. She had embroidered a white "Welcome" upon a blue ground, with an anchor in red upon each side, and a border of laurel leaves; and this was to hang upon the two lilac bushes which flanked the cottage door. He could not have left the Mediterranean before we had this finished, and every morning she looked to see if it were in its place and ready to be hanged.

But it was a weary time before the peace was ratified, and it was April of next year before our great day came round to us. It had been raining all morning, I remember— a soft spring rain, which sent up a rich smell from the brown earth and pattered pleasantly upon the budding chestnuts behind our cottage. The sun had shone out in the evening, and I had come down with my fishing-rod (for I had promised boy Jim to go with him to the mill-stream), when what should I see but a post-chaise with two smoking horses at the gate, and there in the open door of it were my mother's black skirt and her little feet jutting out, with two blue arms for a waist belt, and all the rest of her buried in the chaise. Away I ran for the motto, and I pinned it up on the bushes as we had agreed, but when I had finished there were the skirts and the feet and the blue arms just the same as before.

"Here's Rod," said my mother at last, struggling down on to the ground again.

"Roddy, darling, here's your father!"

I saw the red face and the kindly, light-blue eyes looking out at me.

"Why, Roddy, lad, you were but a child and we kissed good-bye when last we met, but I suppose we must put you on a different rating now. I'm right glad from my heart to see you, dear lad, and as to you, sweetheart—" The blue arms flew out and there were the skirt and the two feet fixed in the door again.

"Here are the folk coming, Anson," said my mother, blushing. "Won't you get out and come in with us?"

And then suddenly it came home to me, both that for all his cheery face he had never moved more than his arms, and that his leg was resting on the opposite seat of the chaise.

"Oh, Anson, Anson!" she cried.

"Tut, 'ts but the bone of my leg," said he, taking his knee between his hands and lifting it round. "I got it broke in the Bay, but the surgeon has fished it out and spliced it, though it's a bit crank yet. Why, bless her kindly heart, if I haven't turned her from pink to white. You can see for yourself that it's nothing."

He sprang out as he spoke, and with one leg and a staff he hopped swiftly up the path, and under the laurel bordered motto, and so over his own threshold for the first time for five years. When the postboy and I had carried up the sea chest and the two canvas bags, there he was sitting in his arm-chair by the window in his old, weather-stained blue coat. My mother was weeping over his poor leg, and he patting her hair with one brown hand. His other he threw round my waist, and drew me to the side of his chair.

"Now that we have peace, I can lie up and rest until King George needs me again," said he. "Twas a carronade that came adrift in the Bay when it was blowing a top-gallant breeze with a beam sea. Ere we could make it fast it had me jammed against the mast. Well, well," he added, looking round at the walls of the room, "here are all my old curios, the same as ever: the narwhal's horn from the Arctic, and the blowfish from the Moluccas, and the paddles from Fiji, and the picture of the Cà Ira with Lord Howtham in chase. And here you are, Mary, and you also, Roddy, and good luck to the carronade which has sent me into so snug a harbour without fear of sailing orders."

My mother had his long pipe and his tobacco all ready for him, so that he was able now to light it and to sit looking from one of us to the other and then back again, as if he could never see enough of us. Young as I was, I could still understand that this was the moment which he had thought of during many a lonely watch, and that the expectation of it had cheered his heart in many a dark hour. Sometimes he would touch one of us with his hand, and sometimes the other, and so he sat, with his soul too satiated for words, whilst the shadows gathered in the little room and the lights of the inn windows glimmered through the gloom. And then, after my mother had lit our own lamp, she slipped suddenly down upon her knees, and he got one knee to the ground also, so that, hand-in-hand, they joined their thanks to Heaven for manifold
mercy. When I look back at my parents as they were in those days, it is at that very moment that I can picture them most clearly; her sweet face with the wet shining upon her cheeks, and his blue eyes upturned to the smoke-blackened ceiling. I remember that he swayed his reeking pipe in the earnestness of his prayer, so that I was half tears and half smiles as I watched him.

"Roddy, lad," said he, after supper was over. "You're getting a man now, and I suppose you will go afloat like the rest of us. You're old enough to strap a dirk to your thigh."

"And leave me without a child as well as without a husband!" cried my mother.

"Well, there's time enough yet," said he, "for they are more inclined to empty berths than to fill them, now that peace has come. But I've never tried what all this schooling has done for you, Rodney. You have had a great deal more than ever I had, but I dare-say I can make shift to test it. Have you learned history?"

"Yes, father," said I, with some confidence.

"Then how many sail of the line were at the Battle of Camperdown?"

He shook his head gravely when he found that I could not answer him.

"Why, there are men in the fleet who never had any schooling at all who could tell you that we had seven 74's, seven 64's, and two 50-gun ships in the action. There's a picture on the wall of the chase of the 'Caledonia.' Which were the ships that laid her aboard?"

Again I had to confess that he had beaten me.

"Well, your dad can teach you something in history yet," he cried, looking in triumph at my mother.

"Have you learned geography?"

"Yes, father," said I, though with less confidence than before.

"Well, how far is it from Port Mahon to Algeriias?"

I could only shake my head.

"If Ushant lay three leagues upon your starboard quarter, what would be your nearest English port?"

Again I had to give it up.

"Well, I don't see that your geography is much better than your history," said he.

"You'd never get your certificate at this rate. Can you do addition? Well, then, let us see if you can tot up my prize-money."

He shot a mischievous glance at my mother as he spoke, and she laid down her knitting on her lap and looked very earnestly at him.

"You never asked me about that, Mary," said he.

"The Mediterranean is not the station for it, Anson. I have heard you say that it is the Atlantic for prize-money and the Mediterranean for honour."

"I had a share of both last cruise, which comes from changing a line-of-battle ship for a frigate. Now, Rodney, there are two pounds in every hundred due to me when the prize-courts have done with them. When we were watching Massena, off Genoa, we got a
matter of seventy schooners, brigs, and
tartans, with wine, food, and powder. Lord
Keith will want his finger in the pie, but
that's for the Courts to settle. Put them at
four pounds apiece to me, and what will the
seventy bring?"

"Two hundred and eighty pounds," I
answered.

"Why, Anson, it is a fortune," cried my
mother, clapping her hands.

"Try you again, Roddy!" said he, shak-
ing his pipe at me. "There was the Avela
frigate out of Barcelona with twenty thousand
Spanish dollars aboard, which make four
thousand of our pounds. Her hull should
be worth another thousand. What's my
share of that?"

"A hundred pounds."

"Why, the purser couldn't work it out
quicker," he cried in his delight. "Here's
for you again! We passed the Straits and
worked up to the Azores, where we fell in
with the La Sabina from the Mauritius with
sugar and spices. Twelve hundred pounds
she's worth to me, Mary, my darling, and
never again shall you soil your pretty
fingers or pinch upon my beggarly pay."

My dear mother had borne her long
struggle without a sign all these years,
but now that she was so suddenly eased
of it she fell sobbing upon his
neck. It was a long time before
my father had a thought to spare
upon my examination in arith-
metic.

"It's all in your lap, Mary," said he, dashing his own hand
across his eyes. "By George,
lass, when this leg of mine is
sound we'll bear down
for a spell to Brighton,
and if there is a smarter
frock than yours upon
the Steyne, may I never
tread a poop again. But
how is it that you are
so quick at figures,
Rodney, when you know
nothing of history or geo-
graphy?"

I tried to explain that
addition was the same
upon sea or land, but
that history and geography were not.

"Well," he concluded, "you need figures
to take a reckoning, and you need nothing
else save what your mother will
teach you. There never was one of our
breed who did not take to salt water like
a young gull. Lord Nelson has promised me
a vacancy for you, and he'll be as good as his
word."

So it was that my father came home to us,
and a better or kinder no lad could wish for.
Though my parents had been married so
long, they had really seen very little of each
other, and their affection was as warm and
as fresh as if they were two newly-wedded
lovers. I have learned since that sailors can
be coarse and foul, but never did I know it
from my father; for, although he had seen
as much rough work as the wildest could
wish for, he was always the same patient,
good-humoured man, with a smile and a jolly
word for all the village. He could suit him-
self to his company, too, for on the one hand
he could take his wine with the vicar or with
Sir James Ovington, the squire of the parish:

"She fell sobbing upon his neck."
while Jim's eyes have smouldered like the forge embers as he listened.

My father had been placed on half-pay, like so many others of the old war officers, and so, for nearly two years, he was able to remain with us. During all this time I can only once remember that there was the slightest disagreement between him and my mother. It chanced that I was the cause of it, and as great events sprang out of it, I must tell you how it came about. It was indeed the first of a series of events which affected not only my fortunes but those of very much more important people.

"Whom think you that it is from, Anson?" she asked.

"I had hoped that it was, from Lord Nelson," answered my father. "It is time the boy had his commission. But if it be for you, then it cannot be from anyone of much importance."

"Can it not!" she cried, pretending to be offended. "You will ask my pardon for that speech, sir, for it is from no less a person than Sir Charles Tregelles, my own brother."

My mother seemed to speak with a hushed voice when she mentioned this wonderful brother of hers, and always had done so as long as I can remember, so that I had learned also to have a subdued and reverent feeling when I heard his name. And indeed it was no wonder, for that name was never mentioned unless it were in connection with something brilliant and extraordinary. Once we heard that he was at Windsor with the King. Often he was at Brighton with the Prince. Sometimes it was as a sportsman that his reputation reached us, as when his Meteor beat the Duke of Queensberry's Egham, at Newmarket, or when he brought Jim Belcher

The spring of 1803 was an early one, and the middle of April saw the leaves thick upon the chestnut trees. One evening we were all seated together over a dish of tea when we heard the scrunch of steps outside our door, and there was the postman with a letter in his hand.

"I think it is for me," said my mother, and sure enough it was addressed in the most beautiful writing to Mrs. Mary Stone, of Friar's Oak, and there was a red seal the size of a half-crown upon the outside of it with a flying dragon in the middle.
up from Bristol, and sprang him upon the London fancy. But usually it was as the friend of the great, the arbiter of fashions, the king of bucks, and the best-dressed man in town that his reputation reached us. My father, however, did not appear to be elated at my mother’s triumphant rejoinder.

"Aye, and what does he want?" asked he, in no very amiable voice.

"I wrote to him, Anson, and told him that Rodney was growing a man now, thinking, since he had no wife or child of his own, he might be disposed to advance him."

"We can do very well without him," growled my father. "He sheered off from us when the weather was foul, and we have no need of him now that the sun is shining."

"Nay, you misjudge him, Anson," said my mother, warmly. "There is no one with a better heart than Charles; but his own life moves so smoothly that he cannot understand that others may have trouble. During all these years I have known that I had but to say the word to receive as much as I wished from him."

"Thank God that you never had to stoop to it, Mary. I want none of his help."

"But we must think of Rodney."

"Rodney has enough for his sea-chest and kit. He needs no more."

"But Charles has great power and influence in London. He could make Rodney known to all the great people. Surely you would not stand in the way of his advancement."

"Let us hear what he says, then," said my father, and this was the letter which she read to him:

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"14. Jermyn Street, St. James’s, April 15th, 1803.

"My dear Sister Mary,—In answer to your letter, I can assure you that you must not conceive me to be wanting in those finer feelings which are the chief adornment of humanity. It is true that for some years, absorbed as I have been in affairs of the highest importance, I have seldom taken a pen in hand, for which I can assure you that I have been reproached by many des plus charmants of your charming sex. At the present moment I lie abed (having stayed late in order to pay a complaisant to the Marchioness of Dover at her ball last night), and this is writ to my dictation by Ambrose, my clever rascal of a valet. I am interested to hear of my nephew Rodney (Mon dieu, quel nom?), and as I shall be on my way to visit the Prince at Brighton next week, I shall break my journey at Friar’s Oak for the sake of seeing both you and him. Make my compliments to your husband.

"I am ever, my dear sister Mary,

"Your brother,

"CHARLES TREGELLIS.

"What do think of that?" cried my mother in triumph when she had finished.

"I think it is the letter of a fool," said my father, bluntly.

"You are too hard on him, Anson. You will think better of him when you know him. But he says that he will be here next week, and this is Thursday, and the best curtains unhung, and no lavender in the sheets!" Away she bustled, half distracted, while my father sat moody, with his chin upon his hands, and I remained lost in wonder at the thought of this grand new relative from London, and of all that his coming might mean to us.