New Orleans Republican.
OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE UNITED STATES
OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF NEW ORLEANS.

[For the New Orleans Republican.]

MUSIC'S MINISTRY.

BY A. B. COLLINS.

The merry march of youthful feet,
Three hundred, less or more,
Had clashed the hall and filled the street;
The schoolday's task was o'er.
Some homeward went with weary pace,
While others sought the green;
Some sought the river's laughing face,
And some the wood serene.

Some stayed to see the teacher's ire
Reveal a ruler dread;
Two sat upon the window sill
And ancient Virgil read.
One youth, with aching heart and brain,
Still lingered there alone,
And, hidden deep his life of pain,
To others was unknown.

While musing in the chapel still,
The sounds all died away,
Save from the magic window sill
Anon an echo gay—
Two happy maidens came to sing;
They woke the silver notes;
Piano touched his trembling strings,
And vied their choral throats.

They lightly trip from waltz to song,
Or sound pathetic air;
The youth made glad is borne along,
And up the golden stair
All paved with music's precious stones,
His bouyant spirit bounds,
And all the wreath of silver tones
His burning brow surrounds.

The music melting softly low
Its wilder frolics cease;
And in its measures sweet and low,
The weary youth finds peace.
A sunny laugh—a playful talk,
The maidens go their way;
The youth now takes his homeward walk
At crimson close of day.

His gayer heart and nimbler feet
A golden secret tell;
The magic minstrel, music sweet,
Hath wrought its charm full well,
Nor knew the maidens to what draught
Of healing filled their song—
What warming sunbeam, when they laughed,
Broke on his night so long.

Nor know they yet, nor yet do dream
What angels plumed their wings,
And flew to feed the choking stream
Of life with purer springs
Of purpose, that therefrom should flow
A flood, whose surface bright
Should mirror all the stars that glow
And heaven's serener light.

Such ministries hath music, when
The heart weighed down with pain
Feels every icy look of men
Whose only care is gain.
Then sing! let merry music fill
Some soul that hungers long;
And laugh! let sunny laughter thrill
Some heart by taunts made stone!

Of poverty and suffering
The world is full to-day;
Their freezing, sickly state should wring
The tears from hardest clay.
Then hail to Christmas chimes! whose swell
Makes glad the waning year.
"The gospel to the poor!" they tell—
"The sufferer, good cheer!"

New Orleans, December 15, 1876.

THE SACKFUL OF SOVEREIGNS.

In Three Chapters.

CHAPTER I.—THE SUMMONS.

A sunny garden slope upon the southern side of Highgate Hill; at its lower end a delicious tangle of orchard, long grass and underwood, russet-tinged briers and common ferns.

Higher up, the gnarled and twisted old apple trees, thick with frosted fruit, give place by degrees to a strip of gooseberry and currant bushes and kitchen greenery; until these, in their turn, edged by a high box border, sweet and gay with waving lavender, gilly flowers, cabbage roses, sunflowers, hollyhocks and the homelier order of garden treasures, terminate in a smooth, well kept lawn.

Upon this look several windows of a quaint, old-fashioned, irregular red-bricked cottage, partly thatched and partly tiled; with honey-suckle and many a sweet-scented creeper clambering round the angles, and even going some way up a little stack of twisted chimneys; the whole—cottage, garden and orchard—surrounded by an old moss-grown wall which, on the front or high road side of the domain, is bright and odorous in spring with overhanging lilac and laburnum, while, where the antique iron gateway makes a gap, a great arch of ivy marks the entrance to this pleasant home—one of those homes, indeed, which, rural and unpretentious, might have been found in many a London suburb a quarter of a century back; but which, alas, have well-nigh disappeared now, since the overwhelming wave of bricks and mortar has swept out from the great city, like the over-widening eddy on the surface of a lake when rising fish or idly thrown stone disturbs its placid waters.

There is a wooden summer-house, also in perfect harmony with its surroundings, save that part of its roof has been recently repaired with a patch of somewhat too new and over-bright red tiles. Nestling snugly under the shade of a big elm tree midway on the slope, between orchard and kitchen garden, it overlooks that well known view which terminates with St. Paul's, dimly looming—with chimney stacks, towers and spires—through the long line of murky and dusky sky.

A sweet retreat for a toil-worn citizen, or any caring for the gentler, simpler ways of life.

Particularly suited as a background does it seem to the figure seated at the rustic table, in the little arbor on the soft September afternoon when our tale begins. He is an aged but tolerably hale looking, broad-shouldered man of about seventy-five, with keen brown eyes, and having that smug old-fashioned aspect in dress and mien befitting the retired well-to-do man of business, that all who have any acquaintance with Matthew Rickman know him to be. Open before him lies a small memorandum-book, in which he seems to be adding up some figures; and beside him, with ink bottle and tray of pens, are a few scattered papers. Now and then, in the pauses of his calculations, he strokes his clean-shaven chin, or toys with his mutton-chop strip of pure white whisker, and the quiet expression of satisfaction with which from time to time he looks out upon the view tells of contentment with both place and circumstances. Yet in his eyes and round the corners of his mouth a very close observer might detect some signs of waning health, and there is at times a knitting of the brows and a raising of the garden hat which might suggest occasional twinges of pain passing across the forehead. The clock of the neighboring church chimes out the half-hour past five, and while the sound dies away on the delicate air he draws from his fob, by its broad ribbon and bunch of seals, a large old-fashioned gold watch to compare the time. Presently he is deep in his figures again, when footsteps approaching along the winding gravel-path that leads down from the cottage to the summerhouse divert his attention, and hastily gathering up some of the scattered papers he places them with a certain air of secretiveness under the book he is examining.

"You are home earlier to-day, George," says Mr. Matthew Rickman, looking up toward the figures of a young man and woman who had by this time come within speaking distance.

"A little, sir, perhaps; we have had rather a slack day at the bank," answered the former, a pleasant, blue-eyed, fair-haired young fellow, albeit with a somewhat weak and changeless expression of face. His tall hat and tight-fitting black frock-coat, apart from his remark, proclaimed him straight from the city.

"I am not sorry either," he resumed, stretching himself with an air of weariness, "and I have been a little disappointed and vexed."

"Ah! how so?"

"Why, father," quickly answered the young woman, as she entered the summer house, and placed her hand gently on the old man's shoulder, "don't you remember I told you George was hoping to get a step through Mr. Gore's retirement? And now it has been given to Geoge's junior—and, of course, he feels it as hard."

"Well, well, I am sorry for that," answered Mr. Rickman somewhat vacantly; "but it will come—it will come. He's better off where he is, anyhow, than if he had been in a government office."

"O, I question that, sir," broke in the younger man.

"But I don't," was the rather sharp response. "You have at least the satisfaction of working with a clear conscience; you are not idling your time in reading the newspaper all day, wasting stationery, and robbing your country, as you would have been if your father had got you a post under government. You know my opinion of the way government offices are managed, and government too, for the matter of that. I have no patience with the waste and reckless expenditure that go on in all departments, while we hard working folk have to pay treble the taxes we need. No, George, I really don't think I should ever have consented to your marrying my Alice here if you had been a government clerk."

"Then, sir, I am very glad things are as they are," said Mr. George Woodwyn, smiling, whose position in this family group is thus made evident.

"Here, Lily, come along, here's daddy," he went on, as a sweet little curly-haired girl of about three came toddling down the path, and ran into her father's arms. "Shall we go in now and have tea? and grandfather will come in at six, won't he?"

The father, carrying his child, strolled up toward the house. His wife lingered to say an affectionate word or two, and to kiss tenderly and with solicitude her parent's cheek. He patted her hand kindly, but with some anxiety evident in his action that she should not catch sight of the contents of his memorandum book.

Alice Woodwyn was a tall and graceful woman of about five-and-twenty, having her father's eyes and mold of features. Her profusion of warm brown ringlets were restrained in the evident tendency to fly out wildly by a cunningly-devised band of delicate blue ribbon, ending in the neatest and most coquettish of bows. There was a rather sad expression on her gentle, comely face as she joined her husband in the little paelor looking upon the lawn. And as she busied herself in making tea and arranging the details of the ample meal spead upon the snowy tablecloth, she said:

"I don't think father seems quite so well as usual, George. I have noticed for the last two or three days something rather strange about him. I feel a little anxious."

"I don't see it," answered her husband from the easy chair into which he had thrown himself, while dancing the little girl upon his knee; "you know he is at times somewhat petulant in his manner, especially when he gets on the subject of taxes and the government. It was a great pity he retired from his business so soon; he has never been quite happy since."

"Ah, no, indeed; but his unhappiness began some time before that. It was poor dear Tom's rash determination to go to sea that was his first great sorrow; I mean his first great sorrow since he lost my dear mother. Silly lad! only to think of his turning his back upon such good prospects, such a business as my father's was for him to step into, besides causing so much grief and anxiety!"

"Yes, he was a great fool, no doubt," answered the husband; "but it's an old story now; it's no use talking of that; why, Tom has been away more than ten years, I suppose."

"Yes. But father has never got over it; he never seemed to take the same interest in his business afterward."

"Still," said George, "I say it was a great pity he gave it up; he is always hankering after it now; can't cut himself adrift; as you knew, he is constantly going into the city and pottering about; I wonder what he finds to do there so often. By the by, that reminds me. Judkins told me that he met him in Lombard street nearly every day during the whole fortnight we were away last month at Broadstairs; and he had always got his little blue bag with him. I wonder what he does there. Judkins asked if I could guess at all. Everybody wonders at him."

"Well, then, it's a pity everybody has not something better to do," said Mrs. Woodwyn. "I suppose my father can go into the city when he likes, without consulting everybody?"

"Yes, certainly. But now tell me, Alice, does it never occur to you as strange? and do you never think what it is that can take him there so frequently? One would think your woman's curiosity would at least be excited."

"Perhaps it would be, George, if I did not love my father as dearly as I do. He has always been so good and kind and loving to me all my life, that I have striven never to cause him even the least anxiety if I could help it, and much more not to do what I know he dislikes above all things; and you know there is nothing he so much dislikes as any prying into his doings or his affairs. Therefore I never appear to take any heed of his going or coming; I never even ask him where he has been, much less what he has done, because I know he so particularly dislikes it."

"Just like you, my dear loving wife, always striving to make people happy. I'm a stupid, blundering fellow to have asked you; I might have known all you have said without your saying it. Ah, there's six o'clock striking; let's have tea. Come, Lily, you shall sit between daddy and grandfather; he'll be here in a minute."

But several minutes passed, and the old gentleman did not appear. Then said the mother, "Run down, and tell grandpapa that tea is ready, Lily: he will be late."

"It will be for the first time in his life, then," broke in George. "No, sit still, Lily," as the child was about to move; "grandfather is half way here by this time, I'll be bound; he is not the man to break an appointment, whether for business or pleasure; if he had not been as punctual as the day throughout his long life he would never have turned that little hosiery business in Cheapside into the fine concern it became; no, nor have made all the money he did in other ways."

"What other ways do you mean, dear?" asked his wife; "has he made much money in other ways?"

"Oh, of course. Don't you know, Alice, that it was he, and one or two more men of his stamp, who laid the foundation of much of our most remunerative intercourse with the silk trade in China? And though his name has never been prominent in the affairs, it is said that he has been their backbone; if he had lived fifty or sixty years earlier he would have been just such sort of man as the old East Indian directors were. Lord bless my heart, people in the city who know more of these things than I do say he must be worth a mint of money. He is rather late, though," went on Woodwyn, after a minute's pause; "perhaps you had better run and fetch grandfather. Lily; he can't have heard the clock." And the child scampered away through the low open window.

A few minutes pass, and she is back again, breathless, frightened, and sobbing.

"What is the matter, my darling? What is the matter?" cries the mother, taking her up in her arms.

"Grandpa, grandpa," gasps out the little one, "grandpa won't 'peak; grandpa tumbled down on table."

In a moment husband and wife are flying down to the summerhouse. At a glance they see the child's words are true; for there, prone across the table at which he has been writing, helpless, speechless, unconscious, lies the dear, kind old man, his body partly resting against the chair, the pen still in the outstretched hand as it lies across a sheet of paper, slightly smeared with the last touch of ink. To raise him and loosen his stiff, high, white neckcloth is the work of an instant on George's part, while Alice, bending over the distorted face, calls loudly for help.

It comes, of course, in time, and Matthew Rickman is laid upon his deathbed; for he never recovers consciousness, and within four-and-twenty hours of his apopletic seizure his spirit passes peacefully away.

For one moment at the last the glazed eyes turned with the faintest look of recognition to the face of the loving and heart-stricken daughter; a slight twitching of the mouth, as if he would have spoken some words of farewell, a momentary expression of anxiety, and all was over.

CHAPTER II.—THE DISAPPOINTMENT.

Beyond and entirely apart from the deep sorrow into which the little home at Highgate was plunged for many months after the death of its oldest inmate, there was interwoven with the grief a sense of amazement at the obscurity in which Matthew Rickman had left his affairs; an amazement, it may be said, not limited to the region of Highgate, where so old a resident was, of course, almost as well known as the church spice, but extending into many an influential commercial circle in the city.

As may have been gathered from the words of his son-in-law, George Woodwyn, Mr. Matthew Rickman was supposed—nay, by those who were best informed, was known—to have amassed considerable wealth; yet, except in regard to a comparative small sum, no clue was discovered to indicate what he had done with it, or in what securities it had been invested. He left no will, and never seemed to have employed a lawyer, having himself arranged the disposal of his business in Cheapside, and most other matters. At one time he had had a confidential clerk, or head man, who had been in his employ for a long while and might have known something about his masters affairs; but he too was dead—had died very soon after the business passed into other hands. Such memoranda and accounts as were found with Mr. Matthew Rickman's effects were couched in terms so mysterious, and set down in trade and private marks so obscurely, that it was evident they were not intended to be understood by any one save their owner—that is, with one exception, but this a very notable one.

Among the papers picked up in the summer house, after the confusion ensuing upon the sad catastrophe which happened there had passed away, was a certain sheet of foolscap, which, from the purport of what was written in a trembling hand upon it and at the smear of ink across it, appeared to be that on which the old gentleman had been in the act of writing when hand and brain were so suddenly paralyzed. Whether he was induced to write what he did from not feeling well, or whether he had received some prevision of what was going to befall him, or whether merely after his own eccentric fashion he conceived that the time had come for him to make some arrangements by which those who were to follow him could inherit his property, will never be known; but it is certain that he seemed to have been struck by the difficulties that would arise through his dying intestate, and that he desired in some sort to repair his error, for thus ran the document in question:

"HIGHGATE, September, 1849.

Having for many years been of the firm opinion that the English people are too heavily and unjustly taxed, through the reckless maladministration of the finances of the country, by a selfish and corrupt government, and having in my time more than amply contributed my share toward swelling the enormous revenue collected from universally large duties and taxes annually levied, I am determined that when I die no more of my property shall pass to the credit of the State in the shape of probate or legacy duties. Therefore I have made no will, but by this, my deed of gift, I make over to my youngest and best beloved child, Alice Woodwyn, the sum of £1500, and a like sum to my much misguided, but always affectionately remembered son, Thomas Rickman, at present supposed to be sheep farming in Australia; and that, further, when it be possible to convey to him the said sum of £1500, I request that he may be told at the same time that, notwithstanding the grief his wayward conduct caused me, I, in these my last days, heartily forgave him, and pray that the Almighty may do the same, and in the future guide his footsteps back to those paths of rectitude and obedience whence he has so sadly strayed. Also, I hereby give to my little granddaughter, Lilian Woodwyn, the sum of £1000, to be held by her parents in trust for her until she be of age, or until she shall marry with their full consent and approval. These three sums in gold will be found, each tied up in a separate bag and labeled with the names of those for whom they are intended, in the small iron safe at my bed-head; they key of the safe, also labeled, is attached to the bunch I always carry in my pocket. That my children only may understand how the main bu—"

Here the writing ceased. The incomplete word ended with an irregular upward stroke of the pen, which was partly smeared, probably by the coat-cuff as the helpless hand slid suddenly across the paper.

That Mathew Rickman should have died worth no more than £4000, everybody said, was simply absurd; nay, these written directions, this deed of gift—call the paper what you please—clearly indicated that the writer was going on to say something about "the main bulk" of his property. All who saw the unfinished writing were unanimous in interpreting "but—" as the beginning of the word "bulk," and this, from the context, it was quite natural to conclude would have been followed by, "of my property." But at the critical moment the summons had come. As the momentous sentence hung upon the pen's point, the fingers guiding it had relaxed, and the dictating, busy, plotting mind became as meaningless a blank as the remainder of the unwritten page.

Despite the most minute search and inquiry, extending over two or three years, as to what the old gentleman had done with the presumed mass of his wealth, nothing came of it; not a sign, not a hint could be obtained. It was brought to light that several large sums at different periods had been secretly presented by him to various charities; indications that he had constantly been doing good by stealth in many directions cropped up, all going to confirm the wide-spread opinion that he had large resources to draw upon, but not in the least leading to an idea of where those resources were deposited.

The £4000 divided, as the paper described, into three portions, were in the iron safe sure enough. When the canvas bags were emptied, 4000 bright new golden sovereigns, in three glittering heaps, lay upon the table—an amazing, dazzling sight this, truly, to unaccustomed eyes, but to those of the experienced bank clerk, George Woodwyn, suggesting nothing for the first moment so much as checking by a careful counting the correctness of the amounts; and, of course, they were correct to the last sovereign.

No contemptible sum either for "humble livers" in content, such as George and his wife were; and it was with a grateful heart that he prepared to place his wife's and his child's portion in, as he thought, some more profitable place of security than an iron safe. Still, without any mean repining or covetous feeling with regard to what they had naturally supposed they would come into, it was impossible for them to banish all sense of disappointment. The ever recurring question as to what the old man could have done with his money would in itself have kept this sense alive.

The ne'er-do-weel renegade son, Tom Rickman, who with all his faults was not a bad fellow at heart, and very fond of his sister, had never entirely broken off communication with home. His father, in his anger, had forbidden the mention of the lad's name from the time he quitted England to go as a common seaman before the mast. But to his sister Alice he had from time to time written; and when, by his last letter, he showed that he had, after a fashion, managed to make a start in sheep-farming in Australia, with a prospect of doing well, she had ventured to put the letter into her father's hands. He read it, but he gave it back without any remark.

Nevertheless, it seemed he had not forgotten it. Thus means were open for sending the £1500 to Tom without much difficulty, and the loving sister in doing so, we may be sure, poured out in the fullness of her heart many entreaties that her brother would profit by his father's forgiveness and generosity, and many an earnest hope that he might be spared to return to his native land.

Within twelve months of old Matthew's death the Woodwyns know that Tom had received the money safely. He wrote:

"It has come in the very nick of time, and by its means you will see I shall coin a fortune that shall be large enough before I have done to compensate us all for the lamentable loss we sustain through the eccentric and mysterious crotchets entertained by my father in all money matters, though I don't despair of your coming upon some trace yet of the 'bulk' of his property. What I have got, however, I shall invest in this farming business, in which I am a partner with a man whom I picked up out here, and who, like myself, had nothing to begin with; but we shall both be rich men in time, and then, but not till then, my dear and loving Alice, you will see me in England again."

"So be it! I hope Tom will not be disappointed; it is time his luck began to turn. If a little of it came this way I should not be sorry," was George Woodwyn's remark when he had read the letter.

"What do you mean," inquired Alice.

"Why, I mean," answered her husband, "that mine seems to be deserting me. I did not intend to tell you about it, but you see it's of no use my attempting to keep anything from you; the fact is, I have had another disappointment in the bank this very day There have been more promotions, owing to the epening of the new branch, but I am again paesed over. I suppose I shall be left out in the cold now until I am an old man. I'm sure it's very fortunate we have no house rent to pay, for I shall get no rise in salary for years, I can see."

"Now, dear, don't begin to worry yourself please, about money; we shall do very well, even if you don't get an increase, though it is hard for you; but we shall always have this roof to cover us, thanks to my dear mother's foresight in making her father leave this little freehold to me at her death. At any rate we can never be turned out of house and home; besides, there will be dividends coming in soon from mine and Lily's portion of dear father's money."

"Yes, yes; I know all about that; not but what I see the shares in the 'Wheal Grydd Copper Mining Company' have gradually been going down, and they are now at five or six lower than when we bought in, not quite a year ago. I dare say I am foolish; but there seems to be a run of bad luck with us just now—that's all I meant to say; think no more about it."

But a loving wife has sharpened perceptions, and will easily divine the state of her husband's mind, strive he ever so earnestly to hide it; and though Alice Woodwyn gave little heed to the tone in which George had referred to the matter of luck on this occasion, the first suspicion that he had some anxiety which he was keeping from her was raised by it. This suspicion increased after some months, when she observed not only that there was a saddened look creeping over her husband's kindly face, but a constant inclination on his part to refer to the ill luck which he conceived was besetting them.

In the course, however, of little more than three years after they were left alone in their home, a real anxiety arose, which touched both husband and wife more nearly perhaps than any they had ever felt. The little girl Lilian became dangerously ill, and after the fever which struck her down had passed she remained in sadly delicate health for many months. She had to be taken to the sea for change of air; and what with this and the heavy expenses for medical attendance (for the first doctors in London were consulted), it was indeed found that their income was barely sufficient to meet the strain upon it. For it must never be forgotten that though the mother and daughter's portion, amounting to £2500 of old Mathew's money, had yielded by its investment in the "Wheal Grydd Company" fair dividends up to this time, they were not equivalent to the share the old grandfather had contributed to the expenses of the home, and which, of course, had entirely ceased through the unhappy mystery in which he had chosen to envelop his affairs.

By way of adding to the Woodwyns' anxieties, news had come that Tom Rickman's venture with the sheep-farming was going wrong. A murrain had broken out, by which he had lost large sums, while, to put the finishing stroke to their misfortunes, the dividends from the "Wheal Grydd Company" suddenly ceased, there being a check in the mining operations.

By the time, therefore, that the fifth Christmas after Mr. Rickman's death was coming round, we find the Woodwyns really in somewhat straitened circumstances. Still sickly, Lilian has this autumn failed to get her usual breath of sea air; it could not be afforded, and this deprivation left its mark on the pallid checks of both mother and daughter. As if, too, to bear out the adage that misfortunes never come alone, one gloomy November afternoon, George, returning from the city more depressed than ever, has to make a clean breast of his troubles, unable any longer to evade the tender questionings and appealing looks of his wife.

"I don't know what we shall do, darling," he said; "but that abominable mining company, after gradually showing signs of decreasing prosperity, the shares going steadily down month by month, so that I should have lost hundreds of yours and dear Lily's money if I had sold—though I ought to have had the pluck to realize my loss long ago—has finally come to such a pass that everyone in the city says there must be a call on the shares soon. I have foreseen this for months, I may say for years, and yet I have been such an idiot I could not make up my mind to sell."

"I am grieved for you, my poor George," said Alice, "more than I can say; but we must not let trouble take away all our hope and strength; we need both. And we should not forget the dear, bright days that we have known, now that we have to face unflinchingly many a dark and dreary one; for I, too, have only sad news to tell. By the mid-day post came a letter from poor Tom; he has lost all—every farthing of the £1500. His partner has absconded with everything he could lay his hands on; and we may expect Tom here, bereft of means, and having worked his way home (as in his happier and younger days he worked his way out), trusting and assured that with us he will find comfort and a hearty welcome. God help him and us! The hearty welcome he shall have, George, from both of us, shall he not? But another mouth to feed—will be—a burden—and my heart is heavy!"

Here a few quiet tears stole softly down Alice's cheeks, and for a moment choked her utterance.

"Tom coming home!" said George, "and penniless?"

"Yes," answered the wife, "and he will be here a day or two before Christmas Day if the ship makes as good a run as he expects. This letter was sent by the mail which started a week before he was to sail."

"Well, well, well, dear wife," said poor George, "he is your brother, has your dear eyes and kind heart, we know. Such as we have he shall share; and, thank God, no man can rob us of the love that has hallowed these walls to us for many a year past. Let us thank Him that we stand here together with one heart ond one hope, and not a thought unshared by the other."

Somehow, notwithstanding their gloomy prospects, this opening of heart to heart gave to each a fortitude which sent them to sleep that night more peacefully, perhaps, than had been the case for a long while past.

CHAPTER III.—THE LUCK.

Christmas Eve, in this the most memorable of all years for the Woodwyn household, fell upon a Sunday. The long anticipated fatal call on the shares had come about a fortnight previously, and the poor drudging bank clerk, unpromoted yet save by a very slight step, had met it with great difficulty and many sacrifices; but he returned to his little home at Highgate on the Saturday night, determined that at least for the next two days care should be driven from its doors, and that nothing but gratitude to the Giver of all good for what was still left to him should fill his heart.

So the best fare befitting the season that circumstances would allow, though falling far short, maybe, of the profusion of some former Christmas times, had been prepared by the careful housewife. The minor portion of it—for the great feast was, of course, not to be dreamed of till the morrow—was being set forth by degrees that Sunday afternoon upon the table in the little parlor looking out upon the lawn and garden, all now crisp and brilliant under a fresh-fallen canopy of snow. As far as the immediate moment was concerned, one thing alone slightly clouded the happiness that, notwithstanding their troubles, beamed in the faces of our two friends and their little girl. No further news had been heard of that other luckless and long absent member of the family.

"I could have wished," said George, "that poor Tom could have arrived in time to eat his Christmas beef with us. There would be enough for him; and I had heartily hoped that he might have 'come to hand,' as we say in the city, in time."

The words had scarcely passed his lips when, after that fashion of "coincidence" so necessary for stories and plays, and which by critical readers and audiences is often held to be artificial in fiction, but which, when occurring in real life, is considered only "very fortunate," the bell at the outer gate beneath the ivied arch clanged with a boisterous peal, and two minutes later the little sittingroom was dwarfed in its proportions by the appearance within its walls of a huge, broad-chested, large-limbed, weather-beaten man, sadly travel stained and battered as to his exterior, but with a pair of bright pure eyes, so full of hope and cheeriness that they made your heart bound at once with trust and joy; and they made not only the heart, but the whole person of Alice Woodwyn bound; for, with the rapidity of lightning, she sprang toward him, and before a word could be uttered had flung her arms around his neck, and almost hidden his bearded, honest face by the deluge of kisses she poured upon it.

What a talking and hand-shaking and kissing, again and again, began after that! What a succession of incoherent questionings and impossibly constructed answers! What ungrammatical, voluble sentences were scattered about! How there never seemed to be any likelihood of the performance coming to an end and matters settling down again! First—if there ever could be a first in such a complication of sayings and doings—Tom would take up his little niece with so much strength of arm and hand that the child's head appeared imperiled by the low ceiling; then he seemed inclined to treat his own sister in the same way, and was not quite sure but what he would give George a hoist up in his arms, so entirely overcome was he by the boisterousness and strength of his joy. Nor was that of the other three in their degree less demonstrative. They had thoroughly caught the infection, and all the time their eyes were as full of tears as they could hold, and Mrs. Woodwyn's didn't hold them, for they kept running over and streaming down her face, so that you would have thought a private cataract was somewhere at work, and was only hidden from view by the profusion of her brown curls, which now, fairly escaping from the bondage of all plaits and bands, were flowing about in all directions, and getting so mixed up and entangled with her brother's locks, which were exactly the same color, and only, as it seemed, a little less long—when his head shook with laughter, that the confusion of appearance was quite as great as the confusion of tongues.

By degrees, however, a little tranquillity set in, and, when every due arrangement had been made for everbody's comfort, the whole party fell to at the repast. After a while it was but natural that a certain amount of reaction should follow, as we know there were many circumstances connected with the little group likely to have a depressing influence. The evening, too, began to close in, and for the first half hour after the chairs were pulled around the fire and before candles were brought the conversation took rather a gloomy turn. But presently Tom, bringing his big hand down on to his knees with a heavy spank, said, while the ruddy glow of the fire which he had just stirred showed his face beaming again with smiles:

"Well, it's no use repining; we must try and make the best of matters. It is true, I haven't got a penny in the world—not a stiver; but I am full of hope and good health, thank God, and between us we will retrieve our fortunes somehow. At present I am too glad to be in the dear old home once again for anything to depress me much. Dear heart! only to think! sixteen years since I was in this room—and then I was but sixteen years old! How small the place looks! And this little puss—she seems very pale and peaky, poor child—wasn't born or thought of; and I had only seen you once in my life, Mr. George, and a naughty, stuck up young sprig I thought you—casting sheep's eyes even then at Alice; not but what she was nearly as tall at fourteen as she is now—yes!" looking straight at his sister and patting her cheek; "but you don't look quite so plump and rosy in the face as you did then, you poor darling! But we'll bring the roses back, somehow yet!"

"I don't know how you are going to do it, Tom," she answered sadly. "When I think of how affairs stand with us all, there comes a great knock at my heart in the midst of my gladness at having you back again. What a great big fellow you have grown—I can't help looking at you. I should never have known you but for your eyes; and they are, as always, exactly like dear father's. You will be the image of him when you are as old."

"Ah, in looks perhaps; but I am afraid that's all I follow him in," answered the brother. "I feel like a horrid brute as I sit here, and remember the misery I caused the dear old chap. I can see him sitting over there where George is as plainly—ah, well! it's of no use talking about it; but I suppose if it hadn't been for me he would have managed differently about his money. Yes, I am the cause of the trouble all round. You would, no doubt, have been well off but for me."

"Don't say so, Tom," chimed in George; "it's bad luck, but we can't tell; you must not accuse yourself of too much. You and I must go on working hard, that's all it comes to."

"Yes," slowly answered the burly sailor, after a pause; "but it's very strange to think that nobody has any idea of what he did with all his savings. Dear heart! it's very curious."

Then there was silence for a long while. But when the candles came the talk went on again, rising at times into merriment, and again lapsing to the sadder key, but ever hinging, of course, upon the return home, the adventures abroad, and all that had happened during these long years.

The Christmas eve waned; little Lily went to bed: and, finally, bed time came for all. Alice and George both saw their brother up to the little room, which, for many days past, had been ready for him, He never seemed weary of gazing about him at the old familiar domestic objects—the passages, the stairs, the rooms. Just as they were bidding "Good night," Tom turned to his sister and said:

"And the garden, Alice—is that much the same? All the queer gnarled apples trees, just as they were?"

"Yes," she answered; "but I don't often go down there now; it has been sadly neglected of late years."

"And the doll's nest?" went on the brother; "is that still in existence?"

"The what?" inquired George from the threshold of the room where he was standing.

"The doll's nest," replied Tom. "Do you mean to say that Alice never told you anything about the doll's nest? Why, we used to have rare fun there! We used to sit in the doll's nest for hours together when she and I were children—didn't we, Alice?"

"Never heard of it," said George.

"Oh, it was only a queer old hole in the largest apple tree," broke in Alice. "It made a rough sort of seat, and Tom used to lift me up into it and put his arm round my waist, and hold me in alongside him, and we used to call it the 'doll's nest,' that's all. I have not given it a thought for years; but it is still there, I have no doubt."

"Well, I have often thought of it," said Tom; "thought of it when I've been thousands of miles away the other side of the globe—thought of it and dreamed of it frequently, and you and I sitting in it, dear"

"Well, I have never heard of it," repeated George; "but good-night now, old boy. I'm very glad you are back again, safe and sound, once more."

And not long after, everybody was fast asleep, and stillness reigned throughout the house.

With Christmas morning the conversation seemed inclined to rise to the happy key. Everything favored a joyous tone of talk; the sun shone bright and clear, and set the snow and the icicles sparkling like jewels.

Little Lilian looked fresher and better, her mother said, than she had done for weeks. She thought her uncle's return had begun to act like a tonic on the child. Alice herself likewise seemed to have taken a dose of it, for there was a genuine happiness in her face to which it had long been a stranger. As to the sailor, he had so brushed himself up, and polished his brown cheeks with soap and water, that he was hardly recognizable for the travel-stained wanderer of the evening before.

George Woodwyn alone had failed to catch this infection of beaming looks. He had a meditative, absent air about him, quite usual, and ate his breakfast without seeming to know what he was doing. To all inquiries as to what was the matter he answered, "Nothing;" there was nothing the matter with him, not a bit of it; but it took him some time even to reply thus much; and the strangeness of his manner continued long after breakfast was finished, and all the way to church, and was quite observable even in church; and Alice went so far as to nudge her brother several times during the service, as much as to say, "Do you see how strange he is still?" And Tom would respond by raising his eye brows; and the child was caught by them both watching her father, and wondering what it could all mean. For let it be clearly understood there was no expression of unhappiness on his face; on the contrary, there was almost a smile playing over it at times, as though he were thinking about something not altogether unpleasant that he could not forget

When church was over, and the party were returning through the crisp clear air everybody now a little silent under the influence of George's strange manner, he himself suddenly stopped in the middle of the quiet lane which was the short cut home. He planted his umbrella firmly down in front of him, as if to gave additional force to something he was evidently about to say, and then, looking with the most serio-comic expression possible, first at his wife on the left, and then at her brother, who was on the right, began:

"I must tell you—I can't keep it any longer. You will both laugh at me, perhaps, and I feel inclined to laugh at it myself, and yet it is no laughing matter. At first I thought I would not tell you; but I can not shake it off, and so I must out with it. The fact is, I saw grandfather last night!"

"Saw grandfather! What do you mean?" from both sides.

"What I say. I saw grandfather, old Mr. Matthew Rickman, as plainly as I ever saw him in my life."

"Why, you are dreaming, George," said his wife.

"No, you *were* dreaming," cried Tom.

"Well, you may choose to say so, and to think so," went on the speaker, "but there he was, standing at the foot of our bed; and if I was dreaming—why, then all life's a dream, for I never saw anything more real since I was born."

George was so earnest in his assertion that the listeners were distinctly impressed. At least Tom was, for his sister soon began to laugh; but the brother, on the contrary, grew graver and graver, and after fixing his eyes on the ground for a minute looked up inquiringly, saying:

"Did he speak?"

"Yes," answered George, seriously, "and that's what seems so convincing. If I had only seen him I might have thought it a dream; but I heard him as plainly as I saw him."

"What did he say?" asked the sailor, solemnly.

"Why," went on George Woodwyn, "he said these words, though what on earth they meant I can't tell, but he said distinctly, 'Shoot an arrow from the doll's nest.'"

Tom, giving a perceptible start, looked at his sister; she was grave now, and returned his look. Then for a minute they both seemed to be on the same track of thought, and the family likeness, always strong between them, appeared stronger than ever, while the expression in each of their faces was identical.

"How odd?" at length they both exclaimed in a breath. Alice continued:

"Don't you remember, Tom, we used to shoot with our bows and arrows down among the old apple and pear trees?"

"Of course I do," was the answer; "have I ever forgotten those days? And what's more, don't you remember why we once shot an arrow from 'the doll's nest' itself?"

Alice dropped her eyes in thought for a second; then said, "To be sure; when we hid our money box."

Her brother nodded. "Yes, and father saw us and laughed at our queer pranks."

Then there was another pause, when George, moving down the lane, said, "Well, what has all this got to do with my dream, if you choose to call it a dream?"

But he received no answer for several moments, during which Tom was murmuring to himself again and again, as if in deep cogitation, "Can it be possible? can it be possible?"

"Can what be possible?" he was asked.

"Just this," he said; "we had a common money-box, Alice and I, and we used to hide it down at the bottom of the orchard, in the thickest corner of the underwood—buried it in fact; and we decided on the place we would hide it in first of all by shooting an arrow as we sat one day in 'the doll's nest,' and the spot where the arrow fell was to be the spot where we were to bury our box. Then, in order to find it again (because we never disturbed it till we had something to put into it, and so it was sometimes left for a week or two together), I, with my sailor-like turn of mind, took the bearings; that is, we were to get the old stack of twisted chimneys on the cottage exactly on a line with 'the doll's nest,' and then twenty yards straight away on that line, down toward the orchard wall, was the exact spot where we should find the box. Why, Alice, you must remember all this, surely," urged the speaker warmly.

"Certainly," she answered; "it all comes back to me, now you speak of it, vividly enough; still, I don't quite see what it has to do with George's dream."

"No, nor I," echoed the husband.

"Be patient, and I'll tell you," went on Tom, "what I think it has got to do with it. Life at sea may make people superstitious. They say that sailors are so; perhaps I am. I have dreamed and seen many queer things in my time not always quite easy to make out; but let that pass; what occurs to me now is simply this: As I said, father knew of and saw our dodge about the money box, and it may be just possible that in his latter days, when he got a little queer and cranky, as we know he did, and with his views about property and probate duties, and so on, that he may have remembered what we used to do, and have done something himself of the same kind. It was this he was going to refer to, perhaps, when he began to write the words, 'That my children only may understand how the main bu—' I say, it is just possible—odd men do odd things; who would ever have thought of his having £4000 of gold stowed away just under his bed head?"

Tom's reasoning so excited him that he stopped suddenly, looking straight into space, saying, "I suppose it has never entered your heads to have a look round about the garden to see if there were any signs of a hiding place?"

Of course it never had entered either of their heads, and they said so.

"Then it has mine," said Tom; "and what's more, I'll have a look before I am an hour older. Dear heart! if I should be right after all! Come along."

They had reached by this time the end of the lane where it passed round the lower part of the old moss-grown wall surrounding the cottage and grounds. At one of the angles there was a heavy nailed door.

"Can't we get in here?" said Tom, giving it a poke impatiently with his stick. O, dear, no; it hadn't been opened for years; the path on the other side had been long disused and overgrown with bushes.

"So much the better," continued the sailor; "the less chance of the place having been disturbed."

Then the three, with Lilian following, all now quite excited by Tom's idea, soon found their way to the inner side of the garden wall through the ivied arch at the front entrance.

The seaman, with his experienced eye, first of all took a general survey. Then, pushing his way through the tangled bushes, scattering the snow, now softened by the warm sun, in showers right and left, halted beneath a wide-spreading gnarled apple tree. "There's 'the doll's nest,'" he exclaimed, pointing up to a great bulging bole or knot where two large branches forked; "I feel inclined to swing myself up into it as I used, only I'm afraid it wouldn't bear me now. Yes, there it is, and now I've got it in a line with the chimneys, just as in the old days! Then twenty long strides will bring me down close under the wall—ah! But this brushwood is thicker than it used to be," he continued, as he tramped heavily through the neglected undergrowth, his companions watching him from the upper slope by the strip of kitchen garden. He has reached to within a yard of the wall, and he stands peering for a while in among the densest part of the tangle.

Lifting a branch there with his stick, and putting two or three aside here with his hands, he makes another step forward, peers down once or twice again, throws up his arm as if in signal to those behind, and then with a shout plunges, as it seems, headlong into the bushes and all but disappears. George gets down to him in a minute or two, and by the time Alice has managed, with astounding disregard of flounces, and the effect of wet and thorns upon them, to come up with the pioneers, she sees them engaged in clearing aside with feet and hands a mass of accumulated rubbish, fallen leaves, earth and underwood. The snow has been very light and has not penetrated far below the upper twigs.

"A spade, a spade," calls out Tom, "or a pick of some sort!"

"Lilian, go to the tool house," cried her father.

And the child, who is only half way down the slope, runs back, and soon reappears, struggling with a spade.

Alice relieves the little hands of their unwieldy burden, and takes it down to Tom, sending the child back to the house for fear of her taking cold.

Five minutes pass, and the sailor, by hacking at the bushes and delving into the earth, has laid bare the top of a queer looking, half bricked, half tiled sort of structure. He lifts away some of the tiles with which a portion of it is covered, and discloses the upper end of a large leathern sack, all mouldy and begrimed, having a kind of brass binding and hasp fastened by a rusty padlock.

With low muttered exclamations from Tom, and much gasping and puffing from George, by degrees a regular clearance is made, and there lies exposed to view the whole of an enormous sack, nearly five feet long and three feet wide!

A clasp-knife flies out from the sailor's pocket, the leather is ripped open, and the sack is discovered to be crammed with a succession of canvass bags. With some difficulty, for it is very heavy, Tom, having handed the spade to George, is the first to lift one of these out. It is firmly tied at the mouth with a strong string and sealed, and has a parchment label, with the sum £1000 in figures marked upon it. Again the knife is used with more impatience than ever, and Tom, dipping his hand in, produces a dozen or more bright sovereigns!

"Hurrah, hurrah! Here it is, then," cries Tom—"the main bulk of my property—hidden, buried, after the fashion of our old money box. And here it has lain certainly for five, and who can say for how many more years?"

Bag by bag is removed from the leathern sack; the sample which has been opened explains what they each are filled with. There they are—forty of them, all alike, tied and labeled alike; each weighing about seventeen pounds, a solid mass of some six hundred weight of gold!

"Total," says George, with a facetious assumption of the banker's air, when, with much labor and hurrying to and fro, everything has been conveyed very quietly and secretly into the house, "£40,000 in gold!"

The surprise, the excitement, and the general commotion which went on while these facts were being arrived at, no words can describe. However, there was Matthew Rickman's accumulated wealth at last, standing in forty bags upon the table and floor in the little parlor. But how his heirs and executors behaved, and what they said, must, in detail, be left to the imagination. They walked around it, and felt it, moved first one bag and then another, to try if they were all the same weight. Then they counted a few sovereigns from the bag that had been opened, and then put them in again; and the whole time they were talking, every one of them, all at once, and not a soul listening. They exclaimed, they wondered, they laughed, and, of course, Alice cried, and Lilian followed suit. And it is quite impossible to say how long this thing went on, for everything they did they did fifty times, and everything they said they said at least a hundred times over and over again, and the performance might have lasted till "crack of doom," but for the closing in of the short Christmas day. This seemed to suggest a practical remark to George, and to which at length the rest seemed inclined to listen.

"It is all very well," he cried; "but we can't dine off gold—at least not at present—and I'm getting hungry."

Then it suddenly occurred to them all that they were hungry; and then the good old-fashioned general servant, who had been looking in from time to time at the parlor door, and who had not yet quite mastered what had happened, was told to bring dinner. So, finally, the treasure was stowed away in a corner, just, Tom said, as if it had been so many bags of sawdust, such as he used to have in his toy miller's cart, and which he always stabled in the self same corner.

While the cloth was being laid the whole party looked out of the window, apparently entirely absorbed by their own thoughts. After a long silence, Tom said, as he gazed absently in the direction of the little summerhouse.

"That's where he got them."

"Got what?" inquired George.

"The materials to make his strong-room with. As I looked through the bushes just now I perceived some remnants of old tiles, and I saw at a glance they were the same sort as those in that patch in the roof of the summer-house. They would not have suggested anything in themselves; but seeing them where I did, with what I had in my mind, they confirmed my suspicion, and the first kick or two I gave to the earth settled the question."

"Why, of course, exclaimed George;" "the old gentleman had the roof mended while we were away that year, not a month before he died, and no doubt he secreted some of the workmen's materials for this purpose."

"Only fancy!" cried Alice; "and the sack—where did he get the sack, do you think?"

"Oh, simply had it made years ago, no doubt, when this idea first possessed him," was Tom's rejoinder.

"Well, God bless him," said Alice; "he never meant that we should have so much trouble about it all, poor dear father! God bless him, I say again."

And they all answered, "Amen."

Presently after this the Christmas feast was served, and we may be pretty sure that there was not a merrier or happier Christmas dinner party throughout the length and breadth of the land to be found that day. There was no melancholy tone in the talk now; it was all in the bright, high, happy key.

"And why not?" asks George. "If grandfather had not buried the money in the orchard, why, I might have buried it in the copper mine—who knows? No, it is all for the best, depend upon it; and I call it a wonderful story of Christmas luck. Tom will have half, and Alice will have half—£20,000 apiece—and we will invest the whole in the three per cents. That will be enough for us, won't it? Yes, wonderful luck," he continued; "only I can't make out about my dream, for it must have been a dream, after all; it could not have been anything else."

"Ah, so we may," broke in Tom solemnly, "and so most people would say; and they would tell you that it was my talking about 'the doll's nest' just before we went to bed that started the dream in your head, George; but I'm not for having everything cut and dried and explained in this matter-of-fact sort of fashion. I say I have seen enough to know that it can't be done; things happen in this world that baffle the wisest—that is, if those can be counted the wisest who are not inclined sometimes to accept mysterious dispensations as the rulings of a higher power than man's."

Just for two or three minutes everybody looked grave; but after that they soon recovered, and the merry making was resumed without one jot of alloy—resumed and kept up until a quite absurdly late hour for the inhabitants of the little quiet home upon the Highgate slope.—*Christmas number of London Society.*

Silk Culture.

Three million dollars worth of silkworms eggs are in transit by rail across the country. The silk manufacture of the United States has already grown to proportions surprising to those who had not investigated the subject until they saw the superb exhibit of our home manufacturers at the Centennial Exhibition. This surprise was shared in an important degree by the French silk weavers, who came over with their exhibits hardly willing to admit that they had any competition in this country. They have gone home and reported that there is nothing that the Yankees can not do when they give their minds to it. Silk will always be a luxury. It can never be made cheap in comparison with other dress goods. But it can be made cheaper than it now is, and this country can avoid the necessity of paying $10,000,000 to $15,000,000 a year to the silk weavers of Lyons and Marseilles.—*Cleveland Leader.*