THE LUCK OF LUKE SHANDS

I.

MY LADY'S CHAPEL.

It was a quaint little village, that of Felspar. It is still a quaint village, although Felspar is famous in its way now, and has one big hotel in the valley, and by the stream which falls headlong from the hills to a boulder-broken channel where the water fumes and froths and rushes by, a mass of seething silver in the sun. The hotel does well in the summer-time, because there are curiosities in Felspar, and tourists and geologists come to see them; because there are fine bits of English hill scenery and woodland, pine trees and white weird tors, and artists come to paint them; because the guide-books have written up Felspar, and it is fashionable to see it, and fashionable folk, being sheep-like, come in droves in the season with odd-looking shepherds to keep an eye upon them sometimes. But our story is of Felspar before it woke up and found itself famous, and of a certain humble individual who helped to make it famous, and who without a gleam of greatness, fortunate fellow that he was, had greatness thrust upon him. There are some lucky people in the world—even of a world not lying back more than fifteen years from present date.

Fifteen years ago, then, Felspar was only known to a few in the county in which it was hiding, and to the people who lived and died in the little nest of cottages clustered by the one-arched stone bridge crossing the babbling brook; to the inhabitants of the bigger village ten miles away, and to a few folk in the nearest town, twenty miles off as the crow flies, the town that had a railway station all to itself and was a flourishing place, and had waters which cured gout and rheumatism and general bone-disarrangements, and was at all times and seasons running over with every variety of cripple and contortionist.

Felspar fifteen years ago was only running over with every variety of beauty—which it had completely, which those living in it day by day did not seem to value, for they were a homespun, matter-of-fact lot, whose only thought was how to live, but who clung to the place because their fathers and grandfathers had clung to it before them, struggling in the summer on a few shillings a week's wage to rear large families—and rearing them!—and fighting with the winter always very desperately, and dying in the fight now and then.

It was getting on for winter, when the days were cold and the nights set in very early in the Felspar valley, although the leaves had not all shaken themselves off the trees, and there were rare autumnal tints about for those who cared to notice them, and nobody did care. "Leaves brownish" was the one verdict, and there was an end of it, just as in the city sometimes "money's tightish," and then there's an end of that.

And yet if any one noticed the beauty of the autumn in the valley, it was Peggy Brantwell, a pretty girl acclimatized too much out-of-door occupation, with her grandfather's pigs and poultry to look after, and two cows to milk, and her grandfather to keep in a good temper, and make sure that his poor old legs took him up safely to bed in the early evening before "a sight of candle light" was wasted. Peggy was a beauty in her way, or rather had been a beauty in her day, for she was seven-and twenty now. She was a favorite with Felspar folk, who thought her grandfather was hard upon her, and put upon her, like an old curmudgeon as he was, they said, old Brantwell being as generally disliked as are most people who give themselves airs, and are better off than their neighbors. Why Peggy had grown up so amiable and lovable a little woman under the guardianship of Matthew Brantwell no one exactly could make out, and why, when it was rumored he was not kind to her, and said hard things, and taunted and suspected her, and threatened her even with turning her out of house and home, she did not take him at his word, and get "oop and oot o' it," the Felspar community did not understand. But the Felspar community was not quick of comprehension; they were in by certain Peggy could have done better for herself than remaining all these years her grandfather's drudge—that Lady Glide up at the Hall would have been glad long ago to have had her for lady's-maid, and trained her for a lady's-maid; they did not think it possible that there could be any affection for an irritable, rasping, ungenerous old hunks who gave nobody a good word; she might be waiting for her grandfather's money—which, with his usual spirit of contrariness, he would be sure to leave elsewhere—but it was impossible to say what she was waiting for. Unless—she was waiting for Luke Shands, which we may say at once was exactly the fact of the case.

Perhaps to put it more politely it would have been graceful to say Luke Shands was waiting for her—but as they were waiting for each other, it matters not a great deal, and looking at it either way is to look at it in the right light.

Matthew Brantwell, however, did not look at it in the right light at all; they were waiting till he was dead, he said; he was sure they were waiting till he was dead and gone, but he wasn't a-going to die to oblige either of them. His father had lived fifty ninety-four, and he was only seventy-three next bean-feast, and, but his crossed legs, he was as good a man as any in Felspar, and if they were waiting for his death and his money, never were two people more mistaken in their lives. As they would see. See if they wouldn't, rabbit 'em for a selfish, aggravating, greedy pair!

"But we are not waiting for your death, grandfather," Peggy said, on the autumn day to which we have already alluded; "I shall be only too glad if you'll live to be as old as Methusaleh."

"I shouldn't be surprised if I did."

"So," said Peggy, laughing.

"There's been some wonderful ages in my family. I don't see anything to laugh at in the idea," said Mr. Brantwell.

"Oh, you're not an old man yet, grandfather," said Peggy, as she bustled about the room preparing the afternoon tea for her relative. "There are plenty in Felspar older than you, and plenty younger who look as old already."

"Because they never took care of themselves," he said, "but sotted away their time at the Quarry Inn and sat up till 9 or 10, night after night, like these rackety Londoners. Because—but ain't you in a mortal hurry to get tea over to-night?"

"What a question!" said Peggy briskly; "is it any earlier?"

"It's a good bit earlier," said her observant grandfather; "the shadow across the floor was longer yesterday afternoon by fourteen inches afore the kettle biled."

"I didn't notice the shadow," said Peggy.

"But it was."

"Indeed?"

"Very well—it was, then. And it was later in the afternoon, o' course. And you know it was later. And you have a reason for it's being later yesterday, or earlier to-day, and it's no use trying to trick me," he snapped.

"I am not trying to trick you grandfather."

"Yes, you are. You had a reason."

"Well—I had a reason," Peggy confessed.

"You're a-going out."

"Yes—for a little while."

"To meet that Luke. You know you are."

"No, I'm not going to meet that Luke," replied the granddaughter. "I'm not thinking of such a thing."

"Oh, ain't you?" exclaimed the irritable old man, bringing his broad brown hand with a formidable slap into the tea-tray, and causing a considerable commotion among the crockery in consequence. "Then why can't you be fair and straight, and say what you are going to do? Why can't you tell me you want to choke me off with tea before I've got the dinner down my throat, and to put me into bed again afore I'm hardly got out of it, or it's had time to cool? I hate such artful ways."

"Grandfather, what has disturbed you to-day?"

"I ain't disturbed."

"You are not very often like this."

"Yes, I am."

"Not often quite as hard as this, I think," said Peggy, in a calm, half-wondering way, which, if it had not been natural, would have been very aggravating. But Peggy was really surprised by the extra energy which her grandfather had contrived to throw into the conversation that afternoon.

"I shall be harder soon, if that's any comfort to you," was the final remark of this amiable old gentleman; after which he went to bed, though the sun was still shining, and it was half an hour before his usual time. Indeed, the alacrity with which he had taken himself off would have aroused the suspicions of most folk; but Peggy was not mistrustful—on the contrary, very, very trustful—or she would not have waited all this while for Luke Shands, and Luke Shands's luck, which was generally going the wrong way to which he was.

Five minutes after her grandfather had gone to bed, Peggy had put on her neat little straw hat, and was out of the house and tripping along the high road. Had she looked back, she would have seen the head of old Mother Crasp craning out of the front window watching her. Had she waited at the bend of the road, she would have found old Matthew there five minutes afterward; and had she hidden herself behind the great sprawling brambles, she would have seen Matthew bribe little Tom Crasp—a rapped youth, who professed to mind the sheep in Owen's fields, and spent his time in flinging stones at crows—to follow her, and bring him back the news where she had gone. To make all the haste that he could, too, because he, Matthew Brantwell, did not want to be out of his bed much later than his usual time.

But Peggy, unmindful of all this treachery, had gone on her way with grave composure, steadily and swiftly. She had turned from the high road, or the apology that there was for a high road in so break-neck a part of the country as Felspar, and gone down into the valley, deep down into the lower path by the side of the stream, where the trees arched overhead, and the way was thickly hidden now by rustling dead leaves.

Presently she crossed a little plank across the stream, and went up from the valley by degrees, making for the higher ground by a steep ascent through trees and bushes, which hid the way from those below. Here a hundred or a hundred and fifty feet from the valley's level, and a quarter of the way to the summit of the green crested tor, she paused at a strange fissure in the rock, which she could now touch with her hands, and looked around at the fair English landscape lying beneath her steeped in autumn tints.

It had been a sharp ascent, and she might have paused to get breath, only she was light of foot, and not half as "blown" as Tom Crasp, who, lying on his stomach among the bracken, was panting like a puppy-dog.

Peggy Brantwell was waiting for something, it was evident. She crossed her hands, and sat down on a boulder that had slipped in times remote from the summit, and was covered now with lichens and mosses, and here she waited patiently, looking along the valley, a pretty figure that any artist would have loved to sketch. There was just a little expression of anxiety on her face even, as she gazed toward the sun dipping slowly behind a cloud bank of purple and gold—a sun which she watched sink at last with all the devout expression of a fire-worshipper. Then, as the edge of the disc disappeared, she turned round, darted into the cleft of the rock, and was gone.

The cleft widened after a few steps over some rough loose shingle, and here, well out of the draught, Peggy lighted a candle which she had brought with her, and went on groping her way steadily forward into the heart of those grand old cliffs which have been the wonder of geologists of late years, but which nobody thought a great deal about in Peggy's time.

Peggy's best time, that is—for Peggy lives and flourishes still, and has grown very stout and buxom, and laughs when she tells this story, as she has told it to the present writer—with all the fears and troubles in the background of some fifteen dusty years, and with the sunshine, as she says, "round about her everywhere." And yet it was Peggy's best time, for her good looks, and health and strength of youth, and the faith and courage of love, and in the belief even in old country superstitions, which she clung to with the rest of the good folk in Felspar, who believed in "all the wonders," just as unsophisticated Peggy did.

But Peggy was showing her belief by acts, having great faith, poor little dreamer that she was. And the proof was in this desperate expedition, and in the sudden dropping down on her knees in a ragged, jagged part of the cavern which had widened out into some semblance of a rough-hewn room, and in planting her candle on an anvil-shaped rock that stood in the centre, uncommonly handy for catching unawares the kneecaps of rash explorers. And had any one been listening, which there was not—for Tom Crasp would not have followed her into "My Lady's Chapel" for the wealth of Felspar, and was even lurking outside with his hair on end—he would have heard this extraordinary appeal to the hidden genius of the place, supposed to be propitiatory to all intercessions if uttered five minutes after sundown, neither more nor less, because her ladyship loved punctuality, objected to be kept waiting, and, it was possible, had important business elsewhere:

"Lady of the Gry Tor Chapel (this repeated three times), listen to me, Peggy Brantwell, speaking with all her heart, as all must speak who enter here, please bring luck to my dear Luke, change his bad luck into good, and help us all you can. No one has seen me come in, no one shall see me come out. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven (which being exactly the number of letters in Felspar, was supposed to be the principal part of the ceremony). A, b, c, d (to the end of the alphabet). High, low, jack, game. Amen." Here our superstitious heroine blew out her candle, deposited it as a votive offering to the gods on the extempore altar, and groped her way cautiously and timidly through the fissure to the daylight, which shone at last ahead of her, and which she was so long in discovering that she began to fear she had taken a wrong turning, and was coming out at the other end of the world.

There was only twilight left, in fact, when she emerged from My Lady's Chapel, and it had not pierced very far into the shadows. It would be pitch dark night before she got home to her grandfather, she was afraid. Never mind, she had succeeded in her mission, and perhaps luck would turn now. At all events, she had done her best to make it turn, and no one could blame her afterward. And no one had seen her come out, and—Yah!

Peggy gave vent to a very substantial, unromantic and high-pitched yah, for exactly in front of her, and evidently highly amused by her exit from the cave—"grinning like a goose" she called it afterward, and in her hot indignation—was Luke Shands.

II.

"THE QUARRELLING OF LOVERS IS," ETC., ETC.

Luke Shands was a very fine specimen of Felspar manhood, and manhood ran there to six feet one, as a rule. Luke had run over. He was six feet two, with a chest like a bull's, and hands like sledge-hammers. Why a man with such latent force in him should have been for twenty-five years of his life such an unlucky fellow—a sober, hard-working young herdsman as he was, too—is not to be accounted for any more than why he should be so particularly good-tempered over it. He was always laughing, even at his own bad luck; he would have his jest, and be none the worse for it. That he had never been able to save money enough to marry Peggy Brantwell was the only thing he had not roared with laughter at; but there were odd little points of humor about that even, which made him smile, if with a little effort at times, like a twinge in the wrong place. And there he was laughing at Peggy's surprise and fright and discomfiture, as at a huge joke which really was worth a little extra hilarity that evening.

"Did you see me come out?" she asked quietly.

"Yes, of course I did."

"Then it's all spoiled, and I've had my trouble for nothing; and you ought to be ashamed of yourself for following me about in this way," cried Peggy. "I—I shall never forgive you, Luke," she added, whimpering, "never."

"I'm sorry I've put you out, Lass," said Luke, becoming suddenly grave, "and, of course, I didn't mean it—but what have you been a-saying of to the lady? Now come—a clean breast of it. Won't you?"

"How did you know I was up here?"

"Cock-eyed Dobson," he explained, as they proceeded down the winding path together. "and me he'd seen you go by, and I thought you had gone to Mother Twitters, who's down with dropsy, and whooping awful. And then I caught sight of Tom Crasp, sneaking and dodging about the bushes, and I followed him. And I scared him a bit," said Luke, with a sudden and prolonged roar of laughter, which caused Peggy in her turn, and made her slip a step or two, "and he went home in a hurry. Hadn't you better take hold of my hand?"

"I don't want your hand."

"You're not as sure-footed as usual, Lass. It was Tom," he continued, "who told me you'd gone up to you chapel."

"Tom's a sneak. I'll never give him a halfpenny again."

"He's not worth it."

"And I'll never forgive you," she added, "spying and prying after me like this, just as if—just as if you thought I was—I was not to be trusted by myself, for a moment. It's not fair. It's not like you."

"Now, it's not like me," asserted Luke, "and it's not like you, lass, to come a-clambering up here, and saying in the cave all sorts of gibberish that a pack of silly women have been a-talking to you about. Mother Twitters for one, I'll be bound. I know her."

"Never mind," said Peggy, startled by Luke's proximity to the truth, and taking refuge in a phrase that committed her to nothing, and at the same time asserted that spirit of independence which he had aroused.

"It's not as if you haven't been sensibly brought up," said Luke gravely, "or were one of those wenches in the village. It's just the sort o' thing I can't abide in man or woman, Peggy; hardly in a child. I can't abide it."

"Then don't abide it," said Peggy pertly; "that doesn't matter to anybody, I suppose."

"I should hope it would matter to you," he said tenderly, now, "and if it don't matter what I say or think, why, you're not my Peggy, but some other lass who's come out of My Lady's Chapel instead of yourself."

"You shouldn't make me angry."

"You shouldn't have gone up there all alone, Peg," he said reproachfully; "there's some rough fellows at the quarries about, and it's late and dark. And you might have fallen, and it's a steep way down, too. Catch hold of my hand—do."

"No, thank you, Mr. Shands."

Luke Shands looked gravely at her and then said:

"I shouldn't have thought it of Peggy Brantwell, if anybody had told me but herself, that she could go off in a tiff and temper because the man who likes her was afraid she might come to harm. I couldn't have believed it."

"It isn't as—as it—"

And then Peggy, meeting a sob on its way upward, made a gurgling noise, and swallowed it to disguise her emotion.

"And blest if I believe it even now," he added.

"I—I didn't want to be seen."

"Just as my luck has turned, too—just as a little streak of good luck seemed coming to you and me—that you should go on like this," he said.

"What!"

"And snap me just like that old grandfather of yours. I wish," he cried, a little crossly himself, "that I may never be lucky again, if this is to be the end of it."

"Oh! you wicked—"

And then Peggy burst into tears, and frightened Luke, who drew her more closely to his side, and soothed and caressed her, and was very nearly crying too. Thus the storm ended, and the sheet lightning flickered away, and before the lovers had reached the village they were laughing and talking again, and the best of friends.

"And what is the good luck, Luke?" she asked, as he did not speak of it again, indeed—such is the aggravating habit of the male sex in general—seemed to carefully avoid a subject upon which he knew she would be anxious. "Why don't you tell me?"

"Well—Uncle Ribton's dead."

"Oh!" exclaimed Peggy, "how dreadful! And you call that luck?"

"Well—Uncle Ribton never saw any of us for years—he wasn't unlike your grandfather, I've heard, not but what *he's* very pleasant at times if he likes. I've no cause to fret much because Uncle Ribton's dead. I don't even remember what he was like when he was living, you see."

"That makes a difference," said Peggy, thoughtfully.

"And as he has no relations so near as I am, the lawyer wrote to me to-night to say I've come in for his pigs."

"His what?"

"His pigs. He was a pig-dealer in Neltescombe. Haven't you heard me say so?"

"Did you get that letter by this afternoon's post?"

"Yes."

"Just at sundown? That was when I was praying for good luck to you, Luke."

"Were you, though? Well, that's a little strange, ain't it," said Luke, "and for me too. Bless you, Peggy, let me kiss you for that before we go any further."

That little ceremony having been gone through satisfactorily, Peggy said:

"It doesn't seem to matter any one seeing me go in or out of the 'Chapel'—I'm so glad."

"Perhaps something 'll happen to spoil it," said Luke, with another long laugh, "as it has not been done according to Mother Twitters—it was Mother Twitters that put all that nonsense into your head, wasn't it now?"

"Well, Mrs. Twitters did mention it," Peggy confessed.

"Your grandfather said long ago she was a witch, and ought to be drowned."

"Poor thing! And how many pigs are there, Luke?" asked Peggy, returning to the main subject; for upon those pigs hung the destiny of this young couple.

"Five; and one of 'em's blind," replied Luke.

"Oh, good gracious, all this fuss about five pigs!"

"It's a stroke of luck," said Luke Shands again.

III.

A SUNDAY BARGAIN.

Luke lived all alone in a tumble-down one-roomed shanty, close to the hills of Felspar. He was worse housed than even Felspar folk were housed as a rule. The Irish mud huts were roomy and capacious in comparison with many of the domiciles where the villagers of this remote district drew the breath of life.

It was a cottage perched by itself ten feet below the level of the narrow path in front of it, so that a spirited person passing by could have easily kicked the roof off, and it possessed a back garden of some twenty feet in length, ending abruptly with the white, blank hill side, a colossal wall of four hundred feet which towered above it and shut out air and light. In the distance, from the valley, and the lower ground, Luke Shands' cottage seemed growing out of the jagged limestone like a wen, but there was room in the garden behind for the pigs, if those animals would not object to a little overcrowding.

And Luke had brought his pigs home, and Matthew Brantwell, a shrewd business man in his old age, toddled over to see them and to see too what could be done. Whether Luke could not be "done" might be added, even without reflecting too severely on the character of Matthew, who was certainly an unreasonable and covetous old gentleman. Everybody knew that—even Luke, who thought the best of most people, Mrs. Twitters excepted, had his suspicions of it, though he made a great deal of allowance for the eccentricities of Peggy's grandfather.

For Peggy's sake, and at Peggy's wish even, Luke was always extra civil to Matthew Brantwell, a civility which was not often reciprocated, Matthew's temper being a bad one. For Peggy's sake even he was living in this cottage, as a tenant of Mr. Brantwell's, at four pounds per annum, a sum of money for which Luke might have secured quite a comfortable room at cock-eyed Dobson's, and without the bother of housekeeping. But Matthew had persuaded Luke two years ago to take the establishment after his mother's decease, and Luke had thought it as well to please the old gentleman, not caring much where he lived until he settled down for good with Peggy. It was only to sleep in; all day he was in the valley, or on the hills with the sheep, and in the early evening he was courting Peggy—Sunday excepted, when he and she walked seven miles to church in the afternoon, with three or four other decorous inhabitants of Felspar, the rest of them stopping at home from year's end to year's end.

It was on Sunday morning that Matthew called on Luke, who was shaving by a bit of glass hung up in the front window, which Matthew banged at with his walking stick and cracked.

"I've come to see the pigs," said Matthew, who was an authority on pigs. "Peggy tells me you've had quite a bit of a legacy."

"Yes, Master Matthew, I call it luck myself."

"Your Uncle Ribton and I have done many a stroke of business together, Luke," said the old man; "and if he had lived twenty-four hours longer I should have had those pigs, and there'd been a matter of—well, ten pounds, very likely, in his stocking instead."

"Oh!" said Luke, as he put away his shaving tackle, "I've heard they're worth a lot more than ten pounds. But I ain't a judge of pigs."

"They're very ugly."

"They're uncommonly ugly," asserted Luke, "but they're very healthy."

"They'll eat you out of house and home."

"Yes—they do eat," said Luke with a sigh, "but there's a chance of getting their own living down the valley. I let them out every day."

"You'll lose 'em."

"Oh, they know their way back to supper," said Luke, with one of his laughs, "trust them. But they're so aggravating, I wish they wouldn't come back sometimes."

"Why don't you sell 'em, then?" You're not able to keep 'em in ease and comfort as a pig should be kept any more than you have ever been able to keep yourself—though I say it as shouldn't p'raps—in ease and comfort. But I'm a plain-speaking man."

"You are, sir."

"Why don't you sell the pigs, then?"

"Bless your heart, I'm going," said Luke.

"Eh—what? What's that, you say?"

"I'm going to sell them, and back the money before winter comes on. At least, I'm going to sell four of 'em."

"Well, well then, what do you want for the four?" asked Matthew. "That's what I've come all this beastly way for—and my legs so bad too—to ask if I should take 'em off your hands. The five, I mean—I want the lot. What's the use of keeping one pig?"

"I shall stick to the blind one," said Luke, firmly.

"Why?"

"Well, my old mother was blind the last two years of her life, and the pig reminds me of her very much."

Matthew Brantwell sneered at this touch of sentiment, but he said no more about the blind pig just then.

"Let's look at them," he said, shortly.

They passed into the little space behind the house, where were the five animals, all with their noses turned toward the gate which shut them out of the valley. Luke was right, they were uncommonly ugly. A mishapen, rheumatic kind of pig, four of them red-eyed as though they had been crying, and the fifth with his eyes hunged up forever.

The sight of them excited the cupidity of Matthew Brantwell.

"I'll give you twenty pounds for the lot. Say it's a bargain, and don't be a fool, Luke," he said.

"I can't drive a bargain on a Sunday, Master Brantwell," answered Luke; "not that I'm a religious man, hard and fast as I ought to be—but I promised Peggy I never would again."

"Peggy's always got some nonsense in her head and a interfering about something."

"Peggy's always right, only she's a bit superstitious. Nothing ever came right that was done on a Sunday, I've heard her say over and over again, bless her."

"Never mind about Peggy. We're talking about pigs, ain't we?"

"I'd rather not talk about them any more till Chipstoke comes to see them."

"Chipstoke—what, from Roundell Pikes?" exclaimed Matthew.

"That's the man."

"What do you want to see him for?"

"I don't know that I want to see him," replied Luke. "He sent me word last night he wanted to see me. That's all. Except that he said, "Don't part with the pigs till I've made you a good bit."

"Selfish beast," said Matthew, "that's like him. I know him of old and then he'll offer you less than I have. See if he doesn't. He'll want them for a mere song, and then you'll be sorry you didn't let me have them."

"I don't say I won't sell them to you. You're Peggy's grandfather."

"To be sure I am—Peggy's grandfather, exactly so."

"And you shall have them for what he offers me there."

"Oh!"

Matthew Brantwell seemed checkmated for a moment. What might not Chipstoke offer if "dead-set" on these pigs, and knowing what pigs they were? And what might not Chipstoke make of them being an expert in pigs—a specialist—a pig collector?

"Luke, if you don't let me have these pigs now, I'll forbid you ever coming to my house again," he spluttered forth. "I'll move out of Felspar, and take Peggy with me. I'll go and live in London; I'd be shut of you altogether."

"Good Lor'!" exclaimed Luke in horror.

"I hate Chipstoke—and he mustn't stand afore me."

"Of course not," said Luke. "I never said he should."

"Look here, Luke Shands. I tell you what I'll do. I'll give you this cottage—this freehold property—for them. There you're rent free for life—needn't worry about rent any more—can save up and build another little room here presently, so that when you marry Peggy—"

"When—I marry Peggy!" cried Luke, "yes, yes, go on."

"Well, it will come to that some day, I dare say," said the old man. "At all events, when you marry somebody, you can take her to a good roomy place as this would be, and say here's our home—rent-free—now and forever. And you may keep the blind pig—there."

"Done!" cried Luke.

"Done!" echoed Mr. Brantwell.

The two men shook hands and clenched the contract.

"We'd better not say anything about this to Peggy till it's all settled," said Luke after a little reflection; "as it is a Sunday bargain, after all."

"Certainly not. Not a word to Peggy."

"Shall I give you a bit of writing about it?"

"Yes; and date it Saturday, Luke. It looks so much better, too."

It is astonishing how quickly that bargain was concluded, and how the freehold of Luke's cottage was made over to Luke by a lawyer who came from Neltescombe on purpose, and how Luke became his own landlord, and felt very proud of the new position he had secured. But when he met Peggy the day after the four pigs had gone home, leaving their blind companion in Mr. Shands' possession, a little light—even a strong, lurid light—was thrown upon the whole transaction.

"Luke, do you know what you have done?" she cried with tears in her pretty blue eyes, "and done without telling me anything about it, of course?"

"Done? Yes; got a house of my own over my head, at least."

"You great, big silly, what's the good of such a place as this? You might have bought it for less than fifty pounds at any time, and you've let him have four pigs."

"Well?"

"And they're exhibition pigs—prize things, and worth forty pounds apiece. And grandfather has sold them already, and is laughing at you."

"Your grandfather is a sharp old man, and I'm a dull young ass," said Luke, looking very grave.

"And that was all he had to say at Matthew Brantwell's" besting" him.

"I knew something would happen to you for watching me at 'My Lady's Chapel,'" said Peggy. "I knew what it would come to. I wonder where it will end now."

"I wonder what that blind one's worth," said Luke.

IV.

THE LUCK TURNS IN GOOD EARNEST.

The blind pig was not worth much—indeed, was not of the same "strain," and was not even fit for pork when the winter set in in real earnest, and the animal caught cold, and went blundering about the back yard coughing like an old man, or leaning against the rock at the end of the garden, too weak to get round the premises without taking a good rest by the way. The pig suffered very much from cold, and Luke, being a good-tempered and feeling fellow, took the animal indoors for one night on the Hibernian system, when it had a shivering fit that nearly brought the house down, and screamed so loudly to get out again that Felspar thought there was murder doing somewhere in the valley, and ran for the one policeman of the place—who'd gone ten miles over the hills to a supper-party, and could not be brought back to duty under six good hours.

"That pig's going to die, Peggy," said Luke, when he saw her again. "Did you ask your grandfather whether he'd make a bid for him?"

"Yes, and he said he wouldn't have it at any price."

"He's very ill," he said. "Do you know what I'm going to do?"

"No," said Peggy, a little alarmed, for Luke was not particularly wise when the impulse seized him.

"I've got some dynamite charges from the quarry, and I'm going to blow him a sty out of the rock—a good big hole, where he can get in out of the snow and the wind, poor beggar."

"Oh, you must not do that."

"Why not? It's my rock. It's part of the freehold," he said, with a laugh not quite so hearty as usual.

"Yes, it's your rock, but you'll blow the freehold down, Luke."

"Ah! I had forgotten that."

"The house was condemned months and months ago, only grandfather kept it to himself. And the surveyor says it'll have to be rebuilt, or he won't answer for the consequences. That's why grandfather wanted to sell it in a hurry."

"Yes, I know. I've had notice instead of your grandfather," said Luke ruefully. "Your statement's quite correct, lass."

"And what's to be done?"

"I don't quite see. I shall have to chuck up the freehold, I expect."

But the next day the blind pig was so very ill, and the mist came swooping in such bitter gusts down the valley, that Luke Shands resolved to carry out his original intention.

"It will bring the house down too, I dare say—and I don't care if it does," he added, "the darned old lucifer-box that it is. Yes, I'll chance it."

So Luke Shands, in a desperate kind of mood, full of anger against his house, and of sympathy for his pig, laid his plans and his dynamite, and went to work in a business kind of way, having done good service in the quarries at times, off and on, for a change. Here he lighted his fuse, and retired a little way down the valley, leading his quadruped at the end of a string, and there waited the result with grave composure. But Luke's luck kept pace with him. The report came, and the crash of cliff wall followed, and the pig died of fright there and then—turned over on his side and gave up the ghost forthwith.

"That's a settler," said Luke; then he marched back, and found his house standing, with only the roof blown a trifle askew, and looking as if it had got a cocked hat on. And the hole he had blown into the cliff was black and cavernous, and seemingly without end—and what was the most remarkable part of the whole occurrence, it had all gone inward, as though the charge had shattered a thin crust of limestone, and driven a way into the heart of the hills.

"Bless and save us, this is a queer start," said Luke Shands.

It was a queerer start than Luke imagined, than Felspar had imagined, than scientific folk had imagined, until they came down presently in twos and threes, and accounted for it clearly and graphically, and said it was just what might have been expected. Luke had not expected anything, and it was not till he had lighted a candle and passed into the hole that he discovered he had blown a passage into a cavern, long and tortuous and seemingly winding its way now up and now down to an extent that, on the spur of the moment, he thought he would pursue no further.

"Why, here's a lady's chapel all to myself in my back garden," he said with one of his hearty roars, and then he was startled by the rays of his candle light falling on what looked like a lace curtain with tints and traceries from roof to floor.

"That's very queer," said Luke.

But the first scientist who came to see this—and he was hardly on the spot, ain't had been foraging about Felspar with a hammer for the last week—said:

"That's one of the grandest stalactites and stalagmites I have ever seen in my life."

And the cavern was full of stalactites and stalagmites of all shapes, sizes and colors, when one came to examine it carefully.

"You'll exhibit, then," said one of the wise men. "Have the gas laid on, and charge so much a head."

"I can't afford it," said Luke.

"Oh, but you'll have plenty of people here presently. I shall write an account in the 'Universal Geological Chronicle.' Is this your own property?"

"Yes, sir."

"You're a lucky fellow. Do you know the man who owns the cavern in the Crookaway Hills?"

"I've heard of him."

"He's worth twenty thousand pounds."

Luke sat down on his garden palings and felt as if he should faint away on the spot.

"You don't say so!" he said.

"But I do."

"You'll excuse me, sir, but I must run and tell Peggy."

And away Luke started, down the valley at a pace that might be set down as headlong, and Professor Pregnine seized the opportunity to chop off one small stalagmite that he was sure would not be missed, and which would add considerably to the character and tone of his own private collection.

There is not much more to be told. Shands's cavern was soon famous in the Felspar district, had its place in guide-books, became a feature of interest in the locality, and was lighted up by gas presently, having a little gas-meter all to itself, on the site where the blind pig died. And all at Luke Shands's expense, when Luke began to get a rich man, and that with some degree of rapidity. The last Easter Monday before Matthew Brantwell died, three thousand excursionists came to Felspar valley from the new station a mile and a half away, and most of them paid a shilling apiece admittance without a murmur. After that Matthew Brantwell died of jaundice, and was buried with his forefathers.

Luke and his wife—need I say, Luke's wife was Peggy Brantwell, whose grandfather had cut her off with a shilling!—and the children are living in a brand new stone house at the head of the valley where the Felspar hotel is now.

It was in this strange fashion—and true fashion—that Luke Shands's luck turned, and in her heart of hearts Peggy still puts it down to her little prayers in My Lady's Chapel that autumn evening when the spell seemed broken by her lover's untimely interference. But Luke will not have this; and Mrs. Twitters—who is still living, we rejoice to say—thinks that a man who could have had such luck as he had, and not be grateful to it, and own how it came round to him, is little better than a born heathen, and doesn't deserve to prosper.—[F. W. Robinson in Belgravia.

FULL OF WRATH AT "TEA KETTLES."

AN OLD SAILOR'S UNHAPPY EXPERIENCE ON A STEAMSHIP.

"Say, young feller, I shat no kicker," said an old sailor to a TRIBUNE reporter as they met on West st., "but I'm blowed if you ever catch me aboard of one of these here steamships again. What's the matter? Well, there's matter enough. I've been to sea man and boy for the last twenty-five years, and I've sailed in every kind of craft that floats in the water, from a sugar dragher to a China tea clipper, and now I've tried these bloomin' tea kettles. I want no hog, and I know when I've got enough. How did I come to go in one of 'em? I'll tell you how, and I'll tell you how I fared.

"I'm getting old now, and tired knocking round the world in wind jammers. So I thought I'd take in one of these steamers as a kind o' rest. I made one v'yage, and I've got enough of that kind of rest to last me the balance of my life, and don't you forget it. I'll just give you an idea of what you have to do. In the first place, they don't stand watch and watch at all. It's all day on and all night off—at least that's what they tell you—but mostly it's all day and all night on. You turn to at 4 o'clock in the morning and wash down the decks. We carried about 400 steerage passengers, and I tell you for the first two or three days out it was sickening the way them poor devils carried on. Well, we'd get washed down about 5 o'clock, and then we'd knock off for coffee. We'd have a pannikin of coffee and two or three ship biscuits. At half past 5 we are turned to again and three groups to the work holystone the decks. What is holystonin'? A holystone is a heavy stone with a handle to it, that you drag up and down the deck to make it white. There are two kinds. One with a regular wood handle, or long ropes on both sides that two men haul backward and forwards. That kind is called a bible, because you can stand up to it. The other kind is a heavy stone with a bucket on it that you kneel down and work by yourself. They call that a prayer-book.

"After we get through holystonin' we are knocked off for breakfast. There's no use talkin'; they do feed you well aboard them hookers. For breakfast we had fresh meat and salt meat. You could take your choice. Then there was all the murphys that you could eat. Why murphys are white potatoes. We had soft tommy and hard tack, and butter and coffee. Oh, there was no discount on the grub. But they have the worst lot of sailors I ever fell against. Dutchmen, Italians, dagoes, and everything else but Americans. We carried twelve men and two boys before the mast, and there was only one American besides me, and he was a nigger. They were the dirtiest lot I ever fell in with. After breakfast we were turned to and set to work at scrubbing paintwork and polishing brass work. Of all the unholy jobs I ever struck that's the worst. Why, you get the soapy water in your eyes, and your hands get so soft and white as a washerwoman's. Why, just look at my hands," and the old salt stuck out a fist about the color of a well-cured ham, and as hard as a piece of sole leather.

After receiving the condolence of the reporter, he continued: "Well, that sort of business kept up till half past 5 in the afternoon, except when we were eating dinner. At half past 5 we was knocked off for supper, and after that we had to lay aft and take in the awnings on the quarterdeck. You'd think that was enough work for one day, wouldn't you? But it ain't, for every man Jack has to stand his hour's lookout at night. We was bound for Aspinwall, and of all the hot places I ever was in, the foksell of that hooker was the hottest. It was on the saloon deck, chocks-blocks forward, and as dark as Egypt. There was steampipes running through it to heat it in cold weather, I guess. Half the time the bloomin' things was out of fix and we'd have a full head of steam on when the thermometer was 120 degrees on deck. You can guess what it felt like. We had to sleep in the bloomin' place, because the spar deck was full of passengers. Then in most of the ports where we'd stop the men would have to stow cargo. Did you ever handle green hides when the thermometer was way above a hundred? No. Well, you'd never want to do it but once. No, sir, as I said before, I ain't no hog, and wind jammin' is plenty good enough for me."

And the old sailor walked slowly down to a shipping office, breathing out nautical curses against steamships in general, and the one on which he sailed in particular.

CHANGING OF THE DIALS.

Now that the question of standard time seems definitely settled, despite the defection of Louisville, the attention of railroad men and scientists, the two classes most concerned in the above reform, is turned toward the question of dial reform. Instead of our two divisions of twelve hours apiece, which now make up the day and night of twenty-four hours, the advisability of numbering the hours consecutively from one to twenty-four is being discussed. Already in many jewellers' windows may be seen watch faces provided with a double ring of figures, the inner one of which shows the figures 13 to 24. Though to some extent this meets the primary objection to the change of hours, namely, that the twelve-hour watch movements would be rendered useless, it does not altogether work simply and satisfactorily. Another system has been invented by Dr. Whitney, a Philadelphia enthusiast. This needs a complete distribution of the figures on the dial, and in this particular only is bettered by the form above described, which can be adapted to any existing watch-face. According to the new method the figures from 1 to 24 are arranged as it were upon an endless band which crosses on itself so that the figures 6 and 18 are in contact. Thus it will be seen that there is an outer rim with the figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, and an inner rim with the figures 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12. The 13 of the inner rim is under the one of the outer rim, and the other numbers follow in the order given. Starting our twenty-four hours at midnight, one can use up half the outer rim until the morning hour of the work-a-day world is reached. At 6 o'clock one can shift to the inner rim and use this throughout the day until the approach of dusk warns us that we have changed again on the outer rim, which is accordingly used until midnight. It may be remarked that the day would have to begin at midnight instead of in astronomical fashion at midday. Were this not the case it would be one day of the month in the morning and the next day in the afternoon.

This plan of arranging the dial has secured the warm commendation of Sanford Fleming, who was one of the chief movers in the introduction of the standard time system. There seems but little doubt that at the international convention shortly to be held the subject will receive full discussion, and it is hoped that the railroad companies will make the first move by adapting it on their time tables, thus doing away with the necessity of the awkward and puzzling "a. m." and "p. m." It has been suggested by the inventor of the above-described dial that to satisfy the conservative-minded ones who would still cling to the system of their forefathers and would affect to be puzzled by the new notation, the following plan should be adopted. A foot note might be printed at the bottom of each page of the time-tables: Note. For p. m. hours, read 12 less. Thus a time table would read: "Trains arrive: From Fottsburg, 6:10, 11:20, 19:10 and 22:20 daily. From Washington and Baltimore, 6:10, 6:10, 13:20, 15:10, 15:50, 17:30, 21:20, 22:20, and 22:35.

Note. For p. m. hours, read 12 less.

"THE ROWDY WEST."

From The Current, Chicago.

From the Mississippi's rolling coast,
Where a lot first a Yankee a keep
Their watch over valorous of sin,
While the nine's favorite story sleep,
There come a hurtling, sonorous tear,
"The West, the West, the Row