

ways so very loving and innocent as we are apt to fancy them ; and whether the peasantry in those times were really so Arcadian as they have been fondly represented. I begin to fear

—“Those days were never ; airy dreams
Sat for the picture, and the poet's hand,
Imparting substance to an empty shade,
Imposed a gay delirium for a truth.
Grant it ; I still must envy them an age
That favored such a dream.”



THE CULPRIT.

From fire, from water, from all things amiss,
Deliver the house of an honest justice.

THE WIDOW.

THE serenity of the Hall has been suddenly interrupted by a very important occurrence. In the course of this morning a posse of villagers was seen trooping up the avenue, with boys shouting in advance. As it drew near, we perceived Ready-Money Jack Tibbets

striding along, wielding his cudgel in one hand, and with the other grasping the collar of a tall fellow, whom, on still nearer approach, we recognized for the redoubtable gypsy hero, Starlight Tom. He was now, however, completely cowed and crest-fallen, and his courage seemed to have quailed in the iron gripe of the lion-hearted Jack.

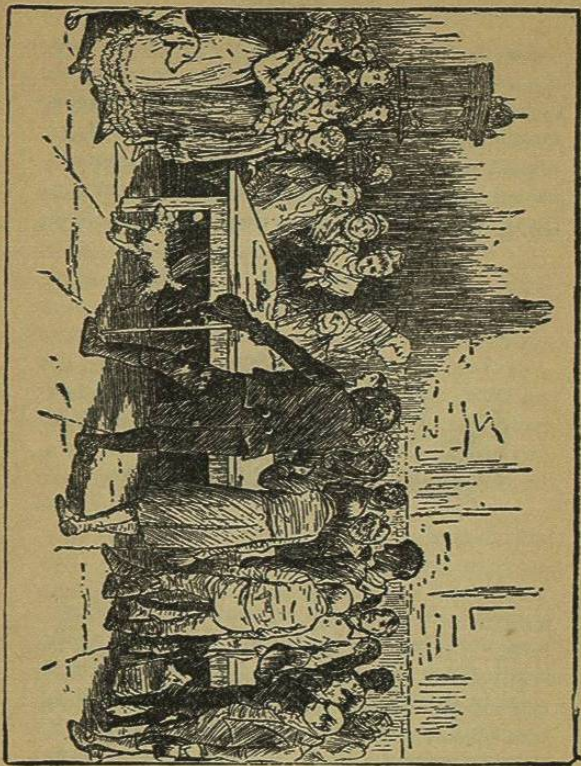
The whole gang of gypsy women and children came draggling in the rear ; some in tears, others making a violent clamor about the ears of old Ready-Money, who, however, trudged on in silence with his prey, heeding their abuse as little as a hawk that has pounced upon a barn-door hero regards the outeries and cacklings of his whole feathered seraglio.

He had passed through the village on his way to the Hall, and of course had made a great sensation in that most excitable place, where every event is a matter of gaze and gossip. The report flew like wildfire that Starlight Tom was in custody. The ale-drinkers forthwith abandoned the tap-room ; Slingsby's school broke loose, and master and boys swelled the tide that came rolling at the heels of old Ready-Money and his captive.

The uproar increased as they approached the Hall ; it aroused the whole garrison of dogs, and the crew of hangers-on. The great mastiff barked from the dog-house ; the stag-hound, and the greyhound, and the spaniel, issued barking from the Hall door, and my Lady Lillycraft's little dogs ramped and



barked from the parlor window. I remarked, however, that the gypsy dogs made no reply to all these menaces and insults, but crept close to the gang, looking round with a guilty, poaching air, and now and then glancing up a dubious eye to their owners ; which shows that the moral dignity, even of dogs, may be ruined by bad company !



When the throng reached the front of the house, they were brought to a halt by a kind of advanced guard, composed of old Christy, the gamekeeper, and two or three servants of the house, who had been brought out by the noise. The common herd of the village fell back with respect; the boys were driven back by Christy and his compeers; while Ready-Money Jack maintained his ground and his hold of the prisoner, and was surrounded by the tailor, the schoolmaster, and several other dignitaries of the village, and by the clamorous brood of gypsies, who were neither to be silenced nor intimidated.

By this time the whole household were brought to the doors and windows, and the squire to the portal. An audience was demanded by Ready-Money Jack, who had detected the prisoner in the very act of sheep-stealing on his domains, and had borne him off to be examined before the squire, who is in the commission of the peace.

A kind of tribunal was immediately held in the servants' hall, a large chamber with a stone floor and a long table in the centre, at one end of which, just under an enormous clock, was placed the squire's chair of justice,

while Master Simon took his place at the table as clerk of the court. An attempt had been made by old Christy to keep out the gypsy gang, but in vain; and they, with the village worthies, and the household, half filled the hall. The old housekeeper and the butler were in a panic at this dangerous irruption. They hurried away all the valuable things and portable articles that were at hand, and even kept a dragon watch on the gypsies, lest they should carry off the house clock or the deal table.

Old Christy, and his faithful coadjutor, the gamekeeper, acted as constables to guard the prisoner, triumphing in having at last got this terrible offender in their clutches. Indeed I am inclined to think the old man bore some peevish recollection of having been handled rather roughly by the gypsy in the chance-medley affair of May-day.

Silence was now commanded by Master Simon; but it was difficult to be enforced in such a motley assemblage. There was a continued snarling and yelping of dogs, and, as fast as it was quelled in one corner, it broke out in another. The poor gypsy curs, who, like errant thieves, could not hold up their

heads in an honest house, were worried and insulted by the gentlemen dogs of the establishment, without offering to make resistance; the very curs of my Lady Lillycraft bullied them with impunity.

The examination was conducted with great mildness and indulgence by the squire, partly from the kindness of his nature, and partly, I suspect, because his heart yearned towards the culprit, who had found great favor in his eyes, as I have already observed, from the skill he had at various times displayed in archery, morris-dancing, and other obsolete accomplishments. Proofs, however, were too strong. Ready-Money Jack told his story in a straightforward independent way, nothing daunted by the presence in which he found himself. He had suffered from various depredations on his sheep-fold and poultry-yard, and had at length kept watch, and caught the delinquent in the very act of making off with a sheep on his shoulders.

Tibbets was repeatedly interrupted, in the course of his testimony, by the culprit's mother, a furious old beldame, with an insufferable tongue, and who, in fact, was several times kept, with some difficulty, from flying at him tooth and nail. The wife, too, of the

prisoner, whom I am told he does not beat above half a dozen times a week, completely interested Lady Lillycraft in her husband's behalf, by her tears and supplications ; and several other of the gypsy women were awakening strong sympathy among the young girls and maid-servants in the background. The pretty black-eyed gypsy girl, whom I have mentioned on a former occasion as the sibyl that read the fortunes of the general, endeavored to wheedle that doughty warrior into their interests, and even made some approaches to her old acquaintance, Master Simon ; but was repelled by the latter, with all the dignity of office, having assumed a look of gravity and importance suitable to the occasion.

I was a little surprised, at first, to find honest Slingsby, the schoolmaster, rather opposed to his old crony Tibbets, and coming forwards as a kind of advocate for the accused. It seems that he had taken compassion on the forlorn fortunes of Starlight Tom, and had been trying his eloquence in his favor the whole way from the village, but without effect. During the examination of Ready-Money Jack, Slingsby had stood like "dejected Pity at his side," seeking every now

and then, by a soft word, to soothe any exacerbation of his ire, or to qualify any harsh expression. He now ventured to make a few observations to the squire in palliation of the delinquent's offence ; but poor Slingsby spoke more from the heart than the head, and was evidently actuated merely by a general sympathy for every poor devil in trouble, and a liberal toleration for all kinds of vagabond existence.

The ladies, too, large and small, with the kind-heartedness of their sex, were zealous on the side of mercy, and interceded strenuously with the squire ; insomuch that the prisoner, finding himself unexpectedly surrounded by active friends, once more reared his crest, and seemed disposed for a time to put on the air of injured innocence. The squire, however, with all his benevolence of heart, and his lurking weakness towards the prisoner, was too conscientious to swerve from the strict path of justice. There was abundant concurrent testimony that made the proof of guilt incontrovertible, and Starlight Tom's mittimus was made out accordingly.

The sympathy of the ladies was now greater than ever ; they even made some attempts to

mollify the ire of Ready-Money Jack ; but that sturdy potentate had been too much incensed by the repeated incursions that had been made into his territories by the predatory band of Starlight Tom, and he was resolved, he said, to drive the "varmint reptiles" out of the neighborhood. To avoid all further importunities, as soon as the mittimus was made out, he girded up his loins, and strode back to his seat of empire, accompanied by his interceding friend, Slingsby, and followed by a detachment of the gypsy gang, who hung on his rear, assailing him with mingled prayers and execrations.

The question now was, how to dispose of the prisoner ; a matter of great moment in this peaceful establishment, where so formidable a character as Starlight Tom was like a hawk entrapped in a dovecot. As the hubbub and examination had occupied a considerable time, it was too late in the day to send him to the county prison, and that of the village was sadly out of repair from long want of occupation. Old Christy, who took great interest in the affair, proposed that the culprit should be committed for the night to an upper loft of a kind of tower in one of the out-houses, where he and the gamekeeper

would mount guard. After much deliberation this measure was adopted ; the premises in question were examined and made secure, and Christy and his trusty ally, the one armed with a fowling-piece, the other with an ancient



blunderbuss, turned out as sentries to keep watch over this donjon-keep.

Such is the momentous affair that has just taken place, and it is an event of too great moment in this quiet little world, not to turn

it completely topsy turvy. Labor is at a stand. The house has been a scene of confusion the whole evening. It has been beleaguered by gypsy women, with their children on their backs, wailing and lamenting; while the old virago of a mother has cruised up and down the lawn in front, shaking her head and muttering to herself, or now and then breaking out into a paroxysm of rage, brandishing her fist at the Hall, and denouncing ill-luck upon Ready-Money Jack, and even upon the squire himself.

Lady Lillycraft has given repeated audiences to the culprit's weeping wife, at the Hall door; and the servant-maids have stolen out to confer with the gypsy women under the trees. As to the little ladies of the family, they are all outrageous at Ready-Money Jack, whom they look upon in the light of a tyrannical giant of fairy tale. Phœbe Wilkins, contrary to her usual nature, is the only one that is pitiless in the affair. She thinks Mr. Tibbets quite in the right; and thinks the gypsies deserve to be punished severely for meddling with the sheep of the Tibbetses.

In the meantime the females of the family have evinced all the provident kindness of the

sex, ever ready to soothe and succor the distressed, right or wrong. Lady Lillycraft has had a mattress taken to the out-house, and comforts and delicacies of all kinds have been taken to the prisoner; even the little girls have sent their cakes and sweetmeats; so that, I'll warrant, the vagabond has never fared so well in his life before. Old Christy, it is true, looks upon everything with a wary eye; struts about with his blunderbuss with the air of a veteran campaigner, and will hardly allow himself to be spoken to. The gypsy women dare not come within gunshot, and every tatterdemallion of a boy has been frightened from the park. The old fellow is determined to lodge Starlight Tom in prison with his own hands; and hopes, he says, to see one of the poaching crew made an example of.

I doubt, after all, whether the worthy squire is not the greatest sufferer in the whole affair. His honorable sense of duty obliges him to be rigid, but the overflowing kindness of his nature makes this a grievous trouble to him.

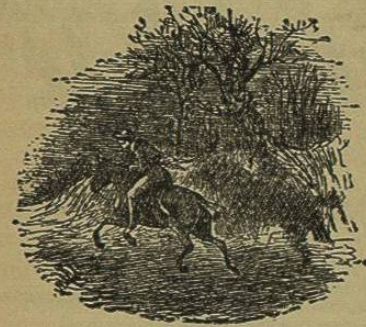
He is not accustomed to have such demands upon his justice in his truly patriarchal domain; and it wounds his benevolent spirit,

that, while prosperity and happiness are flowing in thus bounteously upon him, he should have to inflict misery upon a fellow-being.

He has been troubled and cast down the whole evening ; took leave of the family, on going to bed, with a sigh, instead of his usual hearty and affectionate tone, and will, in all probability, have a far more sleepless night than his prisoner. Indeed this unlucky affair has cast a damp upon the whole household, as there appears to be an universal opinion that the unlucky culprit will come to the gallows.

Morning.—The clouds of last evening are all blown over. A load has been taken from the squire's heart, and every face is once more in smiles. The gamekeeper made his appearance at an early hour, completely shamefaced and crestfallen. Starlight Tom had made his escape in the night ; how he had got out of the loft no one could tell ; the devil, they think, must have assisted him. Old Christy was so mortified that he would not show his face, but had shut himself up in his stronghold at the dog-kennel, and would not be spoken with. What has particularly relieved the squire is, that there is very little likelihood

of the culprit's being retaken, having gone off on one of the old gentleman's best hunters.





LOVERS' TROUBLES.

The poor soul sat singing by a sycamore tree,
Sing all a green willow ;
Her hand on her bosom, her head on her knee,
Sing willow, willow, willow ;
Sing all a green willow must be my garland.

OLD SONG.

THE fair Julia having nearly recovered from the effects of her hawking disaster, it begins to be thought high time to appoint a day for the wedding. As every domestic event in a venerable and aristocratic family connection

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like this is a matter of moment, the fixing upon this important day has, of course, given rise to much conference and debate.

Some slight difficulties and demurs have lately sprung up, originating in the peculiar humors that are prevalent at the Hall. Thus, I have overheard a very solemn consultation between Lady Lillycraft, the parson, and Master Simon, as to whether the marriage ought not to be postponed until the coming month.

With all the charms of the flowery month of May, there is, I find, an ancient prejudice against it as a marrying month. An old proverb says, "To wed in May, is to wed poverty." Now, as Lady Lillycraft is very much given to believe in lucky and unlucky times and seasons, and indeed is very superstitious on all points relating to the tender passion, this old proverb seems to have taken great hold upon her mind. She recollects two or three instances in her own knowledge of matches that took place in this month, and proved very unfortunate. Indeed, an own cousin of hers, who married on a May-day, lost her husband by a fall from his horse, after they had lived happily together for twenty years.

The parson appeared to give great weight to her ladyship's objections, and acknowledged the existence of a prejudice of the kind, not merely confined to modern times, but prevalent likewise among the ancients. In confirmation of this, he quoted a passage from Ovid, which had a great effect on Lady Lillycraft, being given in a language which she did not understand. Even Master Simon was staggered by it; for he listened with a puzzled air, and then, shaking his head, sagaciously observed that Ovid was certainly a very wise man.

From this sage conference I likewise gathered several other important pieces of information relative to weddings; such as that if two were celebrated in the same church on the same day, the first would be happy, the second unfortunate. If, on going to church, the bridal party should meet the funeral of a female, it was an omen that the bride would die first; if of a male, the bridegroom. If the newly-married couple were to dance together on their wedding-day, the wife would thenceforth rule the roast; with many other curious and unquestionable facts of the same nature, all which made me ponder more than ever upon the perils which surround

this happy state, and the thoughtless ignorance of mortals as to the awful risks they run in entering upon it. I abstain however, from enlarging upon this topic, having no inclination to promote the increase of bachelors.

Notwithstanding the due weight which the squire gives to traditional saws and ancient opinions, yet I am happy to find that he makes a firm stand for the credit of this loving month, and brings to his aid a whole legion of poetical authorities; all which, I presume, have been conclusive with the young couple, as I understand they are perfectly willing to marry in May, and abide the consequences. In a few days, therefore, the wedding is to take place, and the Hall is in a buzz of anticipation. The housekeeper is bustling about from morning till night, with a look full of business and importance, having a thousand arrangements to make, the squire intending to keep open house on the occasion; and as to the housemaids, you cannot look one of them in the face, but the rogue begins to color up and simper.

While, however, this leading love affair is going on with a tranquillity quite inconsistent with the rules of romance, I cannot say that

the underplots are equally propitious. The "opening bud of love" between the general and Lady Lillycraft seems to have experienced blight in the course of this genial season. I do not think the general has ever been able to retrieve the ground he lost when he fell asleep during the captain's story. Indeed, Master Simon thinks his case is completely desperate, her ladyship having determined that he is quite destitute of sentiment.

The season has been equally unpropitious to the love-lorn Phœbe Wilkins. I fear the reader will be impatient at having this humble amour so often alluded to; but I confess I am apt to take a great interest in the love troubles of simple girls of this class. Few people have an idea of the world of care and perplexity that these poor damsels have in managing the affairs of the heart.

We talk and write about the tender passion; we give it all the colorings of sentiment and romance, and lay the scene of its influence in high life; but, after all, I doubt whether its sway is not more absolute among females of a humbler sphere. How often, could we but look into the heart, should we find the sentiment throbbing in all its violence in the bosom of the poor lady's maid, rather

than in that of the brilliant beauty she is decking out for conquest; whose brain is probably bewildered with beaux, ball-rooms, and wax-light chandeliers.

With these humble beings love is an honest, engrossing concern. They have no ideas of settlements, establishments, equipages, and pin-money. The heart—the heart—is all-in-



all with them, poor things! There is seldom one of them but has her love cares, and love secrets; her doubts, and hopes, and fears, equal to those of any heroine of romance, and ten times as sincere. And then, too, there is her secret hoard of love documents;

—the broken sixpence, the gilded brooch, the lock of hair, the unintelligible love scrawl, all treasured up in her box of Sunday finery, for private contemplation.

How many crosses and trials is she exposed to from some lynx-eyed dame, or staid old vestal of a mistress, who keeps a dragon watch over her virtue, and scouts the lover from the door! But then how sweet are the little love scenes, snatched at distant intervals of holiday, fondly dwelt on through many a long day of household labor and confinement! If in the country, it is the dance at the fair or wake, the interview in the churchyard after service, or the evening stroll in the green lane. If in town, it is perhaps merely a stolen moment of delicious talk between the bars of the area, fearful every instant of being seen; and then, how lightly will the simple creature carol all day afterwards at her labor.

Poor baggage! after all her crosses and difficulties, when she marries, what is it but to exchange a life of comparative ease and comfort for one of toil and uncertainty? Perhaps, too, the lover, for whom, in the fondness of her nature, she has committed herself to fortune's freaks, turns out a worthless

churl, the dissolute, hard-hearted husband of low life; who, taking to the alehouse, leaves her to a cheerless home, to labor, penury, and child-bearing.

When I see poor Phœbe going about with drooping eye, and her head hanging "all o' one side," I cannot help calling to mind the pathetic little picture drawn by Desdemona:—

"My mother had a maid, called Barbara;
She was in love; and he she loved proved mad;
And did forsake her; she had a song of willow,
An old thing 'twas; but it express'd her fortune,
And she died singing it."

I hope, however, that a better lot is in reserve for Phœbe Wilkins, and that she may yet "rule the roast," in the ancient empire of the Tibbetsets! She is not fit to battle with hard hearts or hard times. She was, I am told, the pet of her poor mother, who was proud of the beauty of her child, and brought her up more tenderly than a village girl ought to be; and ever since she has been left an orphan the good ladies at the Hall have completed the softening and spoiling of her.



I have recently observed her holding long conferences in the churchyard, and up and down one of the lanes near the village, with Slingsby the schoolmaster. I at first thought the pedagogue might be touched with the tender malady so prevalent in these parts of late ; but I did him injustice. Honest Slingsby, it seems, was a friend and crony of her late father, the parish clerk ; and is on intimate terms with the Tibbets family. Prompted, therefore, by his good-will towards all parties, and secretly instigated, perhaps, by the managing dame Tibbets, he has undertaken to talk with Phoebe upon the subject.

He gives her, however, but little encouragement. Slingsby has a formidable opinion of the aristocratical feeling of old Ready-Money, and thinks, if Phoebe were even to make the matter up with the son, she would find the father totally hostile to the match. The poor damsel, therefore, is reduced almost to despair ; and Slingsby, who is too good-natured not to sympathize in her distress, has advised her to give up all thoughts of young Jack, and has promised as a substitute his learned coadjutor, the prodigal son. He has even, in the fulness of his heart, offered to give up the school-house to them, though it would leave him once more adrift in the wide world.