

## XXI.

## How to tell bad news.

## MR. LEOPOLD AND THE STEWARD.

MR. LEOPOLD. Ha! Steward, how are you, my old boy? How do things go on at home?

STEWARD. Bad enough, your honor; the magpie is dead.

MR. LEOPOLD. Poor Mag! So he is gone. How came he to die?

STEWARD. Overeat himself, Sir.

MR. LEOPOLD. Did he? A greedy dog; why, what did he get he liked so well?

STEWARD. Horse-flesh, Sir; he died of eating horse-flesh.

MR. LEOPOLD. How came he to get so much horse-flesh?

STEWARD. All your father's horses, Sir.

MR. LEOPOLD. What! are they dead, too?

STEWARD. Ay, sir; they died of overwork.  
 MR. LEOPOLD. And why were they overworked, pray?  
 STEWARD. To carry water, Sir.  
 MR. LEOPOLD. To carry water! and what were they carrying water for?  
 STEWARD. Sure, Sir, to put out the fire.  
 MR. LEOPOLD. Fire! what fire?  
 STEWARD. Oh! Sir, your father's house is burned to the ground.  
 MR. LEOPOLD. My father's house burned-down! and how came it set on fire?  
 STEWARD. I think, Sir, it must have been the torches.  
 MR. LEOPOLD. Torches! What torches?  
 STEWARD. At your mother's funeral.  
 MR. LEOPOLD. My mother dead!  
 STEWARD. Ah, poor lady! she never looked up, after it.  
 MR. LEOPOLD. After what?  
 STEWARD. The loss of your father.  
 MR. LEOPOLD. My father gone, too?  
 STEWARD. Yes, poor gentleman! he took to his bed as soon as he heard of it.  
 MR. LEOPOLD. Heard of what?  
 STEWARD. The bad news, sir, and please your honor.

MR. LEOPOLD. What! More miseries! More bad news!

STEWARD. Yes, sir; your bank has failed, and your credit is lost, and you are not worth a shilling in the world. I made bold, Sir, to wait on you about it, for I thought you would like to hear the news.

## XXII.

## Behind time.

A railroad train was rushing along at almost lightning speed. A curve was just ahead, beyond which was a station where two trains usually met. The conductor was late,—so late that the period during which the up-train was to wait had nearly elapsed; but he hoped yet to pass the curve safely. Suddenly a locomotive dashed into sight right ahead. In an instant there was a collision. A shriek, a shock, and fifty souls were in eternity; and all because an engineer had been behind time.

A great battle was going on. Column after column had been precipitated for eight hours

on the enemy posted along the ridge of a hill. The summer sun was sinking in the west; reinforcements for the obstinate defenders were already in sight; it was necessary to carry the position with one final charge, or everything would be lost. A powerful corps had been summoned from across the country, and if it came up in season all would yet be well. The great conqueror, confident in its arrival, formed his reserve into an attacking column, and ordered them to charge the enemy. The whole world knows the result, Grouchy failed to appear; the imperial guard was beaten back; and Waterloo was lost. Napoleon died a prisoner at St. Helena because one of his marshals was behind time.

A leading firm in commercial circles had long struggled against bankruptcy. As it had large sums of money in California, it expected remittances by a certain day, and, if they arrived, its credit, its honor, and its future prosperity would be preserved. But week after week elapsed without bringing the gold. At last came the fatal day on which the firm had bills maturing to large amounts. The steamer was telegraphed at day-break; but it was found, on inquiry, that she brought

no funds, and the house failed. The next arrival brought nearly half a million to the insolvents, but it was too late; they were ruined because their agent, in remitting, had been behind time.

A condemned man was led out for execution. He had taken human life, but under circumstances of the greatest provocation, and public sympathy was active in his behalf. Thousands had signed petitions for his reprieve; a favorable answer had been expected the night before, and though it had not come, even the sheriff felt confident that it would yet arrive. Thus the morning passed without the appearance of the messenger. The last moment was up. The prisoner took his place, the cap was drawn, and a lifeless body swung revolving in the wind. Just at that moment a horseman came into sight, galloping down hill, his steed covered with foam. He carried a packet in his right hand, which he waved frantically to the crowd. He was the express rider with the reprieve; but he came too late. A comparatively innocent man had died an ignominious death because a watch had been five minutes too late, making its bearer arrive behind time.

It is continually so in life. The best laid plans, the most important affairs, the fortunes of individuals, the weal of nations, honor, happiness, life itself, are daily sacrificed, because somebody is "behind time." Here are men who always fail in whatever they undertake, simply because they are "behind time." There are others who put off reformation year after year, till death seizes them, and they perish unrepentant, because forever "behind time."

## XXIII.

## The Will.

*Characters.—Swipes, a brewer; Currie, a saddler; Frank Millington; and Squire Drawl.*

SWIPES. A sober occasion, this, brother Currie. Who would have thought the old lady was so near her end?

CURRIE. Ah! we must all die, brother Swipes; and those who live the longest outlive the most.

SWIPES. True, true; but, since we must die and leave our earthly possessions, it is well that the law takes such good care of us. Had the old lady her senses when she departed?

CURRIE. Perfectly, perfectly. Squire Drawl told me she read every word of the will aloud, and never signed her name better.

SWIPES. Had you any hint from the Squire what disposition she made of her property?

CURRIE. Not a whisper; the Squire is as close as an underground tomb: but one of the witnesses hinted to me that she had cut off her graceless nephew, Frank, without a shilling.

Swipes. Has she good soul, has she? You know I come in, then, in right of my wife.

CURRIE. And I in my own right; and this is no doubt the reason why we have been called to hear the reading of the will, Squire Drawl knows how things should be done, though he is as air-tight as one of your beer-barrels. But here comes the young reprobate. He must be present, as a matter of course, you know. (*Enter Frank Millington.*) Your servant, young gentleman. So your benefactress has left you at last.

SWIPES. It is a painful thing to part with old and good friends, Mr. Middleton.