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B. F. SCHWEIER. THE CONSTITUTION—THE UNION—AND THE ENFORCEMENT OF THE LAWS. Editor and Proprietor.

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CHAPTER VIII.—(Continued.)

"I really thought Mr. Winton would have been killed," said the eldest of the rector's daughters. "How wonderfully he rides! My brother says he is a great 'shekary,' in fact, he cares for nothing else but sport. You were frightened, too, Miss L'Estrange."

"I have not been used to horses for years," stammered Nora.

"You ought to ride now. I remember you managing your little sheltie capitally, long ago. Won't you come back to luncheon at the rectory? Mother would be charmed to see you and Mrs. L'Estrange. Mrs. Gardner and her friends are coming."

Mrs. L'Estrange preferred returning with her little daughter, but Nora was glad to divert her thoughts by accepting the invitation, and was one of the most animated of the party. She could not, however, be persuaded to stay till the eldest son of the house, an officer on leave from his regiment, in India, returned with a report of the run.

"I suppose Mrs. Ruthven has heard nothing of her jewels?" said Mrs. Gardner, as Nora was saying good-bye.

"Nothing whatever. She seems to despair of recovering them."

"It was a frightful business altogether," exclaimed Mary Damer, the rector's second daughter. "Do you remember a Captain Shirley who was at the ball. You danced with him several times. He danced very well."

Nora did remember.

"George says there were queer reports about him in India. He was in same regiment as Mr. and Major Ruthven. People said, too, that Mrs. Ruthven was—well not too particular."

"I only know she is particularly nice," returned Nora. "Do not believe half the ill-natured things you hear."

"I wish," said Miss Damer, "that Mr. Marsden had not been frightened away by the worry of this unlucky robbery. How nice it would be to have Evesleigh open once more."

"Do tell me, Miss L'Estrange," cried the younger sister, "is the squire engaged to Mrs. Ruthven?"

"Indeed, I do not know; but I am sure she would make a very pleasant mistress for the manor house. Now I must not stay, it will be dusk before I get back."

"I think you are quite heartless, not to stay and hear if poor Mr. Winton came alive out of the hunt, and he is such a great friend of yours."

"Oh, he can take care of himself," said Nora, and with a few more words she escaped, her heart beating with annoyance at the tone of Miss Damer's last remark. She would certainly persuade Helen to come up to town next week, or as soon as possible, and then she would take singing lessons, and amuse herself, and forget the folly and weakness into which she had fallen. "How ill-natured people are," she thought, "and ready to spread ill-natured stories." She did not believe that Captain Shirley ever did anything disgraceful, though she had not been favorably impressed by him, and was disposed, in an instinctive and unreasoning way, to dislike and distrust him.

Large drops of rain made her hurry on to gain shelter before the threatened storm burst; but as she crossed the carriage drive of Evesleigh Manor, on her homeward way, she noticed fresh traces of wheels and horses' feet. The steward had no doubt been up at the house. She caught a glimpse of it before she passed through the gate leading into the wood opposite her own home. How mournful it looked with its closed shutters, and the one thin thread of smoke rising from its wide stack of chimneys! She was quite glad to be safe at home, in her own comfortable bedroom, changing her dress for her indoor garments. She had grown stupidly nervous of late. One folly brings on another, she thought.

In the drawing room Bea was dressing her doll, while her mother read aloud some of Grimm's fairy tales.

"How late you are, Nora; did you get wet?"

"No; at least very little."

"Had George Damer come back? How did the hunt go off? I should be glad to know if Mark Winton is safe."

"I did not wait. I think the fox must have headed for Anchester downs. Do let me have a cup of tea! I feel so tired."

No more was said; but when the time came for shutting up the house, Mrs. L'Estrange sent to ask if Roberts had heard of any accident at the hunt. Roberts reported that young Mr. Gardner had been thrown, and had broken his collar bone, and that as he (Roberts) had been leaving Oldbridge that evening, where he had gone to fetch oats, he had met Mr. Winton and the rector's son, riding back, all covered with mud and "tired like."

"I am really quite relieved," said Mrs. L'Estrange. "I was rather uneasy."

Nora did not reply and the rest of the evening was spent in making their plans for a visit to London, and writing to an ex-cook and housekeeper, who had taken a lodging house in one of the streets on the Tyburnian side of Hyde Park, and to whom all Evesleigh folk applied when they needed temporary quarters in the great city.

The next morning broke bright and crisp after a night of rain, and after their midday meal, Mrs. L'Estrange drove away in the pony carriage, with her little girl, to do various errands in the town. Nora, relieved by the absence of Winton, whose presence was of late always a restraint, put on thick boots and set forth to visit the blind woman whom she had rather neglected of late. She accused herself of selfishness, and many minor crimes and misdemeanors, as she donned her walking attire, and bullied herself considerably on the score of being better off than she deserved, and leading a self-indulgent life. Still, she did not see how she could do otherwise. At any rate, she would never sink into a weak, sentimentalist, a faded flower, pining under the weight of an unrequited attachment. No, in a month or two she would have thrown off this dead, aching, steady pain in her heart, and be able to smile at it.

With this brave determination she stared on her walk to the blind woman's cottage, seeing as she went, in spite of all her resolutions, the picture of Winton contending with his horse, as it was stamped on her mental retina the day before.

Walking across the bridge which connected her own little domain with Evesleigh, she turned sharply into the path leading to the moorland higher up, and nearly ran against the lord of the manor coming in an opposite direction.

"This is luck!" cried Marsden. "In another moment you would have passed, and I should have only found Mrs. L'Estrange."

"Not Mrs. L'Estrange either," said Nora, returning his cordial greeting. "She is gone into Oldbridge for the afternoon."

"Then, if you will allow me, I'll be your escort."

"Oh, yes, do come!" returned Nora heartily glad of his company. "When did you arrive, and where did you come from?"

"I came last night, that is to say, last afternoon, and I came from Paris."

"Mrs. Ruthven, when she wrote, did not seem to know what had become of you."

Marsden turned, and walked beside her.

"Oh, yes, to be sure. I went away to a place near Fontainebleau, to see an old chum of mine, De Meudon, who has been very ill, and so a letter or two of hers miscarried; but I saw her the day before yesterday in town. She is in a fidget to complete the purchase of a damp villa at Twickenham, which she could not do without me; but I have settled everything to her satisfaction."

"And are you going to stay here?"

"No—yes," replied Marsden, with a quick sigh, and he looked earnestly into her eyes, a curious wistful, strained expression in his own. "I am a rolling stone, you see, Nora—I presume your high mightiness will permit me to use your baptismal appellation—and I am rather at a loss what to do with myself. I shall be hard up for another year or two; but then the property will be pretty clear—then I will settle in the halls of my fathers, and live cleanly and like a gentleman."

"I hope you will, squire," said Nora, kindly and seriously.

"What! Do you think I have been such a scamp?" asked Marsden, laughing.

"You know I did not mean that," she returned, the color rising in her cheek "I hope you will live at Evesleigh."

"And be your neighbor? Thank you, sweet cousin."

"Yes, it would be very nice to have you at the manor house. It looks ghostly when shut up."

"Your kindness is killing. Do you understand why?"

"No; there is something not quite like yourself about you to-day. You are looking white and thin. Have you been ill, Clifford?"

"You darling. How graciously you have granted my prayer, and brought out the name I want you to call me with just the sweetest little hesitation in the world."

He laughed as he spoke, carrying off the ardor of his words with a mocking air.

"Nonsense!" returned Nora, a little piqued. "I did not hesitate at all. You seem to forget that I am not a child."

"I am deeply conscious you are a woman; a—" He pulled himself up short, and added: "A most serious young woman."

"And I suppose there is no chance of finding the lost jewels?" said Nora, to change the subject, for there was an indefinable something in Marsden's tone which she neither liked nor understood.

"I fear not. I thought I might have tracked them to the den of an old Dutch receiver of stolen goods, and went myself to Amsterdam, to see what I could do—all in vain. Don't talk of them; you don't know what an infernal blow that unfortunate business has been to me. That my guest should have been robbed almost under my roof! It's a sort of blot on me and my house."

"That is quite a morbid idea. How could any reasonable being blame you? I am sure Mrs. Ruthven——"

"Mrs. Ruthven has behaved very well, but she is desperately cut up, and I do not wonder at it," interrupted Marsden.

"She is very nice, and so pretty—attractive looking, rather."

Marsden glanced sharply at her before he answered.

"Yes, she is a piquant little devil, but she ought not to be so heavy with her paint brush about the lips; that sort of art may be overdone."

"Squire!" in a shocked tone, "how can you be such a traitor? I thought you were fond of Mrs. Ruthven—that you were her best friend."

Marsden laughed.

"So I am, but I am not, therefore, blind. All the world (except you) can see she paints—her lips."

"I did not, and it is not nice or loyal of you to tell me."

"I am rebuked. You are an awful piece of perfection, Nora."

"Do not be sarcastic. I know my own shortcomings well enough; but I am not false to my friends. I shall not confide my weakness to you."

"Do you fancy I would betray you? You understand me. Why, you are my own——" he hesitated—"my own kinswoman."

Nora shook her head, and they walked on silently for a few moments. Then she said:

"Helen and I are thinking of going up to town for a couple of months. It is rather melancholy and uncomfortable to be so far from one in the winter. Helen has been so nervous since that robbery."

"You are quite right—it is an excellent idea," cried Marsden, with hearty approbation. "Where do you think of staying—at the Langham?"

"The Langham!" laughing. "Why, the Langham would swallow up all our money in ten days. No, no; we think of going to Mrs. May, if she can take us in. Do you remember Mrs. May?"

"Well, yes, I seem to have heard the name."

"She was cook at Evesleigh when you were a boy, I believe. Oh! years ago."

"Exactly; before I grew old and decrepit."

"She has a house near Hyde Park, and we shall take rooms there."

"You'll be awfully uncomfortable, you'll get nothing to eat but scorched mutton and watery rice-pudding, and you'll never move without carrying off a knitted chair cover on your back, or hung to a button."

"You are quite wrong! We stayed a week there, on our way back from Germany, and it was very comfortable. I do not think there is a knitted antimacassar, if that is what you mean, in the house."

Talking lightly, with occasional silence on Marsden's part, they reached the blind woman's cottage.

"How long shall you stay here?"

"I do not know, but you need not trouble about me."

"If I choose to trouble, you cannot prevent me. I am going to look for one of the gamekeepers about a mile further on, and I shall wait for you outside, when I return."

"Oh, no! pray do not mind, I—"

"Do I bore you?" very gravely.

"How can you say so, Clifford?"

"Would you rather not walk with me?"

"Nonsense!"

"Very well, I will wait for you, and if you give me the slip, deep will be my wrath."

"I have no such intention," and she vanished into the cottage.

Marsden walked on in deep thought, his brows knit, his handsome face firmly set, all the smiling softness of his ordinary aspect gone and replaced by a stern haggard look, that made him seem years older.

When Nora had read the better part of a newspaper to her old protege, and discussed some of its contents, she perceived the odor of tobacco wafted through the open window, and guessing that the squire was waiting, she bade the blind woman good-bye and went to join him.

"Will you tell me," he said, throwing away his cigar, when they had gone a few paces, "what is the pleasure of going into a stuffy cottage to read to a stupid old woman, who would probably prefer being left to sleep?"

"It is not a very great pleasure, certainly, but I assure you I like reading to old Betsy. She is very shrewd, and, though I don't profess to be an angel, we ought to help each other sometimes. It is not much to do for a poor soul; think how lonely she must be. We should be rather worthless, if we did only what we like."

"Hum! That has been the only rule I have ever followed."

"I do not believe you. People would not like you so well, if you cared for nothing but self; you must have some heart."

"I begin to fear I have," said Marsden, as if to himself. "I assure you," he went on, "it is impossible to me to do what I do not like, and equally impossible to resist snatching at what I desire, ay! and getting it, too, by some means or other."

"What a bad character!" cried Nora. "If any one else spoke of you in that way, I should have been quite angry."

"And would you have defended me?"

"Yes, of course! you are my kinsman, and good friend."

"And you are a very pearl of a cousin."

They were silent till they reached a turn in the path, from which the dull red towers of Oldbridge were visible; the sight of them perhaps prompted the abrupt question:

"What has become of Winton? Is he here still?"

"No; he is gone to Devonshire, I think."

"Ha! and how has he been prospering?"

"Prospering? How? In what pray?"

"With your step-mother. I expected to hear that their engagement had been announced when I came back. Why has he let the grass grow under his feet?"

Nora was too amazed to reply at once; but memory swiftly unrolled her picture of the past few months, and showed a hundred important nothings which corroborated Marsden's startling assertion.

"I suppose I am very stupid," she exclaimed, as soon as she could speak, "but I never suspected this. Helen, too, is so frank, she would surely have told me."

"I am not so sure of that! Pray, what do you think kept a man like Winton in such a dull hole as Oldbridge, and brought him day after day to Brookdale? Yourself, eh? A very natural supposition! You are sufficiently magnetic, sweet cousin."

"Indeed—indeed," began Nora, eagerly, but Marsden went on smiling, and shaking his finger at her.

"It is soothing to so imperfect a fellow as myself to find out a little weakness—a tinge of vanity in such an admirable 'human' as you are! I don't doubt that Winton, like many another, would have fallen to your spear; but, you see, he was Mrs. L'Estrange's lover in bygone ages—when they were boy and girl, and after—I know all about it. I fancy Winton, when he first came home from India, was not too anxious to take Helen Landell back with him. I remember her, a sad, eyed, timid creature, under the thumb—I should say thumb-screw—of old Miss Webster. She was a soft, taking little thing then, she is a very charming woman now, and Winton is well off. It would be a comfortable settlement for her and her little girl, for they are, I think, quite dependent on you."

At the end of this long speech, during which Marsden watched his companion's face, Nora was quite prepared to reply.

"If they are fond of each other, I shall be very pleased. Helen has been a real mother to me, and I like Mr. Winton immensely. You don't know what a hard life Helen has had. If Mr. Winton will be kind and make her happy—and now you have opened my eyes, I think he is fond of her—I shall be glad. But, as to her dependence on me, if I die before I am twenty-one, of course all I possess will go to Beatrice, and as soon as ever I am of age I will settle half my fortune on Helen, to go to Bea after her."

"But, Nora! you must not be quixotic; make some provision for your father's widow, but not half of your fortune," cried Marsden, looking at her with surprise.

"Oh! if Helen is married, well, I shall make the settlement on Bea only. I have always considered it an oversight on my father's part not providing for her, an oversight I am bound to make good."

Her tone was perfectly easy and natural; nor did it express the slightest consciousness of doing more than a simple act of justice.

Marsden walked on in silence for a few paces.

"You are right, I think," said he. "It is a horrid nuisance to know that people belonging to you want for anything; but, at the same time, you are acting with unusual liberality. When shall you be of age? if I dare ask such a question."

"The fifteenth of February next, I shall be twenty-one."

"And suppose you marry some stingy fellow before that date?"

Nora laughed merrily.

"I do not fancy I shall run away with any one between this and February, and if I marry soberly, conventionally, the lawyers can devise the means of carrying out my wishes, or, if the suitor likes my poor little money better than myself, why, he may go," she waved her hand with an expressive gesture.

"I wonder what sort of a woman you will develop into, Nora?" said Marsden, his eyes fixed upon hers as if brooding over some somber thought.

"Am I not developed already, squire?"

"You have heaps to learn! for one thing, your own power! but why do you go back to the patriarchal appellation? Promise to call me Clifford, always Clifford."

"I will try," returned Nora, smiling. "Now, Clifford, here we are at the bridge, and before we part, promise me first to consider all I have said a profound secret between us two; next not to tease Helen about Mr. Winton; she is a shy creature, and I do not think he has absolutely proposed for her yet, so it would annoy her dreadfully if you said anything on the subject."

"Trust me, I shall be most discreet! But, Nora, suppose this marriage takes place and they will go to India. What shall you do?"

"Stay behind and educate Bea, or marry that stingy man you seem to have found for me."

"Will you promise to marry the man I shall find for you?" cried Marsden eagerly.

"Yes! If he is pleasant and handsome, and rich, and accomplished, and ready to love, honor and obey me," returned Nora with mock solemnity. "It will take you a long time to find such a rara avis; undertake nothing rashly, so good-bye."

"Are you going to dismiss me? What have I done?"

"Helen is out and I—I am going to be busy; but if you will dine with us at seven, we will not oblige you to eat scorched mutton."

"Thanks, many thanks. It is," looking at his watch, "three-twenty. May I present myself at half past six?"

"Yes, certainly; Helen will be delighted to see you." She bent her head with an arch smile and, turning away, walked quickly toward the cottage.

Marsden leaned his arms on the parapet of the bridge and looked after her so long as she was in sight, then he pursued his way home in profound thought.

Nora went quietly to her own room, to cogitate the wonderful information imparted by Marsden.

She was glad, very glad, not only for Helen, but for herself. This knowledge would fortify her to resist her own folly, to uproot the ridiculous fancy which had mastered her. The man who was to be Helen's husband ought to be, could be, nothing to her. Her cure was certain. But, oh! what a weak conceited fool she had been, to take for granted that she herself, and she only, was the attraction that drew Winton so constantly to Brookdale, to be so blind to the gentle charm of her step-mother's looks and voice and manner. She saw it all now. How quietly tender Winton always was in speaking to Helen, and how much more notice he took of her than of her stepdaughter. Yet across this conviction would shoot puzzling gleams of memory, recalling significant looks and words which might have been interpreted as indicative of a strong liking for herself; this no doubt was but the exaggeration of her own vain unhealthy imagination. How she thanked heaven that none could read her thoughts. She was tolerably safe, no one save Mrs. Ruthven had ever hinted at any possible tenderness between herself and Winton, and that suspicion would soon be dispelled by the announcement of his engagement to Mrs. L'Estrange.

At any rate, for the moment, Nora thought herself quite cured. She made some changes in her dress and rearranged her hair so as to be ready for the evening. Then she descended to the drawing room, and set herself diligently to answer some long-neglected letters.

Before she had finished Mrs. L'Estrange returned, and there were parcels to be opened, purchases to be looked at and put away, and Bea's report of all she had seen and heard to be listened to.

Mrs. L'Estrange was surprised and pleased to hear that Marsden was to be their guest. He was a great favorite with her, and showed her much kindly consideration.

On this evening he conversed chiefly with her, but she was too observant, too warmly interested in her step-daughter, not to perceive that he was aware of Nora's every movement, even her slightest gesture. She had already suspected that the lord of Evesleigh had lost his heart to his young kinswoman, and she was not a little puzzled by Nora's evident unconsciousness. She had very little idea, however, of the overpowering intensity of the passion Nora had inspired.

From motives, which need not now be revealed, Marsden masked his batteries cleverly; until the right moment came to open fire, he was merely a pleasant, playful, admiring relative. To-night, however, she was struck by some slight though distinct indications which escaped his resolute self-control.

Marsden had never denied himself anything, nor thought any price too high for the pleasure of the moment. He had had endless love affairs, but none of any depth, and when he met his young cousin, he was unaccountably fascinated by her. Her delicate freshness, her simplicity and shrewdness, her quick spirit and keen self-respect, her moments of softness, suggestive of delicious possibilities, of responsive tenderness, which was not to be lightly won, made, to him, an irresistible combination.

Clifford Marsden was a man of infinite taste; taste so true, that it all but made him enamored of goodness, if only for its harmony. Alas! what a chasm that "but" covered! He could be generous, too, though he was quite capable of sacrificing all and everything to gratification of self, yet, at times, that self took an amiable form. At present he was determined Nora L'Estrange should be his wife. She was the first woman he had ever wished to marry, and nothing should stand between him and the accomplishment of his wishes.

In such a passion there is a tinge of cruelty. Marsden would rather kill her with his own hand, than give her up to another.

Meantime, the wild animal within him slumbered in the sunshine of its own hopes. Marsden talked well, Nora, who had more color than usual, was charmingly bright. Winton was never mentioned, and all went merrily.

CHAPTER IX.

The last week of October saw nearly all the personages in this true history assembled in town.

Nora L'Estrange was almost ashamed of the eager pleasure with which she hailed their removal to London. The change of scene, the various objects of interest, the different occupations of town, contrasted with those of the country, roused and diverted her.

Beatrice and her attendant fraulein were left with Winton's aunt, Mrs. Atherley, who had invited them to stay with her in Oldbridge, in order that the young lady might have music lessons from the organist of the cathedral, and be preserved from the disorganization of life in a London lodging, where she was to join her mother before Christmas.

Winton, as was expected, soon made his appearance, and then Marsden; both bestowing a good deal of their spare time on the ladies of Brookdale. So the days went speedily and pleasantly, with the help of galleries and concerts by day, and theaters in the evening. Nora flattered herself that by the careful cultivation of more frank friendliness of manner toward Winton, she was killing out warmer feelings in her heart, and at any rate successfully masking the true state of affairs in that weak citadel.

Mrs. Ruthven, however, put in a claim for a good deal of her trustee's time and attention. She also found it expedient to take up her abode in the capital. The police gave her little hope of recovering her lost property, but the preliminaries of her new purchases made her presence requisite.

"Have you seen Miss L'Estrange?" asked Mrs. Ruthven, one morning when Shirley had been admitted before luncheon.

"No, I thought of calling, but did not see what business I had to do so."

"I wish you would. Why should you not?"

"I do not know. Mrs. L'Estrange is rather stand off."

"Pooh!" she returned with an expression of contempt. "Mrs. L'Estrange is nobody! They called here yesterday, but I was out. Shirley, I wish you would make love to Nora! It would not be a bad marriage for you, and you need not marry her if you do not like."

"What is the real reason of your regard for my interests?"

"I want to see you cut out Winton."

"I do not think there is anything to interfere with in that direction. The running at present is all on Marsden's side."

Mrs. Ruthven stooped to pick up her pocket handkerchief before she replied, "Well, cut Marsden out. Why should you not? You have been something of a favorite with women, more experienced women than Nora L'Estrange, before this."

"I am flattered," said Shirley with a self-satisfied smile. "Still I imagine—"

"Oh! I would give anything to see you safely married to Nora L'Estrange," she interrupted, clasping her hands together with a fervent air. "What a denouement the whole thing would be!" and she laughed—a cruel, mocking laugh.

"What whole thing?" asked Shirley, with an angry look.

"My good friend, I am thinking of complications which do not enter your mind."

"I do not see how they can when I am in ignorance."

Here Mrs. Ruthven's courier entered with a note, which she took and glanced at.

"Let him came up," she said, and sat a moment in silence, twisting it with her small pointed finger.

"Am I in the way?" asked Shirley, with some stiffness.

"No! not you can stay," said Mrs. Ruthven, carelessly, and as she spoke the detective, Waite, was shown in.

"So! you are back again?" she said. "Have you anything fresh?"

"Something, I—" he hesitated and glanced at Shirley.

"Oh, you may speak. This gentleman, Captain Shirley," with a slight emphasis on the name, "was, you remember, at the ball when I was robbed, and knows all about it."

Waite bowed gravely.

"I have just come from Brussels," he said. "A report I heard at, no matter where, induced me to visit a merchant there, who, it was said, had some fine rubies for sale. They were certainly very fine, and were, I find, bought from a respectable looking young man, of small stature and very dark complexion, who said he was a native of India. He spoke French very imperfectly. He had, he said, inherited the stones from an uncle. He stated he was a native of Pondicherry and had offered the gems in Paris, but could not get his price. This surprised the jeweler, as he asked less than their value, which the purchaser, Vandersluys, Rue de la Montague, gave him. After much trouble, I traced this man back to Ostend, and ascertained that a passenger answering to his description embarked on board the Dover steamboat about three weeks ago, and there I lost all trace!"

"But you must find it again," exclaimed Mrs. Ruthven, who had listened intently. "You know the reward I offered for the jewels themselves. I will double it if you enable me to punish the robber! Do you not think I am right?" she added with sudden startling vehemence to Shirley, who hesitated an instant and then replied:

"Certainly, Mrs. Ruthven, certainly. Such a miscreant deserves no mercy."

"From Pondicherry, did he say? Did he give any name?"

"No! I fancy the jeweler was too glad to get such a bargain, to make many inquiries."

"You do not intend to give up?" cried Mrs. Ruthven, eagery.

"Certainly not, madame. These are the first tracks." He paused and gave a quick, questioning glance at Mrs. Ruthven, who slightly bent her head. "Yes," he went on, "these are the first tracks I have hit on, and I am determined not to give up till I have done all man can do to find the rascal and his accomplices, if he has any."

"I should imagine he had," said Shirley, who had risen, and going over to the fire, stirred it into a blaze. "A man would hardly attempt so bold a stroke single-handed."

"It would be a good deal safer alone."

"Then what do you propose to do next?"

"I have not yet quite decided, sir," replied the detective dryly. "Moreover, I never speak of my plans. As there is no time to be lost in trying to find the trail, I shall wish you good morning, madame, and keep you informed of my movements."

"A shrewd fellow," said Shirley, "but I fear his chances are but scanty of tracking this darky."

"He will do it yet," returned Mrs. Ruthven, with gloomy conviction, and fell into such persistent silence that, finding it impossible to rouse her, Shirley, himself irritated and uneasy, bid her good morning.

The next afternoon Marsden, who had been gratifying his lawyer by detailing the particulars of a successful speculation he had made on the Paris Bourse through the guidance of a friend, drove away to Southwick street, having sent some flowers to keep Mrs. Ruthven quiet.

Somewhat to his discomfiture—for he always suspected that Shirley was more or less a spy—that gentleman was in the act of leaving his card as he went up the steps.

The ladies were "out driving with Mr. Winton," said the highly respectable ex-butler, who opened the door.

"When do you expect them in?" asked Marsden.

"Can't say, sir. Not till late, anyway."

Marsden then left his card, and, turning, walked a few paces with Shirley.

(To be continued.)

A Novel Way to Collect a Bill.

Quite a novel suggestion in the way of bill-collecting was made the other day through the mistake of a man making two letters in this city. He had had considerable difficulty in persuading a young woman that his goods had not been sold to her for the mere pleasure of selling, and finally she had dismissed his messenger with the statement that she did not want to hear from him again. Nothing was left for the merchant to do but to resort to the United States mails. He accordingly sat down and wrote to the young woman a letter which was characterized rather by terseness and vigor than by any terms of affection. Fortunately for him, he had a social acquaintance with another young lady in the same house, and while he had his pen he thought he would write to her, too, a personal letter. When he came to direct his envelopes, though, he sent the dunning letter to his personal friend and his personal letter to his debtor. It is needless to say that the mistake was corrected within a few moments after the receipt of the letters, but the debtor's chagrin at the revelation of her position to another was so great that she paid her bill immediately.—Washington News.

The man who is always ready to follow advice is sure to follow the poorest kind that offers

REV. DR. TALMAGE.

The Brooklyn Divine's Sunday Sermon.

Subject: "Business Troubles."

TEXT: "These were thy merchants in all sorts of things."—Ezekiel xxvii., 24.

We are at the opening door of returning National prosperity. The coming crops, the re-establishment of public confidence and, above all, the blessing of God will turn in upon all sections of America the widest, greatest prosperity this country has ever seen. But that door of success is not yet fully open, and thousands of business men are yet suffering from the distressing times through which we have been passing.

Some of the best men in the land have faltered, men whose hearts are enlisted in every good work and whose hands have blessed every great charity. The church of God can afford to extend to them her sympathies and plead before heaven with all availing prayer. The schools such men have established, the churches they have built, the asylums and beneficent institutions they have fostered will be their eulogy long after their banking institutions are forgotten. Such men can never fail. They have their treasures in banks that never break and will be millionaires forever. But I thought it would be appropriate to-day and useful for me to talk about the trials and temptations of our business men and try to offer some curative prescriptions.

In the first place, I have to remark that a great many of our business men feel ruinous trials and temptations coming to them from small and limited capital in business. It is everywhere understood that it now takes three or four times as much to do business well than it once did. Once a few hundred dollars were turned into goods. The merchant would be his own storekeeper, his own salesman, his own bookkeeper. He would manage all the affairs himself, and everything would be net profit. Wonderful changes have come. Costly apparatus, extensive advertising, exorbitant store rents, heavy taxation, expensive agencies are only parts of the demand made upon our commercial men, and when they have found themselves in such circumstances with small capital they have sometimes been tempted to run against the rocks of moral and financial destruction. This temptation of limited capital has ruined men in two ways. Sometimes they have shrunk down under the temptation. They have yielded the battle before the first shot was fired. At the first hard dun they surrendered. Their knees knocked together at the fall of the auctioneer's hammer. They blanched at the financial peril. They did not understand that there is such a thing as heroism in merchandise and that there are Waterloos of the counter and that a man can fight no braver battle with the sword than he can with the yardstick. Their souls melted in them because sugars were up when they wanted to buy and down when they wanted to sell, and unsalable goods were on the shelf and bad debts in their ledger. The gloom of their countenances overshadowed even their dry goods and groceries. Despondency, coming from limited capital, blasted them. Others have felt it in a different way. They have said: "Here I have been trudging along, I have been trying to be honest all these years. I find it is of no use. Now it is make or break." The small craft that could have stood the stream is put out beyond the lighthouse on the great sea of speculation. He borrows a few thousand dollars from friends who dare not refuse him, and he goes bartering on a large scale. He reasons in this way: "Perhaps I may succeed, and if I don't I will be no worse off than I am now, for $100,000 taken from nothing, nothing remains."

Stocks are the dice with which he gambles. He bought for a few dollars vast tracts of Western land. Some man at the East, living on a fat homestead, meets this gambler of fortune and is persuaded to trade off his estate for lots in a Western city, with large avenues, and costly palaces, and lake steamers smoking at the wharves, and rail trains coming down with lightning speed from every direction. There it is all on paper! The city has never been built nor the railroads constructed, but everything points that way, and the thing will be done as sure as you live. Well, the man goes on, stopping at no fraud or outrage. In his splendid equipage he dashes past, while the honest laborer looks up and wipes the sweat from his brow and says, "I wonder where that man got all his money?" After a while the bubble bursts. Creditors rush in. The law clutches, but finds nothing in its grasp. The men who were swindled say, "I don't know how I could have ever been deceived by that man," and the pictorials, in handsome woodcuts, set forth the hero who in ten years had genius enough to fail for $150,000!

And that is the process by which many have been tempted through limitation of capital to rush into labyrinths from which they could not be extricated. I would not want to chain honest enterprise. I would not want to block up any of the avenues for honest accumulation that open before young men. On the contrary, I would like to cheer them on and rejoice when they reach the goal, but when there are such multitudes of men going to ruin for this life and the life that is to come through wrong notions of what are lawful spheres of enterprise it is the duty of the Church of God, and the ministers of religion, and the friends of all young men, to utter a plain, emphatic, unmistakable protest. These are the influences that drown men in destruction and perdition.

Again, a great many of our business men are tempted to overanxiety and care. You know that nearly all commercial businesses are overdone in this day. Smitten with the love of quick gain, our cities are crowded with men resolved to be rich at all hazards. They do not care how money comes if it only comes. Our best merchants are thrown into competition with men of more means and less conscience, and if an opportunity of accumulation be neglected one hour some one else picks it up. From January to December the struggle goes on. Night gives no quiet to limbs tossing in restlessness nor to a brain that will not stop thinking. The dreams are harrowed by imaginary loss and flushed with imaginary gains. Even the Sabbath cannot dam back the tide of anxiety, for this wave of worldliness dashes clear over the churches and leaves its foam on Bibles and prayer books. Men who are living on salaries or by the cultivation of the soil cannot understand the wear and tear of the body and mind to which our merchants are subjected when they do not know but that their livelihood and their business honor are dependent upon the uncertainties of the next hour. This excitement of the brain, this corroding care of the heart, this strain of effort that exhausts the spirit, sends a great many of our best men in middle life into the grave, their life dashed out against money safes. They go with their store on their backs. They trudge like camels, sweating, from Aleppo to Damascus. They make their life a crucifixion. Standing behind desks and counters, banished from the fresh air, weighed down by carking cares, they are so many suicides. Oh, I wish I could to-day rub out some of these lines of care; that I could lift some of the burdens from the heart; that I could give relaxation to some of these worn muscles. It is time for you to begin to take it a little easier. Do your best and then trust God for the rest. Do not fret. God manages all the affairs of your life, and He manages them for the best. Consider the lilies. They always have robes.

Behold the fowls of the air! They always have nests. Take a long breath. Bethink bettimes that God did not make you for a pack horse. Dig yourselves out from among the hogsheads and the shelves, and in the light of the holy Sabbath day resolve that you will give to the winds your fears, and your fretfulness, and your distresses. You brought nothing into the world, and it is very certain you can carry nothing out. Having food and raiment be therewith content. The merchant came home from the store. There had been a great disaster there. He opened the front door and said in the midst of his family circle: "I am ruined. Everything is gone. I am all ruined." His wife said, "I am left," and the little child threw up its hands and said, "Papa, I am here." The aged grandmother, seated in the room, said, "Then you have all the promises of God beside, John." And he burst into tears and said: "God forgive me that I have been so ungrateful! I find I have a great many things left. God forgive me!"

Again, I remark that many of our business men are tempted to neglect their home duties. How often it is that the store and home clash, but there ought not to be any collision. It is often the case that the father is the mere treasurer of the family, a sort of agent to see that they have dry goods and groceries. The work of family government he does not touch. Once or twice in a year he calls the children up on a Sabbath afternoon, when he has a half hour he does not exactly know what to do with, and in that half hour he disciplines the children and chides them and corrects their faults and gives them a great deal of good advice, and then wonders all the rest of the year that his children do not do better when they have the wonderful advantage of that semi-annual castigation.

The family table, which ought to be the place for pleasant discussion and cheerfulness, often becomes the place of perilous expedition. If there be any blessing asked at all, it is cut off at both ends and with the hand on the carving knife. He counts on his fingers, making estimates in the interstices of the repast. The work done, the hat goes to the head, and he starts down the street, and before the family have arisen from the table he has bound up another bundle of goods and says to the customer, "Anything more I can do for you to-day, sir?" A man has more responsibilities than those which are discharged by putting competent instructors over his children and giving them a drawing master and a music teacher. The physical culture of the child will not be attended to unless the father looks to it. He must sometimes lose his dignity. He must unlimber his joints. He must sometimes lead in their sports and games. The parent who cannot forget the severe duties of life sometimes, to fly the kite and trundle the hoop and chase the ball and jump the rope with his children, ought never to have been tempted out of a crusty and unredeemable solitariness. If you want to keep your children away from places of sin you can only do it by making your home attractive. You may preach sermons and advocate reforms and denounce wickedness, and yet your children will be captivated by the glittering saloon of sin unless you can make your home a brighter place than any other place on earth to them. Oh, gather all charms into your house. If you can afford it, bring books and pictures and cheerful entertainments to the household. But above all teach those children, not by half an hour twice a year on the Sabbath day, but day after day and every day teach them that religion is a great gladness; that it throws chains of gold about the neck; that it takes no spring from the foot, no blitheness from the heart, no sparkle from the eye, no ring from the laughter, but that "her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." I sympathize with the work being done in many of our cities by which beautiful rooms are set apart by our Young Men's Christian Associations, and I pray God to prosper them in all things. But I tell you there is something back of that and before that. We need more happy, consecrated, cheerful Christian homes everywhere.

Again I remark that a great many of our business men are tempted to put the attainment of money above the value of the soul. It is a grand thing to have plenty of money. The more you get of it the better, if it come honesty and go usefully. For the lack of it sickness dies without medicine, and hunger finds it out in the empty bread tray, and nakedness shivers for lack of clothes and fire. When I hear a man in canting tirade against money—a Christian man—as though it had no possible use on earth and he had no interest in it at all, I come almost to think that the heaven that would be appropriate for him would be an everlasting poorhouse. While, my friends, we do admit there is such a thing as the lawful use of money—a profitable use of money—let us recognize also the fact that money cannot satisfy a man's soul; that it cannot glitter in the dark valley; that it cannot pay our fare across the Jordan of death; that it cannot unlock the gate of heaven. There are men in all occupations who seem to act as though they thought that a pack of bonds and mortgages could be traded off for a title to heaven and as though gold would be a lawful tender in that place where it is so common that they make pavements out of it. Salvation by Christ is the only salvation. Treasures in heaven are the only incorruptible treasures.

Have you ever ciphered out in the rule of loss and gain the sum, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" However fine your apparel, the winds of death will flutter it like rags. Homespun and a threadbare coat have sometimes been the shadow of coming robes made white in the blood of the Lamb. The pearl of great price is worth more than any gem you can bring from the ocean, than Australian or Brazilian mines strung in one carcanet. Seek after God, find His righteousness, and all shall be well here—all shall be well hereafter.

Some of you remember the shipwreck of the Central America. That noble ship had, I think, about 500 passengers aboard. Suddenly the storm came, and the surges trampled the decks and swung into the hatches, and there went up a hundred voiced death shriek. The foam on the jaw of the wave. The pitching of the steamer as though it were leaping a mountain. The dismal flare of the signal rockets. The long cough of the steam pipes. The hiss of extinguished furnaces. The walking of God on the wave! The steamer went not down without a struggle. As the passengers stationed themselves in rows to bail out the vessel, hark to the thump of the buckets, as men unused to toil, with blistered hands and strained muscle, tug for their lives. There is a sail seen against the sky. The flash of the distress gun is noticed; its voice heard not, for it is choked in the louder booming of the sea. A few passengers escaped, but the steamer gave one great lurch and was gone! So there are some men who sail on prosperously in life. All's well, all's well. But at last some financial disaster comes—a euroclydon. Down they go! The bottom of the commercial sea is strewn with shattered hulks. But because your property goes do not let your soul go. Though all else perish, save that, for I have to tell you of a more stupendous shipwreck than that which I just mentioned. God launched this world 6000 years ago. It has been going on under freight of mountains and immortals, but one day it will stagger at the cry of fire. The timbers of rock will burn, the mountains flame like masts, and the clouds like sails in the judgment hurricane. Then God shall take the passengers off the deck, and from the berths those who have long been asleep in Jesus, and He will set them far beyond the reach of storm and peril. But how many shall go down will never be known until it shall be announced one day in heaven. The shipwreck of a world! So many millions saved! So many millions drowned!