

To love; and I, my Dora,
If once I fancied so,
It was a brief delusion,
And over,—long ago.”

XIII.

Between the Past and Present,
On that bleak moment's height,
She stood. As some lost traveller
By a quick flash of light
Seeing a gulf before him,
With dizzy, sick despair,
Reels to clutch backward, but to find
A deeper chasm there.

XIV.

The twilight grew still darker,
The fragrant flowers more sweet,
The stars shone out in heaven,
The lamps gleam'd down the street;
And hours pass'd in dreaming
Over their new found fate,
Ere they could think of wondering
Why Bertha was so late.

XV.

She came, and calmly listen'd ;
In vain they strove to trace
If Herbert's memory shadow'd
In grief upon her face.
No blame, no wonder show'd there,
No feeling could be told ;
Her voice was not less steady,
Her manner not more cold.

XVI.

They could not hear the anguish
That broke in words of pain
Through that calm summer midnight,—
“ My Herbert—mine again ! ”
Yes, they have once been parted,
But this day shall restore
The long lost one : she claims him :
“ My Herbert—mine once more ! ”

XVII.

Now Christmas Eve returning,
Saw Bertha stand beside
The altar, greeting Dora,
Again a smiling bride ;
And now the gloomy evening
Sees Bertha pale and worn,
Leaving the house for ever,
To wander out forlorn.

XVIII.

Forlorn—nay, not so. Anguish
Shall do its work at length ;
Her soul, pass'd through the fire,
Shall gain still purer strength.
Somewhere there waits for Bertha
An earnest noble part ;
And, meanwhile, God is with her,—
God, and her own true heart !

I could warmly and sincerely praise the little poem, when Jarber had done reading it ; but I could not say that it tended in any degree towards clearing up the mystery of the empty House.

Whether it was the absence of the irritating influence of Trottlet, or whether it was simply fatigue, I cannot say, but Jarber did

not strike me, that evening, as being in his usual spirits. And though he declared that he was not in the least daunted by his want of success thus far, and that he was resolutely determined to make more discoveries, he spoke in a languid absent manner, and shortly afterwards took his leave at rather an early hour.

When Trottlet came back, and when I indignantly taxed him with Philandering, he not only denied the imputation, but asserted that he had been employed on my service, and, in consideration of that, boldly asked for leave of absence for two days, and for a morning to himself afterwards, to complete the business, in which he solemnly declared that I was interested. In remembrance of his long and faithful service to me, I did violence to myself, and granted his request. And he, on his side, engaged to explain himself to my satisfaction, in a week's time, on Monday evening the twentieth.

A day or two before, I sent to Jarber's lodgings to ask him to drop in to tea. His landlady sent back an apology for him that made my hair stand on end. His feet were in hot water ; his head was in a flannel petticoat ; a green shade was over his eyes ; the rheumatism was in his legs ; and a mustard-poultice was on his chest. He was also a little feverish, and rather distracted in his mind about Manchester Marriages, a Dwarf, and Three Evenings, or Evening Parties—his landlady was not sure which—in an empty House, with the Water Rate unpaid.

Under these distressing circumstances, I was necessarily left alone with Trottlet. His promised explanation began, like Jarber's discoveries, with the reading of a written paper. The only difference was that Trottlet introduced his manuscript under the name of a Report.

TROTTLER'S REPORT.

THE curious events related in these pages would, many of them, most likely never have happened, if a person named Trottlet had not presumed, contrary to his usual custom, to think for himself.

The subject on which the person in question had ventured, for the first time in his life, to form an opinion purely and entirely his own, was one which had already excited the interest of his respected mistress in a very extraordinary degree. Or, to put it in plainer terms still, the subject was no other than the mystery of the empty House.

Feeling no sort of objection to set a success of his own, if possible, side by side, with a failure of Mr. Jarber's, Trottlet made up his mind, one Monday evening, to try what he could do, on his own account, towards clearing up the mystery of the empty House. Carefully dismissing from his mind all nonsensical notions of former tenants and their histories, and keeping the

one point in view steadily before him, he started to reach it in the shortest way, by walking straight up to the House, and bringing himself face to face with the first person in it who opened the door to him.

It was getting towards dark, on Monday evening, the thirteenth of the month, when Trotter first set foot on the steps of the House. When he knocked at the door, he knew nothing of the matter which he was about to investigate, except that the landlord was an elderly widower of good fortune, and that his name was Forley. A small beginning enough for a man to start from, certainly!

On dropping the knocker, his first proceeding was to look down cautiously out of the corner of his right eye, for any results which might show themselves at the kitchen-window. There appeared at it immediately the figure of a woman, who looked up inquisitively at the stranger on the steps, left the window in a hurry, and came back to it with an open letter in her hand, which she held up to the fading light. After looking over the letter hastily for a moment or so, the woman disappeared once more.

Trotter next heard footsteps shuffling and scraping along the bare hall of the house. On a sudden they ceased, and the sound of two voices—a shrill persuading voice and a gruff resisting voice—confusedly reached his ears. After a while, the voices left off speaking—a chain was undone, a bolt drawn back—the door opened—and Trotter stood face to face with two persons, a woman in advance, and a man behind her, leaning back flat against the wall.

“Wish you good evening, sir,” says the woman, in such a sudden way, and in such a cracked voice, that it was quite startling to hear her. “Chilly weather, ain’t it, sir? Please to walk in. You come from good Mr. Forley, don’t you, sir?”

“Don’t you, sir?” chimes in the man hoarsely, making a sort of gruff echo of himself, and chuckling after it, as if he thought he had made a joke.

If Trotter had said, “No,” the door would have been probably closed in his face. Therefore, he took circumstances as he found them, and boldly ran all the risk, whatever it might be, of saying, “Yes.”

“Quite right, sir,” says the woman. “Good Mr. Forley’s letter told us his particular friend would be here to represent him, at dusk, on Monday the thirteenth—or, if not on Monday the thirteenth, then on Monday the twentieth, at the same time, without fail. And here you are on the Monday the thirteenth, ain’t you, sir? Mr. Forley’s particular friend, and dressed all in black—quite right, sir! Please to step into the dining-room—it’s always kep scoured and clean against Mr. Forley comes here—and I’ll fetch a candle in half a minute. It gets so dark in the evenings, now, you hardly know where you are, do you, sir? And how is good Mr.

Forley in his health? We trust he is better, Benjamin, don’t we? We are so sorry not to see him as usual, Benjamin, ain’t we? In half a minute, sir, if you don’t mind waiting, I’ll be back with the candle. Come along, Benjamin.”

“Come along, Benjamin,” chimes in the echo, and chuckles again as if he thought he had made another joke.

Left alone in the empty front-parlour, Trotter wondered what was coming next, as he heard the shuffling, scraping footsteps go slowly down the kitchen-stairs. The front-door had been carefully chained up and bolted behind him on his entrance; and there was not the least chance of his being able to open it to effect his escape, without betraying himself by making a noise.

Not being of the Jarber sort, luckily for himself, he took his situation quietly, as he found it, and turned his time, while alone, to account, by summing up in his own mind the few particulars which he had discovered thus far. He had found out, first, that Mr. Forley was in the habit of visiting the house regularly. Second, that Mr. Forley, being prevented by illness from seeing the people put in charge as usual, had appointed a friend to represent him; and had written to say so. Third, that the friend had a choice of two Mondays, at a particular time in the evening, for doing his errand; and that Trotter had accidentally hit on this time, and on the first of the Mondays, for beginning his own investigations. Fourth, that the similarity between Trotter’s black dress, as servant out of livery, and the dress of the messenger (whoever he might be), had helped the error by which Trotter was profiting. So far, so good. But what was the messenger’s errand? and what chance was there that he might not come up and knock at the door himself, from minute to minute, on that very evening?

While Trotter was turning over this last consideration in his mind, he heard the shuffling footsteps come up the stairs again, with a flash of candle-light going before them. He waited for the woman’s coming in with some little anxiety; for the twilight had been too dim on his getting into the house to allow him to see either her face or the man’s face at all clearly.

The woman came in first, with the man she called Benjamin at her heels, and set the candle on the mantel-piece. Trotter takes leave to describe her as an offensively-cheerful old woman, awfully lean and wiry, and sharp all over, at eyes, nose, and chin—devilishly brisk, smiling, and restless, with a dirty false front and a dirty black cap, and short fidgety arms, and long hooked fingernails—an unnaturally lusty old woman, who walked with a spring in her wicked old feet, and spoke with a smirk on her wicked old face—the sort of old woman (as Trotter thinks) who ought to have lived in the dark

ages, and been ducked in a horse-pond, instead of flourishing in the nineteenth century, and taking charge of a Christian house.

"You'll please to excuse my son, Benjamin, won't you, sir?" says this witch without a broomstick, pointing to the man behind her, propped against the bare wall of the dining-room, exactly as he had been propped against the bare wall of the passage. "He's got his inside dreadful bad again, has my son Benjamin. And he won't go to bed, and he will follow me about the house, up-stairs and down-stairs, and in my lady's chamber, as the song says, you know. It's his indigestion, poor dear, that sours his temper and makes him so agravating—and indigestion is a wearing thing to the best of us, ain't it, sir?"

"Ain't it, sir?" chimes in agravating Benjamin, winking at the candle-light like an owl at the sunshine.

Trottle examined the man curiously, while his horrid old mother was speaking of him. He found "My son Benjamin" to be little and lean, and buttoned-up slovenly in a frowsy old great-coat that fell down to his ragged carpet-slippers. His eyes were very watery, his cheeks very pale, and his lips very red. His breathing was so uncommonly loud, that it sounded almost like a snore. His head rolled helplessly in the monstrous big collar of his great-coat; and his limp, lazy hands potted about the wall on either side of him, as if they were groping for an imaginary bottle. In plain English, the complaint of "My son Benjamin" was drunkenness, of the stupid, pig-headed, sottish kind. Drawing this conclusion easily enough, after a moment's observation of the man, Trottle found himself, nevertheless, keeping his eyes fixed much longer than was necessary on the ugly drunken face rolling about in the monstrous big coat collar, and looking at it with a curiosity that he could hardly account for at first. Was there something familiar to him in the man's features? He turned away from them for an instant, and then turned back to him again. After that second look, the notion forced itself into his mind, that he had certainly seen a face somewhere, of which that sot's face appeared like a kind of slovenly copy. "Where?" thinks he to himself, "where did I last see the man whom this agravating Benjamin, here, so very strongly reminds me of?"

It was no time, just then—with the cheerful old woman's eye searching him all over, and the cheerful old woman's tongue talking at him, nineteen to the dozen—for Trottle to be ransacking his memory for small matters that had got into wrong corners of it. He put by in his mind that very curious circumstance respecting Benjamin's face, to be taken up again when a fit opportunity offered itself; and kept his wits about him in prime order for present necessities.

"You wouldn't like to go down into the

kitchen, would you?" says the witch without the broomstick, as familiar as if she had been Trottle's mother, instead of Benjamin's. "There's a bit of fire in the grate, and the sink in the back kitchen don't smell to matter much to-day, and it's uncommon chilly up here when a person's flesh don't hardly cover a person's bones. But you don't look cold, sir, do you? And then, why, Lord bless my soul, our little bit of business is so very, very little, it's hardly worth while to go down-stairs about it, after all. Quite a game at business, ain't it, sir? Give-and-take—that's what I call it—give-and-take!"

With that, her wicked old eyes settled hungrily on the region round about Trottle's waistcoat-pocket, and she began to chuckle like her son, holding out one of her skinny hands, and tapping cheerfully in the palm with the knuckles of the other. Agravating Benjamin, seeing what she was about, roused up a little, chuckled and tapped in imitation of her, got an idea of his own into his muddled head all of a sudden, and bolted it out charitably for the benefit of Trottle.

"I say!" says Benjamin, settling himself against the wall and nodding his head viciously at his cheerful old mother. "I say! Look out. She'll skin you!"

Assisted by these signs and warnings, Trottle found no difficulty in understanding that the business referred to was the giving and taking of money, and that he was expected to be the giver. It was at this stage of the proceedings that he first felt decidedly uncomfortable, and more than half inclined to wish he was on the street-side of the house-door again.

He was still cudgelling his brains for an excuse to save his pocket, when the silence was suddenly interrupted by a sound in the upper part of the house.

It was not at all loud—it was a quiet, still, seraping sound—so faint that it could hardly have reached the quickest ears, except in an empty house.

"Do you hear that, Benjamin?" says the old woman. "He's at it again, even in the dark, ain't he? P'raps you'd like to see him, sir!" says she, turning on Trottle, and poking her grinning face close to him. "Only name it; only say if you'd like to see him before we do our little bit of business—and I'll show good Forley's friend upstairs, just as if he was good Mr. Forley himself. My legs are all right, whatever Benjamin's may be. I get younger and younger, and stronger and stronger, and jollier and jollier, every day—that's what I do! Don't mind the stairs on my account, sir, if you'd like to see him."

"Him?" Trottle wondered whether "him," meant a man, or a boy, or a domestic animal of the male species. Whatever it meant, here was a chance of putting off that uncomfortable give-and-take-business, and, better still, a chance perhaps of finding out

one of the secrets of the mysterious House. Trotter's spirits began to rise again, and he said "Yes," directly, with the confidence of a man who knew all about it.

Benjamin's mother took the candle at once, and lighted Trotter briskly to the stairs; and Benjamin himself tried to follow as usual. But getting up several flights of stairs, even helped by the bannisters, was more, with his particular complaint, than he seemed to feel himself inclined to venture on. He sat down obstinately on the lowest step, with his head against the wall, and the tails of his big great coat spreading out magnificently on the stairs behind him and above him, like a dirty imitation of a court lady's train.

"Don't sit there, dear," says his affectionate mother, stopping to snuff the candle on the first landing.

"I shall sit here," says Benjamin, aggravating to the last, "till the milk comes in the morning."

The cheerful old woman went on nimbly up the stairs to the first-floor, and Trotter followed, with his eyes and ears wide open. He had seen nothing out of the common in the front parlour, or up the staircase, so far. The House was dirty and dreary and close-smelling—but there was nothing about it to excite the least curiosity, except the faint scraping sound, which was now beginning to get a little clearer—though still not at all loud—as Trotter followed his leader up the stairs to the second floor.

Nothing on the second-floor landing, but cobwebs above and bits of broken plaster below, cracked off from the ceiling. Benjamin's mother was not a bit out of breath, and looked all ready to go to the top of the monument if necessary. The faint scraping sound had got a little clearer still; but Trotter was no nearer to guessing what it might be, than when he first heard it in the parlour downstairs.

On the third, and last, floor, there were two doors; one, which was shut, leading into the front garret; and one, which was ajar, leading into the back garret. There was a loft in the ceiling above the landing; but the cobwebs all over it vouched sufficiently for its not having been opened for some little time. The scraping noise, plainer than ever here, sounded on the other side of the back garret door; and, to Trotter's great relief, that was precisely the door which the cheerful old woman now pushed open.

Trotter followed her in; and, for once in his life, at any rate, was struck dumb with amazement, at the sight which the inside of the room revealed to him.

The garret was absolutely empty of everything in the shape of furniture. It must have been used, at one time or other, by somebody engaged in a profession or a trade which required for the practice of it a great deal of light; for the one window in the room which looked out on a wide open space at the

back of the house, was three or four times as large, every way, as a garret-window usually is. Close under this window, kneeling on the bare boards with his face to the door, there appeared, of all the creatures in the world to see alone at such a place and at such a time, a mere mite of a child—a little, lonely, wizen, strangely-clad boy, who could not at the most, have been more than five years old. He had a greasy old blue shawl crossed over his breast, and rolled up, to keep the ends from the ground, into a great big lump on his back. A strip of something which looked like the remains of a woman's flannel petticoat, showed itself under the shawl, and, below that again, a pair of rusty black stockings, worlds too large for him, covered his legs and his shoeless feet. A pair of old clumsy muffedees, which had worked themselves up on his little frail red arms to the elbows, and a big cotton nightcap that had dropped down to his very eyebrows, finished off the strange dress which the poor little man seemed not half big enough to fill out, and not near strong enough to walk about in.

But there was something to see even more extraordinary than the clothes the child was swaddled up in, and that was the game which he was playing at, all by himself; and which, moreover, explained in the most unexpected manner the faint scraping noise that had found its way down-stairs, through the half-opened door, in the silence of the empty house.

It has been mentioned that the child was on his knees in the garret, when Trotter first saw him. He was not saying his prayers, and not crouching down in terror at being alone in the dark. He was, odd and unaccountable as it may appear, doing nothing more or less than playing at a charwoman's or housemaid's business of scouring the floor. Both his little hands had tight hold of a mangy old blacking-brush, with hardly any bristles left in it, which he was rubbing backwards and forwards on the boards, as gravely and steadily as if he had been at scouring-work for years, and had got a large family to keep by it. The coming-in of Trotter and the old woman did not startle or disturb him in the least. He just looked up for a minute at the candle, with a pair of very bright, sharp eyes, and then went on with his work again, as if nothing had happened. On one side of him was a battered pint saucepan without a handle, which was his make-believe pail; and on the other a morsel of slate-coloured cotton rag, which stood for his flannel to wipe up with. After scrubbing bravely for a minute or two, he took the bit of rag, and mopped up, and then squeezed make-believe water out into his make-believe pail, as grave as any judge that ever sat on a Bench. By the time he thought he had got the floor pretty dry, he raised himself upright on his knees, and blew

out a good long breath, and set his little red arms akimbo, and nodded at Trottle.

"There!" says the child, knitting his little downy eyebrows into a frown. "Drat the dirt! I've cleaned up. Where's my beer?"

Benjamin's mother chuckled till Trottle thought she would have choked herself.

"Lord ha' mercy on us!" says she, "just hear the imp. You would never think he was only five years old, would you, sir? Please to tell good Mr. Forley you saw him going on as nicely as ever, playing at being me scouring the parlour floor, and calling for my beer afterwards. That's his regular game, morning, noon, and night—he's never tired of it. Only look how snug we've been and dressed him. That's my shawl a keepin his precious little body warm, and Benjamin's nightcap a keepin his precious little head warm, and Benjamin's stockings, drawn over his trowsers, a keepin his precious little legs warm. He's snug and happy if ever a imp was yet. 'Where's my beer!'—say it again, little dear, say it again!"

If Trottle had seen the boy, with a light and a fire in the room, clothed like other children, and playing naturally with a top, or a box of soldiers, or a bouncing big India-rubber ball, he might have been as cheerful under the circumstances as Benjamin's mother herself. But seeing the child reduced (as he could not help suspecting) for want of proper toys and proper child's company, to take up with the mocking of an old woman at her scouring-work for something to stand in the place of a game, Trottle, though not a family man, nevertheless felt the sight before him to be, in its way, one of the saddest and the most pitiable that he had ever witnessed.

"Why, my man," says he, "you're the boldest little chap in all England. You don't seem a bit afraid of being up here all by yourself in the dark."

"The big winder," says the child, pointing up to it, "sees in the dark; and I see with the big winder." He stops a bit, and gets up on his legs, and looks hard at Benjamin's mother. "I'm a good 'un," says he, "ain't I? I save candle."

Trottle wondered what else the forlorn little creature had been brought up to do without, besides candlelight; and risked putting a question as to whether he ever got a run in the open air to cheer him up a bit. O, yes, he had a run now and then, out of doors (to say nothing of his runs about the house), the lively little cricket—a run according to good Mr. Forley's instructions, which were followed out carefully, as good Mr. Forley's friend would be glad to hear, to the very letter.

As Trottle could only have made one reply to this, namely, that good Mr. Forley's instructions were, in his opinion, the instructions of an infernal scamp; and as he felt that such an answer would naturally prove

the death-blow to all further discoveries on his part, he gulped down his feelings before they got too many for him, and held his tongue, and looked round towards the window again to see what the forlorn little boy was going to amuse himself with next.

The child had gathered up his blacking brush and bit of rag, and had put them into the old tin saucepan; and was now working his way, as well as his clothes would let him, with his make-believe pail hugged up in his arms, towards a door of communication which led from the back to the front garret.

"I say," says he, looking round sharply over his shoulder, "what are you two stopping here for? I'm going to bed now—and so I tell you!"

With that, he opened the door, and walked into the front room. Seeing Trottle take a step or two to follow him, Benjamin's mother opened her wicked old eyes in a state of great astonishment.

"Mercy on us!" says she, "haven't you seen enough of him yet?"

"No," says Trottle. "I should like to see him go to bed."

Benjamin's mother burst into such a fit of chuckling that the loose extinguisher in the candlestick clattered again with the shaking of her hand. To think of good Mr. Forley's friend taking ten times more trouble about the imp than good Mr. Forley himself! Such a joke as that, Benjamin's mother had not often met with in the course of her life, and she begged to be excused if she took the liberty of having a laugh at it.

Leaving her to laugh as much as she pleased, and coming to a pretty positive conclusion, after what he had just heard, that Mr. Forley's interest in the child was not of the fondest possible kind, Trottle walked into the front room, and Benjamin's mother, enjoying herself immensely, followed with the candle.

There were two pieces of furniture in the front garret. One, an old stool of the sort that is used to stand a cask of beer on; and the other a great big ricketty straddling old truckle bedstead. In the middle of this bedstead, surrounded by a dim brown waste of sacking, was a kind of little island of poor bedding—an old bolster, with nearly all the feathers out of it, doubled in three for a pillow; a mere shred of patchwork counterpane, and a blanket; and under that, and peeping out a little on either side beyond the loose clothes, two faded chair cushions of horsehair, laid along together for a sort of makeshift mattress. When Trottle got into the room, the lonely little boy had scrambled up on the bedstead with the help of the beer-stool, and was kneeling on the outer rim of sacking with the shred of counterpane in his hands, just making ready to tuck it in for himself under the chair cushions.

"I'll tuck you up, my man," says Trottle. "Jump into bed, and let me try."

"I mean to tuck myself up," says the poor forlorn child, "and I don't mean to jump. I mean to crawl, I do—and so I tell you!"

With that, he set to work, tucking in the clothes tight all down the sides of the cushions, but leaving them open at the foot. Then, getting up on his knees, and looking hard at Trotter, as much as to say, "What do you mean by offering to help such a handy little chap as me?" he began to untie the big shawl for himself, and did it, too, in less than half a minute. Then, doubling the shawl up loose over the foot of the bed, he says, "I say, look here," and ducks under the clothes, head first, worming his way up and up softly, under the blanket and counterpane, till Trotter saw the top of the large nightcap slowly peep out on the bolster. This over-sized head-gear of the child's had so shoved itself down in the course of his journey to the pillow, under the clothes, that when he got his face fairly out on the bolster, he was all nightcap down to his mouth. He soon freed himself, however, from this slight encumbrance by turning the ends of the cap up gravely to their old place over his eyebrows—looked at Trotter—said, "Snug, ain't it? Good-bye!"—popped his face under the clothes again—and left nothing to be seen of him but the empty peak of the big nightcap standing up sturdily on end in the middle of the bolster.

"What a young limb it is, ain't it?" says Benjamin's mother, giving Trotter a cheerful dig with her elbow. "Come on! you won't see no more of him to-night!"—

"And so I tell you!" sings out a shrill, little voice under the bedclothes, chiming in with a playful finish to the old woman's last words.

If Trotter had not been, by this time, positively resolved to follow the wicked secret which accident had mixed him up with, through all its turnings and windings, right on to the end, he would have probably snatched the boy up then and there, and carried him off from his garret prison, bedclothes and all. As it was, he put a strong check on himself, kept his eye on future possibilities, and allowed Benjamin's mother to lead him down-stairs again.

"Mind them top bannisters," says she, as Trotter laid his hand on them. "They are as rotten as medlars every one of 'em."

"When people come to see the premises," says Trotter, trying to feel his way a little farther into the mystery of the House, "you don't bring many of them up here, do you?"

"Bless your heart alive!" says she, "nobody ever comes now. The outside of the house is quite enough to warn them off. More's the pity, as I say. It used to keep me in spirits, staggering 'em all, one after another, with the frightful high rent—especially the women, drat 'em. 'What's the rent of this house?'—'Hundred and twenty

pound a-year?'—'Hundred and twenty? why, there ain't a house in the street as lets for more than eighty?'—'Likely enough, ma'am; other landlords may lower their rents if they please; but this here landlord sticks to his rights, and means to have as much for his house as his father had before him!'—'But the neighbourhood's gone off since then!'—'Hundred and twenty pound, ma'am.'—'The landlord must be mad!'—'Hundred and twenty pound, ma'am.'—'Open the door you impertinent woman!' Lord! what a happiness it was to see 'em bounce out, with that awful rent a-ringing in their ears all down the street!"

She stopped on the second-floor landing to treat herself to another chuckle, while Trotter privately posted up in his memory what he had just heard. "Two points made out," he thought to himself: "the house is kept empty on purpose, and the way it's done is to ask a rent that nobody will pay."

"Ah, deary me!" says Benjamin's mother, changing the subject on a sudden, and twisting back with a horrid, greedy quickness to those awkward money-matters which she had broached down in the parlour. "What we've done, one way and another for Mr. Forley, it isn't in words to tell! That nice little bit of business of ours ought to be a bigger bit of business, considering the trouble we take, Benjamin and me, to make the imp up-stairs as happy as the day is long. If good Mr. Forley would only please to think a little more of what a deal he owes to Benjamin and me—"

"That's just it," says Trotter, catching her up short in desperation, and seeing his way, by the help of those last words of hers to slipping cleverly through her fingers. "What should you say, if I told you that Mr. Forley was nothing like so far from thinking about that little matter as you fancy? You would be disappointed, now, if I told you that I had come to-day without the money?"—(her lank old jaw fell, and her villanous old eyes glared, in a perfect state of panic, at that!)"—"But what should you say, if I told you that Mr. Forley was only waiting for my report, to send me here next Monday, at dusk, with a bigger bit of business for us two to do together than ever you think for? What should you say to that?"

The old wretch came so near to Trotter, before she answered, and jammed him up confidentially so close into the corner of the landing, that his throat, in a manner, rose at her.

"Can you count it off, do you think, on more than that?" says she, holding up her four skinny fingers and her long crooked thumb, all of a tremble, right before his face.

"What do you say to two hands, instead of one?" says he, pushing past her, and getting down-stairs as fast as he could.

What she said Trotter thinks it best not to

report, seeing that the old hypocrite, getting next door to light-headed at the golden prospect before her, took such liberties with unearthly names and persons which ought never to have approached her lips, and rained down such an awful shower of blessings on Trottlet's head, that his hair almost stood on end to hear her. He went on down-stairs as fast as his feet would carry him, till he was brought up all standing, as the sailors say, on the last flight, by aggravating Benjamin, lying right across the stair, and fallen off, as might have been expected, into a heavy drunken sleep.

The sight of him instantly reminded Trottlet of the curious half likeness which he had already detected between the face of Benjamin and the face of another man, whom he had seen at a past time in very different circumstances. He determined, before leaving the House, to have one more look at the wretched muddled creature; and accordingly shook him up smartly, and propped him against the staircase wall, before his mother could interfere.

"Leave him to me; I'll freshen him up," says Trottlet to the old woman, looking hard in Benjamin's face, while he spoke.

The fright and surprise of being suddenly woke up, seemed, for about a quarter of a minute, to sober the creature. When he first opened his eyes, there was a new look in them for a moment, which struck home to Trottlet's memory as quick and as clear as a flash of light. The old maudlin sleepy expression came back again in another instant, and blurred out all further signs and tokens of the past. But Trottlet had seen enough in the moment before it came; and he troubled Benjamin's face with no more inquiries.

"Next Monday, at dusk," says he, cutting short some more of the old woman's palaver about Benjamin's indigestion. "I've got no more time to spare, ma'am, to-night: please to let me out."

With a few last blessings, a few last dutiful messages to good Mr. Forley, and a few last friendly hints not to forget next Monday at dusk, Trottlet contrived to struggle through the sickening business of leave-taking; to get the door opened; and to find himself, to his own indescribable relief, once more on the outer side of the House To Let.

LET AT LAST.

"THERE, ma'am!" said Trottlet, folding up the manuscript from which he had been reading, and setting it down with a smart tap of triumph on the table. "May I venture to ask what you think of that plain statement, as a guess on my part (and not on Mr. Jarber's) at the riddle of the empty House?"

For a minute or two I was unable to say a word. When I recovered a little, my first question referred to the poor forlorn little boy.

"To-day is Monday the twentieth," I said.

"Surely you have not let a whole week go by without trying to find out something more?"

"Except at bed-time, and meals, ma'am," answered Trottlet, "I have not let an hour go by. Please to understand that I have only come to an end of what I have written, and not to an end of what I have done. I wrote down those first particulars, ma'am, because they are of great importance, and also because I was determined to come forward with my written documents, seeing that Mr. Jarber chose to come forward, in the first instance, with his. I am now ready to go on with the second part of my story as shortly and plainly as possible, by word of mouth. The first thing I must clear up, if you please, is the matter of Mr. Forley's family affairs. I have heard you speak of them, ma'am, at various times; and I have understood that Mr. Forley had two children only by his deceased wife, both daughters. The eldest daughter married, to her father's entire satisfaction, one Mr. Bayne, a rich man, holding a high government situation in Canada. She is now living there with her husband, and her only child, a little girl of eight or nine years old. Right so far, I think, ma'am?"

"Quite right," I said.

"The second daughter," Trottlet went on, "and Mr. Forley's favourite, set her father's wishes and the opinions of the world at flat defiance, by running away with a man of low origin—a mate of a merchant-vessel, named Kirkland. Mr. Forley not only never forgave that marriage, but vowed that he would visit the scandal of it heavily in the future on husband and wife. Both escaped his vengeance, whatever he meant it to be. The husband was drowned on his first voyage after his marriage, and the wife died in child-bed. Right again, I believe, ma'am?"

"Again quite right."

"Having got the family matter all right, we will now go back, ma'am, to me and my doings. Last Monday, I asked you for leave of absence for two days; I employed the time in clearing up the matter of Benjamin's face. Last Saturday I was out of the way when you wanted me. I played truant, ma'am, on that occasion, in company with a friend of mine, who is managing clerk in a lawyer's office; and we both spent the morning at Doctors' Commons, over the last will and testament of Mr. Forley's father. Leaving the will-business for a moment, please to follow me first, if you have no objection, into the ugly subject of Benjamin's face. About six or seven years ago (thanks to your kindness) I had a week's holiday with some friends of mine who live in the town of Pendlebury. One of those friends (the only one now left in the place) kept a chemist's shop, and in that shop I was made acquainted with one of the two doctors in the town, named Barsham. This Barsham was a first-rate surgeon, and might have got