But now the young and fresh imagination
Finds traces of their presence everywhere,
And peoples with a new and bright creation
The clear blue chambers of the sunny air.

For them the gate of many a fairy palace
Opes to the ringing bugle of the bee,
And every flower-cup is a golden chalice,
Wine-filled, in some grand elfin revelry.

Quaint little eyes from grassy nooks are peering;
Each dewy leaf is rich in magic lore;
The foam-bells, down the merry brooklet steering,
Are fairy-freighted to some happier shore.

Stern theorists, with wisdom overreaching
The aim of wisdom, in your precepts cold,
And with a painful stress of callous teaching,
That withers the young heart into the old,

What is the gain if all their flowers were perished,
Their vision-fields for ever shorn and bare,
The mirror shattered that their young faith cherished,
Showing the face of things so very fair?

Time hath enough of ills to undeceive them,
And cares will crowd where dreams have dwelt before;
Oh, therefore, while the heart is trusting, leave them
Their happy childhood and their fairy lore!

HUNTED DOWN.

BY CHARLES DICKENS.

IN TWO PORTIONS. PORTION THE FIRST.

I.

MOST of us see some romances in life. In my capacity as Chief-Manager of a Life Assurance Office, I think I have, within the last thirty years, seen more romances than the generality of men, however unpromising the opportunity may at first sight seem.

As I have retired, and live at my ease, I possess the means that I used to want, of considering what I have seen, at leisure. My experiences have a more remarkable aspect, so reviewed, than they had when they were in progress. I have come home from the Play now, and can recal the scenes of the Drama upon which the curtain has fallen, free from the glare, bewilderment, and bustle, of the Theatre.

Let me recal one of these Romances of the real world.

There is nothing truer (I believe) than physiognomy, taken in connexion with manner. The art of reading that book of which Eternal Wisdom obliges every human creature to present his or her own page with the individual character written on it, is a difficult one, perhaps, and is little studied. It may require some natural aptitude, and it must require (for everything does) some patience and some pains. That, these are not usually given to it—that, numbers of people accept a few stock common-place expressions of face as the whole list of characteristics, and neither seek nor recognise the refinements that are truest—that You, for instance, give a great deal of time and attention to the reading of music, Greek, Latin, French, Italian, Hebrew, if you please, and do not qualify yourself to read the face of the master or mistress looking over your shoulder teaching it to you—I assume to be five hundred times more probable than improbable. Perhaps some little self-sufficiency may be at the bottom of this; facial expression requires no study from you, you think; it comes by nature to you to know enough about it, and you are not to be taken in.

I confess, for my part, that I have been taken in, over and over and over again. I have been taken in by acquaintances, and I have been taken in (of course) by friends; far oftener by friends than by any other class of persons. How came I to be so deceived? Had I quite misread their faces? No. Believe me, my first impression of those people, founded on face and manner alone, was invariably true. My mistake was, in suffering them to come nearer to me, and explain themselves away.

II.

THE partition which separated my own office from our general outer office, in the City, was of thick plate-glass. I could see through it what passed in the outer office, without hearing a word. I had had it put up, in place of a wall that had been there for years—ever since the house was built. It is no matter whether I did or did not make the change, in order that I might derive my first impression of strangers who came to us on business, from their faces alone, without being influenced by anything they said. Enough to mention that I turned my glass partition to that account, and that a Life Assurance Office is at all times exposed to be practised upon by the most crafty and cruel of the human race.

It was through my glass partition that I first saw the gentleman whose story I am going to tell.

He had come in without my observing it, and had put his hat and umbrella on the broad counter, and was bending over it to take some papers from one of the clerks. He was about forty or so, dark, exceedingly well dressed in black—being in mourning—and the hand he extended with a polite air, had a particularly well-fitting black kid glove upon it. His hair, which was elaborately brushed and oiled, was parted straight up the middle; and he presented this parting to the clerk, exactly (to my thinking) as if he had said, in so many words: "You must take me, if you please, my friend, just as I show myself. Come straight up here, follow the gravel path, keep off the grass, I allow no trespassing."

I conceived a very great aversion to that man, the moment I thus saw him.

He had asked for some of our printed forms, and the clerk was giving them to him, and explaining them. An obliged and agreeable smile was on his face, and his eyes met those of the clerk with a sprightly look. (I have known a vast quantity of nonsense talked about bad men not looking you in the face. Don't trust that conventional idea. Dishonesty will stare honesty out of countenance, any day in the week, if there is anything to be got by it.)

I saw, in the corner of his eyelash, that he

became aware of my looking at him. Immediately, he turned the parting in his hair towards the glass partition, as if he said to me with a sweet smile, "Straight up here, if you please. Off the grass!"

In a few moments he had put on his hat and taken up his umbrella, and was gone.

I beckoned the clerk into my room, and asked, "Who was that?"

He had the gentleman's card in his hand. "Mr. Julius Slinkton, Middle Temple."

"A barrister, Mr. Adams?"

"I think not, sir."

"I should have thought him a clergyman, but for his having no Reverend here," said I.

"Probably, from his appearance," Mr. Adams replied, "he is reading for orders."

I should mention that he wore a dainty white cravat, and dainty linen altogether.

"What did he want, Mr. Adams?"

"Merely a form of proposal, sir, and a form of reference."

"Recommended here? Did he say?"

"Yes; he said he was recommended here by a friend of yours. He noticed you, but said that as he had not the pleasure of your personal acquaintance he would not trouble you."

"Did he know my name?"

"Oh yes, sir! He said, 'There *is* Mr. Sampson, I see.'"

"A well-spoken gentleman, apparently?"

"Remarkably so, sir."

"Insinuating manners, apparently?"

"Very much so, indeed, sir."

"Hah!" said I. "I want nothing at present, Mr. Adams."

Within a fortnight of that day, I went to dine with a friend of mine—a merchant, a man of taste, who buys pictures and books; and the first person I saw among the company was Mr. Julius Slinkton. There he was, standing before the fire, with good large eyes and an open expression of face; but still (I thought) requiring everybody to come at him by the prepared way he offered, and by no other.

I noticed him ask my friend to introduce him to Mr. Sampson, and my friend did so. Mr. Slinkton was very happy to see me. Not too happy; there was no overdoing of the matter; happy, in a thoroughly well-bred, perfectly unmeaning way.

"I thought you had met," our host observed.

"No," said Mr. Slinkton. "I did look in at Mr. Sampson's office, on your recommendation; but I really did not feel justified in troubling Mr. Sampson himself, on a point within the every-day routine of an ordinary clerk."

I said I should have been glad to show him any attention on our friend's introduction.

"I am sure of that," said he, "and am much obliged. At another time, perhaps, I may be less delicate. Only, however, if I have real business; for I know, Mr. Sampson, how precious business time is, and what a vast number of impertinent people there are in the world."

I acknowledged his consideration with a slight bow. "You were thinking," said I, "of effecting a policy on your life?"

"Oh dear, no! I am afraid I am not so prudent as you pay me the compliment of supposing me to be, Mr. Sampson. I merely inquired for a friend. But you know what friends are in such matters. Nothing may ever come of it. I have the greatest reluctance to trouble men of business with inquiries for friends, knowing the probabilities to be a thousand to one that the friends will never follow them up. People are so fickle, so selfish, so inconsiderate. Don't you, in your business, find them so every day, Mr. Sampson?"

I was going to give a qualified answer; but, he turned his smooth, white parting on me, with its "Straight up here, if you please!" and I answered, "Yes."

"I hear, Mr. Sampson," he resumed, presently, for our friend had a new cook, and dinner was not so punctual as usual, "that your profession has recently suffered a great loss."

"In money?" said I.

He laughed at my ready association of loss with money, and replied, "No; in talent and vigour."

Not at once following out his allusion, I considered for a moment. "*Has* it sustained a loss of that kind?" said I. "I was not aware of it."

"Understand me, Mr. Sampson. I don't imagine that you have retired. It is not so bad as that. But Mr. Meltham——"

"Oh, to be sure!" said I. "Yes! Mr. Meltham, the young actuary of the 'Inestimable'?"

"Just so," he returned, in a consoling way.

"He is a great loss. He was at once the most profound, the most original, and the most energetic man, I have ever known connected with Life Assurance."

I spoke strongly; for I had a high esteem and admiration for Meltham, and my gentleman had indefinitely conveyed to me some suspicion that he wanted to sneer at him. He recalled me to my guard, by presenting that trim pathway up his head, with its infernal, "Not on the grass, if you please—the gravel."

"You knew him, Mr. Slinkton?"

"Only by reputation. To have known him as an acquaintance, or as a friend, is an honour I should have sought, if he had remained in society: though I might never have had the good fortune to attain it, being a man of far inferior mark. He was scarcely above thirty, I suppose?"

"About thirty."

"Ah!" He sighed in his former consoling way. "What creatures we are! To break up, Mr. Sampson, and become incapable of business at that time of life!—Any reason assigned for the melancholy fact?"

("Humph!" thought I, as I looked at him. "But I WON'T go up the track, and I WILL go on the grass.")

"What reason have you heard assigned, Mr. Slinkton?" I asked, point blank.

"Most likely a false one. You know what Rumour is, Mr. Sampson. I never repeat what I hear; it is the only way of paring the nails and shaving the head of Rumour. But, when *you* ask me what reason I have heard assigned for Mr. Meltham's passing away from among men, it is another thing. I am not gratifying idle gossip then. I was told, Mr. Sampson, that Mr. Meltham had relinquished all his avocations and all his prospects, because he was, in fact, broken-hearted. A disappointed attachment, I heard—though it hardly seems probable, in the case of a man so distinguished and so attractive."

"Attractions and distinctions are no armour against death," said I.

"Oh! She died? Pray, pardon me. I did not hear that. That, indeed, makes it very very sad. Poor Mr. Meltham! She died? Ah, dear me! Lamentable, lamentable!"

I still thought his pity not quite genuine, and I still suspected an unaccountable sneer under all this, until he said, as we were parted, like the other knots of talkers, by the announcement of dinner:

"Mr. Sampson, you are surprised to see me so moved, on behalf of a man whom I have never known. I am not so disinterested as you may suppose. I myself have suffered, and recently too, from death. I have lost one of two charming nieces, who were my constant companions. She died young—barely three-and-twenty—and even her remaining sister is far from strong. The world is a grave!"

He said this with deep feeling, and I felt reproached for the coldness of my manner. Coldness and distrust had been engendered in me, I knew, by my bad experiences; they were not natural to me; and I often thought how much I had lost in life, losing trustfulness, and how little I had gained, gaining hard caution. This state of mind being habitual to me, I troubled myself more about this conversation than I might have troubled myself about a greater matter. I listened to his talk at dinner, and observed how readily other men responded to it, and with what a graceful instinct he adapted his subjects to the knowledge and habits of those he talked with. As, in talking with me, he had easily started the subject I might be supposed to understand best, and to be the most interested in, so, in talking with others, he guided himself by the same rule. The company was of a varied character; but, he was not at fault, that I could discover, with any member of it. He knew just as much of each man's pursuit as made him agreeable to that man in reference to it, and just as little as made it natural in him to seek modestly for information when the theme was broached.

As he talked and talked—but really not too much, for the rest of us seemed to force it upon him—I became quite angry with myself. I took his face to pieces in my mind, like a watch, and examined it in detail. I could not say much against any of his features separately; I could say even less against them when they were put together. "Then is it not monstrous," I asked myself, "that because a man happens to part his hair straight up the middle of his head, I should permit myself to suspect, and even to detest, him?"

(I may stop to remark that this was no proof of my good sense. An observer of men who finds himself steadily repelled by some apparently trifling thing in a stranger, is right to give it great weight. It may be the clue to the whole mystery. A hair or two will show where a lion is hidden. A very little key will open a very heavy door.)

I took my part in the conversation with him after a time, and we got on remarkably well. In the drawing-room, I asked the host how long he had known Mr. Slinkton? He answered, not many months; he had met him at the house of a celebrated painter then present, who had known him well when he was travelling with his nieces in Italy for their health. His plans in life being broken by the death of one of them, he was reading, with the intention of going back to college as a matter of form, taking his degree, and going into orders. I could not but argue with myself that here was the true explanation of his interest in poor Meltham, and that I had been almost brutal in my distrust on that simple head.

III.

On the very next day but one, I was sitting behind my glass partition as before, when he came into the outer office as before. The moment I saw him again without hearing him, I hated him worse than ever.

It was only for a moment that he gave me this opportunity; for, he waved his tight-fitting black glove the instant I looked at him, and came straight in.

"Mr. Sampson, good day! I presume, you see, upon your kind permission to intrude upon you. I don't keep my word in being justified by business, for my business here—if I may so abuse the word—is of the slightest nature."

I asked, was it anything I could assist him in?

"I thank you, no. I merely called to inquire outside, whether my dilatory friend has been so false to himself, as to be practical and sensible. But, of course, he has done nothing. I gave him your papers with my own hand, and he was hot upon the intention, but of course he has done nothing. Apart from the general human disinclination to do anything that ought to be done, I dare say there is a speciality about assuring one's life? You find it like will-making? People are so superstitious, and take it for granted they will die soon afterwards?"

—Up here, if you please. Straight up here, Mr. Sampson. Neither to the right nor to the left! I almost fancied I could hear him breathe the words, as he sat smiling at me, with that intolerable parting exactly opposite the bridge of my nose.

"There is such a feeling sometimes, no doubt," I replied; "but I don't think it obtains to any great extent."

"Well!" said he, with a shrug and a smile, "I wish some good angel would influence my friend in the right direction. I rashly promised his mother and sister in Norfolk, to see it done, and he promised them that he would do it. But I suppose he never will."

He spoke for a minute or two on indifferent topics, and went away.

I had scarcely unlocked the drawers of my writing-table next morning when he reappeared. I noticed that he came straight to the door in the glass partition, and did not pause a single moment outside.

"Can you spare me two minutes, my dear Mr. Sampson?"

"By all means."

"Much obliged," laying his hat and umbrella on the table. "I came early, not to interrupt you. The fact is, I am taken by surprise, in reference to this proposal my friend has made."

"Has he made one?" said I.

"Ye-es," he answered, deliberately looking at me; and then a bright idea seemed to strike him;—"or he only tells me he has. Perhaps that may be a new way of evading the matter. By Jupiter, I never thought of that!"

Mr. Adams was opening the morning's letters in the outer office. "What is the name, Mr. Slinkton?" I asked.

"Beckwith."

I looked out at the door and requested Mr. Adams, if there were a proposal in that name, to bring it in. He had already laid it out of his hand on the counter. It was easily selected from the rest, and he gave it me. Alfred Beckwith. Proposal to effect a Policy with us for two thousand pounds. Dated yesterday.

"From the Middle Temple, I see, Mr. Slinkton."

"Yes. He lives on the same staircase with me; his door is opposite mine. I never thought he would make me his reference, though."

"It seems natural enough that he should."

"Quite so, Mr. Sampson; but I never thought of it. Let me see." He took the printed paper from his pocket. "How am I to answer all these questions?"

"According to the truth, of course," said I.

"Oh! Of course," he answered, looking up from the paper with a smile: "I meant, they were so many. But, you do right to be particular. It stands to reason that you must be particular. Will you allow me to use your pen and ink?"

"Certainly."

"And your desk?"

"Certainly."

He had been hovering about between his hat and his umbrella, for a place to write on. He now sat down in my chair, at my blotting paper and inkstand, with the long walk up his head in accurate perspective before me, as I stood with my back to the fire.

Before answering each question, he ran over it aloud, and discussed it. How long had he known Mr. Alfred Beckwith? That he had to calculate by years, upon his fingers. What were his habits? No difficulty about *them;* temperate in the last degree, and took a little too much exercise, if anything. All the answers were satisfactory. When he had written them all, he looked them over, and finally signed them in a very pretty hand. He supposed he had now done with the business? I told him he was not likely to be troubled any further. Should he leave the papers there? If he pleased. Much obliged. Good morning!

I had had one other visitor before him; not at the office, but at my own house. That visitor had come to my bedside when it was not yet daylight, and had been seen by no one else but by my faithful confidential servant.

A second reference paper (for we always required two) was sent down into Norfolk, and was duly received back by post. This, likewise, was satisfactorily answered in every respect. Our forms were all complied with, we accepted the proposal, and the premium for one year was paid.

OUR DAILY BREAD.

In the time of Pliny, six different kinds of wheat were cultivated by the Romans; in the present time there are from a hundred and fifty to a hundred and sixty different races of wheat: most of which, however, are distinctly referable to four or five principal types. The minor varieties are by no means permanent in their characters, except under special cultivation, and they degenerate when grown in unfavourable conditions. In like manner, favourable conditions readily bring out improved qualities in inferior kinds. But it must not be concluded from this, that Buffon and the other writers are correct in their views who regard the corn-grains as artificial products. The principal types appear constant, for Decandolle recognised the seeds of "Triticum turgidum" in specimens from the Egyptian mummy-cases; Loiseleur confirms this fact; and the Count de Sternberg, in 1834, raised plants of the common wheat from a sample obtained from an Egyptian tomb. This is further confirmed by a note presented to the French Academy of Sciences by M. Guerin Méneville. Some botanists—to whom the absence of wild wheat in most countries is an indication of the artificial origin of the corn of our fields—regard it as a product of long-continued cultivation.

A few years ago, M. Esprit Fabre, of Agde, gave an account of the supposed production of wheat by a grass called "Ægilops ovata," growing wild in the south of France. It never exceeds a foot in height, and has a short broad ear with but four spikelets, only two of them being fertile. It has long been known to produce a variety called "triticoides," from its approach in some degree to the character of wheat. When this grass, in its wild state, produces this variety, a portion of the characteristic bristles or awns on the valves disappears, and the spikelets are generally barren. The ripe grain is long and