

# MY NEW FRIEND.

## CHAPTER III

As the reader may suppose, I was in feverish expectation of a summons to wait upon Messrs. Banner, Wregg, and Carrowble—the firm for which Mr. Soate was acting—hour by hour, almost minute by minute; but the business took a very different turn. Mr. Soate called one day, out of the time at which he usually paid his visits, which was generally in the evening, and said that he would not trouble me to call; they were quite satisfied, he said, with what they had heard from him; and not caring to multiply the agents with whom they dealt directly, he preferred to consider my transactions as a branch of his own. This being the case, he would at once, if I were agreeable, commence our joint work by either seeing people on my behalf, or making appointments at my house himself.

I could have no possible objection to this, beyond the grave one that I had no experience in buying and selling, and did not even know what kind of goods I was expected to examine. To all this he had conclusive answers. A man "with his head screwed on the right way," as mine was, would have no difficulty in picking up such knowledge; while at first he would see everything right for me, and when he was obliged to be away, would leave me instructions how far to go in any purchase. But there! it was not mountains of molehills to talk in that place; and I could not help thinking that Soate took care never to hold them in the presence of Mr. Chelms; and I sometimes actually thought he must lie in wait in the neighbourhood to see the old gentleman go out, so promptly did he look in directly afterwards. But Mr. Chelms was so interested in the matter, so anxious for actual work to begin, he said, that he generally extracted a pretty full account from me; besides holding long conversations on his own prospective share with Mr. Soate.

Among other preparations for the agency, Mr. Soate had some office furniture brought in; so that, with a massive table and desk, half-a-dozen heavy chairs, with various racks and shelves fitted on the walls, my front parlour assumed quite a solid, banking, or life-assurance aspect, which met the approval not only of Mr. Soate, but of Mr. Chelms. The first transaction which was completed in the new office, took place very suddenly—to me; and was surprising by its brevity and various special features, common perhaps to my novel business, but altogether different from my previous experience. It was conducted thus. At twilight one evening, only a few days after the subject was first broached, for Mr. Soate would lose no time in the matter, he came in, and repaired to the office. He had not been there five minutes, when a man knocked at our door and asked for him. It so happened that I opened the door to this person, who, in the few words he spoke, seemed to have an unpleasantly furtive way with him; and although not disguised in any particular manner, his hat was so slouched over his brows, and the collar of his coat so pulled up, that it was impossible to distinguish his features clearly. I showed him into the office, and went down-stairs. As I did so, I thought for an instant that I caught sight of Mr. Chelms's face, in the dusky gloom of the staircase, peering over the banisters. I paused to look again; but no one was there, and I went on.

In a few minutes Mr. Soate called down the speaking tube which he had caused to be carried from the office to our sitting room, and asked me to step up. I complied, and found him with the stranger I had previously admitted; but their figures were barely discernible, as they were sitting without a light, and the twilight had now almost changed to darkness. I naturally noticed this, and endeavored to procure a light.

"No, thank ye," returned Mr. Soate. "Our business is finished, and I am going out directly. I wished to introduce you to this gentleman, who will be here again to-morrow, or the next night, and will transact some business with you. Mr.—a—Mr."

"Jerry Wilkins, you know," said the other, as Soate hesitated.

"To be sure I—of course!" exclaimed the latter. "Mr. Wilkins, this is our new agent, Mr. Matley, who will carry on the business at this branch for the present; so you will know who to ask for when I am not here."

"Yes; I shall know him," returned the stranger. His words were not a direct reply to Mr. Soate's remark, and although I could scarcely see him in the darkness, I felt he was eying me narrowly. However, there was little time for this or anything more, as Soate rose from his seat, and in a few words intimated that our business was concluded.

I opened the door for them, and they went out, not exactly together, for Mr. Wilkins left at once, while Soate lingered for a couple of minutes on the threshold with me, although he seemed to have nothing particular to say. As I closed the door, I again thought I saw Mr. Chelms, this time at the farther end of our little entrance hall; but it was very dark there, and I might easily have been mistaken. I at once lighted the gas, and went down to our breakfast-room, where I found the old gentleman calmly smoking his pipe in the dark, and by himself; for Susan was absent, making some trifling purchases in the neighbourhood.

I apologized for his not having a light; but, in his usual cheerful manner, he said it was of no consequence, as he liked to sit and smoke in a half-dreamy state, to which twilight, or even darkness, was very favorable. He was chatty on other subjects, but, for a wonder, did not refer to business, which indeed, was not spoken of until my wife returned. She had gone out just after I had admitted Mr. Jerry Wilkins, and so naturally asked me who the visitor was. But even while I told her, Mr. Chelms was too much engrossed by his pipe to pay any attention to the subject, or at any rate to join in the conversation.

Though on various occasions Mr. Chelms indulged in a glass or two of grog, it is only right that I should say that he never, even at first, gave us the idea that he was an intemperate man. He certainly seemed led away a little by the example of Soate, who occasionally took, we thought, a malicious pleasure in tempting the old gentleman. We did not and could not let Soate, while we

both felt favourably disposed to our lodger from the beginning.

The next day Soate came early, and had a brief interview with me in the office. His object was to say that Mr. Wilkins would probably call that night, and if so, would bring a parcel, of which I was to take charge and for which I was to give him forty-five pounds. This money he gave me all in gold.

"Am I to examine or check the goods?" I began.

"O no," he said; "it is all settled about them. We know Jerry, and have done many bits of business with him, so we can trust him."

"Will you give me a receipt for him to sign?" I asked, "or will he draw one up?"

"Receipt don't signify between people who can trust each other," he replied.

"Way, you do not mean to say you are going to pay all this money without a receipt?" I exclaimed in amazement; for such a proceeding was horribly opposed to all my experience.

"Yes, with Jerry," he returned carelessly; "it's our way. You will get into it soon, old fellow, and when you come to know your customers, you will deal with them accordingly. By-the-by, you may let old Chelms know that you have begun business; you may show him the money, to let him see that it's a real thing; but don't let him be in the room when you pay Wilkins. In fact, he had better not see Wilkins at all. All this was odd; but as I knew literally nothing of the business as yet, or how the unseen firm conducted it, I could not say anything against it.

Mr. Soate added one piece of information this day which was welcome. He said that my engagement would be considered to commence from this date; that a rent would be paid for the use of the office, the amount of which would depend upon his report; and upon his report also, to be sent in at the end of four weeks—when I should be introduced to the firm—it would depend whether I was paid by salary or commission. "And you may rely upon my report saying the best it can for you, old fellow," he continued. "I could have got this settled at once; but I knew what our principles are, and I am confident that to wait a bit will make a difference of fifty pounds a year to you; so you can draw on me for five, or ten if you choose, while the month runs on, and pay me at your leisure."

It was impossible not to feel grateful to a man who did so much for a stranger, and who was so perfectly disinterested; yet—although I hated myself for allowing such a feeling to exist—I was conscious, even while I was thanking Soate, and thanking him sincerely—I was conscious, I say, that I was gradually growing almost to detest the man, my benefactor though he was.

Soate did not come in again that day; and I took the first opportunity of telling Mr. Chelms what my instructions were; showed him the money, as suggested; told him that I was now fairly in the employ of the firm; that I was to be introduced to them in four weeks' time, and that my pay would be settled on such a scale as the report of Mr. Soate justified. He asked me, after a moment's reflection, what the address of the firm was. I told him that I had asked the same question of Soate, who had replied, that I had better postpone all inquiries till the month was over; they would prefer it.

"Ah, I see," said the old gentleman. "Until that time, you are, as one may say, on probation. Very cautious of them, very, not to allow Mr. Soate even to reveal his address until then.—But I like them all the better for it, sir; I do, indeed. Now if I get my money in a few days, I may hope—as Mr. Soate holds out the most favourable expectations to me—to be introduced at the same time as yourself. I should like that, because, of course, I should not invest without knowing something of the people, no matter how high my opinion of Mr. Soate might be."

I agreed with the old gentleman that he was quite right in this.

A man went by with plants in a barrow that afternoon, and Mr. Chelms declaring—rather to my surprise—that he was an enthusiastic admirer of flowers, bought a number, which he told Mrs. Matley—who really was fond of them—he would plant in the front garden after the sun went down. He was as good as his words too, or nearly; for he went into the garden with spade and water-can, and slowly—for it was plain he was not an expert gardener—commenced his work. I offered to help him; but the old gentleman said that half his pleasure in shrubs and flowers would be lost unless he planted them himself; so he went on until it was almost dark, making, however, but little progress.

It was between twilight and dark when a cab stopped at our gate, and a knock following, I went to the door, expecting to find—as it proved—Mr. Jerry Wilkins. I had lost no time in answering the knock; but Mr. Chelms was already in conversation with the visitor, and inviting him, as I could hear, to admire some beautiful bulbs he was holding out for his inspection. Mr. Wilkins, who had struck me as being of a somewhat merose turn when I admitted him on the previous evening, looked gloomier and sulkier now. He turned with a very unconvincing grunt from the garrulous old gentleman, and came in the moment I opened the door. Mr. Chelms, however, smiled with imperturbable good-humour, but, as it was too dark to see any longer, gave up his gardening for the night.

"You are not an enthusiast in flowers, Mr. Wilkins," I began. "I am afraid you did not see any particular beauty in the bulb which Mr. Chelms so greatly admires."

"Beauty, no!" said Mr. Wilkins. "What do I want with a thing as looks as if it was pulled out of a rope of onions; and yet Ned Soate is going to do business with him, isn't he?"

I could make no reply for the moment, the man's vulgar familiarity, and his knowledge of Soate's plans, so thoroughly staggered me.

while he rapidly ran over the gold. "All right, governor. Will you come to the corner and have a glass?—You won't? Well, that's your business. Mine is to clear out; so good-night." Saying this, he went, leaving me with a growing feeling of dislike to the "agency," with which indeed I had never been greatly enamoured.

Mr. Chelms, who, as he explained, had gone out for a short stroll, returned soon after Wilkins left, and joining Mrs. Matley and myself, began what promised to be a long, as it was certainly an unconnected account of his gardening experiences in the country; but ere he was fairly in the midst of his narrative, a knock at the street door was heard; and, to my astonishment, Lizette brought down a message to the effect that a gentleman wished to see me at the Three Bells, a tavern in the next street. It immediately occurred to me that it must be that dreadful Wilkins, who wished to transact some fresh piece of the most irregular business in which I was engaged, and this was perhaps his way of managing it. I hurried accordingly, Mr. Chelms saying he would smoke a pipe in the front garden until I came back, so that he should be out of the way while Mrs. Matley and Lizette prepared the supper.

I hastened away, as I have said, and went into each compartment of the bar at the Three Bells, which was a large place, without seeing Wilkins or any one that I knew. On my looking for the second or third time into the most select division, where I had naturally expected to find him, a big, square-built man, a customer who was leaning against the bar, said civilly: "Are you looking for anybody, sir?"

It occurred to me that this after all might be the sender of the message, so at a venture, I replied: "Yes; I am indeed looking for some one; but the awkward part of it is that I do not know who I am looking for. A lad came to my house, and said a gentleman wished to see me here; but I think there must have been some mistake."

"I am sure there is!" exclaimed the stranger. "What a pity it is you cannot get the simplest thing done in a straightforward manner. I sent a boy with that message to an old acquaintance.—May I ask where you live, sir?"

"No. 9 Victoria Louisa Terrace," I replied.

"The young idiot!" said the stranger. "I told him a totally different number. It is evidently through me you have been brought here, sir; and though I did not come myself, I must apologise for the utter stupidity of my messenger. You must have a glass of something with me."

I tried to decline this; but the stranger was clearly one of those who think nothing is complete until ratified by the wine-pledge; so I had to stay and assure him of my completely excusing him, and listen to his repeated apologies over a glass of ale, before I could get away.

I found Mr. Chelms leaning over the gate, and smoking tranquilly. When I told him of my adventures, the old gentleman laughed heartily. I thought business was concluded for that evening; but at the very last moment, just indeed as we were going to bed, Soate came in for the parcel left by Mr. Jerry Wilkins. I went with him into the office, where I experienced a momentary "turn" by not being able to lay my hand upon the packet in the dark, which I made sure I could have done. On procuring a light, however, I found I had merely made the mistake of supposing that the parcel was on a chair to the right of the door, when in reality it was upon one to the left.

"I shall be round early to-morrow," said Mr. Soate, "as, since I saw you, I have had a foreign letter, which you must answer. It is from Belgium, and will lead to a great deal of business. You understand French, I believe?"

I said I had a fair knowledge of that language.

"That's a good job," continued Soate. "It has been a staggerer to me over and over again, the not knowing anything of the *parlyvoos* jargon. This will be a big transaction, you will find.—And I say, Matley!"—this exclamation was uttered just as he reached the door, as if it were a sudden thought—"just sound old Chelms about his money. If he can get it in two or three days it will be just in time to make such a profit for him as he never got in Australia, or wherever he has been. Tell him that; and tell him that afterwards it may be too late. I will come round and see him myself as well."

He went rapidly away with the parcel; and I had a long talk with my wife, before I went to sleep that night, upon the singular features of the employment on which I had entered; and we half decided that unless I saw the principals at the end of the month, and liked them when I did see them, I would not continue the engagement.

I spoke to Mr. Chelms in the morning, as desired about his investment; and the old gentleman seemed anxious not to lose the promised chance, and said that perhaps, by sacrificing a trifle of interest, he might get his money a day or two earlier than agreed, which would be in about a week later. Perhaps Mr. Soate would show him a way out of the difficulty. But it was not likely that he would give up all this money without an introduction to the firm, and being well satisfied of their stability, or, in lieu of this, some tangible security meanwhile.

As soon as Mr. Soate came, I told him this. He declared he greatly applauded the old gentleman's caution, and asked me to call him down, so that we might talk things over. I did so; and Mr. Chelms came at once.

"You are naturally desirous of knowing where you put your money, and what it is for, Mr. Chelms"—began Soate.

"I am, sir, naturally anxious, as you say," interposed the old gentleman, feeling for his eyes, as he always did when business was the topic of conversation. Scouring it at last, he fixed it to his eyes, and looked earnestly, yet with an expression which was ridiculously helpless, at Mr. Soate. "No offence, I hope," he continued; "but you see a thousand pounds, or eleven hundred, is a great deal to me; and although I have every confidence in you, yet—"

"No apology, my dear sir," exclaimed Soate; "your conduct is strictly business-like, and I will satisfy you. One of my principals, if not two of them, shall wait upon you here, in the first place."

"They shall come, sir; and you shall arrange them, if you like each other, for a final interview at headquarters. Their reference, I may remark, will be to three tolerably well-known establishments—the Bank of England, Mr. Baring's, Mr. and Mrs. Rothschild's, etc. Are they good enough?"

"Splendid! Oh! I'm sure," commenced Mr. Chelms; but here his eyes fell down, and the interruption gave Soate an opportunity of going on.

"It is possible, Mr. Chelms," he said, "that the Belgian transaction I have spoken of may be finished before you can arrange with my principals, unless you can have your money at once. In fact, I know this will be the case. Mr. Matley, who is luckily a capital French scholar, has written this morning a formal acceptance of these foreigners' terms. They will telegraph to their agent, who will be here on the third day from this with the dock-notes of the goods, which are lying here. I have already seen my principals to-day, and took upon me to say—being anxious to forward your wishes—that I could have your money by that time. Accordingly, as the total required will be sixteen hundred pounds, they handed me five hundred pounds in notes. Here they are." He pulled out a bulky pocket-book as he said this. "They are strictly ready-money people, as I told you."

"What the Belgians?" exclaimed Chelms, whose eyes sparkled at the sight of the rustling notes. "And what are their names?"

"I did not mean them exactly," returned Soate. "I meant that my people are ready-money men; but so for the matter of that, are Belgians, especially when they are selling anything. Their names are Delrot, Vianet, and Company. You may have heard of them?"

"Yes; I think I have heard of them," said Chelms. "And are all those bank-notes?" His interest in the Belgian firm was evidently small compared with his interest in bank notes, from which he had never taken his eyes since Soate produced them.

"Yes; fifty tons. Look at 'em!" replied the latter, passing the notes towards the old gentleman, and once again shaking down the eye-glass. "Well, sir," continued Soate after a moment's pause, during which the notes had been handed back again, "you shall have the delivery-order of these goods as security, until you are quite satisfied about my principals; and that is exactly equal to giving you five hundred pounds of their money to hold without any security at all."

"So it is—so it is!" chuckled Chelms. "Nothing could be better. I will go into the City, sir, and sell out to-day. My broker will let me have the money in advance if I like. Oh, I can manage all that; and I shall be quite satisfied, especially if I can see one of the firm; I must own I should like that."

"You shall do so, sir," answered Soate. "One of them shall be here to see the completion of the transaction. He will like to do so, being Mr. Matley's first piece of business on their account. Then, sir, in his presence, I will give you the dock-warrants, and you will give me eleven hundred pounds. I may say, as between friends, that these things are already as good as sold for two thousand pounds. There's business, sir. Our firm knows where to plant the articles."

"Mr. dear sir," exclaimed Chelms, "it's as good as done. If I had any doubts before, what you now say, and the sight of those notes, have quite removed them, and I shall not be easy now until I have had the pleasure of seeing you and your friends together."

Mr. Soate shook his hand heartily, re-stored the notes to his pocket-book, took the letter I had written; and then, after a most expressive wink at me, which implied anything but respect for his new partner, he left.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

## SUMMER SMILES.

A lawyer may be muscular, and at the same time a fee-bill man.

The strawberry short-cake is not long for this world.

Which is the longest word in the English language? "Smiles," because there's a mile between the first and last letters.

"What's in a name?" a recent traveller was heard to exclaim. "Why, about the hottest country on the globe is Chili."

What word is that composed of five letters from which if you take two one remains? Stone.

More than four thousand devices for coupling have been patented, and yet thousands of bachelors and maidens go it alone in this country.

## YOUNG FOLKS.

"Well Enough."

This was a favorite phrase of Georgie's. She used it upon all occasions and lived up to it too. When she was thirteen her mother gave her a little bed-room all to herself, which she was to keep clean and in order with her own hands. One morning she was in there putting on her coat and hat in great haste to go to school. Her mother, happening to be passing, opened the door and looked in:

"Why Georgie!" she exclaimed, "why didn't you put your room in order?"

"I did!" said Georgie going on buttoning with rapid fingers.

"My dear child just look at it!" said her mother with an expressive gesture.

The pillows were placed crookedly on the bed, the towels flung on the rack without being folded, all the bureau drawers open a little, and a piece of string hanging out of one, etc.

"O, mamma!" Georgie exclaimed impatiently. "It will do well enough I'm in such a hurry. I shall be late at school."

"You must not be late at school," said her mother, "but you must put your room in complete order as soon as you come home. I don't want you to get in the habit of doing things just half."

It was the same way with sewing. Mrs. Blair insisted that her girls should know how to sew, and Georgie learned very readily, but was so careless and so easily satisfied that her work often looked very badly, and was a great worry to her mother.

"O! won't it do well enough, mamma?" Georgie would say. "What's the use of being so awfully particular?"

"It won't do until it is done just as well as you can do it," Mrs. Blair would reply, and many a piece of work the young lady was obliged to pick out and do over.

She carried the "well enough" system into her musical studies also, and of course it did not work well there. She was fond of music, learned with great ease, and played spiritedly, but her performance was spoiled by the way she had of dropping notes, and slurring over hard passages which she was too lazy to practice sufficiently. It was in vain her teacher lectured her about such carelessness, and told her she must practice the difficult parts patiently until she could play them as rapidly as the rest; out of his hearing she played in her own fashion and said it did well enough.

"What is that you are playing?" Elizabeth asked one time.

"It is that new gallop Mary Haines played the other evening," Georgie replied.

"Isn't it pretty?"

"Yes," said Elizabeth, "but it doesn't sound just as it did when Mary played it."

"Well, I don't play it exactly as she did. You see the bass skips about so that I have to go down for the lower F's and B flats. I can't play fast enough, so I just play them all up here; and then I don't play the octaves in right hand—just take the upper note."

"Seems to me," said her sister, "it would be better to go slower at first and learn it right so as to play as it is written."

"O, this sounds well enough," said Georgie and banged away perfectly satisfied.

Her father had a scrap book in which he posted newspaper articles he wished to keep. Sometimes when he was busy he asked Elizabeth to paste the pieces in, and this she did very neatly. Once when she was away from home he said: "Georgie, won't you put these pieces in my book?"

"Yes, sir, of course," she replied, quite proud to be asked.

He showed her how he wanted it done, and she set to work. At first she was very careful to get them all straight and smooth, so the first page she did was just as good as any of Elizabeth's; but soon she became tired of going so slowly and particularly, and began to alight the work. There were two or three little bits that were very hard to fit in nicely and instead of persevering until they were right she hurried them in any way, saying to herself: "O, well it won't matter if such little bits are crooked. It will look well enough."

But it looked very badly, the crooked pieces spelling the whole page.

When her father looked at the book he said: "I'm very much obliged to you, Georgie; but—I'm afraid my little girl hasn't a very straight eye."

"O, yes, I have, papa," said Georgie. "I know those pieces are a little crooked, but it is so very little I thought you wouldn't mind."

Her father said nothing more, but he never asked her again to paste in pieces, and once when he brought out the book to show a certain political article to a gentleman he was talking with, she noticed he turned the botched page over very quickly, as if he were ashamed of it.

This is about the way Georgie does everything, and if she does not break herself of this bad habit of doing things just any way at all she is not likely to grow up to be a very useful and reliable woman.

MY NEW FRIEND. CHAPTER III. As the reader may suppose, I was in feverish expectation of a summons to wait upon Messrs. Banner, Wregg, and Carrowble—the firm for which Mr. Soate was acting—hour by hour, almost minute by minute; but the business took a very different turn. Mr. Soate called one day, out of the time at which he usually paid his visits, which was generally in the evening, and said that he would not trouble me to call; they were quite satisfied, he said, with what they had heard from him; and not caring to multiply the agents with whom they dealt directly, he preferred to consider my transactions as a branch of his own. This being the case, he would at once, if I were agreeable, commence our joint work by either seeing people on my behalf, or making appointments at my house himself. I could have no possible objection to this, beyond the grave one that I had no experience in buying and selling, and did not even know what kind of goods I was expected to examine. To all this he had conclusive answers. A man "with his head screwed on the right way," as mine was, would have no difficulty in picking up such knowledge; while at first he would see everything right for me, and when he was obliged to be away, would leave me instructions how far to go in any purchase. But there! it was not mountains of molehills to talk in that place; and I could not help thinking that Soate took care never to hold them in the presence of Mr. Chelms; and I sometimes actually thought he must lie in wait in the neighbourhood to see the old gentleman go out, so promptly did he look in directly afterwards. But Mr. Chelms was so interested in the matter, so anxious for actual work to begin, he said, that he generally extracted a pretty full account from me; besides holding long conversations on his own prospective share with Mr. Soate. Among other preparations for the agency, Mr. Soate had some office furniture brought in; so that, with a massive table and desk, half-a-dozen heavy chairs, with various racks and shelves fitted on the walls, my front parlour assumed quite a solid, banking, or life-assurance aspect, which met the approval not only of Mr. Soate, but of Mr. Chelms. The first transaction which was completed in the new office, took place very suddenly—to me; and was surprising by its brevity and various special features, common perhaps to my novel business, but altogether different from my previous experience. It was conducted thus. At twilight one evening, only a few days after the subject was first broached, for Mr. Soate would lose no time in the matter, he came in, and repaired to the office. He had not been there five minutes, when a man knocked at our door and asked for him. It so happened that I opened the door to this person, who, in the few words he spoke, seemed to have an unpleasantly furtive way with him; and although not disguised in any particular manner, his hat was so slouched over his brows, and the collar of his coat so pulled up, that it was impossible to distinguish his features clearly. I showed him into the office, and went down-stairs. As I did so, I thought for an instant that I caught sight of Mr. Chelms's face, in the dusky gloom of the staircase, peering over the banisters. I paused to look again; but no one was there, and I went on. In a few minutes Mr. Soate called down the speaking tube which he had caused to be carried from the office to our sitting room, and asked me to step up. I complied, and found him with the stranger I had previously admitted; but their figures were barely discernible, as they were sitting without a light, and the twilight had now almost changed to darkness. I naturally noticed this, and endeavored to procure a light. "No, thank ye," returned Mr. Soate. "Our business is finished, and I am going out directly. I wished to introduce you to this gentleman, who will be here again to-morrow, or the next night, and will transact some business with you. Mr.—a—Mr." "Jerry Wilkins, you know," said the other, as Soate hesitated. "To be sure I—of course!" exclaimed the latter. "Mr. Wilkins, this is our new agent, Mr. Matley, who will carry on the business at this branch for the present; so you will know who to ask for when I am not here." "Yes; I shall know him," returned the stranger. His words were not a direct reply to Mr. Soate's remark, and although I could scarcely see him in the darkness, I felt he was eying me narrowly. However, there was little time for this or anything more, as Soate rose from his seat, and in a few words intimated that our business was concluded. I opened the door for them, and they went out, not exactly together, for Mr. Wilkins left at once, while Soate lingered for a couple of minutes on the threshold with me, although he seemed to have nothing particular to say. As I closed the door, I again thought I saw Mr. Chelms, this time at the farther end of our little entrance hall; but it was very dark there, and I might easily have been mistaken. I at once lighted the gas, and went down to our breakfast-room, where I found the old gentleman calmly smoking his pipe in the dark, and by himself; for Susan was absent, making some trifling purchases in the neighbourhood. I apologized for his not having a light; but, in his usual cheerful manner, he said it was of no consequence, as he liked to sit and smoke in a half-dreamy state, to which twilight, or even darkness, was very favorable. He was chatty on other subjects, but, for a wonder, did not refer to business, which indeed, was not spoken of until my wife returned. She had gone out just after I had admitted Mr. Jerry Wilkins, and so naturally asked me who the visitor was. But even while I told her, Mr. Chelms was too much engrossed by his pipe to pay any attention to the subject, or at any rate to join in the conversation. Though on various occasions Mr. Chelms indulged in a glass or two of grog, it is only right that I should say that he never, even at first, gave us the idea that he was an intemperate man. He certainly seemed led away a little by the example of Soate, who occasionally took, we thought, a malicious pleasure in tempting the old gentleman. We did not and could not let Soate, while we