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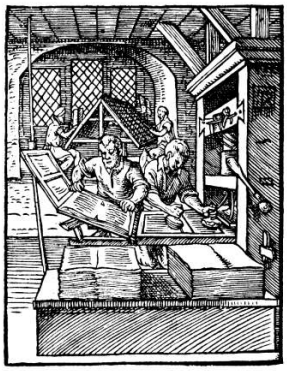

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I. — AT THE SIGN OF THE SHIP

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On a September evening, before the setting of the sun, a man entered the tavern of the Ship in Thursley, with a baby under his arm.

The tavern sign, rudely painted, bore, besides a presentment of a vessel, the inscription on one side of the board:—

"Now before the hill you climb,
Come and drink good ale and wine."

On the other side of the board the legend was different. It ran thus:—

"Now the hill you're safely over,
Drink, your spirits to recover."

The tavern stood on the high-road side between Godalming and Portsmouth; that is to say the main artery of communication between London and Portsmouth.

After rising out of the rich overshadowed weald land, the road had crossed long sandy wastes, where population was sparse, where were no enclosures, no farms, only scattered Scottish firs; and in front rose the stately ridge of sandstone that culminates in Hind Head and Leith Hill. It was to prepare the wayfarer for a scramble to the elevation of a little over nine hundred feet that he was invited to "drink good ale and wine," or, if he were coming from the opposite

direction was called upon to congratulate himself in a similar manner on having over-passed this ridge. The wayfarer with the baby under his arm came from the Godalming side. He looked up at the sign, which appealed at once to his heart, for he was obviously a sailor, no less than did the invitation commend itself to his condition.

He entered, tumbled the baby on to the tavern table that was marked with wet rings from beer cans, and upset a saucer containing fly poison, and said, with a sigh of relief—

"There you are! Blowed and all of a lather!"

He pulled out a blue cotton pocket-handkerchief, mopped his face and shouted, "Beer!"

"Well, I never!" exclaimed the landlady. "Whoever heered afore or saw of a babby lugged about wrong side uppermost. What would you say if I was to bring you your tankard topsy-turvy?"

"I wouldn't pay for it," said the sailor.

"'Cos why?" asked the woman, planting herself arms akimbo, in front of the wayfarer.

"'Cos it 'ud capsize the ale," he answered.

"Very well, ain't babbies got no in'ards to capsize?" asked the landlady, defiantly. "And chucked in among the pison for killing them dratted flies, too!"

"Never mind about the kid," said the man.

"I do mind about the child," retorted the woman; "look at him there—the innocent—all in the nasty slops. What'll the mother say to the mess and crumple you've made of the clothes?"

The landlady took the infant from the table, on one arm, and proceeded to the bar to draw the beer.

The landlady took the infant on one arm.

Presently she returned, kissing the child and addressing it in terms of affection. She thrust the pewter full of foaming ale on the table towards the customer, with resentfulness in her action.

"He's a stomachy (sturdy) young chap," she said, patting the babe with the now disengaged hand.

"He ain't a he at all," retorted the man. "He's a she."

"A girl, is it!" exclaimed the hostess; "and how came you by the precious?"

"Best rights of all," answered the man; "'cos I'm the kid's father."

"Her mother ought to be ashamed of herself letting you haul about the poor mite under your arm, just as though she

was pertatoes."

"Her mother can't help it," said the man. "She's dead, and left me wi' this here child a month or six weeks old, and I've been sweating along the way from Lun'non, and she yowlin' enough to tear a fellow's nerves to pieces." This said triumphantly; then in an apologetic tone, "What does the likes o' me know about holdin' babies? I were brought up to seamanship, and not to nussin'. I'd joy to see you, missus, set to manage a thirty-pounder. I warrant you'd be as clumsy wi' a gun as I be wi' a kid."

"D'r say," responded the landlady, "and where be you a-g'win to with this here angel? Takin' her to sea to make a mermaid of her?"

"No, I aren't," said the mariner. "Her mother's dead—in lodgin's down by the Katherine docks, and got no relatives and no friends there. I'm off to sea again when I've dispodged o' this here incumbrance. I'm takin' her down to her mother's sister—that way." He indicated the down road with his thumb.

"It's a wonder you ain't made a crook of her backbone, it is," said the woman. "And if you'd gone and crippled she for life, what would you think o' that?"

"I didn't carry her like that all the road," answered the sailor. "Part ways I slung her over my back."

"Wonder she's alive. Owdatious strong she must be. Come in, my cherry beam. I'll give you as good as mother's milk. Three parts water and a bit o' shuggar. Little your father thinks o' your wants so long as he gets his ale."

"I let her suck my thumb," said the sailor, timidly.

"Much good she got out o' that," retorted the landlady. "Yes, yes, my syrup. I'll give you something."

"If you can stop her yowling, I'll thank you."

With a contemptuous look at the father, the hostess withdrew.

Then the sailor planted his elbows on the table, drank a long draught of beer, and said, sententiously, "It's an institootion is wimin."

"Woman is the joy of our lives," said a lanky, dark-haired man at the table.

"'Tain't exactly that," answered the sailor, now first observing that there were other men in the room. "'Tis that there's things for everything—there's the capstan for hawlin' up the anchor, and there's the woman for nussin'. They was ordained to it—not men—never, no—not men. Look at my hand." The sailor extended his arm across the table. "It's shakin' like a guitar-string when a nigger's playing—and all along of that kid's yawls. Wimin likes it."

"It's their moosic," said the lanky man.

Then in rushed the landlady with flashing eyes, and holding out both palms before her said, "The child's mouth be that purple or blue—it's fits."

"It's blackberries," answered the seaman. "They was nice and ripe, and plenty of them."

"Blackberries!" almost shrieked the hostess, "and the child not six weeks old! You've killed her! It's upset her blessed little inside."

"I thought I'd done wrong," said the sailor, timidly, "that's why I was a-carryin' of her topsy-turvy. I thought to ha' shooked the blackberries out again."

"If that child dies," exclaimed the landlady, solemnly, "then where will you go to, you unnat'ral parient?"

"I did it wi' the best intention," apologized the man.

"That's what Betsy Chaffers said when she gave wrong change. Oh that heaven should ever a created man. They's terrible monsters."

She disappeared again after the child.

The sailor drank more beer, sighed, wiped his brow, then his upper lip, and looked appealingly about him at the men who were present. Of these there were four and a half. That is to say, four men and a boy. Three of the men were at the table, and of these the lanky sallow man was one.

These three men were strange, unpleasant-looking fellows, dressed up in scraps of incongruous clothing, semi-nautical, semi-agricultural. One was completely enveloped in a great-coat that had belonged to a very tall and stout man, and he was short and thin. Another was incompletely dressed, for what garments he had on were in rags that afforded glimpses between them of tattered lining, of flesh, but of no shirt.

The third man had the unmistakable lower jaw and mouth of an Irishman.

By the fire sat an individual of a different type. He was a young man with heavy brows and a large mouth devoid of lips, set tight as a snapped man-trap. He had keen, restless, watchful eyes. His hair was sandy, thrust forward over his brow, and hanging low behind. On the opposite side of the hearth crouched a boy, a timid, delicately formed lad with a large head and full lustrous eyes.

"Come from far?" asked one of the ragamuffins at the table.

"Didn't yur hear me say from Lun'non town?" answered the sailor. "Lagged that there dratted baby the whole way. I'll have another glass of beer."

"And what distance are you going?" asked the lanky man.

"I shall put into the next port for the night, and tomorrow on to Portsmouth, and stow away the kid with my wife's sister. Lord! I wishes the morrer were well over."

"We're bound for Portsmouth," said the man in tatters. "What say you? shall we keep company and relieve you of the kid? If you'll pay the shot here and at the other end, and at the other pubs—can't say but what we'll ease you."

"It's a bargain," exclaimed the sailor. "By George! I've had enough of it from Lun'non here. As to money, look here," he put his hand into his trousers pocket and pulled out a handful of coins, gold, silver and copper together. "There is brass for all. Just home, paid off—and find my wife dead—and me saddled with the yowling kid. I'm off to sea again. Don't see no sport wider-erring here all bebothered with a baby."

"We are very willing to accompany you," said the tattered man, and turning to the fellow with sallow face and lantern jaws, he said, "What's your opinion, Lonegon?"

"I'm willing, Marshall; what say you, Michael Casey?"

"Begorra—I'm the man to be a wet nuss."

The sailor called for spirits wherewith to treat the men who had offered their assistance.

"This is a mighty relief to me," said he. "I don't think I could ha' got on by myself."

"You've no expayrience, sir," said Casey. "It's I'm the boy for the babbies. Ye must rig up a bottle and fill it with milk, and just a whisk of a drop of the craytur to prevent it curdling, and then stuff the mouth with a rag—and the darlin'll suck, and suck, and be still as the evenin' star as I sees yonder glimmering at the window."

"You'll have to start pretty sharp if you want to get on a stage before dark," said the man by the fire.

"It's a lone road," threw in the boy shyly.

"What's the odds when we are four of us?" asked the man whose name was Lonegon.

"And all of us pertecting the little cherub from ketching cold," threw in Casey.

"We ain't afraid—not we," said the ragged man.

"Not of bogies, at any rate."

"Oh, you need not fear bogies," observed the man at the fire, dryly.

"What is it, then?" asked Michael Casey. "Sure It's not highwaymen?"

The man by the fire warmed his palms, laughed, and said: "It would take two to rob you, I guess, one to put the money into your pocket and the second to take it out."

"You're right there," answered the Irishman, laughing. "It's my pockets be that worn to holes wi' the guineas that have been in them, that now they let 'em fall through."

The man by the fire rubbed his palms together and made a remark in a low tone—addressed to the boy. Lonegon turned sharply round on his seat and cried threateningly, "What's that you're hinting agin us? Say it again, and say it aloud, and I'll knock your silly, imperdent head off."

"I say it again," said the young man, turning his cunning head round, like a jackdaw. "I say that if I were going over Hind Head and by the Punch Bowl at night with as much money in my pocket as has that seaman there—I'd choose my companions better. You haven't heard what I said? I'd choose my companions better."

II. — WANDERING SOULS

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The long, lean fellow, Lonegon, leaped to his feet, and struck at the man by the fire.

The latter was prepared for him. He had snatched a brand from the hearth, and without losing the sarcastic laugh on his great mouth, presented it sharply in the way of the descending fist, so as to catch Lonegon's wrist.

The sparks flew about at the clash, and the man who had received the blow uttered a howl of pain, for his wrist was torn by the firewood, and his hand burnt by the fire.

With an imprecation and a vow to "do for" "eyes, liver, and lights" of the "clodhopper," he rushed at him blindly. With a mocking laugh, the man assailed thrust forth a leg, and Lonegon, stumbling across it, measured his length on the floor.

The man called Marshall now interfered by snatching the pewter tankard from the sailor, and aiming it at the head of him who had overthrown his mate.

At the same time the boy, terrified, began to scream. "Mother! mother! help! pray! they'll murder Bideabout."

The hostess speedily appeared, set her arms akimbo, planted her feet resolutely on the floor, and said, in commanding tones—

"Now then! No fighting on the premises. Stand up, you rascal. What have you done with the pewter? Ah, crushed out of all shape and use. That's what Molly Luff sed of her new bonnet when she sat down on it—Lawk, a biddy! Who'd ha' thought it?"

Lonegon staggered to his feet, and burst into a torrent of recrimination against the man whom the boy had called Bideabout.

"I don't care where the rights are, or where be the wrongs. An addled egg be nasty eating whether you tackle it one end or 'tother. All I sez is—I won't have it. But what I will have is—I'll be paid for that there tankard. Who threw it?"

"It was he—yonder, in tatters," said the boy.

"You won't get money out o' me," said Marshall; "my pockets—you may turn 'em out and see for yourself—are rich in nothing but holes, and there's in them just about as many of they as there are in the rose o' a watering can."

"I shall be paid," asserted the hostess. "You three are mates, and there'll be money enough among you."

"Look here, mistress," put in the sailor, "I'll stand the damage, only don't let us have a row. Bring me another can of ale, and tell me what it all comes to. Then we'll be on the move."

"The other fellows may clear off, and the sooner the better," said the landlady. "But not you just now, and the baby has dropped off into the sweetest of sleeps. 'Twere a sin to wake her."

"I'm going on to the Huts," said the seaman.

"And we're going with him as a guard to the baby," said the Irish fellow.

"A blackguard set," threw in Bideabout.

"What about the color so long as it is effective?" asked Casey.

By degrees the anger of Lonegon was allayed, and he seated himself growling at the table, and wiped the blood from his torn wrist on his sleeve, and drawing forth a dirty and tattered red kerchief, bound it round the bruised and wounded joint. The man, Bideabout, did not concern himself with the wrath or the anguish of the man. He rubbed his hands together, and clapped a palm on each knee, and looked into the fire with a smirk on his face, but with an eye on the alert lest his adversary should attempt to steal an advantage on him.

Nor was he unjustified in being on his guard, judging by the malignant glances cast at him by Lonegon.

"Whom may you be?" asked the tattered man.

"I'm Jonas Kink," answered the young fellow at the fire.

"He's Bideabout, the Broom-Squire," explained the landlady. Then with a glimmering of a notion that this variation in names might prove confusing, she added, "leastways that's what we calls him. We don't use the names writ in the Church register here. He's the Broom-Squire—and not the sort o' chap for you ragamuffins to have dealings with—let me tell you."

"I don't kear what he be," said Lonegon, sullenly, "but dang it, I'd like a sup o' ale with your leave," and without further ceremony he took the new tankard from the sailor and quaffed off half its contents.

The hostess looked from the drinker to the seaman and said, "Are you standing tick for they?"

"I'll pay for their drink and they'll help me along the road with the baby," said the sailor.

The landlady shrugged her shoulders contemptuously, and asked, "If I may be so bold, what's her name?"

"What's whose name?"

"The baby's."

"Ha'n't got none," said the seaman.

"What, ain't she been christened yet?"

"No, I reckon not," answered the father. Then he proceeded to explain. "You see my poor wife she was down in lodgings and hadn't no friends nor relations no'ther nigh her, and she took ill and never got over the birth of this here babe, and so it couldn't be done. But the kid's aunt'll see to all that right enough when I've got her there."

"What! you're trapsing about the country hugging a babe along under your arm and slung over your shoulder and feeding her o' blackberries and chucking her in among fly poison, and not a Christian yet! My! What a world it is!".

"All in good time, missus."

"That's what Betsy Cole said o' her pork and 'ams when the pig wor killed and her hadn't salt nor saltpetre. She'd see to it some day. Meanwhile the maggots came and spiled the lot."

"It shall all be made right in a day or two."

"Ah! but what if it be too late? Then where will you go to some day? How can you say but that the child wi' being hung topsy-turvy and swinging like a pendiddlum may die of the apoplexy, or the blackberries turn sour in her blessed stomach and she go off in convulsions, or that she may ha' put out the end o' her tongue and sucked some o' that there fly paper? Then where will you be?"

"I hope I shall be on board ship just before that comes to pass," said the sailor.

"Do you know what happens if a child dies and ha'n't been christened? It becomes a wanderer."

"What do you mean?"

"It ain't a Christian, so it can't go to heaven. It ain't done no evil, so it can't go to hell; and so the poor spirit wanders about in the wind and never has no rest. You can hear them piping in the trees and sobbin' at the winder. I've heard 'm scores of times. How will you like that when at sea to have your own child sighing and sobbin' up in the rigging of the vessel, eh?"

"I hope it will not come to that," said the sailor.

"That's what Susan Bay said when she put a darnin' needle into the armchair cushion, and I sed, said I, 'twas a ticklesome thing and might do hurt. She did it once too often. Her old man sat down on it."

She brought some more ale at the request of the seaman, and as she set down the tankard said:

"I won't be so bold as to say it's in Scriptur', but it's in the Psalm-book I dare swear. Mother, she were a tip-top tearin' religious woman, and she used to say it to me when I was younger than I be now:—

"'They flies in clouds and flap their shrouds
When full the moon doth shine;
In dead of night when lacketh light,
We here 'em pipe and pine.

"'And many a soul wi' hoot and howl
Do rattle at the door,

Or rave and rout, and dance about
All on a barren moor.'

"And it goes on somehow like this. You can think on it as you go over Hind Head in the dark:

"'Or at the winder wail and weep,
Yet never venture nigher;
In snow and sleet, within to creep
To warm 'em at the fire.'"

The child began to cry in the adjoining room.

"There," said the landlady, "'tis awake she is, poor mite without a name, and not as much Christianity as could make a cat sneeze. If that there child were to die afore you got to Portsmouth and had her baptized, sure as my name is Susanna Verstage, I'd never forgive myself, and I'd hear her for sure and certainty at the winder. I'm a motherly sort of a woman, and there's a lot o' them poor wanderers comes piping about the panes of an evening. But I can do nothing for them."

"Now then, lads, let's be moving," said the mariner.

The three men at the table rose; and when standing exposed more of their raggedness and the incongruity of their apparel than was shown when they were seated.

The landlady reluctantly surrendered the child.

"A babe," said she, "mustn't be shaken after feeding;" then, "a babe mustn't be allowed to get its little feet cold, or gripes comes;" then, "you must mind and carry it with the head to your shoulder, and away from the wind." Presently another item occurred to the good woman, as the men left

their places at the table: "You must hold the child on your arm, between the wrist and the elbow-jint."

As they went to the door she called, "And never be without a drop o' dill water: it's comforting to babies."

As they made their exit—"And when nussin', mind, no green meat nor fruit."

When all had departed the landlady turned to the man by the fire, who still wore his sarcastic smirk, and said "Bideabout! What do you think of they?"

"I think," answered the Broom-Squire, "that I never saw three such cut-throat rascals as those who have gone off with the sailor; and as for him—I take he's softish."

"I thought him a bit of a natural."

"He must be so to start on one of the lonesomest roads in England, at fall of night, with such a parcel of jailbirds."

"Well, dear life!" exclaimed the good woman. "I hope nothing will hap' to the poor child."

"Mother," said the boy, timidly, "it's not true is it about the spirits of babies in the wind?"

"Of course it is. Where would you have them go? and they bain't Christians. Hark! I won't say there be none flying about now. I fancy I hear a sort of a kind o' whistling."

"Your boy Iver, he's coming with me to the Punch-Bowl," said the Broom-Squire; "but I'll not go for half-an-hour, becos I don't want to overtake that lanky, black-jawed chap as they call Lonegon. He ain't got much love for me, and might try to repay that blow on his wrist, and sprawl on the floor I gave him."

"What is Iver going to the Punch-Bowl for?" asked the landlady, and looked at the boy, her son.

"It's a snipe's feather Bideabout has promised me," answered the lad.

"And what do you want a snipe's feather for at this time o' night?"

"Mother, it's to make a paint brush of. Bideabout ain't at home much by day. I've been over the road scores o' times."

"A paint brush! What do you want paint brushes for? Have you cleaned out the pig-stye lately?"

"Yes, mother, but the pig lies abroad now; it's warm in the stye."

"Well, you may go. Dear life! I wish I could see that blessed babe again, safe and sound. Oh, my!"

The good-hearted woman was destined to have her wish answered more speedily than she could have anticipated.

III. — THE PUNCH-BOWL

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The Broom-Squire and the boy were on their way up the hill that led towards the habitation of the former; or, to be more exact, it led to the summit of the hill whence the Squire would have to diverge at a sharp angle to the right to reach his home.

The evening had closed in. But that mattered not to them, for they knew their way, and had not far to go.

The road mounted continuously, first at a slight incline, over sand sprinkled with Scotch pines, and then more rapidly to the range of hills that culminates in Hind Head, and breaks into the singular cones entitled The Devil's Jumps.

This is one of the loveliest parts of fair England. The pine and the oak and the Spanish chestnut luxuriate in the soil, the sand tracts between the clumps are deep in heather, at intervals the country is furrowed as by a mighty plough; but the furrowing was done by man's hand to extract the metal of which the plough is formed. From a remote antiquity this district of Surrey, as well as the weald of Sussex, was the great centre of the iron trade. The metal lies in masses in the sand, strangely smooth and liver-colored, and going by the name of kidney iron. The forest of Anderida which covered the weald supplied at once the ore and the fuel for smelting.

In many places are "hammer ponds," pools of water artificially constructed, which at one time served to turn

wheels and work mechanism for the beating out of the iron that had been won on the spot.

The discovery of coal and iron together, or in close proximity, in the North of England brought this industry of the counties of Surrey and Sussex to an abrupt end. Now the deposits of ore are no longer worked, no furnaces exist, only the traces of the old men's mines and forges and smelting pits remain to attest that from an age before Caesar landed in Kent, down to the close of the last century, all the iron employed in England came from this region.

Another singular feature of the district consists in the masses of hard stone, gray with lichen, that lie about, here topping a sandhill, there dropped at random in the plain. There was at one time many more of these, but owing to their power of resisting heat they were largely exploited as hearthstones. These masses, there can be no doubt, are remains of superincumbent beds of hard rock that have been removed by denudation, leaving but a few fragments behind.

That superstition should attach to these blocks is not marvellous. The parish in which lies the Punch-Bowl and rises Hind Head, comprises one such Thors-stone, named perhaps after the Scandinavian Thunder god. One of these strange masses of stone formerly occupied a commanding position on the top of Borough Hill. On this those in need knocked, whereupon the "Good People" who lived under it lent money to the knockers, or any utensil desired in loan, on condition that it was returned. One night, a petitioner, who was going to give a feast at the baptism of his child,

went to the stone, and knocked, and asked in a loud voice for the loan of a cauldron.

This was at once thrust out from under the stone, and was carried away and used for the christening feast. Unhappily, the applicant for the cauldron neglected to return it at the time appointed, and since then no more loans have been made. The cauldron, which is of copper, is now preserved in Frensham parish church. It is two feet in diameter, and stands on an iron trivet.

After the road had ascended some way, all trees disappeared. The scenery was as wild and desolate as any in Scotland. On all sides heathery slopes, in the evening light a broken patch of sand showed white, almost phosphorescent, through contrast with the black ling. A melancholy bird piped. Otherwise all was still. The richly-wooded weald, with here and there a light twinkling on it, lay far below, stretching to Lewes. When the high-road nearly reached the summit, it was carried in a curve along the edge of a strange depression, a vast basin in the sand-hills, sinking three hundred feet to a marshy bottom full of oozing springs. This is termed the Devil's Punch-Bowl. The modern road is carried on a lower level, and is banked up against the steep incline. The old road was not thus protected and ran considerably higher.

The night was gathering in, fold on fold, and obscuring all. The Punch-Bowl that the Broom-Squire and the boy had on their right was a bowl brimming with naught save darkness. Its depths could not be fathomed by the eye at that time of night, nor did any sound issue from it save a hissing as though some fluid were seething in the bowl; yet

was this produced solely by the wind swirling in it among the harsh branches of the heather.

"So your mother don't like your drawing and painting," said the Broom-Squire.

"No, Bideabout, she and father be terrible on at me to become a publican, and carry along with the Ship, after father's got old and gived up. But I don't fancy it; in fact, I hate the thought of it. Of course," added the boy; "if they forces me to it, I must. But anyhow I wouldn't like to have that there Ship sign at our door so bad painted as she be. I could do better if I had the paints."

"Oh! drinkers don't care for beautiful pictures at the door, but for good ale within."

"I don't like that there ship, and I wouldn't stand it—if the inn were mine."

"You're a fool," said the Broom-Squire contemptuously. "Here's the spot where the turn comes off the road to my house. Mind where you walk, and don't roll over down the Punch-Bowl; it's all a bog at the bottom."

"There's no light anywhere," observed the boy.

"No—no winders look this way. You can't say if a house is alive or dead from here."

"How long have you had your place in the Punch-Bowl, Bideabout?"

"I've heard say my grandfather was the first squatter. But the Rocliffes, Boxalls, Snellings, and Nashes will have it they're older. What do I care so long as I have the best squat in the lot."

That the reader may understand the allusions a word or two must be allowed in explanation of the settlements in the

Punch-Bowl.

This curious depression in the sand range is caused by a number of springs welling up several hundred feet below the summit of the range. The rain that falls on the hills sinks through the sand until it reaches an impervious bed of clay, when it breaks forth at many orifices. These oozing springs in course of vast ages have undermined and washed away the superincumbent sand and have formed the crater called the Devil's Punch-Bowl. The bottom is one impassable swamp, and the water from the springs flows away to the north through an opening in the sand-hills.

At some unknown date squatters settled in the Punch-Bowl, at a period when it was in as wild and solitary a region as any in England. They enclosed portions of the slopes. They built themselves hovels; they pastured their sheep, goats, cattle on the sides of the Punch-Bowl, and they added to their earnings the profits of a trade they monopolized—that of making and selling brooms.

On the lower slopes of the range grew coppices of Spanish chestnut, and rods of this wood served admirably for broom-handles. The heather when long and wiry and strong, covered with its harsh leafage and myriad hard knobs, that were to burst into flower, answered for the brush.

On account of this manufacture, the squatters in the Punch-Bowl went by the designation of Broom-Squires. They provided with brooms every farm and gentleman's house, nay, every cottage for miles around. A wagon-load of these besoms was often purchased, and the supply lasted some years.

The Broom-Squires were an independent people. They used the turf cut from the common for fuel, and the farmers were glad to carry away the potash as manure for their fields.

Another business supplemented farming and broom-making. That was holly-cutting and getting. The Broom-Squires on the approach of Christmas scattered over the country, and wherever they found holly trees and bushes laden with berries, without asking permission, regardless of prohibition, they cut, and then when they had a cartload, would travel with it to London or Guildford, to attend the Christmas market.

Not only did they obtain their fuel from the heaths, but much of their victual as well. The sandy hills abound in rabbits, and the lagoons and morasses at the foot of the hills in the flat land teem with fish and wild fowl. At the present day the ponds about Frensham are much in request for fishing—at the time of our tale they were netted by the inhabitants of the neighborhood when they felt a hankering after fish, and the "moors," as marshes are locally termed, were prowled over for ducks, and the sand burrows watched for rabbits, all without let and hindrance.

At the present date there are eight squatter families in the Punch-Bowl, three belong to the branches of the clan of Boxall, three to that of Snelling, and two to the less mighty clan of Nash. At the time of which I write one of the best built houses and the most fertile patches of land was in the possession of the young man, Jonas Kink, commonly known as Bideabout.

Jonas was a bachelor. His father and mother were dead, and his sister had married one of the Rocliffe's. He lived alone in his tolerably substantial house, and his sister came in when she was able to put it tidy for him and to do some necessary cooking. He was regarded as close-fisted though young; his age about twenty-three years. Hitherto no girl had caught his fancy, or had caught it sufficiently to induce him to take one to wife.

"Tell'y what," said his sister, "you'll be nothing else but an old hudger (bachelor)."

This was coming to be a general opinion. Jonas Kink had a heart for money, and for that only. He sneered at girls and flouted them. It was said that Jonas would marry no girl save for her money, and that a monied girl might pick and choose for herself, and such as she would most assuredly not make election of Bideabout. Consequently he was foredoomed to be a "hudger."

"What's that?" suddenly exclaimed the Broom-Squire, who led the way along a footpath on the side of the steep slope.

"It's a dead sheep, I fancy, Bideabout."

"A dead sheep—I wonder if it be mine. Hold hard, what's that noise?"

"It's like a babe's cry," said the boy. "Oh, lawk! if it be dead and ha' become a wanderer! I shu'd never have the pluck to go home alone."

"Get along with your wanderers. It's arrant nonsense. I don't believe a word of it."

"But there is the crying again. It is near at hand. Oh, Bideabout! I be that terrified!"

"I'll strike a light. I'm not so sure about this being a dead sheep."

Something lay on the path, catching what little light came from the sky above.

Jonas stooped and plucked some dry grass. Then he got out his tinderbox and struck, struck, struck.

The boy's eyes were on the flashing sparks. He feared to look elsewhere. Presently the tinder was ignited, and the Broom-Squire blew it and held dry grass haulms to the glowing embers till a blue flame danced up, became yellow, and burst into a flare.

Cautiously Jonas approached the prostrate figure and waved the flaming grass above it, whilst sparks flew about and fell over it.

Jonas approached the prostrate figure and waved the flaming grass above it.

The boy, shrinking behind the man, looked timidly forward, and uttered a cry as the yellow flare fell over the object and illumined a face.

"I thought as much," said the Broom-Squire. "What else could he expect? Them three chaps ha' murdered him. They've robbed and stripped him."