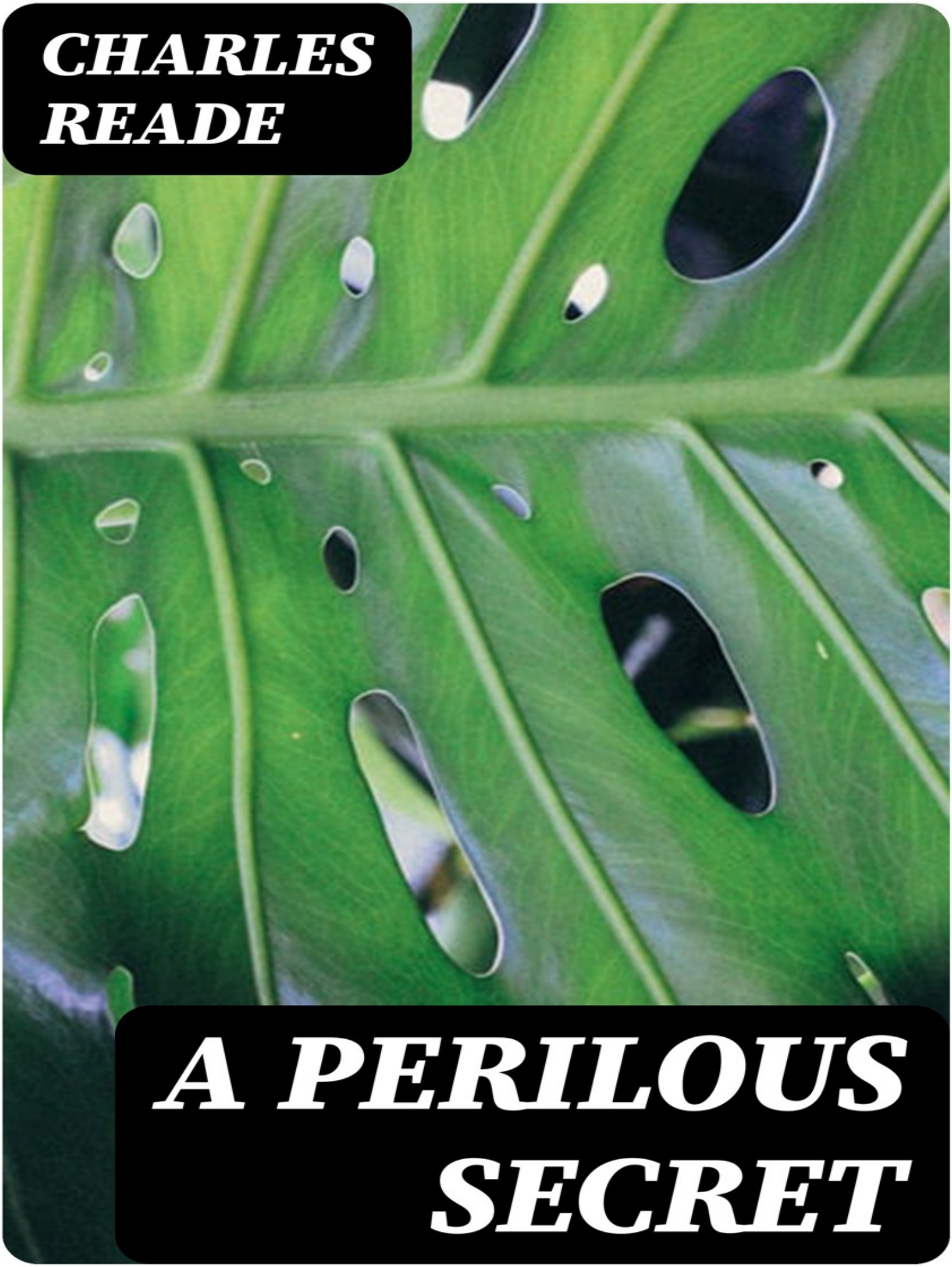
CHARLES READE



A PERILOUS SECRET

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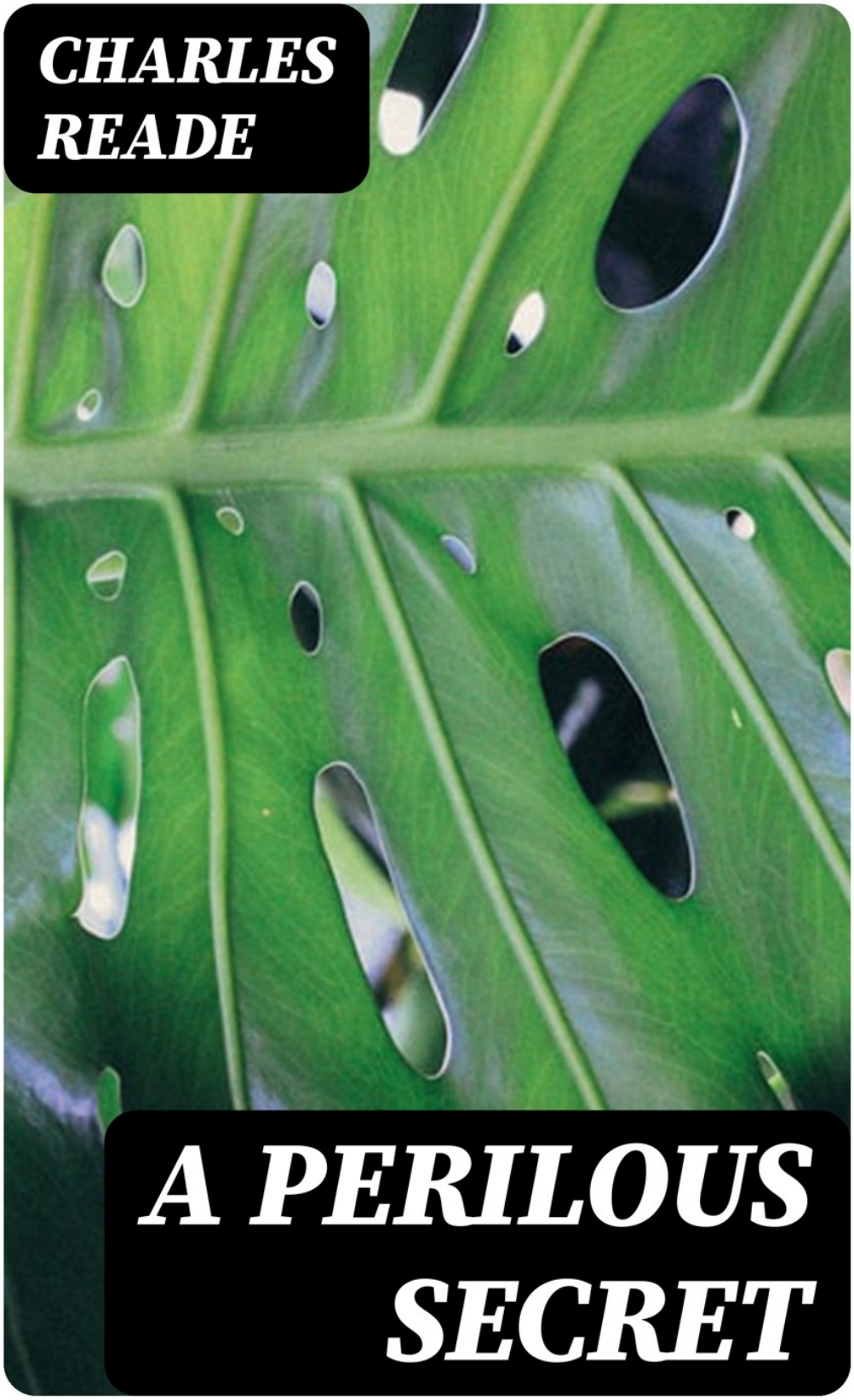

A PERILOUS SECRET

Charles Reade

A Perilous Secret

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CHAPTER XXVII.

CHAPTER I.

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THE POOR MAN'S CHILD.

Two worn travellers, a young man and a fair girl about four years old, sat on the towing-path by the side of the Trent.

The young man had his coat off, by which you might infer it was very hot; but no, it was a keen October day, and an east wind sweeping down the river. The coat was wrapped tightly round the little girl, so that only her fair face with blue eyes and golden hair peeped out; and the young father sat in his shirt sleeves, looking down on her with a loving but anxious look. Her mother, his wife, had died of consumption, and he was in mortal terror lest biting winds and scanty food should wither this sweet flower too, his one remaining joy.

William Hope was a man full of talent; self-educated, and wonderfully quick at learning anything: he was a linguist, a mechanic, a mineralogist, a draughtsman, an inventor. Item, a bit of a farrier, and half a surgeon; could play the fiddle and the guitar; could draw and paint and drive a four-in-hand. Almost the only thing he could not do was to make money and keep it.

Versatility seldom pays. But, to tell the truth, luck was against him; and although in a long life every deserving man seems to get a chance, yet Fortune does baffle some meritorious men for a limited time. Generally, we think, good fortune and ill fortune succeed each other rapidly, like red cards and black; but to some ill luck comes in great long slices; and if they don't drink or despair, by-and-by good luck comes continuously, and everything turns to gold with him who has waited and deserved.

Well, for years Fortune was hard on William Hope. It never let him get his head above-water. If he got a good place, the employer died or sold his business. If he patented an invention, and exhausted his savings to pay the fees, no capitalist would work it, or some other inventor proved he had invented something so like it that there was no basis for a monopoly.

At last there fell on him the heaviest blow of all. He had accumulated £50 as a merchant's clerk, and was in negotiation for a small independent business, when his wife, whom he loved tenderly, sickened.

For eight months he was distracted with hopes and fears. These gave way to dismal certainty. She died, and left him broken-hearted and poor, impoverished by the doctors, and pauperized by the undertaker. Then his crushed heart had but one desire—to fly from the home that had lost its sunshine, and the very country which had been calamitous to him.

He had one stanch friend, who had lately returned rich from New Zealand, and had offered to send him out as his agent, and to lend him money in the colony. Hope had

declined, and his friend had taken the huff, and had not written to him since. But Hope knew he was settled in Hull, and too good-hearted at bottom to go from his word in his friend's present sad condition. So William Hope paid every debt he owed in Liverpool, took his child to her mother's tombstone, and prayed by it, and started to cross the island, and then leave it for many a long day.

He had a bundle with one brush, one comb, a piece of yellow soap, and two changes of linen, one for himself, and one for his little Grace—item, his fiddle, and a reaping hook; for it was a late harvest in the north, and he foresaw he should have to work his way and play his way, or else beg, and he was too much of a man for that. His child's face won her many a ride in a wagon, and many a cup of milk from humble women standing at their cottage doors.

Now and then he got a day's work in the fields, and the farmer's wife took care of little Grace, and washed her linen, and gave them both clean straw in the barn to lie on, and a blanket to cover them. Once he fell in with a harvest-home, and his fiddle earned him ten shillings, all in sixpences. But on unlucky days he had to take his fiddle under his arm, and carry his girl on his back: these unlucky days came so often that still as he travelled his small pittance dwindled. Yet half-way on this journey fortune smiled on him suddenly. It was in Derbyshire. He went a little out of his way to visit his native place—he had left it at ten years old. Here an old maid, his first cousin, received Grace with rapture, and Hope pottered about all day, reviving his boyish recollections of people and places. He had left the village ignorant; he returned full of various knowledge; and so it was that in a

certain despised field, all thistles and docks and every known weed, which field the tenant had condemned as a sour clay unfit for cultivation, William Hope found certain strata and other signs which, thanks to his mineralogical studies and practical knowledge, sent a sudden thrill all through his frame. "Here's luck at last!" said he. "My child! my child! our fortune is made."

The proprietor of this land, and indeed of the whole parish, was a retired warrior, Colonel Clifford. Hope knew that very well, and hurried to Clifford Hall, all on fire with his discovery.

He obtained an interview without any difficulty. Colonel Clifford, though proud as Lucifer, was accessible and stiffly civil to humble folk. He was gracious enough to Hope; but, when the poor fellow let him know he had found signs of coal on his land, he froze directly; told him that two gentlemen in that neighborhood had wasted their money groping the bowels of the earth for coal, because of delusive indications on the surface of the soil; and that for his part, even if he was sure of success, he would not dirty his fingers with coal. "I believe," said he, "the northern nobility descend to this sort of thing; but then they have not smelled powder, and seen glory, and served her Majesty. *I have*."

Hope tried to reason with him, tried to get round him. But he was unassailable as Gibraltar, and soon cut the whole thing short by saying: "There, that's enough. I am much obliged to you, sir, for bringing me information you think valuable. You are travelling—on foot—short of funds perhaps. Please accept this trifle, and—and—good-

morning." He retreated at marching pace, and the hot blood burned his visitor's face. An alms!

But on second thoughts he said: "Well, I have offered him a fortune, and he gives me ten shillings. One good turn deserves another." So he pocketed the half-sovereign, and bought his little Grace a neck-handkerchief, blue with white spots; and so this unlucky man and his child fought their way from west to east, till they reached that place where we introduced them to the reader.

That was an era in their painful journey, because until then Hope's only anxiety was to find food and some little comfort for his child. But this morning little Grace had begun to cough, a little dry cough that struck on the father's heart like a knell. Her mother had died of consumption: were the seeds of that fatal malady in her child? If so, hardship, fatigue, cold, and privation would develop them rapidly, and she would wither away into the grave before his eyes. So he looked down on her in an agony of foreboding, and shivered in his shirt sleeves, not at the cold, but at the future. She, poor girl, was, like the animals, blessed with ignorance of everything beyond the hour; and soon she woke her father from his dire reverie with a cry of delight.

"Oh, what's they?" said she, and beamed with pleasure. Hope followed the direction of her blue eyes, open to their full extent; and lo! there was a little fleet of swans coming round a bend of the river. Hope told her all about the royal birds, and that they belonged to sovereigns in one district, to cities in another. Meantime the fair birds sailed on, and passed stately, arching their snowy necks. Grace gloated on them, and for a day or two her discourse was of swans.

At last, when very near the goal, misfortunes multiplied. They came into a town on a tidal river, whence they could hope to drift down to their destination for a shilling or two; but here Hope spent his last farthing on Grace's supper at an eating-house, and had not wherewithal to pay for bed or breakfast at the humble inn. Here, too, he took up the local paper, praying Heaven there might be some employment advertised, however mean, that so he might feed his girl, and not let the fiend Consumption take her at a gift.

No, there was nothing in the advertising column, but in the body of the paper he found a paragraph to the effect that Mr. Samuelson, of Hull, had built a gigantic steam vessel in that port, and was going out to New Zealand in her on her trial trip, to sail that morning at high tide, 6.45 A.M., and it was now nine.

How a sentence in a newspaper can blast a man! Bereavement, Despair, Lost Love—they come like lightning in a single line. Hope turned sick at these few words, and down went his head and his hands, and he sat all of a heap, cold at heart. Then he began to disbelieve in everything, especially in honesty. For why? If he had only left Liverpool in debt and taken the rail, he would have reached Hull in ample time, and would have gone out to New Zealand in the new ship with money in both pockets.

But it was no use fretting. Starvation and disease impended over his child. He must work, or steal, or something. In truth he was getting desperate. He picked himself up and went about, offering his many accomplishments to humble shop-keepers. They all declined him, some civilly. At last he came to a superior place of

business. There were large offices and a handsome house connected with it in the rear. At the side of the offices were pulleys, cranes, and all the appliances for loading vessels, and a yard with horses and vans, so that the whole frontage of the premises was very considerable. A brass plate said, "R. Bartley, ship-broker and commission agent"; but the man was evidently a ship-owner and a carrier besides; so this miscellaneous shop roused hopes in our versatile hero. He rapidly surveyed the outside, and then cast hungry glances through the window of the man's office. It was a bow-window of unusual size, through which the proprietor or his employees could see a long way up and down the river. Through this window Hope peered. Repulses had made him timid. He wanted to see the face he had to apply to before he ventured.

But Mr. Bartley was not there. The large office was at present occupied by his clerks; one of these was Leonard Monckton, a pale young man with dark hair, a nose like a hawk, and thin lips. The other was quite a young fellow, with brown hair, hazel eyes, and an open countenance. "Many a hard rub puts a point on a man." So Hope resolved at once to say nothing to that pale clerk so like a kite, but to interest the open countenance in him and his hungry child.

There were two approaches to the large office. One, to Hope's right, through a door and a lobby. This was seldom used except by the habitués of the place. The other was to Hope's left, through a very small office, generally occupied by an inferior clerk, who kept an eye upon the work outside. However, this office had also a small window looking inward;

this opened like a door when the man had anything to say to Mr. Bartley or the clerks in the large office.

William Hope entered this outer office, and found it empty. The clerk happened to be in the yard. Then he opened the inner door and looked in on the two clerks, pale and haggard, and apprehensive of a repulse. He addressed himself to the one nearest him; it was the one whose face had attracted him.

"Sir, can I see Mr. Bartley?"

The young fellow glanced over the visitor's worn garments and dusty shoes, and said, dryly, "Hum! if it is for charity, this is the wrong shop."

"I want no charity," said Hope, with a sigh; "I want employment. But I do want it very badly; my poor little girl and I are starving."

"Then that is a shame," said the young fellow, warmly. "Why, you are a gentleman, aren't you?"

"I don't know for that," said Hope. "But I am an educated man, and I could do the whole business of this place. But you see I am down in the world."

"You look like it," said the clerk, bluntly. "But don't you be so green as to tell old Bartley that, or you are done for. No, no; I'll show you how to get in here. Wait till half past one. He lunches at one, and he isn't quite such a brute after luncheon. Then you come in like Julius Caesar, and brag like blazes, and offer him twenty pounds' worth of industry and ability, and above all arithmetic, and he will say he has no opening (and that is a lie), and offer you fifteen shillings, perhaps."

"If he does, I'll jump at it," said Hope, eagerly. "But whether I succeed with him or not, take my child's blessing and my own."

His voice faltered, and Bolton, with a young man's uneasiness under sentiment, stopped him. "Oh, come, old fellow, bother all that! Why, we are all stumped in turn." Then he began to chase a solitary coin into a corner of his waistcoat pocket. "Look here, I'll lend you a shilling—pay me next week—it will buy the kid a breakfast. I wish I had more, but I want the other for luncheon. I haven't drawn my screw yet. It is due at twelve."

"I'll take it for my girl," said Hope, blushing, "and because it is offered me by a gentleman and like a gentleman."

"Granted, for the sake of argument," said this sprightly youth; and so they parted for the time, little dreaming, either of them, what a chain they were weaving round their two hearts, and this little business the first link.

CHAPTER II.

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THE RICH MAN'S CHILD.

The world is very big, and contains hundreds of millions who are strangers to each other. Yet every now and then this big world seems to turn small; so many people whose acquaintance we make turn out to be acquaintances of our acquaintances. This concatenation of acquaintances is really one of the marvels of social life, if one considers the chances against it, owing to the size and population of the country. As an example of this phenomenon, which we have all observed, William Hope was born in Derbyshire, in a small parish which belonged, nearly all of it, to Colonel Clifford; yet in that battle for food which is, alas! the prosaic but true history of men and nations, he entered an office in Yorkshire, and there made friends with Colonel Clifford's son, Walter, who was secretly dabbling in trade and matrimony under the name of Bolton; and this same Hope was to come back, and to apply for a place to Mr. Bartley; Mr. Bartley was brother-in-law to that same Colonel Clifford, though they were at daggers drawn, the pair.

Miss Clifford, aged thirty-two, had married Bartley, aged thirty-seven. Each had got fixed habits, and they soon disagreed. In two years they parted, with plenty of

bitterness, but no scandal. Bartley stood on his rights, and kept their one child, little Mary. He was very fond of her, and as the mother saw her whenever she liked, his love for his child rather tended to propitiate Mrs. Bartley, though nothing on earth would have induced her to live with him again.

Little Mary was two months younger than Grace Hope, and, like her, had blue eyes and golden hair. But what a difference in her condition! She had two nurses and every luxury. Dressed like a princess, and even when in bed smothered in lace; some woman's eye always upon her, a hand always ready to keep her from the smallest accident.

Yet all this care could not keep out sickness. The very day that Grace Hope began to cough and alarm her father, Mary Bartley flushed and paled, and showed some signs of feverishness.

The older nurse, a vigilant person, told Mr. Bartley directly; and the doctor was sent for post-haste. He felt her pulse, and said there was some little fever, but no cause for anxiety. He administered syrup of poppies, and little Mary passed a tranquil night.

Next day, about one in the afternoon, she became very restless, and was repeatedly sick. The doctor was sent for, and combated the symptoms; but did not inquire closely into the cause. Sickness proceeds immediately from the stomach; so he soothed the stomach with alkaline mucilages, and the sickness abated. But next day alarming symptoms accumulated, short breathing, inability to eat, flushed face, wild eyes. Bartley telegraphed to a first-rate London physician. He came, and immediately examined the

girl's throat, and shook his head; then he uttered a fatal word—Diphtheria.

They had wasted four days squirting petty remedies at symptoms, instead of finding the cause and attacking it, and now he told them plainly he feared it was too late—the fatal membrane was forming, and, indeed, had half closed the air-passages.

Bartley in his rage and despair would have driven the local doctor out of the house, but this the London doctor would not allow. He even consulted him on the situation, now it was declared, and, as often happens, they went in for heroic remedies since it was too late.

But neither powerful stimulants nor biting draughts nor caustic applications could hinder the deadly parchment from growing and growing.

The breath reduced to a thread, no nourishment possible except by baths of beef tea, and similar enemas. Exhaustion inevitable. Death certain.

Such was the hopeless condition of the rich man's child, surrounded by nurses and physicians, when the father of the poor man's child applied to the clerk Bolton for that employment which meant bread for his child, and perhaps life for *her*.

William Hope returned to his little Grace with a loaf of bread he bought on the road with Bolton's shilling, and fresh milk in a soda-water bottle.

He found her crying. She had contrived, after the manner of children, to have an accident. The room was almost bare of furniture, but my lady had found a wooden stool that *could* be mounted upon and tumbled off, and she had done

both, her parent being away. She had bruised and sprained her little wrist, and was in the depths of despair.

"Ah," said poor Hope, "I was afraid something or other would happen if I left you."

He took her to the window, and set her on his knee, and comforted her. He cut a narrow slip off his pocket handkerchief, wetted it, and bound it lightly and deftly round her wrist, and poured consolation into her ear. But soon she interrupted that, and flung sorrow to the winds; she uttered three screams of delight, and pointed eagerly through the window.

"Here they be again, the white swans!"

Hope looked, and there were two vessels, a brig and a bark, creeping down the river toward the sea, with white sails bellying to a gentle breeze astern.

It is experience that teaches proportion. The eye of childhood is wonderfully misled in that matter. Promise a little child the moon, and show him the ladder to be used, he sees nothing inadequate in the means; so Grace Hope was delighted with her swans.

But Hope, who made it his business to instruct her, and not deceive her as some thoughtless parents do, out of fun, the wretches, told her, gently, they were not swans, but ships.

She was a little disappointed at that, but inquired what they were doing.

"Darling," said he, "they are going to some other land, where honest, hard-working people can not starve, and, mark my words, darling," said he—she pricked her little ears

at that—"you and I shall have to go with them, for we are poor."

"Oh," said little Grace, impressed by his manner as well as his words, and nodded her pretty head with apparent wisdom, and seemed greatly impressed.

Then her father fed her with bread and milk, and afterward laid her on the bed, and asked her whether she loved him.

"Dearly, dearly," said she.

"Then if you do," said he, "you will go to sleep like a good girl, and not stir off that bed till I come back."

"No more I will," said she.

However, he waited until she was in an excellent condition for keeping her promise, being fast as a church.

Then he looked long at her beautiful face, wax-like and even-tinted, but full of life after her meal, and prayed to Him who loved little children, and went with a beating heart to Mr. Bartley's office.

But in the short time, little more than an hour and a half, which elapsed between Hope's first and second visit, some most unexpected and remarkable events took place.

Bartley came in from his child's dying bed distracted with grief; but business to him was the air he breathed, and he went to work as usual, only in a hurried and bitter way unusual to him. He sent out his clerk Bolton with some bills, and told him sharply not to return without the money; and whilst Bolton, so-called, was making his toilette in the lobby, his eye fell on his other clerk, Monckton.

Monckton was poring over the ledger with his head down, the very picture of a faithful servant absorbed in his

master's work.

But appearances are deceitful. He had a small book of his own nestled between the ledger and his stomach. It was filled with hieroglyphics, and was his own betting book. As for his brown-study, that was caused by his owing £100 in the ring, and not knowing how to get it. To be sure, he could rob Mr. Bartley. He had done it again and again by false accounts, and even by abstraction of coin, for he had false keys to his employer's safe, cash-box, drawers, and desk. But in his opinion he had played this game often enough, and was afraid to venture it again so soon and on so large a scale.

He was so absorbed in these thoughts that he did not hear Mr. Bartley come to him; to be sure, he came softly, because of the other clerk, who was washing his hands and brushing his hair in the lobby.

So Bartley's hand, fell gently, but all in a moment, on Monckton's shoulder, and they say the shoulder is a sensitive part in conscious rogues. Anyway, Monckton started violently, and turned from pale to white, and instinctively clapped both hands over his betting book.

"Monckton," said his employer, gravely, "I have made a very ugly discovery."

Monckton began to shiver.

"Periodical errors in the balances, and the errors always against me."

Monckton began to perspire. Not knowing what to say, he faltered, and at last stammered out, "Are you sure, sir?"

"Quite sure. I have long seen reason to suspect it, so last night I went through all the books, and now I am sure.

Whoever the villain is, I will send him to prison if I can only catch him."

Monckton winced and turned his head away, debating in his mind whether he should affect indignation and sympathy, and pretend to court inquiry, or should wait till lunch-time, and then empty the cash-box and bolt.

Whilst thus debating, these words fell unexpectedly on his ear:

"And you must help me."

Then Monckton's eyes turned this way and that in a manner that is common among thieves, and a sardonic smile curled his pale thin lip.

"It is my duty," said the sly rogue, demurely. Then, after a pause,

"But how?"

Then Mr. Bartley glanced at Bolton in the lobby, and not satisfied with speaking under his breath, drew this ill-chosen confidant to the other end of the office.

"Why, suspect everybody, and watch them. Now there's this clerk Bolton: I know nothing about him; I was taken by his looks. Have your eye on *him*."

"I will, sir," said Monckton, eagerly. He drew a long breath of relief. For all that, he was glad when a voice in the little office announced a visitor.

It was a clear, peremptory voice, short, sharp, incisive, and decisive. The clerk called Bolton heard it in the lobby, and scuttled into the street with a rapidity that contrasted drolly enough with the composure and slowness with which he had been brushing his hair and titivating his nascent whiskers.

A tall, stiff military figure literally marched into the middle of the office, and there stood like a sentinel.

Mr. Bartley could hardly believe his senses.

"Colonel Clifford!" said he, roughly.

"You are surprised to see me here?"

"Of course I am. May I ask what brings you?"

"That which composes all quarrels and squares all accounts—Death."

Colonel Clifford said this solemnly, and with less asperity. He added, with a glance at Monckton, "This is a very private matter."

Bartley took the hint, and asked Monckton to retire into the inner office.

As soon as he and Colonel Clifford were alone, that warrior, still standing straight as a dart, delivered himself of certain short sentences, each of which seemed to be propelled, or indeed jerked out of him, by some foreign power seated in his breast.

"My sister, your injured wife, is no more."

"Dead! This is very sudden. I am very, very sorry. I—"

Colonel Clifford looked the word "Humbug," and continued to expel short sentences.

"On her death-bed she made me promise to give you my hand. There it is."

His hand was propelled out, caught flying by Bartley, released, and drawn back again, all by machinery it seemed.

"She leaves you £20,000 in trust for the benefit of her child and yours—Mary Bartley."

"Poor, dear Eliza."

The Colonel looked as less high-bred people do when they say "Gammon," but proceeded civilly though brusquely.

"In dealing with the funds you have a large discretion. Should the girl die before you, or unmarried, the money lapses to your nephew, my son, Walter Clifford. He is a scapegrace, and has run away from me; but I must protect his just interests. So as a mere matter of form I will ask you whether Mary Bartley is alive."

Bartley bowed his head.

Colonel Clifford had not heard she was ill, so he continued: "In that case"—and then, interrupting himself for a moment, turned away to Bartley's private table, and there emptied his pockets of certain documents, one of which he wanted to select.

His back was not turned more than half a minute, yet a most expressive pantomime took place in that short interval.

The nurse opened a door of communication, and stood with a rush at the threshold: indeed, she would have rushed in but for the stranger. She was very pale, and threw up her hands to Bartley. Her face and her gesture were more expressive than words.

Then Bartley, clinging by mere desperate instinct to money he could not hope to keep, flew to her, drove her out by a frenzied movement of both hands, though he did not touch her, and spread-eagled himself before the door, with his face and dilating eyes turned toward Colonel Clifford.

The Colonel turned and stepped toward him with the document he had selected at the table. Bartley went to meet him.

The Colonel gave it to him, and said it was a copy of the will.

Bartley took it, and Colonel Clifford expelled his last sentences.

"We have shaken hands. Let us forget our past quarrels, and respect the wishes of the dead."

With that he turned sharply on both heels, and faced the door of the little office before he moved; then marched out in about seven steps, as he had marched in, and never looked behind him for two hundred miles.

The moment he was out of sight, Bartley, with his wife's will in his hand and ice at his heart, went to his child's room. The nurse met him, crying, and said, "A change"—mild but fatal words that from a nurse's lips end hope.

He came to the bedside just in time to see the breath hovering on his child's lips, and then move them as the summer air stirs a leaf.

Soon all was still, and the rich man's child was clay.

The unhappy father burst into a passion of grief, short but violent. Then he ordered the nurse to watch there, and let no one enter the room; then he staggered back to his office, and flung himself down at his table and buried his head. To do him justice, he was all parental grief at first, for his child was his idol.

The arms were stretched out across the table; the head rested on it; the man was utterly crushed.

Whilst he was so, the little office door opened softly, and a pale, worn, haggard face looked in. It was the father of the poor man's child in mortal danger from privation and hereditary consumption. That haggard face was come to ask

the favor of employment, and bread for his girl, from the rich man whose child was clay.

CHAPTER III.

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THE TWO FATHERS.

Hope looked wistfully at that crushed figure, and hesitated; it seemed neither kind nor politic to intrude business upon grief.

But if the child was Bartley's idol, money was his god, and soon in his strange mind defeated avarice began to vie with nobler sorrow. His child dead! his poor little flower withered, and her death robbed him of £20,000, and indeed of ten times that sum, for he had now bought experience in trade and speculation, and had learned to make money out of money, a heap out of a handful. Stung by this vulgar torment in its turn, he started suddenly up, and dashed his wife's will down upon the floor in a fury, and paced the room excitedly. Hope still stood aghast, and hesitated to risk his application.

But presently Bartley caught sight of him, and stared at him, but said nothing.

Then the poor fellow saw it was no use waiting for a better opportunity, so he came forward and carried out Bolton's instructions; he put on a tolerably jaunty air, and said, cheerfully, "I beg your pardon, sir; can I claim your attention for a moment?"

"What do you want?" asked Bartley, but like a man whose mind was elsewhere.

"Only employment for my talent, sir. I hear you have a vacancy for a manager."

"Nothing of the sort. *I* am manager."

Hope drew back despondent, and his haggard countenance fell at such prompt repulse. But he summoned courage, and, once more acting genial confidence, returned to the attack.

"But you don't know, sir, in how many ways I can be useful to you. A grand and complicated business like yours needs various acquirements in those who have the honor to serve you. For instance, I saw a small engine at work in your yard; now I am a mechanic, and I can double the power of that engine by merely introducing an extra band and a couple of cogs."

"It will do as it is," said Bartley, languidly, "and I can do without a manager."

Bartley's manner was not irritated but absorbed. He seemed in all his replies to Hope to be brushing away a fly mechanically and languidly. The poor fly felt sick at heart, and crept away disconsolate. But at the very door he turned, and for his child's sake made another attempt.

"Have you an opening for a clerk? I can write business letters in French,
German, and Dutch; and keep books by double entry."

"No vacancy for a clerk," was the weary reply.

"Well, then, a foreman in the yard. I have studied the economy of industry, and will undertake to get you the

greatest amount of labor out of the smallest number of men."

"I have a foreman already," said Bartley, turning his back on him peevishly, for the first time, and pacing the room, absorbed in his own disappointment.

Hope was in despair, and put on his hat to go. But he turned at the window and said: "You have vans and carts. I understand horses thoroughly. I am a veterinary surgeon, and I can drive four-in-hand. I offer myself as carman, or even hostler."

"I do not want a hostler, and I have a carman."

Bartley, when he had said this, sat down like a man who had finally disposed of the application.

Hope went to the very door, and leaned against it. His jaw dropped. He looked ten years older. Then, with a piteous attempt at cheerfulness, he came nearer, and said: "A messenger, then. I'm young and very active, and never waste my employer's time."

Even this humble proposal was declined, though Hope's cheeks burned with shame as he made it. He groaned aloud, and his head dropped on his breast.

His eye fell on the will lying on the ground; he went and picked it up, and handed it respectfully to Bartley.

Bartley stared, took it, and bowed his head an inch or two in acknowledgment of the civility. This gave the poor daunted father courage again. Now that Bartley's face was turned to him by this movement, he took advantage of it, and said, persuasively:

"Give me some kind of employment, sir. You will never repent it." Then he began to warm with conscious power.

"I've intelligence, practicability, knowledge; and in this age of science knowledge is wealth. Example: I saw a swell march out of this place that owns all the parish I was born in. I knew him in a moment—Colonel Clifford. Well, that old soldier draws his rents when he can get them, and never looks deeper than the roots of the grass his cattle crop. But *I* tell *you* he never takes a walk about his grounds but he marches upon millions—coal! sir, coal! and near the surface. I know the signs. But I am impotent: only fools possess the gold that wise men can coin into miracles. Try me, sir; honor me with your sympathy. You are a father—you have a sweet little girl, I hear."—Bartley winced at that.—"Well, so have I, and the hole my poverty makes me pig in is not good for her, sir. She needs the sea air, the scent of flowers, and, bless her little heart, she does enjoy them so! Give them to her, and I will give you zeal, energy, brains, and a million of money."

This, for the first time in the interview, arrested Mr. Bartley's attention.

"I see you are a superior man," said he, "but I have no way to utilize your services."

"You can give me no hope, sir?" asked the poor fellow, still lingering.

"None—and I am sorry for it."

This one gracious speech affected poor Hope so that he could not speak for a moment. Then he fought for manly dignity, and said, with a lamentable mixture of sham sprightliness and real anguish, "Thank you, sir; I only trust that you will always find servants as devoted to your interest as my gratitude would have made me. Good-

morning, sir." He clapped his hat on with a sprightly, ghastly air, and marched off resolutely.

But ere he reached the door, Nature overpowered the father's heart; way went Bolton's instructions; away went fictitious deportment and feigned cheerfulness. The poor wretch uttered a cry, indeed a scream, of anguish, that would have thrilled ten thousand hearts had they heard it; he dashed his hat on the ground, and rushed toward Bartley, with both hands out—"FOR GOD'S SAKE DON'T SEND ME AWAY—MY CHILD IS STARVING!"

Even Bartley was moved. "Your child!" said he, with some little feeling. This slight encouragement was enough for a father. His love gushed forth. "A little golden-haired, blue-eyed angel, who is all the world to me. We have walked here from Liverpool, where I had just buried her mother. God help me! God help us both! Many a weary mile, sir, and never sure of supper or bed. The birds of the air have nests, the beasts of the field a shelter, the fox a hole, but my beautiful and fragile girl, only four years old, sir, is houseless and homeless. Her mother died of consumption, sir, and I live in mortal fear; for now she is beginning to cough, and I can not give her proper nourishment. Often on this fatal journey I have felt her shiver, and then I have taken off my coat and wrapped it round her, and her beautiful eyes have looked up in mine, and seemed to plead for the warmth and food I'd sell my soul to give her."

"Poor fellow," said Bartley; "I suppose I ought to pity you. But how can I? Man—man—your child is alive, and while there is life there is hope; but mine is dead—dead!" he almost shrieked.