

***ARTHUR  
QUILLER-COUCH***

A detail from a painting, likely a portrait of a nobleman or knight. The figure is wearing highly detailed, dark armor with gold-colored rivets and a large, ornate ruff collar. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the textures of the metal and fabric. The background is dark and indistinct.

***THE BLUE  
PAVILIONS***

**Arthur Quiller-Couch**

# **The Blue Pavilions**

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# CHAPTER I.

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### **CAPTAIN JOHN AND CAPTAIN JEMMY.**

At noonday, on the 11th of October, 1673, the little seaport of Harwich, beside the mouth of the River Stour, presented a very lively appearance. More than a hundred tall ships, newly returned from the Dutch War, rode at anchor in the haven, their bright masts swaying in the sunshine above the thatched and red-tiled roofs of the town. Tarry sailors in red and grey kersey suits, red caps and flat-heeled shoes jostled in the narrow streets and hung about St. Nicholas's Churchyard, in front of the Admiralty House, wherein the pursers sat before bags and small piles of money, paying off the crews. Soldiers crowded the tavern doors—men in soiled uniforms of the Admiral's regiment, the Buffs and the 1st Foot Guards; some with bandaged heads and arms, and the most still yellow after their seasickness, but all intrepidly toasting the chances of Peace and the girls in opposite windows. Above their laughter, and along every street or passage opening on the harbour—from Cock and Pye Quay, from Lambard's stairs, the Castleport, and half a dozen other landing-stages—came wafted the shouts of captains, pilots, boatswains, caulkers, longshore men; the noise of artillery and stores unloading; the tack-tack of mallets in the dockyard, where Sir Anthony Deane's new ship the *Harwich* was rising on the billyways, and whence the blown odours of pitch and hemp and timber, mingling with the landward breeze, drifted all day long into the

townsfolk's nostrils, and filled their very kitchens with the savour of the sea.

In the thick of these scents and sounds, and within a cool doorway, before which the shadow of a barber's pole rested on the cobbles, reclined Captain John Barker—a little wry-necked gentleman, with a prodigious hump between his shoulders, and legs that dangled two inches off the floor. His wig was being curled by an apprentice at the back of the shop, and his natural scalp shone as bare as a billiard-ball; but two patches of brindled grey hair stuck out from his brow above a pair of fierce greenish eyes set about with a complexity of wrinkles. Just now, a coating of lather covered his shrewish underjaw.

The dress of this unlovely old gentleman well became his rank as captain of his Majesty's frigate the *Wasp*, but went very ill with his figure—being, indeed, a square-cut coat of scarlet, laced with gold, a long-flapped blue waistcoat, black breeches and stockings. Enormous buckles adorned the thick-soled shoes which he drummed impatiently against the legs of his chair.

The barber—a round, bustling fellow—stropped his razor and prattled gossip. On a settle to the right a couple of townsmen smoked, listened, and waited their turn with an educated patience.

"Changes, indeed, since you left us, Captain John," the barber began, his razor hovering for the first scrape.

"Wait a moment. You were about to take hold of me by the nose. If you do it, I'll run you through. I thought you'd like to be warned, that's all. Go on with your chatter."

"Certainly, Captain John—'tis merely a habit—"

"Break yourself of it."

"I will, sir. But, as I was saying, the changes will astonish you that have been at sea so long. In the first place, a riding-post started from hence to London and from London hither a-gallop with brazen trumpet and loaded pistols, to keep his Majesty certified every day of the Fleet's doings, and the Fleet of his Majesty's wishes; and all Harwich a-tremble half the night under its bedclothes, but consoled to find the King taking so much notice of it. And the old jail moved from St. Austin's Gate, and a new one building this side of Church Street, where Calamy's Store used to stand—with a new town-hall, too—"

Here, as he paused to scrape the captain's cheek, one of the two townsmen on the settle—a square man in grey, with a red waistcoat— withdrew the long pipe from his mouth and groaned heavily.

"What's that?" asked the hunchback snappishly.

"That, sir, is Mr. Pomphlett," the barber explained. "He disapproves of the amount spent in decorating the new hall with pillars, rails, balusters, and what not; for the king's arms, to be carved over the mayor's seat and richly gilt, are to be a private gift of Mr. Isaac Betts, and the leathern fire-buckets to be hung round the wall—"

Mr. Pomphlett emitted another groan, which the barber good-naturedly tried to drown in talk. Captain Barker heard it, however.

"There it is again!"

"Yes, sir. You see Mr. Pomphlett allows his public spirit to run high. He says—"

The little captain jerked round in his chair, escaping a gash by a hair's-breadth, and addressed the heavy citizen—

"Mr. Pomphlett, sir, it was not for the sake of listening to your observations upon public affairs that I came straight off my ship to this shop, but to hear the news."

The barber coughed. Mr. Pomphlett feebly traced a curve in the air with his pipe-stem, and answered sulkily—

"I s-said nun-nothing. I f-felt unwell."

"He suffers," interposed Mr. Pomphlett's neighbour on the settle, a long-necked man in brown, "from the wind; don't you, Pomphlett?"

Mr. Pomphlett nodded with an aggrieved air, and sucked his pipe.

"Death," continued the man in brown, by way of setting the conversation on its legs again, "has been busy in Harwich, Barker."

"Ah! now we come to business! Barber, who's dead?"

"Alderman Croten, sir."

"Tut-tut. Croten gone?"

"Yes, sir; palsy took him at a ripe age. And Abel's gone, the Town Crier; and old Mistress Pinch's bad leg carried her from us last Christmas Day, of all days in the year; and young Mr. Eastwell was snatched away by a chain-shot in the affair with the Smyrna fleet; and Mistress Salt—that was daughter of old Sir Jabez Tellworthy, and broke her father's heart—she's a widow in straitened circumstances, and living up at the old house again—"

"*What!*"

Captain Barker bounced off his chair like a dried pea from a shovel.

"There now! Your honour's chin is wounded."

"P'sh! give me your towel." He snatched it from the barber's arm and mopped away the blood and lather from his jaw. "Mistress Salt a widow? When? How?"

"I thought, maybe, your honour would know about it."

"Don't think. Roderick Salt dead? Tell me this instant, or —"

"He was drowned, sir, in a ditch, they tell me, but two months after he sailed with his company of Foot Guards, in the spring of this year. It seems 'twas a ditch that the Marshal Turenne had the misfortune to forget about—"

"My hat—where is it? Quick!"

Already Captain Barker had plucked the napkin from his throat, caught up his sword from a chair, and was buckling on the belt in a tremendous hurry.

"But your honour forgets the wig, which is but half curled; and your honour's face shaved on the one side only."

The hunchback's answer was to snatch his wig from between the apprentice's tongs, clap it on his head, ram his hat on the top of it, and flounce out at the shop door.

The streets were full of folk, but he passed through them at an amazing speed. His natural gait on shipboard was a kind of anapaestic dance—two short steps and a long—and though the crowd interrupted its cadence and coerced him to a quick bobbing motion, as of a bottle in a choppy sea, it hardly affected his pace. Here and there he snapped out a greeting to some ship's captain or townsman of his acquaintance, or growled testily at a row of soldiers bearing down on him three abreast. His angry green eyes seemed to clear a path before him, in spite of the grins which his hump



and shambling legs excited among strangers. In this way he darted along High Street, turned up by the markets, crossed Church Street into West Street, and passed under the great gate by which the London Road left the town.

Beyond this gate the road ran through a tall ravelin and out upon a breezy peninsula between the river and the open sea. And here Captain Barker halted and, tugging off hat and wig, wiped his crown with a silk handkerchief.

Over the reedy marsh upon his right, where a windmill waved its lazy arms, a score of larks were singing. To his left the gulls mewed across the cliffs and the remoter sandbanks that thrust up their yellow ridges under the ebb-tide. The hum of the little town sounded drowsily behind him.

He gazed across the sandbanks upon the blue leagues of sea, and rubbed his fingers softly up and down the unshaven side of his face.

"H'm," he said, and then "p'sh!" and then "p'sh!" again; and, as if this settled it, readjusted his wig and hat and set off down the road faster than ever.

A cluster of stunted poplars appeared in the distance, and a long thatched house; then, between the trees, the eye caught sight of two other buildings, exactly alike, but of a curious shape and colour. Imagine two round towers, each about forty feet in height, daubed with a bright blue wash and surmounted with a high-pitched, conical roof of a somewhat darker tint. Above each roof a gilt vane glittered, and a flock of white pigeons circled overhead or, alighting, dotted the tiles with patches of silver.

A bend of the road broke up this cluster of trees and buildings. The long thatched house fell upon the left of the highway, and in front of it a sign-post sprang into view, with a drinking-trough below. Directly opposite, the two blue roofs ranged themselves side by side, with long strips of garden and a thick privet hedge between them and the road. And behind, in the direction of the marsh, the poplars stretched in an irregular line.

Now the nearer of these blue pavilions was the home of Captain Barker, who for more than two years had not crossed its threshold. Yet he neither paused by its small blue gate nor glanced up the gravelled path. Nor, though thirsty, did he turn aside to the porch of the Fish and Anchor Inn; but kept along the privet hedge until he came to the second blue gate. Here he drew up and stood for a moment with his hand on the latch.

A trim lawn stretched before him to the door of the pavilion, and here, on a rustic seat before an equally rustic table, sat a long lean gentleman, in a suit of Lincoln green faced with scarlet, who gazed into a pewter tankard. His sword lay on the turf beside him, and a hat of soft cloth edged with feathers hung on the arm of the bench.

This long gentleman looked up as the gate clicked, stretched out his legs, rose, and disappeared within the pavilion, returning after a minute with a jug of beer and a fresh tankard.

"Paid off your crew already?"

The little hunchback took a pull, answered "No" as he set down the tankard, and looked up at the weathercock overhead.

"Wind's in the south-east."

The long man looked at the little one and pursed up his mouth. His face proclaimed him of a like age with Captain Barker. It did not at all match his figure, being short as a bull-dog's; and like a bull-dog he was heavily jowled. Many weathers had tanned his complexion to a rich corn-colour. His name was Jeremy Runacles, and for two years, that had ended on this very morning, he had commanded the *Trident* frigate. As he climbed down her ladder into his gig he had left on the deck behind him a reputation for possessing a shorter temper than any three officers in his Majesty's service. At present his steel-blue eyes seemed gentle enough.

"You've something to tell," he said, after a minute's silence.

The hunchback kicked at a plantain in the turf for two minutes longer, and asked—

"How's the little maid, Jemmy?"

"Grown. She's having her morning nap."

"She want's a mother."

"She'll have to do with a nurse."

"You don't want to marry again?"

"No."

"That's a lie."

Before Captain Runacles could resent this, the little man turned his back and took six paces to the party hedge and six paces back.

"I say, Jemmy, do you think we could fight?"

"Not decently."

"I was thinking that. I don't see another way out of it, though."

He kicked the plantain out of the ground, and, looking up, said very softly—"Meg's a widow."

Captain Jeremy Runacles sat down on the rustic bench. A hot flush had sprung into his face and a light leapt in his eyes; but he said nothing. Captain Barker cocked his head on one side and went on—

"Yes, you lied, Jemmy. That fellow, as I guess, ran off and left her, finding that the old man had the courage to die without coming to reason. He went back to his regiment, sailed, and was drowned in a ditch. She's back at the old house, and in want."

"You've seen her?"

"Look here, Jemmy. You and I are a couple of tomfools; but we try to play fair."

"Upon my soul, Jack," observed Captain Jemmy, rising to his feet again, "we can't fight. You're too good a fellow to kill."

"H'mph, I was thinking that."

As if by consent, the pair began to pace up and down the turf, one on either side of the gravelled path. At the end of three minutes Captain Jack looked up.

"After all, you've been married once, whereas I—"

"That doesn't count," the other interrupted. "I married in an unguarded moment. I was huffed with Meg."

"No, I suppose it doesn't count."

They resumed their walk. Captain Jemmy was the next to speak.

"It seems to me Meg must decide."

"Yes, but we must start fair."

"The devil! we can't propose one in each ear. And if we race for it—"

"You must give me half a mile's start."

"But we can write."

"Yes; and deliver our letters together at the door."

"On the other hand, I've always heard that women look upon a written proposal of marriage as rather tame."

"That objection would hardly apply to two in one day. And, besides, she knows about us."

"We'll write," said Captain Jemmy.

He went into the pavilion to search for pens and paper, while Captain Barker stepped down to the Fish and Anchor to borrow a bottle of ink.

"There must be preliminaries," the little man observed, returning and setting the ink down in the centre of the rustic table, on which already lay a bundle of old quills and some quarto sheets of yellow paper.

"As for instance?"

"*Imprimis*, a thick folio book for me to sit on. The carpenter built this table after your measure."

"I will fetch one."

"Also more beer."

"I will draw some."

"Thirdly, a time-keeper. My stomach's empty, but it can hold out for another hour. We'll give ourselves an hour; start together and finish together."

Captain Runacles fished a silver whistle from his waistcoat pocket and blew on it shrilly. The blue and white door of the pavilion was opened, and a slight old man in a

blue livery appeared on the step and came ambling down the path. The weight of an enormous head, on the top of which his grey wig seemed to be balanced rather than fitted, bowed him as he moved. But he drew himself up to salute the two captains.

"Glad to welcome ye, Captain John, along with master here. Hey, but you've aged—the pair o' ye."

"Simeon," said his master, "draw us some beer. Aged, you say?"

"Aye—aged, aged: a trivial, remediless complaint, common to folk. Valiant deeds ye'll do yet, my masters; but though I likes to be hopeful, the door's closin' on ye both. Ye be staid to the eye, noticeably staid. The first sign o't, to be marked at forty or so, is when a woman's blush pales before wine held to the light; the second, and that, too, ye've passed—"

"Hurry, you old fool! As it happens you've been proving us a pair of raw striplings."

"Hee-hee," tittered the old man sardonically, and catching up the tankards trotted back to the house, with his master at his heels. Captain Barker, left alone, rearranged his neckcloth, contemplated his crooked legs for a moment with some disgust, and began to trot up and down the grass-plot, whistling the while with great energy and no regard for tune.

The pair reappeared in the doorway—Captain Runacles bearing an hour-glass and a volume of "Purchas," and Simeon the tankards, crowned with a creamy froth.

"Have you picked your quill?"

"Yes," answered the hunchback, settling himself on top of the brown folio. "No, 'tis a split one."

The pens were old, and had lain with the ink dry upon them ever since the outbreak of the Dutch War. The two men were half a minute in finding a couple that would write. Then Captain Runacles turned the hour-glass abruptly; and for an hour there was no sound in the pavilion garden but the scratching of quills, the murmur of pigeons on the roof, and the creaking of the gilded vane above them.

## **CHAPTER II.**

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### **THE DICE-BOX.**

That same afternoon, at four o'clock, Captain Barker and Captain Runacles entered Harwich and advanced up the West Street side by side. Each had a bulky letter in his side-pocket, and the address upon each letter was the same. They talked but little.

On the right-hand side of West Street, as you enter the town, and a hundred yards or more from the town gate, there stood at that time a two-storeyed house of more pretensions than its fellows—from which it drew back somewhat. A line of railings, covered with ironwork of a florid and intricate pattern, but greatly decayed, shut it off from the roadway. The visitor, on opening the broad iron gate over which this pattern culminated in the figure of a Triton blowing a conch-shell, found himself in a pebbled court and before a massive front-door.

Neglect hung visibly over house and court alike as the two captains entered by the iron gate and looked around them with more trepidation than they had ever displayed in action. Grass sprouted between the pebbles and a greenish stain lay upon the flagstones. The drab frontage was similarly streaked; dust and rain together had set a crust upon the windows, and tufts of dark mossy grass again flourished in the gutter-pipes beneath the eaves.

Surveying this desolation, Captain Jemmy uttered a grunt and Captain John a "p'sh!" They fumbled in their pockets,



drew out their two letters, and moved to the blistered front-door. A bell-pull, as rusty as the railings outside, depended by the jamb. Captain Jemmy tugged at it. It was noteworthy that whenever any effort had to be put forth, however small, the tall man stepped forward and the hunchback looked on. It was Captain Jemmy, for instance, who had, a moment before, pushed back the gate.

He had to tug thrice before a discordant bell sounded within the house, and twice again before footsteps began to shuffle along the passage.

A bolt was let down and the big door fell open, disclosing a small serving-girl, who stared upon the visitors with round eyes.

"Is your mistress within?"

"Mistress Salt is within, sirs; but—"

"But what?"

"She—she can't see you!" The girl burst into tears.

"Who the devil asked her to see us?" rapped out Captain Barker.

"You are to take these two letters," interposed Captain Runacles. Each captain held out his letter. "You are to take these two—blow your nose and dry your eyes—letters to your mistress at once—mind you, *at once*—and together—*together*, you understand, and—what in thunder are you whimpering about?"

"I c-c-can't, sirs."

"Can't! Why, in the name of—don't drip on 'em, I tell you! Why, in the name of—"

The iron gate creaked behind them, and the two captains turned their heads. A portly, broad-shouldered gentleman,

in a suit of snuff colour, came slowly across the court, with both hands behind him, and a cane rapping against his heels.

"Dr. Beckerleg."

"Hey? Why—Captain Barker! Captain Runacles! Glad to see you both—glad to see you both home again! Also I'd be glad to know what you're both doing here, at such a time."

The captains looked at each other and coughed. They turned towards the doorway. The serving-girl had disappeared, taking their letters with her. Captain Barker faced round upon the Doctor.

"You said 'at such a time,' sir."

"I did."

"And why not at this time, as well as another?"

"God bless me! Is it possible you don't know?"

"It is not only possible, but certain."

The Doctor bent his head, pointed up at a window, and whispered; then went softly up the three steps into the house.

He left the two friends staring at each other. They stood and stared at each other for three minutes or more. Then Captain Barker spoke in a hoarse whisper.

"Jemmy, do you know anything about this—this kind of business?"

"Nothing. I was abroad, you know, when my own little maid—"

"Yes, I remember. But I thought, perhaps—say, I can't go home till—till I've seen the Doctor again."

"Nor I."

A dull moan sounded within the house.

"Oh, my God!" groaned Captain Runacles; "Meg—Meg!"

A lattice was opened softly above them and the doctor leant out.

"Go away—you two!" he whispered and waved his hand towards the gate.

"But, Doctor—"

"H'sh! I'll come and tell you when it's over. Where shall you be?"

"At the Three Crowns, down the street here."

"Right."

The lattice was closed again very gently. Captain Barker laid his hand upon the tall man's sleeve.

"Jemmy, we're out of this action. I thought I knew what it meant to lay-to and have to look on while a fight went forward; but I didn't. Come—"

They passed out of the courtyard and down the street towards the Three Crowns. Beneath the sign of that inn there lounged a knot of officers wearing the flesh-coloured facings of the Buffs, and within a young baritone voice was uplifted and trolling, to the accompaniment of clinking glasses, a song of Mr. Shirley's:

You virgins that did late despair  
To keep your wealth from cruel men,  
Tie up in silk your careless hair:  
Soft Peace is come again!&#8230

There was one sitting-room but no bedroom to be had at the Three Crowns. So they ordered up a dinner which they could not touch, but sat over in silence for two weary hours,

drinking very much more burgundy than they were aware of. Captain Jemmy, taking up three bottles one after another and finding them all empty, ordered up three more, and drew his chair up to the hearth, where he sat kicking the oaken logs viciously with his long legs. The little hunchback stared out on the falling night, rang for candles, and began to pace the room like a caged beast.

Before midnight Captain Runacles was drunk. Six fresh bottles stood on the table. The man was a cask. Even in the warm firelight his face was pale as a sheet, and his lips worked continually.

Captain Barker still walked up and down, but his thin legs would not always move in a straight line. His eyes glared like two globes of green fire, and he began to knock against the furniture. Few men can wait helplessly and come out of it with credit. Every time Captain John hit himself against the furniture Captain Jemmy cursed him.

Tie up in silk your careless hair;  
Soft Peace is come again!

—Sang the little man, in a rasping voice. "Your careless hair," he hiccoughed; "your careless hair, Meg!"

Then he sat down on the floor and laughed to himself softly, rocking his distorted body to and fro.

"Bah!" said his friend, without looking round. "You're drunk." And he poured out more burgundy. He was outrageously drunk himself, but it only affected his temper, not his wits.

"Meg," he said, "will live. What's more, she'll live to marry me."

"She won't. She'll die. Hist! there's a star falling outside."

He picked himself up and crawled upon the window-seat, clutching at the red curtains to keep his footing.

"Jemmy, she'll die! What was it that old fool said to-day? The door's closing on us both. To think of our marching up, just now, with those two letters; and the very sun in heaven cracking his cheeks with laughter at us—us two poor scarecrows making love thirty years after the time!"

His wry head dropped forward on his chest.

After this the two kept silence. The rest of the house had long since gone to rest, and the sound of muffled snoring alone marked the time as it passed, except when Captain Jemmy, catching up another oak log, drove it into the fire with his heel; or out in the street the watch went by, chanting the hour; or a tipsy shouting broke out in some distant street, or the noise of dogs challenging each other from their kennels across the sleeping town.

A shudder of light ran across the heavens, and over against the window Captain Barker saw the east grow pale. For some while the stars had been blotted out and light showers had fallen at intervals. Heavy clouds were banked across the river, behind Shotley; and the roofs began to glisten as they took the dawn.

Footsteps sounded on the roadway outside. He pushed open the window and looked out. Doctor Beckerleg was coming up the street, his hat pushed back and his neckcloth loosened as he respired the morning air.

The footsteps paused underneath, by the inn door; but the little Captain leant back in the window-seat without making a sign. He had seen the Doctor's face. Before the

fire Captain Jemmy brooded, with chin on breast, hands grasping the chair-rail and long legs stretched out, one on each side of the hearth. The knocking below did not rouse him from this posture, nor the creaking of feet on the stairs.

Doctor Beckerleg stood in the doorway and for a moment contemplated the scene—the empty bottles, the unsnuffed candles guttering down upon the table, and the grey faces of both drunken men. Then he turned and whispered a word to the drawer, who had hurried out of bed to admit him and now stood behind his shoulder. The fellow shuffled downstairs.

Captain Barker struggled with a question that was dried up in his throat. Before he could get it out the Doctor shook his head.

"She is dead," he announced, very gravely and simply.

The hunchback shivered. Captain Runacles neither spoke nor stirred in his chair.

"A man-child was born at two o'clock. He is alive: his mother died two hours later."

Captain Barker shivered again, plucked aimlessly at a rosette in the window-cushion, and stole a quick glance at his comrade's back. Then, putting a finger to his lip, he slid down to the floor and lurched across to the Doctor.

"She was left penniless?" he whispered.

"That, or almost that, 'tis said," replied Dr. Beckerleg in the same key, though the question obviously surprised him. "Her father left his money to the town, as all know—"

"Yes, yes; I knew that. Her husband—"

"Hadn't a penny-piece, I believe: pawned her own mother's jewels and gambled 'em away; thereupon left her, as a dog his cleaned bone."

The little man laid a hand on his collar, and as the doctor stooped whispered low and rapidly in his ear.

Their colloquy was interrupted.

"I'll adopt that child!" said Captain Runacles from the hearth. He spoke aloud, but without turning his head.

Captain Barker hopped round, as if a pin were stuck into him.

"You!—adopt Meg's boy!"

"I said that."

"But you won't."

"I shall."

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, Jemmy; but I intend to adopt him myself."

"I know it. You were whispering as much to the Doctor there."

"You have a little girl already."

"Precisely. That's where the difference comes in. This one, you'll note, is a boy."

"A child of your own!"

"But not of Meg's."

Captain Runacles turned in his chair as he said this, and, reaching a hand back to the table, drained the last bottle of burgundy into his glass. His face was white as a sheet and his jaw set like iron. "But not of Meg's," he repeated, lifting the glass and nodding over it at the pair.

His friend swayed into a chair and sat facing him, his chin but just above the table and his green eyes glaring like an

owl's.

"Jemmy Runacles, / adopt that boy!"

"You're cursedly obstinate, Jack."

"Having adopted him, I shall at once quit my profession and devote the residue of my life to his education. For a year or two—that is, until he reaches an age susceptible of tuition—I shall mature a scheme of discipline, which—"

"My dear sir," the Doctor interposed, "surely all this is somewhat precipitate."

"Not at all. My resolution was taken the instant you entered the room."

"That hardly seems to me to prove—"

The little man waved aside the interruption and continued: "Tristram—for I shall have him christened by that name—"

"He'll be called Jeremiah," decided Captain Runacles shortly.

"I've settled upon Tristram. The name is a suitable one, and signifies that its wearer is a child of sorrow."

"Jeremiah also suggests lamentations, and has the further merit of being my own name."

"Tristram—"

"Jeremiah—"

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," cried Dr. Beckerleg, "would it not be as well to see the infant?"

"I can imagine," Captain Barker answered, "nothing in the infant that is likely to shake my resolution. My scheme of discipline will be based—"

"Decidedly, Jack, I shall have to run you through," said his friend gloomily. Indeed, the Doctor stood in instant fear



of this catastrophe; for Captain Runacles' temper was a byword, and not even his customary dark flush looked so dangerous as the lustreless, sullen eyes now sunk in a face that was drawn and pinched and absolutely wax-like in colour. To the Doctor's astonishment, however, it was the little hunchback who now jumped up and whipped out his sword.

"Run me through!" he almost screamed, dancing before the other and threatening him with absurd flourishes—"Run me through?"

"Listen, gentlemen; listen, before blood is spilt! To me it appears evident that you are both drunk."

"To me that seems an advantage, since it equalises matters."

"But whichever of you survives, he will be unable to forgive himself; having sinned not only against God, but also against logic."

"How against logic?"

"Permit me to demonstrate. Mrs. Salt, whom (as I well know) you esteemed, is lost to you; and in her place is left a babe whom— healthy though he undoubtedly is—you cannot possibly esteem without taking a great deal for granted, especially as you have not yet set eyes on him. Now it is evident that, if one of you should kill the other, a second life of approved worth will be sacrificed for an infant of purely hypothetical merits. As a man of business I condemn the transaction. As a Christian I deprecate the shedding of blood. But if somebody's blood must be shed, let us be reasonable and kill the baby!"

Captain Barker lowered his point.

"Decidedly the question is more difficult than I imagined."

"At least it cannot be settled before eating," said Dr. Beckerleg, as the drawer entered with a tray. "You will forgive me that I took the liberty of ordering breakfast as soon as I looked into this room. Without asking to see your tongues, I prescribed dried herrings and home-brewed ale; for myself, a fried sole, a beef-steak reasonably under-done, a kidney-pie which the drawer commended on his own motion, with a smoked cheek of pork, perhaps—"

"You wish us to sit still while you devour all this?"

"I am willing to give each side of the argument a fair chance."

"But I find nothing to argue about!" exclaimed Captain Runacles, pushing his plate from him after a very faint attempt to eat. "My mind being already made up—"

"And mine," interrupted Captain Barker.

"If I suggest that both of you adopt the child," Dr. Beckerleg began.

"Still he must be educated; and our notions of education differ. Moreover, when we differ—as you may have observed—we do so with some thoroughness."

"Let me propose, then, a system of alternation, by which you could adopt the boy for six months each, turn and turn about."

"But if—as would undoubtedly happen—each adoptive parent spent his six months in undoing the other's work, it must follow that, at the end of any given period, the child's mind would be a mere *tabula rasa*. Suppose, on the other hand, we failed to wipe out each other's teaching, the