
Sabine Baring-Gould
KITTY ALONE

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A Story of Three Fires

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CHAPTER I
THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

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With a voice like that of a crow, and singing with full lungs also like a crow, came Jason Quarm riding in his donkey-cart to Coombe Cellars.

Jason Quarm was a short, stoutly-built man, with a restless grey eye, with shaggy, long, sandy hair that burst out from beneath a battered beaver hat. He was somewhat lame, wherefore he maintained a donkey, and drove about the country seated cross-legged in the bottom of his cart, only removed from the bottom boards by a wisp of straw, which became dissipated from under him with the joltings of the conveyance. Then Jason would struggle to his knees, take the reins in his teeth, scramble backwards in his cart, rake the straw together again into a heap, reseat himself, and drive on till the exigencies of the case necessitated his going through the same operations once more.

Coombe Cellars, which Jason Quarm approached, was a cluster of roofs perched on low walls, occupying a promontory in the estuary of the Teign, in the south of Devon. A road, or rather a series of ruts, led direct to Coombe Cellars, cut deep in the warm red soil; but they led no farther.

Coombe Cellars was a farmhouse, a depôt of merchandise, an eating-house, a ferry-house, a discharging wharf for barges laden with coal, a lading-place for straw, and hay, and corn that had to be carried away on barges to

the stables of Teignmouth and Dawlish. Facing the water was a little terrace or platform, gravelled, on which stood green benches and a green table.

The sun of summer had blistered the green paint on the table, and persons having leisure had amused themselves with picking the skin off these blisters and exposing the white paint underneath, and then, with pen or pencil, exercising their ingenuity in converting these bald patches into human faces, or in scribbling over them their own names and those of the ladies of their heart. Below the platform at low water the ooze was almost solidified with the vast accumulation of cockle and winkle shells thrown over the edge, together with bits of broken plates, fragments of glass, tobacco-pipes, old handleless knives, and sundry other refuse of a tavern.

Above the platform, against the wall, was painted in large letters, to be read across the estuary--

PASCO PEPPERILL,
Hot Cockles and Winkles,
Tea and Coffee Always Ready.

Some wag with his penknife had erased the capital H from “Hot,” and had converted the W in “Winkles” into a V, with the object of accommodating the written language to the vernacular. One of the most marvellous of passions seated in the human heart is that hunger after immortality which, indeed, distinguishes man from beast. This deep-seated and awful aspiration had evidently consumed the breasts of all the “’ot cockle and vinkle” eaters on the platform, for there was literally not a spare space of plaster

anywhere within reach which was not scrawled over with names by these aspirants after immortality.

Jason Quarm was merciful to his beast. Seeing a last year's teasel by the wall ten yards from Coombe Cellars' door, he drew rein, folded his legs and arms, smiled, and said to his ass--

"There, governor, enjoy yourself."

The teasel was hard as wood, besides being absolutely devoid of nutritious juices, which had been withdrawn six months previously. Neddy would have nothing to say to the teasel.

"You dratted monkey!" shouted Quarm, irritated at the daintiness of the ass. "If you won't eat, then go on." He knelt up in his cart and whacked him with a stick in one hand and the reins in the other. "I'll teach you to be choice. I'll make you swaller a holly-bush. And if there ain't relish enough in that to suit your palate, I'll buy a job lot of old Perninsula bayonets and make you munch them. That'll be chutney, I reckon, to the likes of you."

Then, as he threw his lame leg over the side of the cart, he said, "Steady, old man, and hold your breath whilst I'm descending."

No sooner was he on his feet, than, swelling his breast and stretching his shoulders, with a hand on each hip, he crowed forth--

"There was a frog lived in a well,
Crock-a-mydaisy, Kitty alone!
There was a frog lived in a well,
And a merry mouse lived in a mill,
Kitty alone and I."

The door opened, and a man stood on the step and waved a salutation to Quarm. This man was powerfully built. He had broad shoulders and a short neck. What little neck he possessed was not made the most of, for he habitually drew his head back and rested his chin behind his stock. This same stock or muffler was thick and folded, filling the space left open by the waistcoat, out of which it protruded. It was of blue strewn with white spots, and it gave the appearance as though pearls dropped from the mouth of the wearer and were caught in his muffler before they fell and were lost. The man had thick sandy eyebrows, and very pale eyes. His structure was disproportioned. With such a powerful body, stout nether limbs might have been anticipated for its support. His thighs were, indeed, muscular and heavy, but the legs were slim, and the feet and ankles small. He had the habit of standing with his feet together, and thus presented the shape of a boy's kite.

"Hallo, Pasco--brother-in-law!" shouted Quarm, as he threw the harness off the ass; "look here, and see what I have been a-doing."

He turned the little cart about, and exhibited a plate nailed to the backboard, on which, in gold and red on black, figured, "The Star and Garter Life and Fire Insurance."

"What!" exclaimed Pepperill; "insured Neddy and the cart, have you? That I call chucking good money away, unless you have reasons for thinking Ned will go off in spontaneous combustion."

"Not so, Pasco," laughed Jason; "it is the agency I have got. The Star and Garter knows that I am the sort of man they require, that wanders over the land and has the voice

of a nightingale. I shall have a policy taken out for you shortly, Pasco."

"Indeed you shall not."

"Confiscate the donkey if I don't. But I'll not trouble you on this score now. How is the little toad?"

"What--Kate?"

"To be sure, Kitty Alone."

"Come and see. What have you been about this time, Jason?"

"Bless you! I have hit on Golconda. Brimpts."

"Brimpts? What do you mean?"

"Don't you know Brimpts?"

"Never heard of it. In India?"

"No; at Dart-meet, beyond Ashburton."

"And what of Brimpts? Found a diamond mine there?"

"Not that, but oaks, Pasco, oaks! A forest two hundred years old, on Dartmoor. A bit of the primæval forest; two hundred--I bet you--five hundred years old. It is not in the Forest, but on one of the ancient tenements, and the tenant has fallen into difficulties with the bank, and the bank is selling him up. Timber, bless you! not a shaky stick among the lot; all heart, and hard as iron. A fortune--a fortune, Pasco, is to be picked up at Brimpts. See if I don't pocket a thousand pounds."

"You always see your way to making money, but never get far for'ard along the road that leads to good fortune."

"Because I never have had the opportunity of doing more than see my way. I'm crippled in a leg, and though I can see the road before me, I cannot get along it without an ass. I'm crippled in purse, and though I can discern the way to

wealth, I can’t take it--once more--without an ass. Brother-in-law, be my Jack, and help me along.”

Jason slapped Pasco on the broad shoulders.

“And you make a thousand pounds by the job?”

“So I reckon--a thousand at the least. Come, lend me the money to work the concern, and I’ll pay you at ten per cent.”

“What do you mean by ‘work the concern’?”

“Pasco, I must go before the bank at Exeter with money in my hand, and say, I want those wretched scrubs of oak and holm at Brimpts. Here’s a hundred pounds. It’s worthless, but I happen to know of a fellow as will put a five pound in my pocket if I get him some knotty oak for a bit of fancy-work he’s on. The bank will take it, Pasco. At the bank they will make great eyes, that will say as clear as words, Bless us! we didn’t know there was oak grew on Dartmoor. They’ll take the money, and conclude the bargain right on end. And then I must have some ready cash to pay for felling.”

“Do you think that the bank will sell?”

“Sell? it would sell anything--the soil, the flesh off the moors, the bones, the granite underneath, the water of heaven that there gathers, the air that wafts over it--anything. Of course, it will sell the Brimpts oaks. But, brother-in-law, let me tell you, this is but the first stage in a grand speculative march.”

“What next?”

“Let me make my thousand by the Brimpts oaks, and I see waves of gold before me in which I can roll. I’ll be

generous. Help me to the oaks, and I'll help you to the gold-waves."

"How is all this to be brought about?"

"Out of mud, old boy, mud!"

"Mud will need a lot of turning to get gold out of it."

"Ah! wait till I've tied up Neddy."

Jason Quarm hobbled off with his ass, and turned it loose in a paddock. Then he returned to his brother-in-law, hooked his finger into the button-hole of Pepperill, and said, with a wink--

"Did you never hear of the philosopher's stone, that converts whatever it touches into gold?"

"I've heard some such a tale, but it is all lies."

"I've got it."

"Never!" Pasco started, and turned round and stared at his brother-in-law in sheer amazement.

"I have it. Here it is," and he touched his head. "Believe me, Pasco, this is the true philosopher's stone. With this I find oaks where the owners believed there grew but furze; with this I bid these oaks bud forth and bear bank-notes. And with this same philosopher's stone I shall transform your Teign estuary mud into golden sovereigns."

"Come in."

"I will; and I'll tell you how I'll do it, if you will help me to the Brimpts oaks. That is step number one."

CHAPTER II
A LUSUS NATURÆ

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The two men entered the house talking, Quarm lurching against his companion in his uneven progress; uneven, partly because of his lame leg, partly because of his excitement; and when he wished to urge a point in his argument, he enforced it, not only by raised tone of voice and cogency of reasoning, but also by impact of his shoulder against that of Pepperill.

In the room into which they penetrated sat a girl in the bay window knitting. The window was wide and low, for the ceiling was low. It had many panes in it of a greenish hue. It commanded the broad firth of the river Teign. The sun was now on the water, and the glittering water cast a sheen of golden green into the low room and into the face of the knitting girl. It illumined the ceiling, revealed all its cracks, its cobwebs and flies. The brass candlesticks and skillets and copper coffee-pots on the chimney-piece shone in the light reflected from the ceiling.

The girl was tall, with a singularly broad white brow, dark hair, and long lashes that swept her cheek. The face was pale, and when in repose it could not be readily decided whether she were good-looking or plain, but all hesitation vanished when she raised her great violet eyes, full of colour and sparkling with the light of intelligence.

The moment that Quarm entered she dropped the knitting on which she was engaged; a flash of pleasure, a

gleam of colour, mounted to eyes and cheeks; she half rose with timidity and hesitation, but as Quarm continued in eager conversation with Pepperill, and did not notice her, she sank back into her sitting posture, the colour faded from her cheek, her eyes fell, and a quiver of the lips and contraction of the mouth indicated distress and pain.

“How is it possible to turn mud into gold?” asked Pepperill.

“Wait till I have coined my oak and I will do it.”

“I can understand oaks. The timber is worth something, and the bark something, and the tops sell for firewood; but mud--mud is mud.”

“Well, it is mud. Let me light my pipe. I can’t talk without my ’baccy.”

Jason put a spill to the fire, seated himself on a stool by the hearth, ignited his pipe, and then, turning his eye about, caught sight of the girl.

“Hallo, little Toad!” said he; “how are you?”

Then, without waiting for an answer, he returned to the mud.

“Look here, Pasco, the mud is good for nothing where it is.”

“No. It is a nuisance. It chokes the channel. I had a deal of trouble with the last coal-barge; she sank so deep I thought she’d be smothered and never got in.”

“That’s just it. You would pay something to have it cleared--dredged right away.”

“I don’t know about that. The expense would be great.”

“You need not pay a half-crown. It isn’t India only whose shining fountains roll down their golden sands. It is

Devonshire as well, which pours the river Teign clear as crystal out of its Dartmoor reservoir, and which is here ready to empty its treasures into my pockets and yours. But we must dispose of Brimpts oak first."

"I'd like to know how you are going to do anything with mud."

"What is mud but clay in a state of slobber? Now, hearken to me, brother-in-law. I have been where the soil is all clay, clay that would grow nothing but moss and rushes, and was not worth more than five shillings an acre, fit for nothing but for letting young stock run on. That is out Holsworthy way. Well, a man with the philosopher's stone in his head, Goldsworthy Gurney, he cut a canal from Bude harbour right through this arrant clay land. With what result? The barges travel up from Bude laden with sand. The farmers use the sand over their clay fields, and the desert blossoms as the rose. Land that was worth four shillings went up to two pound ten, and in places near the canal to five pounds. The sand on the seashore is worthless. The clay inland is worthless, but the sand and clay married breed moneys, moneys, my boy--golden moneys."

"That is reasonable enough," said Pasco Pepperill, "but it don't apply here. We are on the richest of red soil, that wants no dressing, so full of substance is it in itself. Besides, the mud is nothing but our red soil in a state of paste."

"It is better. It is richer, more nutritious; but you do not see what is to be done with it, because you have not my head and my eyes. I do not propose to do here what was done at Holsworthy, but to invert the operation."

"What do you mean?"

“Not to carry the sand to the clay, but the mud to the sand. Do you not know Bovey Heathfield? Do you not know Stover sands? What is there inland but a desert waste of sand-hill and arid flat that is barren as my hand, bearing nothing but a little scrubby thorn and thistle and bramble--sand, that’s not worth half a crown an acre? There is no necessity for us to cut a canal. The canal exists, cut in order that the Hey-tor granite may be conveyed along it to the sea. It has not occurred to the fools that the barges that convey the stone down might come up laden with Teign mud, instead of returning empty. This mud, I tell you, is not merely rich of itself, but it has a superadded richness from seaweed and broken shells. It is fat with eels and worms. Let this be conveyed up the canal to the sandy waste of Heathfield, and the marriage of clay and sand will be as profitable there as that marriage has been at Holsworthy. I would spread this rich mud over the hungry sand, thick as cream, and the land will laugh and sing. Do you take me now, brother-in-law? Do you believe in the philosopher’s stone?”

He touched his head. Pasco Pepperill had clasped his right knee in his hands. He sat nursing it, musing, looking into the fire. Presently he said--

“Yes; very fine for the owners of the sandy land, but how about you and me?”

“We must buy up.”

“But where is the money to come from?”

“Brimpts oak.”

“What! the profit made on this venture?”

“Exactly. Every oak stick is a rung in my ladder. There has been, for hundreds of years, a real forest of oaks, magnificent trees, timber incomparable for hardness--iron is not harder. Who knows about it save myself? The Exeter Bank knows nothing of the property on which it has advanced money. The agent runs over it and takes a hasty glance. He thinks that the trees he sees all up the slopes are thorn bushes or twisted stumps worth nothing, and when he passes is too eager to get away from the moor to stay and observe. I have felt my way. A small offer and money down, and the whole forest is mine. Then I must fell at once, and it is not, I say, calculable what we shall make out of that oak. When we have raked our money together, then we will buy up as much as we can of sandy waste near the canal, and proceed at once to plaster it over with Teign clay. Pasco, our fortune is made!”

Jason kept silence for a while, to allow what he had said to sink into the mind of his brother-in-law.

Then from the adjoining kitchen came a strongly-built, fair woman, very tidy, with light hair and pale blue eyes. She had a decided manner in her movements and in the way in which she spoke. She had been scouring a pan. She held this pan now in one hand. She strode up to the fireplace between the men and said in a peremptory tone--

“What is this? Speculating again? I’ll tell you what, Jason, you are bent on ruining us. Here is Pasco as wax in your hands. We’ve already lost half our land, and that is your doing. I do not wish to be sold out of house and home because of your rash ventures--you risk nothing, it is Pasco and I who have to pay.”

“Go to your scouring and cooking,” said Jason. “Zerah, that is in your line; leave us men to our proper business.”

“I know what comes of your brooding,” retorted the woman; “you hatch out naught but disaster. If Pasco turned a deaf ear, I would not mind all your tales, but more is the pity, he listens, and listening in his case means yielding, and yielding, in plain letters, is LOSS.”

Instead of answering his sister, Jason looked once more in the direction of the girl, seated in the bay-window. She was absorbed in her thoughts, and seemed not to have been attending to, or to be affected by, the prospects of wealth that had been unfolded by her father. When he had addressed her previously, she had answered, but as he had not attended to her answer, she had relapsed into silence.

She was roused by his strident voice, as he sang out--

> “There was a frog lived in a well
> Crock-a-mydaisy, Kitty alone!
> There was a frog lived in a well,
> And a merry mouse lived in a mill,
> Kitty alone and I.”

Now her pale face turned to him with something of appeal.

“How is the little worm?” asked Quarm; “no roses blooming in the cheeks. Wait till I carry you to the moors. There you shall sit and smell the honeybreath of the furze, and as the heather covers the hillsides with raspberry-cream, the flush of life will come into your face. I’m not so sure but that money might be made out of the spicy air of Dartmoor. Why not condense the scent of the furze-bushes, and advertise it as a specific in consumption? I won’t say

that folks wouldn’t buy. Why not extract the mountain heather as a cosmetic? It is worth considering. Why not the juice of whortleberry as a dye for the hair? and pounded bog-peat for a dentifrice? Pasco, my boy, I have ideas. I say, listen to me. This is the way notions come flashing up in my brain.”

He had forgotten about his daughter, so enkindled was his imagination by his new schemes.

Once again, discouraged and depressed, the girl dropped her eyes on her work.

The sun shining on the flowing tide filled the bay of the room with rippling light, walls and ceiling were in a quiver, the glisten was in the glass, it was repeated on the floor, it quivered over her dress and her pale face, it sparkled and winked in her knitting-pins. She might have been a mermaid sitting below the water, seen through the restless, undulatory current.

Mrs. Pepperill growled, and struck with her fingers the pan she had been cleaning.

“What is a woman among men but a helpless creature, who cannot prevent the evil she sees coming on? Talk of woman as the inferior vessel! It is she has the common sense, and not man.”

“It was not you who brought Coombe Cellars to me, but I brought you to Coombe Cellars,” retorted her husband. “What is here is mine--the house, the business, the land. You rule in the kitchen, that is your proper place. I rule where I am lord.”

Pasco spoke with pomposity, drawing his chin back into his neck.

“When you married me,” said Zerah, “nothing was to be yours only, all was to be yours and mine. I am your wife, not your housekeeper. I shall watch and guard well against waste, against folly. I cannot always save against both, but I can protest--and I will.”

On hearing the loud tones of Mrs. Pepperill, Kate hastily collected her knitting and ball of worsted and left the room. She was accustomed to passages of arms between Pasco and his wife, to loud and angry voices, but they frightened her, and filled her with disgust. She fled the moment the pitch of the voices was raised and their tones became harsh.

“Look there!” exclaimed Zerah, before the girl had left the room. “There is a child for you. Her father returns, after having been away for a fortnight. She never rises to meet him, she goes on calmly knitting, does not speak a word of welcome, take the smallest notice of him. It was very different with my Wilmot; she would fly to her father--not that he deserved her love; she would dance about him and kiss him. But she had a heart, and was what a girl should be; as for your Kate, brother Jason, I don’t know what to make of her.”

“What is the matter with Kitty?”

“She is not like other girls. Did you not take notice? She was cold and regardless when you arrived, as if you were a stranger--never even put aside her knitting, never gave you a word.”

Zerah was perhaps glad of an excuse for not continuing an angry discussion with her husband before her brother.

She was hot; she could now give forth her heat upon the head of the girl.

“I don’t think I gave her much chance,” said Jason; “you see, I was talking to Pasco about the oaks.”

“Give her the chance?” retorted Zerah. “As if my Wilmot would have waited till her father gave her the chance. It is not for the father to dance after his child, but the child should run to its father. I’ll tell you what I believe, Jason, and nothing will get me out of the belief. You know how Jane Simmons’ boy was born without eyelashes; and how last spring we had a lamb without any tail; and that Bessie Penny hasn’t got any lobe of ear at all, only a hole in the side of her head; and Ephraim Tooker has no toe-nails.”

“I know all that.”

“Very well. I believe--and you’ll never shake it out of me--that child of yours was born without a heart.”

CHAPTER III
ALL INTO GOLD

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Pasco Pepperill was a man slow, heavy, and apparently phlegmatic, and he was married to a woman full of energy, and excitable.

Pasco had inherited Coombe Cellars from his father; he had been looked upon as the greatest catch among the young men of the neighbourhood. It was expected that he would marry well. He had married well, but not exactly in the manner anticipated. Coombe Cellars was a centre of many activities; it was a sort of inn--at all events a place to which water parties came to picnic; it was a farm and a place of merchandise. Pasco had chosen as his wife Zerah Quarm, a publican's daughter, with, indeed, a small sum of money of her own, but with what was to him of far more advantage, a clear, organising head. She was a scrupulously tidy woman, a woman who did everything by system, who had her own interest or that of the house ever in view, and would never waste a farthing.

Had the threads of the business been placed in Zerah's hands, she would have managed all, made money in every department, and kept the affairs of each to itself in her own orderly brain.

But Pepperill did not trust her with the management of his wool, coal, grain, straw and hay business. "Feed the pigs, keep poultry, attend to the guests, make tea, boil

cockles--that’s what you are here for, Zerah,” said Pepperill; “all the rest is my affair, and with that you do not meddle.”

The pigs became fat, the poultry laid eggs, visitors came in quantities; Zerah’s rashers, tea, cockles were relished and were paid for. Zerah had always a profit to show for her small outlay and much labour.

She resented that she was not allowed an insight into her husband’s business; he kept his books to himself, and she mistrusted his ability to balance his accounts. When she discovered that he had disposed of the greater portion of his land, then her indignation was unbounded. It was but too clear that he was going on the high road to ruin, by undertaking businesses for which he was not naturally competent; that by having too many irons in the fire he was spoiling all.

Zerah waited, in bitterness of heart, expecting her husband to explain to her his motives for parting with his land; he had not even deigned to inform her that he had sold it.

She flew at him, at length, with all the vehemence of her character, and poured forth a torrent of angry recrimination. Pasco put his hands into his pockets, looked wonderingly at her out of his great water-blue eyes, spun round like a teetotum, and left the house.

Zerah became conscious, as she cooled, that she had gone too far, that she had used expressions that were irritating and insulting, and which were unjustifiable. On the other hand, Pasco was conscious that he had not behaved rightly towards his wife, not only in not consulting her about

the sale, but in not even telling her of it when it was accomplished.

Neither would confess wrong, but after this outbreak Zerah became gentle, and Pasco allowed some sort of self-justification to escape him. He had met with a severe loss, and was obliged to find ready money. Moreover, the farm and the business could not well be carried on simultaneously, one detracted from the other. Henceforth his whole attention would be devoted to commercial transactions.

To some extent the sharpness of Zerah's indignation was blunted by the consciousness that her own brother, Jason, was Pasco's most trusted adviser; that if he had met with losses, it was due to the injudicious speculations into which he had been thrust by Jason.

The governing feature of Pasco was inordinate self-esteem. He believed himself to be intellectually superior to everyone else in the parish, and affected to despise the farmers, because they did not mix with the world, had not their fingers on its arteries like the commercial man. He was proud of his position, proud of his means, and proud of the respect with which he was treated, and which he demanded of everyone. He valued his wife's good qualities, and bragged of them. According to him, his business was extensive, and conducted with the most brilliant success. For many years one great object of pride with him had been his only child--a daughter, Wilmot. As a baby, no child had ever before been born with so much hair. No infant was ever known to cut its teeth with greater ease. No little girl was more amiable, more beautiful; the intelligence the child

exhibited was preternatural. When, in course of time, Wilmot grew into a really pretty girl, with very taking if somewhat forward manners, the exultation of the father knew no bounds. Nor was her mother, Zerah, less devoted to the child; and for a long period Wilmot was the bond between husband and wife, the one topic on which they thought alike, the one object over which they were equally hopeful, ambitious, and proud. Jason, left a widower with one daughter, Katherine, had placed the child with his sister. He had a cottage of his own, small, rarely occupied, as he rambled over the country, looking out for opportunities of picking up money. He had not married again, he had engaged no housekeeper; his daughter was an encumbrance, and had, therefore, been sent to Coombe Cellars, where she was brought up as a companion and foil to Wilmot. Suddenly the beloved child of the Pepperills died, and the hearts of the parents were desolate. That of Zerah became bitter and resentful. Pasco veiled his grief under his phlegm, and made of the funeral a demonstration that might solace his pride. After that he spoke of the numbers who had attended, of the great emotion displayed, of the cost of the funeral, of the entertainment given to the mourners, of the number of black gloves paid for, as something for which he could be thankful and proud. It really was worth having had a daughter whose funeral had cost sixty pounds, and at which the church of Coombe-in-Teignhead had been crammed.

The great link that for fifteen years had held Zerah and Pasco together was broken. They had never really become one, though over their child they had almost become so.

The loss of the one object on whom Zerah had set her heart made her more sensitive to annoyance, more inclined to find fault with her husband. Yet it cannot be said that they did not strive to be one in heart; each avoided much that was certain to annoy the other, refrained from doing before the other what was distasteful to the consort; indeed, each went somewhat out of the way to oblige the other, but always with a clumsiness and lack of grace which robbed the transaction of its worth.

Kate had been set back whilst her cousin lived. Nominally the companion, the playfellow of Wilmot, she had actually been her slave, her plaything. Whatever Wilmot had done was regarded as right by her father and mother, and in any difference that took place between the cousins, Kate was invariably pronounced to have been in the wrong, and was forced to yield to Wilmot. The child soon found that no remonstrances of hers were listened to, even when addressed to her father. He had other matters to occupy him than settling differences between children. It was not his place to interfere between the niece and her aunt, for, if the aunt refused to be troubled with her, what could he do with Kate, where dispose her?

Kate had not been long out of the room before her father and uncle also left, that they might talk at their ease, without the intervention of Zerah.

Kate had gone with her knitting to the little stage above the water, and was seated on the wall looking down on the flowing tide that now filled the estuary. Hither also came the two men, and seated themselves at the table, without taking any notice of her.

Kate had been studying the water as it flowed in, covering the mud flats, rising inch by inch over the refuse mass below the platform, and was now washing the roots of the herbage that fringed the bank.

So full was her mind, full, as though in it also the tide had been rising, that, contrary to her wont, she broke silence when the men appeared, and said, “Father! uncle! what makes the tide come and go?”

“The tide comes to bring up the coal-barges, and to carry ’em away with straw,” answered Pasco.

“But, uncle, why does it come and go?”

Pepperill shrugged his shoulders, and vouchsafed no further answer.

“Look there,” said Jason, pointing to an orchard that stretched along the margin of the flood, and which was dense with daffodils. “Look there, Pasco, there is an opportunity let slide.”

“I couldn’t help it. I sold that orchard. I wanted to concentrate--concentrate efforts,” said Pasco.

“I don’t allude to that,” said Quarm. “But as I’ve been through the lanes this March, looking at the orchards and meadows a-blazing with Lent lilies, I’ve had a notion come to me.”

“Them darned daffodils are good for naught.”

“There you are wrong, Pasco. Nothing is good for naught. What we fellows with heads have to do is to find how we may make money out of what to stupids is good for naught.”

“They are beastly things. The cattle won’t touch ’em.”

“But Christians will, and will pay for them. I know that you can sell daffodils in London or Birmingham or Bristol, at a penny a piece.”

“That’s right enough, but London, Birmingham, and Bristol are a long way off.”

“You are right there, and as long as this blundering atmospheric line runs we can do nothing. But wait a bit, Pasco, and we shall have steam-power on our South Devon line, and we must be prepared to seize the occasion. I have been reckoning we could pack two hundred and fifty daffodils easily without crushing in a maund. Say the cost of picking be a penny a hundred, and the wear and tear of the hamper another penny, and the carriage come to ninepence, and the profits to the sellers one and eleven-pence ha’penny, that makes three shillings; sold at a penny apiece it is twenty shillings--profit, seventeen and ten; strike off ten for damaged daffies as won’t sell. How many thousand daffodils do you suppose you could get out of that orchard and one or two more nests of these flowers? Twenty-five thousand? A profit of seventeen shillings on two hundred and fifty makes sixty-eight shillings a thousand. Twenty times that is sixty-eight pounds--all got out of daffodils--beastly daffies.”

“Of course,” said Pasco, “I was speaking of them as they are, not as what they might be.”

“Look there,” said Jason, pointing over the glittering flood, “look at the gulls, tens of hundreds of ’em, and no one gives them a thought.”

“They ain’t fit to eat,” observed Pasco. “Dirty creeturs.”

“No, they ain’t, and so no one shoots them. Wait a bit. Trust me. I’ll go up to London and talk it over with a great milliner or dressmaker, and have a fashion brought in. Waistcoats for ladies in winter of gulls’ breasts. They will be more beautiful than satin and warmer than sealskin. It is only for the fashion to be put on wheels and it will run of itself. There is reason, there is convenience, there is beauty in it. How many gulls can we kill? I reckon we can sweep the mouth of the Teign clear of them, and get ten thousand, and if we sell their breasts at five shillings apiece, that is, twenty-five pounds a hundred, and ten thousand makes just two thousand five hundred pounds out of gulls--dirty creeturs!”

“Of course, I said that at present they are no good; not fit to eat. What they may become is another matter.”

Quarm said nothing for a while. His restless eye wandered over the landscape, already green, though the month was March, for the rich red soil under the soft airs from the sea, laden with moisture, grows grass throughout the year. No frosts parch that herbage whose brilliance is set forth by contrast with the Indian-red rocks and soil. The sky was of translucent blue, and in the evening light the inflowing sea, with the slant rays piercing it, was of emerald hue.

“Dear! dear! dear!” sighed Quarm; “will the time ever come, think you, old fellow, that we shall be able to make some use of the sea and sky--capitalise ’em, eh? Squeeze the blue out of the firmament, and extract the green out of the ocean, and use ’em as patent dyes. Wouldn’t there be a run on the colours for ladies’ dresses! What’s the good of all

that amount of dye in both where they are? Sheer waste! sheer waste! Now, if we could turn them into money, there'd be some good in them."

Jason stood up, stretched his arms, and straightened, as far as possible, his crippled leg. Then he hobbled over to the low wall on which his daughter was seated, looking away at the emerald sea, the banks of green shot with golden daffodil, and overarched with the intense blue of the sky, clapped her on the back, and when with a start she turned--

"Hallo, Kate! What, tears! why crying?"

"Oh, father! I hate money."

"Money! what else is worth living for?"

"Oh, father, will you mow down the daffodils, and shoot down the gulls, and take everything beautiful out of sea and sky? I hate money--you will spoil everything for that."

"You little fool, Kitty Alone. Not love money? Alone in that among all men and women. A fool in that as in all else, Kitty Alone."

Then up came Zerah in excitement, and said in loud, harsh tones, "Who is to go after Jan Pooke? Where is Gale? The train is due in ten minutes."

"I have sent Roger Gale after some hides," said Pasco.

"We have undertaken to ferry Jan Pooke across, and he arrives by the train just due. Who is to go?"

"Not I," said Pepperill. "I'm busy, Zerah, engaged on commercial matters with Quarm. Besides, I'm too big a man, of too much consequence to ferry a fare. I keep a boat, but am not a boatman."

"Then Kate must go for him. Kate, look smart; ferry across at once, and wait at the hard till Jan Pooke arrives by

the 6.10. He has been to Exeter, and I promised that the boat should meet him on his return at the Bishop’s Teignton landing.”

The girl rose without a word.

“She is not quite up to that?” said her father, with question in his tone.

“Bless you, she’s done it scores of times. We don’t keep her here to eat, and dress, and be idle.”

“But suppose--and the wind is bitter cold.”

“Some one *must* go,” said Zerah. “Look sharp, Kate.”

“Alone?”

“Of course. The man is away. She can row. Kitty must go alone.”