



Taylor. del. et sc.

"He met a person, whom of all beings in the world he least wished to encounter."

Published Sept 1781 by Baldwin Cradock & Joy London.

RALPH RICHARDS,

12115

THE MISER.

*Don't give Royal.*

1831

BY JEFFERYS TAYLOR,

AUTHOR OF HARRY'S HOLIDAY,

AND ESOP IN RHYME.

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"De riches, and de mine of goot metal, and now de great big  
chests of plate : dey are de crop ; vary goot crop too, on mine  
wort."

*The Antiquary.*

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LONDON:

PRINTED FOR BALDWIN, CRADOCK AND JOY,  
PATERNOSTER ROW;

AND N. HAILES,  
JUVENILE LIBRARY, LONDON MUSEUM, PICCADILLY.

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1821.

Printed by T. C. Hansard, Peterborough Court, Fleet Street, London.



## CHAP. I.

**R**ALPH RICHARDS was born, nobody knows where, and nobody knows when. He was brought up, nobody knows how, by nobody knows whom, and he died at last, either of old age or starving, nobody knows which.

And whether he was handsome or plain, large or small, long or short, nobody knows. Whether he was like any one else, or like no one but himself;—whether in figure he most resembled a magnified animalcule, or an Indian idol, nobody now knows, and nobody ever cared; for as Ralph Richards cared for nobody but himself, nobody but himself cared for Ralph Richards.

Neither is it possible to state at this time, what were the precise habits and modes of life, of this extraordinary being. By what means he contrived to acquire so much, and to spend so little money, he never told; nor would it probably be important to learn: suffice it to say, that his character and conduct were perfectly suitable to a regular money-bag miser, for such he *was known* to be; but whether he lived upon wind or water, upon oyster shells or chopped straw, it would be equally difficult and useless to determine.

There can, however, be no reasonable doubt entertained, as to the genuineness of the thoughts, words, and actions, that are, in the following pages, imputed to him; if they should not be found inconsistent with the feelings and views of a man, who was completely selfish, yet most incredibly self-denying; who, with considerable acuteness and energy of mind, evinced the most astonishing stupidity and weakness; who could foresee and obviate the most obscure and remote contingencies, yet was all his life blind to the most glaring absurdity that

could possibly be presented to the mind of a rational being. He, in fact, felt and acted as one might be expected to do who was to such a degree infatuated with the love of *possession*, or who was what is commonly called a *miser*, although that term rather implies the consequences of the disposition upon personal happiness, than the disposition itself.

Ralph Richards's conduct was regulated by two or three very simple notions. "Bread," thought he, "is bread, and cheese is cheese; but *money* is bread and cheese too. A house is a house, and a field is a field; but money is both, and therefore better than either. So I will keep my *money*, and let other people keep their goods; for if I exchange my money for their bread, or cheese, or houses, or fields, then I shall have *good* things, but they will have better." Ralph Richards, however, forgot, that money was *neither* bread nor cheese, house nor field, *whilst* he kept it, and that its only value consists in its being the medium of that exchange, which he regarded as unwise.

His dwelling, which he held upon the same terms as the sand-martins and rabbits, his only neighbours, was something between a hermitage and a hog-sty; yet was not to be compared to either; for though it exhibited the poverty of the first, it wanted its cleanliness, and while it possessed the less pleasing characteristics of the second, it was entirely destitute of its comfortable profusion, so that a hog and a hermit would have been equally ill at ease as his guests.

At the bottom of a forsaken sand-pit, and on that which was the windy side, when it blew from the south, had this curious and cunning animal scooped out his den; to be distinguished only from the abode of some burrowing quadruped, by a few massy logs, which formed a kind of barricade at the entrance.

Here Ralph Richards had maintained undisputed possession for many years, rarely observed, and never molested; for he who could feel no apprehension from the appearance of supernatural beings in such a situation, was, by the common people, reckoned

among them ; and therefore his residence was as carefully shunned after sun-set, as the church-yard itself. Sometimes, indeed, at noon-day, two or three idle boys would scramble down the sides of the bank, and glance a cautious eye at the miser's retreat, but they would speedily scramble up again when the old man appeared at the mouth of his cave ; which he generally contrived to do, upon the most distant alarm ; and he usually found, that the first sight of his charming visage was quite enough for all purposes of defence. Ralph Richards was not at all mortified at the poor compliment that was thus paid to his physiognomy, but was very well contented that so it should be ; since in his situation, it was more to his advantage to frighten than to fascinate ; for he well knew that this terror of him and his haunts was the best imaginable security for him and his hoards.

Within a short distance of the miser's residence, there were standing the venerable and dignified remains of a structure that had been erected probably soon after the Conquest. Although it appeared to have been a



place of some importance, from the strength and extent of the building, its history was involved in considerable obscurity. Conjecture, however, furnished abundantly what history denied, and many and opposite were the opinions concerning it. The virtuosi of the *neighbouring* town, stickled stoutly and warmly for its being a prior erection to a somewhat similar building in a town a few miles distant. On the other hand, their opponents, who maintained that *their* town was indisputably the *Camulodunum* of the Romans, asserted strenuously, that the castle of which they were the champions, had been the residence of Boadicea, Queen of the ancient Britons. Their adversaries again, smiled and sneered at these pretensions, and attributed this edifice to the idle conceit of a thrifty merchant, in the reign of Henry VIII. Thus they contended; but somehow, unaccountably, it happened, that the disputants on each side were always solicitous for the honour of that building of the two which was the nearest their own dwellings.

These disquisitions, however, it may

readily be imagined, were as uninteresting to Ralph Richards, as those respecting the seat of the soul. Whether the castles had been constructed by Nimrod or Jack Cade, by Semiramis or Joan of Arc, he neither knew nor cared. He, indeed, knew something more than others of the ruins first mentioned, for he had tenanted beneath their walls, during many a severe winter, and would gladly have remained there, had he not been dislodged by the sudden prostration of his apartment in a high wind.

Satisfaction and regret filled his mind upon this occasion in nearly equal proportions, when the miser perceived that his bones were preserved, while his cell was destroyed. It was upon this emergency, that after having, with considerable difficulty, disengaged himself and his treasures, from the ponderous mass of crumbling ruins, he bethought him of the excavations in the sand-pit ; where, after having exercised some industry and ingenuity in preparing and enlarging this new residence, he, at length, invested both himself and his property as in a bank, calculated in this instance, to afford

equal security to both. He therefore deserted the old castle, as he thought, for ever ; but, many years after, he renewed his acquaintance with it, in a way that remains now to be explained.

## CHAP. II.

RALPH RICHARDS found it needful occasionally to depart from the letter of the rule that he had laid down for himself; and for other people's *good* things was positively obliged sometimes to exchange *his* money which was better.

As he had no debtors, so he had no creditors, but his own most patient and accommodating intestines. None therefore, beside, had any demands upon him; and these had been so accustomed to transact business at long credit, as in general to remain pretty quiet till the miser's time of payment arrived.

One day, after having expostulated with his necessities the usual time, he selected a small copper coin, to make a most needful purchase. Now beside the unpleasant sensations which the miser experienced on those occa-

sions, in parting with the money, he was liable to encounter the curious eyes of many, who gladly availed themselves of an opportunity to get a sight of this curious animal out of his den; when he was commonly addressed in a far more familiar manner than was agreeable, and once he received a very unceremonious handling, during which, the operators had vainly endeavoured to explore the intricacies of his incomprehensible garments, which civility was accompanied with a threat, that if money was not to be found there, his bank would be applied to in his absence.

In order, therefore, to avoid adventures of this kind (for the miser was by no means so tired of his monotonous life, as to desire such incidents for variety-sake), he usually made these excursions when it was nearly dark; but in the present instance it appeared absolutely impossible to delay his journey till the evening.

He determined, however, to proceed by a less-peopled road, than that which formed the nearest communication between himself and the town; and instead of it, took a

lonely and circuitous path, which led him through the old ruins.

Neither curiosity, nor any other sentiment existed in his mind in a sufficient degree, to induce him once to visit these remains since he resided amongst them, although the distance was scarcely a quarter of a mile from his present dwelling; nor was it his intention now, to bestow a look or a thought upon them, more than might enable him to keep his legs, in traversing the fragments and rubbish with which this rough overgrown spot was covered.

This he found little difficulty in doing, till he came to a part, where, owing to a recent fall of a considerable portion of the building, the ruins were more thickly scattered. Here, in setting his foot upon a loose stone, it so far betrayed him, that he involuntarily and suddenly extended his right arm to recover his balance, and in so doing, ejaculated the piece of money from his hitherto well-closed fist.

Had his head dropped from his shoulders, could he have retained his consciousness, he would not have felt more sudorific dismay,

than he did at that moment. With unbelieving eyes, he stared at the vacant palm of his hand ; in which the impression was yet so strong, that he could scarcely persuade himself the coin was not still there. The conviction, however, shortly forced itself upon his mind, that the money was—he knew not where ; that is to say—*lost* ; when he instantly formed an iron resolution to *find* it, or brave the utmost fury of his already clamorous internals.

The probability of being able to discern a piece of money, dropped, or rather thrown amongst heaps of ruins, overgrown in many places with herbs six feet high, would, to any but Ralph Richards, have appeared small indeed. *He*, however felt *determined*, that he would not eventually *lose* it ; and of course, therefore, he felt certain, that he should eventually *find* it.

It is an advantage possessed by energetic minds, to be free from many of those fears, as to the possible attainment of an object, which weaken the purpose, relax the exertions, and commonly insure the failure of the doubtful ; who, by continually pausing

to ascertain the height of an obstruction in the way, lose that *momentum*, which might enable them to surmount it.

Had the miser dropped a half-penny in the Caspian Sea, the practicability of emptying it, would probably have crossed his mind; so that he was not likely in the present instance to be disheartened by a few brick-bats and nettles. Beside, as a penny saved is a penny got, he felt a degree of that interest in the undertaking which he always experienced, and which enlivened his soul, when hunting for *money*.

After having unbuttoned and untied, searched, knocked, and shaken every known and unknown recess of his complex drapery, the miser proceeded carefully to examine the ground immediately adjacent. Nothing, however, that would have passed for a penny with a drunken man in the dark, could he find. After some time occupied in this kind of search, he resolved to go more systematically to work. Accordingly he placed himself exactly upon the spot where he had stumbled, and after an accurate survey of the ground, he estimated pretty



exactly, the area likely to contain the money, allowing so much of radius and circumference as the centrifugal force, and the arc described by his hand, would probably amount to, and no more; for as he was neither an antiquarian nor a botanist, he had no wish to become acquainted with any more of the nettles and rubbish than were likely to be acquainted with his money.

Kneeling down therefore, he began regularly to part the entangled herbage with his hands, and to remove every brick-bat, stick, or stone, that he conceived might be guilty of harbouring the fugitive; thus, prosecuting his researches, in a way that would render it quite needless to go over the same ground again. But a task executed in this manner, was likely to occupy our hero three or four days; for, after being engaged thus diligently for several hours, he had traversed but a small portion of the space he had marked out.

As he was hungry in the morning, he was of course, not less so at noon. Still the thought of abandoning his quest, or of employing another penny for the present, in

lieu of the one he had lost, never entered his brain. The twilight however, in process of time arrived, and compelled the old man to think of postponing his operation until the ensuing morning; when, just as he was about sorrowfully to rise, a small circular block of stone, partly buried in the earth, caught his attention. It required but a slight effort to displace it, and on doing so, he discovered that it had been carefully fitted into a stone of a similar shape upon which it had been placed.

To this he immediately transferred his attention, and could just discern something like a hollow in the surface hitherto covered by the part he had removed. It was too dark to acquire much farther information with his eyes; but upon introducing his fingers, they encountered a moveable substance, which he instantly knew to be a coin!

Scarcely had he touched it, when he hastily replaced the cover, and rising from his knees, cast a careful and a suspicious glance around, to convince himself that no one was at hand. Seeing the coast was clear, he again removed it, and enclosed the

coin between his fingers ; then drawing the edge across the stone, he examined the glisten, and immediately deposited it in a part of his dress, whence no evolution, however sudden, could possibly remove it. He then made the best of his way home, and in consideration of the coin he had found, obtained his own consent to employ another penny in the room of that he had not found ; and as it was now sufficiently dark, he took the shortest road to the neighbouring town, made his purchase, and returned unmolested and unobserved ; appropriated a part to his necessities, and betook himself to his couch.

## C H A P III.

As it was too dark when the miser reached his dwelling for him to make any particular observations upon the coin he had discovered, he contented himself with putting it in a place of safety for the night; for it never occurred to him to procure artificial light, since that could not be obtained without setting his gold on fire; nor, indeed, was his curiosity by any means hot enough to burn a hole in his economy. He had fully ascertained that the piece was *gold*, and that was nearly all he wished to know; so he calmly waited for that gratuitous illustration, which he doubted not the next morning would afford.

It was not, therefore, impatience to know whether this was an antediluvian or a lunar half-guinea, that deprived him of his wonted slumbers; neither could it be indigestion, or

the fumes of wine: so it was, however, that sleep entirely forsook him; and his mind was now as much occupied with the events of the day, as his body had recently been.

His sagacity led him to conjecture, that the curiously concealed box he had discovered, was indicative of something more than the single coin which it enclosed, and as this surmise strengthened in his mind, it gave an entirely new aspect to the circumstance.

As he reflected with increasing interest upon this subject, he suddenly recollected that he had left the stone displaced and exposed, so as to excite the attention of any one who might happen to pass that way early in the morning. The probability was small, that any one would tread the mazes of the haunted ruins, before the complete arrival of broad and courage-giving day-light; for many a ghost-story concerning this spot, had been told in the snug chimney corners of the neighbourhood; and many a lass—not to say a lad, had found some difficulty in summoning resolution sufficient to extinguish

the evening taper after such a recital. Small, therefore, as the chance was, that this spot would be visited before day-light, and certain as it was, that in that case this money-chest would be invisible, the miser was very uneasy, ardently wished it in the same circumstances of concealment in which he had found it.

It was now the dead of the night, and whether Ralph Richards was capable of any sensation analogous to that which prevented others from approaching the ruins after sunset, it is impossible to say. Certain it is, however, that although he most fervently desired the re-adjustment of the stone, he did not immediately rise to replace it.

After a while, however, he *did* arise, determined to ease his mind of this care. He therefore left his bed, if such it could be called, and feeling his way as he had been accustomed to do heretofore, proceeded to remove the cumbrous fastenings from the mouth of his cave. He then crawled out, and making good his securities, again set his face towards the ruins.

It was one of those nights, in which an owl might have been glad of a lantern. The horizon was as invisible, as it was in the farthest recesses of the miser's subterranean labyrinths. Finding, therefore, that his eyes were likely to be of no more use to him in directing his course than his nose, our hero resolved—since the sense of feeling was the only one applicable to the present occasion, to touch the ground in as many points as possible, and therefore he immediately descended to all fours.

In this position he crept along, *feeling* his way so accurately, that he was perfectly acquainted with the depth and temperature, of every puddle that he encountered. Vainly did he strain his eyes at the first touch of the cold water, to gain some idea of its direction or extent—he had the gratification of passing through most of these refreshing pools the longest way.

Nevertheless, he was not materially wrong as to his course, and having reached a cluster of trees which now stood between him and the ruins, he found it advisable to resume his erect position. It was con-

siderably windy, and the continued rustling of the invisible branches, which occasionally slightly touched him as he passed, might, without any great effort of the imagination, have been attributed to the agency of the supernaturals, especially as this grove had always been regarded as their head quarters; yet it is probable, that Ralph Richards experienced little but bodily inconvenience from this expedition at present.

He had, it is said, almost cleared the trees which separated him from the ruins, when something like a pale light glanced from a short distance, during a violent gust of wind, but disappeared as the breeze subsided. The miser stopped short, and cringed; for, although he was heartily tired of the darkness, he was by no means pleased with this light. He however fixed his eye in the same direction, and after a while, the gust returned, and the light again slightly appeared, but presently vanished as before.

It was not until a considerable interval had elapsed, that Ralph Richards ventured from the spot upon which he stood. At



last, however, he advanced a few steps, when a ghastly, moon-shiny figure stood full in sight, though how near, he could not guess. The miser stared for an instant, when the upper part of the figure formed more distinctly into a grim, grinning visage, partly averted; but the eyes of which were fixed upon the old man, with an intensity of gaze, that felled him to the earth. With a horri-fied shudder, and an inarticulate groan, he clasped the ground, which he moistened with perspiration, that he knew not until then, existed in his body: wishing that his money and he could sink together to the center of the earth. A mighty blast then raved among the trees but presently died away; when the apparition addressed the prostrate miser as follows, in a low, yet distinct voice, interrupted occasionally by the howling of the wind.

“ Ah! wherefore fear, or worship *me* ?

A phantom true,  
Thou dost *pursue*.

Thy shining *god* thou dost not see;  
Though beaming bright,  
With silvery light!

Oh wretch ! lie close, and bite the dust,  
 Thy chosen food,  
 Thine evil good ;  
 Which mouldering bones have here in trust,  
 —From him concealed :  
 To whom revealed !

Dig 'neath these walls, where mazes wind ;  
 Till thou behold  
 The hidden gold :  
 Till thou the earth-worm's treasure find.  
*Dig and obtain :*  
*Yet dig in vain."*

After an interval occasioned by the storm,  
 the apparition repeated,

“ Ah ! wherefore fear, or worship *me* ?  
 A phantom true,  
 Thou dost *pursue*.  
 Thy shining *god* thou dost not see ;  
 Though beaming bright,  
 With silvery light ! ”

The spectre then vanished instantly ; but  
 it was not until morning dawn that  
 Ralph Richards knew it had done so ; for  
 neither head nor hand did he move till day-  
 light insinuated itself between his fingers.

Now, as to this apparition :—although  
 the actual manner in which it was pro-

duced, has not certainly transpired, yet there be so many ways in which it could have been accomplished, that it would seem mightily uncandid in the reader to consider this tale as a mere romance, on account thereof, however incredible it may at first appear. But, whether the nether part of a decayed post (which is certainly capable of becoming luminous) had been wickedly carved into the shape of an image, behind which any one might have stood to repeat the above mysterious lines; or whether any ill-favoured person had rubbed his face with a stale mackerel (after the manner that the fisherman's face was rubbed with the mullet, that he presented to Tiberius), and so had transferred, by such anointing, the radiant effluvia to his own countenance; or whether, finally, some ill-disposed, but not unhandy youth, had cunningly scraped away the heart of a Norfolk turnip, on the rind of which he had naughtily imprinted eyes, nose, and mouth, and had privily thrust therein a candle, at the same time uttering the words aforesaid, it is not at this distance of time possible, nor indeed is it needful, to determine. Suffice it

to say—and it rests upon authority that will not be called in question—that the figure appeared, the words were spoken, and the miser was frightened, and that most wofully; and it was not before the sun had fairly risen, that he could venture to look about him.

He found himself close against the ruins, and that the stone was precisely in the situation in which he had left it. He, however, felt quite indisposed just then to meddle with it, and therefore bent his steps homeward, where he remained perfectly quiet for several days.

## CHAP. IV.

WONDER is said in general to last about nine days; but when coupled with fear it lasts ten: for at the end of that time Ralph Richards determined to have another look at the stone that he had found hidden beneath the ruins, and this resolution was somewhat strengthened by two or three sentences in the mysterious communication that had been made to him; for notwithstanding the obscurity and the apparent inconsistency of some parts of it, there were others so comprehensible, that even the terror and confusion of mind experienced by the miser during their recital, did not prevent their being deeply impressed upon his memory. "*Dig and obtain; yet dig in vain,*" were words continually haunting his mind. "If I *dig and obtain,*" thought he, "it will be *my* fault if I dig in vain; and as to that bit of moon-shine, it has given me full leave to

try, let it be what it may. So I'll just poke about a little yonder, and see what is to be seen."

Ralph Richards accordingly issued forth early on the ensuing morning; just at the time when he thought there was light enough to make a ghost invisible; and darkness enough to render himself so too. It was cold, raw, and foggy, and the grass and shrubs were drenched with the dew; so that before the old man had reached the ruins, he felt deplorably wet and uncomfortable. As, however, his mind was not accustomed to consult his body, his resolution to proceed was not influenced in the smallest degree by that circumstance.

Every thing was as quiet and lonely here as he could wish. There was not a ghost, a gossip, nor even a goose to be seen; nor any thing to be heard, but the crowing of the distant cock, and the periodical cawing of a rook perched upon the old wall, who seemed both surprised and disturbed by the miser's presence.

The stone from which Ralph Richards had taken the coin, had been deposited

within the site of a large circular column, that occupied nearly the center of the ruins. This bulky pier, which was intended to have the appearance of solidity, was in fact hollow, and had doubtless a regular, although a concealed entrance. But the recent fall of a large portion, at once revealed its construction, and gave easy admission.

Ralph Richards could not help casting two or three suspicious glances, as he entered, at the heavy masses that still hung doubtfully over head; for the greater part of the column was yet standing. As, however, it was impossible for him either to help or to hinder, any further movement of the building, he gave himself no more concern about it, but proceeded immediately to business.

With little difficulty, the old man loosened the stone yet remaining in the earth, having something more than a surmise, that he should be paid for his trouble. He was, therefore, somewhat disappointed, yet not altogether discouraged, when he found nothing beneath, but the soil in which it had been imbedded. After having burrowed

away the earth for some depth, to no purpose, he once more examined the stones between which the coin had been deposited; but after turning them about in all directions, he was convinced, that they were solid blocks, and had never contained any thing beside.

With this conviction he was just putting them away, when he perceived the outlines of a man's hand faintly chiselled upon the side of the upper one, having the fore finger extended, as if in the act of pointing. Ralph Richards immediately had the wit to place the block precisely in its original position, and perceived then, that the finger pointed downwards. This was a perfectly intelligible hint, and one that would have been sufficient for a much less sagacious mind than our hero possessed.

“ Now, good luck to that fly-away penny !” thought he. “ Ralph Richards does not throw his money away for nothing.” Having apparently obtained the scent, this true-bred terrier began with amazing vigour to scratch, claw, and burrow, in the direction suggested by the hand.

At first he contented himself with making



hastily a funnel-shaped hole; hoping that the sign, and the thing signified, might be sociably near. He found it needful however, shortly, to proceed in a more regular manner; for before the excavation was a yard in depth, the loose earth was perpetually tumbling down and re-occupying its former place. Nevertheless, having an idea that the object of his search might be within reach of a probe, he prepared a stick for the purpose of trying the experiment, and, after thrusting it down with some difficulty, felt that it encountered a substance, which offered a complete resistance to his further efforts. He then withdrew the stick, and eagerly introduced his hand; but his greedy fingers were not to be indulged with the feel of the coin at present; for there was a considerable mass of earth to be removed before they could reach the substance beneath.

Finding that it would require better light, and better tools, to proceed further with advantage, he judged it best to remit his labours until the next morning; so after carefully scraping the earth into the hole again, he arose from the spot and returned home.

Having provided himself with a curious non-descript implement, which was accustomed to the various functions of a shovel, a cleaver, and a bolt to his door, and which was intended in case of invasion, for a battle-axe, the miser rose early in the morning, and bent his course towards the ruins.

As he turned an angle of the building within a few yards of which he had been engaged, he met a person, whom of all beings in the creation he least wished to encounter. This was an elderly female, whose professional pursuits were of that kind which in times past might have placed her in a situation where the lingering juices of her body would have been very rapidly exhaled.

This lady, commonly called Dame *Trudge*, was, in plain terms, a reputed witch. She was attired in the usual habiliments of an old woman; but had, over all, a large, ragged, man's coat, and a man's hat upon her head. She had, moreover, a pair of broad buckles in her shoes, and carried a walking staff, which seemed rather too high for her convenience. The meeting between this per-

sonage and our hero, though not equally satisfactory, was at the moment, equally unexpected on both sides.

“ Ah, old Grope ! what ye’re at your old trade again, arn’t ye?—but ye’d better let that there alone I reckon.”

“ Let what alone ?” muttered the miser, slipping his tool behind his clothes.

“ Why, grubbing up *th’ arth* yonder, ye old thief !”

Ralph Richards could do little but mumble inarticulately in reply ; for beside that an old man is seldom a match for an old woman, when the conversation takes a lively turn, he was so little used to exchange words with any human being, that he scarcely knew when he had uttered one syllable in which corner of his mouth to thrust his tongue for the next : he contrived, however, in process of time, to repel the old woman’s accusation, and to deny that he was a thief.

“ Why, yes y’ar !” said the Dame, who laboured under no kind of impediment, “ ye’re hunting after that as an’t none o’ *yourn.*”

The miser thought that he had as good a right as the old woman to the proceeds of the gold-mine, especially if he undertook to work it; yet feeling very unwilling that his designs should be known, he contented himself with stating, that he had lost a piece of money, and had been trying to find it.

“ Oh, yes—I dare to say you have;” said she, “ but if you get to groping there, you’ll see that as will make your old bones shake, as they haven’t done, a bit,—I’m bound for’t !” so saying, knitting her brows and jerking her head on one side, the old woman brandished her stick over the old man’s head and shoulders, and after two or three most portentous flourishes, she stumped away.

Although it may be as well to suppose, that the circumstances here related occurred some years ago, and that the miser and witch have long since demised, it is certain, that the race of witches is by no means extinct, any more than that of misers. In many country towns there is still superstition enough to maintain a person of this

description, whose aid is frequently called in to a split thumb or a bad leg, when the unguents of the parish doctor may chance to have failed. Dame Trudge liked the feel of money almost as well as Ralph Richards, but it was because she had a genuine taste for the comforts of life, nor did she ever run in debt with her own necessities when she could help it. She had, therefore, a sharp eye for a penny, which she had more ways than one of obtaining. She had, for many years, been employed to distribute letters from the post-office to the lone houses scattered over a considerable extent of the surrounding country; to do which, this nimble old lady daily accomplished a journey of more than a dozen miles. The income arising from this service was further augmented by continual perquisites for the delivery of notes, parcels, and messages, from distant families; she being a regular circulating medium of communication between houses separated by thirty or forty ploughed fields, at all seasons, and in all weathers; for frost, fog, and flood, were alike unable to stop her.

To the money thus obtained, an extensive

practice in the way of her profession before alluded to made a very comfortable addition; and, connected with this, she had another string to her bow, in the use of which, our hero was, in the course of his present undertaking, likely to be concerned.

There was a long shady lane, lying between the town and a neighbouring village, which, at one part where the hedge was low, commanded a complete view of the haunted ruins, they being just there, within the distance of two fields. Now, when the sun was on the meridian of Greenwich, or indeed at any time while it was fairly above the horizon, this circumstance was an inducement with some to visit the spot, and was not an objection to any. But, when the sun was exchanged for the moon, or the moon for a lantern, the case was quite altered and nothing but *needs must*, could drive any one down that lane after dark.

The *why* and the *wherefore* of this, was derived from several long stories current in the neighbourhood, which were boldly asserted by some, and denied by others; but had more or less influence upon all; for

many a one who cared not to answer the question, 'why *shouldn't* you go down that lane?' found it convenient to ask, 'why *should* I?'

The old woman saw that it would be advantageous at once to assist the credibility of these tales, and the credulity of her neighbours, since she was in the habit of granting passports for a trifling pecuniary consideration to those whom dire necessity obliged to travel that way at night.

For this purpose, she occasionally took a lonely and a midnight walk herself among the ruins, and in the meadows between them and the lane; when, with a very little variation of her usual voice and manner, she contrived to personify that which was sufficiently alarming in such a situation.

It was during an excursion of this kind, one moon-light night, that she discovered the appearance of earth having been recently moved at the spot where the miser had been engaged. She instantly guessed that Ralph Richards had been there, and as she had long wished to open an account with him, she determined to enter into partnership in

his present speculations, the nature of which she was at no loss to conjecture. The old woman was arranging her plans with this view, when she had the unexpected meeting before mentioned, and this terminated as we have seen, with a threat, which she resolved to put in execution, as the readiest means of making him tractable.



## CHAP. V.

RALPH RICHARDS watched the old woman until she was fairly out of sight; when, muttering something that was meant only for his own ear, he entered the ruins, and resumed his labours.

Having again removed the loose earth which he had replaced the night before, he next endeavoured to enlarge the hole, so as to obtain some idea of the substance beneath; but there was so little light, that he could only ascertain, that it was either brick or stone, and was unable to discern whether it was in one mass or otherwise. As, however, he had exposed but a very small surface, he proceeded, with great labour, to chop, dig, pick, and shovel away the stony rubbish which appeared to have been deposited there, on purpose to render further progress as difficult as possible. He

had occupied the greater part of the day in this manner, before he had cleared a space large enough to stand upon conveniently; and then could form no conjecture as to the size and shape of that upon which he stood, much less of what was beneath it:—a slight accident, however, presently gave him some information.

He was very industriously wedging his tool between two loose stones or bricks immediately under him, and had administered a slight blow with his foot to assist its penetration; when, without a moment's warning, stones, bricks, earth, and miser, descended simultaneously to the depth of about sixteen feet, and alighted upon the next hard substance, that presented itself.

Ralph Richards perspired for the third time in his life, when he found himself suddenly immured in a vault nearly as dark as pitch. He remained seated upon the floor of his new apartment some minutes, before he could so far regain the power of volition, as to prove the state of his bones, every one of which he expected to find broken. As it happened, however, he had

the same good fortune now, as upon a former occasion, when the ruins tumbled on his back ; for he found all, and every one of his own most durable and serviceable bones, muscles, and sinews, as able as ever, to resume their wonted functions.

He felt now, for once in his life, more tempted to look towards the heavens than the earth, for he was well aware, that the way in, was likely to be the only way out. There was, indeed, the irregular aperture through which he had descended, and it was large enough for him to pass, though riding astride of one of his most roomy hutches ; but, amongst all the six sides of a square apartment, there is none in which the exit is altogether so incommodious, as in that opposite to the one upon which one happens to be standing.

The miser was reflecting with considerable interest upon his situation, when the words of the apparition darted like lightning across his mind. ‘ Dig and obtain, yet dig in vain,’ thought he. “ This, then is it ; the treasure is here without a doubt, and so am I, and we are

likely to remain together, as long as my old bones shall last. There's time enough to get acquainted then," muttered he, "and I can hold out a bit." He then prepared to grope his way round the vault; for the dim ray admitted by the sky-light, exhibited little more than a foot or two of the spot immediately under it. He made his way for some distance, till he came to a wall. It was here completely dark, so that he was unable to discern an obstruction over which he stumbled, as he crept along. He felt that it was a chest of some sort, and imagining that the treasure might be contained within it, he applied his fingers accurately round the top edge which projected a little, and endeavoured to raise it; when, after two or three slight efforts, the part he touched broke away, and remained in his hand. He eagerly thrust his other hand into the opening, when, instead of coin, he felt a round smooth substance, and immediately after, his fingers encountered the jagged inequalities of a human skull, which rolled upon its side at his touch. The miser slunk away like a detected thief, and pro-

ceeding to the spot upon which he had alighted, resolved to tax his invention vigorously for some means of escape: for he had little curiosity to examine further the contents of this chest, since it seemed to contain nothing but old bones, and there was but one set in the world that he cared a straw about.

The miser found by repeated trials, that the earth and stones which had accompanied him in his fall, would not, with the most skilful building, form a mound high enough, by several inches, to enable him to reach the orifice through which he had heretofore proceeded. The next thing to be done then was an important question, and one that occupied his undivided attention, for a considerable time. At last thought he, "a dead man shall help a living one. I'll just borrow his hutch a minute; and if he won't *give* leave, I know he won't refuse it." Then retracing his steps to the coffin, he boldly raised one end, and heard as he expected, the bones rattle down to the other. Then placing it upon the earth and rubbish, raised to their greatest

altitude, he gently stepped upon it and found now, that he was just able to reach the brick-work above, and gave a slight spring, in order to raise himself through it, when the brittle lid gave way, and Ralph Richards once more descended to the earth, accompanied this time, by the coffin and the dead man's bones, which were scattered widely around him.

Little dismayed, however, the nimble and indestructible old man, immediately tumbled up, re-adjusted the earth and stones with more care; placed the coffin bottom upwards upon them, and stepping up more warily, was at last, by this means, enabled to scramble out; thus proving incontestibly, that if the living can't raise the dead, the dead can raise the living.

Scarcely was he out, however, ere he wished himself in again; for as nothing but the love of life could make him for a moment forget the love of money, his fears concerning the first had no sooner fled, than his hopes respecting the other returned; and he felt strongly persuaded, from the indications already mentioned, that the vault

contained something more than he had yet discovered in it. He therefore looked down again wishfully; but could only see the bones which lay below, and part of the coffin that had been the means of his resurrection. Uninviting as this prospect was, and alarming as it had lately been, he determined, nevertheless, to enter again, and renew his researches.

He reflected however, that it would be advisable to provide himself with means of descent, less rapid than he before possessed, and which might help him to ascend also; seeing that the attraction of gravity, would only accommodate him one way: a spade also it would be needful to procure; for the tool he had hitherto employed, had fared worse than its owner, being broken in its fall. A light moreover, he judged would be indispensable, since without one, it would be impossible to distinguish a coffer from a coffin.

But here two considerable difficulties immediately presented themselves; for first and foremost, a spade, a rope, and a candle, would cost more money than he had expended for any thing but food, during twenty years of

his life ; and secondly, for that very reason, he could not hope to procure them without exciting the curiosity, and probably the suspicions of the neighbourhood, and he was, as has been mentioned, very unwilling to draw the public attention to himself or his concerns. As, however, he saw no alternative that had less difficulty in it, and as he felt an irresistible inclination to resume his investigations, he resolved to run the hazard, and hazard the run to the adjacent town, as soon as it was sufficiently dark.



## CHAP. VI.

THE miser did not forget the old woman's parting threat, and although he thought it unlikely that she could conjure up any thing more alarming than that which he had already witnessed, he felt that it would be highly desirable to prevent any kind of interference if possible.

There were apparently but two ways of dealing with the old lady, that seemed at all likely to prosper; the first was, to placate her with money; the second to encounter her with her own weapons; and seeing that she proposed to make *his* old bones shake, to endeavour to make *her* old bones shake previously. The first of these schemes had the same objection as every other that required him to dispossess himself of any part of his property; besides, he well knew

that it would be highly dangerous ever to let the old woman know the feel of his cash, which it was no fault of her's that she had never yet done. The other plan, therefore, he thought the least objectionable, and of course the most feasible, seeing it would cost nothing, and would not probably need to be repeated, "If *my* old skull bone won't scare you," thought he, "I'll find one that will." With these words, as they comprehended the sum of his arrangements, he dismissed the subject from his mind.

Soon after the old miser stole into the town, and meekly entered the first shop that was likely to furnish his commodity. He hoped that good luck would favour him so far as to give him an interview with the shopkeeper alone. Not so. There were five or six persons there, who all turned their eyes upon him, as he was accosted with,— "Ah! Squire Guinea-pig!—what for you Sir?" but, without waiting for an answer, as the old miser was not expected to give a very important order, Mr. Sharpsly proceeded to serve his other customers, to whom in the mean time, our hero's unexpected

appearance afforded a little gossip: at last however, he obtained his candles, and hastened to make his more important purchases.

For this purpose he next entered the shop of Mr. Tilpenny, where almost any article with two ends and a middle, excepting an epic poem and a mile-stone was to be had—from a gold pin, to a roasting-spit; from a smelling bottle, to a tar-barrel; from the cedar of a pencil-stick, to the man-trap that groweth upon the wall. Happily there was no one in this shop, where the rope and the shovel were to be bought, but the owner himself; who in general was perfectly contented to sweep his customer's money into his till without making remarks, or asking questions: the appearance of Ralph Richards, however, awakened his vigilance, not his curiosity; for, knowing the wonderful attraction that existed between the miser and the precious metals, he felt some uneasiness lest his gold should leap from his pocket, and elope with our hero: he, therefore kept, what is called, 'a sharp look out' but this was quite needless, for the

man was far too long-sighted to be a  
nief.

Having accomplished this business better than he expected, Ralph Richards made the best of his way home; whence, after having provided himself with the means of procuring light, he proceeded to the ruins.

Nobody can have a new handle to an old broom in a country town, without the cognizance probably of several officious neighbours. But a new head to an old horse would scarcely have excited more gossip than the circumstance of the old miser buying a pound of candles. It would be quite useless to mention the various surmises and hypotheses that were built upon this event; suffice it to say, that it quickly came to Dame Grudge's ears, who, if she had forgotten her threat, was thus forcibly reminded of it.

Immediately guessing the destination of these candles, she resolved to be at hand, to snuff them, if needful, and determined, with this view, to visit the ruins at midnight; where, and when, she had no doubt of finding the old miser, groping away, very far from the surface; for she was

entirely ignorant of the subterraneous apartment, of which he had taken such rapid possession.

As, however, the time was not arrived by several hours, when she thought it would be advisable to venture forth; she had ample leisure to prepare her terrors. These consisted of, first a white sheet, that well known skin, guise, or garment of a ghost, and a high conical white cap, with a long feather on each side. Beside these, she provided two or three pieces of tobacco pipe, each about an inch long, with which, on such occasions, she was wont to prop open her charming jaws. There was, this night, a small shred of moon, which suited her scheme, as she never preferred a totally dark night; for somehow, goblins, like guide-posts, are apt to be invisible then.

With these accoutrements, this praiseworthy old woman, had contrived to frighten many a penny out of her credulous neighbours' pockets, into her own; and, by the same means, she hoped to frighten a good part of the miser's treasure into the same place.

Squire Guinea-pig, as we have seen, had some idea of *having the start* of her. When he arrived at the vault, he sent in his newly-acquired shovel, and a few other things, by the same conveyance, that had accommodated himself at first, and then, making his rope fast to the top, easily descended by it.

His first business was with the skull-bone, before mentioned. "Two heads are better than one," muttered he, as he took it up, and twisted it on to the small end of his stick. Having done this, he laid it carefully aside, and proceeded to the necessary operation of striking a light.

Any one beside, who could have been present, would have felt somewhat impressed with the sight, which those transient, but vivid flashes exhibited. The miser, however, saw nothing but the tinder-box and his own knuckles, until his candle was lighted. He then perceived, that the coffin over which he had stumbled, was the first in a row that had extended from one end of the vault to the other; raised by a ledge of brick-work, about two feet from the ground. The

coffins, however, with the exception of this one, had all long since perished, and had deposited their contents regularly beneath them. So strangely durable are those most valueless things, a dead man's bones, that they frequently remain entire, when scarcely an atom of the substances employed for their preservation is to be seen.

However profitable a suitable train of reflections, arising from those objects might have been, they were, by no means, likely to be productive of that kind of benefit which the miser desired; and he felt convinced, that the failure of the brick-work over-head, had accidentally introduced him to a place, very different from that indicated by the hand carved upon the stone.

He was carefully and noiselessly, with his candle in his hand, perusing every crack and cranny in the walls around him, before he quitted the vault; when he heard something like the sound of a footstep over-head. He listened more attentively, and was presently informed, by the descent of some loose earth from above, that his old enemy was at hand. His usual ready wit, unfettered by sentiment

or scruples of any kind, immediately made a sconce of a skull, into the jaws of which he thrust his candle; then creeping gently to the instrument he had prepared, he took it up, and calmly waited the event.

The old woman, expecting to find the miser knee-deep, in a hole of his own digging, was greatly surprised to see what appeared to be a dim light at a considerable depth. In fact, she was stooping down in the guise before mentioned, to reconnoitre more exactly, when our hero, on taking a glimpse of her, suddenly, and with considerable violence, elevated the death's-head, so as mechanically and forcibly to clash with the old woman's living one. With a genuine and horrid yell, she fell backwards; meanwhile, the, (for once) grinning miser, held it up at arm's-length, turning it about in all directions; for he knew not, precisely, on what point of the compass the old woman lay, taking care to keep himself as much out of sight as possible. Her shriek was succeeded by hysterical, half-laughing cries for some time, after which her accustomed mutter returned; when, with a sort of a



grunt, she raised herself from the earth, and fled, as much frightened as the miser could possibly wish ; who, finding at last, that the coast was clear, withdrew his tipstaff, and depositing it where he could readily obtain it again, upon any similar occasion, he took up his candle, and resumed his researches.



AFTER having accurately examined the vault round the walls, the miser directed his attention, more particularly, to the parts contiguous to the aperture through which he had descended.

He found by inspection, that the part which had broken away with him, was, by no means, exactly under the situation of the stone that seemed to have been intended as a guide; and as it was a mere failure of the arch in consequence of his operations, it could not, of course, be considered as the intended entrance.

On removing a few more bricks, however, immediately over the nearest wall of the vault, he discovered a regularly formed square; filled by a single stone. After a little time he contrived to displace this, when a distinct apartment was discernible, the descent into which was provided for by

a few vacancies, and projections in the side; but it was not without some hazard of a fall, and of extinguishing his light, that the old man contrived by those accommodations, to let himself safely down. It was, he perceived, a very small room, constructed apparently for the reception of one inhabitant, as it was occupied by a single coffin, which was placed against the wall. This coffin, unlike the others, was quite entire, and richly ornamented, and among the various devices upon the lid, the miser happened to espy the effigies of two keys crossing each other. Now, a key, was of all things, except money, the most interesting object to the miser, that could be imagined; nay, it was in some views of it more agreeable to contemplate than unprotected coin, since it implied security as well as possession.

Although these were mere effigies, the miser felt strongly disposed to conjecture, that they were intended to indicate the presence of valuables within. To obtain them, therefore, was his next object. But he soon found, that being a stone chest, it was not quite so easy to gain access, as into the de-

cayed wooden one. There was not, however, the smallest hesitation in his mind as to making the attempt. He applied, therefore all his strength, with indefatigable perseverance, in endeavouring to raise the lid. But, whether it was fastened down, or whether it was its own weight that detained it, he could not guess; in either case, the difficulty seemed one likely to try his patience; for after a whole day spent at it unremittingly, he had not made the least difference in the aspect of the business. It was now, therefore, time to set his *brains* to work; he always found it very advantageous, to tax his mind and his body alternately when any thing of this kind was to be done.

The coffin rested upon bearers, formed by ledges in the wall, which raised it about four feet from the ground. Now, it suddenly occurred to this straight-forward genius, that the solidity and consequent weight of this impregnable bone-hutch, would prove its own destruction if he could contrive to tumble it down.

Without the smallest compunction therefore, but with considerable complacency,

Ralph Richards, the miser, introduced a lever between the coffin and the wall, when he soon perceived the degree of obedience which usually results from the judicious application of that omnipotent engine. The coffin moved so decidedly at each pull, that he thought it prudent to take the upper hand of it, although he had not quite so good a situation for his exertions as before. He pulled and wedged, nevertheless, so satisfactorily, that the accomplishment of his purpose was rather unexpected, not to say a little alarming; for the old man's shins very narrowly escaped, when the coffin, with a tremendous force, descended.

The reader will feel, probably, much less anxious to become acquainted with the result of this experiment than the operator, who was greatly disappointed by the extinction of his light, which accompanied the coffin in its fall. He was, therefore, obliged to ascend as well as he could in entire darkness, and to descend into the other vault, where he had placed his apparatus. Here, it was some time before he could find them, and still longer before he could succeed in

using them. At last, however, another candle was lighted, and he returned to see what was to be seen.

The lid having flown off, and the coffin being turned partly on its side, a human body, by no means reduced to a skeleton, had rolled out, and lay extended upon the ground. It had been wrapped in a stiff cere-cloth, which still remained entire, except in a few places from which the sudden motion had removed it. The miser felt no inclination to decorticate this trunk, but proceeded very carefully to examine the floor upon which it had fallen, for something more suited to his taste, when close beside the body, he espied a gold cross. He eagerly grasped it; but, as he attempted to withdraw it, the body suddenly started up, and the cross was as suddenly detained. Most submissively did the miser restore the gold to its owner, when the body quietly resumed its original position.

Seeing things were so, Ralph Richards felt considerably disposed to relinquish his enterprise; when he accidentally caught a glimpse of that which explained the mystery,

at the same time that it made him amends for his fright; for he perceived a fine gold chain attached to the cross, which was passed round the neck of the deceased.

Although this accounted very satisfactorily for the circumstance; it was not without some hesitation, and a degree of tremulousness in his hand, that the miser proceeded to disengage the chain from its quiet possessor. He, however, obtained it without any further interruption, and felt that incomprehensible delight in the acquisition, which was strangely natural to his mind, and which it was incapable of deriving from any other source.

After a sufficiently minute search, he convinced himself, that nothing more of value had been connected with the body. He, therefore, next directed his attention to the place which the coffin had occupied, and immediately discerned a small square chest, standing within a niche in the wall above it, alluded to in a Latin inscription upon the lid; but to this our hero was not indebted. He easily withdrew the box, but found that it was as firmly closed as the

coffin had been. Here again the inscription would have aided him, had he been able or willing to consult it. He, however, resolved upon a similar expedient to that which had succeeded before, and accordingly threw the chest to the ground with all his force: when this had been repeated four or five times, the box flew open and disclosed two heavy iron keys.

It is common enough to search for a key; but not quite so common when that is obtained, to have to search for the lock. This business, however, employed the old man, patient and persevering as he was, much longer than was agreeable; particularly because he was burning his precious candles, one after the other, apparently to no purpose. There was not a joint, a crack, a mark, or a speck in the arch above,—in the walls, or in the pavement, to which he did not pay as much attention as if he had been deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphics. Still there was nothing to be seen that bore the smallest resemblance to a door-way, a lid, or a key-hole. This was almost posing. The old man stood at last in the middle of



the vault, giving a forlorn glance around, very nearly, as the phrase goes, 'at his wit's end;' which was a point that he had never yet quite arrived at in all his emergencies.

It seemed very improbable, that his present general survey, should reveal more to him, than his very close and minute inspection had done; yet he could not easily prevail upon himself, with the keys in his hand, to give up the quest.

The corpse and the coffin, he had removed a countless number of times, to examine the parts which they covered. Once more, however, he determined to move the coffin to the other side of the vault. In doing this, he chanced to set his foot upon one of the square flag-stones upon which it had descended. This had by the blow, been so far loosened, that the miser's weight slightly depressed one corner and raised the other. He thought there could be no harm in assisting it a little farther; and then discovered, that the pavement was double; the upper one consisting of comparatively thin stones, which had been very carefully laid down, and fitted upon that beneath.

The first stone having been removed, the others followed with little difficulty. The miser then perceived an iron door about two feet square, neatly and evenly fitted into the surrounding floor; there was, moreover, a hole in it, corresponding in size and shape, with the keys he possessed, and a large ring, reposing snugly in a hollow made to receive it. He delayed not to introduce one of the keys, which entered readily. He turned it, and had the satisfaction of hearing the bolt creak in its groove, then grasping the ring, he pulled it with all his might. The door, however, obeyed him not. Again he pulled, jerked, and rattled it; but still the door remained unmoved. "I'll rub a hole in ye, if you're a yard thick," muttered he, rapping the noiseless iron with his knuckles. He turned the key repeatedly, backwards and forwards, round and round, and could plainly hear the creaking of the bolt, as before. Once more he gave a hearty tug at the iron ring; when, not the door, but the ring gave way, and that so suddenly that the old man gave way too, who tumbled backwards, and again extinguished his

light. Not at all disconcerted, however, our hero regained his feet with great alacrity; for he knew his head from his heels, notwithstanding the darkness.

There was the smallest glimmer of moon-light imaginable at this time, through the aperture at the top of the vault, which enabled Ralph Richards to find the tinder-box; but not by the most systematic groping, could he lay hands upon his candle. Finding, at length, that it was hopeless to continue this search; he gave it up, and feeling his way up the side of the vault, emerged from this den of death.

It was a clear moon-light night, quite light enough for a luckless lass to see him, who was just then passing that part of the lane before mentioned, which lay nearest to the ruins.

Nobody knows how fast he can run, until he has seen, or imagined he has seen a ghost. With two steps the girl reached the hedge; and with one vigorous scramble she cleared it, and in an incredibly short time, with hair on end, and gothic mouth, she entered the village, and proceeded to

the abode of Dame Trudge, who had by no means forgotten her own late encounter, which, however, she had not yet mentioned.

“Why, aye—drive the house down if ye be a mind,” said the old woman, hastening to the door with accelerated steps; thinking it probable that the next announcement would start her bolts; “what do ye want o’ me?” said she, opening it about two inches.

“Why, La! what do I want! why you said I should be safe enough to go past the *owd chuch* to-night; but I’m hanged if I havn’t seen a sight!”

“Well—seen a sight!—and what then?—so ’ve I, for that matter, and hope I shall again; what colour was it on?”

“Lawk, darkish-like, I count; but I didn’t stand to look on’t; for I give but two jumps, and scratched clean through the hedge, and here I am; and if ever I go ’cross there by dark again, I wish I may never come back no more—that’s all:—you and your *tickut*!—tan’t o’ no more use than nothing at all, I won’t believe, and

you'll see if I don't talk on't too pretty well about."

"Well, I dare to say ye will—a fine thing to talk on!—ye see an owd horse go past, I should'nt wonder, and he was as scared at you, as you was at he, I'm bound for't."

But the old woman's credit was shaken by this circumstance in a way that it had never been before, during the whole course of her practice; for a number of persons had now gathered round her door, who taking courage from her comparative meekness of manner and weakness of argument, joined in with the girl's last speech.

"Well, don't bother me oot," said the old woman, at last, who suddenly pushed to her door, and bolted out the argument which she found herself quite incompetent to sustain with advantage: indeed, she had recently been so thoroughly frightened herself, that her usual nervous style of expressing her thoughts, entirely forsook her.

## C H A P. VIII.

IN the mean time, Ralph Richards, quite unconscious of the fright he had occasioned, returned quietly home; pleased, and yet disquieted, at what he had left behind him.

He had no doubt, that this trap-door concealed the treasures of which he was in search; yet felt very uneasy at leaving it to the possibility of discovery by others, who might find much less difficulty in opening it than he had experienced. He, however, had little cause for fear on this ground, whatever he might have for hope; for beside, that the ruins themselves were very rarely visited, the entrance to these vaults was in so obscure a part, and so hidden by the mass of rubbish at the mouth, that there was scarcely a possibility of its being known to any but himself and the old woman, and she was not likely to trouble

him again at present. Moreover, the vaults were by no means badly guarded; for in such situations, dead men are much better centinels than living ones.

Nevertheless, the miser resolved to return before dawn to the spot, to take possession, lest any one should save him the trouble. As he reflected upon the measures to be adopted for opening the iron door, he could not help admiring the ingenuity with which it had been concealed, and felt an inclination to employ a similar security for his own valuables, as he was, of course, never without his fears on their account; but he afterwards improved upon this plan, as will be seen in the sequel.

Whilst the moon was yet shining into his den, the miser arose, reviewed and secured his hoards with complacency, hoping that he should shortly add something considerable to them; and after having provided himself with an iron instrument, with which he had once been obliged to break open one of his own hutches, he set out towards the ruins.

When he reached the vault, he found that nothing had been disturbed in his absence.

The presence of his quiet companion the dead body, might have incommoded some, in such an undertaking as that in which he was engaged; though it neither threatened nor upbraided. But the miser felt no further inconvenience from it, than resulted from the space that it occupied on the floor. To remedy this, therefore, he tumbled it into the coffin again, upon which he replaced the lid, and by this means obtained more room for his operations.

There was at this time, just light enough from above, for him to distinguish the trap-door, which now seemed to require the utmost exertion of his mental and bodily powers.

The ring being gone, there appeared at first no very ready means of raising it supposing it had been at liberty. He was not long, however, in finding a substitute; for, by inserting the key, and turning it a little, he obtained as good a hold as ever. He now perceived that the door was loosened, though not released, for the bolt rattled firmly against the adjoining stone which enclosed it. Vainly he turned the key time after time; it performed a complete revolution without any further influence upon the



lock. Concluding, therefore, that the bolt had been over-shot; he saw no alternative between laboriously forcing an entrance, and abandoning his hopes and expectations altogether. As the latter was to him infinitely the greater evil of the two, he was not long in choosing the former, and therefore resolved to proceed, let the expense of time and strength be what it might; he, however, by no means deceived himself in estimating the difficulties before him, which were briefly these:—

The iron plate, or rather block, filled a space that was about large enough to admit a man's body. He could, in some measure, judge of its thickness by its weight; for the bolt allowed motion enough for him to raise it about a quarter of an inch; this, however, he had but just strength sufficient to do. The key entered nearly half its length before it turned, consequently the bolt could not be very near the surface. Moreover, the frame in which the door was enclosed, appeared to be one solid mass of stone, upon which the sides of the vault were built. He could, therefore, only gain access, by scraping a hole in the iron; by

chipping away the stone, till the fastening was at liberty ; or, by introducing some instrument for the purpose of forcing the lock. The latter plan seemed to be the most feasible to begin with ; for it was likely to be the soonest accomplished ; if, indeed, it were practicable at all.

An obstacle in the way of an energetic mind, so far from weakening its force, causes an accumulation of power, which frequently becomes the means of overthrowing, or of surmounting it. The miser's confidence of the existence of treasure on the other side of this trap-door seemed to increase with the apparent difficulty of obtaining it ; so that his purpose, instead of being relaxed, was strengthened by a circumstance, which would have completely extinguished it in the minds of almost any beside himself.

Ralph Richards soon found that no instrument that he could apply, had the least tendency to force the bolt or to raise the door. After nearly a day spent in contriving and introducing the most likely and unlikely mechanical agents, and working in

the most patient and cunning manner, all things remained as they were, there was the door, there was the lock, there was the key, and more than all, the miser firmly believed, there was the money.

He had tried the most gentle and the most violent methods that could be imagined, excepting a hog's bristle, or half a pound of gunpowder, the first of which is said to have been applied in a similar case with instant success by one, after the most crafty and insinuating instruments had been employed in vain by others; and the latter is certainly a drastic medicine, capable of simplifying intestinal intricacies, and of removing obstructions, wherever it is administered. As neither of these methods, however, occurred to the present operator, he was obliged to abandon all attempts upon the lock, and proceed to the very laborious business of chipping away the stone, until the bolt should be exposed and released. This plan, if persisted in, was doubtless certain of succeeding, and demanded little apparently, but muscular exertion; yet it requires considerable mental energy to command the

continuance of long protracted bodily labour under such circumstances.

As it was now quite dark in this vault, the miser was obliged to postpone further proceedings until the next morning, when having furnished himself with the best instrument his stores afforded, he betook himself to the ruins.

Unfortunately, it was only when there was broad day-light above, that there was not midnight beneath; so that being nearly winter, there were but a few hours in the day when the vault was not in total darkness. When he now entered, the miser could scarcely perceive the trap-door itself, much less the precise spot upon which it would be advisable to commence his operations. Nevertheless, after a time, he could just distinguish enough to make a beginning; he therefore seated himself in as commodious a position as he could, and with mallet and chisel set to work.

## CHAP. IX.

THE miser had operated with unwearied application for nearly two months upon the stone, and had scarcely penetrated through one tenth part of the substance which must be removed before the door could be freed from its confinement. The mere labour, however, gave him little concern; but the dread of discovery in his operations, and fears for the safety of his hoards at home, were worms at his heart, gnawing as incessantly as his own chisel, the progress of which was greatly impeded by these apprehensions; for in order to make as little noise as possible, he was obliged to deal his blows with less than half his strength; so that the labour of a week was hardly perceptible: again, as he was very anxious that it should not be thought he had deserted his dwelling, or was continually absent from it, he was compelled frequently to leave his work and show himself, or be ready to show himself at his old haunts.

But there was another inconvenience greater than either of these, to which his economical habits subjected him in the present instance, and that was, the want of light. He had, as we have seen, procured candles to aid him at first in his researches, and had used one occasionally in his operations upon the lock; when, however, he found that it would be requisite to dig through the stone, he resolutely extinguished his taper, since the expense of continuing it would have rendered the present far too hazardous a speculation; for it was a rule with him in all methods of obtaining money, never to put a penny in jeopardy if he could possibly avoid it.

He contented himself, therefore, with lighting his candle as often as he wished to ascertain the progress of his labours, and he found not unfrequently, that the efforts of a whole day had been fruitlessly expended, by his chisel having wandered to a part upon which it was by no means needful to operate. Without wasting more time, however, in useless regret, when he discovered such a deviation, he transferred his tool to

the right spot, and at last acquired the habit of retaining it there more permanently.

He was not troubled and hindered with a single grain of that impatience which is continually out-running the slow progress of circumstances, and which being obliged as often to return to the same situation in the course, feels consequent exhaustion and disappointment. Nor was he, as we have seen, apt to be discouraged with fears for the result. Had he perpetually entertained doubts as to the possibility of his being able eventually to accomplish his purpose, or had he felt much uncertainty as to the benefit likely to accrue, it is likely that he never *would* have accomplished it; for any degree of despondency would have abstracted just so much available impulse from each of the countless strokes to be administered, as might have rendered them all useless. He knew that the inconceivably small impression made by a single drop of water was yet not *so* small, but that a succession of them would in the course of time effect that which he was endeavouring to achieve with hard iron.

The same things appear easy or difficult

according to those beside which they are placed. If, instead of comparing his exertions with the dropping of water, the miser had continually tantalized his mind with an idea of the speedy aid which a blacksmith's tools would have afforded, his present means must have appeared, and therefore would probably have been, entirely inadequate to his task.

Ralph Richards was not troubled with any vacillations of opinion, as to the best plan to be adopted, but adhered steadily to that which he at first conceived to be the most likely to prosper; he continued therefore at his employment, in calm expectation of eventual success, knowing that impatience has longer to wait than perseverance; nevertheless, it is certain that he would have been quite as well pleased if the trap-door had opened readily to his hand, or at any rate if the stone had been only half the thickness that he found it to be.

But that which encouraged his soul and seemed to invigorate his body was, the smell of the gold; of which he appeared to have an instinctive perception, even though separated



from it by cast iron or stone walls. He had apparently some organic power, similar to that possessed by the camel, who is conscious of its approach to water fifty miles before it reaches it. Or perhaps, by having made a couch of a chest of gold for more than half a century, he had acquired a magnetic sympathy with the precious metals which apprised him of their presence when within a certain distance.

These perceptions or qualities of his mind had probably availed him frequently in his former life, and had perhaps enabled him to accumulate the greater part of that which he possessed; for it is generally the case, that beings whose desires or necessities point exclusively or peculiarly to one object, have some exclusive and peculiar faculties which enable them to obtain it. A crow feeling a particular interest in the demise of an aged horse, has organs of such delicate sensibility that they almost instantly inform him of the event, and thereby he has an opportunity of showing his regard by assisting at its obsequies.

The miser had imagined when he first discovered this trap-door, that it was the lid

of a chest in which the treasure was deposited. He perceived however, occasionally as he struck his tool, something hollow in the sound, which, though very indistinct, was yet sufficient to induce a suspicion that this was the entrance of some passage or vault, which might have to be explored before the gold could be obtained.

He could not avoid, notwithstanding the solidity of the stone upon which he was engaged, feeling somewhat anxious lest his introduction to the mysteries of the place should be as precipitate and unceremonious as on a former occasion; and he was fully aware that there was nothing to guaranty his descending as safely, much less as commodiously, as he did then. Finding, however, that it would be impossible to continue his operations if he placed himself so as to avoid accompanying the floor if it should travel, he did not suffer the apprehension to deter him; but as he could not prevent the worst, set himself to hope for the best.

Thus day after day and week after week he continued at his work; during which time no circumstance occurred to interrupt

him, but his visits to his own home, which he generally made at night, to avoid observation ; from this, however, since his adventure with Dame Trudge, he had been perfectly free.

## CHAP. X.

Most wofully did the poor old man's back ache with his long continued and in-commodious position, and most lamentably cold was the stone upon which he sat. These inconveniences, however, he did not suffer to interrupt him in his work. His own most dutiful and serviceable members had been long educated in the doctrine of active as well as passive obedience; nor could any thing short of the probable injury of them, by which they might be incapacitated for future labour, induce him to remit any portion of the task that he destined them to perform; but, although he could thus command the continued services of his body to an almost indefinite extent, he could not do so exactly by the tool with which he wrought.

This instrument, from incessant use and the frequent obtusion and necessary renewal of the edge, (which he effected with no small labour on the stone itself,) had at last become so short and thick as to be nearly useless. This was a more disagreeable circumstance to the miser than if he had abridged or amputated a thumb or a finger, because he had others of them in reserve; whereas this chisel or wedge, was the only thing of the kind that he possessed, and he was well aware that he could not procure another without expense and hazard. Nevertheless, he found at length that it was impossible to proceed further with his present instrument, and seeing no other alternative, he resolved, on the ensuing day to procure another.

Among all the sacrifices that this self-denying old man was willing to make, in the furtherance of his present designs, it is certain that money even to the smallest amount would never have been one, had it not been for the gold cross and chain that he had already obtained, which he knew would indemnify him for twenty times the

expense likely to be incurred; but being thus amply secured from loss, he felt less difficulty in obtaining his own consent to abstract a small portion of coin from his coffers.

In order, if possible, to transact this business without interruption or observation, he resolved to proceed to a town at some distance from that in which he was known, and where he was likely to meet with friendly greetings.

Having reached this place unnoticed, he was congratulating himself upon his good luck in that respect, and was turning over the old iron of a broker's sundry-box, secure as he thought from remark, when Dame Trudge stood before him, who unknown to our hero, usually took this town in her morning's walk.

“Aye!—what *owd* grope!” said she in a loud tone of surprise and exultation; “what o’ the name o’ good-luck can ye be after here? what have ye chuck’d a penny ’mongst *th’owd* iron?—ye pretty well sick o’ ye job hinder I reckon.”

The miser remained silent, according to

his usual custom, and sought the more obscure regions of the shop, whither the old woman he conceived, had no pretence for following him; she however could still make herself heard.

“Aye—well—’twas as I said within a little. I thought ye should git enow o’ what ye was pok’n arter,—ye got your fill for once, if ye never han’t afore;”—continued the old woman, who had no doubt that the miser had been served with the same entertainment as herself. Ralph Richards however, still remained silent, till his ingenious tormentor at last said something that almost made him howl.

“Aye—well—ye swallowed ye tong, for want of a muff’l o’ wittls,—’shoon’t wonder;—so rummage th’owd stuff about for a hook to fetch it up agin: only have a care I an’t home first, and then ’ts a chance if I don’t rummage over some o’ yar rusty guineas; f’r all your keys, and f’r all yar owd bones can do o’ running arter me.”

Truly, if the witch and the miser had made a race of it and started fair, it is difficult to say which *would* have been in first,

for they were both pretty evenly matched as to activity ; though it is probable that the regular pedestrian habits of the former, would have given the latter a tight pull for it. Ralph Richards, however, was by no means disposed to enter the lists with Dame Trudge on this occasion in any such way ; but instantly concluding his purchase, he bargained with a man who was driving by in a cart for a corner in his vehicle.

This was one of those instances which showed how completely the miser's inclinations were in subjection to his judgment ; for had they been consulted, he would much sooner have crawled twenty times the distance upon his hands and knees than have paid a farthing for a conveyance.

The manœuvre was transacted with such incredible dispatch, that the old woman had not time for a word, and was in danger of swallowing *her* tongue with astonishment.

“ Well ! if ye be a mind for a ride, set off with ye—y'onaccountable owd crittur ! ” said she at last, staring after the cart with all her eyes ; “ but if I an't as good as my word yet, my name an't Trudge, and if I b'an't too



many for ye now," continued the old woman; who was convinced from the sudden alarm of the miser, that his gold was not quite so secure as she had before supposed.

In the mean time our hero was jogging on in the cart at a round trot, and at times was within a little of jogging off; for it was as much as he could possibly do to keep his seat; this being the first time within his own remembrance, that he had travelled by any other conveyance than his legs afforded him.

He soon found himself at the spot where he had intended to alight; when having paid the stipulated sum he descended. But if the miser found it difficult before to keep his seat, he found it more difficult now to keep his legs; for had he, like the earth, travelled in a circle, and kept spinning round upon his own center all the time, he could not have felt a more alarming vertigo in his whirling brain than at present. After two or three lateral, and even backward strides, and telegraphic extensions of his arms, which were rather directed by instinct than his own volitions, he contrived to maintain his

perpendicular with less alarming inclinations, and before he reached his own dwelling had nearly regained his wonted steadiness of deportment.

He now set about making more secure arrangements for his treasures, and for this purpose he dug a hole in the earth large enough to receive them, under the most hidden and remote part of his cave, and having carefully replaced the earth over them he secured the entrance as usual, and returned to the ruins.

His new instrument had so much more of the gift of penetration than his former one, that it effected more in a few days than the other had done in several weeks; but still he had millions of blows to deal, and much fatigue to endure.

There would however be little benefit or amusement in accompanying him in every stroke of his mallet during his very tedious operations; indeed, had they lasted a thousand years the narrative could scarcely be made to occupy so long a time as that which relates the circumstance of Columbus cracking the egg.

Suffice it to say then, that *in process of time*, he had the satisfaction to perceive, upon a careful examination of his work, that he had really arrived at the bolt; the end of which now lay completely exposed to his view; having fairly chipped away all the intervening stone, that had secured it. Nothing, therefore, now remained, but to raise the door, which he immediately proceeded to do, by introducing the key as before.

It will be remembered, that when he first applied one of these keys it revolved, and moved the bolt, but not far enough to release it from its confinement; and that afterwards the key circulated, without any further influence upon it, in consequence of which he undertook the laborious task which he had now happily accomplished.

Having found one key only of the two that would turn at first, it did not occur to him to apply the other when this failed to operate. By mere accident, however, now he chanced to introduce the second key, not caring which, as he merely needed its assistance in lieu of the broken ring. But who

can express the very peculiar feelings of his mind, when happening to turn this key he found that the bolt readily followed it, as it had the other key at first, and that by this second movement the bulky mass of iron was entirely removed from all contact with the stone, being now snugly contained in the lock itself!

## CHAP. XI.

“WELL and so ! Sir ?”—Why, Sir, the miser did not waste time in useless regret ; but calmly brushed away the chips of stone, which bore testimony to the millions of blows that he had unnecessarily expended in producing them. But he was not without a conjecture, that this his needless labour had been alluded to in the words ‘ dig in vain,’ in which case he thought, ‘ dig and obtain,’ might now be fulfilled.

With this hope he once more set about raising the said iron door, after having prepared a light. He accordingly pulled it carefully but forcibly by the key ; when he soon perceived that all difficulties were really removed ; for, notwithstanding that once or twice its great weight caused it to resume its original position, he succeeded at last in elevating and throwing it back. He

then knelt down, and holding his candle as far in as he could reach, saw plainly that this was no money chest, but a dark and for what he knew, an illimitable void, black as midnight itself. It was indeed so uninviting, that the miser assumed a less forward position, and leaned over a little more carefully; he then introduced a few pieces of the stone chips, which informed him that it was not at any rate a bottomless abyss. Encouraged by this he lowered his candle by means of a shred of his drapery a little further, and at length discerned under the floor and against one side, something like a series of narrow steps or ledges, which descended steeply and in a straight direction as far as his dim light could exhibit them.

As Ralph Richards did not feel altogether disposed to explore this gulph, without some definite idea of its termination, he procured a bunch of straw from above, and setting fire to a part of it, threw it in; but he gained little information from this experiment at first; for the flame was almost instantly extinguished, and it was not until he had repeated it a number of times that

it survived till it reached the bottom, and it then burned so feebly and for so short a time that he could scarcely form a judgment as to the depth of the dungeon.

Here then was something more to be done before this well hidden gold could be obtained. The miser drew a deliberate breath very much like a sigh, as he looked into this uncertain profundity. Although there appeared to be the means of descent provided, they were so extremely steep and narrow, and that nearest to the top was so nearly under the floor of the vault he now occupied, that it could scarcely be obtained, without considerable danger of a fall. The miser, therefore, eyed it with the most careful attention for a long time; continually changing his position, so as to gain a view in all possible aspects; frequently varying the elevation of his candle and of his own head; using all that circumspection that a fly will often exhibit when at the orifice of a bottle, going from side to side, now venturing his head in and now taking it out again, till at last he resolves to descend; and so did the miser,

after the most mature and deliberate consideration; reflecting that the steps, incommodious as they were, had evidently been intended as the means of descent, and therefore could hardly be really impracticable; and moreover their existence plainly indicated something of importance to which doubtless they conducted.

With these persuasions our hero prepared to introduce his nether half into the aperture. Having seated himself upon the edge, his legs first entered the gloom. He then, most warily slid down the more weighty and important parts of his body, describing diligently a multitude of intersecting circles with his toes and his heels, in order to encounter some projections upon which to place them. He had at the same time quite enough to do with every faculty and function appertaining to that moiety of his material substance which still remained above. His arms and his elbows had a most onerous and momentous charge, as upon them only he now depended for support. One hand was occupied with that indispensable article a candle, and the other firmly grasped the



rope which he had made fast to the iron door, while his vigilant brain superintended the board of works.

At last, by a most inconvenient extension of his left leg in a lateral direction, he gained an acquaintance with one corner of the uppermost step. It was, however, so far removed from the perpendicular which a mathematician would have drawn through his body, that he could transfer but a small portion of his weight to it, and therefore could little relieve his uneasy and impatient elbows. In fact, they at last acted upon their own account, and so far betrayed him that he suddenly found he had only his head and shoulders above ground. Happily this movement enabled him to obtain a more firm footing below, by which means he had one hand at liberty. With this he introduced the candle, and could now just see enough to guide in reaching the steps completely. He found them constructed so as to make the progress down them a possibility, and nothing more; they were each little less than two feet in height, and were such narrow ledges that it required all his

care to retain his footing, while the inconvenient distance to which he was obliged to protrude one foot downwards before the other could be released, made him apprehensive continually, that the rest of the journey must be accomplished without their assistance. The old man could not help glancing at the trap-door, which was lessening above him every step he descended, with increasing interest, almost amounting to anxiety; at the same time that the side of the steps next the unexplored and unfathomed dungeon demanded the most assiduous watchfulness.

He had descended about a dozen of these steps, when he perceived that they were no longer necessary, for a narrow raised gallery now presented itself which ran along the wall beside him; this proceeding horizontally could of course be trodden in the usual way, and was a great relief to the miser while it lasted, which however was not long. He presently came to a small arched door-way, in which was inserted a well-fitted door. He began to fear that here was another difficulty similar to that which he had

experienced above. But, for once, he was agreeably disappointed; for at the first effort, the door crumbled to dust at his feet, and disclosed a lone vaulted passage, of whose extent he could at present, of course, form no conjecture.

As hitherto, neither earth, water, stone, nor iron; ghosts, witches, frights, falls, coffins, nor skull-bones; the living nor the dead; wind, rain, nor midnight, had been able to make our hero relinquish his purpose; it was not likely that he would long wait before an open door. Nevertheless, he *did* wait some time before he entered; for as real difficulties vanish, imaginary ones sometimes arise.

He was now at a very considerable distance below the surface of the earth, the ascent to which, could not on any emergency be accomplished without delay and difficulty. He could not help feeling some uneasiness at the *possibility* of the trap-door above being discovered and closed upon him. The place through which the gallery ran upon which he now stood, was so poorly illumined by his candle, that he could yet form no idea

of its size or construction, or of the depth below him. But if the extent of this apartment was nearly unknown, that of the narrow passage before him was quite so, which he had no means of ascertaining, but by himself exploring it; this, however, it is probable he would not so long have hesitated to do, had not a cause, of which he was quite ignorant, already operated upon his bodily feelings, which had insensibly influenced his mind, and relaxed its powers. Nevertheless, he proceeded a few steps into this place, but with a tremulousness to which he was little accustomed.

His candle now became excessively dim, the flame having assumed an unusually slender form, giving at the same time a strangely pale and lurid light; at the next step it lengthened still more, and scarcely appeared to touch the wick, being at times entirely withdrawn, and hovering over it. The old man now felt an insupportable sensation of internal oppression: his head became confused; the flickering and attenuated flame he now imagined to be a distant spectre; it at length slowly retired from the

candle and vanished. The miser gazed an instant at the red smouldering wick ; dropped it, and with a convulsive effort forced himself back to the entrance. He then sunk down and became completely insensible.

## CHAP. XII.

“Am I Giles Jenkins, or am I not?”

ONCE more, after a most perilous escape, our immortal hero began to recover the use of his faculties. The few hurried steps by which, at the moment his senses were forsaking him, he was enabled to quit the passage, saved his life; for the dungeon into which this movement brought him, had been in a considerable degree purified from its noxious vapours by the opening of the trap-door, and the atmosphere had been further remedied by the fire that he had introduced. Had he known how accurately the flame of his candle indicated the poisonous quality of the air, he would instantly have withdrawn upon perceiving its dimness. When Ralph Richards first opened his eyes he was unable to account in any satisfactory way for his situation.

He was, it is needless to state, in perfect darkness. The dim light of the vault above him was scarcely sufficient to render the trap-door itself visible, and of course there was not a ray in his present apartment. The question of personal identity had never before puzzled his brain; but now, whether he was Ralph Richards in his own cave, or a toad in a block of marble, he scarcely knew. Whether he had been hanged or drowned, and was now dead and buried, were questions which it was a hard matter for his bewildered and unassisted brain to answer. Gradually, however, he rallied his scattered thoughts; and his first drowsy hypothesis, that he had locked himself up in one of his own hutches and mislaid the key, was by degrees corrected, until his real circumstances occurred to his recollection. It required, however, the utmost exertion of his newly-recovered powers, both of body and mind, safely to extricate himself from his present very awkward circumstances; for he was now upon that narrow raised gallery which formed the communication between the steps and the arched-

way from whence he had recently escaped. He raised his head and shoulders gently, and supported himself sphynx-fashion, for some time, while, by feeling, he informed himself, on which side was the wall, and on which the dungeon. Having done this, he moved very slowly and cautiously along, a little after the example of a caterpillar; until he felt the lowest of the steps, when he was just able to discern the trap-door above him. The sight of this effectually rectified all remaining confusion and uncertainty; it therefore, now required only time and care, neither of which he spared when they were needed, to ascend into the upper vault, and from thence to gain that most charming country, the land of the living.

It may be thought unlikely, that after this last adventure, the miser should have any remaining inclination to proceed further in his subterranean investigations. The fact was however, that he was entirely ignorant of the danger he had escaped. All he could recollect of the circumstances above related was this, that he had dropped his candle,



and he supposed, from finding himself in the situation described, that he had afterwards fallen asleep. That he should have done so at such a time and in such a place, seemed strange; but it seemed also undeniable. How long he had lain, he was, of course, quite unable to conjecture; but judging from the imperious demands within, he was induced to believe that no business had been transacted there for several days.

Having sparingly administered to the importunities of his body, he felt as much as ever disposed to gratify the more insatiate cravings of his mind. Food and fresh air had done wonders for him, in restoring his wonted strength and spirits, so that he felt as able and willing as ever to resume his labours.

Once more, therefore, he repaired to the ruins and descended into the vault; when having again prepared a light, he entered at the trap-door, and proceeded down the steps as before.

When he reached the low-browed arched door-way, he involuntarily halted an instant for a strange association of indistinct remi-

visions crowded upon his mind at this spot, which impressed him with an indefinite idea of danger. With a penetrating eye, therefore, an attentive ear, and a keen scent, he endeavoured to ascertain the safety of each step that lay before him. The peril, however, was here inconsiderable now; for owing to the access of external air through the open door-way, the atmosphere of this passage, near the entrance, was so far improved as to have little effect either upon himself or his candle. Finding, therefore, nothing in his way, the miser stepped carefully along this unfrequented alley, surveying attentively the wall on each side of him as he went, for some new doorway or hidden recess. It, however, continued straight and unvaried for some length. The only difference was, that as he proceeded, the arch became narrower and lower, so that he was obliged to stoop inconveniently, and at last to descend to his hands and knees. This position was much less agreeable, and the air at this part began to partake of the qualities that had before arrested him; but he was himself unconscious of any thing at present but a

peculiar smell, which he rightly enough attributed to the long-imprisoned damp of the place.

How much further he might have proceeded with impunity it is impossible to say; but it is probable that causes similar to those which before operated upon him, would finally and speedily have terminated his adventures, had not a very decided obstacle suddenly presented itself; for a quantity of loose earth and bricks which completely filled the passage, informed him that the arch had here fallen in.

As he was quite ignorant of his danger in penetrating further among the deadly vapours of the place, he was far from congratulating himself upon this obstruction. He had, of course, no means of ascertaining the extent or quantity of the ruins before him; but he saw enough to convince him, that their removal would be a long and most laborious operation. The distance from this spot to the entrance was very considerable, and the lowness of the arch, which obliged him to crawl more than half the way, would render any kind of burthen extremely inconvenient. There was little

possibility of varying the aspect of the business, or of becoming more acquainted with it by a thousand years consideration than he could in five minutes; in the course of which time, therefore, he made his determination, arranged his plans, and set about the execution of them.

For this purpose, he immediately retraced his steps, ascended into the upper vault, and from thence bent his way homeward. When he arrived at his dwelling, he carefully displaced the contents of a strong chest, of a portable size, and having found other accommodations for these valuables, took the hutch under his arm, and returned to the ruins.

Our hero consoled himself in the prospect of what he had now to accomplish by the encouraging consideration that the crumbling mass of earth and bricks would yield more readily to his endeavours than that upon which he had lately expended so many weary blows; for six yards of this would be more easily penetrated than six inches of stone.

It was evident that this stoppage was

purely accidental, and could never have been intended by those who had constructed these subterranean recesses. The trap-door, so well concealed by the pavement over it, seemed perfectly sufficient for all purposes of security, without any further disguise or impediment; at the same time that the two keys, preserved and yet hidden with so much care, together with the other indications, rendered it impossible to believe that nothing important was connected with them.

With these convictions, therefore, our indefatigable hero once more *buckled to*. Having lowered himself and his box into the vault, his first uneasy apprehension was, that the latter would not enter the aperture through which it was needful for it to pass. It, however, filled the trap-door-way so exactly, that only a little urging was required to force it through. Ralph Richards was very carefully assisting it for this purpose, intending to retain his hold of it, until himself could follow; when a trifling diminution in its size toward the uppermost end released it so suddenly, that it eluded his grasp, and accomplished the remainder of the journey

without either his aid or direction, of which in due time it gave him audible demonstration.

This was by no means an amusing incident to our hero, for to this box he had looked as to the only feasible machine he could procure for the removal of the obstruction in the passage; indeed, without it, or something of the kind, it would be nearly impossible to displace a bushel of the mass in six months, since the position upon hands and knees, which it was necessary to assume, would leave no other vehicle but his mouth, at liberty for its reception.

This being the case, he thought it would be advisable to take some measures for the recovery of the hutch; which had returned a sound of that kind, that he conceived would not have proceeded from it, had the fall occasioned a complete disruption of its parts. He, therefore, procured a light, and attaching it to one end of his very serviceable rope, he entered the trap-door, and descending the steps, planted himself upon the gallery to reconnoitre.

Having fixed his candle so as to remain

in an upright position, he let it down gently from the spot upon which he stood, into this incomprehensible gulf. It was, however, of very little service in revealing the mysteries of the place. The size of this dungeon, and the darkness of its walls, blackened by the moisture that was continually exuding from them, rendered it impossible by the means of his dim candle to gain any idea of its size or construction. As, however, this was not his object, it was enough for him to discern, after the light had descended to the utmost extent of his rope, that the box was lying quietly under it.

His first endeavour was to hook it up; but this he soon found was a vain attempt. He saw, therefore, that there was no probable way of obtaining it, but by descending himself into the dungeon; but this required consideration; for as there were no means of descent provided, it would, he was aware, be far better to abandon this hutch, needful as it was to the accomplishment of his task, than to incur the hazard of falling a distance of fifteen or twenty feet, and of spending the rest of his days in this retirement.

But upon a closer examination of that part of the wall into which the further end of the gallery was built, it appeared that time or some other cause, had here and there displaced a stone or widened a crevice, so that with the aid of his rope, there could be little difficulty or danger in descending.

Having convinced himself of this, he fastened one end of the rope to an iron hinge of the broken door, which was close at hand, and carefully disengaging himself from the gallery, in due time reached the bottom. The first thing, however, that his foot encountered was a moveable substance, which was speedily broken by his pressure. On examination, he found a human skeleton lying in a position that plainly indicated its having fallen from above. The miser perceived this instantly, and felt a momentary qualm at his present situation, which was only relieved by the rope that he still held, and which he felt strangely unwilling to relinquish.



## CHAP. XIII.

THE persons who had concerned themselves in the history and antiquities of these ruins, would have paid Ralph Richards something considerable to have told all he knew of their subterranean apartments; that especially into which he had now entered would have greatly interested the sentimental virtuosi of the neighbourhood. It was a place of that kind, which was an important convenience a few ages ago, being a keep, or dungeon; an apartment provided for the reception of those who might be troublesome in any other situation.

It was clear, that the bones upon which the miser had set his foot, were the remains of one who had been imprisoned in this place. A large iron ring still encircled one wrist and one ancle. A chain composed of a few massy links remained hanging from

the opposite side, and the last link of the chain appeared to have been divided, by grinding it against a projecting angle of the wall, which bore evident marks of the operation. The hopes and fears that urged this attempt, and the vivid spark of joy that attended its success, were, doubtless, speedily extinguished by the fall, which had caused his death; a termination however, less terrible probably than the one that had been anticipated.

There was only one thing in this place that attracted the miser's attention particularly, and that was a small door, placed at some height in the wall, and to which a few narrow steps ascended.

It was, as might have been expected, firmly secured in its place by bolts, that could only be removed on the other side. It appeared to be one solid stone, fitted into, and hanging in a case or frame of iron, of sufficient strength to support its own enormous weight when it was opened. The miser sounded it with his knuckles repeatedly; but this experiment indicated the same degree of solidity as any part of

the wall, through which, therefore, it would have been equally easy to have carved a passage. He therefore descended the steps from this door, and taking his candle round the dungeon, carefully surveyed every part. There was, however, not the smallest vacancy or variation in the walls beside, nor was there any thing upon the floor but the dusty remains of what had probably been the prisoner's couch in one corner. Having made these observations, and remarked the height of the gallery above him, from which as has been mentioned, no means of descent were provided, the miser was convinced that this place was no otherwise connected with the object he had in view, than as it afforded a communication for a short space between the steps under the trap-door and the vaulted passage.

Feeling quite satisfied with this persuasion, he fastened the depending end of the rope to the hutch, which, like its owner, seemed to be formed of indestructible materials, being quite uninjured by its fall. He then achieved his ascent, though not without difficulty and frequent apprehensions of an

event which might add his bones to those of the skeleton beneath him. He, however, reached the gallery again in safety, when he drew up the box, with no further incident or impediment.

He had now to commence his labours in the narrow passage by proceeding to remove the earth and rubbish that obstructed it. There was a question, however, occurred at first starting, between his economy and his convenience, in which it required some resolution to determine in favour of the former: the point to be decided was, whether or not to allow himself a light.

Here was a very tedious operation to be performed in an uncouth subterranean passage, leading he knew not where, at rather an anxious distance from the surface of the earth; the communication with which lay over a narrow unprotected gallery, and subsequently ascended a most incommodious series of narrow steps, having the before-mentioned dungeon twenty feet below him. A chandelier with ten tiers of sconces, in this place, would have been scarcely sufficient to afford the illustration that he needed.

On the other hand, the business that he was about to commence, might occupy him a week, a month, or seven years, it was impossible to say which; but from the nature of the case it was not to be hoped that the mass which now filled the way could very speedily be disposed of. The constant use of a light during one week, would consume more candles than the miser could at any rate obtain his own consent to purchase; beside which, he could not hope to procure them without attracting an inconvenient degree of attention to his concerns. Again he reflected, that having gained the entrance of the passage he could not possibly lose his way or overshoot his mark; he thought moreover, that there would be no great difficulty in moving, filling, and emptying the chest, the contents of which the capacious dungeon below would conveniently receive, and by which means (though the thought did not occur to him as an inducement) the naked bones of its present inhabitant would receive decent burial. His reasoning powers therefore resolved unanimously, that it would be practicable and expedient to transact this

business, for the most part, without a light ; but that it would be desirable and allowable to use one occasionally.

Having come to this conclusion, which was arrived at in much less time than has been occupied in recording it, Ralph Richards deemed the commencement of his operations a fit occasion for the temporary assistance of the candle which was now lighted in his hand ; he therefore retained it at present and entered the passage, drawing the box slowly after him.

The air of this place was now so far improved, that no inconvenience was likely to arise to the miser from his continuance in it. This was an advantage of which, of course, he was quite ignorant, as he knew nothing of his recent peril. The only difference of which he was conscious was this, that his candle burned more clearly, and that the air was less offensive than before.

The old man heaved something like a sigh as he approached that part of the arch-way which obliged him to stoop, and afterwards to crawl upon hands and knees. Having reached the spot, he proceeded to fill his

hutch with the first loose fragments that presented themselves, and was concerned to perceive that the quantity it contained, though sufficient to make it very weighty and unwieldy, did not perceptibly diminish the mass from which it was taken.

He found upon actually commencing, that there were several practical inconveniences and impediments which he had not anticipated. The road was here so narrow that it was quite impossible for the chest to pass him in any way, consequently he was obliged to let it precede him, and then to reach over it at his arm's length whilst he filled it. When this was done, he found it needful to retrograde for a considerable distance, under which disadvantage it was by no means easy to make his loaded vehicle follow him. In time, however, he drew it to that part of the passage which permitted him to take the other side of it, when he was able to push it before him. At last he reached the end of his journey, when he precipitated the contents of his box into the dungeon; but for which convenience he must have borne it up the steps into the vault, and

perhaps ultimately have taken it to the surface, a labour that would have given quite another aspect to his undertaking.

Having completed this first journey and made himself acquainted with the measures to be adopted in the next, and after taking a most minute survey of the exact spot at which he was to rid himself of his load, every motion requisite for which he deeply impressed upon his memory, our economical and resolute hero extinguished his light.

There was now only one of the five points through which the mind, by means of the body, is capable of being apprized of external circumstances, that could be of any available benefit to the miser, which was the sense of feeling; so that in this respect as well as in his employment, he bore a greater analogy than usual to that species of worms amongst which misers are by moralists usually classed.

It was, he found, a pure effort of memory, as soon as the light was extinguished, to inform him which part of the passage lay inwards and which outwards, and there be



some puzzle-brained geniuses, who might have made a fatal error in the decisions upon this important point. Not so Ralph Richards. He remembered distinctly, that the dungeon was on his right hand, and that his course must now be directed to his left. Thither, therefore, he groped his way, and at length was informed by his further progress being suddenly checked, that he had arrived at the right place.

He soon found that it would take more than twice the time to fill his box in the dark than it had occupied him with a light; for the earth and fragments which he removed did not all enter the chest, but some fell on one side, owing partly to the inconvenient position in which he was obliged to operate; nevertheless, he obtained a load at last and proceeded on his way.

They who have observed an ant tugging at a grain of earth, or food, in the narrow passage leading to its habitation, may form a pretty correct idea of the miser's labours in the present instance; but as that industrious insect is urged by natural instinct to the accomplishment of a useful purpose,

and the miser is impelled to his task by the absurd requirements of a disordered brain, the comparison is greatly in favour of the former.

When the old man had reached that part of the way which allowed him to rise, he slackened his pace, and at the first moment of anticipating the dungeon, placed himself between it and his load, thinking thus to feel the part where the precipice commenced, lest otherwise his lading, cart, and all, should descend. But upon second thoughts, he resumed his former situation, and e'en permitted the hutch to precede him and take its chance, since in case of an accident it would probably take less injury than himself.

He therefore drove his sledge before him; but with so much care and hesitation towards the last, that it scarcely moved an inch at each impulse. He knew that this was the most hazardous part of the business to be transacted in the dark, and was not without considerable anxiety for the result of this first experiment. He therefore halted when he imagined that the end could not be far distant, and prudently extended his hands

along the floor as far as he could reach, but could feel no termination whatever. In this way he proceeded, expecting his journey's end long before he arrived at it. At last, however, when he began to imagine that the passage had been supernaturally lengthened, a sudden tilt of his vehicle informed him that it was high time to direct its motions.

This was a very delicate operation to be performed under such circumstances; for the chest with its contents was so heavy, that it required a great effort to guide and retain it when off its balance, in doing which it was as much as he could do to preserve his own. Had both been to descend, the business might have been very speedily accomplished; but this would have materially disconcerted the miser's arrangements. In due time he heard the rubbish begin to rattle upon the dead man's bones, and took all imaginable care, that the *living* man's should not rattle among them.

There would be little more amusement in attending our hero through his present undertaking than while carving his way

through the flag-stone. We shall therefore take it for granted that he has not been idle, if we observe the progress of his labours when for his own information he employs a candle occasionally as he proposed.

At the end of the first day, or rather at the end of the first fast (for day and night were pretty nearly alike to him here), he produced a light and examined his work. He then observed that he had cleared about a yard of the passage, by nearly fifty journeys.

As he was making his observations, and applying the candle closely to every part of the ruins before him, for which purpose he had introduced his head into the furthest nook that was capable of receiving it, he was a little startled by the slight but sudden pressure of something that touched his shoulder behind. The miser started up and looked about him, but there was neither any thing, nor any body, to be seen; indeed, he thought it highly improbable that there should be, and seeing no cause, began to doubt the fact, and endeavoured to persuade

himself that he had been deceived ; for he who will believe nothing but what he can immediately account for, must sometimes discredit his own senses. Ralph Richards therefore resumed his examinations,—until darkness, death, and the grave, seemed at once to have closed upon him ; for a large mass of the now unsupported earth from above, suddenly descended upon his back ; of which event, the previous fall of a small portion had given him timely but ineffectual warning.

It happened upon this, as it frequently does upon similar emergencies, when wit and reason fail or have no time to operate, that nature or instinct, assisted by a momentary but prodigious increase of galvanic impulse, made a Herculean effort, which accomplished more than an hour's labour and consideration would probably have effected ; for the miser had the satisfaction to find, after a most tremendous struggle, that he had fairly achieved his own disinterment.

This was worth doing ; and the feeling of complacency with which he reflected upon

this happy event, far exceeded what he would have experienced had he unearthed a silver sign-post or a golden lion.

He perceived on arranging his locks and shaking the dust from his ears, that the incomprehensible accumulation of spirally involved bandages which he usually wore upon his head, had, together with his candle, in the press of business, been left behind. Since, however, fate had cast their lot in that obscurity for a season, he felt little disposed to murmur at the temporary separation which prevented his sharing it with them. Nevertheless, the detention of his wig was not altogether a thing to which he would have acceded had he been consulted; for beside that it was exceedingly doubtful whether his wardrobe could supply any article that would readily become a substitute, there were valuables folded within it, (to say nothing of what was tucked under it), of value sufficient to have maintained him for more than a century. He however had no doubt of regaining it ultimately, and determined to run all hazards for that purpose; so that this circumstance was the best pos-

sible security for his re-appearance, though he had little idea half an hour before, that he should be so suddenly and closely confined, and be compelled to find bail on his liberation in so large an amount.

The old man found on beginning to move, that his back had not been so fitted to his burthen, as to prevent it from feeling stiff and uneasy in many places. A considerable portion of terreous matter had entered and still remained in his mouth, and some angular fragments of building materials had inconveniently insinuated themselves between himself and his drapery.

Altogether he felt strongly disposed to visit the upper regions; for light and fresh air seemed to him more desirable just then than they usually were. For this purpose he crept along the passage and the gallery, ascended the steps and entered the upper vault, all which movements had now become familiar, and proceeded to the surface. But here was a most confounding puzzle ready for him, and one that made him fear that his brains had been left behind, or turned upside down in the late scuffle; for

whereas, on raising his head above ground, he expected to enjoy the gratuitous blessings of broad day-light, there was nothing but the most pitchy darkness to envelope his astonished poll.

That he had fairly emerged, was proved by a keen breeze that swept over his wigless pate. Either therefore his chronology was strangely at fault, and instead of being day it was really night, or he had gone blind, a misfortune that he imagined could scarcely have taken place without his knowledge.

Matters being in this state, he very meekly groped his way down again, uncertain whether he was blind or not, whether it was noon or midnight, only persuaded of this, that he could not see. He determined, however, as soon as might be, to prove this point, for which purpose he made his way to the tinder-box, and urged the well-fought pugilistic combat between flint and steel, the result of which gave him more satisfaction than if he had staked and obtained two-pence on the issue.

Having obtained a light, and being



convinced by his capability of beholding it, that day-light was not yet published, he thought he might as well examine the place from which he had recently escaped.

He was concerned to perceive that a mass of earth and stones had fallen, the removal of which would probably occupy him many weeks before he could reach the spot at which he had commenced his operations.

There was now another feature in the business, and rather a more awkward one than any that he had before discerned, since at first he had anticipated only labour, but now, there was not a little danger connected with it; for there was nothing to prevent a similar or a larger quantity from descending in future, from which he might not find it so easy to disengage himself.

## CHAP. XIV.

IF any species of difficulty had been capable of making the miser relax his endeavours for the discovery of the treasure which he had the best reason to believe was concealed in these dungeons, that which was the most nearly related to personal peril would undoubtedly have been the most likely to do so; and it cannot be denied, that the contemplation of the matter before him considerably lessened the power of those motives which had hitherto urged him to proceed.

How far these considerations might have influenced him had it not been for his jewelled peruke, it is impossible to say. The recollection of this, however, put every fear to flight, and he determined to dig it out, let the pains or perils be what they might.

With this view he set himself resolutely to work as before, filling and emptying his chest, until he had cleared the passage as far as the arch over-head remained entire. When he had done this, he sent an enquiring glance into the chasm above, which had been heretofore occupied by the mass that had descended. It was a most uncouth looking void, extending he knew not how far, nor could he tell whether the next substance that might arrive would be earth, or the foundations of the superincumbent building. He saw therefore the necessity of providing some adequate shelter in case of falling weather, and for this purpose once more left the lower for the upper regions.

He had now the pleasure of perceiving that the dawn had arrived, which enabled him to rectify his notions to true time; although he found some difficulty in thus forcibly annihilating the ideas of five or six hours, which he had erroneously imagined should have preceded that event.

It had often been regretted by those who visited these ruins with antiquarian eyes,

that some execrable barbarian had been suffered to erect a shed against the most interesting part of the structure; thereby presenting a hideous assemblage of barrel-staves, faggot-poles, and old boards of all sorts, surmounted by the sweepings of a farm-yard, instead of the most majestic and beautiful specimen of ancient architecture that was to be seen in the county. It was beside, particularly lamented that the greater part of the noble and richly ornamented gate-way was thus hidden, leaving only one pier of the arch visible on the outside.

Now it was strange, that seeing this unhappy shed was an object of such unlimited abuse, and that it had been long since deserted by even the gipsy nags that were its latest tenants, no one, gentle or simple, had hitherto possessed public spirit enough to pull it down; although every stake, stick, and straw of which it was composed, might have been simultaneously prostrated by hooking a horse to one corner.

But of all birds in the air, or rather of all worms in the earth, Ralph Richards, the

miser, seemed the person least likely to undertake this business. He, however, is the man to whom the public are indebted for the denudation of this wall and gateway; for he had this shed in his eye at the moment of leaving the dungeons, and therefore probably for his own convenience, destined its removal.

The moment that he found some old boards and planks would be requisite, he recollected where they might be obtained, and determined without scruple to appropriate as many of the materials of which this hovel was constructed, as might suit his occasions. However, as he was afraid of exciting remark, he commenced by abstracting such parts as were least in sight, and not essential to the support of the rest; for it was not until long after he had withdrawn the last board needful for his purpose, that the shed weakened by these means of itself descended.

It was not without some trouble, that the miser contrived to detach these fragments, and to introduce them to the place in which they were wanted; but this was easy indeed, compared with the labour of cutting,

shaping, and adjusting them, so as to form a security above, similar to that afforded by the arch. He was, of course, obliged to continue these props and planks as far as his excavations appeared to render them necessary; and this, to the best of his judgment, was as often as his operations required him to protrude his head beyond the influence of those already fixed, and he had a peculiar kind of admonitory sensation in his conscious occiput, which duly apprized him when this was the case.

He continually made an inquiring thrust as he proceeded, after his cap and candle, which he was very anxious to meet with; but he was not quite aware of the quantity of earth still intervening, nor how much his progress was retarded by arranging and fitting the boards above him. However, after having employed himself almost unremittingly in this manner, for several days, he regained them safely; yet, notwithstanding his constant solicitude on their account, they were very near being turned into the dungeon with a load of the earth that had contained them.

Had these articles been abandoned to their fate by our hero, and had they been discovered in a succeeding age by an ingenious and learned virtuoso, they would doubtless have given rise to some still more sagacious conjectures, than any that had before been hazarded upon these curious ruins. The cap would have required consideration. Being found beneath the ruins of an English structure it could scarcely have been the nest of a phoenix or of a griffin; more probably some article of dress, or intended for some domestic use;—*quare*, a skull-cap or a strainer; a peruke or a colander;—the shape might indicate the first, but the feculent residuum, would suggest an idea of the second; or possibly—probably—*certainly*, it was used occasionally for both, according to that old incomprehensible rhyme, which happily includes cap, candle, and colander, in a few words:—

For he as many a wife can tell,  
 Did run a merry rig;  
 His pottage, stirred with a *candell*,  
 He strained through his wig.

This brilliant and undeniable illustration of

these hitherto inexplicable lines, was however unhappily prevented, by the miser himself finding his cap and candle, and appropriating them to the use for which he well knew they were intended, and having examined the folds of this trusty envelope, he once more placed it upon his head.

So strong is the power of association in the mind, or the idea of a place is so intimately and so permanently connected with the idea of an event which occurred there, that the situation will recal the circumstance with nearly the same sensations, as those experienced at the time it happened. Thus dogs will yelp on passing a spot impressed upon their memory by a sound horse-whipping; no wonder then, that the miser had some displeasing sensations on perceiving the nook into which his head had been thrust when the earth closed over him, for he had now arrived at the spot where he had been so suddenly overwhelmed: he therefore, of course, took all imaginable care to prevent the recurrence of so awkward an accident, by making good his wooden securities above him.



As the greater part of this laborious work was productive of no incident whatever, it may be sufficient to observe, that he pursued it with little intermission, until he had removed the earth and had arrived at a mingled mass of bricks and stones, similar to that which first presented itself to his notice. Finding here some little difficulty in working his way through with his hands, he forced his shovel against the obstruction, for the purpose of loosening some small portions more effectually, when they very suddenly retired, at the same time that another mass descended from above; but which however, passed quickly out of sight, and left a very considerable opening for the miser's accommodation. But he withdrew upon this occasion as speedily as he could retrograde through the long wooden tube that he had constructed, having good reason to congratulate himself, that he had not ventured his skull one inch beyond the shelter that his planks afforded.

## CHAP. XV.

IT was upon the twentieth day of the third month from the time Ralph Richards removed the first chest full of earth and stones from this passage, that he removed the last; an undertaking to the magnitude of which, the aspiring mountain in the dungeon, bore ample testimony; indeed the distance of the summit from the gallery was now so inconsiderable, that a fall from it would be by no means so objectionable as heretofore.

The old man having thus completed the removal, or rather the perforation of the intervening mass, there was no apparent objection to his entering, and availing himself immediately of the opening which he had laboured so hard to accomplish: yet there was something far from tempting in the appearance of it; especially when

connected with the late rapid movement and disappearance of the mass, in the unknown gulf beyond.

The miser peered through it with that kind of suspicious curiosity with which a monkey would look through a telescope, or with which one might cast an eye down a gun-barrel; or with that indication of caution visible in the countenance of a terrier dog, whilst holding his lately-bitten nose before a rat-hole. I say, that the miser peeped through this tube with the same kind of curiosity, suspicion, and caution as any of these, and at the same time he watched the narrow field of vision at the further end, with as much inquisitive earnestness, for the appearance of any opaque body passing across it, as if he had been expecting a transit of Venus; because he well knew, that the transit, or rather the junction of any of these bodies with his own orb, would be to him the most important event that could occur in nature.

However, after the most careful observation and consideration, Ralph Richards determined to proceed through this Tartarean

turnpike, though uncertain at present what the toll might be. He therefore introduced his body slowly and silently, listening with attention for any audible indications of danger; for he was quite aware that the wooden case which now contained him, would become his coffin by a trifling alteration of structure arising from external circumstances.

With these apprehensions, he wormed his way for a distance that was equal to about three times his length, when a large gloomy aperture presented itself. This was the part through which some heavy body had recently descended from unknown vaults above, to equally unknown dungeons beneath. Here, therefore, his greatest peril commenced, and here the wooden props, his only protection ended. No wonder then, that this cautious old man spent as much time in deliberation at this end of the tube, as he had at the other; for his advance seemed to be hazardous, and his retreat might be doubtful.

It appeared that the arch of the passage had given way in consequence of the partial

failure of a much larger one connected with it, which spanned the gloomy apartment that was now before the miser. His light just enabled him to perceive that the vault above was depressed by this failure, on one side, but that it still supported itself, and probably also some immense superincumbent weight. He next directed his eye downwards; his candle, however, gave him no information as to the depth beneath him; but upon closely examining the wall immediately under the opening, he discerned a series of narrow steps. Once more he cast an enquiring glance above and below him, but nothing more was to be seen than has been described. He listened, but nothing was to be heard. His candle, which burned vividly enough, indicated a slight progression of the air, by the inclination of the flame towards the part he occupied. This last circumstance gave rise to a number of surmises in his mind, none of which, however, were satisfactory.

At last he obtained his own consent, and issued from the passage, trusting himself upon these long forsaken stairs, thinking it possible

that he might find the treasure at their foot. Not exactly so; at the bottom, another passage opened before him, which, having no door, the miser entered, and proceeded along it in a straight direction for about twenty paces, when two ways suddenly presented themselves, each, at the entrance, similar to the other in every respect, and glancing aside with the same degree of obliquity.

Here therefore was a point for consideration, and he immediately called a council of all his wits, for an opinion upon the subject. These two ways were divided by a plain circular pillar of large dimensions, which rose straight up to a considerable height, and then spread into arches over-head. In the face of this column, or that part which first met his eye, was inserted a large stone in the form of a shield, upon which were deeply engraven many curious heraldic devices, under which was a copious Latin inscription; the whole surmounted by a most ingeniously constructed monogram. All this was quite uninteresting and unintelligible to the miser; yet as he had reason to suppose that a guide to the treasure was here pro-

vided, he continued his examinations, in the hope of perceiving something that might give him a hint in his researches. The only thing however, that he could comprehend at all, was a small figure in one corner, representing a man winding up a bucket from a well. As this, unimportant as it seemed, was nevertheless more plain than any thing beside, he bestowed more attention upon it, and on holding his candle close, discerned that the bucket in form resembled an earthen vase. This, without the interpretation of the inscription, furnished but scanty information, and little food for conjecture. All that the miser could resolve upon from it was this; that if he obtained a vase from a well, he would undoubtedly examine its contents.

Having nothing to guide him in deciding which of the two ways before him was the right one; he determined to try one first, for a short distance, and then the other, that he might judge for himself which was the most eligible. Accordingly he proceeded a few steps along that to the right hand; this however soon became so low, narrow, and

even rugged, requiring at the same time the inconvenient position upon hands and knees, that he presently resolved to return and try the other. He found, as he advanced in this passage, that it preserved the same dimensions as at the entrance, so that he continued his course without either crawling or even stooping. He perceived farther on, that the walls assumed a slight curve, which, however, turned aside more rapidly every step. The miser imagined at first, that he was on the outside of some large circular apartment, into which this path would conduct him. But at last it turned so quickly round, that he thought he had arrived at the column before-mentioned; but this idea soon vanished, for in a few more steps he found himself on the inner side of this circular wall, and suddenly a narrow arched door-way stood before him, which he immediately entered. Here the passage lessened considerably in width, and performed apparently a complete circle, when a door-way appearing, exactly corresponding with that just mentioned, the miser concluded it must be the same: he therefore turned about, intending to retrace



his steps, but unconsciously entered, as he proceeded, another passage, which curled round itself, and presently terminated in a strangely convoluted apartment; the entrance to which was so constructed, that it was hardly possible to recognize it as such, when it had been once lost sight of. After having again performed what appeared to be a complete circle, our revolving hero arrived at that which he conceived to be this door, but was confounded on perceiving that it conducted him to an angular termination of the passage, occasioned by the sudden intersection of these spiral walls.

With some alarm the miser again turned back; but nothing that now met his eye seemed to be what he had seen before. The door-way which presently stood before him had so uncouth an appearance, being placed obliquely in the wall, that he was convinced he could never have been through it; he therefore passed on, and entering an archway before mentioned, pursued the windings to which it had then introduced him, and once more found himself at the angular intersection of the walls.

It was now sufficiently plain that these complex ways had been designed for the purpose of detaining any one who should enter them without the clue; a purpose which seemed to be entirely accomplished in the case of our bewildered hero, who now hurried with desperate and heedless steps, round and round these circling paths, perpetually advancing and returning to the same spot again.

His candle was now nearly consumed; his knees trembled under him; a cold perspiration settled upon his brow, and his perilous adventures would no doubt here have been terminated, had not the hand of time defeated the intentions of those who constructed these labyrinths; for the wall had in one place fallen outwards, and thereby a considerable breach was occasioned. This the miser entered immediately upon perceiving it, careless whither it conducted him. It opened into a low, roughly-hewn passage, pointing alike to the right and left, and as the old man had lost all ideas of the relative situation of these walls, he waited not to consider, but turned to the left.

He had proceeded about a dozen steps, when the way suddenly widened, and ended in a circular pit of moderate depth, the sides of which were accurately formed of hewn stones. One glance was sufficient. Quick as lightning the conviction darted through the mind of the miser, that here was the treasure; and with the speed of a thunderbolt he descended upon it, reckless of limbs or of life; for danger and death itself were to him, at this instant, trifles.

Of the miser's sensations nothing can be said, but that they extinguished for a time every other perception of mind or body; for his eyes failed to apprise him at the moment, that he was in utter darkness.

## CHAP. XVI.

THE man who was drowned by his own request in a butt of malmsey, experienced probably sensations analogous to those of our miser when the real nature of his situation forced itself upon his mind. The flood of delight which first overwhelmed him, quickly savoured of uneasiness, and immediately after filled his soul with horror and despair.

His candle having failed him, it was not to be hoped, that the escape which he could not effect while it lasted, could be accomplished without its assistance. His doom, therefore seemed to be fixed, and so it was undoubtedly; for which reason he must needs have emerged, had the planet Jupiter been crumbled to atoms over him; for he that is born to be hanged, will never be drowned; and he that is to starve

by his own choice, will never be starved by necessity. The destinies therefore that helped him into this place, were obliged to help him out; to whose good offices it should seem, rather than to his own exertions it was owing, that our buoyant hero tumbled out of this well, (which however was not deep) with nearly as much alacrity as he had lately tumbled in; when finding, after two or three attempts at progression on various sides, that his head encountered a stone wall; he felt round with his hands, and at last protruded his night-foundered noddle in that only direction that allowed it to advance.

Happily for him, he was now in a situation like a beetle in a bone, where he could neither turn nor miss his way; he therefore proceeded to the best of his ability, on this new and important expedition of discovery; having little hope however, that day-light would again bless his eyes. But the narrow walls that had heretofore perplexed him, were now his most invaluable guides. In process of time this passage ended, and he found himself in a large void place, rendered

slightly visible, by slender but brilliant streams of light, which issued obliquely from a narrow fissure at a great height above him.

More precious even to the miser, were these fine threads of day, than bars of gold or silver would have been at that moment. Had not his eyes been recently enveloped in such painful darkness, they would have been able to distinguish nothing in this place; it was however to him, comparatively light and clear, so that he instantly perceived, upon leaving the passage, that it was one of the two ways which presented themselves at first, on either side of the bulky pier bearing the inscription, which was now beside him. It was only when the sun shone strongly, that any light pervaded this dismal vault; it was therefore entirely dark when he before entered it; but he could now without his candle, distinctly perceive the large broken arch, doubtfully supporting itself over head, which he had before observed.

Ralph Richards wanted no one to tell him that he was now out of danger, and that the passage which led *from* the treasure,

led also *to it*. He would, it is probable, instantly have returned, had not the slender shreds of light been suddenly withdrawn, by which means the blackest midnight once more surrounded him. As he did not think it advisable to incur the hazard of perambulating in the amusing labyrinths to which the next step might again conduct him, he postponed his intentions, and with the next perceptible glimmer from above, gained the steps leading to the passage he had cleared, of which enough has been said.

Having procured a candle from his diminished store, and applied a match to it, he once more sought these deadly dungeons, an expedition however in which we must again accompany him, or remain for ever ignorant of the result of his labours.

Nothing would be easier than to suppose, that in this last journey to take possession, some ponderous mass closed over him, or some hidden gulf opened under him; such may have been the end of many adventurers in fact and in fiction, but such was not the end of Ralph Richards the Miser. He

gained the pit in which the treasure was deposited without difficulty, or even inconvenience, and with a good candle, nine inches long, in his hand; nor was the air amiss, owing to the fissures in the wall mentioned before. Moreover, he found, that steps were provided for the descent into this well, of which he knew nothing at first. Should any, therefore, feel at all curious to know what the miser obtained, they may without danger attend him, and look over his shoulder. Time had very accommodatingly removed the covering from the mouth of this pit, which remained in various fragments below. Our hero having disposed of these, witnessed a sight that might almost have justified those extravagant lines,

Ineffable amazement seize us!

Speak not of Solomon or Cræsus—

Doubtless the gods have pawned their plate,  
Aurora pledged her golden gate!

Here Plutus, mortgagee, did toss it;

Who shows at last, his secret closet:

Compelled, no doubt, by blows and gags,

Thus to reveal his secret bags!

But to be more particular. Cups, basins,



sconces, vases, spoons, plates, dishes, bracelets, chains, censers, rosaries, crosses, images, chalices;—implements, and jewels of all sorts, civil, sacred, and military, of solid gold and silver, were here thrown down in heedless confusion, evidently in a moment of desperate hurry and alarm.

The miser knew not what either to think or do. He took up as many as he could grasp; thrust them under his arms; laid them down again; inclosed a parcel in his drapery; looked round; again replaced them; knelt upon them; sat down upon them; spread his coat over them, and listened; grinned, muttered, turned round and round, and could scarcely breathe. But these promiscuous articles were trifles. Willing to see to what depth they continued, he withdrew them from one side, and piled them up on the other. He then perceived earthen jars beneath, standing as thick as loaves in a baker's oven. Jars which the miser would almost have wept for joy to have had filled with half-pence, were here stored to the brim with coins of gold: his utmost strength could scarcely raise one of

these pots. He expected to wake, rubbed his eyes, and shook himself; but no—it was not a vision in sleep; for he would never have dreamed of burning a candle. There was then, perhaps, a short space of time during which he felt something like happiness; it was however but a short space; for within ten minutes of their greatest elevation, his spirits were as much depressed as ever. The mind, like a thermometer, is maintained at a certain height, by causes upon which accidental circumstances have little influence. They raise or sink it, sometimes violently at the instant of their application; but themselves gradually acquiring the temperature of the surrounding medium, the feelings at length, settle nearly at the same point again. Nevertheless the mind is capable of *permanent* elevation and depression, the causes of which, however, are happily, more at its own disposal.

But it was not exactly upon this principle, at present, that Ralph Richards felt little more happiness, and nearly as much uneasiness, as during many of his very awkward bodily perils and mental quandaries; for

quickly a tremendous load of care weighed upon his mind: care, the alloy of gold, being specifically as heavy as gold itself; so that his positive good was balanced by positive evil, which rendered him as unhappy while racking his brains for some method of removing and securing the treasure before him, as he was whilst devising means for clearing away and disposing of the rubbish that obstructed the passage.

In this enviable state of mind our hero stood, knee deep in gold and silver, of which no one was disputing the possession with him. His candle, however, at length admonished him, that something must speedily be done. He therefore determined to remove the treasure as expeditiously as possible, to the vault containing the coffins before mentioned during the day; and to convey it thence to his own dwelling by night.

He now proceeded to dispose as many of those valuables about his garments as they would contain, ingeniously arranging the variously shaped implements in the variously shaped receptacles of his apparel.

When he had thus loaded himself to the utmost, he perceived an article of still larger dimensions at his feet, than any he had yet seen. This was a thing of which the miser knew not the design, but supposed it to be the lid of a boiler. It was, however, a silver shield, richly embossed, though not the *ægis* of Minerva, or it would have furnished him with wit enough to have made a tray of it for the other articles. The old man eagerly grasped this, and several others which it had covered, until he resembled an emblematical figure of Europe, or a pawn-broker making his escape in a fire, with such articles of value as came first to hand. He, however, found upon attempting to move, that it would be needful to exonerate himself of one-half his load, before he could gain the upper regions in safety: his own volitions being entirely counteracted by the free agency of his self-moving drapery, which swagged from side to side in a way that compelled our hero to do the same, as a man with the pendulum-bob of the church-clock in his pocket, invo-

luntarily imitates the motion to which it has been accustomed.

The miser therefore was compelled to unload, and resumed a smaller quantity; with this he proceeded by the usual route, and carefully deposited it at the further end of the upper vault; then, returning to the well, he repeated the process.

It, however, occupied him longer to empty this pit of gold, than to complete many of the laborious operations which he had undertaken to obtain it; for the narrow ways through which he had to pass, particularly that which he had himself cleared, and the inconvenient steps that he had to ascend, allowed of little addition to his own size and weight. It will be believed, however, that the perseverance which penetrated the block of stone and the obstructed passage, would not be likely to fail him in removing the treasure.

This employment being rather barren of incidents, it will be sufficient to state, that in process of time the miser arrived at a substance, for the removal of which he felt no

inducement, it being the bottom of the well. Yet here he employed himself an incredible time, scratching, picking, and even digging for any thing that might still be hidden. At length, however, he cleared it so satisfactorily, that he would not have grudged Dame Trudge a lodging there, and would even have helped her in, if needful.

The apartment of the dead, into which he had conveyed the treasure, was now furnished in a manner that few apartments of the living could equal. The fountain of gold, was now a mountain of gold, by the side of which stood thirty or forty earthen jars filled with the same enchanting metal.

The miser capered about it, like a cannibal round a roasting enemy, rubbing his hands, and grinning from ear to ear. Nevertheless, his mouth frequently diminished to a scarcely perceptible line, as the possibility of discovery crossed his brain, upon which the idea of his formidable foe, the old woman, was so strongly imprinted, that he more than once imagined he saw her at the opening above, and actually seized the impressive tipstaff which had served so well

upon a former occasion. That, however, was a dose that needed not to be repeated. The witch felt so thoroughly persuaded, that it was supernaturally administered (and what else could she think?), that she never again wandered within many a yard of that memorable spot, and was very well contented to leave the miser alone, concluding that if she was not permitted to look, he would scarcely be permitted to dig.

It now only remained for him to remove the treasure to his own residence—an operation however, which he dreaded as much, as if he had been obliged to transport it red hot in his hands. The apprehension of being seen, made the idea of day-light a misfortune to him, and every human being a foe, and fervently he wished that all eyes were out but his own.

However, as not a rat or a toad saw the less clearly for this wish, he resolved that only in the blackest darkness that midnight afforded, would he attempt it; nor hazard one atom of gold while a ray lingered in the horizon, or wandered from a star. Under these circumstances this bird of night deter-

mined to feather his nest, hoping that if ever a ghost appeared, to keep guard upon these grounds, they would (seeing they had allowed him to discover the treasure), aid him in the removal of it.

“ The iron tongue of time had performed its long dirge in the attentive ear of night,” before our hero could prevail upon himself to commence his labours. At length, however, he raised his head from the vault, and turned it in all directions. It was dark enough, for he could not have distinguished a horse-chesnut from a chesnut-horse, had they been before him. Being, therefore, pretty well satisfied, he once more ducked his head under; and having made the most judicious arrangement of as much gold about his person as he deemed it prudent to carry at one time, he emerged, and completed his journey in safety, by feeling his road as on former occasions.

In this manner, during the darkest part of nearly two hundred nights, the miser conveyed the whole of the treasure to his own dwelling, accomplishing thereby a dis-



tance of nearly five hundred miles upon his hands and knees.

Having thus attended our hero during all his perilous adventures, for the discovery of this well-hidden treasure; and having, moreover, seen him safe home with it, there remains little more to be said concerning him, and probably few will regret dropping the acquaintance. It would be neither instructive nor amusing to dwell long upon his uneasy apprehensions for the safety of his newly-acquired wealth, or to notice particularly the various measures that he adopted for its security; all this may be very readily imagined. There is, however, one little circumstance touching these arrangements, which it may be as well to mention, since it was more satisfactory to his own mind than any other, and gives rather a peculiar aspect to his former labours. It was merely this: that after having vainly racked his brain for some scheme that should completely agree with his ideas of security, running about with it, like a crow with a worm in his mouth, from place to place, from one re-

tirement to another, harassing body and mind, until almost in despair: it suddenly occurred to him that the well beneath the old ruins was exactly suited to his purpose.

Under cover, therefore, of a few more dark nights, he crawled a few more hundred miles, and at length had the satisfaction of safely bestowing the last particle of the treasure in this trust-worthy concealment, where it doubtless remains,—the property of any one, whose ideas of *possession* correspond with those of Ralph Richards the Miser.

THE END.