I have said that a thick fog had fallen over that part of Nature's face on which stands the city of London. This remark I am sensible, exposes me to the inconvenience of being asked what part or particular feature of Nature's face it is which the aforesaid city occupies. But in order to forestall any such inquiries, I do hereby openly acknowledge that I am wholly at a loss to answer them with any degree of certainty; but if I may be allowed to venture a guess on so difficult a subject, I should say, it most certainly be the upper lip For how otherwise is it possible to account for the dust, dirt, and dinginess with which London is eternally besmutted? But grant that it stands on the upper lip—and only suppose, further, that Dame Nature is, like most other ancient Dames, a snuff taker, and not a cleanly one and the thing is explained at once—'tis as plain as a pike-staff. Nay, by heavens! ' it is much plainer,'—' 'tis as plain,' may it please your Grace of Wellington, ' as the nose on your face.

My friend Withering is a natural philosopher—by which I mean a philosopher naturally, and not by acquired habits. He knows that the great sum of human misery is made up by the continual addition of small items—that these items are the taxes which we are called upon to pay to the King of kings for the protection which he affords us, and for the countless blessings which he is continually showering down upon us. He knows, moreover, that, let us grumble as we will, pay them we must—so my friend pays them cheerfully. He knows, too, that the sum of human happiness does not chiefly consist of high excitement and momentary transports—but of the quiet enjoyment of things as they are—so my friend takes the world as he finds it. He walks through life with a composed step—neither turning to the right, in order to gallop after the will-wi'-the-whisps, with which the beckoning devil, temptation, lights up the marshes and quagmires of life, nor is he frightened away to the left by the hobgoblins of fanaticism—but holds on his way as nearly in a straight line as he can, content to gather by the way side here a flower and there a flower.

On the present occasion, however, I found my friend's equanimity thrown a little off its centre. On inquiring into the cause of the musing dejection in which I found him absorbed, he addressed me as follows:—" You must remember to have often heard me mention the name of a very old and dear friend, who died some ten years ago. His name was Hammond. When he died he was a widower, and left behind him an only daughter. His little Maria was the apple of her poor father's eye, and on his death-bed he besought me to keep a parent's watch over her till I saw her settled in life. After the funeral of her father, Maria was sent to reside with a maiden aunt, and shortly after that event was conveyed to a respectable boarding-school of my own choosing. At this school she almost immediately formed an intimate acquaintance with a Miss Melton—on interesting child of her own age, and the daughter of highly respectable parents. They became at once school-cronies. They walked always together—sat always next each other at the desk and at the dining-table—slept together—and each spent one half of the holidays at the house of the other. During the whole time they remained together at school their friendship was never broken—but grew with their growth and strengthened with their strength. At length the time arrived for Miss Melton to leave school, and the two friends were parted. About twelve months after this, Miss Hammond also left school and returned to live with her aunt, when she learnt that Mr Melton had gone to reside in a distant part of the country.

" Not very long after Miss Hammond left school, her aunt fell into a bad state of health, and her medical attendants recommending her to try a change of air, she went to reside at the town of C———, taking of course her neice along with her. After having resided here about twelve months, she one day met in the street, leaning on the arm of a gentleman, her old friend Miss Melton—now, however, no longer Miss Melton, but Mrs. Remington. She had married, it seems, all parties happily consenting, only a few months previously, to Mr Remington, who was an attorney (and a most excellent man) in full practice at the town of C———. The old friendship was of course renewed, and from that time they were almost daily visitors at each other's houses. It was about this time that I received a letter from Maria's aunt, requesting to see me. When I arrived I found I had been summoned by the old lady in order to consult with her as to the propriety of allowing Maria to accept the addresses of a young gentleman who had made pretensions to her hand. I immediately set about making inquiries into his respectability, connexions, &c. and found him in all things an unexceptionable match. I do not mean to say that the young man was represented to me as an absolute saint; but all parties agreed in speaking of him as an honorable young man of promising talents. Having satisfied myself thus far, and having seen and conversed with him on the subject of his pretensions to Maria, he was formally permitted to visit my *protege* as her accepted suitor; and I returned to town. This gentleman's name was Charles Fenton. All things seemed now to ' work together for good.' I was delighted with my poor orphan's prospects; and had she *not been* an orphan—could I have congratulated my poor friend on the approaching happiness of his only and beloved daughter—we should have set our feet, at the same moment, and shaken hands together on the topmost step of human happiness.

Days, weeks, and months passed away, and our sky was still without a cloud. Fenton, however, became importunate with Maria, to name the wedding day, which was at last fixed. It was to be the sixth Saturday after Mrs Remington's confinement, which was expected to take place in the course of the current month. This was exacted by Maria in compliment to her friend, in order that she might be present at the ceremony. Maria was now almost constantly with Mrs Remington, assisting her in the various preparations for her approaching accouchement; and frequently sleeping at her house. On these occasions, Fenton of course went also to see Maria. It was in fact, at her friend's house, where Fenton had first seen Miss Hammond, for he had become acquainted with Remington, and had visited him on the most friendly footing, almost from the time of his marriage. One evening while Maria was sitting at work with Mrs Remington—rather late in the evening, for she intended to stay all night—Fenton knocked at the door. When he was admitted into the parlour where the ladies sat, it was instantly perceived that he had been drinking somewhat too freely. As this was, however, a circumstance of exceedingly rare occurrence, and as he was always at such times well-tempered and tractable, it occasioned no uneasiness in Miss Hammond, but was only treated by her as a matter of good-humoured raillery. On this occasion Fenton was so much excited, that Mr Remington insisted on his staying where he was all night; and soon after supper he was prevailed on to go to bed. As he was going up stairs, the maid following with a light, he suddenly stopped, and laughing as he did so, took off his coat, and giving it to the servant. ' Here,' said he, ' carry this into Maria's bed room.' The servant considering it as a mere drunken frolic or whim, did as she was ordered, and when she came down stairs, mentioned the circumstance, with a smile, to Miss Hammond. When Maria went into her bed-room for the night, the first thing she saw was Fenton's coat, spread out on the bank of a chair. ' What a ridiculous fancy!' said she, and then, without further notice, proceeded to undress and get into bed. It appears, however, continued my friend, with a forced smile, that although she took no further notice of the coat, either it or its owner was still uppermost in her mind; for she forgot to put out the light until she was in bed. As she rose again for this purpose, the coat again caught her eye, and it now for the first time occurred to her, that certainly Fenton must have had some motive in sending his coat into her room. She sat upright in the bed for a minute or two, with her eyes fixed on it, musing and wondering what that motive could be. Not being able to frame, however, any satisfactory conjecture, but still intent upon the subject, she once more lay down in bed, and once more discovered that she had again wholly forgotten the light When, however, she made this second discovery, she did not immediately get up and rectify the error, but lay for some time still pondering on the circumstance of the coat. At length she suddenly started up, exclaiming to herself, ' I'll lay my life Fenton has some present, or perhaps a letter, in his coat pocket for me; and has taken, in tipsy fun, this whimsical method of delivering it.' She got out of bed and went straight to the chair on which hung the object which had so much puzzled her. She had no sooner come within reach of it, however than she hesitated, and began to question the propriety of putting her hand into another's pocket. After a little pause—whether it was that she felt assured it was sent there by its owner for that very purpose, or whether it was the perfect innocence and simplicity of her intentions, or that she thought the whole affair altogether too ridiculous to be worth a moment's serious reflection, or whether, continued my friend with another sad smile, it was curiosity—whatever it was, it soon overcame her scruples, and laughing to herself, and putting her hand into one of the pockets, she withdrew from it, not one merely, but several letters, all with their seals broken. The idea of reading these letters, merely because, the seals being broken, she might do so undiscovered, never even presented itself to the delicate mind of Maria Hammond; but in lookihg at them one by one, in order to discover whether any of them were addressed to herself, she was struck with the strange fact, that the superscriptions were all evidently in the handwriting of her friend, Mrs Remington, and all addressed to Fenton. An indefinable misgiving came over her, and almost made her sick. The shadow of some impending evil fell upon her, the frightfulness of which was only so much the more appalling, that she had no distinct notion of its nature and extent. She longed to know the contents of the letters—perhaps the whole happiness of her life depended upon it—but she could not bring herself to read them: it was a trying moment—one by one she returned them slowly into his pocket, her eye dwelling on the superscription of each as she did so, till she came to the last. She paused—over and again the poor girl read the superscription—it was certainly her friend's writing—it was impossible to doubt it: she looked on the other side of the letter—the seal was quite unbroken—the paper was not even confined by having one of its folds slipped within the other—she could even see, where the edges gaped, a little of the writing within. It was not in human nature to resist the temptation—and, while her mind was in the act of reiterating its condemnation of the deed, her eyes, swimming in tears, were running over the contents of the letter. Poor Maria! she has not forgiven herself for that act of what she calls treachery, though so fully justified by the event, as far as events can justify an act—' but indeed,' said Maria, weeping most piteously, when she told me the circumstance, ' indeed I could not help it.'

When she had read the letter through, she let it fall on the floor, and taking another from the pocket, (for her mind was now too far bewildered to speculate on the nature of the act,) she read that also, and so on, till she had read them all, then sinking down upon a chair by the bed-side, she buried her face in the bed-clothes, and wept bitterly. The feeling that most oppressed her at that moment was not resentment, but a sense of desolation. There was not one of all those letters which did not, of itself, contain the most damning proofs of a long continued adulterous intercourse between the woman whom from childhood she had loved as her friend and the man whose vows of affection had so often and so lately mingled with her own: and who was on the point of becoming her husband ' If these,' said she, ' injure and betray me, who will love and protect me?' At length her mind having recovered somewhat of its tone, she rose, refolded the letters, and returned them all except one, to the pocket. She then got into bed to weep away the night. In the morning, before the family had risen, she dressed herself, and merely telling the servant she felt unwell, and that she was going home, left the house. To her aunt's enquiries she gave some evasive answer, for with a beautiful feeling of forbearance and compassion towards her who had wronged her, but who nevertheless she felt had wronged herself more, she had already determined to make no disclosure till she had recovered from the perils of her expected accouchement; perhaps not then, unless circumstances should compel her. In case Fenton should call, she desired the servant to say that she was ill, and could not see him. This indeed was perfectly true; for the poor girl was unable to leave her room for some days.

In the course of the day, on the morning of which she left her friend's house, Remington called to enquire after her. She saw him; but to all his enquiries she only answered with tears, and the reiterated expression: ' I am ill and low spirited, but shall soon be better.' I was sent for by her aunt, and pressed her to consult a physician, but this she steadily and absolutely refused to do. Fenton never once called—and there is no doubt that he, having missed one of the letters, guessed but too truly how matters stood. There was a young gentleman, whose name was Markham, who, being a friend of Remington and Fenton, had often met Miss Hammond at the house of the first. One day this gentleman called and requested to see Maria. He was admitted. He had heard nothing of Maria's indisposition, and was wholly unconscious of its cause. After a little general conversation, he told her that he had often wished to see her alone, and that he had come at last on purpose; ' for,' said he ' I think you ought to know that Fenton is in the habit of showing your letters about among his friends—which is, in my estimation, as I have often told him, a piece of conduct alike ungenerous and ungentlemanly. I own,' said he, ' that this seems something like intermeddling with matters which concern me not; and yet, by concealing the fact from you, I really did feel as though I should be guilty of a sort of misprison of treason against the united sovereignty of love and honour.' Maria did not seem so much surprised and offended as this as Markham expected. She merely said that it certainly was unhandsome conduct, but that there was nothing in her letters which might not be exhibited to the whole world; so the matter dropped. Shortly after Mr Markham took his leave. Soon after he was gone, however, it occurred to her that, perhaps, Fenton had exhibited *as hers*, the letters he had received from Mrs Remington, only concealing the signature. This thought overwhelmed poor Maria with confusion, and she instantly dispatched a note to Mr Markham, requesting to see him immediately. He came, and saved Miss Hammond the embarrassment of opening the business, by remarking at once that the handwriting of the note he had just received was nothing like the writing of those letters which Fenton had shown him among others, as having come from her. The truth was now clear. Fenton had shown Mrs Remington's letters, concealing the signature, and boasted of having received them from Miss Hammond. It now became necessary to her reputation, therefore, to tell the whole circumstances to Markham, which she did at once; for an honest and honourable pride had now mastered every other feeling. Without comment, Markham asked if she had secured the letters. She said she had retained one, in case it should become necessary to vindicate her future conduct towards Fenton and Mrs Remington. ' And have you taken no steps to bring this foul affair to light?' said he. She said she had not—that she had resolved not to stir in the matter, at all events, until after her unhappy friend's confinement, for fear of consequences—and not then, unless it were to vindicate her own reputation. ' But what can I do?' said the poor girl weeping; ' I cannot suffer it to be supposed that those vile letters were written by me!' ' Do!' said Markham, rising from his chair—' but no—give me that letter, and I will do it for you.' He then took the letter which Maria had concealed, and went straight to Remington's house. He found him alone; and after a short preface, told him the facts. The only answer he received from Remington was:

' It's a lie, by God!'

' My dear friend,' said Markham, ' I can easily understand your feelings, and therefore pass over that expression unnoticed—but it is all, believe me, too true.'

' Dare you confront my wife with that tale?'

' I will confront her immediately,' said Markham.

' They went up stairs into the drawing-room. Mrs. Remington was sitting at the table sewing. Markham repeated, in her presence, the principal facts. Mrs. Remington sewed on, with a dogged resolution, exhibiting no symptoms of concern, excepting that her fingers moved more quickly as the speaker went on. When he had nearly done, poor Remington started up, exclaiming, ' Helen! why do you not deny this foul calumny?'

' His wife sewed on, making no reply; and Markham, taking the letter from his pocket, gave it to Remington. He sat down, and opening it, began to read. At last, the iron hand, which had hitherto restrained his feelings, gave way, and he burst into tears. For one whole hour he sat weeping and sobbing, with the letter in his hand, in wordless anguish.—He was then taken to bed. Next morning Mrs. Remington was no where to be found; and yesterday the iron gates of a mad-house closed on poor Remington—perhaps for ever

' In this sad story,' concluded Withering, ' there are two remarkable circumstances—that of Fenton sending his coat into Maria's room—and that of her forgetting, not only once, but twice, to put out the light: for had she extinguished the light, the chances are a hundred to one that the discovery of this iniquitous transaction had not been made Shall we say that these circumstances only serve to show by what minute threads the most important accidents of life hang suspended—from what trivial causes the most stupendous effects often result—or would it be wiser to suppose, that circumstances like those mentioned