

A

PRACTICAL MAN.

AN ORIGINAL FARCE,

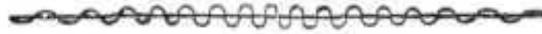
IN ONE ACT.

BY BAYLE BERNARD,

(Author of "His Last Legs," "The Boarding School," &c., &c.)

HAILES LACY,
17, WELLINGTON STREET, STRAND,
LONDON.

Produced at the Royal Lyceum Theatre, Saturday, Oct. 20, 1849.



Characters.

CLOUDSLEY (a Gentleman of imaginative tendencies).....	}	MR. CHARLES MATTHEWS.
HORTON (a Merchant).....	MR.	F. COOKE.
ROCKSTONE (a Solicitor).....		MR. GRANBY.
JENNINGS } (his Clerks).....	{	MR. HONNER.
BIGGS }	{	MR. KERRIDGE.
CLIENT.....	MR.	BURT.
MRS. MILDMAY.....		MRS. MACNAMARA.
SAVOYARD GIRL.....	MISS	BURBIDGE.

Male and Female Clients—Man with Organ.

Time in Representation—Forty-one Minutes.

Costume.

CLOUDSLEY. —Dark-coloured coat, bright buttons—light waistcoat and trousers, without straps—high shirt collar and fancy cravat—gossamer hat—gloves, and cotton umbrella.

HORTON.—An elderly gentleman's attire of the day.

ROCKSTONE.—Black frock coat—light waistcoat—dark trousers—white cravat.

BIGGS.—A seedy coat—trousers—cravat—no waistcoat or shirt visible.

MRS. MILDMAY.—A fashionable walking dress.

SAVOYARD.—Costume of an itinerant musician of the country.

A PRACTICAL MAN.



SCENE—ROCKSTONE'S *Offices at the West End,—a large apartment, with the usual business look, gloomy, dusty, and old-fashioned; bookcases and deed boxes line the walls, with maps and almanacs; a portrait of a chancellor over the fireplace; a square table R. C., another L. C., (with desk) heaped with papers, large arm chairs beside it; washing stand and jug, L. H. 2 E.; double desk at back, L. H.; table with papers, &c., R. H., a door opens on passage, L. H. 3 E.; another on room, R. H. 3 F.; an outer office at back, R. C. F. JENNINGS is discovered at table, R. H., writing. A LADY and GENTLEMAN seated at table, L. C, the latter with a newspaper.*

JEN. (*calling*) Biggs, nearly done ?

BIGGS. (*in outer office*) Only a line or two.

JEN. Almost the time—and they'll be here to a minute.

BIGGS. Ready directly.

JEN. What a lot of work really; seems to have doubled since our chief clerk's been ill.—If our governor wasn't a first-rate man of business he'd never get through it—In court all the morning—after that to a committee—and now two appointments—and council at chambers—besides meeting this gentleman—who hasn't yet come.—Oh! Mr. Rockstone.

ROCKSTONE *comes from R. H. door, and passes to L. H., followed by a CLIENT whom the LADY and GENTLEMAN join.*

ROCK. Quite right, my dear sir—if that clause isn't in it, the lease must be altered; so, if you could look in to-morrow—or shall we say Friday, if you like, at half-past eleven? Friday then be it. Good morning to you, madam.—Good morning, my dear sir.—Good morning, good morning, (*bowing them through L. H. door—he turns*) There—cleared the room—and now what's the time?—Long after one (*looks at his watch, and takes chair L. H., sitting down*), and at two I'm engaged. How very provoking! Jennings!—quite sure Mr. Cloudsley's not been ?

JEN. (R.H.) Quite, sir.

ROCK. (L.H.) Nor sent any message?

JEN. None, sir, that I have heard.

ROCK. Very provoking; hope he will come.

JEN. A friend of Mr. Wrangham's, sir?

ROCK. Yes, Jennings, yes ; my principal client.

JEN. A gentleman you are going to get some employment ?

ROCK. Well, I hope so; I'm trying—must oblige Mr. Wrangham. In addition to which his conduct's so handsome he actually offers me £500 if I will procure his young friend a genteel situation.

JEN. Five hundred pounds, sir

ROCK. And I'm happy to think I shall be able to serve him. I've something in view which appears just the thing, easy and gentlemanly, not to say dignified ; whilst my pleasure's increased by the fact that Mr. Cloudsley's a man of such talent—a person, it seems, who's adapted to anything.

JEN. Oh! he is, sir ?

ROCK. Yes, honourably connected, educated at Oxford, and been all over Europe—with only one drawback, a slight indecision.

JEN. Indecision, sir?

ROCK. Yes, a little want of practicality which Mr. Wrangham explains by his never having met with a practical friend. The idol of his parents he was allowed to run wild, and grew up a colt to be broken in by misfortune, and surrounded since then by flatterers whose only design was to blind him.

JEN. He's now come to one, sir, who'll open his eyes.

ROCK. Well, so his friend hopes—that he'll encounter in me what he's always required, a firmness that will lead him to alter his system.

JEN. No doubt, sir, no doubt. But I wish he were here ; for at two you'll have these parties to sign the " re-lease," Mr. Horton and Mrs. Mildmay.

ROCK. Very true, a most important engagement.

JEN. So you said, sir.

ROCK. One which took me six months of hard work to effect, and would cost me several hundreds if it happened to fail—so meet them I must—and—— (*looks at his watch*) Is this youth coming? (*rises*) I could finish that letter—so, Biggs!

BIGGS *looks from outer office, R. H. F.*

BIGGS. Yes, sir.

ROCK. Tell me the instant Mr. Cloudsley arrives.

He goes off through R. H. door.

BIGGS. (*advancing, L.H.*) Cloudsley ! Why, Jennings! it never can be ?

JEN. A friend of Mr. Wrangham. (*still at desk, R.H.*)

BIGGS. And—and—do you know what he wants?

JEN. Why to get some employment.

BIGGS. Ha, ha !—as I'm living, the very same man.

JEN. Who's the same man ?

BIGGS. Here's my old friend again from Red Lion Square.

JEN. What do you mean ?(*advancing, R.H.*)

BIGGS. Did I never tell you of a client who haunted old Sykes till the clerks used to call him the governor's conscience?

JEN. No.

BIGGS. A chap who ploughed into the office about nine times a day, and couldn't pay for his washing till he had taken advice ?

JEN. Why, it's never the same.

BIGGS. Oh, but it is, though—had punished a lot before he tried us—had been a regular vampire to all of his friends—driven one out of town, and given another the gout; and as for their lawyers, why he taxed them as bad as a Master in Chancery.

JEN. And all to get a berth ?

BIGGS. Yes, which he did get; had dozens of things, but gave 'em all up, because he found out he was to work : all his pleasure consisted in talking about it!

JEN. And now he comes here——

BIGGS. To punish the governor. Mr. Wrangham, I know, is one of his friends, and——

JEN. And he gives £500 in hopes to get rid of him. Now I understand his want of decision. But what a rod for the old one—why, Biggs, you ought to tell him.

BIGGS. Tell him, not I; he'll learn it soon enough. Wait till to-morrow.

CLOUDSLEY is heard in the outer office.

CLOUDS. Mr. Rockstone within ?

BIGGS. Yes, there he is; that's the man ; that question we shall hear at least ten times a day.

JEN. Poor Mr. Rockstone!

BIGGS. Ha, ha! isn't it fun ? But I must say he's here. (*goes to R.H.*) Mr. Cloudsley, if you please, sir. (*turns to office*) Will you step in, sir?

CLOUDSLEY comes from outer office, an umbrella under his arm. ROCKSTONE from R.H. door, and shaking his hand warmly, they advance. JEN. and BIGGS go out at back.

CLOUDS. My dear Mr. Rockstone, how charmed I am to see you!

ROCK. And I you, Mr. Cloudsley—and I you, be assured.

CLOUDS. As the old friend of Mr. Wrangham—not less than a man so esteemed and distinguished——

ROCK. Thank you, sir, thank you.

CLOUDS. A man who, standing first in his arduous profession, to the highest sagacity unites the most——

ROCK. Thank you, thank you — will you be seated? (CLOUDSLEY *puts down his hat and umbrella on a table at back, R.H. ; they sit, ROCKSTONE R. H., CLOUDSLEY L. H.*)

— I trust, Mr. Cloudsley, my respect for your friend is a sufficient guarantee of my desire to serve you; but if it were not, sir, the high character he gives both of your talents and principles, ought certainly to form a sufficient inducement.

CLOUDS. You flatter me, really.

ROCK. Indeed I think not. After the account I've received, I should regard my best efforts almost as a duty—and if I hear in connection with claims such as yours, of a certain trifling defect—a little want of decision——

CLOUDS. A want of decision ! Why, my dear sir, you're jesting ! decision's a quality for which I am remarkable.

ROCK. Remarkable?

CLOUDS. The thing, I may say, that distinguished my life; for take any pursuit, did I ever resign it but on practical grounds?—why surgery, for instance?—why, but for my teacher, a fellow who was ignorant of the source of sensation—who allowed the brain and the spine to be an electrical battery; but not the arms and the legs, though they're masses of nerves. Now I said the legs were a pair of conductors, and had almost to kick him to prove I was right.

ROCK. Practical, certainly!

CLOUDS. Then, sir, engineering—why did I resign that? Now that involves a long and a curious story.

ROCK. (*aside*) Good powers! at this rate he'll gabble all day.

CLOUDS. In engineering, you know, sir, we have two motive forces—steam and the atmosphere—and both have their evils; that of steam, as you know, sir, is a want of condensing.

ROCK. (*aside*) That I fear's your case.

CLOUDS. Whilst both of these systems relying on pressure, on what we call in science an exhausted receiver——

ROCK. (*aside*) That's me; I must stop this at once, Mr. Cloudsley.

CLOUDS. Allow me, my dear sir, to illustrate their differ-

ence. Say now my right leg is a horizontal piston, working one stroke a second, at a pressure of forty-four pounds on the inch. Now, to understand the principle, if you'd place your breast against my feet, and allow me to give you two strokes to the second— (*leaning back and illustrating, ROCKSTONE jumps up.*)

ROCK. Good powers, Mr. Cloudsley, are you out of your mind? At two, I must tell you, I've a serious engagement.

CLOUDS. (*rising*) Well, speak—speak, my dear sir; I'm all attention.

ROCK. Then to come at once to business, I'm happy to say that I've something in view for you; but as I should like a little proof of your fitness to take it, will you oblige me by sitting down and just stating your claims.

CLOUDS. My claims, sir?

ROCK. Your claims, education, experience, position, acquirements; all you know or can do, as a ground I can go upon.

CLOUDS. Nothing can be easier.

ROCK. And whilst you are about it, (*looks at watch*) as it still wants a quarter, I could step to the party who's the place to bestow, and perhaps arrange a meeting. I'll do so at once; and if some clients arrive—a city friend I expect, and a lady, his cousin; a couple, I must tell you, who were once to have been married, and I'm doing all I can to bring together again—why, they needn't disturb you; you can go on with your work, and I'll be back in five minutes.

He goes out through L. H. door.

CLOUDS. Why, what a capital fellow!—what a perfect phenomenon! A generous lawyer—a rarity great as ever grew in New Holland. What a contrast to Sykes!—a scoundrel who wasted my time for six months, keeping me day after day hanging about his old den, and finding me nothing to do but what he knew must disgust me. But now I've a prospect, a chance of exertion, of something to appease my great hunger of soul—I, who, in these times which need men of action, had been dying of atrophy for want of employment. So now for my task—(*seating himself at desk R.C.*) this statement of claims, which of course I shall put—"Statement of a gentleman,"—yes, that's the heading; but, hang it, what pens! they're like the cheap trousers, only intended to split, (*tears up paper, seizes a knife, and cuts up pens.*) Failure again!—this is paring a parsnip, and yet a canal as big as—

BIGGS *opens office door at back.*

BIGGS. Mr. Horton, sir.

CLOUDS. (*aside, at desk*) Oh! the city man.

HORTON *advances* L. H., BIGGS *closes the door.*

HOR. Mr. Rockstone's not here.

CLOUDS. (*rising*) But will be directly, sir ; pray take a seat.

HOR. Thank you, sir, thank you. (*aside*) So—I'm the first.

CLOUDS. (*aside*) And this youth's a lover—a counting-house Cupid—well, all I can say is—confound these quills ! I hope the next bundle's better, (*opens another and cuts away, HORTON sits, L.H.*)

HOR. (*aside*) How strangely I feel!—just as great a reserve as if he hadn't explained.

CLOUDS. " Statement of a gentleman."

HOR. Still, as she's wished it—as it seems is so anxious, why——

CLOUDS. Might as well think of nibbing the jaws of a crocodile. Funds are up to-day, sir ?

HOR. Yes, sir, they are.

CLOUDS. Bread stuffs abundant?

HOR. Very, sir, very.

CLOUDS. And good spring stock of cotton, and yet trade's very dull—but no wonder at that—Europe manufacturing—Colonies glutted. We've only one chance, sir—we must go to the Pacific—cut a canal through Panama to connect the two oceans, and make a wharf of Owhyee for the whole Archipelago.

HOR. And do you imagine that possible ?

CLOUDS. Possible, of course; with English money and skill we can get through a crisis, why not through an isthmus ?

HOR. But I doubt if 'twould pay us: what trade should we get there ?

CLOUDS. What trade, sir? what trade? why that of a hemisphere! allow me to show you—just say for instance—— (*he wheels round to him, knife in hand.*) I'm England—you're America—and there's China beyond you (*pointing to the washstand*) now I want a canal, and I cut through your middle—which of course makes a current—then the fur coast we'll say being the nape of your neck—I send my goods through you to the central depôt—I take your beaver—and you get my calico. (*takes HORTON'S hat and throws his own handkerchief to HORTON.*)

HOR. (*aside*) An original man this—I should like to have some talk with him.

CLOUDS. By the bye, that's bad news from the Society Islands—sad insurrection.

HOR. Insurrection !

CLOUDS. Oh, frightful: the Society group hard at work cutting throats.

HOR. (*rising*) Why when did you hear this? It's not in the papers.

CLOUDS. But 'twas current this morning, with the additional news that they've seized all the shipping.

HOR. (*rising*) And we've sent their consignments—I must go to the city instantly.

CLOUDS. And you won't wait for Rockstone ?

HOR. Rockstone ! of course not. I've thousands at stake, sir. (*aside*) And Eliza—Eliza—I can't stop even for her at a time such as this. Good morning, sir, thank you—much obliged for your news, it's really most important—most bewildering to me! the Society group cutting up one another.

He goes out through L. H. door.

CLOUDS. Well informed man that; and now to continue—statement of a gentleman—yes, I think that's the heading, and——

BIGGS *opens office door.*

BIGGS. Mrs. Mildmay, sir.

MRS. MILD MAY *advances*, CLOUDSLEY *rises*, BIGGS *closing the door.*

MRS. M. I really beg pardon—I expected——

CLOUDS. Mr. Rockstone—who'll be here in a moment—allow me to offer a seat, (*placing a chair for her, L. H., which she takes.*) And this is the Psyche—a very comfortable soul. (*reseating himself, R. H.*)

MRS. M. (*aside*) But they said Horton was here—he surely can't avoid me after all I've conceded—the advances I have made—worn down as I am to——

CLOUDS. (*throwing down the pen*) The very last stump!

MRS. M. (*aside*) But this is woman's history ever crushed till she cannot feel even.

CLOUDS. Exquisite weather, madam.

MRS. M. Oh, lovely indeed, sir.

CLOUDS. Town's very full.

MRS. M. Very full, really.

CLOUDS. At the opera last night ?

MRS. M. No, sir, I was not.

CLOUDS. A charming debutante—seen nothing like her since I left Naples.

MRS. M. Naples; you've been there ?

CLOUDS. Oh, frequently—frequently. (*rising.*)

MRS. M. And may I ask if you met there a family named Estcourt?

CLOUDS. Estcourt! the Estcourts—my most intimate friends, madam. The captain and I galloped half over Asia, (*taking chair by her side.*)

MRS. M. Is it possible?

CLOUDS. Crossed the Desert together, had a plunge in the Caspian, and smoked a chibouque on a peak of the Caucasus.

MRS. M. How very extraordinary: and of course you like Italy?

CLOUDS. Like it—an Eden! though to perfect it's claims, I confess that its Eves must come always from England. (*bows.*)

MRS. M. (*aside*) What an agreeable person.

CLOUDS. There life is a passion—the arts are an atmosphere—your servant quotes Tasso as he brushes your boots—your pastry-cook moulds you an Apollo in cream—your coachman and footman are Greek characters—and, do you know, with a view of making our streets picturesque, I thought of importing a few of these fellows—we've Italians to conduct operas, why not an omnibus ?

MRS. M. An omnibus ?

CLOUDS. Yes, ma'am—when in lieu of a savage, who stands like a turnkey, a creature all angles, with his horrid " Bank, bank"—Imagine a being all lightness and curves, who perched on its step with the toe of a Mercury, bends and waves to the public as he gracefully murmurs—Signori, Signori, Andrete al Banco. (*placing his foot on the front rail of his chair, he propels it on the castors standing in attitude.*)

MRS. M. What a charming idea; but to return to the Estcourts—Julia, you must know, is my dearest of friends, in fact, is engaged to a relation of mine.

CLOUDS. Engaged—why she's married!

MRS. M. Married, sir!

CLOUDS. Married to Frank Holt, of the 10th!

MRS. M. Impossible, sir—you must be mistaken.

CLOUDS. Indeed I am not, took place at the Embassy two months ago.

MRS. M. When already contracted to—(*rising.*) Why this conduct is monstrous—her cousins must know of it—I must go to them instantly.

CLOUDS. And not wait for my friend.

MRS. M. I really cannot, this matter involves me—married—when by my means she was engaged to poor George, and I was daily expecting she'd *name her return*. The most infamous treatment, it must be explained; but allow me to thank you for what I have heard——

CLOUDS. Very happy, I'm sure, madam.

MRS. M. Allow me to thank you, and to bid you good day. (*she goes out at the back, R.D.F., he bowing.*)

CLOUDS. Well, really, one meets here very agreeable people, I never passed a morning at a lawyers more pleasantly—and now to proceed—"statement of a gentleman"—yes, I think that will do—so—— (*holding the paper before him.*)

ROCKSTONE *comes from L. H. door.*

ROCK. Have you done it ?

CLOUDS. (*hiding it*) Ahem.

ROCK. For you've no time to spare—and—and—now just a question—you were born in the West, I think ?

CLOUDS. Yes, sir, I was.

ROCK. In a great farming quarter ?

CLOUDS. Of course, sir, of course.

ROCK. Then you knew something of it ?

CLOUDS. Something, sir, everything—the condition of the farmer has been my favourite study—the question of soils and of chemical agencies——

ROCK. Very good, so I thought; and so now to explain to you—there's a commission on foot, a government enquiry into the state of the West, and it's in want of a secretary——

CLOUDS. A secretary!

ROCK. Yes ; and the client I've been to is charged to procure him—so I've undertaken to recommend you——

CLOUDS. My dear Mr. Rockstone.

ROCK. As a person in every way likely to suit him—so he's anxious to see you ; but you must go to him at once, for he's loaded with work, and can spare but ten minutes.

CLOUDS. I'll be there, sir, in one.

ROCK. Especially as I must tell you he's a strict man of business, and won't wait a second beyond the fixed time. Now you know what's your plan, you'll show him your statement, which, of course, is a proof of what you can do——

CLOUDS. (*holding it behind him*) Exactly—what I can do ! (*putting paper in his pocket.*)

ROCK. Which he'll see represents you: and remember,

Mr. Cloudsley, that this office obtained may serve as a step to some higher appointment.

CLOUDS. Some higher one, sir ?

ROCK. To some permanent post! So lose not a moment—here's his card—it's close by, and my best wishes go with you—my very best wishes. Need I name my delight if this business succeeds—and though I shall now be engaged with two particular clients, yet let me beg you'll return and let me know that you've triumphed.

He goes out at the back, CLOUDSLEY gets his hat and umbrella and walks about.

CLOUDS. What an excellent fellow, and what marvellous fortune—a public appointment! An office of high and responsible duties—no fear of my staying. Let me see, I'm in order—boots all right, yes—and coat, buttoned up, yes—give a look of business—and take my umbrella, no—think I'll leave it—that'll do—now I'm off, and—hard if I fail—Why, it's the thing I'm designed for—the task of all others for which I've a mission—born in that quarter, bred up among farmers, intimately acquainted with their habits and manners, I must be appointed—and if I happen to serve them, the result, as he says, must be a permanent office, in the treasury or colonies, or perhaps something better, when they find I can speak ; who knows but they'll wish to get me into the "house ?"—no rising man now—party ranks sadly thin—a first-rate debater would be an absolute windfall. Only I'm a fellow that wants pulling out—some strong party motion demanding an enquiry, or perhaps an impeachment—opening with the charge of a dashing ex-secretary, and wound up with the artillery of the leader himself: when, as our fire was failing, and their cheers grew vociferous—when, as certain of triumph, the cry rose to divide, *I* spring on the floor and claim a word in reply—"The new member !" they cry—"Order, hush!"—"Hear him, hear him!"—"Who is he ? who is he ?" runs round the back benches—then, as voices sink down, and faces are fixed on me, as I stand there alone to confront the whole host. I plant my foot thus, and in thunder exclaim—

ROCK. (*roars inside*) Jennings 

CLOUDS. Oh, zounds ! I forgot—

He runs off by L. H. door, ROCKSTONE and the CLERKS come from office.

ROCK. (C.) Why, I can't believe my senses—they've been and are gone ?

JEN. (R. H.) Both, sir, it seems.

ROCK. And without explanation ?

JEN. Without a word, sir, to any one.

ROCK. When it's still scarce the time—and I ran every step ! Why what can be the cause ? This disappointment is ruin.

BOTH. Ruin, sir!

ROCK. Ruin—or what's very near it. You know how I've worked to bring this meeting about, but you don't know it's value—that out of the legacies I was to pay 'em to-day they were to lend me £1000—which I've promised a client—a client whose credit and position's at stake, and to whom this sum is essential before six o'clock!

BIGGS. (L. H.) It is, sir?

ROCK. It is—who, if he doesn't obtain it, may have to stop payment. And more, had they married I was to have had further aid—when now, if they've quarrelled—it's madness to think of it—I must write or go after them—I must see if this breach isn't yet to be healed—and——

BIGGS. Here is Mr. Horton, sir.

They go out at the back, HORTON comes from L. H. door hastily.

ROCK. (R. H.) Oh, my dear sir, how glad I am to see you !

HOR. (L. H.) Well, you're very good—but this is pleasant news, isn't it ?

ROCK. News?

HOR. Of these vagabond islands—frightened me so much that I went off to the city without half the details.

ROCK. (*aside*) Why, what's this about?

HOR. So you see I'm come back just to say to your friend that—hope he's still in ?

ROCK. Do you mean Mr. Cloudsley ?

HOR. The person I met here.

ROCK. Yes, he's gone out.

HOR. Then perhaps you'll oblige me by making an appointment.

ROCK. But, my good sir, you've got an appointment with me——

HOR. Oh! I can't stop for that——

ROCK. You've to meet Mrs. Mildmay——

HOR. And I can't stop for her—if your friend's not within I must go on to the city, and perhaps when he's there he'll give me a call. We're in want of an agent to go out to Australia, and I should like his advice, as he understands

trade—and as for the re-lease, why I'll sign that to-morrow, or the next day, or any time ; but what I want at present is to see Mr. Cloudsley.

Goes off by L. H. door.

ROCK. So Mr. Cloudsley's the cause—it's him I've to thank ! He's heard of some failure or shipwreck, or other, and this meeting—the labour of months—is destroyed. I break my word, and my client may fail, and all because people can't mind their own business. What had he to do with shipwrecks ? the fellows at Lloyd's manage that well enough. His news wasn't fish, 'twould have kept for a week. But then, Mrs. Mildmay, what has sent her off ? No quarrel, it's clear, for the two havn't met, that's still a mystery that requires a key, and——

BIGGS *comes from outer office door, R. H.*

BIGGS. Mr. Sykes has just called, sir, and left you this note.

ROCK. That requires a key, and——

BIGGS. And begged, sir, particularly that you'd read it at once.

ROCK. Why, what's it about ?

BIGGS. I think Mr. Cloudsley, sir.

ROCK. Who ?

BIGGS. Mr. Cloudsley—as he's an old friend of his.

ROCK. A what, sir ?

BIGGS. Who used to assist us in Red Lion Square.

ROCK. Assist you ?

BIGGS. Pretty much, I believe, sir, as he's helped you to-day.

ROCK. Biggs !

BIGGS. For I know that's his talent—he can cut up appointments as easy as quills.

ROCK. Gracious powers !

BIGGS. Stuck there five months, sir, till he'd half killed the business, and——

ROCK. I'm dreaming ! (*he tears open the note and reads hurriedly.*)

BIGGS. So, oddly enough, Mr. Sykes happening to pass as he was leaving the door——

ROCK. (*extending the note*) And—and is this the fact ?

BIGGS. Every word of it, sir.

ROCK. Then you treacherous villain, why didn't you tell me ?

BIGGS. Because Jennings said, sir, you'd found him a place, and, moreover, was likely to get something by it.

ROCK. Get something by it? Why, what could I get to repay such an evil? And this is the act of a client, a friend! But what an escape—that I found him that post.

BIGGS. Why, yes; but when *we* did——

ROCK. Well, sir, speak out.

BIGGS. He was like a bagatelle ball—he always come back again!

ROCK. Merciful goodness!

BIGGS. Fingers quite frozen, sir, couldn't hold anything.

ROCK. And do you mean to say that this harpy was with you five months?

BIGGS. And easily, sir—to a business like yours he'd stick for a twelvemonth.

ROCK. I'm paralysed, prostrated, stiffened into parchment! There's but one course to take—that fellow must never set foot here again——

BIGGS. That's the only way, sir.

ROCK. Never be received on any plea whatsoever——

BIGGS. Very well, sir, he shan't.

ROCK. So remember when he comes I'm engaged—and what's more—— CLOUDSLEY *is heard in the office*

CLOUDS. Mr. Rockstone within?

ROCK. Eh—there he is—run, run—shut him out—if he once enters the room——

BIGGS *runs to office door, CLOUDSLEY comes from it breathless, and meeting BIGGS, whom he throws round to back, advances R. H.*

CLOUDS. My dear Mr. Rockstone!

ROCK. (*turning*) Oh! it's all over, (*he totters forward and sinks into a chair, L. H.*)

CLOUDS. I'm back as you wished, sir——

ROCK. (*aside*) As I wished!

CLOUDS. As you were kind enough to say you'd be dying to see me!

ROCK. (*aside*) Here's retribution.

CLOUDS. And I've something to tell you that's very absurd.

ROCK. Absurd!

CLOUDS. I reached your friend's door as he was entering his carriage, and didn't know till he was gone——

ROCK. That you'd got there too late.

CLOUDS. By merely five minutes.

ROCK. When I told you expressly he wouldn't wait one
This is your decision—your boasted decision, sir——

CLOUDS. But what does it matter—I can see him to-morrow.
(*placing hat and umbrella on table, R. H.*)

ROCK. To-morrow, impossible, he'll decide, sir, to-day—
your neglect you may rely on it has settled your claims—the
post is gone, sir—is gone, (*he rises and walks about.*)

CLOUDS. Well, of course, if it's gone, sir, there's no use
regretting it.

ROCK. (*aside*) There's a philosopher!

CLOUDS. And really on reflection I'm not very sorry, for I
doubt after all if 'twas exactly the thing for me.

ROCK. (*aside*) And I wonder what is—unless a straight
waistcoat.

CLOUDS. All talk, sir, all talk; but nothing to do.

ROCK. (*aside*) What is to become of me—how to get rid
of him?

CLOUDS. So as that is the case, and till something turns
up, if you thought, sir, I could prove of any service to you ?

ROCK. To me ?

CLOUDS. In any matter of business, seeing any of your clients?

ROCK. (*aside*) Ha, ha—there's an offer.

CLOUDS. I trust that you'll say so, and have no reserve;
and I flatter myself if you ask Mr. Horton——

ROCK. (*aside*) Horton—deliverance—I could send him to
him.

CLOUDS. Whom I fancy I have been of some little use to,
you——

ROCK. About the Pacific—where he's sending an agent ?

CLOUDS. An agent ?

ROCK. And respecting which agent he wants your advice.

CLOUDS. He does—Well that's odd, for if there's a post
in the world, I should fancy myself——

ROCK. What, sir?

CLOUDS. A pursuit I should fix on above every other——

ROCK. Would you go abroad ?

CLOUDS. With commerce so long my chief taste and my
passion——

ROCK. Do you actually tell me you'd go to Australia ?

CLOUDS. 'Pon my word, now it's mentioned, I actually
think so.

ROCK. (*aside*) Why, what capital news!

BIGGS *looks from outer office.*

BIGGS. Mr. Rockstone, Lady Grant begs a word at the door.

ROCK. Say I'll come instantly. (BIGGS *closes the door.*)
Then there can't be a doubt, sir, you'd have this appointment.

CLOUDS. I should, sir——

ROCK. You would—for he's waiting to see you.

CLOUDS. Then I'll go to him of course.

ROCK. And this time at once——

CLOUDS. At once, sir—at once.

ROCK. And you'll now give a proof that you can be decided?

CLOUDS. Decided!—my hat. (*seizes his hat and pulls on his gloves.*)

ROCK. (*aside*) Well, that looks in earnest.

CLOUDS. The city of course is only half an hour's walk——

ROCK. And Bread Street you know—where his name's on the door——

CLOUDS. Bread Street, of course, sir—so now I'm all right—and——

ROCK. And now what's the time?—seven minutes past one.

CLOUDS. Then at twenty-seven minutes I'm with Mr. Horton.

ROCK. At twenty-seven minutes?

CLOUDS. Twenty-seven exactly, sir—ask him to-morrow.

ROCK. Then you're sure of succeeding——

CLOUDS. And before two o'clock, sir, the blow shall be struck.

He goes through door, L. H., without his umbrella.

ROCK. Why, he's gone—really gone—so he can't be so bad. I've a right to infer that he's settled at last; and as that is the case, and my fears are at rest, why now with much pleasure I'll go to her ladyship.

He goes out at back. CLOUDSLEY returns from L. H. door.

CLOUDS. Mr. Rockstone, it's raining, so I'll have my umbrella—he's not here—well, I can take it—just turn up my collar, and button my coat—and (*walking about arranging himself, he pauses*) a life in the Pacific—was ever such luck!—the sphere of all others for which I am fitted—the special pursuit to develop my powers. Talk about Parliament—such slavery as that, where one's baited to death—to be buried in Hansard—when here there's such freedom, such spirit, and scope, I should have the whole ocean to throw myself over—and then the results! Emigration's becoming the hope of the day, and I might direct it to some better shore, perhaps turn discoverer—another Columbus turning up a new world—some continent lying across the south pole, which to reach requires courage almost superhuman—a ship day and night to be dodging the icebergs—a mutiny on board after the seventeenth week; but my voice restores order, my

look dispels fear. Surveying calmly ever peril as I stand at the wheel (*opening his umbrella, he turns it before him as though steering*) a voice at the mast head at last cries out "Land !" We near a new soil—my foot's first on shore—and seizing our flag as I spring up the rocks, I wave up my brave fellows with the heart-stirring cry of—— (*mounting a chair, he springs on table, scattering papers.*)

ROCKSTONE *comes from outer office.*

ROCK. What do I see !

CLOUDS. Confound it!—I am at the south pole, and here's Ursa Major. (*he jumps down and runs off by L. H. door, ROCKSTONE advances, and sinks into chair, L. H.*)

ROCK. I'm a doomed man; that fellow's my Atropos—my fate, that I feel is to hunt me to destruction. I can see 'em printing my name in the London Gazette. He go abroad?—not if government paid for him ! And it isn't work only ; I can feel my brain going—softening and sinking into a sort of morass. I must make one more effort, or I see it's all over. (*he jumps up and bawls*) Biggs—Jennings—he's gone—d'ye hear me ? He's gone, and on you rests the onus if he ever gets in again. Seize him at the door, and if you're not sufficient send for the police—have a whole station-house, only take care that——

BIGGS *opens office door.*

BIGGS. Mrs. Mildmay, sir.

MRS. MILD MAY *advances, L. H., the door closing.*

ROCK. (R.H.) Ah, my dear madam, how glad I am to see you. I learnt you'd been here—had been, and had left.

MRS. M. (L.H.) And did you also learn the reason ?

ROCK. No, not a word, madam.

MRS. M. That I'd met here a gentleman who——

ROCK. And was that fellow the cause? Well, I half guessed as much. An impudent rascal, that——

MRS. M. You are mistaken; I never encountered a more agreeable person!

ROCK. What, madam?

MRS. M. More elegant manners, or a more refined taste !

ROCK. (*aside*) Why, here's an impression !

MRS. M. And to tell you the truth, it was to speak to that gentleman that I—I've stepped in again.

ROCK. Mrs. Mildmay !

MRS. M. Having learnt from him some news which has

not been confirmed, and which makes me most anxious; so I trust he's within ?

ROCK. No, madam, he's not.

MRS. M. But I hope he soon will be ?

ROCK. I really can't say.

MRS. M. Then I must get you to be kind enough to make an appointment.

ROCK. But, madam, you've got an appointment with me !

MRS. M. Ah, that can stand over; this affair's pressing.

ROCK. But your wish is impossible. He—he's gone to Australia.

MRS. M. Gone to Australia ?

ROCK. This very day, madam; the ship sails this evening.

MRS. M. You surely are jesting.

ROCK. Quite true, believe me. Mr. Horton's the means. He's left me to meet him, and really I'm sorry, for he's a very good fellow—a person, I assure you, I esteem very much; but as the die has been cast, and his fate is decided, why——

BIGGS *looks in from outer office.*

BIGGS. Mr. Rockstone, Mr. Horton's sent to say that there's been an insurrection in the Society Islands, and your friend Mr. Cloudsley needn't give him a call. (*closes the door again.*)

MRS. M. Why, what capital news. Then he's not gone abroad ?

ROCK. No ; so it seems.

MRS. M. And of course you're very likely to see him again ?

ROCK. Very likely, madam.

MRS. M. Well, this is delightful. I really congratulate you; and now, I suppose, you can send to him instantly ?

ROCK. Instantly?

MRS. M. Of course, if my peace is at stake. This is a matter, Mr. Rockstone, that endangers my happiness! I must know the truth, sir, and know it at once; and since you prefer it, he can call upon me. I shall now return home, and expect him this evening. Now you really must promise, for this matter is imminent—If you are to see me to-morrow, I shall see him to-day.

She goes off by L. H. door.

ROCK. Then I must see this fellow. This woman's in love with him—in love as expressly as words could convey it; and if I interpose, I shan't even get the loan promised by her; so there's no use resisting—I'm in the coils of a snake—absorption's beginning, and——

BIGGS *comes from office.*

BIGGS. Mr. Rockstone, he's come.

ROCK. Oh, of course—I knew that.

BIGGS. Looking from the door, I saw him enter the street—

ROCK. Well, well, I'm resigned.

BIGGS. When a queer-looking fellow crossed over and tapped him.

ROCK. What do you say ?

BIGGS. Tapped him, sir.

ROCK. Arrested!

BIGGS. I think so, though I don't know the bailiff.

ROCK. Arrested, and going to jail; why, that's as good as Australia. (*he jumps up and dances about*) Hurrah, hurrah! I'm a free man—a free man. Biggs, there's a crown for you. Going to prison—I live and I breathe again. I recover my reason, my strength, and my energy—I can now go to business, attend to my clients, and——

CLOUDSLEY *returns from L. H. door.*

CLOUDS. My dear Mr. Rockstone !

ROCK. Oh! death and the devil, (*he falls in the chair, L.H., and begins kicking—BIGGS goes out at the back.*)

CLOUDS. Why, pray, what's the matter, sir? (*taking chair opposite.*)

ROCK. The matter, indeed—I thought you were arrested!

CLOUDS. Arrested! why, yes, by an unfortunate friend; but don't infer falsely—think I've shewn indecision. I was on the way to the city at the top of my speed, when, whilst evolving a great scheme of colonisation, I forgot the address—

ROCK. And whilst you were here, sir, playing tricks on my table, my friend forgot you—he has no wish to see you.

CLOUDS. No wish, sir ?

ROCK. No wish ! And so now say good-bye to your second appointment.

CLOUDS. Well, if this isn't villainous—a practical man actually dying for work, and a conspiracy on all sides to keep him in idleness.

ROCK. (*rises*) And yet if she does love him, 'tis my only escape—I should get rid of my plague and—Mr. Cloudsley, it's now time I should tell you, that you've cost me to-day several hundreds of pounds—

CLOUDS. What, sir?

ROCK. Now I admit all your talent—you're a wonderful

man, sir—but your principal skill is in ruining your friends, and I confess I'm too poor to afford your acquaintance.

CLOUDS. Mr. Rockstone!

ROCK. So I've a right to expect, if you refuse my last offer, that you'll never think of entering this office again.

CLOUDS. That you may rely upon.

ROCK. So I expected—and now, to be plain with you, it's nonsense your thinking of any employment—a soap-boiler could as easily grapple an eel—there's only one thing, sir, to save you from starving, and that is a wife.

CLOUDS. A wife, sir!

ROCK. A wife—a woman of fortune who can give you the dinner which you never can earn.

CLOUDS. Why, that's a new notion.

ROCK. A new one or not, sir, that's your last plank.

CLOUDS. Well, but if it is, sir, I must know where it floats. Marriage, it's true, may be a cure for my complaints, but I've got to find out where the physic's prepared.

ROCK. At 200, Harley Street—the lady you met here.

CLOUDS. What, sir!

ROCK. Herself—she's now waiting to see you, under the pretence of discussing some news that you've told her—so you can have her if you like, and you've no right to refuse—she'll save you the trouble of making any more victims—if you must have a sufferer, let it be a legal one—prey on your wife.

CLOUDS. But such a dreadfully old woman.

ROCK. Old woman! What's that to you, sir? You've no right to a taste except in your gullet! I tell you she's rich!

CLOUDS. Well, I own the temptation——

ROCK. And consent?

CLOUDS. Well I do.

ROCK. Come, that shows a conscience. So you'll go to her at once?

CLOUDS. Of course, sir, of course.

ROCK. And to make sure of that I'll see you out of the house!

CLOUDS. Out of the house, sir!

ROCK. No idling this time—no dance on my table.

CLOUDS. But my dear Mr. Rockstone——

ROCK. She's waiting to see you.

CLOUDS. But allow me to say, sir——

ROCK. I won't hear a word.

CLOUDS. Allow me to thank you——

ROCK. Yes, when you get her—thank as much as you like. (*he pushes him through L. H. door, BIGGS opens door at back.*)

BIGGS. Mr. Rockstone—not here!—have they been tussling, I wonder, and gone out into the street to see who's the best man ?

ROCKSTONE *returns from L. H. door hastily.*

ROCK. All right, Biggs—all right—seen him out of the house, and as the widow's gone home, why——

BIGGS. But here's Mr. Horton, sir. .

ROCK. Horton! Confound it! Well, now, then for him. (*he goes out with BIGGS at back. CLOUDSLEY is heard in the passage.*)

CLOUDS. Mr. Rockstone—Mr. Rockstone —(*louder*) Mr. Rockstone ! I've dropped my handkerchief—I say, sir, I've dropped my handkerchief, and, as I've got a bad cold, I can't go without it. (*puts his head into the door, then enters.*) Not here—then I'll look for it—quite sure that I used it—in this very room—yes—here it is—not very clean—ought to buy another, and a new pair of gloves. Can't go in these to call on a lady, and one too, especially, who—I wish she'd been younger, or a little better looking; but a man can't have everything, and really a fortune does go a great way. If a public career, as it seems, is denied me, why then social enjoyment has a great many charms—dinners, balls, soirées—parties that should become all the fashion—the rush—grouping, night after night, under my chandeliers all that's noble in rank, all that's brilliant in talent—my first night of the season creating a struggle great as Almacks itself—a bal costumé—the quadrilles all historical—the supper by Gunter, the music by Strauss—the rooms of course cleared, presenting to the vision a palatial expanse— (*he runs the tables off on both sides, creating a loud crash. A SAVOYARD GIRL looks in from L. H. door. An organ is heard in passage.*)

GIRL. Ah, monsieur—monsieur! Charité—charité pour les enfans?

CLOUDS. There—all's arranged—settees round the sides, and a Camilla japonica chalked on the floor. Then at twelve they arrive—carriage after carriage rattles up to my door—thunder after thunder reverberates from it. Then come the announcements (*knocking on table with a ruler, he announces and receives the company*)—The Countess Frescati—the Countess Frescati—Countess, believe me, I'm delighted to

see you! The Duchess Montalban—the Duchess Montalban—Duchess, indeed you've done me a great honour. Her Highness the Princess of Hockenstofgriffenheim—her Highness the Princess of Hockenstofgriffenheim—Your Highness, this condescension is wholly overpowering ; permit me to place a seat—Duchess, you polk; will you allow me the honour?—any choice as to music?—my band's wholly German—Mein herr, des Aurora, (*humming a tune and beginning to polk, the GIRL, who has watched him, shakes her tamborine.*)

GIRL. Oui, oui, monsieur—la polka, la polka. (CLOUDSLEY *seizing a chair, polks with that—the GIRL stepping in, he seizes and polks with her.* ROCKSTONE *coming from outer office, followed by HORTON, MRS. MILDMAY, and CLERKS*) *he seizes and polks with him into R. corner ; then observing his face*)

ROCK. Ten thousand furies! (*the GIRL runs out by L. H. door—CLOUDSLEY after her—ROCKSTONE pursues and seizes him—drags him back—he falls over chair.*)

ROCK. Stop, stop, sir—come back—come back, I insist.

CLOUDS. But the lady is waiting, sir.

ROCK. The lady is here, sir, and will save you the trouble.

MRS. M. (*advancing*) Yes, Mr. Cloudsley, I am here, sir, to thank you for the information you gave me of Miss Estcourt's marriage, every syllable of which I have had proof was untrue.

HOR. And I, Mr. Cloudsley, for your further veracity—your Pacific intelligence, which scared me out of my life !

MRS. M. But all which annoyance should, perhaps, make us grateful, since it has tended the sooner to reunite parted friends.

ROCK. You see he's overwhelmed; so if you'll enter this room, I'll follow you instantly.

MRS. M. A good-for-nothing creature!—he ought to be banished society.

HOR. A meddling impostor! he ought to be sent to the hulks.

They go off by R. H. door.

ROCK. And now, sir, for my last communication with you. Luckily I've escaped the ruin with which you have threatened me, so I am able not only to forgive but assist you. Here's a check for twenty pounds; but if you come here again, sir, I'll call in a policeman—do you mark—a policeman! Go

now, and plague others—the public's a vast one! it has plenty more victims. I abandon you now to your wits—and the public. (*he goes off through R. H. door with papers, the CLERKS remaining at back and L.H. door to show CLOUDSLEY out.*)

CLOUDS. The public—the public—I never thought of that—there certainly is something to be done with the public. They're sensible, generous, and like to encourage a desire for work—as an author, for instance—bring out a new serial—a strong work of fiction, to be published in parts, six pages of print and three fine engravings, where each number should work up to a point of suspense and leave the reader in agony for thirty-one days—"Genevieve screamed, the knife entered her throat"—but whether it stays there or comes out again you don't know for a month—or what if I tried acting! The stage is a good field—choose comedy, and embody some singular character—illustrate some species of mental infirmity—suppose me successful—and at the close of the piece I step forward to announce it for nightly repetition—I say, ladies and gentlemen, with your kind permission, the little sketch of this evening will be repeated to-morrow—Then, if approved of, I hear the hands going—whilst I go on bowing—and in the midst of this happiness——

BIGGS. (*advancing*) Come, come, Mr. Cloudsley, you must go out. (*he and JENNINGS seizing CLOUDSLEY, drag him to the back as he continues bowing.*)

CLOUDS. Ladies and gentlemen!—do for heaven's sake say a word for a PRACTICAL MAN.

Curtain.