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DREAMLAND

AND

GHOSTLAND:

An Original Collection

OF

TALES AND WARNINGS

FROM THE

BORDERLAND OF SUBSTANCE AND SHADOW;

EMBRACING

REMARKABLE DREAMS, PRESENTIMENTS, AND COINCIDENCES; RECORDS OF SINGULAR PERSONAL EXPERIENCE BY VARIOUS WRITERS; STARTLING STORIES FROM INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY HISTORY; MYSTERIOUS INCIDENTS FROM THE LIPS OF LIVING NARRATORS; AND SOME PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDIES, GRAVE AND GAY.

IN THREE VOLUMES.—VOL. I.

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"These are the aërial Spirits of great Jove, beneficent, walking over the earth, guardians of mankind; they watch our actions, good and bad, passing everywhere over the earth, invisible to mortal eyes; such royal privilege they possess."—HESIOD.

"The Soul in Sleep, above all other times, gives proofs of its divine nature; for, when free and disengaged from the immediate service of the body, it has frequently a foresight of things to come; from whence we may more clearly conceive what will be its state when entirely freed from this bodily prison."—CICERO: *Senect* 22.



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PREFACE.

For some thirty years it has been the lot of the Editor of this collection to adjudicate on a large mass of literary matter, written in all parts of the world, and of very miscellaneous character. A fair proportion of this has found its way into print, in books and in contributions to periodical literature.

In the course of these labours the Editor has come across some extremely curious and interesting narratives, which he has combined in these volumes. A number of these records and stories now see the light for the first time.

Few subjects afford room for a greater variety of treatment than the Dream and the Ghost Story—the tragic, the pathetic, and the joyous. Whether grave or grotesque, the deep human interest and the mysterious gloom which surround the whole question give ample play for that subtle charm which sweeps "the harp of

life" and sends a thrill through every heart. Byron put it well when he wrote—

> "Dreams in their development have breath,
> And tears and tortures, and the touch of joy;
> They leave a weight upon our waking thoughts,
> They take a weight from off our waking toils;
> They do divide our being: they become
> A portion of ourselves as of our time,
> And look like heralds of eternity."

Perhaps in all secular literature there is no more concise or trenchant observation on the great subject of Spiritualism than that of good Sir Thomas Browne:— "Such as deny Spirits subsistent without bodies will with difficulty affirm the separate existence of their own." The same wise and cheerful physician says:— "I thank God for my happy dreams, as I do for my good rest, for there is a satisfaction in them unto reasonable desires, and such as can be content with a fit of happiness" (*Religio Medici*, xi.).

In the supreme trials of life—when we are confronted with sudden danger; in the solemn moments when we hang over a dear one hovering between life and death; in the dim, silent watches of the night, whilst prostrate by sickness or labouring under mental anguish and the tension of highly-strung nerves—then the narrow borderland between the seen and the unseen becomes at times almost impalpable; then the

ministry of angels and the strong words of Scripture, such as those of St. Paul on Spiritual powers, and "the world-rulers of this darkness" (Eph. vi. 12, *Revised Version*), assume a deep significance which they are apt to lose at other times,—in the whirl of the world, in the glare of day, and in the careless ease of happy hours.

It is believed that, in the matter here brought together, the psychological student and the general reader of open, reverent mind will find much that possesses far more than a passing interest—elements which are profoundly impressive and suggestive—touching at many points those things which "now we see in a mirror," as the Apostle to the Gentiles has told us.

The Editor could have wished that he had been more at liberty to give specific names attached to certain facts which have come to his knowledge through personal acquaintance with the narrators. He might then have attempted to point out where the story is the simple record of an actual experience, and where it is a germ of reality expanded and coloured in the hands of a practised writer.

In some cases the authors are unwilling to court further publicity either from personal or family reasons; in others the analysis would have been difficult and perhaps too elaborate except for specialists.

By the courtesy of the proprietors of 'The Cornhill Magazine,' 'Belgravia,' 'Chambers's Journal,' and 'Cassell's Saturday Magazine,' the Editor is able to include several striking stories, written from material picked up in various countries by a member of a distinguished family,—Mr. A. Conan Doyle, the grandson of H. B. and nephew of the late Richard Doyle. His contributions are distinguished by the Δ affixed to them. They introduce some curious examples of the power of superstition, and a singular mixture of truth and error, as in the Diamond Story of the Sassassa Valley. Stories by various writers have been obtained from the pages of 'London Society.' Some of those printed from manuscript which recently passed into the Editor's possession, bear upon speculations of a more or less "burning" character in the Psychological World.

DREAMLAND AND GHOSTLAND.

MAB: THE WOMAN OF THE DREAM.

A PSYCHOLOGICAL ROMANCE.

MABEL EASTWOOD was an odd girl, so people said at least. I, being her greatest friend, and believing in her utterly, failed to understand how people could think her merely "odd." For my part I should apply to her any adjective rather than that very dubious one. Sincere, generous, clever, brave, original, unconventional even—anything rather than "odd." Most of her friends did not know her as well as I, or they could not so have misjudged her. The world is apt to be severe on women who rise above the dead level of commonplace, and whatever Mabel's faults were, she was never commonplace. Her talents—they were far above the average—would alone have lifted her out of the mob of girls whose

only ambition in life is to out-dress, out-shine, and out-manœuvre each other.

Then she was, and is, extremely handsome—even her detractors could not deny that; and her beauty was of an uncommon type; intelligence beamed from her dark hazel eyes, and sat on her broad low brow. But the great charm of her face was the ever-varying expression of her eyes and mouth—a charm so potent that one hardly cared to notice how clear and delicate was her colouring, and how classically correct were her features.

Mabel was handsome and she knew it, but she was not vain; she knew too the marvellous power her beauty gave her over the hearts of men, but she was too noble to use that power for ignoble or merely selfish ends. I who knew her and loved her can confidently say that Mabel was quite incapable of flirtation, much less of coquetry.

We were friends, and had been for years, in spite of the difference in our ages. Mabel, at the time of which I write, was in the heyday of her youth and beauty, while I was a sober matron on the shady side of thirty. I hasten to confess this latter fact, that the reader may acquit me of exaggeration—a luxury of the imagination which is especially the prerogative of youth—in narrating the following curious episode in Mabel Eastwood's life.

What I have to relate may appear improbable to some, impossible to others. Nevertheless I hope a small percentage may read and believe it, after laying to heart the time-honoured maxim, that "fact is stranger than fiction." By the way, what marvellous truth there is in some of these old sayings! They seem the crystallization of ages of unwritten wisdom; they are the thoughts of generations of inglorious if not mute Bacons, Lockes, Hobbeses, whose names are unrecorded in the book of Fame and unhonoured because unknown.

Mabel often spent a month or two at my house during the summer and early autumn. She was a great favourite with us all; my husband liked her cordially, and admired her too in his sober fashion. I loved her dearly, and the children positively adored her, consequently her visits to our quiet country home were eagerly looked forward to by every one at Hamleigh Combe.

I little thought as I sat down one brilliant August morning to write my invitation to Mabel, that my hand was setting "Fortune's wheel" in motion in such a manner that my favourite's whole life would henceforth be revolutionized. Having despatched my letter, I went out into the garden to trim my roses with a light heart. I had little doubt that Mabel would accept my invitation, for her home,

though luxurious enough, was not a particularly cheerful one. She lived in London with an uncle and aunt of mature years, both her parents having died while she was a child.

Mabel, like a good girl as she was, was duly grateful for the affection lavished on her by her relatives, though naturally their society was not all-sufficient for a bright, happy-hearted, freedom-loving creature not yet twenty-two years old; and I knew that her visits to Hamleigh Combe were pleasant oases in her life.

In two or three days I had a letter from Mabel, saying that she would be with us in a week, and when I announced the news at the breakfast-table, there was quite a chorus of rejoicing.

"I am so glad Mab is coming!" exclaimed my son and heir in a triumphant tone; "she'll do all my lessons for me."

"I *know* she'll bring me something," put in Bertie, "because she's my godmother."

There was a general laugh at this mercenary speech, which nearly drowned little Mary's remark:

"I shall be so glad to see Mab, because she's so pitty to 'ook at."

"Bravo, baby!" said my husband, whose quick ear had caught the words. "My dear Connie," he added, turning to me with a laugh, "have you been

giving this small daughter of yours lessons in the art of making pretty speeches? If so, she is a most promising pupil."

I smiled as I patted my little Mary's golden head. "Baby," as she was still called, looked wonderingly up at me with her big, wistful brown eyes.

"What is pitty speech-making?" she demanded gravely; "is it something Mab will like?"

"Of course she will, all her sex do," replied my husband promptly.

"What nonsense you talk, Will," said I. "Come, children, it's a lovely morning. Off with you to the garden, and take great care of baby."

The trio trooped out of the room with a clatter, and my husband and I were left alone.

"By the bye, who have you asked for the 1st?" I inquired suddenly, remembering that the festival of St. Partridge would be celebrated during Mabel's visit.

"Oh, Wyatt, and Mowbray, and Dennis, and—well, I hardly know yet who will come. I dare say I shall have definite answers in a day or two."

"Hadn't I better ask some women-folk to meet them? Mabel will be bored to death by all those men; some of them are sure to fall in love with her, and—and none of those you have mentioned are in the least amusing."

"They wouldn't thank you for your estimate of them," said my husband drily. "But ask as many people as you like, the more the merrier."

"Oh, there will be plenty of time, this is only the 15th; I should like to have Mabel to ourselves for a few days."

"Just so. I agree with you entirely, my dear, being the meekest of hen-pecked husbands."

At the end of the week Mabel arrived. I thought her handsomer than ever as she entered the drawing-room in her white dinner-dress. Her fine eyes were radiant with happiness as she seated herself on a low foot-stool at my feet, and a bright smile curved her red lips as she looked up into my face.

"You dear old Connie!" she said, rubbing her soft cheek against my hand; "how nice it is to be with you again!"

People who met Mabel Eastwood in society never knew her real nature. The handsome stately young lady, who occasionally shocked the susceptibilities of the worthy matter-of-fact individuals who formed the society in which her uncle and aunt loved to move by the uncompromising frankness of her remarks, was a very different person to the affectionate, warm-hearted Mabel we knew and loved.

"What have you been doing with yourself all this year, Mab?" I asked, after a few minutes of that

pleasant silence which is so eloquent between friends who thoroughly understand each other.

A bright blush rose on Mabel's cheek as her eyes met mine. I guessed at once that she had something to tell me, some confidence to make, and, woman-like, I jumped to the conclusion that the confidence regarded a love-affair of some sort. I was secretly rather triumphant at the prospect of listening to such a confession of weakness on her part, for Mabel had hitherto prided herself on her immunity from all "folly" of that sort, as she contemptuously called it. But her embarrassment soon passed, and, as her frank gaze met mine, I felt half ashamed at the silly fancy that had entered my head.

"I have not had a pleasant time of it lately," she said, a little troubled pucker ruffling her white forehead. "Uncle John has been bothering me so."

"What about?"

Again that bright blush came into her cheeks.

"Oh—about a—man."

"You are not very explicit, my dear."

She laughed a little nervous laugh, and bending her graceful head so that I could not see her face, she went on slowly.

"He wanted me to marry the man."

"And who *is* this unlucky man?" I inquired, smiling; "is he very objectionable?"

"*Very.* He is about the most uninteresting person I have ever seen, and that is saying something."

"Handsome?"

"Well—yes, rather," she replied dubiously; "but oh! so stupid and prosy—and horrid!" she added vehemently.

I laughed. It was the old story,—some luckless individual had been fascinated by Miss Mabel's beautiful face, while she, "in maiden meditation, fancy free," looked coldly and contemptuously surprised at his "audacity" in falling in love with her.

"Poor man!" I said, trying to be grave; "did you tell him so?"

"N—no, not exactly; but I'm afraid I showed him what I thought of him."

"And your uncle wanted you to marry this presumptuous mortal?"

"Yes. He was dreadfully annoyed when I refused Mr. Trefusis. You can't think how delighted I was to get your invitation; life was becoming quite unbearable in Maryville Square."

"Poor little girl!" I said, stroking her rich brown hair as she nestled closer to my side in the coaxing, caressing way she had when quite alone with me. "You shan't go back until Mr.—Trefusis is no longer a bugbear to you."

At that moment my husband entered the room, and our *tête-à-tête* was at an end.

* * * * *

On the evening of the 31st of August, about a dozen guests were to arrive at Hamleigh Combe. I flattered myself that I had arranged the party with tolerable tact and discrimination. Two or three young married couples, two pretty sisters who sang duets charmingly, and several bachelor friends of my husband's, had been invited; and I had not had a single disappointment. The shooting was good, and people were kind enough to say that my house was the pleasantest one to stay at in the county.

Mabel had apparently forgotten all about her luckless admirer, and was in brilliant spirits. But the evening before our guests arrived a sudden change came over her. She was silent, absent, and unaccountably restless.

"My dear girl, what is the matter with you?" I said, when she had paced the room for fully five minutes, with a troubled, uneasy look on her face I had never seen there before.

"I don't know what is the matter with me," she said, with a little nervous laugh. "I can't settle to anything to-night. I have an uncanny sort of feeling that something is going to happen to me."

We were sitting in my own particular sanctum

that evening, as my husband had gone to dine with a bachelor friend who lived near us. A cottage piano stood in one corner of the room, and I suddenly bethought myself that music might possibly have a calming effect on Mabel, for she loved it passionately, and played remarkably well, in a far different style to that of most amateurs.

"Play me something, dear," I said coaxingly.

She seated herself obediently at the instrument, and dreamily played a few bars of one of Mendelssohn's *Lieder ohne Worte,* that is popularly called the *Duetto;* but her mind was evidently preoccupied, and she could not fix her attention on the music. Her fingers lay idly on the keys for a minute or two, and then she rose abruptly from the music-stool, and recommenced her restless walk up and down the room.

"I can't play to-night, Connie," she said wearily.

I saw that it was best to leave her to herself. This new mood was a strange one—Mab was usually the brightest, merriest, and least morbid of mortals —but no doubt it would pass away. At any rate it would do no good to worry her with questions, so I stitched away industriously at my crewel-work, while she paced silently but rapidly to and fro.

Once or twice I stole a glance at her face. Her cheeks were slightly flushed, her eyes were bright

and somewhat dilated; now and again her lips quivered; her whole aspect betrayed the suppressed excitement under which she suffered.

At last, after about half-an-hour's silence, I heard her murmur to herself—

"Yes, I will do it; perhaps I shall be able to get it out of my head then."

To tell the truth I felt seriously alarmed as I caught these words. To me they seemed incoherent, for I had no clue to their meaning.

Mabel's manner was decidedly odd, and her voice sounded strained and unnatural in tone. What had come to the girl? Was this strange restlessness and excitement the prelude to an illness of some sort?

Perplexed as I was by these questions, it was no small relief to my mind when Mabel seated herself quietly at the table where her drawing-materials lay scattered about, just as she had left them several hours ago, and, after carefully choosing a large sheet of paper, set herself industriously to work with her pencil.

The flush on her cheeks had deepened almost to crimson, there was a nervous tremor about her lips, her forehead was slightly corrugated, and from the rapid rise and fall of her white gown, I could tell that the bosom it covered was agitated by some strong emotion. For some time she worked silently and steadily on; the drawing, whatever it was, absorbed

her completely. She appeared to have forgotten my presence—possibly my very existence.

The perfect stillness, broken only by the sound of her pencil on the paper, had at last such an irritating effect on my nerves that I could bear it no longer.

"Mab, dear, what are you drawing? you seem very intent on it, whatever it is," I said somewhat incoherently, for I was beginning to feel seriously alarmed at her strange conduct.

No answer. Still her white, slender fingers guided the pencil with feverish speed over the paper. I could hear her hurried breathing as she bent over her task; I could see that her eyes were bright and much dilated under their long lashes. Otherwise she looked more like an automaton than a woman as she worked swiftly but mechanically on.

My words had made no more impression on her than on the drawing-board under her hand. Rising from my chair in desperation, I laid my hand on her shoulder, and bending down over her—for I am short-sighted—I looked at the mysterious drawing. Apparently she did not feel the touch on her shoulder, for her fingers did not relax their hold on the pencil, neither did she look up. Her whole soul appeared to be absorbed in putting the finishing touch to the drawing.

To my utter astonishment I saw that the girl had

drawn the portrait (such at least I supposed it to be) of a rather plain but remarkable-looking man. The eyes which looked at me from the paper were deeply set in their orbits, singularly large and penetrating; the brows were heavy, meeting almost over the aquiline nose; the mouth was firm, the chin massive, the head broad—it was a powerful but by no means a pleasing face.

"Whose portrait is this, Mab?" I asked, trying to laugh, but failing miserably. "I can't congratulate you on your choice of subject."

The extraordinary tension at which her whole being had been maintained during the past hour seemed suddenly to relax as her task was finished. The pencil dropped from her fingers; she rose abruptly with a half-hysterical laugh, and then, as if the reaction from the intense mental excitement under which she had been suffering was too much for her physical strength, she staggered slightly, and would have fallen had I not caught her in my arms and half led, half carried her to a sofa.

"Oh, Connie," she said at last, when I had soothed and petted her into calmness, "did you think me mad?"

"No, dear, of course not," I replied, with pardonable untruth; "but tell me, for I am dying to know, who is the original of this mysterious portrait."

"I don't know."

"You—don't know!" I repeated in amazement. "Is it a fancy portrait then? it doesn't look in the least like one."

"I suppose it is though—at least I am perfectly certain that I have never seen the original with the eyes of the flesh."

"Then what on earth made you think of that face?"

"How can I tell?" she cried almost angrily. "It has been haunting me for hours; I couldn't get it out of my head; I couldn't think of anything else!"

"You *must* have seen the face somewhere—in the streets, in some theatre, in a railway-carriage," I suggested.

"No, I have never seen it. I should remember if I had," she said positively. "The whole thing is a mystery; perhaps some day we shall solve it. Don't tell anybody about it—the portrait, I mean—and don't speak of it to me even, until—"

She left the sentence unfinished; but I observed that as she put the drawing carefully away in her portfolio, there was an expression half of expectancy, half of fear, in her eyes that told me she longed for yet dreaded the day when the subject should be re-opened between us.

* * * * *

The mystery, as Mab truly called it, was never really solved, but the events of the following day gave a totally new complexion to the affair. Most of our guests arrived during the afternoon, and we were quite a large party in the drawing-room for afternoon tea. Mab seemed almost herself again; but now and again she fell into a fit of abstraction, from which, however, she roused herself directly she met my eye. We were all talking and laughing merrily when my husband and two gentlemen walked in.

I have said that I am short-sighted: those similarly afflicted will understand the unpleasant feeling of nervous uncertainty which always takes possession of me when strangers, or those I suppose to be strangers, approach me from a distance. My husband had a rooted antipathy to eye-glasses, *pince-nez*, and all the spectacle tribe, so I was doomed to live like Tennyson's Queen Mary, in a "dim dilated world." Mab was seated near me, and as Will came up to introduce the new-comers, I happened to glance at her face. What I saw there startled me beyond expression; her cheeks and lips had lost every vestige of colour, and her large eyes were so unnaturally dilated that only a narrow ring of the hazel irids were visible. Before I could speak to her Will was at my side, and I was dimly conscious of two

strange faces within my limited range of vision, of some words spoken by my husband, and of giving my hand in a mechanical sort of way first to one and then to the other. The two strangers seated themselves near me, and the mist cleared away from my brain.

Had I been dreaming? had I had a vision of that singular face Mab had drawn on the previous evening? No. I was broad awake, and he, the living, breathing original of the sketch, was seated within a yard of me, talking in the most matter-of-fact tone about his journey, the weather, the prospect of the shooting, or any other trivial topic that came uppermost. At last I ventured to steal a glance at Mab. She was still pale, but her eyes had no longer that look of terror; they were fixed curiously, inquiringly on the new-comer; her hands were clasped nervously together on her lap, and there was a slight tremor about the corners of her mouth.

"So glad you were able to come, Stanford," said my husband, coming to the rescue with his usual tact, for he must have seen the state of mental chaos to which I had momentarily been reduced; indeed he told me afterwards that he wondered what on earth had come to me, I looked dazed.

Stanford then was the name of this plain-featured but striking-looking individual, whose advent had

startled Mab out of her self-possession and disturbed my own mental equilibrium in so unusual a manner. Could he be *the* Stanford—the distinguished scientist who had recently been investigating some of those curious psychical phenomena that have exercised so many wise heads of late? I had never heard my husband mention his name before, and I had no idea they were personally acquainted. Afterwards, in the light of subsequent events, I marvelled at the strange combination of circumstances that had brought Harding Stanford to our quiet country home.

My husband chatted away to the new-comers with unusual vivacity, and consequently, as I was for the time being relieved of hostess cares, I had plenty of opportunity for observation. I was curious to see how Mr. Stanford was affected by Mabel's presence, how she would behave towards him—in short, what would be the upshot of this strange affair. As the three men talked I noticed that Mr. Stanford's deep-set eyes roved about the room as if in search of some one he expected to see there. Intuitively I felt that it was Mab he sought. She had taken up her needle-work, and was bending over it as if to hide her face; but the small feminine ruse availed her nothing.

I drew a deep breath as I saw Mr. Stanford's glance alight on her. A curious look flashed into his eyes as they rested on her bowed head—a look whose

meaning I could not fathom. Whatever its meaning, the effect it had on her was curious. She raised her head as though in obedience to an unspoken command, and their eyes met with a flash of *recognition* —and yet I knew this was their first meeting. Mab's eyes did not droop under that fixed gaze of his, but their expression deepened until they had the wistful, pathetic look one sometimes sees in the eyes of a dog.

* * * * *

All that evening Mab was unusually quiet and subdued. Much to my surprise, though my husband had introduced Mr. Stanford to her (a thing I superstitiously and perhaps foolishly shrank from doing), the two hardly spoke. Indeed I fancied I detected in both an endeavour to keep apart, and yet over and over again I saw their eyes meet in a long glance. An odd notion came into my head that they did not need ordinary methods of communication; that the two, strangers as they were, understood each other's thoughts without the aid of words.

Mr. Stanford prolonged his visit with very little pressing on my husband's part,—I studiously avoided adding my word to his,—and I could see that every day deepened the interest of his peculiar relations with Mab. The girl herself had changed so much that I hardly knew her for the bright laughing Mab of a week before, and yet I do not

think she was made unhappy or even uneasy by the singular influence Mr. Stanford had over her.

One evening about ten days after his arrival at Hamleigh Combe, when she and I were alone in my sanctum, to my utter astonishment Mab informed me that she was going to marry Harding Stanford. For the moment the news took my breath away: I gazed at the girl in mute amazement.

"Are you so surprised, Connie?" she asked gravely. There were no blushes on her cheeks; there was none of the half-shy, wholly glad elation usual with girls at such times; only a quiet seriousness and restfulness—the word exactly expresses her aspect at that moment—in her manner.

"That first evening," she went on calmly, "I knew I had met my master. I knew I should be his wife if he asked me—I think I even knew that he *would* ask me."

"But, Mab, do you love him?" I burst out impulsively; "are you sure that you will be happy as his wife?"

"I don't know; it would be impossible for me to marry any one else."

"Mab, darling!" I cried, drawing her into my embrace, "don't let this man persuade you into marrying him if—"

"I have promised to marry him of my own free

will. Connie," she said, with sudden solemnity, "you know the old Greek fable about twin souls; well, that is my—*our* case. Mr. Stanford and I recognized each other at once; and when I told him about that drawing—you remember?"

"Did you tell him about that, Mab?"

"Yes, of course; I showed it to him too. Why should we have secrets from each other? He told me something quite as strange."

"What did he tell you?"

"That evening, at the very time I was drawing, he fell asleep in his study—he had been reading all day and was tired—and a dream came to him. He saw my face so plainly; and—and he says that when he awoke he knew that some day he would meet the woman of his dream, and that she would be his wife."

"But, Mab, dear," I said, after a moment's thought, "he *must* have seen you somewhere, or how could he dream about you?"

"I can't explain it, nor can he, but he is positive we had never met until he saw me here. It is a mystery, as I told you that evening. Mr. Stanford says such things are the romance of psychology."

And the mystery to this day remains a mystery. Harding Stanford and his wife do not care to talk about that dream-meeting of theirs even to me, but

when I proposed—of course changing names and places—to write a brief account of the matter, for the benefit of those interested in such subjects, they offered no opposition, only remarking that fact is so much stranger than fiction, and that my story would be so strange that no one would believe it.

FORE-ARMED.

Sara Forester, rising from the writing-table in the oriel window, and giving an admiring glance at the stately proportions of "Sir Walter's Room," wondered for the second time as she crossed its breadth to go downstairs for tea, that the nerves of Lord and Lady Selhurst should be weaker than their appreciation of the beauties of so fine an "interior" was strong. They had arrived at Carmel Abbey, she had learned, before luncheon, to increase and perfect one of the house parties Lady Lucy Gascoigne was fond of collecting together from Monday till Saturday in the country, but within an hour of their arrival had heard through the gossip of a maid that the room they had been installed in was reported to be haunted, and had transferred themselves to a modest room in the west corridor destined for Sara herself. Sara arriving later found herself, in succession to their retreat, possessed of the importance attaching to the tenant of the state-room

on the central staircase, next to that of her host and hostess, a position, as false ones often are, essentially, if ephemerally, desirable.

The laughter and gossip of a mixed party greeted her as she entered the Oak Parlour. The house party, completed by the recent return of the hunting contingent, was broken up into knots. More than one group of men lounged about the room, where a side-table, supplied with liqueurs, spirits, and potash, supplemented the tea and cakes that were calculated to last the ladies long beyond any legitimate dinner-hour. To the two or three in attendance at the tea-table was added, at the hostess's summons, a fair man, the perfect fit of whose cords and tops detracted indirectly from his undeniable good looks, by necessarily dividing any appreciative observer's attention with them.

"Come and tell Miss Forester about to-day's sport and to-morrow's fixture, Captain Gower," called out Lady Lucy; "she is our only riding lady."

Captain Gower, between draughts of whiskey and seltzer, plunged at once into descriptive detail, while, with the double action of which bright wits are capable, he criticized Sara's expressive face, deciding half-a-dozen times, in less minutes, for and against her claim to beauty. On his own possession of it every woman he had ever met had decided as she

bowed to him, but he had the indifference to abstract beauty not uncommon with men possessed of it in an unusual degree, and Miss Forester's piquant face, with its wide mouth, short nose, and square little chin, took his fancy strongly.

"It's a big country," he said, "and you will like it. Does Gascoigne mount you? Ah, then, you will be sure to go. Lady Lucy, what does Miss Forester ride to-morrow?"

"Don't ask *me!*" answered his hostess in her high-pitched, merry voice, "I know *nothing*. Ask Frank. By the way, isn't he in?"

"We left him at the 'Coach and Horses,'" laughed Captain Gower in return. "He says there is only one thing he can't get in his own house—a decent glass of beer."

"Was Charles Benham out to-day?" asked a new arrival.

"Out and got a crashing fall; no bones broken, though. It ought to frank him for the rest of the season, I suppose?"

"Should do," said Fred Somers. "By the way, who is his heir when he comes to his inevitable end? —does any one know? He has no near relation."

"I am willing to run for it," observed Captain Gower, glancing at Sara by an impulse for which he would have been puzzled to account. "Who'll

back me for the prize? I've never seen the man, understand."

"Ten thousand to one against it," said Fred Somers.

"Not a sovereign more than fifty," corrected Mrs. Mercer, a lively *habituée* of country-houses. "All the world knows Captain Gower's luck, and that the only certainty is what is unexpected."

"My chance should be better," said Lewis Gascoigne, a younger brother of the squire. "We were all one two hundred years ago; more by token Benham grows more like our mutual great-grandfather every day."

"The likeness to Sir Walter is very striking," added Lady Lucy. "They were all talking of it last time he dined here."

Miss Forester, though a little puzzled, listened to these fugitive remarks with interest. The subject of them was known to her by name through a family feud, which had hitherto made any mention of it sound like a fog-horn through the dense moral atmosphere bound to prevail at the time. Her father and the Benhams had been cousins, but she was entirely ignorant of the cause of an estrangement so complete that in the second generation Charles's ownership of an estate in North Midshire had been a reason for Mr. Forester objecting to his daughter's

visit in the same county. It is not necessary to particularize it here. The origin of a family feud is wont to be insignificant and have its roots in some spirit of greed or vanity that has spread from its root to a size that alone gives it importance. Whether a question of game-preserving, legacy-hunting, or trespass, the feud has thriven and spread, and for years the Foresters and Benhams had only had that kind of interest in each other that a Servian may have in a Bulgar, or some pious theologian in the devil. It is necessary to know the enemy's position.

Youth being at its best perverse, Charles Benham and his bruising form of horsemanship was still occupying a place in her thoughts when, after the distractions of comic songs, dressing, and a parade across two intervening reception-rooms, Sara found herself at eight o'clock seated next to Captain Gower before a pile of moss, ferns, and flowers, called conventionally the dinner-table. An old acquaintance sat on her left hand, and it was not until the meal was half over that her new friend succeeded in attracting her attention. Then, with his eyes lifted to a painting on the opposite panel, he called her attention to it by the trivial-sounding remark:

"I have never made up my mind as to the taste that hangs one's ancestors as permanent witnesses of one's greediness."

"You wouldn't have family portraits in a dining-room, you mean?" asked Sara.

"Yes; wasn't it well put?"

"Very," she answered, laughing; "in the form of a problem. But why should they be out of place?"

"Don't let us argue; but doesn't that handsome fellow opposite look supercilious, as if, having known the table loaded with sirloins and nut-brown ale, he despised made dishes and hot-house flowers? I thought so last night."

"It is a beautiful face. Who is it?"

"Some ancestor of the Gascoignes, I know, and that's all. It's a face that sticks by one somehow. But you prefer blue eyes to brown?"

"Yes," she said simply, and then, catching sight of the flash in his own, saw she had fallen into a trap. Nevertheless, for a few minutes the impression of his face drove from her mind the stronger one the portrait had produced. The pictured cavalier regained his ascendancy later, however, and though the talk drifted down an easy current to the field and the chase, the grave eyes surmounting the straight lines of nose and moustache rested upon Sara throughout the meal, consciously to herself, and followed her from the room with lingering watchfulness.

Lady Lucy, from the head of the table, was

unconscious of Sara's divided interests. "That won't do at all," she thought, with a nod of her clever head that fortunately accentuated a political formula her neighbour was at the moment propounding. "A younger son, and Sara without the ghost of a fortune except what she can get by marrying." Nevertheless, she was regretting the rigidity of the social necessities that frowned upon what she conceived was a mutual liking; though she was not going to yield her present scheme, now brought to its initial stage, without trouble, which was nothing less than the healing of a family feud and the marriage of a penniless girl to her wealthy cousin. Just now Rupert Gower looked like standing in Charles Benham's light.

Sara, unconscious of the game in which she was being played, went up to her room that night after an evening merry enough to have made her forget its character, and prepared for sleep with no more serious reflection than that suggested by the sight of the hunting-kit set out for her use next morning. She lay down in the canopied bed without even noticing the waving of the tapestry that the draught from the wide chimney occasioned, and fell asleep at once. The hall clock was striking three on a deep-toned bell when she awoke suddenly and completely. The firelight, gleaming red and dull,

only half lighted the moulded ceiling and heavily hung walls, but as she turned on her elbow away from it, a cavern of coals fell in and flamed up from the hollow with a glare as bright as day. The figure of a man stood in the full light, his eyes fixed on her own. It was a steady, unemotional gaze, that precluded any suggestion of fear or surprise, and she returned it with a vague feeling of expecting him to speak. His face, with its dark eyes, seemed familiar, and as she looked she saw that he was the cavalier of the dining-room portrait, but dressed—and with the same perfection of detail—as Captain Gower had been when she met him a few hours earlier in the tea-room. His hunting-crop was in his hand and his head was bare; a red line crossed one temple, and he raised his hand to it as he spoke:

"The pace is tremendous," he said in a level and somewhat harsh voice. "Lie well away to my right."

"When?" Sara asked, and could neither have accounted for the question nor its form.

"You hear the time," answered the young man. "His point—Markdean. You will remember?"

There was a long pause, during which his gaze seemed to sadden to the intensity of Vandyke's portrait, following Sara's as she dropped back at last on her pillow with the same wistful expression with

which the pictured eyes had seemed to watch her from the dining-room.

She raised herself again. "You are hurt?" she asked involuntarily, for she did not feel as if he needed help.

"It is a mere nothing," he answered, "and the end is near."

There was such an intensity of expression in the harsh tones that Sara covered her face in her hands and shivered. When she looked up again, the place where he had stood was empty.

She was fully awake, and she set herself to consider whom she had seen and why he came. Real and yet unreal, alive and yet a figure of the past, his presence had been a fact and no dream. How had he entered the room, how left it, and who was he? No inhabitant of the Abbey, certainly no visitor; a modern sportsman as to his dress, an ancestor of the house by his features. Sara's conjectures became confusion, and she fell asleep.

The ideal hunting morning song is not necessarily productive of good scent; nevertheless, proverbial sayings have weight, and the bitterness of a whistling north-easter is intensified by its direct opposition to accepted perfection in winds. A north-east wind with a rising glass was, it is true, approved of Huntsman Goodall, but when the Carmel party mounted

on the 13th of January the glass was, as it chanced, falling, and the biting wind was ferreting for victims in every corner of the cloistered quadrangle. Rupert Gower lifted Sara on to her horse with an expression that was less orthodox than forcible, and during the short ride to covert divided his remarks between abuse of the blast and equivocal encomiums on his hunter. "Grand water-jumper, but won't face timber; as fast as the mail, but pulls like the devil; capital in dirt, but money thrown away if you get on the hills"—all of which pullings-off from the horse's value would have remained unrecorded in another mood. Fred Somers, on Sara's other side, rode with his hat crammed down upon his head and the lids of his eyes lowered, so that their unfailing twinkle was invisible; but now and then a word of chaff, directed to Gower, escaped him, showing his cheerful spirit was undaunted; and, indeed, as one of that noble army of martyrs, "a one-horse man," he was inevitably keen upon even the off-chance of sport.

The day was so opposed to social amenities that the Master put his hounds into Lower Shaw with exceptional punctuality, and the Carmel party, coming up ten minutes late, found the field scattered to likely positions for getting away. Half-a-dozen foxes were on foot at once, but none seemed inclined to face the open, and the first hour-and-a-half was spent

in the woodlands with nothing more satisfactory to show for it than spasmodic, ringing runs along and across the rides, with a chopped fox as the result. The Master then made a move for a small wood at a distance of three miles, which lay in a promising hollow, was unexceptional in its harbour of a stout fox, and offered the best chance he could give his hounds of sport for the day. Pipe's Spinney was, however, for once drawn blank, and a neighbouring gorse proved as unsatisfactory, while another draw roused a fox that took them straight back to Lower Shaw and was lost. The fifteen minutes served to warm the blood of horses and men, and though there were some defections on the part of those who thought to save their horses for a better day, a strong field took the chance of an improvement in the afternoon, and followed the Master as he led them at a sharp pace towards a covert lying on the edge of his country known as "The Wilderness."

"The day seems changing," said Fred Somers, riding up to Miss Forester's side as they reached it, "and I suspect we've got one chance. This is the stiffest side, and if you like timber and we get away you'll be in luck. Your horse likes it, I happen to know."

Sara was just beginning a remark about the sudden dropping of the wind, and what was to follow, when a fox stole out of the covert a hundred yards in front

of them, and with a sudden crash of music half the pack were at his brush.

"In luck, and no mistake!" said cheery Fred, ramming his hunting-flask into its case, while his companion sat down and let her horse go. For ten minutes the pace was fast enough to tell upon the worse mounted, and when they checked on the plough and the first flight got a pull at their horses, Sara found herself one of half-a-dozen where fifty had been. Her host, Frank Gascoigne, was up, as were the Master and his wife, Gower, Fred Somers, and a powerfully-built young man, on a white-legged bay, for which Sara recalled having seen him, in the distance, exchange a clever cob he had been riding in the morning. He was in front of her, and she was contrasting the ease of his seat with his breadth and apparent weight, when Gertrude made certain of Bajazets' challenge, and the hounds swinging unexpectedly toward her drew a remark from the Master that gave her a shock of recognition. "Markdean, as I'm alive!" he said to his wife. "Never knew a Wilderness fox make that point before," and then, with "Markdean!" in her ears, Sara found herself riding at a high thorn fence that was awkwardly broken by hedgerow timber. Her perfectly-bitted horse flew it between two closely-planted oaks, landing her in a grass field that was divided along

its breadth by a stiff post and rails, over which she followed Fred Somers, all unconscious that Gower's anticipated failure at timber was to be localized by a heavy roll-over behind her at the spot where she had had it.

She was on good terms with hounds, and had the quasi-satisfaction of seeing three riders drop back to her, while she and the Master, who was fifty yards in advance of her, followed the line at a pace that, good as it was, was unavailing to prevent the distance increasing between them and the flying hounds. The "pace was tremendous." The phrase occurred to her just as the thundering of coming hoofs in the hard turf of the hillside they were breasting made her look round. The white-legged weight-carrier plunged past her, and as he did so the rider turned in his saddle and looked at her. He had lost his hat as his horse crashed through the tree-boughs at the thorn fence, and the broken cord was dangling at his back; his head was uncovered, and as he rode by, his forehead showed a sharp red line across one side, where a branch had cut it. He raised his hand to it, and as he did so Sara saw he was the horseman of her vision, even to the details of the low-growing hair and the expression of his eyes. At the same time his was the face of the dining-room portrait alive before her. Her horse sprang

jealously after his, and for some seconds they were riding side by side, stretching up the sharp pitch that led to the sheep-grazed table-land across which hounds were streaming. Her companion never turned his head, and yet as they galloped together the words of the night before came to her as plainly as if he had spoken them. "Lie well away to my right. Remember."

Hounds were inclining to the left, when, far away down the opposite slope of the hill and blue with distance—an open, well-fenced country lying between —lay the dark line of Markdean Wood. The Master was out of sight. Sure of his point, he had slipped down the hillside, and was riding to nick in with his hounds, while in the plain below a little knot of skirters were bent on overtaking him for the sake of his lead. Sara and her companion were alone on the line, which led straight over the plateau, and down the further slope of the hill. He glanced back at her once as she topped a stone wall, though the plunging movements of a horse he could neither check nor guide called for all his attention. At the same moment a church clock in the valley struck three, and turning away from him, Sara was soon well away to his right, and on the right of the line of hounds. She saw him no more.

Down the hill again, she was able to improve her

position, and ultimately, after another forty minutes of steady riding, in which the skirters had the best of it, she came up with the fast-converging field, just as the hounds ran their fox into Markdean Wood in the South Midshire country. There he went to earth, and as it was impossible to dig and the horses had had enough, the Master, mindful of the time and of the fifteen miles that lay between him and his kennels, gave the word for home. As he did so he glanced round.

"Where's Benham?" he said to Fred Somers, who was mounting again for the ride back.

"He followed the line up the hill, I fancy," returned Fred. "I have not seen him since the young one bolted with him, just after the hounds picked up the scent again. He got his hat knocked off at the first fence and looked as if he must lose his seat—any other man would have done."

"He's mad to ride that horse. I told him so," observed a member of the hunt. "He'll bring him to grief inevitably."

"I should shoot him at once," said another.

"Or send him up to Tattersall's 'to carry a lady,'" grinned Fred.

Rupert Gower looked at Sara.

"Was that your bruising cousin, then?" he asked. "You saw him last, I suppose?"

"He was riding the line to a yard, straight over the hill," said Sara. "I was on his right."

The Master turned in his saddle.

"Hounds skirted the gravel-pits," he said quickly. "I wish I had a horse to send back. With that young one he might be killed."

"He was quite out of hand," returned Sara, changing colour. "Captain Gower, can't we go back? My horse can do it I am sure."

"Of course, if you wish it," Rupert returned. "We are miles from home, and Benham, I should fancy, is the sort of man to be able to look after himself; but——"

"Come!" she said, and she swung off at a rapid trot.

* * * * *

They found him at the bottom of the gravel-pit, side by side with his horse. He lay quietly on his back, with no appearance of injury, but his neck was broken; the horse, with a fractured shoulder, was a few feet from him, as if the violence of the shock on landing had crippled him, and the half roll-over unseating his rider, Benham had been pitched on his head, never to move again. It seemed to Sara, as she sat by him with his head on her lap, while Rupert rode off through the falling rain for assistance, as if the only duty she could now do him softened the

remembrance of the feud with which he was associated, and as she closed the eyes that had looked so strangely at her, the tears that fell from her own, if partly the result of physical fatigue and excitement, came chiefly at the thought that the pluck of the dead man before her must certainly have won for him her obstinate father's liking, if circumstances had not stood all his life in the way of their meeting. She was too kind-hearted not to regret the past ill-feeling, which looked, as ill-feeling does when viewed by the strong light of eternity, small and pitiful to a retrospective eye.

So Charles Benham died and was buried, and Rupert Gower reigned in his stead. The will, upon which the Carmel guests had speculated idly, proved to be made absolutely in favour of the young cousin Charles had never wittingly seen, and Sara found herself, as his heir, a rich woman and owner of the best-appointed hunting-box in North Midshire.

Mrs. Mercer hugged herself on her acute reduction of the odds against Rupert; but Lady Lucy, who was speculative, puzzled herself untiringly over the appearance of Sir Walter Gascoigne, in the form of Charles Benham, to Sara in the room he had always been traditionally said to haunt.

Sara herself did not care to talk of it. The story

was a tragic one to her, despite its happy ending; and for years she carefully avoided the hill where, one January afternoon, the sharp report of a gun had seemed to divide her life into two parts, as its charge sent the half-broken hunter to follow the master whose death he had occasioned into the unknown land.

ONLY TEN MINUTES;

Or, What my Dream told Me.

I.

The Kenricks were always a large family. When I was a lad I drew up a genealogical table, whence it appeared that I, Arthur George Ford Kenrick, was at that period the possessor of eleven uncles and aunts on my father's side, of twenty-eight first cousins in the persons of their children, and of eight brothers and sisters of my own. I was the eldest son of a second brother. My eldest uncle—my Uncle George, to wit, who was also my godfather, as my second name testifies—was the great man of our tribe, and the head of the firm of Kenrick & Company, merchants, of Shanghai. My father had also made a very respectable fortune as a colonial broker: my other uncles were all prosperous fathers of families, and my aunts were all flourishing mothers. As my branch of the family tree developed from the budding stage of the nursery and schoolroom, my sisters bade

fair to follow the good example of their aunts, and my brothers to take after their uncles. I must ask my reader to get it well into his head that I am distinctly a member of a *very* large and exceedingly marrying family on my father's side. That seemingly immaterial accident is the very root of my whole story.

The only exception to the law of likeness which governed the Kenricks in general was, at least until my own birth, my Uncle George. He alone had never married: indeed, he both professed and practised such misogynic principles as to have earned for himself the name of "the old bachelor" at nineteen years old. He had never stumbled over so much as the merest threshold of flirtation. He was friendly with his sisters-in-law and fond of his nieces; but a strange petticoat was a terror to him. A more easy-going genial man among men was not to be found in the world than George Kenrick; but the appearance of a woman acted on him like a sudden frost in summer. Nor did he by any means conceal his objection to the sex at large, but was a public and open railer at women and their ways. So that, in spite of his good looks, good heart, good temper, and good fortune, his enemies gave him up as a hopeless case and left him alone.

It is easy to imagine how such a brother and

uncle was prized and honoured—for I can assure all whom it concerns, that it is not only the needy who make much of a rich relation who has notoriously forsworn matrimony. But it so happened that Uncle George took it into his head that he would like to have a son and heir, so long as he could manage it without the help of anything in the shape of womankind. Naturally, as soon as I came into the world, Uncle George was asked to be my godfather; and I had the advantage, it will be remembered, of being the firstborn of the brother who came next to him. And, curiously enough, it so happened that, as I grew up, I became even less like a typical Kenrick than he. I was idle at my books; I was a dunce at arithmetic; I was mortally afraid of little girls. But I had a consuming passion for paints and pencils, and one lucky or unlucky day I made a shameless caricature of Uncle George himself, which happened to fall into his own hands.

I can see him now, turning it upside down and downside up, and round and round; and I can see his frown trying to keep itself from turning into a smile. It was really a very good bit of art in its way I believe.

"If a herring and a half cost three-halfpence, how many can you buy for twopence?" asked he.

I am sometimes uncertain of the correct answer to

this day; but I said then, at a venture, "One and a quarter."

"You'll do, my lad!" said Uncle George cordially. "I'd give my eyes to be a painter instead of a China merchant; but I never could draw a straight line, and I never could manage to get less than value for my money. Never mind—we'll have an artist in the family yet, and I'll be he—by deputy. And if ever you get as far as 'rule of three,' I'll—'

What he would do I know not. But he had a long talk with my father that same day. And it became an understood thing in the family (which could well afford the disappointment) that I was to study art at Uncle George's expense, and was to be his sole heir: in effect, that I was to be given over to him. So said, so done. It is not his fault that I am not a better painter than I am. Or rather it is his fault; for I should surely have studied harder had I not known myself to be sole heir, under his will, to all the results of the business at Shanghai. My father also altered his will; and, as I was more than amply provided for, divided among my eight brothers and sisters what would have been my share of his fortune. It was just, for I should eventually be richer than all my brothers and sisters put together; but I fancy that my father may have thought it politic to insure my uncle's mind against

changing by making him feel that my career was altogether dependent upon him.

My history thenceforth, up to the age of about eight-and-twenty, is soon told. I was taken from school and put to painting, which I followed with much more pleasure than industry, and without exceeding my very handsome allowance by more than was natural in one who never could understand the price of herrings. My uncle returned to Shanghai; and very soon afterwards my father died, leaving behind him the will I have described.

It was in the autumn of a never-to-be-forgotten year that I started, alone, on a sketching tour in North Wales, and arrived on foot at the little inn of Llanpwll. That little inn is an hotel now, and Llanpwll has been caught and tamed; but it was a pleasant place then, and full of wild charm. I used to like rambling about by myself in those days, though less, I am afraid, for the sake of art than for that of the little adventures one picks up by the way; and very little adventures will serve the turn of one who is by nature a bit of a vagabond. At home in London I liked comfort and pleasure as well as any man, and was much too well off to be a free citizen of artistic Bohemia. So it was all the more pleasant to become at times a sharer with my

fellows in all those luxuries of freedom, hunger, solitude, and fatigue which money cannot buy, and which, in great cities, are the privilege of none but the poor. I never rode, I frequented the humblest inns, I carried no baggage, and I outdid my brother painters in the roughness and shabbiness of my clothes, for painters were not then the well-trimmed race that they have since become.

I was just as well off in mind, body, and estate as a young man can be. I could work as much as I liked, and I could idle as much as I liked, and both in the way that best pleased me. I had perfect health, no restraints, and no cares either for the day or for the morrow: I had only to hold out my hand to life, and to draw it back well filled. I was not even in love; for though I did not altogether take after my Uncle George in the matter of flirtations, and though my original fear of little girls had not been carried on into my intercourse with great ones, still my heart was just as free as my godfather's own. I looked forward to passing just as many or just as few pleasant days at Llanpwll as might please my humour, and then tramping on to find yet pleasenter days elsewhere. Fortune was my hostess everywhere, and always a kind one.

The next day I rambled about in search of a subject all day long, dined luxuriously on trout, and

then slept a single sleep for ten hours without a single dream. For I must tell you that I never dream by night, whatever I may do by day. My habit is to go off when my head touches the pillow, and to wake up all over at once, as soon as sleep has done its duty. I doubt if, in those days at least, I really knew what dreaming meant. And I never felt so refreshed and so vigorous as I did at breakfast-time on that special next morning.

I had found a subject that satisfied me with its promise, and I was eager to begin. I need not describe it: there were water, wood, and mountain, and all the other stock in art of rambling painters in North Wales. I would really paint a picture this time.

But for once I had reckoned without my hostess—Fortune. On the very spot I had chosen for myself yesterday there sat an earlier bird intent upon my worm; a rival wooer of Nature, painting as if she had not an instant of her life to lose. *Her* life—for my rival was a she.

Owing to the nature of the path I had come upon her almost before I saw her; and she was far too absorbed to have heard my coming. I hardly knew what to do. I never felt more eager for work; I had lived a life of mood-humouring, and I felt as if I must needs paint that picture or none, and to-day

or never. And yet there was no possible way of saying to her, "Pardon me; but this bit of Nature is retained." Meanwhile, I took a good long look at her; for one does not—or rather in those days did not—meet a wandering sketcher in petticoats every day at out-of-the-way places like Llanpwll. And less often still used one to meet sketchers in petticoats like her; and not more often now than then. Uncle George, no doubt, would have run away. I kept my ground.

She was beyond all question a remarkably pretty girl—really pretty, and not merely from a painter's point of view. She was very pretty, and very little, and very young. She was a lady, every inch of her—not that this necessarily amounts to much, seeing how few her inches were; and she was tastefully as well as sensibly dressed in—I am a bad hand at describing clothes—some very plain dark stuff made in a very plain and homely fashion, with some sort of hat as unpretending as the rest of her costume. And now, having got rid of the clothes, for her who wore them. Plain and homely as these were, they did not altogether hide a most exquisite and most perfect figure, charmingly slender and lithe, but in no respect less full than is formed by health and Nature. She was the sort of girl who would fly up a mountain, and be fresher at the top than she was

before she began to climb. Her face, even at first sight, was indescribably winning. When I call her pretty I hardly know, after all, whether the word be the right one; or, if it be, whether it was not her expression, and not her features, that made it so. I suppose the truth is that her features were pretty, and their expression a great deal more. She was brightly and healthily fair, not wholly unburned by the sun and wind, which is by no means always so unbecoming as women believe. Her eyes were grey, her nose neither long nor short, and her mouth neither large nor small. That is not much of a description for a painter. But it must pass. For it was a good face, at once pure and wise, and lighted up with kind and gentle humour. I am not sure, after all, that she was so much absorbed in her work as not to have thoughts apart from, though they must needs be in harmony with, the picture she was trying to make her own. Though she had not heard my coming steps, I could see that the bright September air and the deep inaudible song that only belongs to mountain silence had as much to do with the light in her face as what was seen by her eyes. There was something unspeakably true, and simple, and natural, and wise in the best and sweetest way, as surely about her as there was in the light and the air. She seemed to

make the day itself feel the better for her being there.

But, nevertheless, she had picked up my own particular worm. So I did the only thing that seemed to be left me. Here was an adventure, anyhow. There was a convenient bit of rock in which I could sit very comfortably and unseen—unless she happened to look up, which did not seem at all likely. I climbed to the top without making any noise, put a block on my knees, and began to sketch —*Her*.

So she sketched the scene, and I, till I could get my innings, sketched the sketcher. As the minutes went by I began to think that I had by no means the worse of the bargain. There is plenty of Nature in North Wales, but there are not many girls like this in Nature. Presently I began to hope that she would not leave her work too soon; at least, not until I had done enough to make a picture of at leisure. She worked hard and fast, and I harder and faster; and twenty times at least I caught some new light or shade of expression that obliged me to begin in spirit all over again. Never had I found a subject that had interested me, nay, fascinated me, more—never since I had caricatured Uncle George.

At last she laid down her work and rose. And, to my dismay, she *did* look up, and she saw me as

plainly as I saw her. I laid my block face downwards as guiltily as if I had been caught red-handed in the middle of a crime.

"Sir," she said, very quietly and calmly, but in a voice—a very sweet one, by the way—that seemed somehow to hide a smile, "would you mind being so kind as to hand me down a small basket that you will find behind that bit of rock on your left hand? Thank you; I am very much obliged."

As all the world knows, there are exactly eleven thousand three hundred and forty-five ways in which a girl can speak to a strange young man whom she meets alone by chance, and for the first time. The way in which this girl spoke to me was in the very best of them. It was most clearly not meant either to attract or to encourage or to serve for ice-breaking, or, on the other hand, to impress or repel; she wanted something, and she was not afraid to ask for it simply, and that was all. It implied at once the courage that comes from trust, and the trust that comes from courage. I suppose she had never had cause to fear or mistrust any fellow human soul.

She opened the basket I had handed her, took out some sandwiches and a bottle of milk, and began to eat as unconcernedly as if no male creature were by to see. But if she felt no cause for fear, why—not being Uncle George—should I?

"We seem both to have been caught by the same bit," said I. "This is what I was hunting for all yesterday. But I suppose you know this country well?"

"Pretty well," said she. "But—may I not offer you some of my dinner, as you don't seem to have brought any of your own?"

"I don't know how to say No; but I must say it, if I may. I should like to see your morning's work, though, if—"

"Certainly," said she, handing me up a sketch which, combined with her entire freedom from all shyness about the matter, settled at once for me the question of whether she was artist or amateur. Beyond question she was fully as much an artist as I, and probably a great deal more. "I'm afraid it is a sad libel, though. Will you, please, let me see yours?"

"Of course—" I was beginning, when I suddenly remembered what my morning's work had been. I suspected myself of colouring, and the suspicion fulfilled itself, I am sure, in the usual way. "Oh, mine—I'm afraid," I said, leaping at whatever lie was nearest to hand, "I'm afraid I must plead guilty to hideous laziness in the face of your industry. I've been all this while going to begin. I wanted the afternoon light, you see—"

"How lucky! it is afternoon now. I wish you

would let me watch your work, if I may? It will be a grand chance for me."

"But you are yourself a painter, are not you? And a fine one. I can't pretend. But our common choice of a subject should be a sort of introduction between us, any way. I've no doubt I am arguing myself unknown not to know you, and shall feel ashamed of my ignorance when I find out who you are." For I was certain by this time that I had fallen in with somebody who was somebody in the world of art, and whose name and works at least I ought to know.

"I don't think it likely that you ever heard of me," said she, a little stiffly. "I suppose you come from London. I don't. You are not likely to have heard of—of—of—Mildred Ashton. And as to being a painter, I only know I am a very poor one indeed."

"Then all I can say is, you will not remain unknown or poor for long. You have genius, Miss Ashton; that is a big word, but a true one."

Her whole face lighted up with pleasure.

"Do you really mean what you say?" asked she.

"I hope I always mean what I say," said I, stupidly enough. It did not even strike me as strange that such chance companions as we were should be beginning to talk as if we were friends. I

only noticed her childlike pleasure at my speech, and that it was far too simple and natural to be called vain.

"And you are a real painter?" she asked.

"It is my calling. Isn't it yours?"

"I have no other. But I want teaching very badly indeed. I have told you my name. What is yours?"

"Arthur Kenrick."

"No doubt I ought to know it, only I don't," said she, nearly echoing my own words. "The only Kenrick I ever heard of is a friend of a cousin of mine, who lives in China, at a place called Shanghai—"

"What! you know my uncle, Miss Ashton? That is strange indeed! I am the nephew of Mr. George Kenrick of Shanghai."

"No, *I* don't know him," said Miss Ashton. "But why is it strange that your uncle should know my cousin, when they both live in the same town? However, I am glad that I know it is so, and therefore a little about who you are. Are you not going to begin?"

It is only a great deal too easy to write down empty words. But until some man of science finds out how to reproduce their tone and colour, the pen must be content to be to the tongue what a mere

photograph is to a picture. I am obliged to be vain enough to suppose that Miss Ashton took me for some sort of a gentleman, which means a man to whom any woman may speak freely under any circumstances and at any time. But she must have been exceptionally a lady to accept her freedom as so much a matter of course, and without the least shadow of a thought that her making a stranger's acquaintance in this fashion might be thought a little strange by others. I only wish I had the least power of saying exactly what I mean. I can only wish that we all lived in a world where introductions and credentials could be ignored as foolish forms. As it is, those who ignore them must either be worse and more foolish than their neighbours, or else as wise as the serpent and as harmless as the dove. And nobody who had eyes and ears could doubt for a moment as to which order Mildred Ashton belonged. I worked and she watched, for the greater part of the afternoon, without any talk worth mentioning. I learned no more about her than her name, and gathered no more otherwise than that she was poor, lived outside the gates of the world, and loved her art in a very different fashion from mine. I felt as if, until to-day, I had been living—no, not living—existing—without a soul.

In a word, I was not the same Arthur Kenrick

who had come down to Llanpwll. That evening's trout, it is true, had rather gained in flavour, and that night's sleep in depth and sweetness; but I knew, when I rose next morning, that I was a new man, woefully dissatisfied with the old one. I had been drinking the cold dull water of selfishness for eight-and-twenty years; yesterday I had taken my first taste of life's nectar. But such tastes do not quench the thirst for many hours. I went as straight to the place where I had met Mildred Ashton as if I could have fairly hoped to drink there a second time. I had no right to hope; but, nevertheless, in the same spot I found her again, working harder than before; nor, when she saw me, did she show the faintest affectation of surprise. Strangers as we were, and short-lived as my new self had been —not a whole day old—I felt half angry that she should treat me as if I were so utterly a nobody. I fancied I should have been better pleased had she stayed away that day. But then that would have shown self-consciousness; and it was the absence of every hint of possible self-consciousness that was her greatest charm—perhaps the whole source of her charm.

There was no reason why I should not work within sight and speech of her; and so I did, with no barrier but my own increasing shyness between

her and me. We talked a little, but not much, between whiles, and then mostly about my own experiences of art and travel, in which she took the interest of one who has had no such experiences of her own. But even in such somewhat one-sided talk I could not help learning more about her than I knew yesterday. She lived in a far-away part of England—a flat uninteresting country of which I knew nothing. She was staying with some relations at a farm with an unpronounceable name some few miles away, and spent the whole of her time in sketching out of doors, She had some other relations in Shanghai, with whom she corresponded sometimes, and through whom she had heard of my Uncle George in a slight and casual way. She had neither father nor mother, brother nor sister, and no doubt depended on the relations with whom she was staying until she could support herself by her pencil. When I left her that day all the pleasure of my new life had gone, and the beginning of its pain had come. And whether such pleasure or such pain be the better, is more than I can tell.

How our meetings grew into a habit, very matter of course on her part, full of excitement on mine, would be far too long to say. There was certainly nothing unnatural, however unconventional, in the growth of a friendship between two would-be artists,

of whom one wanted help and the other wanted—everything. We had found one another in a world to which conventions did not belong, and in which people soon learn to know each other apart from the accidents of fortune. There was certainly no very great harm for her to find out in me, and there was nothing but good in her. Let me leap to the end at once—I knew that I had found her who must be my wife, whatever else she might be; and sometimes I hoped, and sometimes despaired.

But why, you will ask, should I despair—I, a favourite of Fortune, who would be very rich some day, and was rich enough already—of winning a poor girl without friends or means? Ah, but that was just the thing that troubled me! With all my faith in her, I dreaded the thought of buying her hand to an almost morbid degree. Had she been rich I should have had a hundred times less fear. I must win her as the poor painter I seemed, or not at all; she must not be exposed for a moment to the temptation of taking me because I was rich; and if she took me with that knowledge I should never be able to rid myself of the doubt that she might never have taken me had I been poor. From the moment that my heart made itself up to win her I took every chance I could of acting out the part of the struggling artist without a penny, whose whole fortune is

in the air. It would be time enough for her to learn the truth when she was won—if that was ever to be; if she was not altogether beyond and above my winning, as I very largely feared. Her manner was the same towards me as on the very first day. And yet I had not reached that point when a man would rather have a "No" than no answer at all. It was first love with me, remember, in which only the most hopeless fools can possibly be altogether wise.

I have said that I never dreamed. But one night, after a long afternoon spent in Mildred's company, a new and strange experience happened to me. I *did* dream. Regular and experienced dreamers may not think my dream a particularly strange or remarkable one. But it was remarkably strange to me, just because it was a Dream.

It was not of Mildred. Professed dreamers tell me that dreams very seldom relate to the days which they follow: that the fulness of the heart may be often the moving cause, but very rarely fashions the form. It seemed to me, with extraordinary vividness, that some genii of an Arabian midnight had transported me from Llanpwll to Shanghai. At least I suppose it must have been Shanghai, though the place was more like what, in my waking fancies, I imagine Pekin, or any typically Chinese city, to be. I can remember noticing, without any surprise, that

all the houses, and even many of the people who crowded the streets, were made of porcelain, mostly blue and white, and all exceedingly small: the buildings did not reach above my shoulders, nor the people much above my knees. Nobody, however, noticed me, and this did surprise me a little, though I have been told that incapacity for feeling surprise at anything is the grand test of a dream. So, if this theory be correct, I was not dreaming at all, but was really in Shanghai, or Pekin, or wherever it may be. I walked about the streets, in search of some unknown something, careful not to crack any of the porcelain with the large stick I carried. Presently I had a curious feeling of laborious oppression, especially about the knees, which seemed to have become suddenly loaded with lead, so heavy to lift were they. I still laboured on; and the oppression I felt took an external form, as if my own personality extended itself outwardly from me to everything about me. The air became a thick yellow cloud, very hot, and almost stifling, with a disagreeable flavour, like what I suppose a London fog in the dog-days would be. How I managed to enter one of the porcelain dolls' houses, I know not; but I must have done so, for I presently found myself in a large room, papered all over with playing cards. And there I saw Uncle George.

It did not surprise me that he was standing upright in a brass candlestick—that seemed quite as natural as that he was burning in some indescribable manner with a wick and a flame. If I shut my eyes I can see it all now as clearly as then, for never was any waking impression more vivid; and yet for the life of me I cannot describe the exact manner in which he was identified with a lighted candle. The really extraordinary part of the matter was that the flat dish of the candlestick had two stems, and that in the second, and in like manner, burned the figure of a woman, whose face did not seem wholly strange to me, though I could not connect it with any face I had ever seen. I could not tell whether Uncle George saw me or no. He and the woman became more and more distinctly candle-like without losing their original natures; in a way, they were being transformed into candles without in the least ceasing to be entirely themselves. I did not in any way confuse myself with what I saw—another unusual feature, I am told, in a dream. Presently the melted grease began to run down, and to encircle the human candles with broad spiral folds. I counted the folds as they formed themselves with singular regularity — One: two: three: four: five: six: seven: eight: nine: a tenth was half formed, when suddenly the two flames began to sputter, and then

to leap and flicker. I saw that they were on the point of going out, and wondered which of the two would be the first to go. It was the woman—out she went, and I saw her no more. My uncle still burned on, but always in the same unwholesome way. Sometimes his flame started up, yellow and clear; sometimes it sputtered down to a blue point, like the light of a glowworm. I was about to speak to him, when out he went also; and, after a rush through leagues of air, I found myself transported back from China to my bed at Llanpwll, as unrefreshed as if my journey had been real.

"So that's dreaming, is it?" thought I. "I suppose it's all right to experience everything just once, but if it depends upon me, I'll never try *that* again. It seems to me uncommonly like a spasm of lunacy; and where the pleasure of it lies I can't see. And yet I'm as certain that I saw Uncle George turned into a candle, with my own eyes, as I am that I see the wall before me. And in the same candlestick with a woman—that's too utterly absurd." I leaped out of bed, and in ten minutes was in full swim across the little lake below the inn. By the time I had reached the other side the dream had left me—like a dream.

But the lake did not prove Lethe for long. While I was going to the place where I now knew

I should find Mildred, the grotesque scene of the human candles burning out in a room made of playing cards came back to me in all its vividness, and made me feel most absurdly uncomfortable. I suppose people who often dream get used to such night adventures; as for me, I could not convince my unreason that what I had seen was absolutely unreal. It was a relief to me when I saw Mildred again; for need I say that my heart had been filled with heavy forebodings about *her* by this idiotic dream?

"Do you ever have dreams, Miss Ashton?"

"Very often. Why?"

"Then perhaps you can read me mine." I told her my story; and telling it in the fresh air under the light of the sun proved a better way of putting it into the light of nonsense than even my plunge into the lake had been.

"It is certainly a very odd sort of nightmare," said she. "But I fancy you are wrong in thinking that it had nothing to do with the day. I dare say we had mentioned your uncle; no doubt you had been thinking about him, and a dream of China of course would suggest a great deal of china-ware. The fog and the weight of the knees are signs of unpleasant dreams that everybody knows. Of course, since you tell me that your uncle is a woman-hater,

you would naturally see a woman with him in a dream; and as to the candles and the flat brass candlestick—what was the last thing you saw or did before sleeping? You put out your candle, I suppose; and—"

"And it was in a flat brass candlestick? That it certainly was. Well, I suppose you are right as usual, and that there was really nothing out of the common in recognizing one's uncle in a candle. I certainly don't see what it could portend: most decidedly it can never come true. You say you dream; have you ever known a dream come true?"

"Never, strange to say."

"Strange? I should have thought all the strangeness would be the other way, if all dreams were like mine."

"But they are not all like yours," said Mildred. "And surely it is almost a miracle, out of the millions and millions of dreams that are dreamed every night all over the world, so few thousands should happen by chance to be fulfilled. The fewness of their fulfilments is the most wonderful thing about dreams."

"Well, my uncle is not likely to turn into a candle, anyhow. However, I'm glad to think that my brain had some foundation of fact to build upon—"

"If you were used to dreaming, you would think nothing of it, indeed. I have much stranger dreams than that, often and often; but I take them as a matter of course, and never think of them after waking."

I wished with all my heart that she would take things less as a matter of course. Would she take it as a matter of course that I should ask her to be my wife, and that she should say No? But there was not much chance of letting one's own thoughts take the bit between their teeth in her company. She had an insatiable appetite for what I looked upon as hard work, but which never wearied her. I believe I had done twice as much work in these few weeks as in a whole year before—not that this is to say a great deal. Before long my dream was absolutely forgotten once more; no doubt had it not been a new experience, it would, as she had said, have been absolutely forgotten long ago.

But presently it came back in quite a new way. Had it not led the way to the interpretation of another dream? It needed some courage to risk putting an end to the idyl of Llanpwll. But it had to be done; I felt as if something would keep the end from ever coming unless it came to-day.

"I have not told you the whole of my dream yet," said I at last, laying down my brush. "Shall I tell

you the rest? Though it seems impossible you should need to be told. There; I will and I *must* tell you. All day long I am dreaming that I love you—no, *that* is no dream—but that I have told you so, and that you have said— But why am I talking about dreams? If you haven't guessed that I loved you the first day I saw you, once for all, you know it now. Don't say we know nothing of one another yet, for we do—"

So much I know I said; I am not such an impostor as to pretend that I can repeat the rest of the words in which I asked Mildred to marry me. Were the sentences quite coherent, grammatical, and full of meaning for strange ears, in which you asked your wife (if you have one) to marry you—always supposing that you loved her below the depth of your tongue, and had more fear than hope of her answer? I spoke on with my whole heart; I looked in her face, not knowing what to read. It was full of what might mean a thousand things. I did not dare to hold out my hand; only while I spoke I was listening for the faintest shadow of a coming word. At last, as we stood face to face, her lips parted, and began to move.

"Mildred!" cried a sharp elderly voice from behind the corner of the rock. "Mildred! where in the name of mercy have you been?"

Could anything have been more horribly unlucky than the sudden appearance of this old lady just then and there? She had made no sign for weeks; it was as if she had been watching for the precise moment when she would be most in the way. I may wrong her; but I thought her the most evil-looking monster that had ever been seen—and had she been as young and as beautiful as Mildred herself, I should have thought the same. In point of fact she was very elderly and very plain; and I multiplied her in both directions by ten.

Mildred herself, for the first time, seemed to lose her self-possession, and to turn pale.

"My aunt, Miss Reynolds—Mr. Kenrick," she said falteringly.

Miss Reynolds scarcely deigned to courtesy; I just managed to bow.

"So!" said Miss Reynolds, turning her shoulder towards me contemptuously, and speaking to Mildred. "So this is the meaning of your painting mania, is it; your scarlet and yellow fever, eh? Coming out to meet young men, alone. Perhaps you think I haven't known it all along, and that I didn't think there was more Art about it all than you'd have me believe—and Nature; stuff! Human nature, you mean. I guessed as much, and now I know. You'll please to come home with me. Come."

"Miss Reynolds," said I, recovering my presence of mind, "I am not going to leave this spot till I know whether your niece will be my wife or no. And as to her, she no more knew until to-day that I love her—"

"Not leave this spot? You'll have to take root in it, then, young man; or rather you may leave it as soon as you like, for I say to you, No!"

"It is from herself that I must—" I began, trying to be as courteous to Mildred's aunt as she would allow me.

"Stuff and nonsense," said Miss Reynolds. "And who, pray, are you? What have you to do with the matter, I should like to know?"

"Everything in the world. My name is Kenrick —Arthur Kenrick; I am an artist—"

"So I perceive, sir, from your clothes. May I ask, since you presume to my niece's hand, if you are an R.A.?"

"Not yet, Miss Reynolds; nor an Associate, even. But—"

"An exhibitor, no doubt. Can you give me the name of one of your works that has been hung on the line?"

"I have never as yet exhibited a picture. But—"

"I am aware," said Miss Reynolds, throwing a studiously veiled note of sarcasm into her tone,

"that many famous painters keep aloof from the Academy on principle. It is only right I should know the circumstances as well as the name of the —the—person who tries to entrap my niece into a secret engagement without my leave. No doubt, though you do not exhibit, you sell your works for large sums?"

"I have not yet sold a picture, Miss Reynolds. But—"

"You mean to tell me you are a common drawing-master?" she said, with scorn unveiled.

"I am not even that," said I. "But if I were—"

"You have been saying 'But' five hundred times. 'But' what, if you please? I can't stay here all day."

"I was going to tell you, Miss Reynolds, that though I am not yet a famous painter, I am of, I hope, sufficient respectability and means. My father was a well-known wealthy colonial broker in London: I am his eldest son—"

"Ah!" said Miss Reynolds, with genuine interest in her voice. "You only paint for amusement, then —though I don't see why a gentleman should go about in a coat as shabby as yours. Your father, I am to understand, died a wealthy man, and you are his heir?"

"I was speaking then of my respectability only—not of my means. I have not inherited anything

from my father. My brothers and sisters are his heirs. But—"

"'But' number five hundred and one! I see. You offended your father by turning vagabond artist, and he very properly cut you off with a shilling, though you are his eldest son. I thought a gentleman would have made love in more decent clothes, smelling less like a pot-house. Good morning, Mr. Kenrick, and better luck next time."

What was I to say to the old virago? I could not bring myself to speak of my real means and settled expectations until Mildred herself had answered me; and this treatment of me because I seemed poor, and her insults towards my brothers in art, made any course but silence on this score impossible. To Mildred I would of course tell everything so soon as she had answered me; but to Miss Reynolds, not a word.

"Very well, then," said I. "In the character of a poor unknown landscape painter, disinherited—if you will have it so—for preferring art to trade, but too honest to cheat his tailor, I demand to know from Miss Ashton's own lips whether she will give me any hope that she will ever be my wife or no—if *she* knows me well enough to trust her happiness in my hands. I do not think she will refuse me that hope because I am poor."

"Oh, if it comes to that," said Miss Reynolds, "I'll go and pick a gooseberry or two with pleasure. I'm not afraid of what Mildred will say to you now —*she knows my will.*"

I did not notice her last words just then. They seemed to signify merely that, whatever she willed, others must obey. And besides, Mildred, who had been standing by in silence, spoke at last, and she said.

"Aunt Jane, you need not go. I would rather say before you, just now, everything that I have to say. I know you have meant to be kind to me, and I have tried to be grateful; but I must live my own life, after all. I had found that out before I knew—before Mr. Kenrick; everybody has to find it out at first or at last, I suppose. I should have become a very bad companion for you. Yes, I do know Mr. Kenrick, I hope and I believe. I hope he knows me as well! I am glad that he is poor, and that he—"

She said no more, but she gave me her hand.

II.

So my dream had proved an omen after all, in so far as so exceptional a thing (for me) as a dream of any sort had immediately preceded and been bound up with the gain of my Mildred's hand. It may be that, in the elementary sort of dream philosophy which makes dreaming of one thing prognosticate an event of an entirely remote and different kind, to dream that one's uncle is turned into a candle may foreshadow one's own marriage—whether that be so or otherwise, experts will be able to tell. However that may be, in a new life the dream had very soon become an old and forgotten story.

Mildred's history turned out to be a very simple one, after all, as she told it to me, though it was by no means what I had imagined. She and the cousin of whom she had spoken were the nieces of Miss Reynolds, a rich, somewhat eccentric, exceedingly capricious, and extravagantly obstinate old lady, who had adopted Mildred in a very much less generous fashion than Uncle George had adopted me. Mildred had tried her best to be grateful, but had found it absolutely impossible. She had a very strong nature and decided character, which Miss Reynolds, out of

some uncomfortable mixture of duty, whim, and delight in tyranny for its own sake, had set herself to thwart and distort in every imaginable way. From what I could gather, Miss Reynolds was one of those people who cannot exist without a dependent on whom to exercise their passion for power, and who believe that power consists wholly in making other people conscious slaves. There are such men in thousands; such women in tens of thousands. No wonder that Mildred, having a spirit of her own, had been driven to rebel. Her idea was to make herself independent by learning how to paint pictures that would sell, and then to take her own life, so far as she could, into her own hands. I congratulated myself, more than I can say, on having let her believe that I was as poor as I seemed; and I resolved, in the same spirit, to keep up the part I had assumed until, on our wedding-day, I could give my wife the pleasant surprise of finding that, in following her heart, she had not condemned herself to a life of poverty and toil. Meanwhile the romance of our engagement would be doubled for me, and she would have the zest of feeling that she was sacrificing the world for love and liberty.

I would, for my own pleasure in its memory, linger upon the days of my courtship among the hills round Llanpwll. It had all the charms of romance for us

both, without there being any real reason to fear that all would not end well. I hardly know whether to call it the best or the worst of our engagement that it was so short and flying. I was impatient for its close; but I lingered then upon every hour of it, just as in remembrance I do now. But it was impossible that it should be long. Mildred was ready to face the poorest, hardest, and most laborious life with me, and was proud to show how content she was to become the wife of one who would have no wealth but her. But there were pressing reasons why there should be no delays in our marriage, save such as the law compelled. Mildred, having rebelled against her aunt, was without either a home or means to find one, for Miss Reynolds simply cast her off without a word. I took lodgings for her at a farm, and within a month of our troth-plight married her in the little church of Llanpwll.

It was certainly a marriage in haste, and possibly many may think that I ought to have waited till I had written to Uncle George and had received an answer from him. Very likely I ought to have done so; but, at the same time, I do not feel very much conscience-stricken by my omission. I knew him to be so generous, kind, full of sympathy with every right impulse, and regardless of anything like self-interest, that not even his own anti-matrimonial

principles would stand in my way. He liked people to act for themselves, and hated nothing, not even strange women, more than the idea of being thought tyrannical. I was so anxious that he should take Mildred to his heart as a daughter, that I could not bring myself to prejudice him against her by letting him know of her existence before it was too late for him to do anything but make the best of an exceedingly good bargain; for if he could only be surprised into seeing Mildred without warning, he would receive her into his misogynistic heart, I was sure. Besides, it would take much too long for letters to pass and repass between Wales and China when I was going to marry Mildred, whatever their tenor might be. I was my own master, and he wished me to be so; for Miss Reynolds did not detest free women more than Uncle George hated slaves.

So I wrote to Shanghai the day after my wedding-day, and we remained at Llanpwll for our honeymoon. I could not even yet bring myself to tell Mildred that she was not the wife of a poor and struggling painter. I almost wished myself one in reality, for she made the illusion as sweet to me as it was dear to her. But she must know it at last; and though I was sorry to leave our first married home, I looked forward to the morrow when I should take her back with me to London and to the real life that was to

be ours till the end of our days, so that London should become better and dearer even than Llanpwll.

It was the morning of our return. I had taken my last plunge into the lake, and was on my way back to breakfast, fresh and hungry, when Mildred met me half-way with a letter in her hand.

"There's a letter for you, too," said she. "But I couldn't wait for you to show you this. See what I have brought on myself," she said, with the brightest and happiest of smiles, "by marrying you!"

"Mildred," the letter began, "I waited to see if you were really so lost to all sense of shame as to marry that man in rags in opposition to my irrevocable commands. You have done so; and, as you make your bed, so you must lie. Understand that henceforth you are to have no expectations from me. If you had been commonly grateful, and had married to please me or had remained with me, you may be gratified to know that I had intended to make you my sole heir. As it is, I, on the day after your disgrace, made my will. Whom I have put in your place is no concern of yours. Enough that Scripture bids us give much to those who have much, and that I am your aunt who is ashamed of you,

"JANE REYNOLDS.

"P. S.—If the man in rags is disappointed to find he has married a beggar, you can't say I didn't tell you so."

"*Are* you disappointed?" asked she.

"You have lost a fortune for my sake? Mildred, did you know this when—"

"When I married you? Of course I knew it, very well; only if I hadn't married you, I should have done something else to lose it soon enough all the same. If I couldn't serve Aunt Jane for love, it isn't likely I should for anything less, I suppose."

"Dear, if I tell you that I have been keeping a secret from you ever since we were married, shall you be very angry indeed?"

I could see a half-frightened look come into her face.

"A secret? what do you mean?"

You see that, after all, she had no reasonable reason for knowing that I was not an adventurer who had somehow found out that she had expectations from a rich aunt, and *was* disappointed with my bargain on finding that her expectations had gone off to the other side of the moon, where all the lost things are; or that I had not two or three other wives elsewhere; or that I was not a professional burglar, or anything else she would not like to be married to. I know she did not suspect anything of the sort, for

Mildred was always the most unreasonable of women where I happened to be concerned; but still a secret a whole honeymoon long has an unpleasant sound, whatever it may be, and I felt a little sorry that I had done anything to make her ever so little afraid. Happily, though, it was a secret that would very well bear telling.

We had reached the house, and were entering our breakfast-room.

"Should you be very angry," I asked, "if I tell you that I have been deceiving you from the beginning, and that instead of being what I told you—there darling, it's out now—I *am* a painter; but the reason I've done nothing as yet is because I've always been too well off to be anything but lazy. You can't expect much from a man with an Uncle George like mine. We're rich enough already to do without your aunt's legacy; and my own father left me nothing because it was a family arrangement that Uncle George will leave me everything. He's a splendid fellow, and you'll be as fond of him as I am when he comes home again. I couldn't find the heart to prevent your doing the brave thing you did in taking a man without a penny, all for love and liberty—and now I find out that you've lost a fortune by it, I'm gladder still. Why didn't you tell me you had something to lose?"

"Are you the only one to have secrets? Well, then, *I* wanted *you* to be sure that you married me for myself; and I was afraid—"

"No, you weren't; you were no more afraid I should marry you for anything but yourself than that you—"

"I was afraid you would rather not marry me at all than let me lose anything for you. There!"

"We're quits, then; and we'll have no secrets any more. . . But here's my letter lying here unopened all this while, and taking up the room where a trout or two ought to be. Hullo! From Uncle George's lawyer? What can he have to say? 'Dear Sir,—I regret—'"

The first words silenced me. And I read, no further aloud:

"Dear Sir,—I regret to have to inform you that I am by this post advised of the death, at Shanghai, of Mr. George Kenrick, your uncle, on the 21st ultimo. An epidemic of cholera is raging there, to which he fell one of the first victims. You will be exceedingly surprised to learn that *he was married* last May to a lady at Shanghai. Mrs. Kenrick was also taken with cholera, and died, by a remarkable coincidence, *on the very same day.* I can only suppose that his well-known views and principles concerning matrimony made him unwilling to inform either his family or

his solicitors of his marriage at the time, and have also been the cause of his otherwise unaccountable delay in making it known. As the marriage was so recent, I need hardly say that he has left no children. Most unfortunately, however, it appears that he died intestate. The last will he made is in our hands, under which the whole of his estate (wholly consisting of personalty) is bequeathed to yourself as sole legatee. But, as you are doubtless aware, every will is revoked by the marriage of the testator; and we are advised that he was about to make a new will, almost as largely in your favour, when he died. In effect, therefore, he died intestate; and the practical result is that (Mrs. Kenrick being dead) you will be entitled to no more than your share of the estate after distribution. For your guidance, and pending proceedings, I may tell you that I expect the estate to realize about 90,000*l.* This will give about 9000*l.* for each of Mr. George Kenrick's ten brothers and sisters who either survive him or have left surviving issue. The 9000*l.* which would have come to your father will be divided among his nine children, giving to yourself the share of about 1000*l.*, which, deducting succession duty, will give you, in the result, not more than a clear balance of 970*l.*

"I estimate that the amount coming to you may prove less, but cannot well amount to more.

"I shall be happy to see you and give further particulars any time you can give me a call."

I handed the letter to Mildred without a word. Why had I not put off telling her I was rich for one single half-hour more? Nine hundred and seventy pounds—not fifty pounds a year—for a man who had been carefully taught how *not* to earn his living, who at thirty years old had not even made a beginning, whose so-called profession had been but pastime, who had nothing else to turn to, who had been deliberately trained to exaggerated ignorance of business, and who had just married a wife whose means amounted to nothing! Who could quite have forgotten himself, and one far dearer than himself, in grief for the best uncle who ever lived in the world? I could see it all—how George Kenrick's dread and shyness of women had been only the instinctive self-defence of an exceptionally tender-hearted man; how one woman at last had, as a matter of course, caught his heart, and had proved too much even for the elaborate outworks with which he had guarded it round; how, after all his open and notorious boasts and scorns, he had felt the shame of a man who had proved himself a rank impostor, and had kept putting off the evil day of having to tell; how—always an easy-going procrastinating man—he had in like manner put off

making a new will, which would record his inconsistency in black and white, and would, indeed, be very difficult to settle in such a way as to do justice both to his wife and her possible children and to me. . .

"You have married a poor devil of a painter after all," said I, as Mildred laid the letter down; "and you might have been—"

"Hush!" said Mildred. "I might have been wicked and miserable and rich. I am just as happy now as I was when I only believed that we were poor; and that is, the happiest girl in the world! Surely *you* don't want money so much as to make you forget that he is dead who meant to be so good to you?"

And then I knew that, though I had married in haste, I should never have to repent at leisure. I think that in that moment I first became a man.

III.

BUT it was a terribly up-hill road that lay before me now. Even when that nine hundred and seventy pounds should come into my hands, it would not mean fifty pounds a year, for I owed at least five hundred. If I could get in the end so much as four

hundred pounds out of the ninety thousand I should be fortunate; and even that I must still further diminish by anticipation, in order to live for to-day. It is not good to belong to a very large family when personalty has to be divided.

It was wonderful how uncles, aunts, and cousins turned up their noses at my calling now that I had to earn my daily bread with it instead of carrying it on as Uncle George's whim. Even my brothers had to admit that there was no room in their offices for an amateur artist who had been fool enough to saddle himself with a penniless wife, and to whom accounts were Hebrew and Chaldee. They were right—except in calling Mildred's husband a fool. I could not be of any use to them for years to come, and then I should be too old for a junior clerk or office-boy. I must paint—paint—paint, since that was all I could do, and become an artist, if I could, in fact as well as in name. I should very likely have thrown away my brush if Mildred had not been beside me. But she believed in me, and found heart and courage for two till she made me share them.

Nor was she idle. While I went at my work with patient effort, she threw herself into hers with joy. I verily believe she was glad to find that poverty and labour had not turned out to be dreams,

after all. We lived in three rooms—and lived like hermits, except when we went out together on impromptu holidays to enjoy ourselves nearly as much as we did at home. In time, what with lessons and with occasional sales in very bad markets, we earned something, and made believe that we were beginning to make our own fortunes with our own hands. She was always so bright and gay that I forgot to be as careful over her as I ought to have been, and had not the heart to measure the work for her, over which she found her life so well filled. Mine, I felt, was hard work; hers looked like play, though it took up nearly as many hours as it did of mine.

But I must add that, at accounts and economies, she was nearly as bad a hand as I. There were times when we lived neither she nor I knew how. But at last there came a time when we found ourselves consciously face to face with the wolf at the door; and Love, though he did not even dream of so much as the shadow of a glance towards the bolt of the window, did not reconcile us to the growl.

Unwillingly enough, I had to lay down my brush for a while, and to look about for work out of doors, since none seemed coming to me. Meanwhile, Mildred set to work on a real picture in the spirit of a real artist who can never be divorced from

Hope, do what he will. Away from her easel she was the most modest-minded of women; but, when she worked, she seemed to be fired with some spirit that was strangely like ambition, though I am sure it was really nothing of the kind. It was a fine subject, that she had thought over till it had become a part of herself; and, though her technical skill was still very imperfect, it already showed qualities that are beyond the reach of scores of far better painters.

I knew she was working at it hard, but how hard I never knew, till one afternoon I came back from giving some lessons at a school, and found her in a dead faint upon the floor. And then, and not till then, I learned how, as soon as my back was turned early in the morning, she had been toiling, hungry and alone, every minute of the day until I returned; how energy had burned into fever; how genius, without corresponding vital strength, is nothing better than a disease.

And I had thought that mine alone had been work, and that hers had been pleasure and play; and how could I, while away from her, have guessed how a delicate girl would have spent all her hours? I had not learned to know Mildred, even then; and was the knowledge only to come when it was too late, when— I could not finish the thought. I got

her to bed, and then went for the nearest doctor as fast as I could go.

At three houses, with red lamps and brass plates, I knocked and rang before I found surgeon or physician at home at an hour when most were going their rounds. At last, by good fortune, I found one at home where the plate bore the name of "Mr. E. Segrave, Surgeon and Accoucheur."

I waited for what seemed an age, though I doubt whether two minutes had passed on the clock-dial. At last the door opened.

"Dr. Segrave?" I began eagerly.

"Not Dr. Segrave," said a tall, cool, shrewd-looking Scotchman who entered; "I'm Dr. Menzies, and I am attending to my friend's patients while he gets a little holiday."

"Never mind," I said, more hurriedly than politely, "it's all the same."

In five minutes more—for he seemed to have the art of doing things slowly faster than other people do them quickly—he was by Mildred's bedside, I waiting for him in terrible anxiety by the half-finished picture into which she had been putting her actual life day by day. At last he came back.

"Well?"

"From what you tell me, and from what I can see, she's prostrate from hard work, and want of air

and exercise, and star—well, from not taking time enough to her meals. She wants rest, and plenty of meat, and change of air; and let me tell you that you must look after her well, for I think she is one of those women that look after everybody but themselves."

"There's no danger, then?"

"There's no worse danger on earth than working too much and eating too little. But if you mean, is there anything wrong with her that cannot be mended—not at all. Eating's the easiest thing in the world, and doing nothing's easier still. And that's all *she's* got to do if you can manage it."

A weight was lifted off my heart; but I guessed what he meant, and that his prescription might prove harder to carry out than he knew. "You will call again?"

"I'll see how your wife is getting on before I go; but I am going abroad in a week. I shall tell Mr. Segrave of the case, if you give me your name."

"Kenrick. And thank you for—"

"Kenrick! Indeed! I once had a patient of that name out in Shanghai. I'll write a prescription—"

"What! you knew my uncle, Mr. Kenrick of Shanghai?"

"Yes. I was called in to attend him when he

died in the cholera outbreak. Husband and wife both in one day. It was an awful time with us; people dying around in whole households; it was like a nightmare—"

"And strangely enough I *had* a nightmare on the very eve of my uncle's death, in which I seemed to feel it all, just as if I was there. Yes, *on the very night before he died.*"

"Nightmare's common and death's common; it would be strange if they didn't meet together now and then."

"I dreamed of the cholera cloud. I saw a Chinese city. I did not know my uncle was married; and yet I saw him and a woman turn together into corpse-candles, and die out together before my eyes. I seem to see it now. It was hideously grotesque; but I did not recover from it for a whole day."

"Working too little and eating too much is as bad for the brain, you'll find, as working too much and eating too little. Anybody that knew George Kenrick would be sure to dream about a woman if they dreamed of him, just because of the way he used to talk of them."

"Nevertheless, it was a strange dream, even in detail—"

"We can try that," said Dr. Menzies, getting interested. "You say they were turned into corpse-

candles, burning one against the other. Did you know which was he and which was she?"

"I knew them both to the end."

"Then you can tell which of them burned out first. If you're wrong, it will show that your dream was but a partial coincidence, just as I say. You would naturally dream of a near kinsman, and be safe to dream of a woman for the reason I gave. You knew he was in China, and might have seen in the newspapers—though you might have forgotten—that there was cholera in Shanghai. But you could scarcely know which died the first, unless I tell you; for nobody was in the two rooms where they died but a Presbyterian minister and myself."

"Her candle went out the first," said I. "I remember counting ten, and then his followed hers."

"That's right enough," said Dr. Menzies, a little surprised at last. "It *was* she who died the first, and—you counted *ten?* It was just *ten minutes* by the watch before he followed her. Well, all I can say is that—"

"It's something more than strange?"

"No, Mr. Kenrick. It seemed a little strange at first, but on second thoughts, no! If you dreamed one went out before the other, it must have been one of the two, and it was no more than the chances of heads or tails which one it would be. If I throw

up a penny and you guess heads, and it *is* heads, you were just as likely to be right as wrong. There's nothing about it that's either strange or not strange. That there are not more such coincidences than there are is almost a miracle. There's no such thing as waste in Nature, Mr. Kenrick. And if a dream like that was more than a common ordinary coincidence, it would be waste; for what would be the use of your dreaming that one of your candles went out before the other when the fact itself could be of no manner of use to you?"

Even so had Mildred herself argued; and I was perforce compelled to put up with a chain of reasoning in which her imaginative nature agreed with the prosaic system of Dr. Menzies. Certainly mine had been a useless dream, and must have been useless by its very nature. I had nothing more to say.

It was merely accident that had made me remember my nonsensical dream when Mildred lay ill, and it went fairly out of my mind again as soon as Dr. Menzies had gone. Mildred had fallen asleep; and I sat and watched by her bedside, thinking how I could contrive to put life straight for her. She had no friends to shelter her from the daily troubles of our life till she should be strong enough to face them again; and my marriage, even more than the loss of my fortune, had made my relations cease to

be my friends. Perhaps I was wrong, but I could not bring myself to ask favours—that is to say, charities—from those who now regarded me as a ne'er-do-well, and Mildred as a blunder and a burden. I was a stranger in the land; no more a Kenrick who had a right to the help and countenance of other Kenricks, than Mildred herself. My share in my uncle's estate had gone long ago; over five hundred in paying old debts, the rest in keeping us going while we had been working and waiting, now, as it seemed, in vain. Without Hope by my side in the person of Mildred, I felt that I must lay down my brush once for all, and find something or anything to do that would insure her health, however uncongenial it might be.

The idea of emigration came uppermost in my mind. I had not neglected my body, and could use my hands in better ways than in painting pictures that nobody would buy. But since Mildred must go out with me, and since she could not travel till she was well, and since I must, being no longer a bachelor, carry out with me some sort of means or capital, even emigration did not look particularly hopeful.

However, I managed next day to leave Mildred for an hour or two while I went out to make inquiries about colonial matters in such quarters as

were open to me. I needed advice, and could think of none better worth having than that of Mr. Archer, a young lawyer, who had always been, in a way, one of my friends in old times. He was a shrewd man of business, with an essentially practical way of looking at everything, but with no intolerance for people of different natures. He would give me the best advice he could, I was sure.

"I beg your pardon for keeping you waiting," he said, "but I was very deeply engaged, and I'm afraid I can't give you much time now. So you think of giving up painting and going abroad? Well, it does not sound badly. Only, as a married man, you can hardly treat emigration as a simple adventure, and go out with nothing in your pockets but your hands. I must think it over. Sit down and have a chat—it's a long time since we met, you and I. Not since we've been married men. We've both had our romances, it seems. But I'm hanged if there's any romance in all your Bohemia that beats what we find every day in the law. Talk of fiction! Why, if I wanted that sort of light reading, and had to choose between the novels and magazines on the one hand and the law reports on the other, give me the law reports any day. Do you know why lawyers are so notoriously fonder of reading

novels than any other men? It's because they get *blasés* with romance, and want to refresh themselves with solid, probable, heavy prose. I was up to the eyes in a queer story when you came in, or rather in a wild sort of riddle that will take all the courts together years to solve. It beats *me*. A, you see, makes a will. Next to the law of marriage for conundrums give me the law of wills. All A's estate is left to B, a married woman. We'll call B's husband C. Very well. If B, the wife, dies and leaves children behind her, the estate goes to the children. If B, the wife, dies and leaves no children, but C, the husband, survives her, the estate goes to *him*. If B, the wife, dies and leaves neither children nor husband surviving, then the estate goes to a distant relation, D. That, avoiding technical language, is the effect of the will. And you'd never guess how such a plain-sailing every-day will as that could possibly become likely to puzzle the House of Lords."

"No," said I, already puzzled myself between A, B, C, and D, "I certainly do not see."

"It comes to this. First of all, B, the wife dies. Afterwards A, the testator, dies. To whom does the estate go?"

"To B's children?"

"She had none."

"To B's husband, then?"

"He is dead too."

"To the distant relation, then?"

"D? You're missing the point—that's the very question that's got to be answered. If you'd been the least bit of a lawyer, you'd have asked me whether the wife survived the husband, or the husband the wife, you see. *Don't* you see? If the wife survived, the estate goes to the distant relation. If the husband survived, the estate goes to *him*."

"But if he is dead?"

"That isn't the question. The question is, whether the estate goes to the distant relation, D. And, therefore, D must maintain that B, the wife, survived her husband."

"And which did survive?"

"Now you're getting warmer! Heaven knows. They were found dead on the same day in two rooms of the same house, and so says the register. Get out of that if you can. It's an awful muddle. There's no rule of law. There are cases, of course—there always are. There's a great case where a man and a woman were washed off the same plank out at sea, and both drowned. On one side it has been argued that the man is likelier to survive because he is the stronger and the more selfish and the better able to swim. On the other side, that the woman is

likelier to survive because women have more vitality than men, and because a man naturally takes more care of a woman than he does of himself, especially if he's a sailor; and so on, and so on, through leagues of nonsense unspeakable. But it all comes to this—that there's no rule, that every case must stand on its own bottom, and that the courts will have facts, and nothing to do with fancies. Now, Kenrick—why, that's the very name of the wife and the husband, B and C—that's queer! However, that has nothing to do with the question. The question is—"

"But it *is* queer!" said I. "*I* had an uncle and an aunt who died in the same house on the same day. Did I never speak to you of my Uncle George, of whom I was godson, eldest nephew, and almost son?"

"*By* George! It must be the very man. Not that I ever heard of your having any uncle in particular till now; or, if I ever did, I don't profess to remember pedigrees that I'm not paid to keep in mind. This was a George Kenrick, who, with his wife, died of cholera on the same day in Shanghai."

"Yes, within ten minutes of one another. It is a terrible story—more than terrible to me."

"Ten minutes? How do *you* know that? What do you mean?"

"I was told so by the doctor who attended them both and was with them when they died."

"What! The doctor? Where is he? What's his name?"

"Dr. Menzies. I saw him yesterday—"

"Did he tell you *which* died first—he or—"

"She."

"*She!* . . . Can you lay hands on Dr. Menzies . . . in an hour? You can? Then . . . Don't you understand? Under the will of Miss Reynolds—"

"Miss Reynolds?"

"Under the will of Miss Jane Reynolds, those ten minutes have given you an estate in Lincolnshire worth at least four thousand a year! For she left everything to a niece who married your uncle, and he survived her by ten minutes; and it is all real estate which goes to your uncle's heir-at-law; and you, as the eldest son of his next brother, are he!"

I have been making a very long story very short indeed. My case was certainly as clear as daylight, but that, as Archer would say, is not the question; nor is it the question—though that, too, is a strange one—that Miss Reynolds, by disinheriting Mildred, had made the man in rags her sole heir. To me the strange thing is, and must remain, that all this could never have happened unless I had dreamed my

dream. Had I not dreamed of the extinction of the candles in their proper order and of the number ten, I should never have mentioned the matter to Menzies or learned the precise nature of the coincidence—if so it must still be called—from him. And, therefore, had it not been for my dream, I should have been without the one piece of evidence wanting to complete the chain and make good my legal title.

Nevertheless, I pass no definite opinion. I quite see that, being in an excited state of mind, I should be likely to dream; that, if I dreamed at all, it should be of Uncle George; that, dreaming of him, I should dream of a woman; that, dreaming of two failing candles, one of them should go out without the other, and that it was a mere toss-up which went out the first of them. It is difficult to find even the elements of so common a thing as a striking coincidence in so simple a matter. My readers must decide as they please.

But was this all? In one way it may be yes; but, in another, most surely no.

"Mildred," said I to her one day, not so very long ago,—"Mildred, I once had a very strange and a very wonderful dream. It was that I—I of all men—neither strong nor wise nor particularly brave, who had been selected by some mysterious piece of injustice, to be the husband of the best, truest, and

bravest of all the women in the world. I dreamed it so vividly, that I went out among the hills, and married the first girl I met before I knew anything about her, except that I loved her. Was not that a strange dream for a fairly sane man? Well, I woke up—one always must wake up at last from the very best of dreams, and from the best the soonest—and I found that *what my dream told me* was—"

"What?" asked Mildred, with at least a show of fear.

"*True!*" said I. And I say so still.

Truth, indeed, is always stranger than fiction. I add a few words which may interest the reader who is struck by the pivot of my narrative, and that narrow bridge of time which in *ten minutes* led to such important results.

The genial skilful physician who stood by and saw the two "life-candles" burn out, and whose testimony in the case became so important, is at this moment a distinguished practitioner in "the Garden Isle," where his knowledge of the healing art and of the world together make him at once a most desirable "guide, philosopher, and friend."

THE GHOST OF LAWFORD HALL.

A TRUE STORY.

By the late Walter Thornbury.

[Every word of the following story, taken down by me from the lips of a lady in Warwickshire, may be relied upon as entirely true, without any addition of my pen.—W. T.]

It is now very many years ago that I and my husband, not long after our marriage, went on a visit to Lawford Hall, an old house near Rugby, which I had long desired to see. I remember I posted alone from Coventry, near which town we had been staying, as my husband had gone on two days before to attend some county races, where the Lawfords were running a favourite horse, and to go hunting the next day with the old baronet. At the last Warwickshire house in which we had been staying I had picked up, one wet day, in the library, an old book of trials which contained allusions to Lawford Hall. For three hours in a cosy nook of that old Elizabethan room—where Vandyke's cavaliers seemed longing to come out of their frames to talk

to you—I sat absorbed over a strange and terrible poisoning case, which had made all Warwickshire shudder sixty years before. There are days when the brain seems unusually sensitive to impressions; and all the details of this crime, from some reason or another, became printed or, I may rather say, photographed on my retina, with a sharpness and vividness that was almost painful. I saw the great plumed bed where the rich man lay; again the thin Hogarthian figure of the younger step-brother, in the old costume, stole with silent foot through the shadow of the broad oak staircase, and past the curtained bed to the mantelpiece where the long row of bottles stood. I saw the thin trembling white hand, with the lace ruffle all but covering it, remove half the contents of one vial and substitute the laurel-water, that he had distilled, with cruel care, in his own locked-up room. I heard the dreadful cry of the dying man as his step-brother bent over him. I could hear the ringing hoofs of the doctor's horse as it came racing up the Rugby road. I could see the grave face of the man in black as he stood by the bedside, and raising the cold waxen head let it fall again, uttering only those few solemn words, "It is too late; he is dead." Then I followed the surgeon down to the wainscoted parlour, where the murderer with hypocritical grief told his planned story of the

cause of his brother's fit, and with subtle craft evaded any examination of the body. I tracked the prisoner to the quiet autumn garden, where he eyed with a bitter smile, as he passed the laurel from whence he had picked the fatal leaves. I heard him stop and tell with exultation the old gardener, who was resting on his spade, "that it would be easy days with the old servants now, not as in Sir Edward's time, and that he had long worked to be master of Lawford Hall, and was so at last." I watched him tremble when the letter came from his brother's friend, sternly and coldly desiring that the body should be examined. Step by step, indeed, I followed that soft-spoken, decorous, cat-like, cruel villain, till I left him with irons round his small wrists, while the mourning-coach was preparing that was to take him to the Warwick gibbet, still lying unrepentant, still denying, in spite of the countless proofs of guilt that from earth, water, and air had been drawn to cover him with shame. I saw him also in the dead of the night previous, when the grim keepers were asleep, steal from his pillow, throw himself on his knees, so seldom bent to God, and unite his thin fettered hands in passionate prayer to the Judge of all, and I hoped that even at that last moment he had found mercy.

These scenes again rose in my mind as, after hours

of heavy rain, the sun shone out just as the post-chaise swept round a turn of the road, past Nebold, into little Lawford. The light glittered on the yellowing leaves of the lime-trees and flickered upon the wet gables of the old house. It was a stately, melancholy building, half Tudor, half classic, and the huge Elizabethan porch contrasted unpleasantly with the ugly square windows of the Georgian era, that were rendered more hideous by the picturesque oriels that were here and there left. There was a solid comfort about the heavy stone mullions that the flimsy modern window-sashes of Dutch invention could not touch, and I regretted that the old house had been so awkwardly patched. Just to the right of the porch there was an old Tudor window that especially struck my eye. It was overhung with a Virginian creeper, whose leaves were already turning scarlet. The moment I glanced at that window, a scene of the old trial came again into my thoughts. It was below that room that the prisoner stood that April morning and called in his gay careless way to his sister, to ask her if she was ready for the ride before breakfast. She had just been to her brother's room to give him the fatal medicine, and had left him as she thought asleep. The window opened on a passage between her room and that of the murdered man, and she heard her brother call to her as she

passed back from the one room to the other. "I shall be ready in a quarter of an hour," she called from the window; upon which he went to the stable, mounted his bay mare, which was already saddled, and rode off to the Wells. Five minutes after the sister returned to her brother's room, and found him in the agonies of death.

As the post-chaise swept round the drive to the front entrance, I observed on the right the dial court, of which I had read, with the great iron gates leading into the garden. It was there the prisoner had stood the night he distilled the laurel-water, talking to two tenants who had come to see his sick brother. Stately as the house was, guarded by its avenue of limes and girt with its broad gardens, I could not help fancying that a curse still rested upon it. There was a malign, unhappy look about it that weighed on my too active imagination, so that a curious presentiment of some impending evil came over me, as the great bell, dragged from its socket, gave forth a clamorous jangling clang that seemed to echo through endless passages with a querulous clamour that I thought would never cease.

* * * * *

The dinner was dull. Lady Lawford, whom I had found so delightful, so charming, so vivacious at Paris, seemed oppressed with the social difficulties of

her county position, and to be unequal to the task of entertaining alone a gathering of such local pomposities. Some secret trouble, some sorrow seemed to have fallen upon her. She had an absent manner, and often relapsed into embarrassing silences. The local doctor, the local solicitor, the rector, two or three old maids, and some shy country squires' daughters were all that she had to amuse; but still she failed to amuse them. The Meet had been a long way off, and my husband and hers were not expected till late. Once or twice during dinner she rather alarmed me, by mentioning the dangerous country they would that day ride over. She hoped all was safe. We ladies were just rising to go, to the evident delight of the doctor, the rector, and the solicitor, when we heard a sound of voices in the hall, a scuffling, and then a groan. At that moment Sir Edward Lawford, in a soiled scarlet coat, entered hurriedly, looking rather pale and anxious, and with one arm in a sling.

"Mr. Dobson," said he to the doctor, who instantly pricked up his ears, "we want your help at once. A poor fellow has been thrown, and a good deal hurt."

Then seeing me, his face grew graver; he advanced to me and offered his hand. "My dear Mrs. H——," he said, "you mustn't be alarmed, but your husband

has been thrown in trying a gate; his shoulder is put out, and one of his ribs I'm afraid of—but it will be all right directly."

I remember no more; they told me afterwards that I fainted. By nature I was strong-nerved, but from Sir Edward's manner I formed an immediate notion that my husband was dangerously injured, and so indeed it proved.

* * * * *

It was a week before my husband was out of danger. He had dislocated his shoulder and broken two ribs, besides receiving a painful injury on his knee-cap. I watched him day and night, and gave him myself the narcotics that were required to give him the necessary sleep; for a neuralgic affection attended some of the contusions, and a low fever followed, to allay which rest was indispensable.

It was the ninth day, if I remember right, that, pale, anxious, and exhausted by want of sleep, I came for the first time since my husband's accident to take my doleful seat at the dinner-table. Sir Edward was very frank and cordial; untiring in his attentions to me, and in his sympathy for me.

"Most unfortunate!" he said, "and just at the beginning of the hunting season too—at the end one would not care—and I was so anxious to show him how straight our set here rode. Tell him, poor

fellow, when he gets better, that we've had to shoot Parepa—she'd broken her leg just above the fetlock —but I'd rather have shot all my stud than have had him bowled over like that."

"There is no danger now, I assure you," said the everlasting country doctor, who seemed perennial at Lawford Hall banquets; "I assure you on my honour, as a professional man, if he is only careful, and we can keep up this artificial sleep without injury to his sanguineous circulation and his digestive organs."

"Ah! this riding, like the driving of Jehu, the son of Nimshi, Sir Edward," said the equally perennial rector, "is very much on the increase with our country aristocracy, and is likely, I fear, to be attended with the most terrible casualties. Where do you get your moselle, Sir Edward?"

The inevitable old-maid sisters uttered their usual exclamations, whenever the accident was alluded to, of "Shocking—shocking! Oh, dear, it is dreadful to think of!"

I bore it as long as I could, but that vast evening —a century in itself—was no bad preparation to a year at the hulks. Oh, that never-ceasing sonata of Beethoven, beaten out with remorseless exactitude by the rector's conscientious daughter! Oh, the wearisomeness of that strictly scientific rubber, at which I assisted as in a dream! At last the playing grew

sleepier and sleepier; Sir Edward, tired with fox-hunting, fell asleep as the cards were being shuffled; and I gave an internal three times three when the servant announced the first carriage, and Lady Lawford said:

"Well, I think we're all getting sleepy together; so perhaps we'd better go to bed."

Could this be the Lady Lawford I had known in Paris? I thought as I mounted the old oak staircase, and, with a half-alarmed look at my own shadow, entered the long corridor, in which our room was the only one inhabited. A miserable visit it had been. If past trouble weighed upon the house, was the shadow of that crime to cast a gloom upon the race for ever? I could not account for the change in people I had known so gay and pleasant, and I puzzled myself in vain to invent a reason. Extravagant I might have expected to find them, their life a ceaseless whirl of excitement; but careworn, humdrum—it seemed impossible. One would really have thought that Sir Edward's father had been the murderer, instead of some grandfather's cousin, who had left no children. Oh, that George was well, I thought, that we could get away from this dreadful place!

I uttered these words aloud as I opened the bedroom door, so loud that I almost thought they might

have waked George; but there he lay, in a deep sleep, breathing heavily, and with one bandaged arm resting upon the counterpane. There was no lamp lit in the room, but a cheerful wood fire blazed in the grate, and merry shadows danced on the ceiling. The medicine-bottles were drawn up in ghastly rank and file on the mantelpiece, and the careful servant had left jelly and meat-essence and some fruit ready for my use on a side-table.

I threw myself into a great carved chair that stood by the fire, and listened to my husband's breathing. There was no sound but that and the measured ticking of an old clock in the corridor. A bolt shot, a door slammed far away in some distant wing of the house; then the house seemed to fall into the profoundest sleep. It was still as a family vault. Once a bough of clematis at the window tapped against the glass, as if a fairy was begging admittance; once a cold breath of air—wafted from I knew not where, and going no one knew whither—crept from under the door, and flowed in a cold invisible current through the room in a ghostly kind of way. Half an hour later, as I sat and watched, the wind seemed to spring into a sudden sort of rumbling and bluster in the great chimney, then sank again to silence, gagged by some secret power which it could not resist. I was looking at the fire, thinking of I know

not what, waiting for half-past one, when I was to try and rouse George to give him the strengthening medicine, when my eyes all at once fell on a picture in a row of portraits I had not before especially noticed; it was one of four that hung in a dark corner of the room, very dark by day, and within the shadow of the heavy crimson curtains; but now the firelight gleamed full on it, and I could see its features as clearly as if a sunbeam had fallen full upon the spot. It represented a man of about thirty; the features were firm, but rather sharp and Voltairian; the powdered hair, gathered into a club, was tied with ribbon; the thin-lipped mouth wore a cold set smile. A sudden thought, from which I could not divest myself, arose in my mind—it was the portrait of the murderer. Just such a refined serpentish face I had imagined his to be. The scene of that tragedy came again into my mind: that was the face that had bent over the dead body with affected compassion; that had smiled in triumph upon the gardener; that had angrily rebuked the sister for complaining of his wish to rinse the fatal bottle; that the face that with practised courtesy had pretended to invite every inquiry. I knew the portrait would not be there if the Lawfords knew of its existence; but still I could not help thinking that the portrait it was, and that the name of the wretch

it represented had in the lapse of time been forgotten. Consigned to exile in a garret, the picture had, somehow or other, with a sort of diabolic persistency, found its way back to its old haunts. Perhaps this had been his own bedroom, and that close by was the locked-up chamber where he had distilled the poison. Perhaps (and this terrible thought made me shudder in spite of myself) this was the very room where the sick man had died in agony. Oh, this terrible house! I should never feel happy in it again. My mind relapsed into its old train of associations. One special scene occurred to me: it was that where the two doctors, sent for by the murderer, came to make an examination of the body. He received them in the hall with a candle in his hand, and invited them in. He was courteous and obliging. Sir William Wheeler, he said, had wished for the examination. For what purpose? they asked. Merely to satisfy the family, he said; and showed them a letter from Sir William, expressing such a wish, "merely that those who had been intimate with the dead might be beyond suspicion." Had Sir William written no other letter? asked the more suspicious of the doctors. Yes, there had been another, equally friendly. This second letter had been by no means friendly; it had indeed words which expressed a suspicion of poison. The

guilty man pretended to feel for this letter in his waistcoat-pocket, and in doing so pulled out an envelope. The doctor had only time for one glance, but that glance was sufficient to show it was directed in Sir William's handwriting; still he said nothing. The examination did not take place, and the detection of the crime was for a time deferred, till a keener and less trustful medical man threw himself with untiring energy into the pursuit of the subtle criminal.

I looked up; it was half-past one. I went at once to the bedside and tried to rouse my husband to give him his medicine, but he only stirred once reluctantly, gave a deep sigh, and relapsed into sleep. It was better to let him sleep; so undressing and putting on my dressing-gown, I pressed together the wood, now burnt to a white ash, and threw myself on the bed beside my husband. I was just sinking into a doze, when a slight sound disturbed me. I was highly sensitive just then from want of sleep, and in a moment I recovered my senses. It was a faint sound, like some one trying the handle of the bedroom door. I listened again—all was still. It might have been a rat scratching behind the wainscot: at night the faintest sound becomes magnified by the imagination. I sat up and listened: it was nothing. The burning wood just then gave way, and so broke into a slight blaze. I lay down again, and I think fell asleep. I was

awoke, not by any sound, but by a creeping, indescribable sense of something supernatural and terrible. I looked up without moving, and saw—to an infinite horror that paralyzed every limb—the door softly, noiselessly open, and from the outer darkness the figure of an old man, dressed in an old yellow-silk dressing-gown, glide in. He turned as he silently closed the door, and I saw that his thin emaciated face was pale as the dead; that his head was bandaged and his jaw bound up as that of a corpse is bound. The vacant eyes, that seemed entirely colourless, were bent on the fireplace, and the figure seemed not to notice the bed, or those who were on it. Slowly gliding over the floor, the spirit of the murdered man—for such it seemed to me to be—moved towards the fire, and there stood for a moment, as if wrapped in thought. It then took a bottle from the row on the mantelpiece, examined it carefully, and went through the action of filling a glass with it. The figure then sat down in the old chair by the fire, and sat there moving its thin white hands, that seemed almost transparent, before and over the flame. My courage recovering itself slowly, I began now to question myself seriously as to whether I was delirious or dreaming. To be sure I was awake—softly I stretched out my hand and pressed my husband's arm. He slightly moved, and

uttered a faint groan. I looked up and counted the green and red flowers in the cornice of the bed. I recalled the position of the bell, which was out of my reach. I pulled off my rings, and put them on again. I even took out my watch, and saw the time. It was a quarter past two.

As I lay there reasoning with myself that the half-open door and the pale figure in the faded yellow-silk dressing-gown were only illusions of the senses, arising from an imagination rendered sensitive by excitement, I again pressed my husband's hand tightly, so tightly that he moved and feebly groaned. At that sound the figure rose from the chair, stirred together the embers, and advanced slowly towards the bed. To my indescribable terror, in the firelight I then saw that in one hand it held a long glancing sharp knife, the blade of which it held turned upwards against its arm.

The wood ashes in the grate had now burned so low that they only cast a faint red glimmer on the floor, but there was still quite enough light on the end of the bed for me to see that the figure, raising the knife, was stealing towards me. I was frozen with terror, and had perhaps less power of voluntary movement left through my fear than I imagined, for I lay there uttering no cry, moving no limb. At that moment the figure struck against a chair that

stood by the table where I had been reading, and overset it. In a moment my brain seemed to recover its power, my heart to beat with renewed power. That one slight fact convinced me that the figure was not a supernatural one—it might be a murderer or a sleep-walker, but it was common flesh and blood. Its dreadful object I knew not; but there it stood, with the knife in its hand, eyeing us in a blank deadly way, and with a sort of serpent-like malice. I had just resolved to spring upon it, struggle for the weapon, and scream for help, when it turned towards the door, and glided out as silently and in as death-like a way as it had entered. I watched it an instant, then with a sudden flood of fresh life darted from the bed, closed the door, swiftly turned the key, drew the bolt with the rapidity of lightning, and fell back on the floor in a swoon.

* * * * *

The next morning I went down and joined the party at breakfast as usual. I said nothing, but complained of sleeplessness and not feeling well. Great was the sympathy and universal was the cry that I must not sit up watching another night.

"My dear Mrs. ——, you will take these things quieter a year hence," said Sir Edward cynically.

I saw Lady Lawford fixing her eyes on me with a peculiar earnestness.

When we had done breakfast Lady Lawford took me quietly apart into her boudoir.

"Mrs. ——," she said, taking my hand, "you look very ill. I am a woman of the world, and older than you. You cannot deceive me; something terrible must have happened to you last night. I think I can guess what it was. It was not the watching alone made your hand shake as it now does. Come, dear, tell me."

I told her all, and concealed nothing, from the thought about the prisoner's portrait to the moment that I fainted. I saw her face grow very sad and serious as I went on. When I had done she heaved a great sigh.

"My dear," she said, "I can and must explain this mystery, though I would have concealed it from almost every one but you. We have, in a distant wing of the house, an insane person—an old man, a relation of Sir Edward's. He was fond of Sir Edward when a boy, and my husband in gratitude for his kindness took care of him when his wife and friends deserted him. He is a great care to us, as at times he is subject to paroxysms of homicidal mania. He is very cunning and dangerous, and has to be strictly watched, especially at such periods. Last night the person in charge of him, who had been drinking with the upper servants, fell asleep, as he now confesses;

and the old man, watching his opportunity, stole from the room, and passed down a back staircase leading to the kitchen. There he secreted a large carving-knife left in the butler's pantry by one of the servants, and crossed to your side of the house. The man awaking pursued him, and found him crouching in the hall; but gathered from his few incoherent words that he had entered some bedroom, either yours or one near it. This is the whole mystery, my dear Mrs. ——, and I can only deeply regret you should have been placed for a moment in such great danger."

We remained—were, indeed, obliged to remain for days more—in the house; but I was, I must confess, very glad, in spite of Lady Lawford's hospitality, to see the coach that was to take us away drive up to the front door. Often in my dreams that old Tudor window, the great iron gate, the portrait, and the ghostly figure in the old yellow dressing-gown, figure in wild nightmare complications.

A STRANGE FACT.

"TRUTH is as strange as fiction—ay! stranger." So said Jabez Colquhoun to the company assembled round his dinner-table one night. It was literally a *parti carrée*. Opposite the speaker sat his wife, at each of the other two sides of the table sat a friend.

These friends were an American whom Mr. Colquhoun, banker and—philosophist, shall we say? had encountered in a last-year's tour in the States, and a cousin of Mrs. Colquhoun's.

The conversation had turned as to its more serious side on psychical wonders and discoveries. The American was keen for the discoveries, he argued and re-argued in favour of the possibility of the wildest assertions of mind-searchers and mind-gamblers. There are both. The cousin, who was a lawyer, had made game of many things the American took up as an expert. Some remarks of his anent the marvels that he had come across in his own

daily prosaic work had, as it were, found their fitting peroration in Jabez Colquhoun's sentence,

"Truth is as strange as fiction."

"And there, sir, I must decline to pass your word 'fiction,'—we are not treating of fictitious matters." The American spoke coolly and assuredly. "My own experience has been mixed up with much that I have been suggesting for your thought. Circumstances led me to challenge a matter once, and in that challenge my own eyes were opened, and I say that the unknown forces of nature and the spirituality of the human mind are—infinite. Yes, infinite. In these days we are but at the A, B, C of knowledge; what the ancients knew of these things is lost, and we are groping, nay, I say we will fight our way to the van of insight. Man has had the Divine breath of reason breathed into him, and shall that Divine breath be trammelled with the cords of measurability? No."

"I agree to that,—yes, I agree." Colquhoun's face was pensive, and his tone was like that of a person who is mentally less assured than his tongue would lead one to suppose.

"You will have an adept for a pupil, Mr. Dana," and the little lawyer's keen grey eyes sparkled. "I am not sure that he will not evolve some reminiscence from the hidings of his memory that will over-

top your marvels. He is an older man than you are."

"Yes," Colquhoun said, nodding his iron-grey head. He said no more than the one word.

"I don't understand these things, but I strangely fear them," and Mrs. Colquhoun, a small lady wearing the prettiest of lace caps upon her almost white hair, flushed a little, as a reserved woman generally does on giving an opinion—an opinion, we mean, on a matter of thought and faith.

"Nonsense, Mary!" was Tom Braine the lawyer's quick reply. "We are only philosophizing; we are not going to raise spirits, or bring voices to you in the dead of night, or—or—do any occult work of that sort."

She laughed softly. "Tom, you are an unbeliever! No, my fears are not quite of the sort you suggest. I cannot say what I mean,—nay, I am not sure that my meaning is clear even within myself, but I feel that Mr. Dana speaks truth. Still—"

Dana's lips opened to speak.

"I have a fear." Her gentle brown eyes were grave and yet they were questioning. "I *feel*—that is the best word to use—I just *feel* that these vast hidden powers are withheld from us for good reasons. If we were to know all things, if we were to have powers by which we could foresee events,

annihilate space, win influence over human spirits, should we not be as gods? We should need no trust, no faith. And man, when he is worth anything, must have both."

"Brava, Mary!" Braine cried. "But just like a woman."

"And illogical, eh?" She rose. "You will tell me how you fight it out when you come to my tea-table," she said. "Mr. Dana, ask my husband to tell you his father's dream,—perhaps you will be able to explain it. And, Tom, it may mystify even you!"

"Ah, you have a *bonâ fide* case?" The American's keen face shone keener. He looked at his host.

Colquhoun laughed as a man would do who did not like being dragged into an unpremeditated confession.

"*Bonâ fide!* no empirical inventions, mind you," Dana cried hurriedly; "no rapping of high heels on old stairs, no tapping on doors in the dead of night."

By this time Colquhoun had made up his mind. "No," he said with decision. "A thing of very simple details,—can't work it up at all into anything. Dry facts."

"Let us hear them over Mrs. Colquhoun's tea-table, then," was Dana's way of clinching the matter.

Dana stood by the fireplace, a tall, thin, handsome, fair man, Anglo-Saxon every line of him by race, American every inch of him by keen, cultured training and birth. The late flush of rosy light, for it was a mid-June sunset, glorified the pretty suburban drawing-room. Away in the far distance rose the misty curves of Epsom Downs; intervening green valleys gave a radiant sea of fields and foliage; closer came the wide and the red-roofed dottings of Surrey's villas and homesteads. Dana stirred his tea, but, while the rest sat at their ease as the story went on, he stood erect and alert, and keenly alive to catch point or flaw.

This was the story. Colquhoun began—

"My father was a practical man, an intensely practical and matter-of-fact man. In that line he had been brought up. His imagination had had no culture given to it. I say this to show you how unlikely a person he was to become the victim of what some folks"—he looked at Braine—"would call a spiritualistic craze.

"When he was seventeen years of age he came into the office—our office I mean. His father and his grandfather were then both living, but he must go through all stages of work before he could be head. Naturally he would be 'Colquhoun and Colquhoun' one day. By inheritance and by training

he was of the stuff that makes a man of figures and accounts."

"Ay." Dana threw back his head with a gesture he had.

"At the end of two years' work he got a holiday of a week; that was liberal for those days. He went to some relatives of his mother's, my grandmother's, in Oxfordshire. He came back late one November night. He had had a bad coach journey through fog.

"Now for closer details.

"He went to bed, his mother giving him a hot joram of some sort or other to ward off any ill effects of the journey. His room was away from the rest at the end of a passage, so that no one heard sounds if any did issue from that room. His own story in the morning was that violent sounds must have been made, and made by himself. He woke himself with a shout. And why? He had a dream. He was travelling—in a foreign land he supposed, for people were habited strangely, spoke an unknown tongue, had bizarre ways of action. His journeying went on with rapid ease. He said he could still feel, as he told the tale in the morning, that ecstatic sensation of swift and pleasurable motion. Then he and others whom he knew not were more slowly traversing a labyrinth of town streets. More and

more slowly could they move, closer and ever more closely did high walls enclose and darken about him, fewer and fewer did his companions become. Gradually, too, a horror of solitude, of chilliness, and of imprisonment grew upon him. All at once a flash of lightning sprang from the narrow strip of sky—he saw he was alone and immured in some fortress."

"Then came his shout," Braine put in with his gay lack of faith, "and he woke. Nightmare, Jabez, nightmare."

The American impatiently struck his teaspoon against his cup. "That is not the end?"

"No," Colquhoun answered, "no. He dreamed that he shouted—that cannot be proved. He dreamed that he did make as much noise as a lusty prisoner might be expected to make. He dreamed also that a long space of time—hours, days, months—elapsed; then—then a ray of pale light showed him a narrow opening, as of a corridor, on one side of his prison's wall. He flew to it. Within it was a figure, a commonplace figure like himself, and this figure made him a sign to follow. He obeyed. The passage became a narrow street, a street with quaint houses such as the earlier part of his dream had shown him. Turnings into other streets followed, his guide bidding him mark the road. After some four or five turnings he was in a grand open space.

Daylight flashed broadly over the earth, people were shouting. My father shouted as one shouts at deliverance—it was that shout that woke him. He was in a tremor and sweat." Mr. Colquhoun ceased speaking.

"Ay," said the American. His head went down; his cup he put on a little table. "And next?" he said, looking keenly at his host.

"That's the end, evidently," said Braine. "Pointless—utterly pointless."

"You are so fast, Tom," Mrs. Colquhoun laughed softly.

Colquhoun stretched himself, and his eyes were as keen as Dana's as he looked at him. "Yes," was the apparently absorbed answer to Mrs. Colquhoun. "Tom is fast—too fast. I have not come to the end. I stick to dry details.

"My father lived on. As to the dream, he never spoke of it, but he acted. I have often heard him say of late years that he could never make a reasonable reason even to his own mind for what he did. He sketched on a bit of paper the plan of those streets of escape. He said that having done this he put the paper aside, and never looked at it until years after, when the event came to pass that does make the point of the story, and the point for you, Dana, to explain.

"My father was twenty-five years of age when some business of the house sent him over to Paris on a finance question. He was a steady-headed man, and his parents had more than once suggested to him the advisability of settling—that means marrying. He had no desire for matrimony in those days; I fancy he must have been too hard-headed a young man, too devoted to business, to have been one of those whose society is sought by ladies, either old or young. He went to Paris, transacted the firm's business, and started for home. He came home through Belgium. But no, I will not give you the real name of the town at which the point was struck—*our* point, Dana."

"It does not matter," said the American.

"But it does," Tom Braine cried. "I like a name, I like exactitude."

"Say Brussels."

"Say Ostend," Mrs. Colquhoun put in.

"Why not Calais? Calais is commonplace; no spiritualistic scenes could come off in Calais," Braine insisted.

"But he came back by way of Belgium," the amused lady explained.

"Then I stick to Calais; I will be illogical," said her cousin. "Go on, Colquhoun; at Calais something happened."

"We should have done as well without the name. However, let me go on. At Calais, then, my father and three others were being shown some new arms on the ramparts,—you see now how by fixing a name you will get your mind confused,—some new experiments in gunnery were being explained. This was a favour granted to one certain gentleman of the party, in fact, it was a matter not allowed strictly.

"Presently they came upon two ladies. These ladies were told, politely of course, that they were on forbidden ground. They apologized, they had lost their way, they had walked and each moment had been unable to get back to the public ways. One was an elderly lady, the other a young lady, and a very beautiful young lady. This younger one seemed terrified, and yet she had no cause to be so.

"'In five minutes, ladies,' the officer who was the guide said, 'we shall be on this spot again, and I will then show you the way. Wait here, please; I am sorry that I am not permitted to ask you to follow us.'

"My father knew nought of the strategy of war, he took no interest by his natural bent of mind in the gunnery descriptions he had been listening to, in fact, his interest had been simply that which one clear intellect takes in the work of another

clear intellect; but—he was courteous with old-world courtesy, and as this is no sentimental story I may as well clinch the point at once—he was suddenly in love with the tall beautiful young girl. He waited behind with the two ladies.

"The specified five minutes flew, it became half-an-hour. For him even that had flown, he had never before been so unobservant of time. But the ladies were not like him. The elder one grew timorous, the younger calmed her mother, but grew brave in her delicate way.

"'You can lead us out by the way you came in,' she said to my father, and with all her gentleness there was the quiet, trustful command of a fearless woman.

"'Yes, but perhaps our friend, my friend's friend, might—might prefer—I do not know what military etiquette may be here.'

"'Oh, we must forget military etiquette,' was the girl's sure answer. 'You came in by that little gate; the way by which we came is of no use, we cannot find any way from it, or you would not have found us here.'

"The simple matter was to obey.

"Lo, the little gate was locked! No doubt the officer who acted as guide had the master key for those private ways.

"Still, one could try the supposed useless way,—no good there.

"My father was nonplussed. He pondered.

"Suddenly, as he and the ladies all stood in silence, he rebellious that he could not serve them, a strange thing happened to him. I have heard him say that for one second it seemed to him that an ecstasy filled his mind. He remembered the same ecstatic feeling which in his dream had come by the sensation of swift and easy travelling. In a moment he had before his mental vision the old plan of streets which he had noted down after that strange dream. There was no need to search for the plan in any pocket, for it seemed printed with electric vividness before his eyes.

"He went down the passage the ladies had declared useless. He had already found it, but now he held a clue. Some few feet down it he found what before he had only seen as rough planks leaning against a wall. He called to the ladies. They came. And then as in his dream he had seen a plain man standing at a turning, so now they saw him. He had moved the planks which hid the entrance to a passage arched and dark. Five turnings he took, and he had led the ladies out into an open space, one of the open squares of the town. The officer and his friends were there—they had

forgotten the ladies. That's all," Mr. Colquhoun ended abruptly.

The American was soon ready with a dozen questions:—"Had your father not seen the place before? Had he not read of it, of its strange labyrinthine streets? If it was a fortified place, how could ladies have got in, promiscuously, as one may say?"

"He had never seen the place and knew nothing of it," Colquhoun answered doggedly. "The ladies *were* there, that is all I know. The young beautiful lady was afterwards my mother."

"And there's no sentiment in your story at all?" Tom Braine laughed. "Eh! no sentiment! Ha, ha!"

Colquhoun paid no attention to this. "If you can explain it, Dana, I'd be glad to hear your explanation. My father went more than once to the place afterwards, but he never found that track again. But he *was in*, and he *got out*—through the teaching of the dream."

"I must think it out," Dana said.

A DOUBLE EVENT; OR, 200 TO 1.

"YES, these used to be my quarters in the old days when I ran up to town from Aldershot. Ah, those were cheery times. By Jove! it's just as well one can't see ghosts of the future; it would have given me rather a start then, if I had looked out of the window and seen myself as I am now, at my billet at the corner."

The speaker was the proprietor of the crossing at the corner of Powder Street, St. James's. He was sitting in my chamber in Powder Street, smoking his short black pipe and drinking some whiskey-and-water.

Since I first came to live in Powder Street I had often as I passed his crossing wondered what this man's history had been. He was a man who had obviously seen better days, and yet was able to bear his fallen fortunes with philosophy, if not with resignation. Probably he ought to have been in the prime of his life, but his long drooping moustache

had more white hairs than black in it, and his worn face and bent figure told a tale of hard times. His clothes were wonderfully old and tattered, but they looked as if they had been originally made for him, and had once been the fine feathers of a fine bird, while his battered shapeless old hat had something about it which suggested that it had been the work of a good maker. He never asked for alms with a cadger's whine, but he would remind the passers-by of his claims upon them by an easy gesture, much as one who was playing at loo would remind another player who had forgotten to do so to put into the pool. I used to notice that he usually had a little volume in his hand, which when business was slack he would intently peruse. At first I thought that it was some book of devotion. I am afraid I put down his motive in reading it to a desire to gain the good-will of the pious, though the passers-by were as a rule not much in that way inclined; but when I had a closer look upon one occasion I saw that it was a 'Ruff's Guide to the Turf.' After a time I usually used to have some conversation with him when I passed, it was generally about the same subject, racing, and I found out that he was a very earnest student of public form, and that there were few big races on which some of the takings of the Powder Street crossing were not wagered. Although in the

body he was present at the Powder Street crossing, in the spirit he was on Newmarket Heath, or at Ascot, or Epsom, or wherever the races might be going on, and he would always enjoy a talk about the last meeting with any one who had been there. It was after I had come back from a Newmarket meeting that I asked him to come up to my chambers and discuss the doings there, over some whiskey-and-water. Rather queer company for me to keep, some people—my father the Dean of Bungay—would say; but I was always rather unconventional in my tastes, and I could not help having something like a fellow-feeling for one to whom the Turf had such strange fascination. It was on that occasion that he recognized the rooms, and this, and perhaps the whiskey-and-water, made him communicative and induced him to tell me something of his life.

"Yes, it was a confounded dream that sent me wrong," he said; "it must have come from the devil; I wish he would send me another one like it, by Jove, though. It was when I was at an army crammer's that I had it. Up to that time I had never gambled a bit or had any interest in a race except to have a shilling or two in a sweep. It was a few days before the Derby, and the other fellows were always talking about it, so I knew the horses' names though I took little or no interest in the race.

"Well, one night I had a dream. I dreamt I saw the Derby run and won, and then I went to sleep and dreamt again, and by Jove, sir, that time I dreamt the Oaks. I had never been to Epsom then, but in my sleep I saw the grand stand, and the hill, and the Corner, as I have so often seen them since. I remembered the names of the horses I had seen win in my dream, and the next day I told the other fellows of it, and my description of what I had seen was so vivid that they were wonderfully taken by it and would have it that I must back my luck. I did; I had a tenner on the double event. I took the odds from a good man. A thousand to ten he laid me, and all the other fellows backed it for a sovereign or two as well. We all went to see that Derby and Oaks. The crammer saw that we were so much interested in the races that we might as well be at Epsom as in his study, for all the good we should do in getting ready for our exams, so he didn't make much trouble about our going. Well, it was just like seeing something I had seen before, and the races came off just as they did in my dream, and when the numbers went up after the Oaks I had won my thousand pounds.

"I got paid all right, but the money did not do me much good. It went a short time after I had got my commission, and it left with a gambling devil

in me which will never be sent out. I liked my regiment and the service well enough, only I liked racing better; I had one or two horses of my own in training, and what with backing them and other men's it did not take me very long to go to grief. The wonder is that I lasted as long as I did, but my father died about that time and I had the old place to gamble away. Well, it went; our people had owned it since Henry the II.'s reign. They kept it all through the troubles in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when they staked and lost much for the Stuarts, but I lost it over one St. Leger, and my commission and all I had but a few hundreds. With what I had left I went out to the colonies to seek my fortune, and I didn't do so badly in South Africa, where I went; I had an ostrich farm out there, and was doing rather well, but even out there they have some sort of racing. It is a miserable dog-eat-dog game, every one trying to do every one else, and the robberies are even more barefaced than they are at home. But such as it was I took to it, and at that wretched business I got broke again. After that I had a pretty hard time doing first one thing and then another; at one time I was in the mounted police force and I got maimed, losing some fingers as you see, in a row with some bush-men. Then a relation died leaving me a little money and I came

home again. Well, my experience ought to have kept me straight, then, you will say; my experience was just as useful to me as it is to nine men out of ten—I did exactly what I had done before and took to the Turf again. Yes, with exactly the same result, for again I was left without a penny, worse off than I had ever been before, for I was dead broke in England, the worst country in the world to get anything to do in. I hadn't any one to help me, for I had worn out my relations' patience and my friends'. If you come to grief you will find out how many friends you make while you are knocking about spending your money. Well, I had the experience that many a poor devil has had, and will have, answering advertisements and finding out they were all swindles or not meant for men like I was. I spent a few shillings in sticking one in for myself. By Jove, the answers that I got! Answers from money-lenders offering me terms to tout for them, answers from men who live by getting the last sovereigns some poor wretch has who has been made reckless by trouble. I got one from a clergyman who offered for five pounds to introduce me to the squire of his parish, who, he thought, would take me as a tutor for his boys. At last I got a billet, the one I have now. The man who had it before me had been in my troop in the old regiment, and when

I passed by the crossing he recognized me. He had been rather a bad lot in the regiment, but I had done him some kindness and he hadn't forgotten it. He was as civil and respectful to me as if he thought that I wore a bad hat and ragged coat from choice, and I didn't look as if I often forgot to dine. He told me that he was not doing badly, and that he had laid by a little, only the weather told on him as his lungs were bad, and it ended in my taking the crossing from him to work on half shares. I dare say he must have thought it rather a queer job for his old captain to take to, but one who knows London street life as a crossing-sweeper does has seen queerer starts than that; certainly he didn't say much, but seemed glad of the chance of getting a straight man to work for him. He is dead now, and the crossing belongs to me; I don't do so badly taking one day with another, and though it is hardly the work I should choose, there are lots of men who have had better positions than I ever had whom I don't envy; but the worst of it is, what I make all goes over some race or the other, for I have such bad luck, and the queer thing is, that though I seldom think of anything but races when I am awake, and haven't for all these years, I have never had another dream of one," concluded the sweeper, and he finished his whiskey-and-water and relit his short black pipe,

and in a few minutes he was talking about the horse which must win the Goodwood Stakes, with as much confidence as if he had been the most undefeated of plungers.

When I came back from my holidays that year I found my friend still at his crossing, but I noticed that he seemed rather out of spirits, and he used to have rather a dejected air as he conned his 'Ruff's Guide' and smoked his short black pipe. It was not because he had lost money on the Leger, for which I had a fellow-feeling for him—that he took as a matter of course; nor was it because the winter was coming on, though that was enough to depress a delicate man who had to get his living in the open air; what worried him was the autumn handicaps—for once he was unable to come to a conclusion satisfactory to himself as to what would win. The fact that the conclusions he had arrived at before had almost always been wrong did not make this state of uncertainty less annoying to him.

"I can't get the hang of it anyhow," he would say; "the form of the year is all of a tangle;" and he would go into a long discussion about weights and performances. I must say I felt rather glad of this, and hoped for once that the earnings of the Powder Street crossing would remain in its pro-

prietor's pocket. But he was by no means pleased, his hobby-horse had failed him, and with a bothered expression he read his 'Ruff's Guide' and tried to unravel the tangled skein of public form.

However, one morning when I was in my chambers the servant of the house came up, with rather an indignant expression on her face, and said that there was a man below who wanted to see me. "I think, sir," she answered to my question as to who he was, "he is the party as sweeps the crossing at the corner, and from his manner I fancy as he has had something to drink. I told him as you never would wish to see the likes of him, but he wouldn't go away." "Show him up," I said, and the servant left the room saying that she would tell him to come up, with an expression of scorn which told me that she thought if I had no proper pride, she had. In a few seconds the crossing-sweeper came into the room, and from his appearance I formed much the same opinion that the servant had. His face was haggard with excitement, and he seemed to be trembling all over.

"I have got them, I have got them!" he said as he came in.

"Yes, you look as if you had them rather badly. I didn't know you drank."

"Don't laugh at me, I have the winners of the

Cesarewitch and Cambrideshire—a dead certainty for a double event."

"Oh, that is all," I said without much excitement, for I had no great faith in the sweeper's tips.

"I tell you it is a certainty; I have had another dream. Matadore wins the Cesarewitch, and a horse wins the Cambridgeshire whose name I don't know."

"That is just it," I answered; "we all know that, but we don't know the name."

"Yes, but I should know the horse again, and the colours, and the boy who rode; he wore a black cap, green jacket, red spots."

"Green and red spots! what beastly colours. But now you say so, by Jove, I know them!" I exclaimed. "They are Joe Levi's, that little thief of a Jew who keeps the public-house in the Haymarket and has a few platers training with John Holmes."

"There, I told you so," he cried excitedly. "Let me see what Levi has in the Cambridgeshire; it was a black horse I saw win."

I sent for a sporting paper and got a calendar, and I found that Mr. Levi's black horse, the Crow, was entered for the Cambridgeshire. He was in at six stone—a nice light weight for a five-year-old—and I saw that he had been backed at long odds.

The crossing-sweeper was delighted. "At last my luck is going to turn. After all these years I have had another dream. Remember, when I dream I win," he exclaimed. "Matadore and the Crow, they ought to give us long odds."

I remember having seen the Crow run at Bromley; he was a beast of a horse, probably the worst horse in training, I thought, and I tried to persuade the sweeper against believing there was anything in it, but it was useless to make any such attempt. There was no doubt about the horse, as I was sure about the colours, and it was the only horse Levi had in the race; and as for it having no chance, some one thought it had, for was it not being backed, though at very long odds? He felt strangely confident in his dream coming off, and nothing I could say shook his confidence. It ended in my catching a good deal of his excitement, though I determined only to back his dream for a sovereign. The sweeper, however, was not so cautious, everything he had was to go on it, and he even sold his crossing, so that he could back his dream to win a large sum of money. We got fairly long odds—two hundred to one—the sweeper taking the odds to forty pounds, while I had a pound on. I never thought much about it after I made the bet, but the sweeper became an altered man. He still kept

his crossing, as he had arranged to do that until the day of the Cambridgeshire; but he was restless and began to hate and feel ashamed of his life. "Not much more of this," he would say to me as I passed by. "I hope none of these fellows who pass by will know me again when I have my money."

I did not go to the Cesarewitch that year; I had got tired of going to races, and sick with myself for wasting so much time and money on a pursuit which perhaps might take the same hold upon me that it had upon the sweeper. On the day of the race, however, I waited with some anxiety at the club for the telegram. Matadore had always been backed a good deal, and left off the night before first favourite, so I was fairly hopeful that the first event of our double event would come off. Sure enough Matadore was the name I saw on the telegram, and I at once started out to tell the sweeper of our good luck. He took the good news wonderfully quietly. "I knew it," he said, "just as if I had seen the race; in fact, I have seen the race, and so I have the Cambridgeshire." That day the Crow began to be backed a good deal at Newmarket, and its price began to shorten. I wanted the sweeper to hedge and make certain of a good sum of money, but he refused to do so; in fact, if he had any money I believe he would have gone on backing it. He

seemed to be perfectly confident that he would win, and began to talk of what he would do with his money as if he had already had it. He would talk about what he would do that winter, whether he would hunt in Leicestershire, or go to the South of France.

I went down to Newmarket to see the Cambridgeshire. The only bet I had on the race was the two hundred pounds I stood to win on the Crow, and I began to feel half hopeful that I should win this money, which would be very useful to me, as I was hard up and in debt. As I read the papers in the train I saw that the Crow's price had come up to 20 to 1, and I noticed that the sporting prophets, who had at first howled at the idea of such a brute having a chance, now spoke much more guardedly. When I got into the inclosure some one touched me on the shoulder, and I heard a husky voice whisper in my ear, "Mr. Langdale, I've been a looking for you heverywhere; there is one you must back for the Cambridgeshire." The man who spoke to me was one of those hangers-on to the Turf who get their living by haunting racecourses and training quarters and picking up bits of information, which they retail to their patrons. Sometimes he really did know something. Often he made sure of hitting on the winner by giving each horse in the race to one or

other of his patrons. This day he refused to be repulsed by my telling him that I did not mean to back anything. I must have his information: he said he had given it to all his gentlemen; it was good, real good, and lowering his voice to a husky whisper, he said two words, "the Crow." "Yes, sir," he continued in a second or two, "it's the best thing as ever I 'ad; better than Cock Robin for the Chester Cup as I put you on to; not put you on—well, as I put a lot o' my gents on to. Now look 'ere, this is true," he added sorrowfully, as one who has a great truth to impart, but whose known character for mendacity stands in his way: "My brother Bill, he is in John Holmes's stable where the Crow is trained, and I was down there last night and see'd Bill, and he told me about it."

"Well, what did he say?" I asked, telling him that I had backed the Crow already, but that I would give him a pound or so if it won.

"Well, sir, Bill let me know as it was a real good thing, and that they are certain of it, and he would have told me more only John Holmes comes up and catches him talking to me. He has an awful temper has John Holmes, and he didn't like Bill talking to me, for he know'd me, so he unchains the stable dog and sets it at me, and then he goes for Bill. As I hooks it away from the dog I hears Bill howling out.

If Master Holmes knew Bill as well as I do I don't think he would care to knock him about as he did, for Bill ain't one to stand it quiet. But there, sir, you stick to what you have on the Crow, and put a bit more on too," and the tout shuffled off to look for another of "his gents."

"Well, so far so good," I thought to myself. I did not feel very much confidence in the tout; still I thought that he seemed very much in earnest about what he had told me, and I could not help believing that there was something in it, and I certainly could not help hoping that there might be, for I wanted the two hundred for myself badly enough, and I could not but feel a great interest in the fortunes of my friend the sweeper. There was a horse trained by Knight which they were backing as they used to back red-hot favourites from that stable, and there was an Irish horse the sharps were all on, and Billy Nous, the big north-country bookmaker, had a mare on which it is said that he would win a fortune. The Crow's price was 100 to 6, and though there were some people always ready to lay those odds, there seemed to be money in the market to back it; and I was not surprised at this, for the people connected with Holmes's stable, though they were a very shady lot and men of more than doubtful character, always found money for their good things.

Billy Nous seemed never to be tired of laying against the Crow, and this I did not much like, for he had a reputation for not often making a dead set against a horse unless he knew something; still I had begun to be very hopeful. As I walked from the stand to the side of the course I saw the sweeper; he looked livid, jaded, and ill—worse than I had ever seen him before.

"I could not stand it any longer," he said to me, 'so I came down to see the race. I hadn't enough money, so I had to walk a good bit of the way. I have said good-bye to the crossing, and have given it up."

"Poor fellow! What will he do for a living if it don't come off?" I thought.

When he saw the Crow he looked a good deal happier. "That's all right," he said; "it's the horse I saw in my dream, and the same boy; you see the dream is all right."

After that he did not seem at all troubled by the anxiety of Billy Nous, who was near us, to lay against the horse. I thought the Crow looked very much improved, and though he was an ugly brute, he could stride along.

They got off all together after only one false start. Some horse whose name I did not know made the running for a bit. As they came nearer there was

a cry of "The favourite is beat!" and Billy Nous's mare, Our Emma, looked like a winner, but I saw the Crow coming up.

"Our Emma wins!" they were shouting out, when I heard the harsh voice of a well-known sporting baronet shout, "What is that black horse coming up? The Crow! and the Crow wins!"

"No, he doan't; my mare wins, Our Emma. An even five hundred Our Emma!" shouted Billy Nous.

The baronet had just time to take the bet, and it was clear that the Crow must win; and he did by two lengths, Our Emma second.

As the horses passed the post I looked at the sweeper. He had turned pale and was very queer, and when, in a second or two, he spoke, there was a catch in his breath. "Just what I saw—and then I woke up—just what I saw. Well, you see my dream was all right," he said; and then, after he had thought for a second or two, he asked me to lend him some money, so that he could go and get something to eat at Jarvis's, for though he had eight thousand to draw on Monday, he had not sixpence until then. I lent him a fiver, and he went to get something to eat, while I went back to the inclosure. As soon as I got there I saw that something was wrong. The ready-money bookmakers would not

pay over the Crow. Nobody at first knew what it was about, but there was an objection lodged by Mr. Nous, the owner of the second. For some time all was confusion, and all sorts of rumours were going, but the general opinion was that there was something very wrong. "S'help me, I shan't go near 'em. It's all up; that imp of a boy has split —he's been and told Billy Nous. There will be heaps of proof against us. It's all your fault for hammering him so. I shall clear."

A string of oaths was the only answer, and as I looked round I saw that they were Joe Levi and Jack Holmes, the owner and trainer of the Crow. They seemed to be making off. Soon I heard that the stewards wanted to see these gentlemen, and that they were not to be found. Then I met a friend of mine who, on a racecourse, always knew exactly what was going on. This very astute friend of mine was also good-natured, and when I told him that I had backed the Crow, he let me know what was going on.

"Backed the Crow, did you? Well, I shouldn't talk too loud about it. I am afraid that you have not the slightest chance of getting your money. The race must be given to Our Emma. It is about the biggest swindle since the Running Rein case. The horse which won wasn't the Crow, at

all. It seems Levi got hold of a French horse exactly like the Crow, only a good one instead of a bad one, and he has won with it. The boy, who knew all about it, has rounded on them. It seems Holmes, the trainer, thought that it was a nice safe amusement to beat the boy almost to death last night, though he knew enough against him to send him to penal servitude, and so Mr. Holmes's wild beast's temper has upset the apple cart. You ought to have backed Our Emma; I did," said my friend, and he bustled off to get more information. He was rightly informed. In a short time every one knew all about it, and I shall never forget the scene of excitement that ensued when every one heard of the swindle that had almost been successful. There was no doubt about it, and there were men on the course able to identify the horse that won. It would have gone hard with Messrs. Levi and Holmes if the crowd had got at them, but they were not to be found. So much for my two hundred. And the sweeper—poor old chap—his dream had indeed brought him to grief. It had come to pass right enough, but he had woke up too soon—he ought to have dreamt about the objection. What was he to do? Well, he had my fiver, and though they were getting scarce I did not grudge it him.

As I left the inclosure I saw a crowd of people

round a man who had fallen down. Some one, who looked like a doctor, told them to keep away, and give the man air. I came up, and recognized the fallen man. It was the sweeper. He probably had been one of the last men on the Heath to hear about the objection.

When he had finished his dinner he had walked back to the side of the course, smoking his short black pipe, and thinking of the good time he would have. Then he had heard of the objection, and learnt that his dream had been a will-o'-the-wisp, which had led him to utter ruin. There must have been always something wrong with him, for the bad news had been too much for him, and he had fallen down in a fit or something. The doctor looked at him, felt at his pulse and then at his heart, looked grave, and said, "He is dead." As I looked down at him I noticed that his pockets had been turned inside out. Some one had already secured the change of my fiver, and he lay on Newmarket Heath dead and cleaned out.

A WARNING BELL.

In the spring of the year 188—, I chanced to be residing in the hotel of one of those much frequented little towns which fringe the shores of the Lake of Geneva. I had resided there for the greater part of the winter, and a natural intimacy had sprung up between myself and the few others who had made the same locality their winter resort. Prominent among the pleasant acquaintances thus made, was a Colonel Douglas—a Scotchman, and a soldier of some distinction. He had just returned from India, after an absence there, so far as I could gather, of many years, and was on his way home. He had made a longer stay in Switzerland than he had originally intended, having been recommended the bracing climate for his health, which was considerably shattered.

Colonel Douglas was a man of rather more than middle age, distinguished in appearance, but excessively quiet in manner, and apparently retiring in

disposition. His sunburnt face was grave and rather melancholy, but there was something about it that everybody liked, and he was at once relegated, by the ladies, to that class, which for want of a clearer definition, is known as "interesting." He did not take a forward part in the amusements which we got up amongst ourselves in the hotel, but his courtesy was unfailing; what he really liked was a smoke on the terrace, and a quiet talk with a fellow-smoker. As time went on, the latter individual chanced very frequently to be myself.

A spell of somewhat premature heat in the month of April made us all, I remember, very much in love with our Swiss retreat. But this fore-taste of summer was but brief, and terminated suddenly, in the afternoon of one brilliant day, in a rattling thunder-storm, which cracked and lightened above our heads for some hours, greatly to the terror of some of our number among the ladies. Towards evening the storm died away and was succeeded by a peculiarly exquisite spell of calm and coolness. After *table d'hôte*, we were all gathered together as usual in the *salon*, and there was a great deal of talk and discussion—chiefly on the weather, the atmosphere, and kindred topics suggested by the recent storm. Some one at last suggested—I know not why, or by what inspired—that there should be a

telling of ghost stories. The twilight was creeping on, the room was filled with faint, yellowish and rather unearthly light from a wild and watery-looking west. The suggestion was received with acclamation; the hour and the feelings of those present were said to be exactly what was required for such a *séance*.

Stories were forthwith told; some were inconceivably silly, incoherently and badly told to a degree. Others were really good and memorable, told with spirit and a considerable sense of dramatic effect. At last nearly every one had been called upon for a story except Colonel Douglas, who was present, but who had studiously kept himself in the background. A certain Irish lady of distinguished sprightliness, who had just been favouring the company with a particularly blood-curdling recital of Hibernian mystery and horror, turned to him and addressed him with a suddenness which made him start.

"Now, Colonel Douglas," said she, "it is your turn. Tell us something nice. You're a Scotchman, you know; the Scotch people are famous for their superstitions—ghosts, and second-sight, and all that, as good as the Irish themselves. Now—come!"

The Colonel looked suddenly and deeply perturbed. "I—Madam—" he stammered, "I am quite unequal

to the occasion, I assure you; never told a story in my life, upon my honour. Pray, pray excuse me." Then, to everybody's surprise, and with an abruptness of manner very unusual in him, Colonel Douglas hurriedly left the room.

A few minutes afterwards I saw him outside on the terrace, puffing at a huge cigar, and pacing up and down with a more hasty step than usual. I determined to go out and join him at once; something I felt had disturbed our good friend.

"You got tired of our ghost stories, Colonel," I remarked, when I had joined him and also lighted my cigar.

He did not answer at once, and then said, "No, Mr. Benson, I wasn't tired of them; I was deeply interested—in some of them at least; I have cause to be."

"But you didn't feel inclined to add to the number?" I hinted.

The Colonel took his cigar from his lips, and knocked off the ashes on the terrace balustrade by which we were standing. His face was turned away, its profile looked somewhat stern and sad against the evening light.

"I might have told a story," he said at last, slowly, "not so horrible as some, perhaps, but as strange as any, and far more sad. It is the story of my own

youth, Mr. Benson; too private and personal to be told by me in a mixed company like that. But my mind is full of it to-night, more so than it has been for many a year. If you care to stay out here and listen, Mr. Benson, I will tell you what I can. There is no desecration in speaking of it to one alone, and in a place and hour like this."

I said I should be only too deeply interested to hear the story. It is repeated below, as nearly in the narrator's own words as possible.

"My family," said Colonel Douglas, "owns a small property, which lies in one of the most beautiful parts of Scotland, on the borders of a lake, which every tourist passes now-a-days on his route to the west coast. My father lived here, and here I was born and brought up. With us, and under my father's charge, there lived a young lady,—his ward and my cousin; a beautiful, penniless girl, a niece of my mother, who had died when I was a child,—her name was Lilias Graham, and although she was considerably younger than myself, we were virtually brought up together. Perhaps, sir, you can guess the result. I know very little of what poets and novelists have said about love, but I know that I loved my cousin with a single heart from my earliest boyhood, and that I have loved no other woman since. When I was about seventeen or eighteen, I

was sent to one of the English Military Colleges to complete my professional education. I was absent for three years. When I returned, I found Lilias grown from childhood into the most lovely womanhood—as beautiful a creature in mind and person as the heart of man could desire. My love was too ardent and impulsive to be concealed; her heart, God bless her! was mine always. All the associations of early, happy days bound us together, and we were lovers in the truest and deepest sense of the word. That summer passed away, and we were happy beyond what words can tell. My father—a dreamy, unpractical man, absorbed in his books and papers—let our love run on its wonted course, heedless of its imprudence, and its probable consequences to my career. Lilias and I were together all day long—on the lake, or on the hill, or in the old garden. It is the old story, my dear sir; you must forgive me if I linger over it.

"Our house was an old and curious one—in the style of early Scottish architecture—hedged in by a circle of huge plane trees or sycamores, whose heavy foliage shut out the sun, and darkened most of our small rooms in summer. It had some curiosities among the family relics associated with it—some ancient armour, some blackened parchments, and among other things—a bell. There was nothing

especially curious or noticeable about this bell except its antiquity, and the fact that it had hung in one place for time immemorial; that place being a high branch of one of the old sycamores—the one nearest the house. It was a rough, massive, primitive piece of iron-work—rusty with long exposure, and hung on creaking hinges. A long iron chain, by which to pull it, was attached to it, and dangled below to a length of many feet. It was interesting as a curiosity and an heirloom, but no particular history attached to it, and no particular use had ever been arranged to it. For some years of my childhood the servants were accustomed to ring it for their meals, or for summoning the coachman down from the stables, but the constant pealing disturbed my father in his studies; it also occurred to him that if the bell were seldom or never rung it would be extremely useful as an alarm in case of fire or other accident, and would serve to summon assistance from the village on the other side of the lake. Orders, accordingly, were given that the big bell was never to be touched except for the purpose of summons and alarm; the chain was hooked up out of reach, except by a ladder, and the familiar daily clang was silent. Only once since my infancy had I heard it—that was on the occasion of a great fire in the home-farm buildings—and then, clanging out at

midnight, it was a sound I felt I never should forget.

"I believe I had almost forgotten the existence of the bell,—in these days when Lilias and I were so happy in our youth, and in our love,—but, by a sudden incident, it was brought back to my memory —only too vividly. One autumn evening, exquisitely clear and fine, Lilias and I set out upon a message to a farm about four miles distant from our house. It was late when we started; and at the farm the good woman of the house insisted upon our remaining till she prepared a rustic meal of scones and milk and cheese, which hospitality it would have been highly ungracious to decline; nor were Lilias and I in the least averse to a late walk home in the autumn twilight. There was no one at home to chide us if we came in late, and so we prolonged our visit at the farm till the sun was long set and the dew falling.

"I have no memory more dear and cherished than of that evening walk with Lilias. Our way led along the shore of the lake, whose waters lay calm and silvery under the moonless twilight. The west was still faintly aglow till where it melted into the opalescent green of the cloudless, starlit sky. There was hardly a sound to be heard but the flutter downward of a leaf now and then, and sometimes

the screaming of an owl in the dark woods above us; I hardly fancy that Lilias would have cared to have been walking alone there and at that hour, but her hand was on my arm, and she knew no fear. What is the use of saying we were happy? Everything most lovely and precious in life seemed to be concentrated into that hour; I think human felicity could reach no further point.

"We were nearing home; I remember perfectly the spot we had reached—a clump of birch trees by the road-side, about a quarter of a mile from the house. Suddenly, I hardly know how it happened, Lilias started from me, threw up her hand, and cried out, her startled eyes staring full into mine—

"'Oh—Archie—listen!'

"At the same instant of time there burst from my own lips the words—

"'The bell!'

"We both heard it, but it was only for an instant—only two peals, faintly borne upon the evening breeze, seeming far, far away, though the distance was so little, yet unmistakable. Lilias trembled with terror, and her face was white.

"'Run, Archie,' she said, 'something terrible must be happening. Let us both run; take my hand and help me."

"We took a short cut across the field and through

the wood. I ran as fast as the roughness of the ground would permit, and dragged her with me, though I hated to hear the quick sobbing of her breath. When we reached the open, we hardly dared to lift our eyes to the house, fully expecting to see it wreathed in flames and smoke. What was the almost agony of our relief, when we did at last venture to look before us, to see the old place standing unharmed in its accustomed peace and solitude—the lights from library and kitchen windows, that had so often welcomed us in summer gloaming and across winter snows, shining tranquilly through the deepening dusk.

"Lilias faltered and leant heavily on my arm. 'I am so faint,' she whispered. 'Wait a minute, Archie.'

"I put my arm about her, and we sat down for a few minutes on the trunk of a felled tree. I made her lean her head against my shoulder, and felt her fluttering breath against my cheek. She said she would be better in a moment, and almost immediately, indeed, she seemed to recover.

"We went into the house by the back way, and I at once dashed into the kitchen, where I found the servants collected at supper.

"'What made you ring the bell?' I said loudly and angrily.

"They all gaped at me. I repeated my question more loudly and angrily still.

"'There was no bell rung here, sir,' was at last the deliberate and wondering answer from the old cook.

"'Nonsense!' I said vehemently, 'you know perfectly well the big bell rang twice not ten minutes ago. Alec,' turning fiercely upon the stable-boy, 'this is some of your d—d pranks!'

"Alec, through a mouthful of porridge and milk, spluttered a vehement denial. I flung out of the kitchen, banging the door behind me, and leaving an impression that I had suddenly 'gone daft.'

"I went to my father in the library, and found Lilias already there, also vehemently asserting the ringing of the bell to her uncle, who tranquilly smoked, leaning back in his chair.

"'What's this, Archie?' he said. 'Here's Lilias saying they've been ringing the big bell.'

"'So they have!' I said.

"'Well, my boy, all I can say is, I didn't hear it. I have been in this room for the last two hours without moving from this chair.'

"Now the library was immediately over the kitchen, the windows of both rooms being literally swept by the branches of the tree whereon hung the big bell.

"'It's the most extraordinary thing!' I said, in

utter bewilderment. 'There's no other bell like that in the whole country. The sound of it is perfectly unmistakable.'

"Lilias and I then both went over the story, describing every incident as it occurred.

"'You were both dreaming,' said my father placidly, and he resumed his reading in the midst of our vehement protests.

"But Lilias and I were hardly content with that explanation. We went out in the dark to look at the bell. Peering up through the thick foliage of the sycamore, we could see the dangling chain—and certainly it hung precisely where it had been hanging for the last dozen years—quite out of reach of the accused Alec or anybody else. The night wind began to sigh through the trees as we stood there, and the bats wheeled uneasily about our heads. I heard Lilias shiver and sigh.

"'We were so happy!' she said.

"'We are still happy, are we not, dear?' I said, bending down to her.

"'Yes,' she said softly. 'But I'm so tired.'

"I made her go away to her room at once. I kissed her, but with little thought that those fond kisses were the last that should be pressed upon her living lips.

"Only about half-an-hour later I went to bed

myself. I could not sleep at first, but tossed about uneasily till nearly dawn, and then fell into a sleep that was worse than wakefulness—full of wild dreams and horrible imaginings. At last I felt myself awaking; there was a strong light upon my eyelids, and I had the strange sensation of one who wakes under the spell of a steady gaze. It was broad day when I opened my eyes, and by my bedside —looking at me—stood my father. His face was haggard and drawn; his parched lips seemed hardly able to form the words he wished to utter.

"'Archie, my boy,' he said, laying his hand upon my shoulder, as I started wildly up. 'Oh, Archie, you have to bear—an awful blow!'

"He could say no more.

"'Get up and dress,' he whispered huskily. 'I'll wait for you outside.'

"I flung on some clothes and joined him. There was a world of questions in my eyes. I did not need to speak.

"'Lilias,' he said, 'Lilias—is dead!'

"He did not know how to soften the blow; he was a man of few words—he nearly killed me with these. I was as one struck deaf and dumb and blind. He gripped my arm, and led me along the passage.

"'Come to her room,' he said.

"Outside her door we heard the weeping and wailing of the women-servants within. We entered the room where death had been before us. There lay Lilias like a lily in her white bed—my sweet Lilias!—with her brown hair scattered on the pillow, and her fringed eyelids peacefully closed.

"'They found her like that,' whispered my father, 'when they came to wake her.'

"I looked wildly about me; I looked at her, and then suddenly—through my bursting head, and till the air rang with the horrid clamour—I seemed to hear the ringing of that accursed bell. Flinging up my arms and wheeling round, I fled out of the room, and out of the house, as if pursued by furies.

* * * * *

"They found out how and why Lilias had thus died. It seemed she had been doomed for months. Heart disease of an insidious and fatal kind was found to have been of long standing; only awaiting some moment of agitation or violent exertion to come to a crisis. There was nothing unexplained or unprecedented in the manner of her death—only the sadness of one young life cut off, and another ruined.

"I say, sir, they found nothing strange in the story of her death, and the accident which quickened it; but I felt it far differently, and feel so still. To

me, though I am not a superstitious man, there is some mysterious connection between this death of one so dear to me, and the strange ringing of that bell we both heard on that last evening; I *know* there is! And, sir, though you may hardly believe it, that ringing haunts me to this day—at the distance of all these years. Sometimes it wakes me at the dead of night, and I start up, with the sweat bursting from every pore, and listen to it ringing through my head, and with it strange, wild, human shrieks of terror and alarm. At any moment of silence or of thought I may hear it. Could I ever have forgotten Lilias, this would have warned and preserved me from such faithlessness."

That was Colonel Douglas's story. It impressed me, he told it so simply, earnestly, and sadly. We parted a few days afterwards, and I never saw him again. Six months later I saw his death in a northern newspaper, at that Highland home he had spoken of so affectionately. I imagined him buried beside Lilias Graham, and dreamt that night that the Warning Bell tolled over them both, and was silent for evermore.

COUSIN GEOFFREY'S CHAMBER.*

By Hon. Mrs. Henry Clifford.

PART I.

"There are Annie and Margaret Ducie,—that makes two,—and the Ladies Lascelles, five: I don't see how we can squeeze in another young lady, by any possibility!"

Mrs. Pagonel was the speaker; and it was the sixth time that Beatrice and I had heard her say this, always winding up with a piteous appeal to us—

"Girls, what am I to do?"

"Really, mother dear, I don't see what you can do," said Beatrice, "except just write and say the truth, and that we are very sorry and so forth."

"What's the trouble, mother?" asked Hugh Pagonel, appearing in the doorway, ready equipped for his day's shooting.

"O my dear, didn't you hear at breakfast? Those

* The main incident of this story is one which really took place.

tiresome Mortons,—at least they are charming people, I'm sure, only it is inconvenient,—they have written to ask if they may bring a young lady, a niece of theirs, to stay here for the New-Year's-eve ball."

"Oh! never mind, mother; pack her in somehow or other, can't you? The more the merrier. Let her take my room, and I could have a shake-down anywhere."

"You are the kindest of boys," his mother said, looking fondly up at his stately height and bright, good-tempered face; "but it would be of no use, my dear, thank you. I could not offer a young lady a room in the bachelor's row, up a separate staircase and all; impossible! and it wouldn't do to make room for her by putting a maid there. No, no, I really must write as Beatrice proposes, only it does so vex your father to seem inhospitable."

"Can't Bee and Katie put up together for those two nights?"

"Katie is to be badly enough quartered as it is," said Mrs. Pagonel, smiling at me; "we mean to put her into that little oak cupboard, which really is too small to turn round in, and Bee will give up her room to the Miss Ducies, and sleep in my dressing closet. It is wonderful how little accommodation there is in this great rambling place."

"Well, I can see only one thing to be done,

mother," said Hugh; "give Miss What's-her-name the choice of staying away, or sleeping in Cousin Geoffrey's chamber."

"Really, mamma, we never thought of that," said Beatrice; "it is never used as a sitting-room, why not put a bed there for once! You don't really believe that it is haunted, do you?"

"Not exactly, but such a dreary room, and on the ground floor away from everybody. I could hardly put a guest there."

"No, mamma, I never thought of your putting a guest there; but why should not Miss Morton sleep in your dressing closet?—she must put up with close quarters—and I will have the little stretcher bed put into Cousin Geoffrey's room."

"My dear child, I would not on any account risk your nerves meeting with any shock."

"My nerves are in no danger, mother, I assure you," said Beatrice, in her quiet rather demure manner. "I don't believe in ghosts."

"That is no reason why you should not be afraid of them," I remarked; "you had much better let me sleep in the haunted room. I do believe in ghosts, you know, and I should not at all mind seeing one; it would be great fun."

"I think we have used you ill enough already, Katie," said Mrs. Pagonel; "we don't treat you

much like a visitor;" and, with her sweet smile, she held out to me a hand, which with its delicacy and look of exquisite keeping, its soft palm and nervous fluttering fingers, always seemed to me so like herself and her whole character. I had by no means lost my childish pleasure in admiring it, and fingering her many bright rings, and I took it into both my own hands as I answered her last speech.

"Indeed, I should hope not! No place ever seems half so like home as dear old Ernscliff."

"We'll settle it as I proposed, please, mamma," Beatrice said, with the sober, well-judged decisiveness which she usually brought to the rescue in her mother's many small worries and uncertainties. "I will take all the trouble if you will let me, and I will go at once and desire Mrs. White to see that the room is well aired before the 31st."

And, after making an orderly arrangement of her work, she left the room.

"I'm off too now, mother," said Hugh, who had waited good-naturedly to see if he could be of any use. "Bee is a capital girl, isn't she? she always hits on the right thing; and if she should see the ghost, I hope she'll ask him where the treasure is; for, by Jove, it's wanted!"

He left the room: and his words, light as they were, called up a deep sigh from his mother, of

which I partly knew the cause, for I was too much like a child of the house not to be aware that there were money embarrassments at Ernscliff Castle, which weighed heavily upon them all. The dear old Squire, the kindest, but not the wisest of men, had been led into foolish speculations, which had resulted in severe losses. To meet these demands he had been obliged to effect a heavy mortgage on his estate; and the loss of income which this involved could not fail of being a serious annoyance and difficulty to a family like the Pagonels—warm-hearted, open-handed people, with a considerable position in the county to keep up, with the endless expenses belonging to a large estate, and with numerous traditions of hospitality and charity, to break through any of which would have broken Squire Pagonel's heart as well. I knew that Mrs. Pagonel had been anxious that the New-Year's gathering of county neighbours, which was one of the institutions of Ernscliff Castle, should not take place this year; but her husband could not bear to give it up, especially as Hugh, whose birthday fell on the last day of the year, was to come of age, and his father had long determined that this event should be celebrated by a ball.

"Let us economize in some other way," he had said, as his custom was, and as his wife knew that

he would say again when she should demur to a month in London, or a trip to Scotland, or any other pet scheme which involved the spending of money. So with a little sigh, she had resigned herself, only trying feebly to introduce little economical amendments into the arrangements, to which of course the old servants opposed all their *vis inertiæ*, and which would never have been carried through, but for Beatrice's marvellous gifts of managing everything and everybody. She had, as usual, been head in all the plans, and I had tried to be hands and feet; for, as I have already said, I was like another daughter of the house, though our relationship—for we did "call cousins"—was of the vaguest and most distant kind. My father, General Seaton, and Mr. Pagonel of Ernscliff had been schoolfellows and brother officers; and their friendship had been cemented by the marriage of both, within a few years of each other, with two girls, distant relations, who had been brought up together.

My father and mother had been for the last ten years in India, and I had been left under the care of an excellent kind-hearted lady who took a small number of pupils, and under whose roof I had led a healthy and satisfactory life enough; but Ernscliff, where I spent all my holidays, was the home of my heart; and it made me sad to think that this was

probably my last visit there for many years, as I was to join my father and mother in India in a few months' time. It was a place to attach any child, and especially an imaginative one like myself, used to the monotonous confinement of a London square. The park was wild in the extreme, a wild stretch of wood and hill and moorland, and the castle was a heavy dark-red mass of building, standing at the very edge of a steep descent, at the foot of which nestled the quaint little old-fashioned village, so directly below, that a stone could easily have been thrown from one of the castle windows down straight into the market-place. Inside it was a queer rambling house, full of narrow passages, and large long vaulted rooms, and unexpected staircases round dangerous corners, leading to haunted-looking attics and ranges of dungeon-like cellars; charming for hide and seek, as we had often found, Hugh and Beatrice and I. The entrance-hall was of dark oak, with a stone floor, and with two heavy arched doors leading from it to the dining-room and library; and a third, rarely opened, which belonged to the room I have mentioned before —the blue chamber of the house—the haunted apartment known as Cousin Geoffrey's room. A gloomy, gruesome place it certainly was, partly because it had never, for generations, been made use of, so that it had gradually become a sort of hospital for disabled

furniture and a receptacle for lumber. It took its share in the quarterly sweepings and scrubbings; but at other times I do not think the housemaids frequented it much; and, though I never heard any well-authenticated story of ghostly sights or sounds being seen or heard there, there was a vague horror of the place, which, as well as its quaint name, had been handed down from generation to generation among the traditions of Ernscliff Castle.

When Hugh had gone out shooting, and Mrs. Pagonel had settled herself to her note-writing, I fell to musing on all I had ever heard of this room, and I was surprised to find how very little it was. The subject had hardly ever been mentioned before us in our nursery days; and I knew that Mrs. Pagonel, who believed every one's nerves to be as delicately irritable as her own, would not encourage its discussion now; but I resolved, on the next opportunity, to ask Beatrice or Hugh to tell me who was this dead and gone Cousin Geoffrey, who was supposed to haunt the chamber to which he had given his name.

The opportunity soon came. Dinner-hours in those days were earlier than they are now, and the blessed institution of five-o'clock tea did not yet exist; but Beatrice was in advance of her age in this respect, and she had infected me with her propensity for tea-drinking at irregular hours. It had become

a practice with her and me to find ourselves, in the dusk of the winter afternoons, on the large rug of furs which was spread before the wide old-fashioned hearth in the entrance-hall: there, crouching in the corners, out of the blaze and into the warmth, we used to sit and chat, and drink tea, which we way-laid on its road from the kitchen to the house-keeper's room; and there Hugh would often join us, glad to sit and rest before dressing-time, though his mud-coated gaiters and damp shooting-jacket were not presentable in the civilized drawing-room regions. Those hours were some of the most delightful in my many happy days at Ernscliff; it was so easy to talk, so charming to listen while the red firelight threw weird glares and ghostly shadows across the dark hall, and while a cheerful accompaniment was kept up by the crackling logs and the click of Beatrice's never idle knitting-needles.

On this evening we assembled rather earlier than usual, with aching arms and sore fingers, after a busy afternoon spent in dressing the castle with holly in honour of the approaching Christmas.

As we drew round the fire, Hugh, who had good-naturedly come in early in order to help us in our task, asked his sister if her arrangement held good for New-Year's-eve.

"Yes," she answered, smiling; "the mother was

rather afraid about the ghosts; but it is the best plan, and I am quite willing to take the risk."

"I wish I knew the real story about that room," said I; "it was always tabooed in the nursery, and I have only heard bits and scraps of it; tell it me, Bee, won't you?"

"I would with pleasure, but I really do not know it," said Beatrice demurely. "I don't take much interest in ghost stories."

"I can't make out that there is any ghost in the case," said Hugh; "but the other day, when I had to look up a lot of musty old family papers, I read the whole history of the man who used to live in that room. He didn't begin life as a ghost, you know."

"Oh! then do tell it nicely and make a story of it," I said, cowering closer into my corner, in expectation of something delightfully horrible.

"Well, it dates back to the days of Queen Bess. The Pagonels of that time—not our branch of the family, you know—had the ill-luck to be Papists, and, after being rather in favour as long as Mary reigned, they found themselves quite in a wrong box after her sister came to the throne. The family consisted of two brothers, Ralph, the possessor of Ernscliff, and Geoffrey, the younger, who, I believe, had hung about the house contentedly enough, doing

everything that nobody else chose to do, as younger brothers did in those days, till there was some trouble between them about a certain beautiful cousin, one Beatrix Pagonel, who had been brought up with them both, and whom they both fell in love with."

"Which did she like best?"

"She liked the elder brother best, like a well brought-up young woman. In this instance I don't much wonder, for, judging by their portraits, Ralph had the best of it. That is his picture over there; it is too dark to see it now, but you remember what a fine handsome face it is."

"I would not praise it, if I were you," said Beatrice, smiling, "for it is the image of yourself."

"I'm glad I'm so good-looking. I only hope I sha'n't live to be hanged like my ancestor."

"Hanged? What had he done?"

"You shall hear. The Pagonels stuck to their faith when times changed, the only alteration being that their old chaplain disappeared for a little while, and then reappeared in the character of secretary and house-steward — a very transparent deceit, I should think, but I dare say nobody wished to get the family into trouble. Now the story goes that somewhere in the intricacies of the castle there was a hiding hole, so remote and so skilfully concealed that it defied discovery; the secret of which used to be

in the possession of the head of the family, and of one confidant only chosen by himself. It is said that even the political or religious fugitives who had sometimes taken shelter there had been led to and from it blindfold, such was the jealousy with which the Pagonels guarded their precious secret. In Ralph Pagonel's day he had chosen for his confidant his brother Geoffrey; and, trusting to this place of refuge, where the old priest and all his pious belongings could be stowed away at a moment's notice, they practised their religion more fearlessly than most folks of their persuasion in the glorious days of good Queen Bess. At last, a few years after Ralph's marriage, the coolness between him and Geoffrey seems to have ended in an open rupture. Ralph Pagonel turned Geoffrey out of doors, with high words, which I have no doubt he deserved, and Geoffrey went off, vowing to be revenged on his brother."

"Oh! I know what he is going to do—he gave information."

"When next the little congregation at Ernscliff assembled for prayers, one who was always on the watch on these occasions came to give notice that the sheriff's officers were in the neighbourhood. When they arrived, everything was prepared to receive them, and Mr. Pagonel and his wife welcomed them

politely, trusting to baffle them, as they had done before; but fancy their dismay and their fury when they saw Geoffrey appear, bringing with him the poor old priest and all the sacred vessels which had been hidden in the hiding hole, of which he only knew the secret!"

"Wretched man! no wonder he can't rest in his grave."

"I don't know that he ever had a grave."

"Is he still living then, like the Wandering Jew? I hope he won't come back some day and claim the estate, Hugh."

"Wait till you hear the end. How far all these ins and outs are true I can't tell, but that it is certain that Ralph and Beatrix Pagonel, and Francis Rivers, priest, are among those who died on the scaffold, and that Geoffrey was permitted to take possession of the estate 'in consideration of good service rendered to the crown.' He seems to have led a most miserable life here, shunned by everybody as a traitor and a fratricide, and to have shut himself up at last quite alone in the castle, in that dreary room, having driven even his servants away."

"I don't feel as if I could pity him."

"He was supposed to have become a great miser, for he squeezed all he could out of his tenants; and it was believed that vast sums were accumulated in

the castle while he lived here; but when our branch of the family took possession they found not a coin in the house and no signs of wealth—not even a trace of the family plate or jewels, which had been extremely valuable."

"When did your people come into the estate?"

"When this wretched man disappeared mysteriously, which he did at last. There is no record among the papers of the exact way in which his absence was first discovered; probably, from his queer hermit way of life, not for a long time; but after some months had elapsed his cousin, our ancestor, came and took possession."

"Where can the hiding hole be?" I asked.

"To tell you the truth, I don't believe it ever existed. There are no end of closets and corners in all parts of the house, as you know, where a person who knew the place well could play at hide and seek very cleverly with a stranger; I fancy that is the origin of the story."

"And has any one ever seen this horrible Cousin Geoffrey?"

"I never heard of his being seen, but I have no doubt the horror which was felt for him caused his room to be shut up; and that of course would lead to all kinds of stories; and then there was a great belief that he had left a treasure buried somewhere,

and might appear in approved ghost fashion to show its whereabouts."

"O Bee, what a chance for you!"

Beatrice laughed, and said she was in no way desirous of an interview with her unpleasant ancestor, though she added, with a sigh:

"Anything short of that I would go through for the chance of finding the treasure."

"Ah! and wouldn't I?" said Hugh. "I can't bear to see the dear old Squire look so careworn; I'd do anything to put things square for him."

"Not *anything*, Hugh?" his sister said, with emphasis, and I saw in the firelight how the colour mounted to his forehead as he answered:

"What do you mean? Why do you say that?"

"Because I know there are some things which you would not do for any one," she answered. "Did you hear mamma say that Miss Barnett is coming to the ball with the Lascelles?"

I didn't know why the name of the great Blankshire heiress struck unpleasantly on my ear, but it certainly did, and Hugh's free gay laugh had never been so welcome.

"Oh! no, hang it," he answered; "we are not quite come to that: I'd sooner have

'My hollow tree,
My crust of bread and liberty.'"

There was a pause, and his tone was quite grave and sad when he said, a moment after :

"But at all events, I'll never do anything to add to his cares—God helping me."

Nobody spoke, and we all sat and looked at the fire, and I felt—I don't know how. Hugh Pagonel had always been very dear to me; all, and more than all, that our close intimacy warranted—brother, companion, champion; but I had never thought of him in any other light; and when, with the shy consciousness of my seventeen years, had come the feeling that our friendship could not be as close and free as that of myself and Beatrice, I had been more irritated and chafed than confused by the conviction. But the idea which Beatrice had suggested was strangely distasteful to me; it made me realize how dreary it would be to see Hugh married to another woman; and I found myself recollecting with a pang that my father had no fortune independent of his profession, and that for Hugh to marry a penniless wife would be to take the surest way of adding to the Squire's embarrassments. As I raised my eyes I met Hugh's fixed upon me with a look as sad and earnest as my own could have been. For the first time, his gaze confused me, and it was a relief when the sound of the great clanging house-bell scattered us in our different directions to dress for dinner.

PART II.

On New-Year's-eve the guests assembled for the coming-of-age ball that night, and to stay over the next day, when a tenants' supper was to take place. There is no need to describe them: they were pleasant, good-natured people, most of them old friends and neighbours of the Pagonels; and as I had met them year after year, during my holiday visits at Ernscliff, they were all kind in their notice of me, and civil in their regrets at hearing that this was my last stay there before leaving England. The only stranger besides the Miss Morton whose coming had caused so much discussion, was Miss Barnett, the heiress, who came with the Lord Lieutenant's party from Lascelles Acres. I could not help looking at her with much interest, and I am afraid I felt an uncharitable vexation at finding her to be a remarkably sweet-looking girl, very young, and simple in appearance and manner, and so unaffectedly delighted with the grand old castle, and the wide expanse of park through which they had driven, that I could almost have accused her spitefully, of wishing to win Hugh's heart by praising the home which he loved so dearly. With my childish notion of what an heiress must be like, I was rather surprised

to see her dressed in a sober dark-coloured linsey and coarse straw bonnet of the plainest kind; but when we all went to dress after dinner, I heard Lady Lascelles telling Mrs. Pagonel that she had persuaded "Isabella to bring her jewels, as she thought they really were worth seeing;" and accordingly she entered the great drawing-room where we were to dance blazing with diamonds, which gleamed from the bosom of her white lace dress, and shone like stars in her thick plaits of light-brown hair. She blushed a little when they were admired by all who felt intimate enough to speak of them to her, and anxiously explained that Lady Lascelles had made her wear them, as if she dreaded being supposed to have herself wished to make the display: and again I felt unreasonably annoyed, angered, at the pretty diffident manner which formed such a piquant contrast to her gorgeous ornaments, and cruelly mortified when a glance at the mirror showed me my tall figure in a dress of the simplest muslin (manufactured by my own fingers under the superintendence of Mrs. Pagonel's maid), and my dark hair with a simple wreath of holly laid across it. The consciousness that my face was wreathed into a peculiarly crabbed and unlovely form warned me to recover my temper, and try to acquire something less unlike the sweet looks of the heiress; and I

turned away from the mirror and endeavoured to throw myself into the interest of the moment. The ball began and went on with great spirit; I had plenty of partners, and should have enjoyed myself thoroughly, if it had not been that Hugh did not dance with me—a state of things unprecedented at any of the Ernscliff festivities since I was seven years old. Last year I should have taken him to task for his neglect as fearlessly as if he had been my brother; now I could only fret inwardly while I tried to assume an extra gaiety of manner whenever he was near me, especially if Miss Barnett was his partner.

The result was that I was thoroughly tired before the end of the evening, and heartily glad when I heard the guests who were not staying at Ernscliff order their carriages; and when the Squire insisted that the ball should wind up with Sir Roger de Coverley, I stole away into a small room adjoining the drawing-room, and always known as the "spirit chamber,"—not, I believe, from any ghostly association, but simply from the preference of the Pagonel ancestry for having something at hand, Gamp-like, to which they "could put their lips when so disposed." It was fitted up as a little boudoir, and there I found Beatrice alone, looking so blue and cold, that I exclaimed at the sight,

"What have you been doing to yourself, Bee? You look like a ghost."

"Don't talk about ghosts!" she said with a little shiver; "I am so ashamed of myself, Katie! I have a regular fit of *nerves* upon me to-night—so unlike me!"

"Are you not well, dear Bee?"

"Quite; but it is so foolish! You know I can't dance long without getting a pain in my side, and it is the same with Margaret Ducie; so we came in here to rest, and then our partners would come with us; and somehow they began asking about the family pictures in the hall, and that led to talking about Cousin Geoffrey's room, and they made me tell the story."

"And you frightened yourself? O Bee, what a triumph! I thought you were much too wise to care for ghosts or goblins."

"That didn't frighten me; but then Margaret told us their horrible Ducie ghost-story, and Captain Lascelles capped it with something worse. You know I always dislike that sort of ghost talk, which seems to me such waste of time and trial of nerves for nothing; but I could not stop it, and none of them knew that I was to sleep in that dreary, lonely room to-night."

"And you sha'n't sleep there," I cried; "you

shall have my room, Bee darling. I sha'n't mind sleeping down-stairs in the least."

"No; I'm not quite so selfish as that," she said. "I shall be all right when I get to bed and to sleep. I can't think why I have such a silly fit: it is very unlike me, I flatter myself—very odd."

"Not odd at all, my dear, when you consider that you were up at five this morning dressing the supper-table, and have been hard at work ever since. You may have prodigious strength of mind, but in body you are not a Hercules; and nerves belong to the body, don't they?"

The dance was over, the guests departing; and we had to emerge from our retreat. At the door Hugh was standing, leaning against the wall, and looking gloomy enough, but gazing fixedly across the room. Following his eyes, I saw, with a thrill of pain, that they were riveted on Miss Barnett, who was looking peculiarly soft and attractive as she stood listening to Captain Lascelles, the light flashing from her splendid jewels.

"Do you admire her, Hugh?" I heard Beatrice whisper.

"I admire her jewels," he answered; "but her hair is hardly dark enough to set them off. Wouldn't they look well in black hair! I certainly do like diamonds."

"Most people do," his sister said, smiling.

"I wish I thought that I should ever be able to dress up my wife in such jewels as those," he answered.

"Well," she glanced with her demure gravity at his face, "you know the way, Hugh; faint heart never won fair lady."

"Ah! but the jewels must be of my giving, or I shouldn't value them a rush," he said; and as he moved off to hand some lady to her carriage, I felt my heart wonderfully lightened, and was ready to respond cordially when Beatrice began to sing Miss Barnett's praises.

It was some time before the various guests were shown to their rooms; but as soon as they had disappeared in their different directions I drew Beatrice into the little closet where I was to sleep. She was looking white and over-tired; and though well aware that it was not easy to persuade her to relinquish a plan, I was determined that she should not pass the night in that dreary room down-stairs.

"Beatrice," I began, trying to be very authoritative, "I am going to help you out of your dress, and wrap you up in my dressing-gown, and then I shall carry my goods down-stairs and bring yours up. I am quite determined to change place with you to-night."

"You shall do nothing of the kind, Katie: I am quite ashamed of myself as it is, but you can't suppose I'm quite so selfish!"

"Selfish? but really and truly I should enjoy the fun. You know I like an adventure, and here is the chance of one for me; and I am not feeling in the least nervous to-night."

"I wouldn't on any account. Couldn't we both squeeze in here for this short part of a night?"

And she glanced at the tiny bed which had been with difficulty wedged in from wall to wall of the little cell. I laughed at the idea, but was charmed to see this sign of wavering; and by a few more vehement words I carried my point, for indeed Beatrice was over-tired and unhinged, and had not the strength to oppose me. In one thing, however, she was unpersuadable; she insisted on helping me to carry down my garments, and on seeing me safely installed in my apartment. This I allowed her to do, knowing that the servants were still about and therefore her night journey through the gloomy house would not be as eerie as it sounded.

The door of Cousin Geoffrey's room gave a dismal creak as it swung back on its rusty hinges, and the candle which each of us carried only made the great cavern of darkness look more impenetrable. Truly it was a dreary room, even apart from the memories

of sin, and remorse, and lonely wretchedness which seemed to hang heavily about it. Like most rooms in Ernscliff Castle it was panelled with oak; the window recesses were of such depth as to form small rooms, testifying to the immense thickness of the walls, and were only half concealed by the scanty curtains, so fusty and ragged that I think they must have come down from the days of Cousin Geoffrey himself. There was a dreary array of dilapidated chairs, broken tables, and odds and ends of furniture banished for their ugliness from the more civilized parts of the house, and a space had been cleared in the middle for the light stretcher—a reminiscence of the Squire's campaigning days—for a hastily arranged dressing-table and a sponging-bath—the latter an essentially every-day, nineteenth-century affair, which was quite a cheering sight amidst so much dilapidation and decay. The housemaid had forgotten, or had been afraid to visit the room since dark, and the logs on the hearth had smouldered themselves away. This was the first thing which struck Beatrice, and with a shiver she exclaimed—

"Oh dear, they have let the fire out! how excessively dreary!"

"Never mind," I cried, "it is all *en règle;* much more ghostified than if it were warm and light, like any commonplace room. Now, Bee, make haste to

bed. Here, bundle all these things over your arm—good night."

"I can't bear to leave you," she said, lingering; but my spirit was now thoroughly up to the adventure, and I would not hear of giving it up. I laughed at all Beatrice's demurs and scruples, told her that she would be a ghost herself if she stayed any longer shivering in the cold; and finally dismissed her, saying, as I gave her a last kiss, and saw her wistful troubled look at me: "My dear, you needn't make yourself unhappy; you know I don't possess nerves—I never was afraid of anything in my life!"

Foolish boastful words, which I had often said before, but which I was never to say again!

PART III.

As the last sound of Beatrice's receding footsteps died away I did feel rather lonely and queer; but rallying my spirits, and telling myself that it was 'capital fun,' as Hugh would have said, I began bustling about and preparing for bed, without leaving myself time to get nervous. I was soon out of my ball-dress and in my warm dressing-gown and fur-lined slippers, which felt very comfortable in that

cold cellar-like atmosphere. The unplaiting of my hair was a longer business, and I could not help falling into a reverie as I sat opposite the glass, and forgot cold and fright and all things in speculating as to whether Hugh would, after all, repair the family fortunes by marrying Miss Barnett. With an ingenuity in self-torture which never, I think, exists in perfection except at seventeen, I built a series of most gloomy castles in the air—saw Hugh married to the heiress, Beatrice settled far from Ernscliff, and the dear old place closed against me for ever; and then I indulged in a hearty fit of the dismals over my own future—in a strange country, and with parents who were little more to me than a vague memory and a name. I sat mournfully gazing into the depths of the looking-glass, when I suddenly found that a pair of gloomy painted eyes, from the wall behind, were looking back at me with the earnest solemn gaze which always lives in the fixed eyes of a picture. I hastily turned and looked at the portrait, which I had not noticed before, but on which the rays of my candle happened now to fall. It represented a young man, not uncouth to look upon, though there was a peering near-sighted contraction about the eyes, and a sort of suppressed sneer on the mouth, which gave an unpleasant expression to the otherwise handsome features. No

doubt this was the wretched Geoffrey Pagonel. Whose portrait but his would have been thus banished from the hall, where all the others hung in honoured remembrance? The haunting eyes of the picture made me shiver. I could hardly help gazing at it, fascinated, and felt as if in another moment the painted lips would begin to move, and the painted finger be raised to point out the buried treasure. Oh, it was very well to laugh and joke about the ghost in the cheerful rooms up-stairs; but it was very different in this gloomy darkened chamber, and with those spectral eyes glaring at me from the walls. A sensation as if cold water were running down the back of my neck suddenly warned me that I was getting overpoweringly nervous. There was nothing for it but to hurry over my preparations and plunge into the safe harbour of my bed, where I could draw the clothes over my eyes and ears, and try to sleep away the haunted hours till daylight. With a sudden resolution I sprang up, and in doing so struck the candlestick with my elbow. It fell with a crash to the ground, the light being, of course, extinguished in the fall, and myself left in total darkness!

That was a horrible moment; and yet there was something ludicrous in the adventure which gave me courage, and I instantly remembered that the fire in the hall had been burning cheerily a few minutes

before, and, moreover, that a box of lucifer-matches and a pair of unlighted candles were always to be found on the mantelpiece there. To finish undressing in the dark *tête-à-tête* with that dreadful picture, was not to be thought of; and, though not very sure of my bearings, I began to grope my way in the direction where I believed the door to be, stretching out my hand before me in hopes of finding the handle. Suddenly my foot caught, probably in a hole in the ragged carpet; I fell forward, and was saved by the wall, or rather the door, for it yielded as I fell against it, and as I stumbled forward I heard it close with a sharp click behind me. I must be in the hall, of course; but why was it in such total darkness? Could that blazing fire have gone out entirely in so very short a time? And even if it had, was there no glimmer from the staircase-window, which I knew had no shutters? and why was there such a strange close smell, as if there was hardly any fresh air in the place? I stood for a moment bewildered; then I determined to grope my way along the wall, where I must come in time to the table, which stood only a few paces to the right of the door leading into Cousin Geoffrey's room. I groped on—on—on—till I was suddenly brought up by another wall, at right angles. Turning the corner, I groped on there, and this time I was stopped by

stumbling against what seemed to be a chest or box, about as high as my waist. I still felt my way on, and there seemed to be other chests, sacks, boxes. Oh! where—where was I? Was there any cupboard in the room into which I had unwittingly strayed? No; I was sure that there was none. Again and again I felt high and low for a door-handle, but the wooden walls were hopelessly smooth; there was no trace of the door by which I had entered, though I felt sure that I must have groped more than once quite round my prison. It appeared to be a small room; long but very narrow: raising my hand above my head, I could feel no roof. Bewildered, scared, I believe—for I really hardly know—that I began to scream, the conviction rushing suddenly over me that my light words had been awfully fulfilled—that I had found the hidden room, the existence of which nobody now believed in; perhaps too, to judge by the presence of these chests and sacks, against the walls, I had found the missing treasure. My voice re-echoed drearily. No help came; no sound, no stir was to be heard. Never—never can I remember without a shudder the feeling of utter desolation which struck cold on my heart at that moment—the sense of being cut off from all human help, alone in the cruel unfriendly darkness, I knew not where. I think I could almost have gone mad; but fortunately,

the very feeling that my senses were leaving me gave me strength to make one last strong effort to regain composure. First I heartily commended myself to the protection of God, and then I was able to recollect that, after all, my situation was more ludicrous than terrible. I must be in some unknown recess in the thickness of the wall—probably the outer wall—and, of course, though it might be a work of time to discover the spring which I must have unwittingly pressed, it would be easy to effect my deliverance by removing a panel. The housemaid would come to call me at eight or nine o'clock, and all I had to do now was to reserve my voice, instead of screaming it away, so that I might make her hear and understand when she should enter the room. With this resolve I sank down on the ground where I was—somewhere in the middle of the little narrow cell—and stretching out my hand, I felt along one of the chests, if chests they were, to ascertain if it was to be trusted as a support for my back. O heaven! what, what met my hand? what was hanging down the side of the chest? My cold fingers closed on other fingers; stiff, unyielding fingers; fleshless, bony. Something—I dared not think what—something which had probably been stretched along on the flat top of the chest, yielding to my frightened clutch, fell down close to me, almost over me, with

a horrible rattle, which echoed drearily. Terror, sickening terror, overwhelmed me, and for the first time in my life I must have become entirely insensible; for I remember recovering by slow degrees the consciousness of where I was. When it all came back to me, my first impulse was to crouch up and draw my dress close round me, lest it should touch that horrible nameless thing. And then a fresh dread came over me. How long had my swoon lasted? Was it not very likely that the housemaid had come and gone while I was insensible and incapable of making her hear? If so, might not days, nay, weeks, elapse before any one entered the fatal room? There was something too fearful in the idea that they might be searching for me everywhere, wondering at my disappearance, while I should be starving, dying, suffering all the agonies of a lingering torture, close to them. I thought of the poor bride in the old ballad of the 'Mistletoe Bough;' and the tears which I could not shed over my own situation began to flow freely at the recollection of a horror which was long over and past, if indeed it ever existed in real life. On, on, on crept the lingering hours, and I could not at last help feeling sure that my worst fears must be realized. Day must surely be come, though there must be no day for me in my narrow tomb. It seemed as if the ball had happened

ages ago, as if I must have been many, many hours shut up here. The intense cold which I felt, the thirst which burned my throat, the sinking weakness in all my limbs, strengthened this conviction. Were these the first beginnings of the slow agony which was to end in death?

The horror of this thought swept away all self-control, and I broke into a frantic cry—

"Will no one help me?—will no one hear me? Oh! I can't—I can't die here!—die like this!" and I shrieked violently.

Oh! joy of joys! I was answered. Yes, there was a voice—a loud strong voice, though it sounded strangely muffled, and yet not very far off.

"What is it? What the deuce has happened? What is the matter?"

"Oh! is it Hugh? I am here, Hugh—I—Katie! Oh! do let me out."

"Katie? Where on earth are you? Your voice seems to come out of the wall."

"Yes, I am—I am in the wall: I do believe it is the hiding hole, and oh! I don't know what there is here—such horrors! Can't you take me out, Hugh—dear, dear Hugh?"

"Of course; but how the deuce did you ever get in?"

"From that dreadful room—Cousin Geoffrey's room. I was sleeping there instead of Bee."

"Oh! then I had better go round to that room." And his voice receded, leaving me greatly bewildered as to his present whereabouts. Just as the dreadful sense of loneliness began to creep over me again, I heard the joyous sound of tramping feet and opening doors, and then his dear cheery voice—always welcome, how welcome now!—sounded from the opposite side and much more clearly. "Speak, Katie; I can't tell the least where you are."

"Oh! here, here! Oh! you won't leave me again, Hugh! I fell; I must have touched a spring. Where am I?"

"How uncommonly queer! My poor Katie! You are in the thickness of the outer wall, I fancy. Well! this is a funny state of things!"

In a minute he said, in a calm serious voice, which went a long way towards quieting my nerves,

"Kate, I must leave you for a few minutes. I might fumble here for ever before I touched the spring, as no doubt you happened to do. The best way will be to take out a panel, and for that I must get Adams and his tools. Luckily he has been sleeping here, because of all the ball carpentry. I sha'n't be away long, but probably he is not up, so it may take some minutes: ten, perhaps."

"Not up? What can the time be?"

"Just half-past six by my watch."

"Not six in the morning? Oh! I thought I had been here for ages. I thought I must have missed the housemaid when she came to call me. Hugh —you're not gone, are you?"

"Not gone, but going."

"But don't, don't!" I cried; "if you are only away five minutes, I know it will seem an hour, and I can't bear it—I can't indeed;" and, ashamed as I was of my childishness, I could not prevent my voice from dying away in a burst of sobs and tears. Hugh's answer came back in fond caressing tones, such as I had never heard from him before.

"My poor little darling Katie," he said, "you have had a cruel shock. We shall never forgive ourselves for what we have exposed you to. But you must be reasonable, dearest Katie, and trust me that I won't be one minute longer than I can help. I'm going now, my Katie—don't be afraid. You will be all right and safe in a very few minutes now."

I heard his footsteps die away; but before I had time to become thoroughly nervous again I heard other feet and other voices gathering in the room, and speaking to me in tones of pity and consternation, but of amusement too, which did me great good; for in my feelings of horror and dismay, I had lost sight of the absurd side to my adventure. Beatrice was there, and I heard the Squire's good-tempered voice,

and his wife's gentle tones; and then came back again the voice that I liked best of all, and soon I was aware that Adams was busy at the panel; and at last—oh, blessed moment!—I saw the light of their candles, and the familiar figures in all sorts of quaint deshabilles. I felt myself drawn out through the narrow aperture and upheld by Hugh's strong supporting arms, and, overwhelmed by the sudden sense of relief and safety, I let my head fall helplessly upon his shoulder, and I remember no more.

In a few moments I was conscious again, and found myself laid on the bed, Mrs. Pagonel and Beatrice attending on me, while the Squire and Hugh seemed to be intent on examining the contents of the mysterious cell which I had so strangely been the means of discovering. I heard exclamations of wonder and satisfaction, and then of dismay,—and then Mrs. Pagonel interposed, and said that I must at once be taken to some warmer and more cheerful room. The Squire accordingly came forward to give me the support of his arm, but not before I had seen a look of sick horror on his broad ruddy face, and heard him mutter to Hugh, "Horrible! Is it not well written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord'?"

All that day I was thoroughly upset; suffering from headache to such a degree that I could do

nothing but lie still and endure. Towards evening, however, I fell into a deep sleep, from which I awoke to find myself out of pain; and drawing aside the bed-curtains—I was in Mrs. Pagonel's room—I was well pleased to see Beatrice sitting by the fire, presiding over a most tempting-looking tea equipage.

"O Katie, I am so sorry," were her first words.

"There is nothing to be sorry for, Bee; it is all over, and I am quite well now," I said, rising, and proceeding to twist up my hair and arrange my dress, and then seating myself in the arm-chair which she was drawing close to the fire for me; "but do tell me, have I really found the hiding hole?"

"That you have," answered Beatrice, handing me a cup of tea, which I enjoyed as never tea was enjoyed before; "the hiding hole, and the treasure as well! Such hoards, Katie! chests and sacks full of coins, and all the jewels and plate of which we have the list among our family papers, but which have always been missing, you know. O Katie, how can we thank you? This will put an end to papa's anxieties, I do believe!"

"Thank Heaven! Oh! that is worth all I went through. But, Bee, how came those treasures there, do you suppose? What can have become of the wretched man? I can't tell you what horrible fancies I had about him."

"Are you sure they were fancies?" said Beatrice, very low: then as I looked questioningly at her, she said, with a shudder—

"Yes, my poor dear Katie; he must have really met with the fate which you were afraid of. How it happened, of course, no one can say, and after all we may be jumping to a wrong conclusion; but a skeleton they have found there: surely it must be his—he must have starved to death in the midst of all the wealth he had hoarded."

"Yes, and sold his soul for! Poor wretched man!" I answered, with a shiver: the whole subject was to me too painful for discussion, and when Bee added that one could hardly pity such a wicked man, I could not echo her words; the horror was only a vague unreal-seeming romance to her, seen through the mists of so many hundred years, but to me it was a frightful reality,—a thing of to-day.

I was not well enough to take part in the tenants' supper; but I came down into the little "spirit chamber," and there the guests visited me, one or two at a time. My last visitor was Hugh, who, as soon as he was released from his arduous task of proposing and responding to toasts, and keeping order among his tenants, came to ask how I was.

"You look dreadfully white, Katie," he said, sitting down near me; "not at all the better for

your night in Cousin Geoffrey's room! How lucky it was that I could not sleep after the ball, and thought at last I'd go out before light, and try to get a shot at a wild duck!"

"Oh! that was how it was?"

"Yes: from my hearing your voice so plainly outside the house, I fancy there must be a shaft somewhere leading to the outer air—but we'll turn the place regularly out to-morrow. Poor Cousin Geoffrey! he's done us a good turn after all, hasn't he? and those bones of his shall have a Christian burial at last."

I could not talk about this part of the subject; Hugh saw it, and went on quickly,

"And do you know that you've discovered a perfect mine of wealth for us? My father says a great portion must go in charity before he can feel sure that it won't bring a curse with it: but even so, there'll be enough bullion to pay off this mortgage which has been worrying his life out."

"I am so glad!"

"Ah! and what am I? I wonder if you have the least idea how wretched I have been this last few days."

I felt that, weak and shaken as I was, I could not answer without beginning to cry, and in a moment Hugh went on:

"To-morrow, Katie, will you let me show you all the quaint old plate and the jewels? Such jewels! Miss Barnett may hide her diminished head for ever. But one of them I must show you now—I can't wait till to-morrow."

He took my hand, and held over the third finger a diamond hoop, heavy and old-fashioned in setting, but the stones of great size and brilliancy.

"Katie dearest, we have been looking out these jewels in the lists which we have: shall I tell you the name by which that is described there? The 'troth-plight,' the betrothal ring: it has been handed down as such evidently from one generation of us Pagonels to another. Katie, don't you and I belong naturally to each other? Won't you promise me not to go to India? May I not put this ring upon your finger?"

And so it was that Hugh was enabled to carry out his wish of decking his wife in jewels surpassing the Barnett diamonds, and this was what came of my terrible New-Year's-eve in Cousin Geoffrey's chamber.

THREE STRANGE STORIES.

Both the original narrators of the following incidents are dead. One story came to me at first hand, the other merely from a near relation of the person chiefly concerned. Nevertheless, I am proud to say that I myself firmly believe in them both, though perhaps it is needless to mention this fact, for as a rule every tale-teller does believe his own ghost story, whatever he may think of the halting productions of other people.

My first story belongs to Scotland—the real land of visions, ghosts, warlocks, and wonders. And here I should like to mention the theory of a friend of mine, that second-sight, with all its uncomfortable attendant circumstances, ghost-seeing, wraith-seeing, prophesying unpleasantnesses, and the like, is simply the result upon a nation of long-continued living on unwholesome food. My friend, who is a man of one or two prejudices, asserts that if he lived on porridge and milk, hot scones and

unlimited butter, with such quantities of cream as most Scotsmen daily consume (their very plates, he says, are made on a different principle from English plates to allow of their "supping" cream *ad lib.*), his state would be such that it would cause him no surprise at all if he met his own ghost in his garden, and almost none if his Satanic majesty himself walked up to him and saluted him as a relation. But my friend is a bilious and hasty person. I merely mention his theory without attempting to refute it, only I should like to point out that the inhabitants of the United States of America live habitually on more unwholesome food than the dwellers in any other quarter of the globe, and though they have produced a fair supply of spiritualists, no one has ever accused them of being ghost-seers of the ordinary kind, nor have they laid any claims to second-sight; long-sightedness and clear-sightedness they are very fond of claiming for themselves, but second-sight they have wisely let alone.

It was in Forfarshire—for what is any story of this kind worth without a local habitation? It was in Forfarshire, in a retired part of the county, that Mr. and Mrs. D—— were living some forty or fifty years ago. They were a childless couple, and at the time of my story approaching middle age; but Mrs.

D——, a tall, slender, delicate woman, still retained the remarkable beauty which in her youth had turned the heads of so many promising young Scottish lairds, and which caused more than one man and woman to maintain that to her dying-day Mrs. D—— was the most beautiful woman in Scotland. She was not only beautiful, however, she was extremely refined and sensitive; she was also, alas, a prey to those nervous sufferings and distresses which seem to dog the steps of our advancing civilization, and to curse most deeply our brightest and our best. Yet, spite of all this, she had a spirit and energy of soul which carried her through much that might have crushed a stronger woman. She had an extreme nervous dread of fire, and the precautions taken by Mr. D—— in their hospitable and beautiful old home to keep her mind at rest on this matter made many a visitor smile.

Mrs. D——'s mother, Mrs. E——, of E—— Castle, was alive at this time, residing at her own house some twenty miles away, an aged lady now very infirm and almost helpless, and nearly always confined to bed, but from whom her daughter had, without doubt, inherited her sensitive and romantic disposition.

Mr. D—— had left home for a couple of days to visit a neighbour and join in driving the woods and

roe shooting, which is one of the great sports of the county; but on the second morning of his stay he received before breakfast a hasty summons from his wife, brought by a mounted messenger, begging him to come to her at once if possible, as she was in great distress. Making his excuses as speedily as he could, he set off for home and arrived soon after ten o'clock, having ridden with loose rein the whole way (he was still the devoted lover of his beautiful wife), to find his carriage standing at the door prepared for a journey, and his wife, paler than usual, with an indescribable look of fatigue and distress on her face, watching for him anxiously.

"I knew you would come," she said, "and I could not start till I had seen you."

"But where are you going, dear Margaret," he said tenderly, "and what has distressed you so?"

"I must see my mother at once," she said. "I have had the most terrible night," and her face grew if possible whiter as she spoke. "Can you come with me?"

"Certainly," he answered, for in her evidently overwrought nervous state he could neither oppose her nor let her go alone; and after snatching a hasty breakfast he was ready to start.

On the way Mrs. D—— grew tranquillized under

her husband's tender care, and was able to tell him the cause of her trouble.

"I seemed to have been a long time asleep," she said, "for I had gone to bed earlier than usual last night, when suddenly I heard my mother's voice quite distinctly, close to my ear as it seemed, 'Margie! Margie! Margie!' it said, 'Oh, Margie, I want you, I want you!' From the sound she seemed to be in distress or frightened, and for a moment or two I had the sense of an awful struggle, an agony of helpless feeling something like what one has sometimes in an ordinary nightmare, only far more terrible—so terrible that I hardly think death itself could be worse. Then in an instant it passed, and I found myself standing in the court yard at E—— quite calm and tranquil. It was a moonlight night, and I can see now how the place looked exactly—so still and beautiful."

"Of course," said her husband smiling; "you *have* seen it by moonlight sometimes with waking eyes;" but Mrs. D—— was too absorbed in her story to heed his interruption.

"It was only for a moment that it was so quiet," she said. "I heard strange sounds of people hurrying and voices calling out, and in another moment I saw that the west wing was on fire."

Mr. D—— could not repress a start at this, but,

strangely enough, his wife spoke the dreaded word without any of the shrinking and horror she had been accustomed involuntarily to display even at the thought of it.

"Then at once I knew why I was there," she said. "I did not feel afraid; I went to the little garden door in the east wing and I found it open; I went in and round to the west wing. The servants were bustling and hurrying about, but no one seemed to see me. I spoke to one or two, but they did not seem to hear me. It was all confusion and no one seemed to be giving any orders or directions. As I got nearer the west wing the smell of smoke grew stifling, and I could hear sounds of crackling wood and men's voices in the upper story or the roof. At the foot of the servants' staircase that comes down by the west wing, I met Johnstone; she was carrying a bundle of her own things. 'Johnstone,' I said angrily, 'where is your mistress?' She did not seem to see me, and it was dark but for the glare of the fire; still I think she heard something, she gave a start and dropped her bundle. I hurried on towards my mother's room. You know how long the corridor is, and the smoke grew thicker and thicker."

Here Mrs. D—— paused for an instant. "It takes so long in telling," she said, "*it* is almost

impossible that I can make you believe how rapidly all this passed. I do not believe that actually two whole minutes had gone by, from the moment that at home I heard my mother's voice calling me till I stood at her bedroom door at E——, and heard her dear feeble voice repeating 'Margie, Margie, I want you.'"

"Till you *fancied* you stood there and heard it," amended her husband, but Mrs. D—— shook her head. "I was there," she said simply. "I cannot, I suppose, make any one else realize it, but what passed last night was no dream to me, it was a reality; as real to me as any waking action—as real as my presence in this carriage at this moment. I entered the room, it was thick with smoke. She was in bed looking terribly alarmed. 'Oh, Margie, are you come?' she cried; 'they have left me here alone, and I was just longing for ye to give ye my blessing before I die.'

"I wasted no time, as it seemed to me the danger was terribly near. I helped her out of bed, wrapped her up as well as I could and very slowly we made our way, not through the long corridor, for when I opened the bedroom door the far end of it was ablaze, but through the dressing-room and into the turret and down the turret stair—that steep stair which mother has not used for ten years. I scarcely

spoke to her, I was too anxious to help her on quickly; and yet I was not afraid either; it seemed so certain that I had been brought there to save her that I had no fears for her or for myself. One thing I did say though, I saw the maid's bed in the dressing-room had been occupied, and I said to her, 'Where is Johnstone? Why did she leave you?'

"'Johnstone was ailing last night,' mother said, 'and I said Jessie might sleep there for once; she got up to see what was wrong, and said she would send Johnstone to me, but no one came.'

"As we reached the foot of the turret stair, Johnstone came hurrying towards us. She did not see me. 'Oh, madam,' she said, 'did you come down here alone?' Before mother could answer her there was an awful crash as if part of the roof had fallen in. I heard no more, I seemed to lose all consciousness, and when I came to myself again I was lying in my own bed at home."

Mrs. D—— stopped there as if her story was ended, and for a few moments Mr. D—— did not speak either; indeed, he afterwards confessed he was too much confounded by the calm realism with which his wife told the story, and her own evident belief in it as a fact, to be able to find words. At last he said, "And what conclusion do you draw,

dear, from this terrible dream? What do you fear has happened to your mother?"

"I do not fear anything but that she may have suffered from the fright and exposure. You see I know what happened."

This seemed too utter a delusion not to be combated. Mr. D—— began gently reminding her of many vivid dreams she had had before, of her fear of fire, which very naturally would cause her dreams to turn on that subject, and also of the fact that only the night before he had left her they had been talking of her mother's loneliness, with none but servants in the house, and of the situation of her bedroom, when the suggestion had even been made that she should be removed to the ground floor, as, in case of any emergency such as fire (that constant bugbear of Mrs. D——'s imagination), it would be so difficult to move her.

To all this Mrs. D—— assented willingly enough, but Mr. D—— could see, in the expression of her eyes, in the eager straining looks that showed that the swift horses could not convey her fast enough for her wishes, that her conviction was quite unshaken. He even tried a little gentle raillery, but equally in vain; so he resigned himself to say no more and to wait for the proof, which he had no doubt whatever awaited them at their journey's end

that they had come—well—not on a wise man's errand.

E—— Castle, like many another ancient Scottish house, stands, I believe, for I have never seen it, well sheltered by hills, round which the road winds so that it is almost impossible to catch a glimpse of the building until you actually reach it. As the carriage swept round the last turn over the old bridge, a loud exclamation burst from Mr. D——: *The whole of the west wing was a mass of smouldering ruins.*

"Say nothing of what I have told you," said Mrs. D—— firmly, and her husband signed assent, too much startled and too anxious to speak.

As they drew up at the main entrance, which seemed quite uninjured, Maxwell the old butler was waiting for them with agitated looks. "Oh, madam," he exclaimed, "it's fain we are to see you, but we did not expect you so soon. Did you meet the messenger?"

"No, Maxwell, we met no one. How is my mother?"

"She is asking for you, madam, but the maids say she is just wonderfu', considerin'. We had the doctor up this morning."

Then as Mr. and Mrs. D—— alighted he added anxiously: "Might I speak with you one minute before you see Mistress E——?"

"Certainly," and he led them to a small sitting-room.

"What I wanted to say, madam," he began with some hesitation, "was this. The doctor seemed to think Mistress E—— was wandering a little bit from the shock like."

"That is very probable at her age and in her state of weakness, Maxwell," said Mr. D——.

"Yes, sir, and he desired us on no account to contradict her. She thinks, madam, that you was with her in the night."

"I will not contradict her you may be sure, Maxwell," was the quiet answer, and the old man seemed relieved.

"I take shame to say it, madam," he continued, "but in the confusion last night I thought Johnstone and Jessie were both with her getting her dressed as was fitting, and instead o' that one o' the useless queans was seekin' another or their own gear, an' Mistress E—— was left alone; an' in her sair fright she got up alone—she as has na stirred a foot without help this two years—an' down the turret stairs. How it was she did it I canna think, but she keeps aye saying that you were with her, madam."

"I will go to her at once, Maxwell," and he led the way to the bedroom in the east wing, where the old lady was in bed. At the sight of her

daughter, who had hastily removed her bonnet and cloak, she stretched both her arms to her crying, "Oh, Margie! Margie! you are here! Was it you that was with me, or one of the blessed angels of God?"

"I was with you, dearest mother," was the answer, given with the calmness of one who states an undoubted fact. And having seen the mother and daughter perfectly happy together, and ascertained that Mrs. E—— was not materially the worse for the fright and exposure, Mr. D—— left them to go and make inquiries as to the origin of the fire and to look into the present state of affairs. He found that only the west wing had suffered from the fire. It was the oldest part of the house, originally complete in itself and separated from the main building by a wall of immense thickness which had, however, been pierced by doorways when the addition was built. Maxwell knew this, and by tearing up some portions of flooring had managed to confine the fire entirely to the west wing. Mr. D—— also found that the statement made to him by his wife that Johnstone had been ailing and that Jessie the housemaid had taken her place in the dressing-room, was absolutely correct. He sent for them both, and soon, by a little skilful cross-examination, ascertained that Jessie had been afraid to lift her mistress out of bed without help; that she

had gone for Johnstone; that Johnstone had told her to go back, and supposed she had gone, but that the girl had supposed Johnstone had gone, and both, as a matter of fact, had been looking after their own belongings; and that the first they had again seen of their mistress was when they met her at the foot of the turret stair, just as, stricken with alarm, they were going to seek her, and just before a portion of the roof fell in. Neither of them spoke of having seen or heard Mrs. D——.

Mr. D—— was so much struck with what I believe it is proper to call "these coincidences," that he made a very careful record of all that had passed between himself and his wife and of the facts. This record, curiously enough, was afterwards destroyed by fire. Mrs. E—— lived out the rest of her days in the conviction that her daughter had been with her in the flesh. All concerned have long been dead; the old lady from whom I heard the story, and who had frequently seen Mr. D——'s account, is dead also. The story, therefore, is unsupported by evidence except for the known fact that a fire did take place at E—— Castle.

My second story is an English one, and perhaps more commonplace, though it, too, turns partly on a dream or vision.

Early in the present century, the youngest of a large family living in London, a sprightly damsel of fifteen, came down to breakfast one Sunday morning, observing:

"I dreamt last night that there was some one in our pew—an officer."

The remark was received with considerable derision, for an Englishman's pew, even more then than now, was his castle; so much so that she entered into no details. In due course the party started for church—St. Stephen's—and as our heroine, the last of a long line, trailed slowly up the steep stairs into the gallery, one of the elder sisters turned back to say to her:

"What was it you dreamt, Sophy? there *is* some one in our pew."

In consequence of this intrusion Miss Sophy and a brother had to share the seat of a neighbour, but as she passed the open door of their own pew she observed that the intruder was, as in her dream, a young man in a naval officer's uniform. The livery of honour was not as unfashionable then as now.

Some days later, when Miss Sophy returned home from school, her mother told her that she and her brother might accompany her to see the picture-gallery of a certain nobleman for which they had an order. Much delighted, the girl wished to change

her dress, but the carriage was already at the door and her mother said there was no time; so she was, with some regret, compelled to go just as she was in her simple school-girl frock and bonnet. However, the rooms were quite empty when they arrived, so it mattered less, and she roamed about at her own sweet will studying the pictures she preferred. Presently she was kneeling down in a corner examining a small picture that was hung very low, and becoming aware of some one near her she cried, without looking round:

"Oh, mother! isn't this lovely?"

There was no answer, and startled by the silence she looked up to find two young men standing close beside her—one of them, whom she instantly recognized as the officer who had been in their pew on Sunday, looking at her with grave intentness. He did not speak, and confused and dismayed at having in a fashion addressed a total stranger she sought her mother's side, and did not leave her again, nor did she again see the young officer.

That evening Miss Sophy received a summons to go to her father in his study, and trembling and afraid, expecting to be reproached for some childish delinquency, for the Colonel was a stern and hasty man, she went down. Little did she think what awaited her, and never had she seen her father so

angry. Indeed, so great was his wrath and so complete her innocence that it was long before he could even make himself intelligible to her, and at last he had to call her mother to assist him.

It then appeared that a young officer, a certain Commander S., had had "the d—d audacity, the unparalleled insolence," as Miss Sophy's father gently put it, foaming at the mouth the while, to follow the carriage home and to call, with the startling request that he might be permitted to pay his addresses to Colonel A.'s youngest daughter. It did not appear that there was anything specially insolent in the young man's demeanour or address; he was of good family but without relations, and his present position was excellent. He pleaded his cause with fervour and passion, though with personal modesty, and assured Colonel A. that his daughter was the only lady he could ever love or would ever marry. He said that an indescribable feeling had overwhelmed him at the first sight of her on Sunday, and a sense that she or no one was his fate. Both the intrusion on Sunday and the meeting at the picture gallery had been accidental. The excuse he made for his unusual and precipitate conduct, which it may be admitted was startling enough, though less surprising, perhaps, in the impulsive youth of the nineteenth century than it would be

now in its cool old age, was, that he had no means of obtaining a regular introduction, and that he might at any moment be ordered to join his ship. But nothing would convince Colonel A. that the young man was not an impudent scoundrel, or that his daughter, "who ought still to be in the nursery, by Jove," had not misconducted herself intolerably before the fellow could have dared to presume so far. Therefore he dismissed the one with fury and contempt, and sent the other weeping to bed, where, however, a little later she was visited and somewhat comforted by her mother.

Naturally the maiden of blushing fifteen did not easily forget the hero of such a romance as this, but for three years she neither saw nor heard more of him. Then one night, as she lay awake in bed, she perceived him standing at the foot of her bed holding the curtains apart and looking straight at her with an intent sorrowful gaze. He stood thus for some moments, and she saw that his face was very pale and that he looked ill, then dropping the curtain he moved towards the door. Sophy, who had plenty of courage, slipped out of bed on the side furthest from him and watched his figure as it passed noiselessly towards the door and then vanished. Awed and troubled, she said to herself, "Now I know he is dead," but it was not till

some months afterwards that she heard he had indeed died of fever on board his ship, nor did she learn the exact date of his death so as to know if it coincided with the night of her vision of him—the second vision, be it remembered, which she had had. The really remarkable point of this story, of which I believe the details are strictly accurate—they were most graphically told to me by Sophy herself—is the fact of that first vision previous to any interview. One really feels as if Colonel A. had interfered even more with the intentions of Providence than parents and guardians usually do in such matters. Nevertheless, Miss Sophy married some one else, was a happy wife and in due course became a happy mother; yes, and a grandmother too, and retained all her days, up to the time when I knew her, a spirit and a certain joyous courage such as one is sometimes tempted to think the pert and flippant or melancholy and over-earnest maidens of our own day know little about.

And now I will just give one other short story. It was told to me many years ago on what seemed fairly good authority, but if it be true, there must be many persons living besides myself who have heard it. Corroborative evidence thankfully received.

A bishop of Sodor and Man—not the late learned

and gentle Dr. Powys, but I believe his immediate predecessor—was sorely troubled one summer night with wakefulness, and a restlessness so extreme that at last he yielded to it so far as to rise, dress, and go down-stairs. As he opened a door which led into the large entrance hall of the palace a door opposite opened also, and the bishop perceived his chaplain, like himself, fully dressed.

On mutual inquiry and comparison of experiences it appeared that both gentlemen had suffered in the same way, and had felt themselves almost constrained to rise and dress. Under these circumstances it was natural that they should remain together, and for awhile they paced up and down the hall, the bishop leaning on his companion's arm and conversing, we may suppose, of fate, free-will, fore-knowledge absolute, and other suchlike light and agreeable topics which, of course, form the daily staple of talk in bishops' palaces. Presently, however, the bishop's restlessness grew greater, and he proposed to try if the cool outside air would not be refreshing and soothing. It was now dawn and they turned their steps to the garden, when to their great surprise, in a distant and retired corner, they perceived a man diligently digging.

At first he did not see them and continued working hastily, but when they drew nearer and he

caught sight of them he suddenly dropped his spade, and without waiting to pick up his coat which lay on the ground, he climbed the garden wall and made off.

Still more surprised and a good deal disturbed the gentlemen hurried to the spot. There was no mistaking the nature of his work—*he had been digging a grave.*

More than this, when they lifted the coat to see if they could identify it, underneath it there lay a long dangerous-looking knife.

Before they had at all recovered from their surprise and dismay a young woman stealthily approached from the other side. At sight of the gentlemen she too attempted to hurry away, but poor thing, her condition was such that she was not capable of hurrying much; the chaplain overtook her and persuaded her to return and speak to the bishop.

Her pitiful story was soon told. The man had persuaded her to meet him here, promising to talk over arrangements for their marriage, but there were various reasons why her existence was particularly inconvenient to him at that moment. He was a desperate fellow, and there was little reason to doubt —that his intention had been to murder her and bury her in the grave which he was so carefully

preparing. The wretch was traced to the coast, where he had prevailed on the captain of a small vessel to give him a passage over to England; beyond that he was never heard of again.

Of course this can in no sense be called a ghost story of the ordinary and vulgar type. I am quite satisfied that it should be a mere coincidence if, at least, it be admitted that it is a remarkable one. There are those who maintain that presentiments, visions, ghosts, and the like are always absolutely useless, and that that fact is an irrefragable argument against their having any existence outside the imagination of certain of the unwiser sort. The attention of such persons is respectfully requested.

THE BRAND OF CAIN;

OR, WHAT COULD IT BE?

CHURCH ROAD is a cheerful, open thoroughfare in a pretty London suburb. The houses on both sides are detached; with gardens before and behind, and have a comfortable, well-to-do appearance. The roadway is broad, and the asphalted side-walks, which are wide in proportion, are planted with maples at regular intervals. Standing at the bottom of the hill, in spring or summer, when the trees are in full leaf and the gardens gay with flowers, and looking up the street to the handsome spire of our parish church, which crowns the low eminence, I think you will allow that Church Road is as pretty and pleasant a street as one could wish to live in.

And yet I am afraid that we shall have to leave it, and all through that horrid house opposite! Not that it is the fault of the house itself exactly—though I never liked it—but you shall hear.

The cottage we occupy is situated at the end of Church Road, and close to its junction with Earl Street; and when we came to the neighbourhood, and for a long time afterwards, the corresponding corner opposite remained unbuilt on. It was an awkward, three-cornered piece of ground, and rather untidy—as unoccupied spaces in the neighbourhood of London are apt to be—but it contained a pretty clump of trees, among whose branches the robin sang in the autumn, and the thrush and blackbird in the spring and early summer; and I for one was very sorry when at length the all-devouring builder appeared upon the scene. The first thing he did was to cut down the trees; then he demolished the low wooden paling and built up a high brick wall, which not only is in itself an uninteresting thing to look at, but which also cut off the view we had hitherto enjoyed of Earl Street—the main thoroughfare.

It was October before they began to build the house itself; but when once the foundations were dug and the walls commenced, the work went on with great rapidity—at the rate of a story per week. Wet or fine the bricklayers continued their task; and as the autumn proved a wet one, I not only pitied the workmen standing out day after day in the pouring rain, but also the unfortunate individuals who might hereafter come to reside within those

damp walls. As soon as the roof was on, however, a noticeable change took place. Dawdling now became the order of the day, and it was not until the end of the following June that the dwelling was ready for occupation.

Now that it was completed, the house—whatever it might be inside—was not an attractive one outside. It had too many staring windows, and looked too large and square for the piece of ground on which it stood.

The front was towards Earl Street, but the back completely commanded and overlooked our modest cottage. The name, Montressor Lodge, was painted on the front gate and on the side door opening into Church Road.

For three months the house remained empty; and then, one fine September day, the notice "To Let" was taken down; vans laden with furniture rolled up to the door, and Montressor Lodge was at last occupied.

The tenant proved to be a lady, Miss Spencer by name, living alone and keeping three servants. Our house being exactly opposite we soon learned to recognize our new neighbour. I had abundant opportunities of observing her; for every fine morning she would slip out through the side door, over the way, and walk up and down Church Road for an

hour or more at a time. She was a tall, lady-like, well-dressed woman, with something peculiarly graceful in her walk and carriage, and I liked to watch her as she paced pensively to and fro beneath the maples. As time went on, I began to pity her; for whether taking her morning stroll or afternoon drive in a hired victoria, she was always alone. Whether she was really as solitary and friendless as she appeared to be, of course, I could not tell. The lonely life she led might be of her own choosing, though it did not seem very likely, for there was nothing austere or forbidding in her appearance. Circumstances may condemn a woman to loneliness, but I never heard of one who *liked* it; and the thought of the solitary stranger at my own doors made me uncomfortable.

"How dull Miss Spencer must be in that big house by herself," I remarked one morning at breakfast.

"Yes; she can't be very lively," assented my husband, looking up from his newspaper. "Why don't you call on her? A nice, attractive-looking woman too. But there!—women are so abominably stiff and formal to their own sex."

"Well, well; I *am* going to call on her," I answered, laughing at his vehemence.

But perhaps I should not have carried out my

intention as soon as I ultimately did, if it had not been for a little incident that occurred that same day.

I was walking up Church Road, taking Carlo our much-indulged collie for a little exercise before lunch, when I observed Miss Spencer a short distance in front. My dog was in the wildest spirits, barking and circling round and round me, and not looking one bit where he was going, till, in the middle of a mad rush, he suddenly bounced up against Miss Spencer and nearly knocked her down. I hurried up and apologized.

"Oh, don't mention it," she answered pleasantly, "I am fond of dogs," and Carlo, sensible of his fault, standing quietly beside me at the moment she put out her hand to caress him. To my surprise the dog drew back with an air of offence.

"What a handsome fellow he is," she added, and again she essayed to touch him. This time Carlo uttered an unmistakable growl and showed his teeth. If it had not been absurd, I should have said that there was fear as well as anger in the dog's mien.

"He does not like me, I am afraid," she said wistfully, her face clouding.

"He is very badly behaved this morning," I rejoined, with a severe glance at the culprit. I was vexed at my favourite's unaccountable hostility; usually he was the most gentle and well-mannered of dogs.

"He ought to be friendly, for we are near neighbours," I added; and I introduced myself, and mentioned that I hoped to call upon her.

She looked pleased. "Come to-morrow," she said cordially; and I promised that I would.

The acquaintance thus begun, proved mutually agreeable. I found Miss Spencer a well-read, cultivated woman, and a charming companion. There was a fascination about her difficult to resist and impossible to describe. When in her society I felt the spell strongly, but when absent I sometimes wondered what were my real feelings towards her. I could never be quite sure that my admiration and regard were not leavened by some adverse sentiment to which I could not give a name. That she was a woman capable of exercising a powerful influence over those with whom she came in contact, there could be no doubt. Had she chosen to enter society, she would—for all her forty years—have proved a rival whom even pretty girls in their youthful arrogance would not have been able to despise, but apparently she did not so choose; she rather drew back even from the friendly advances of those among whom she had come to dwell. As far as I am aware, I was the only person she admitted to anything approaching intimacy; and she did not come to see me nearly as often as I called upon her. She

excused herself sometimes on one plea, sometimes on another; and when she did come never seemed at her ease as in her own house. Perhaps she resented Carlo's behaviour, which was certainly odd. If he happened to be in the room when she entered he invariably retreated under the sofa; and on one occasion gave vent to a loud and dismal howl which quite upset her. She turned pale and almost fainted.

"See what a goose I am!" she exclaimed, recovering her composure by a manifest effort. "Too nervous to be fit for any house but my own. Waive ceremony, my dear Mrs. Hope, and come to see me often, and I will come to you—sometimes. You are much my junior, you know," she added with a winning smile.

I went accordingly. My new acquaintance not only aroused my interest but also piqued my curiosity. There was a mystery about her which I could not fathom. What could be the meaning of the impenetrable reserve in which she enveloped herself? In all our long talks together she never spoke of father or mother, brother or sister, friend or lover. Ever ready to discuss books, pictures, music, politics, or any other subject of general interest, she never let fall the least allusion to her own past life, never began a sentence with the familiar words, "I

remember." Once, in reply to a direct inquiry, she told me that her parents were dead; but the look on her face when I put the question did not encourage me to ask another.

Whatever her troubles may have been, however—and it was clear that she had had troubles—want of money did not appear to be one of them. Her dress and style of living were indicative of ample means; and her servants, also, were of the well-trained, expensive kind. The cook and lady's-maid were English, but Louis, the butler and general factotum, was a foreigner—apparently a Frenchman. One of his duties was to accompany his mistress in her drives, and I never saw Miss Spencer in her carriage without Louis seated on the box beside the driver. Sometimes she would send him across in the morning with a message to ask me to drive with her in the afternoon, and as I had no carriage of my own, and the weather continued mild and open, I was glad to accept her friendly invitation as often as I could. One week, however, it so happened that I was obliged to decline on two consecutive occasions, and fearing lest Miss Spencer might think me ungracious, I went over to explain how it was.

I found her looking unusually animated.

"I have had a visitor," she said, cutting short my apologies. "Guess who."

"Mr. Marshall, I suppose."

"Yes. He told me he made a point of calling on all his parishioners. But I don't think he will call on me again," she added with a short laugh.

"Why not?"

"Because I was frank, and told him I had views of my own, and never went to church."

"And what did he say?" I was amused. I could so well imagine our good vicar's horrified face.

"He did not say much, but I am afraid he thought a good deal. Free-thinking in a man is bad enough, but in a woman it would seem to be an unpardonable sin."

"But *you* are not a free-thinker, are you?" I asked, a little scandalized. I was mystified too, for I was sure I had seen Miss Spencer in church more than once. But if she chose to deny it, of course it was no business of mine.

For a moment there was silence in the room, and Miss Spencer's white fingers played nervously with the china on the mantelpiece. Then she turned away, and with the languid grace peculiar to her, subsided into a chair.

"I don't know what I am," she answered with a sigh, passing her hand across her forehead. "I only know what I am *not*, and that is—orthodox."

After this I was surprised the next time I called to

find her leaning back in her favourite seat with an open Bible on her knee.

"I suppose you have read the story of Cain and Abel?" she asked, when the usual salutations had been exchanged. She made the inquiry as though she were speaking of the last new novel.

"Yes; of course," I replied.

"Have you ever considered what was the nature of the mark set upon the first murderer?"

"Sometimes."

"And what conclusion did you arrive at?" Her tone was careless, but there was an intent look in her fine dark eyes.

"It is impossible to arrive at any conclusion on such a point. We are told so little that we can but speculate."

"Just so; but the speculation is an interesting one. For instance, should you think that the brand —whatever its nature—was always apparent, or that it only became visible under certain circumstances?"

"I don't know," I answered, after a moment's reflection. "The idea is new to me."

"Whichever way it was, it could not have mattered much to him," continued Miss Spencer gloomily. "*He* knew that whatever he did—though he prayed fervently and repented bitterly—he must to the last

hour of his life bear about in his person the mysterious mark of Divine displeasure. Oh, it was an awful fate!" and she wrung her hands together.

"But you seem to forget that he killed his brother," said I, amazed at her vivid interest in such a character as Cain. "He deserved to suffer, for his sin was great. For my part I don't pity him a bit."

"Oh, don't say so!"

The words came quick like a cry of pain, and as her glance met mine it thrilled me through and through, and I shivered from head to foot.

She saw it, and instantly resumed her old calm manner, as though it were a mask that had dropped for a moment.

"And it was jealousy that was at the bottom of that first crime as of so many since," she observed. "It is a power potent for evil."

"It is a hateful thing," I rejoined. "It is quite sickening to read of men murdering their sweethearts and offering jealousy as their paltry excuse.'

"You don't believe then in a person killing another for very love?"

"No; I don't," I answered shortly. "Love never committed murder. Passion may prompt to evil deeds; love prompts to sacrifice and self-denial. Jealousy inflicts suffering; love bears it silently to promote the happiness of the one beloved."

Miss Spencer looked at me long and curiously. "You have never known a great temptation," she said slowly; "you do not realize the wickedness one might be capable of. You are a good woman, Mrs. Hope, and I like to be with you."

She put out her hand as though to take mine, and in so doing knocked down a book on a table at her elbow. I stooped to pick it up.

"Farrer's 'Eternal Hope,'" I exclaimed, glad to change the conversation.

"Yes; it is a favourite of mine. You have read it, of course?"

"I'm ashamed to say I have not. But I like the idea," idly turning over the leaves.

"Ah, I might have known as much," she rejoined in a pleased tone, her face lighting up with a rare, sweet smile; "I might have known you would be on Mercy's side. Is not your name Hope, and did not I love you from the moment you told me so?" Then, as if half ashamed of the little outburst, she pushed the book into my hand. "There, child, run away and read it."

I obeyed, and left Montressor Lodge that afternoon more puzzled and curious than ever.

A few days later, Louis came across with a message from Miss Spencer. Was I inclined for a drive that day, and if so, would it be convenient

to me to go before lunch instead of after? I returned an affirmative reply, and about twelve o'clock the carriage drew up at my gate.

Miss Spencer looked very well that morning, and was dressed with even more care than usual. As I took my seat beside her, it struck me afresh what a charming, distinguished-looking woman she was.

It was very pleasant driving, for it was a still, sunny, autumn day, and my companion seemed in very good spirits, and we chatted away quite gaily. We had been out two hours, and were within half a mile of home driving down the main street, when we approached a milliner's shop with a photographic studio next door. Miss Spencer pulled the check-string, and the carriage stopped at the milliner's.

"No—the photographer's," she said in clear accents.

The coachman obeyed and Louis descended to open the door; but instead of doing so he stood for a moment with his hand on the handle, and I wondered at the trouble in his face.

"Madame," he said, and there was a volume of urgent, respectful entreaty in the single word.

Her eyes flashed. "Open the door," and he would have been a bold man who refused to obey that quiet command.

She stepped out and beckoned me to follow. "I am going to have my photograph taken. Come with me, Mrs. Hope."

I alighted, and as I did so heard Louis sigh heavily. He looked at me imploringly, but did not dare to say another word. What in the world did it all mean?

We entered the house, and were shown into the reception-room, hung round with photographs of different kinds and sizes. Smith was a very good photographer, and my husband and I had both been to him more than once. He operated himself, took the utmost pains with all his sitters, and rarely failed to give satisfaction.

"Have you an appointment?" asked a young woman, coming forward.

"Yes; two o'clock," answered Miss Spencer, giving her name. Whereupon we were promptly conducted to the studio.

It was empty; and Miss Spencer walked across and stood looking out of the opposite window, while I chose out a comfortable chair and sat down. Presently Smith emerged from the usual little dark closet in the corner, and recognized me and inquired how I would be taken.

"It is my friend," I replied, indicating the motionless figure by the window. As I spoke Miss Spencer turned slowly round, and the man started.

He might well start. Was this the woman with whom I had chatted merrily barely ten minutes ago? Her eyes had grown suddenly haggard; her face was drawn and white, unmistakable suffering stamped in every line.

"You are ill!" I exclaimed, springing forward in dismay. "Some water, quick!"

"No," she answered, and she took her seat opposite the instrument, and signed to Smith to proceed. He obeyed and disappeared into his closet. (I remembered afterwards that he made no attempt to arrange her attitude, and did not utter a single syllable.)

"But what is the use of going on with it?" I urged, kneeling beside her, and endeavouring to chafe her ice-cold hands. "You are ill—not fit to have your likeness taken. Why, it will look ghastly."

An irrepressible groan broke from her lips; her right hand gripped the arm of the chair; her teeth were clenched, and great drops stood on her forehead. A horrible *fear* seemed to be taking possession of her, against which she was struggling with all the force of her powerful will.

As I gazed I was seized with panic.

"Oh, come away, come away," I cried, trying to drag her from her seat.

But she resisted. "I must know," she whispered

hoarsely. "Stay with me. It is—all you—can do."

I sank down at her side and hid my face, for I could not bear to look upon hers. I felt that I was assisting at a tragedy, and was the more frightened because I did not in the least know what there was to be afraid of.

Time passed. I heard Smith walk to and fro a number of times, and at last his voice broke the silence.

"Madam, I cannot take your portrait."

I looked up, startled by his cold, stern tone, but Miss Spencer did not notice it. Without a word she rose and walked out of the house; blank despair was on her face.

We drove home in unbroken silence. At my gate she turned and kissed me for the first and only time. "Good-bye—a long good-bye to Hope and you."

I could not ask her what she meant, for tears sprang into my eyes and sobs into my throat. Surely, at her own time she would explain the mystery.

When my husband came home that evening I told him what had happened. He listened, but was inclined to make light of it, setting it all down to "nerves" and "fancy."

"It was nothing of the kind," I retorted, rather

nettled. "If you had seen her face you would not talk about 'fancy.'"

The words were yet on my lips, when the housemaid opened the door and announced that Mr. Smith, the photographer, wished to see me.

"Show him in," said I.

"Well, Mr. Smith," said my husband. "My wife has been telling me of something that took place at your studio to-day, which seems to have upset her."

"I don't wonder," returned the man gravely, "I was upset myself. I don't know anything against the lady who came with Mrs. Hope to-day, but if she is a friend of yours I think you ought to know that there is something very, very odd about her."

"In what way?"

"It is impossible to take her portrait."

"Is that all?" said my husband contemptuously.

"No; it is not all," replied Smith bluntly. "I have seen Miss Spencer before to-day. Five years ago, when I was chief operator to Messrs. B. and B.," naming a well-known firm of West End photographers, "she came to have her likeness taken; I could not succeed, and was obliged to tell her so.

"Why couldn't you succeed?" asked my husband, growing interested.

"Because every negative was covered with spots.

To-day, for all she looked so white and frightened, I knew her again in a moment."

"And the result?" I cried.

"Was the same. I have printed off two proofs to show you. *You* had better look at them first, Mr. Hope," he said significantly, handing them to him.

I saw my husband's face change instantly. I could not bear the suspense, and stepped forward quickly and looked over his shoulder.

Ah me, what a sight! The photograph was thickly covered with spots, and each spot was the minute, but perfect picture of *a face. The face of a dead man!*

I turned sick with horror; the room spun round; I believe I fainted.

* * * * *

The next day my husband took me away; and when I returned at the end of a fortnight Montressor Lodge was empty. I cannot bear to look at it now, so striking is the contrast between the new, complacent, commonplace dwelling and the tragic mystery surrounding its first tenant. I have never seen Miss Spencer again; probably never shall. Whatever she may have done, I know that her punishment is great and her repentance bitter, and with all my heart I pity her.

UNMASKED BY A BULLET.

I HAVE been told by medical men that "between the hours of two and six a.m., when the temperature of the human body is at its lowest, the animal courage of man is at a correspondingly depressed ebb." For years I had accepted this dictum as a scientific axiom before I tested it in actual fact, in the manner I am about to relate.

I had been out of health for some time, London fog, Thames miasma, and urban hurry and bustle having jointly and severally contributed to relax my system and depress my nerves. For some time I persistently refused to believe that the gold dust of the City, and the specie-spiced suspirations of Lombard Street, were other, as regards their renovating virtue, than the gales of Araby the blest. But for me there was yet to be "the hour and the man."

The "hour" struck when it was borne in upon me that a threefold foe—bile, dyspepsia, and nervous

debility—had claimed me for their own, and the imperative fiat went forth, "Rest, change, diet, recreation."

The "man" presented himself in the person of Colonel Kerr-Shedden of Monteith Park, Wessex, who revealed to me, with military brevity, that I was required to favour his quarters, as he termed it, with my presence, and his long-tails with my best attention, throughout the proximate October.

Behold me, then, in due process of time, stretched at mine ease on a well-padded lounge in Colonel Kerr-Shedden's snug smoking-den!

Monteith being pretty well filled from basement to garret, the shooting-party for next day promised to muster strongly, whilst the fair garrison of the Park, "the Household Brigade," as we irreverently termed it, was numerous and irresistible.

The Colonel was the proud father of four daughters, the undisputed belles of the country-side. One of these was, just at the time, absent from home, but the remaining three—Mary, Catherine, and Isabella—gracefully dispensed the hospitalities of their stately home.

The ladies had retired for the night, and it was of one of their number I was thinking as I lay lazily puffing an unexceptionable Manilla, and regarding my *vis-à-vis*, a full-blown captain of yeomanry, and

a D.L. for the county to boot, with covert glances of some interest not untempered with dislike.

Captain Waltonville, a long, drawling, heavily-moustached swell, "with plenty money—no brains," as "the Claimant" pertinently put it, was very generally supposed to be engaged to Mary Kerr-Shedden, the Colonel's eldest and favourite daughter. A beauty she most undoubtedly was; all men, and, what is much more to the point, some few women even, acknowledged that. Her sweet expression, the haughty carriage of her small well-set head, her proud step, and the perfect grace of her every attitude and movement, had a charm that was all her own.

From early childhood she had taken "brevet rank" as "Queen May," * and even still, with a privileged circle, she was *la reine blanche.*

Seldom was pet name more appropriate, for the young lady of Monteith was the sweetest and gentlest, for all her stateliness and hauteur, of county *grandes dames.*

The muster-roll of her liege knights was neither brief nor undistinguished, and certainly I was in no minority in the opinion that such a little "thoroughbred" was clean thrown away on the exquisite captain of horse.

* May is diminutive for Mary, *e.g.* May, with the Church of Rome, is the "Month of Mary."

But it was not so much in connection with the "yeoman" as with certain of her belongings that I was now thinking of Miss Kerr-Shedden.

In the drawing-room that evening the Colonel had been showing us a really magnificent set of jewellery, a birthday present to Miss Mary from her godmother, amongst which I had admired in particular a small brooch, of ancient workmanship and unique pattern, composed of rose-diamonds. As he locked the richly-chased casket, and returned it to his daughter, he observed jestingly, "A pretty haul these would be for a cracksman! We may have visitors to-night! I must lend you a six-shooter, May!"

The Colonel's pleasantry was hailed with a merry laugh; but many a true word is spoken in jest, and little did one of us think how grimly the thoughtless words would be verified ere many hours had elapsed.

How was it that the trifling incident would haunt me? As I lounged, ruminating over the "thought-giving weed," I fell into a brown study. From this I was aroused by the Colonel's voice, raised in emphasized asperity — "Gentlemen in the ranks! No, sir! I would far rather command a squadron of roughs, pure and simple, than have a sprinkling of your 'have-beens' in the regiment! The rawest subaltern in the service could enlighten you on that

point. I knew one such fellow. He joined us when we were lying at Preston; I was junior major at the time. Such a fine-built strapping fellow, too! Over six foot, broad-shouldered, deep-chested, lean-flanked, long-reached—the very model of a gladiator; and something more, for he had not only the strength but also the pluck of a lion; and the two don't always go together, let me observe.

"When he chose, his manners were those of a polished gentleman. On duty he was simply perfection as a trooper; off duty, the most utter blackguard in all her Majesty's heavy horse. Three such men would damn any corps!

"Colonel Goodrich tried every possible means of reclaiming him — indulgence, expostulation, reprimand, punishment-drill, confinement to barracks, military prison—each and all useless. Determined not to meet his views by discharging him—for, as I have said, he was a *beau sabreur*, our 'show trooper,' in fact—Goodrich was most awfully puzzled how to break in so rough a colt. Things at last came to such a pitch that 'the chief,' albeit with great reluctance, and as a *dernier ressort*, determined to flog him.

"Well, 'Gentlemen Jones,' as the men called him (of course Jones was not his real name), soon after he was apprized of this, sent for me.

"For some reason best known to himself, this *mauvais sujet* had conceived, as I believe, a strong liking for me, and I confess that I had a sort of interest in the mad dare-devil. I went and saw him in the cells.

"To cut a long story short, I found the man almost insane at the prospective indignity of 'the cat.'

"Strange as it might seem in military circles, I received his word of honour not to kick over the traces in future; so long, at any rate—for he insisted on this 'statute of limitations'—as I was in the regiment. I did my best for him—earwigged the chief, button-holed the old major, talked over the adjutant—the upshot being that 'Gentleman Jones' escaped the halberds by the skin of his teeth.

"He kept his pledged word to the letter; but I had not sold out a month before I heard that he had broken barracks, deserted, and could not be traced. That is the last I ever heard, or want to hear, of him. So much for gentlemen in the ranks! I fear it is a case of *ex uno*."

Selecting a fresh weed in a slow preoccupied manner, utterly unlike his usual abruptness, the Colonel continued,

"I can't, for the life of me, imagine why to-night,

of all others, almost the last words that man spoke to me should so run in my head."

"What did the scamp say?" drawled "the Yeomanry," mixing another soda-and-sherry.

"Say? very little in words, but very much to the purpose. 'Mind, I am in your debt, Major; I may perhaps square the account where and when you least expect it;' and with that he saluted and strode off to the stables."

Shortly afterwards the smoking session broke up, and there was a general trooping up-stairs.

My bedroom was the last but one in the west wing of the spacious old mansion. I by no means objected to my somewhat isolated situation, as, courting rest and quiet, I was not anxious for near neighbours.

Not feeling immediately inclined for sleep, I drew a deep-cushioned easy-chair in front of the fire, placed slippered feet luxuriously on the fender, and lighting a choice cheroot—for it was Liberty Hall at Monteith—proceeded to a fresh smoke by way of a narcotic.

It was a terribly rough night; the rain came down like a deluge in its infancy, and the wind howled and whistled round the angles of the old house as if all the spirits of the storm were loose.

My thoughts were unquiet and disturbed, in

sympathy with the elements. Involuntarily my mind would recur to and dwell on the two particular subjects which had come on the *tapis* in the drawing-room and smoking-den.

I could not then, nor can I now, tell why the Colonel's jest about his daughter's jewels and his sketch of that refractory trooper, "Gentleman Jones," would so persistently connect themselves together. I only know that they did so; so closely, in fact, that an undefinable uneasiness stole over me, despite my self-ridiculing efforts to shake it off. Many a man has, I take it, been at one time or other conscious of a haunting presentiment, a boding, as it were, of impending ill.

"Pshaw!" I muttered impatiently. "I'm a peg too low to-night; out of sorts. This womanish sort of feeling will grow upon me if I give way to it. I must get Kerr-Shedden to mount me in the morning. A rattling burst over the Downs will dissipate the blue devils. 'Black Care' won't sit 'behind the horseman' very long in a stretching gallop on those sunny slopes above South Leigh; and then—"

"I thought I should surprise you mounting guard over your camp-fire, Harry;" and the Colonel, marching across the room, assumed the Englishman's invariable attitude in front of the fire. "Hardly time for a smoke, thank you. Can't think what's

come to May! She's got 'a bee in her bonnet,' I do believe! Never knew her do such a thing before, never!"

"What has her Majesty been at now, Colonel?"

"Been at? Why, nothing would do but she must have my revolver, the small one, you know. A mere toy, to look at; but it will at a pinch shoot as true as any Colt or Derringer. She has never pulled trigger in her life, that I know of; and she has all a woman's dread of firearms of any kind. Any way, she has now pistol, jewel-case, and her own way too, and I hope she is satisfied. Strange, though"—this was said more seriously—"very strange, that to-night, of all nights in the year, she should have taken this whim into her pretty head."

I fancied that I could trace his line of thoughts; they were evidently in unison with my own.

"You are on outpost duty here," he resumed. "No one sleeps on either side of you. In fact, the end room there has never been used since my poor uncle, old Sir John Grace, of South Leigh, died in it some ten years ago or more. The servants call it 'the haunted room,' I believe, and would not enter it after dark on any inducement. They will have it that the old baronet 'walks,' as they term it—the idiots! You, of course, will laugh at such non-

sensical superstitions. Close on twelve! I must turn in. Good night."

And the old soldier woke the long-drawn echoes of the corridor, as he marched off to his own quarters with his lengthy cavalry stride.

As if two haunting demons were not enough, my host must needs introduce a third yet worse than they!

"Hang the haunted room, and its uncanny occupant! What with dreams of *la reine's* pistol practice, 'Gentleman Jones,' and a defunct baronet addicted to night-walking, my sleep is likely to be sweet!"

With that, carefully locking the door, I unharnessed myself, and ere long was revelling in all the voluptuous *abandon* of that *ne plus ultra* of somniferous luxury, a genuine feather-bed, with a soft undulation of pillows of most seductive down. I lay, semi-smothered after a pleasant sort, lazily blinking over snow-white sheets at the leaping fire, till the constant refrain of Hood's verse,

> "O bed, bed, bed, delicious bed,
> Thou heaven on earth to the weary head!"

finally transported me to "the land of Nod."

On a sudden I was roused from a fantastic dream, or series of dreams, in which the grotesque and the terrible were bewilderingly intermingled. I was

roused, I repeat, with startling suddenness, and found myself sitting up like "an egg on end," abnormally wide awake, all my faculties in a state of nervous tension, and listening intently to certain disquieting sounds in "the haunted room."

I was perfectly convinced that somebody or something was moving about on the other side of the party-wall. I distinctly heard a step cross the floor; though very light, it was too distinct for fancy. More than this, there was a smothered cough, and a fumbling as of one groping his way in the dark. Now, what might this mean? Were the domestics such "idiots" after all? Did the departed baronet, ten years since consigned to the family vault, actually revisit the scenes he had so loved in the flesh? As I sat, holding my breath, straining my ears to catch the faintest sound, my heart the while palpitating so painfully that its pulses were plainly audible, I became morally certain that I was suffering from no mere nervous fancy, but that it was in all sober seriousness a fact that a being, either of this world or the next, was within a few feet of me. Who or what it might be I could not tell; nor, in truth, did I care to think. After a minute—it seemed an hour—of breathless suspense, I heard the door of "the haunted room" gently, almost noiselessly, opened, and—"O my prophetic soul, my

uncle!"—stealing with feline footfall past my apartment and up the corridor. The mystic spell of superstitious fear and horror, that till then had held me dumb and motionless, was broken by the almost inaudible sounds. An intense morbid curiosity overmastered the dread of the supernatural. Springing out of bed, I rushed across the room, lit my candle at the now expiring fire, unfastened and tore open the door, and peered out into the long dark passage. As might be expected, I saw nothing for my pains, the feeble light of the taper only serving to render darkness visible. As I stood shivering there, literally "at attention," I fancied more than once that I heard the handle of a door cautiously turned, and at one moment I could have sworn that a door was opened and shut again. "Still," I argued, "these, after all, may be only a sick man's fancies, the feverish delusions of over-wrought imagination."

Turning back into the room, and leaving the door wide open, I coaxed and replenished the fire, subsided into the easy-chair, so placed that I could command the passage, and "lit up" again, for a return to bed was out of the question. I had sat thus, meditating on my recent uncomfortable experiences, for some ten minutes, more or less, when suddenly, with an awful abruptness, above all the din and uproar of the storm, which was now raging

with terrific violence, there rose upon the night air a long, shrill, piercing shriek, the cry of a woman in her extremity, the like of which is happily but seldom heard, but once heard is never forgotten. I recognized the voice, changed as it was by pain or terror, in an instant. Should I not have known our little "queen's" voice anywhere, amidst ten thousand others? Hurrying on such apparel as was absolutely necessary, and snatching up the light, I dashed along the corridor at the top of my speed.

Miss Kerr-Shedden's room, I must explain, opened off the main gallery, about the centre. The Colonel and the Captain slept at either end, their doors being opposite respectively to the staircases leading down to the great hall below.

With all my haste, before I could reach the gallery the sharp crack of a revolver rang out *once, twice, thrice,* telling of murderous work close at hand.

"It is I that am the 'idiot!'" I reflected in my bitter agony of mind. "It was no restless spirit, but a living dangerous man, who was in the room next mine, and I might have intercepted him; but now it is too late. O May! it is all my fault! Mine, who would have died for you, my queen!"

Dashing open the green baize door that shut off the corridor from the centre of the house, I rushed

franticly into the gallery. Never shall I forget the scene of which I then and there became spectator—a drama in real life, tragedy *in excelsis.*

The gallery was nearly in darkness, except towards the middle, where the light streaming out from "May's" open door illumined the central space.

Midway between his own room and his daughter's, with his back to me, stood Kerr-Shedden, confronting, at but brief interval of space, a stranger of lofty stature, who stood, motionless as a statue, nearly opposite the young lady's doorway. The light, thus falling full upon him, showed me a man of soldierly bearing, cast, indeed, in the mould of Hercules, yet with an unmistakable promise of lithe suppleness in each sinewy limb. He seemed the human exponent, as it were, of the royal tiger of Upper India. The crape mask, which concealed his features, added not a little to the instinctive feeling of fear which his formidable person and truculent appearance would have inspired in other minds than those of cravens merely.

A few paces outside his own door, a passive spectator of the domestic drama enacting before his eyes, was Captain Waltonville. I could not, of course, see his face distinctly, but I felt instinctively that it was "as white" (to use a sporting phrase) "as his liver," and that the weighty Indian club

he grasped was quivering like an aspen in his hand.

The two prominent actors on the stage stood for a few seconds silent and grim, each covering the other with his pistol. It was a duel *à outrance*, if one may so speak of it. Both had evidently but just fired, one of them more than once; but whether either were hit I could not tell.

I had but just taken in the situation at a rapid glance when the Colonel fired point-blank at the head of his antagonist. As it happened, providentially so, the latter had, at the same instant, turned his face slightly towards May's room, a sound from within which seemingly attracting his attention; the ball, therefore, instead of crashing through his brain, ploughed up his left check, and carried away the lobe of the ear, cutting in its course the fastening of the mask, which, in consequence, fell off. The burglar's shot followed close. Borrowing the tactics of the Texan Indian fighters, he must have *fired at the flash*. Anyhow, he shot his revolver clean out of the Colonel's hand, the latter uttering a loud exclamation, neither of pain nor of annoyance, but of extreme astonishment. Then, with a grim abruptness, the giant spoke, taking at the same time a stride or two nearer.

"You have contrived to get a look at my face,

spite of the mask," he said through his set teeth, in a deep stern tone, not unlike the low hoarse growl of some huge mastiff; "but you will never live to swear to it!"

His brow lowered felly, his savage eyes lit up with a murderous gleam as he was in the act of raising his weapon.

Not for a renewed lease of life would I live those few unspeakably terrific seconds over again. I could not bear the thought of seeing my oldest and dearest friend butchered before my eyes, and yet I could not turn those eyes away. A horrible fascination held me spellbound. Avert the imminent doom I could not! It would have been a sheer impossibility for the most agile of athletes to have covered the intervening space before that accursed trigger-finger should be tightened. How, then, could I, an invalid?

This midnight marauder *meant* murder, and, to all appearance, there was nobody and nothing to baulk his dire design.

"L'homme propose, mais Dieu dispose."

A novel situation, and that of a sufficiently startling nature, was here introduced into the tragedy.

Certainly, so far as my own experience and memory go, it was unique. I have neither heard nor read of its precise parallel.

As I stood rooted to the spot, in a state of mental anguish easy to conceive but impossible to describe; as Waltonville, whether through pusillanimity or through a want of presence of mind equal to so desperate an emergency, made no sign of moving—in that critical juncture it was that *la reine blanche* appeared upon the scene, in the totally unexpected character of heroine.

Up till now, as we learned later on, terrified and confounded by the rapid interchange of pistol-shots, she had remained in her own chamber as if paralysed. Little wonder; it was no spectacle for a young and delicate lady to look upon.

In this awful moment, however, forgetting self, after the manner of her sex, in the imminent peril of her loved one, she rallied her faculties by what French writers are fond of calling "a supreme effort."

Suddenly presenting herself, like a veritable *dea ex machinâ*, in the doorway, she levelled the little breechloader, which she had coaxed from her father a few hours earlier, at the would-be assassin, and emptied it chamber by chamber at point-blank range. Then, woman-like, she sank swooning on the floor.

Simultaneously the mighty right arm, arrested in the very act of murder, fell shattered and useless by the ruffian's side.

Rescued from the very jaws of death, Kerr-

Shedden was, to all outward seeming, as cool and collected as ever he had been when bringing down "a rocketer." He came of a proud old race, and it was not the first time that he had looked death straight in the face. Such men are not thrown off their balance by perils which would utterly demoralize a whole brigade of dandies.

"The tables are turned now, thanks to my little girl's pluck! 'Tis the fortune of war," said the old cavalry leader very quietly, with never a shake in his voice; then, a trifle more peremptorily, "you will surrender to me, 'Gentleman Jones,' or I shoot you down in your tracks! You know Major Kerr-Shedden of old, and that *he* never broke his word yet; though *you* seem to have forgotten both faith and gratitude!"

It would perhaps be hard to say which was more penetrated with astonishment at this curt cool speech, delivered in the old military style, the disabled burglar or myself.

So this was the reckless dare-devil trooper, at once the pride and despair of H.M. 105th Dragoon Guards, the ruined gentleman, the now abandoned and lawless desperado.

The sensational "situations" of the night were indeed brought to a fitting finale for me, since the force of wonder could no further go, though they

say that "the unexpected is that which always happens."

The ex-dragoon was even more affected. The expression of incredulity, amazement, bewilderment, and recognition chased one another in rapid succession over his originally noble and still striking features.

For a full minute he remained silent, evidently going through a violent mental struggle. At last, his earlier and better nature asserting itself, he said, with soldierly frankness, and with a loyal earnestness that there was no mistaking, "Major, you believed me on my honour once, and I kept faith with you; believe me now, even against your better judgment. Had I only known *whose* crib I had cracked—pshaw! I mean *whose* house I had entered, I would have quitted it on the instant. I would sooner lose my right hand—it's useless enough *now*," this he said with a bitter smile—"than injure you or yours. An utter stranger here, I thought I was dealing with strangers; and as you fired first, I returned the compliment, and then my mad blood was up. I do most bitterly regret that it was *your* daughter whom I frightened and robbed, and I am not sorry that it was her hand which has 'winged' me. This, see, is all I took from her." Here he handed the brooch of rose-diamonds to the Colonel.

"Now I have done my best to redeem my promise as to squaring accounts with you. As for all else, my ignorance of the country, and the confounded darkness, must bear me harmless. I have got the worst of it, as it is. You will not detain me? No; I thought not. And now adieu, Major: you and I are not likely to meet again; but I never shall forget, as I never have forgotten, you."

Giving his old officer the military salute left-handedly, this burglar extraordinary turned on his heel, and lounged in a nonchalant manner towards the further stair-head.

Here, however, he was not to be allowed to pass out unchallenged. Captain Waltonville seeing him unarmed, and one-armed to boot, conceived the ambitious design of capturing so redoubtable a male-factor, and by so doing of distinguishing himself in the eyes of his lady's household. Throwing himself accordingly in the retreating burglar's way, he made a menacing demonstration with his "knobkerrie," and called upon him to stop. The Colonel's lip curled. "Nay, let him pass, Captain Waltonville" (it had always been 'Richard,' or even 'Dick,' hitherto): "better so for him; and perhaps for you also," he added softly, with a queer smile.

"Thanks, Major!" shouted the quondam rough-rider, reckless to the last; "but that long swell

dared not have struck whilst my eye was on him. You used not to like *curs* about your quarters, Major!"

With a scornful laugh he swung down the stairs, a crashing of wood and a shivering of glass notifying the mode of his exit.

I saw the gallant captain of the County Light Horse wince under the insult, the parting and most effective shot fired that exciting night by "the mask" of Monteith. He retired to the privacy of his own sleeping-quarters, and "turned in," I suppose.

By this time the whole household was roused and afoot: guests, domestics, grooms, and gardeners, in all stages of deshabille, came hurrying in, and there was the usual scene of unanswered question and undebated opinion, and sage, if all too late, counsel. Our young queen was, it is needless to say, tenderly cared for by her sweet sister-nurses, Catherine and Isabella, whose loving ministrations proved so efficacious that Miss Mary, as beautiful as and prouder than ever, presided at the breakfast-table with the grace that was all her own.

She declared that "Gentleman Jones" had offered her no actual violence, and that he merited his sobriquet; for, in taking the rose-diamonds, he had graciously observed, "I will make you a present of the rest!"

"He terrified me nearly to death," she said; "but then what a magnificent animal it was! *That is something like a man!*"

On this estimate I do not presume to offer an opinion; a fair lady's mind is an inscrutable enigma. Subsequent investigation showed that "the magnificent animal" had gained access to "the haunted room" by climbing an old pear-tree, whose branches almost touched the window, and had lain in ambush until such time as he deemed most propitious for his nefarious enterprise.

We never heard more of him. I hope with all my heart he lived to amend; he was "not all bad." I trust he "lived cleanly" thereafter.

Do my gentler readers inquire further of the officer of Yeomanry? Well, he "loved and rode away," although not precisely in the sense of the ballad.

Mary Kerr-Shedden's proud scorn, and her father's undisguised opinion of "the masterly inactivity" he had displayed in that night's business, produced their effect.

It was, I believe, discreetly hinted to him that the high-souled daughter of a distinguished soldier was no mate for one who had so conspicuously shown "the white feather."

The engagement, if engagement there had been, ended in (pistol) smoke.

La reine blanche still proudly wears her own "order of merit"—the brooch of rose-diamonds—no little to the admiration of her numerous liege and loyal knights.

No slight misery, that "is yet not all pain," is it to them individually, and to me, the humblest of her subjects, that our "May Queen" is still "the young lady of Monteith," "in maiden meditation fancy free."

TWELVE O'CLOCK, NOON.

It is almost useless to tell you the story, because I know you will not believe it. I have not alluded to the circumstances for the last twenty years, and I quite intended never to speak of them again; but our conversation has taken such an extraordinary turn that I will tell you the story exactly as the event happened to me; and my only stipulation is that when you have heard it, you will make no comment. I don't ask you to believe it, because I know that ninety-nine people out of a hundred never would; but whatever you may think, I will tell you truly and conscientiously what occurred.

It is more easy to say that a period of twenty years has elapsed in a novel than it is to recall the same period to the memory in real life. However, twenty years ago I was a very young man. Like most young men, I was hard up. I had just passed my final examination, and had been duly dubbed a lawyer and made a gentleman by Act of Parliament.

One day, as I was anxiously reading the pages of the 'Law Times,' looking out for something to do, I came across an advertisement, setting forth in glowing language the fact that, in a country market-town, within about thirty miles from London, there was a small lawyer's practice (capable of great extension by an energetic young man, the advertisement averred) which was to be sold for a mere trifle. In those days I had greater confidence in my own abilities than I have at present, and the perusal of this "legal fiction" (for I can call it nothing else) fired my young imagination. I saw myself installed in a cheerful and business-like office, overlooking a quaint old-fashioned street, and shaded by tall trees growing at the back of the house. I imagined myself as the registrar of the County Court, and the receptacle of the family secrets of all the farmers for miles round. I said to myself that I was not ambitious, that I cared little for the worry and anxiety of the busy town. A quiet useful country life, the esteemed friend of the rector, and the husband of a loving wife—these were my desires, and they all seemed to me to be included within the six-line paragraph in the newspaper.

To hesitate was to lose the chance of a lifetime. "There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune," I remarked. There-

fore I at once wrote to the address indicated in the advertisement. After a considerable amount of correspondence, I became the purchaser of the practice; and after paying for it, found myself with five pounds' hard cash, and thousands of pounds in imagination. I decided that it would be unwise to allow the grass to grow under my feet; and so, without losing any time, I packed up all my earthly treasures (which I found would easily go within the compass of my portmanteau), and started from the London terminus for my destination.

In about half-an-hour I arrived at a pretty-looking country station, where I alighted, and, taking advantage of a ruin of a 'bus which was drawn by a wheezy and low-spirited horse, I soon found myself in the middle of the town of H——. I immediately went to the lodgings I had previously secured; and after being delighted with their cleanliness and neatness, I sallied forth to inspect my office. In a few minutes I arrived at the place, and was ushered into my premises by a very young and light-haired clerk, who kindly gave up his pastime of sliding down the banisters, in order to show me over the offices. Here, too, everything looked clean and business-like, and the number of bundles and papers ostentatiously displayed all over the office filled me with bright pictures of the future. Having completed my survey,

I went to see the town. Here, at least, my visions were fulfilled. The long straggling street planted with trees, and terminating in a large square filled with farmers and agricultural implements, was almost exactly what I had imagined in my day-dreams. Turning down a quiet and narrow side-street, I found myself in front of a splendid church, round which clustered old-fashioned cottages and houses. The town was everywhere interspersed with trees, and the whole place, lighted up as it was by the warm glow of the setting sun, looked simply charming.

The next day was Sunday, so I went to church. The interior was no doubt quite equal to the exterior, which had impressed me so much on the previous evening; but I did not notice it. The singing of the surpliced choir was, I dare say, excellent; but I did not join in it (although my voice was an excellent tenor at that time). The sermon was, I have little doubt, an excessively telling and practical one, but I did not listen to it; for, to tell you the truth, a great change had come over me since I arrived at H——. I had fallen in love. *She* was sitting opposite to me, dressed entirely in black. I cannot describe her to you, and I would not if I could, because whatever impression my words might convey to you, it would fall so short of the picture in my

mind that I should hate myself for having slandered her to you. I don't mean to say, as they do in novels, that she was gloriously beautiful, or anything of that sort; but what I mean is, that her sweet pale face and the graceful outline of her figure so impressed me, and called up all the good feelings in my nature, that, without waiting to inquire what the deep crape she wore meant, or whether her affections were in any way previously occupied, without the slightest hesitation, I gave her all my love. Ah, it's a long time ago! (Have another glass of port, old man; the nights draw in now, and it's getting chilly.)

Sitting at my dinner and thinking over the events of the morning, I came to the conclusion that it was the duty of every man, and especially of a country lawyer, to support the Church, "as by law established;" and accordingly, contrary to my usual custom, I again went to church in the evening. She was there. I forget the text. After service, as I had nothing particular to do, I—well, I don't know that it is worth while to beat about the bush for an expression—I followed her home. She knocked at a large and handsome house; and after she had been admitted by a man-servant, I casually walked past the door in an unconcerned manner, and noticed "Dr. Stanton" engraved on the plate. Then I

turned in for the night; and the following day I settled down to work: but I grieve to say that the matter uppermost in my mind was how to obtain an introduction to Dr. Stanton. At length I accomplished this. I forget exactly how it was done; but it is easy enough, as you know, in a country town. The doctor was a very agreeable man, and had a large practice; and after a week or so of nodding and chatting about the weather, the crops, and the ministry, he asked me to dinner. I do not wish to make a love-story of this, because my object in telling it is to prove to you that "there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy," and not to expose to you my own foolishness.

Well, I went to dine with the doctor, and was duly introduced to his niece, Clara Stanton. She was still in black, and appeared low-spirited; but she received me very kindly, and during the course of the evening we had a pleasant chat together. She was well-read, not at all bashful, and fortunately, as I happened to have just finished reading a book in which she was particularly interested, we began talking at once. Miss Stanton, I could see, was interested in the conversation, and brightened up considerably, so that on my leaving she expressed a wish that I would lend her the book we had been

chatting about, which, as you may imagine, I was only too happy to do, especially as it made such a good excuse for calling again. The doctor was to all appearance very pleased, and hoped he would see me there often. I said I hoped he would.

As time went on, I discovered that Miss Stanton was an orphan, and had very little money of her own. The doctor was her guardian, and appeared excessively fond of her. I was a constant visitor at the house, and my love increased more and more each day. Clara always appeared pleased to see me, and by a thousand little ways showed an especial interest in me. I was young then, and took all these "signs of the times" in a straightforward way, and thought that, even if she did not love me then, she was drifting that way. And so a year passed by. I was happy in my love, and I was young; and the love and the happiness were quite sufficient to counterbalance the anxiety that I suffered in another direction.

That business was a delusion and a snare. I was an energetic young man, but I did not extend the practice. Not that it was my fault; I should have extended the practice if there had been a practice to extend, but unfortunately there wasn't. The light-haired youth, who, I subsequently discovered, possessed the quality of lightness in his head and fingers as well as in his hair, gave me a most

impressive and solemn warning at the end of a week, and left me alone in my glory a month after my arrival. The papers turned out on examination to be as deceptive as the youth. I grieve to expose the hollowness of mankind, but those papers were simply and emphatically dummies. Like conjuring tricks, when you once knew them, "there was nothing in them." And consequently my visions (as most pleasant visions do) faded away, and at the end of twelve months I found myself minus money, plus love.

I determined to put an end to this unsatisfactory state of affairs one way or the other. Therefore one evening when I was alone with Clara I told her how I loved her. I know you can understand that it is painful even yet to recall these circumstances, and so I shall tell you nothing but what is absolutely necessary to my story. Miss Stanton seemed almost bewildered when first it dawned upon her that I wished her to be my wife; then, when she fully understood my meaning, in a kind and yet firm manner she declined my proposals, adding that I had been a good friend to her ever since we were first acquainted, and she regretted that I had misconstrued actions, which she had intended merely as tokens of good-will, into hopes that she could ever regard me with any warmer feelings than those of a

friend. She told me (and I can remember to this day how her beauty and grief affected me) that she had for some years been engaged to be married to a young officer in the navy, but that he had recently been drowned during a heavy storm which his ship had encountered. She explained to me that he was the person for whom she always wore mourning, and in broken accents told me how she could never love another. After this I could of course say nothing further to her; and upon apologizing for my want of thought in not first ascertaining how it was she always appeared in black, I left her with feelings which, thank Heaven, one does not often experience.

Miss Stanton's refusal of my offer, coupled with the extremely discouraging nature of my business, induced me to make up my mind to leave H—— without any delay. The business was not worth anything, and so I had no trouble on my mind as regards disposing of it.

One morning, a few days after the event I have just related, I was settling up a few odd things in the office previous to my departure, when Dr. Stanton was announced. He entered, and seeing the nature of my preparations, he said,

"Why, you don't mean to say you are going to leave us?"

"Yes," I answered, "I am. The law is all very

well, but if you don't have any of the profits to counterbalance its proverbial delay, you fare rather badly. I've given this place a fair trial for twelve months. I don't particularly care about the business. I have gained a good experience by the affair, and at twenty-four one needs not be downhearted. I don't mind about the business."

"Then what do you mind about?" inquired the doctor; "for it is easy to see by your manner that there is something the matter with you."

I could not deny it; and as I felt horribly downhearted and troubled, I made a clean breast and told the doctor all about it.

He started and, I thought, turned a little pale at my story; but quickly recovering himself, he answered in a kindly manner, "I am very sorry; I wish you had consulted me first. But, however, least said on such a subject as this is soonest mended. I shall not persuade you to stay in the town after what has occurred; but for all that, you can undertake for me the business on which I have called. I have often regretted that I have hitherto been unable to help you in your business; but at length I can put something in your way, by which you can easily make a hundred or so."

"It's like my luck," I answered. "If this had only come a month ago! However, I will do all I

can to help you, doctor, and thank you over and over again for all your kindness to me."

We shook hands sympathetically, and then the doctor told me his business. He said that a friend of his had lately died, leaving a large property, which had descended to him, he being the only male representative of the family surviving. But he explained to me that there were several distant relations, who were far from being well off; and as the property had come to him unexpectedly, he had decided to sell it all, and then divide the proceeds between the poorer relations, of course taking a fair share himself.

I complimented him on his generosity, but he cut me short by saying,

"The place is situated near to C——, which, as you know, is more than two hundred miles from here. What I want you to do is to go at once to C—— and make all arrangements about the sale of the property, and particularly to get a valuer to go over it with you. You shall have the deed on your return to get the legal part of the affair ready."

Then giving me the names of some first-class auctioneers in C——, Dr. Stanton departed.

Glad to do anything which might divert my thoughts from the painful subject upon which they were concentrated, I at once started for C——. It was late at night when I arrived there; and as

nothing could be done then I immediately went to bed. Next morning I called upon the auctioneers and explained my business. They could not go with me then to survey the property, but we made an arrangement for the ensuing day; and as I did not know a soul in the place and had nothing to do, I said, if they would direct me to the house, I would go and look over it. They gave me the keys, which were in their possession; and after a pleasant four miles' drive I reached my destination. There I drew up at a substantially-built lodge. The gate was opened by an old man, who informed me, in answer to my inquiry, that there was no one in the house. I drove up a long winding carriage-drive, and at length pulled up in front of a large square, old-fashioned-looking mansion situated in what I may almost call a dell, inasmuch as the garden and park rose up on all sides round the house and were thickly wooded with shrubs. The whole looked deserted and forlorn, and the bright hot midsummer sun, which shone with great power and heat, seemed rather to add to the loneliness than otherwise.

I placed the key in the door and with some difficulty turned it. The door swung back on its hinges with a harsh grating sound, and involuntarily I felt a horrible feeling of loneliness come over me. Almost instinctively I turned round; nothing met my eyes

but the quiet country bathed in the sunshine, and then, laughing at myself for my cowardice, I entered the house and closed the door after me. It was completely furnished; but all the furniture and chandeliers were covered, and the carpets were rolled up in a corner. I wandered on from the hall to the dining-room, then into the drawing-room, my footsteps echoing through the whole building. I was making memoranda in my pocket-book of things I wanted to ask the auctioneer. I can remember the whole scene as though it was only yesterday, and I swear that I had my senses fully about me. I looked at my watch and found it was half-past twelve; then I went up the lonely stairs and stood on the landing. Opposite to me was a long corridor of bedroom doors, at the end of which another passage crossed it at right angles. There was little light in the passage I was looking down; but the other passage was lighted by some windows which were out of sight, so that the end of the passage in which I was standing was brightly illuminated.

No sooner had I ascended the stairs and noticed the particulars I have before mentioned, when suddenly I felt an involuntary repetition of the feeling I had experienced at the door, and by some horrible fascination my attention was fastened on the light at the end of the passage. Now is your time to laugh

if you like, but I don't feel like laughing, although it all happened twenty years ago; but as I was standing in that passage, by Heaven, I saw Clara Stanton come out of one of the bedrooms and walk down the passage! I felt my heart give one great leap into my mouth, and then it seemed to stop beating. My blood rushed all through me with a hot flush, and then I was cold as stone. I grasped the banisters for support and looked again. There was no mistaking it. Clara Stanton was walking slowly down the dark passage. Presently she emerged into the light part at the end, and turned her face towards me. I have told you that she always looked sad; but the utter misery and wretchedness on her face at that moment, I shall never forget. Slowly she passed across the end of the passage, and then the wall hid her and she was gone.

Soon my senses returned to me, and shouting "Clara, Clara!" I ran to the bedroom door from which I had seen her come. I had expected to find it open; but it was locked, although I *know* I had seen her come through it. Again the supernatural dread caught hold of me, and without a moment's thought I ran out of the house. It was hours before I recovered my equanimity, and even then nothing would have again persuaded me to have anything to

do with that lonely house, and so by the next train I returned to H——.

The following day I sent a note over to Dr. Stanton, and asked him to call at my office; but the messenger returned with a reply to the effect that the doctor was unable to come. Miss Stanton had died suddenly on the previous day. My feelings had been so wrought upon, that I can hardly say the news surprised me, although you may imagine my sorrow. I immediately hastened to the doctor, and found the good man in the greatest trouble. I told him what had happened to me, and he turned as white as a sheet.

For some moments he could hardly speak. At length he managed to ask me if I recollected the time when I had seen Miss Stanton. I told him half-past twelve at noon.

"That was exactly the time she died," he answered.

Then he told me her story. The property which had descended to the doctor belonged to the young naval officer she had loved. They had known each other from childhood, and were fondly devoted. When the young man came of age they were formally engaged, and there had been great rejoicings at C—— amongst the tenantry. Clara had taken part in them. It had been arranged that her lover should go for one more voyage before they

were married, and that voyage was his last; for he had been drowned, as I have before told you, and Clara had been heart-broken ever since. The doctor knew she was ill, but he had no idea how dangerously. The day she had died, and on which I saw her spirit, was the anniversary of the day on which she had heard of her lover's death.

There is nothing more to tell. The doctor sold the property, but I had nothing to do with it. What it was I saw, I don't know; why I saw it, I don't know; but never you assert again, old man, that it is impossible for a ghost to appear by daylight. I know it is possible, because I've seen one.

SEEN IN THE MIRROR.

A REAL GHOST STORY.

I.

It was optional with me, of course, to refuse or to accept; but somehow I adopted the latter course. I suppose it was easier to write a letter of acquiescence than of apology; or possibly the latent curiosity which I had kept in check for so long had asserted itself at last, to the defeat of reason and resolution.

Three years before I had spent a week at Forrest Hall; and when I brought my stay to an abrupt conclusion, I had all but registered a mental vow that I would never repeat the experiment of a visit again. Yet Mr. Forrester, my host, had been courteous, even cordial; his wife showed herself as agreeable as a foreigner, who spoke English but imperfectly, could be; and there was no other visible inmate of the house to give umbrage or disturbance. The adjective may seem expressive; but if it is

taken to imply that I suffered annoyance from nocturnal visitants of a spiritual cast, it says too much. It was not thus that my seven days' sojourn at the Hall was rendered irritable and almost unendurable. But I need not pause upon a matter which will naturally unfold itself later.

It was on the eve of Christmas-day that I drove beneath the ivied portal which gave entrance to the romantic old place that I had once looked upon as my own. It had belonged, a few years before, to my uncle, Mr. Geoffrey Forrester. He had never married; I was his favourite nephew; and though the son of his youngest brother, it had been an assumed, almost settled thing, that I, George Forrester, was to be his heir. The disappointment in these expectations came to me before that ominous and momentous day when the will was opened. Some months before my uncle's decease, I divined that his intentions respecting the disposal of his property had varied, and that for no fault of mine, but through sudden favour shown to another, changes were made, which were to work strangely on my after-life. The son of his eldest brother came back from a long residence in Italy, with an only and very lovely young daughter. They were naturally invited to Forrest Hall; and before the visit ended I knew that a former estrangement between the uncle and

nephew was dissipated by the friendly intercourse of the present, and more especially and entirely by the fascination exercised over the old gentleman by the winning brightness and beauty of Lucia Forrester. Her mother was an Italian, and was still in her own country, while the father and daughter paid this visit of policy to the fast-failing owner of Forrest Hall. They remained with him to the last, and it was found then that, with the exception of a small bequest to myself, the whole of my uncle's property was willed to his elder nephew, in reversion to his only child Lucia. I had met the latter, had spent a fortnight in the house with her, and had admitted that her power of attraction was deep and incontestable. I thought of her now as I was borne swiftly along the drive, and came presently in view of the old Elizabethan mansion, which was her home. Though the weather was bleak, with a piercing wind blowing on the open road without the demesne, here there was comparative shelter. My Uncle Geoffrey had carried out one of his fancies to a successful issue, and had surrounded himself with the green and shade of summer when there was winter elsewhere. The whole grounds were planted thickly with evergreens which flourished almost like trees, so carefully had their growth and luxuriance been promoted; and now, at this Christmas season, outer

decorations as well as inner might have been specially got up, judging from the glossy holly-branches, ivy-wreaths, and laurel-boughs which filled the view on all sides.

It was evening; the house was brilliantly lighted up; and as the hall-door was thrown open, the warm glow within was all the pleasanter in contrast to the frosty air and flitting moonshine which held the world in a cold spell without. Something else was more inspiriting than all. It was a sight which met my eyes in the first moment of entering. A young lady was crossing the hall, and turning, just in the doorway leading to a room opposite, she gave me a smile of welcome. She was beautifully dressed in silk of a creamy shade, with some draperies of rich violet velvet, relieving an otherwise colourless picture; for the tint of her skin and hair harmonized with that of her dress, and was scarcely deeper in tone. But there was nothing insipid in a face which beamed with expression, which had bewitchingly lovely features, and a pair of dark-blue eyes, set like stars beneath the delicate pencilling of her brows.

"Lucia!" I exclaimed, and sprang forwards eagerly. "Have we met at last?"

"Have you come at last?" she retorted quickly. "Three invitations and three refusals speak pretty fairly for our friendship, but not for yours."

"An invitation to a place is nothing—the people are everything," I said. "When I was last here you absented yourself strangely. Can you wonder I did not come again?"

This was the mere fact of the case. On the occasion of that former Christmas visit my cousin Lucia had not once shown herself. I was told she was ill, and I had felt bound to believe the statement, till it was strangely negatived by a sight which rendered me at once perplexed and indignant. I had started one day for a ride when something went wrong with the equipment of my steed, and I was obliged to return unexpectedly to the house. I was walking along the avenue of the Hall, leading the horse by the bridle, when, in a pathway amongst the evergreens, I caught a glimpse of a well-remembered figure. The tall slight proportions, the girlish step, and the pale amber of the hair, which was rolled low upon the neck and rested on the glossy darkness of a sealskin jacket, were sufficient in themselves to identify the lady; but any doubt or bewilderment on the subject was at once dissipated by a full view of the face.

Miss Forrester had evidently heard the sound of advancing steps on the drive, for she turned suddenly. A rosy flush mounted to her brow at the moment; but before word or gesture could express

questioning surprise on my part, she was gone. Hurrying onwards I left the horse in the care of a groom, and went at once to the house. My quick inquiry for Miss Forrester was met by the reply that the young lady was still very unwell, was confined to her room, and could see no one. Half an hour later I had left Forrest Hall, anger having predominated over the feeling of mystification which might have led me to prolong my stay in the hope of dissipating it by penetration or investigation. I felt that my cousin, who was the heiress now, was determined to arrest any incipient attentions of the former heir by showing him, in the most pointed manner, her disinclination even to tolerate his presence. It was galling enough to have to return as an impoverished guest to a place where I had once hoped to dispense hospitality, on my part, without incurring the additional humiliation of being subject to an unjust suspicion. I could see nothing else in the strange withdrawal of my cousin Lucia from my society. She plainly thought I might become too audacious as a suitor, and was determined that the inheritance I had lost should not be regained through her. This was the view of her conduct which I took at the time, and which nettled me so much that when an invitation came each succeeding Christmas to spend it at Forrest Hall I refused until the present occasion.

A little silvery laugh and a sweet bewitching glance dissipated everything but a sense of entrancement now. They had been the only reply to my inquiry, but they were sufficient to arrest the questionings of the past in the view of a less-perplexing future.

I was soon in the drawing-room, to which Lucia led the way; and amid the excitement of Christmas festivities I was greeted cordially by Mrs. Forrester and my cousin Geoffrey. My hostess was a tall thin lady, scarcely foreign-looking in appearance, as her complexion retained in a faded form the traces of a fairness almost as dazzling as her daughter's. She was still in the prime of life, but a peculiar air of feebleness was given to her aspect by the way in which she carried her head. It was always slightly on one side, was enveloped with muslin or lace ties high up about the throat, and might have been bandaged on, so nervous was its balance, and so little action was allowed to its movements. She spoke generally in italics, and emphasized her reception of me now in a way which was very gratifying.

"*So* glad to see you, Mr. Forrester! But you should have come before. Your absence was *too* bad. *Did* we offend you?"

I got out of the difficulty with a smile it was easy to summon up with Lucia close by, and ready, as I found, to give me her hand for the next dance.

That evening passed delightfully, though I was rendered a shade uneasy towards its close by the assiduity of a young gentleman, who seemed determined to give Miss Forrester the benefit of his entire stock of information. London and literature, the country and sports, all were brought eloquently forward to gain a hold on his companion's attention. He had been only introduced to the young lady that night, I learned; but I could see at once that he was drawing the first parallel, and that, whether effectively or not, the tactics of a siege were beginning.

The next day we had skating. Lucia was an adept in the art, and went skimming over the glassy surface as graceful as a swan on unruffled waters. I was out of practice, and was ploughing along in a rather laboured fashion when she flew up to me.

"Do be a little more adventurous!" she exclaimed. "The outside edge is the easiest thing in the world. Can you not cut some figures?"

"One, as you see," I rejoined, laughing. "My awkwardness speaks for itself; but this singular state of things supposes anything but an advance in the plural direction."

"You are not so very bad," she said, with a long critical look. "Mr. Lerrington has come to grief twice already. He offered me his hand at starting,

or rather made a clutch at mine, but I managed a release."

Mr. Lerrington was the aspiring engineer who had laid himself out to be agreeable on the preceding evening, and whose sanguine nature still kept him up. He was beside us even as Miss Forrester spoke.

"'Acmes' are not perfection after all," he said gaily. "Something went wrong with mine, but I'm all right now;" and he made a successful spin. That Lucia should follow him was not a matter for surprise, but that I should be left behind was certainly one for vexation. Lucia mystified me, and therefore attracted me. I wanted to understand her, but that could scarcely be done at a distance. In the present instance I could keep my footing, though speed was beyond me; yet this plainly was the one thing desirable. Recklessness may be decried in other paths of life, but on the most slippery one of all it seems a rightful exchange for prudence, an indispensable impetus to advance.

After a while the young lady grew tired either of the exercise or the escort, and was back again with me. I am afraid I had been contemplating rashness with too favourable an eye, for I was led away by it unwarrantably now. I began to question Lucia respecting her strange disappearance from the scene on the occasion of my last visit. Breaking the ice is

hazardous work, and I certainly ought not to have attempted it here. I endangered myself, if not another. Lucia rarely flushed. Shade, rather than colour, passed into her face from the effect of emotion or annoyance. A change of the kind was noticeable as I spoke, and I tried hastily to recover my former footing. But my companion would not let me quite escape the consequences of my temerity.

"You seem to have a good memory," she remarked. "But I am afraid it is only for trifles. These you should forget, and not even remember that you are forgetting."

"We are apt to estimate matters differently," I said. "It might be little to you to keep in a seclusion you had cause to prefer; but your absence was not exactly a trifle to another."

"I know it was not so; but what it *should* have been is my point of view. Try to look at things in a pleasant light. It makes life easier."

"An *effort* in that line need not be recommended now," was my response. "There are moments when we have to set realities before us to subdue a too seductive illusion."

"You had better turn to the mainland then, and away from this slippery surface, if this should be one of those instants;" and with the words she was skimming off from me anew.

I saw her rejoin Lerrington, but could scarcely feel jealousy, it was so evident that his society was as indifferent to her as my own. But the fact that she was unimpressionable was not reassuring, taken in conjunction with her own too strong power of fascination. I would rather she had shown susceptibility to almost any emotion than have perplexed me by her unruffled loveliness.

II.

Was I dreaming or waking? My senses, no doubt, were inwrapt by the stillness of a frost-bound midnight; but surely they were too watchful and observant to be enchained likewise by the more potent spell of sleep! With eyes wide open I started upright on my couch. The room I had been allotted on my arrival at Forrest Hall was one hitherto unoccupied by me. But I could scarcely take exception to its comfort or position in the establishment, considering that it was the one chosen by the late master of the house, and which was known as "Uncle Geoffrey's room." The bed, an old-fashioned one, faced a large mirror reaching from floor to ceiling and set into the wall. On the right-hand side of the "four-poster" there was a door opening

into a dressing-closet. This was always left unclosed at night; in the summer to give fuller ventilation to the sleeping-apartment, which was low and somewhat gloomy, and in the winter-time to admit the subdued light and warmth from a fire that was kindled in a wide grate in the dressing-room. Such had been the habit in my uncle's life, and I had made no change in the arrangements. Looking now into the mirror I saw a form reflected at full length. It was moving slowly across the floor in the inner closet and advancing towards the mantelpiece. There was a bright blaze from a wood-fire, and the glass, being opposite to the door and my bed, gave back the clear particulars of the scene. It was a strange one; and some ghostly stories, which had been recounted for the benefit of the company by my cousin Lucia that night, came vividly to mind. The figure I was gazing at was that of my Uncle Geoffrey. Clothed in a well-remembered dressing-gown of Indian pattern and gorgeous colouring, I saw his spare frame and his bent head just as I had last seen them in life. When he had gained the chimney-corner he stretched out his hand towards a huge snuff-box of tortoiseshell, which lay on the marble ledge above.

At this moment I bounded from my couch. My own wakefulness at least was proved by the action;

but it led to no further discovery. I lost sight for an instant of the mirror scene; and when I sprang through the open door of communication into the dressing-room, there was no reality here to justify the spectral appearance. The cabinet had its fire-light glow and its usual air of comfort, but no occupant. The second door, which gave access to the outer corridor, was closed, and not a sound or footfall disturbed the quietude of the house. I looked around me. There was no hiding-place in the small chamber. Wherever the apparition had come from, it had sought the same shrouded precincts again. I paused in a perplexity which was not exactly fear. I saw little reason for apprehension in a warm well-lit room, which showed no token of habitation, no other possessions than my own. My coat was on a chair as I had last thrown it; my dressing-case open on the table. There was nothing to remind me of a nocturnal intruder, and I could no longer conjure up even the vision of such. I returned to rest, and sleep came later, though it was some time ere I removed a fixed gaze from the long glass opposite the couch.

I was down early the next morning, and the first person I saw in the breakfast-room was my cousin Lucia. She had on a beautifully-made dress of some warm ruby shade, with a bewitching little bow at the throat slumbering in lace.

"Good morning," she said gaily. "You are more active than usual. Were your slumbers lighter or more profound? There was some change, I suppose?"

"For the better, of course, since the effect is good," I returned. "But I fear I indulge too much in waking dreams. They are cruelly illusive."

"Then give them up. That cannot be difficult, if you dislike them."

"Did I say that? Some of them are only too dear, that is my objection."

"Oh, the fault is in yourself, I see; not in the visions. I thought there was a reproach somewhere, but I am glad to find it is to your own person."

"Yes, Lucia; I am guilty of a folly, no doubt. There might be a cure for it, but I don't look for it."

"Why not? Hopefulness is a pleasant element in life. You ought to cultivate it. It might repay exertion."

What did she mean? Had she understood me; and, speaking to a scarcely breathed longing, was I to know that she had fathomed it, and was pitiful?

I might have been too daring, but the fortunate entrance of Mrs. Forrester arrested me. Her head was limply adjusted as usual, but there was no dubiousness in her manner; it was decidedly friendly.

I was apt to put in a more tardy appearance in

the breakfast-room, and her first questions ran therefore in the same vein as her daughter's.

Had I slept well? The night had been *so* cold. She hoped my fire had been properly attended to? &c.

"Yes, there was a famous blaze," I responded. "It showed me a good deal more than the daylight brings out;" and then I mentioned the strange apparition in the dressing-room.

Mrs. Forrester gazed at me with a sort of terror in her blue eyes, and turned white as death. Lucia was perfectly composed, and even rallied me playfully on my weak surrender to the sway of Morpheus.

"I make a better fight," she pursued, "but acknowledge myself beaten in the end. You seem to give way at once, and revenge yourself on your opponent by a mere denial of the victory."

"No, no; sleep is no enemy," I interposed. "I never struggle against it; and for that very reason, I suppose, it has less interest in visiting me. Last night, I know, it was very tardy in its advance. But I suppose you won't admit this?"

"Scarcely, with such clear evidence to the contrary. Dreams do not generally come before slumber."

"Waking dreams may, and mine seem to be all of this order."

The conversation dropped here. I did not press

it, as I saw the same disturbed, even terrified, look in my hostess's face. She evidently believed in the possibility of an apparition, and especially in the credibility of what I had portrayed. The facts did not lessen my perplexity, but they made me resolve on attempting a solution of it by myself.

There was a change in the weather this morning. Low-lying mists wrapped the frozen waters in a warning veil, white and mournful as a shroud. Skating was pronounced unsafe, and Lerrington, with some other gentleman of the party, started on a shooting excursion. I remained at home, having still hopes that the approach of rain was more distant than appeared, and that the fog might pass off, giving us another day's enjoyment of the ice. Lucia was too fond of the exhilarating pastime to miss it, if it could with any sense of security be managed, and I determined that if she were led into rashness it should not be alone. Doubts or expectations, however, were at once ended when at twelve o'clock a light rain began to fall, and the wind veered full to the south. If my fair cousin could have been seen or spoken to, the long hours which succeeded would not have been so overclouded. But she absented herself from drawing-room and library during the entire morning and afternoon. I first saw her at dinner-time, surrounded by the usual circle of guests,

and scarcely inclined to afford me a fair share of her attention or amiability. Lerrington was on the scene, and assiduous as usual. He had come back rather cross, I thought, from his moorland trip, having had plenty of rain and little sport. He attempted to shine now, but his jests seemed damp like himself, and would not go off; and if Lucia listened to him, it was scarcely with entrancement. She was evidently bored, or preoccupied, at all events; and when the party broke up at an early hour, she retired with an abruptness which betrayed a secret relief at her escape from society.

I found my room warm and bright as ever, and sat reading for some time by the fire in the dressing-room. Then I left a lamp burning on a table opposite the door leading into the inner chamber, and betook myself to rest. In assuming this attitude I was far from feeling a disposition to slumber. On the contrary, I was never more wakeful in my life; but I was resolved that the apparent routine of matters should go on as on other nights, and that no marked watchfulness on my part should affright a too nervous visitant.

Time passed, midnight approached, and I remembered with a quickening of the pulse, which rose at least to expectation, that it was just at this hour that the mirror before me had reflected such

a strange scene on the preceding evening. The moment was exciting. I was not superstitious. It was suspicion rather which entered my thoughts, but this kept every sense strained and acute. The night was a gloomy one, and rain had begun to fall with such weight and persistency that the thick evergreens outside no longer formed a resisting canopy, but promoted, as it were, a second shower, which maintained a ceaseless echo of that which came direct from the skies. The sobbing sound without, the stillness of my low darkly-wainscoted chamber, each had a significance of its own which was somewhat sad and portentous. I could scarcely say what I apprehended, but my memory had gone back to circumstances of a far-away past. I had heard when a boy that my cousin Geoffrey had lost himself in our uncle's good graces through his habits of wild and reckless extravagance. Having had a final quarrel with him on this head, the nephew had gone abroad, where he managed for a time to subsist in some speculative fashion of his own. He married early an Italian lady with a fortune rather more considerable than usually falls to the lot of foreigners, and from this point in his career little more was heard of him till he returned to Forrest Hall with his daughter, a lovely girl of sixteen, and paid a visit of policy to its fast-failing owner. A strange notion

crossed my mind as I recalled these details. I felt that it was quite possible, indeed most probable, that my cousin had become involved in fresh embarrassments when he made the successful move which had gained him the Forrest Hall property. Could it be that he had tried to step more quickly into this by any false play with its late master? Had a fictitious death been managed, and was Uncle Geoffrey still alive and a prisoner in some dark and mysterious way in his own house? The vision I had seen gave some colour to the thought, but it was dismissed again as a mere freak of the imagination. Such a scheme, and its accomplishment, I well knew could scarcely be a reality of days like the present.

Meditation evokes dreaminess, and in order to conquer it I took up a book which I had at hand. Just as I did so I became aware of some change in the light in the room. I raised my eyes to the mirror opposite to me, and saw that a shadowy form was crossing by the table, with the lamp on it, towards the chimney-piece in the closet. It was that of my Uncle Geoffrey. Arrayed in the same flowered dressing-gown, with his head bent, and a stick in his hand, he went slowly along, and a faint groan was heard. The sound chilled my blood; it caused a sort of horror mingled with alarm, which was all the more unnerving because it was in a

measure indefinite. What could the scene mean? This life-like, yet ghostly, apparition, whence came it, and for what purpose?

Was it reality or illusion? Action was more to the purpose now than questionings, and the next moment I, too, was in Persian garb, and stealing across the floor of my chamber towards the outer door of this apartment. I had left it ajar, and as I gained the corridor I saw that the dressing-room door, which was close beside, was partially open as well. In a second I closed it noiselessly, turned the key in the lock, and was back again in my former quarters. As I re-entered I paused, and a creeping sensation of unknown dread paralysed further movement. The mirror was full before me, and in it the same reflection, the bowed mournful figure of my Uncle Geoffrey. He was at the mantelpiece now, was stooping over it with his back turned towards me, and one hand stretched out in the act of grasping his ancient snuff-box. The lid had been raised, though it could scarcely have been with the view of putting the box to its ordinary purpose of use, for the thin fingers of the old man were placing something within the receptacle, not abstracting anything therefrom. To turn away from the glass, to gain the inner door of communication with the dressing-room, I must necessarily lose the mirrored picture for a

second, and fail to come directly upon the reality, having first to pass by the foot of the bed. This knowledge held me enchained a moment longer. Then the form, whether spirit or matter, began to glide off, and I felt that the crisis had come. I must follow it at all hazards. With a quick bound I was on the threshold of the cabinet; but an actual cry parted my lips at the instant. The room was empty! All remained as I had left it ere I retired to rest. The lamp was burning brightly; the wood-fire was cheerful and ruddy in its gleam as ever. Nothing ghostly or ghastly threw a lurid colouring on the quiet aspect of the scene. More bewildered, more awe-stricken than if I had beheld the phantom which had been such a vivid revelation, I could only stand and gaze. Then I approached the chimney-corner. The tortoiseshell box was on the high marble-ledge above; but it was shut. It seemed hard to believe that a pallid hand had but recently been laid on it, had opened it, reclosed it. Yet all this I had seen. It was no trick of the imagination. I had been wakeful, expectant. Involuntarily, half mechanically, I lifted the box, and touched the silver spring at the side. The lid flew back at the action and revealed something novel and unexpected. The interstice within was not filled with the usual contents. A small folded paper had taken their

place. To withdraw it, to read it, was the work of a second. I was not dreaming before; but surely, I said to myself, there must be something of illusion now. The writing I had perused was that of my Uncle Geoffrey. It was clear and unmistakable. The well-remembered characters had a forcible peculiarity of their own, which I, for one, was not likely to forget. As I gazed upon them I had present to me, in a new vision, his aged form, his withered hand. But the substance of the paper was dreamlike in the extreme, and made me pass my hand more than once across my eyes to clear off any filmy veil of drowsiness. Here, in a few words, a bequest was made to me. Half the Forrest Hall property was mine without reserve or condition; but an express wish followed on the bequest—that I should become the husband of my cousin Lucia Forrester. The document seemed to be a codicil to my uncle's will, and I noted at once that the date was a later one than that of the testament which had been produced and proved at his death.

When sleep came to me that night I had still the paper in my hand. I knew through disturbed slumbers that I had never let it go, yet if, on awakening, I had failed to grasp it or perceive it, I could have felt little surprise. The mode of its discovery, the nature of its contents, scarcely pointed to the scenes of real

life. They were more in harmony with the visions which are fleeting. But there was substance and no shadow here. The precious paper was close in my clasp, and at its touch a thrill of delightful hope ran through me. I was no longer an impoverished man, a fortune-seeking suitor. However clear I might stand in my own sight of the latter reproach, I had needed hitherto the boldness which could defy the criticisms of others. I had it now, and no farther delay should interpose between suspense and a possible happiness.

When I saw Lucia in the breakfast-room that morning she was more bewitching, more beautiful, than ever. I was naturally followed still by a sense of mystery, and felt for the first time drawn to a belief in spiritual manifestations. In no other way could I account for the extraordinary scene of the night. I said to myself that my uncle must have appeared to me to make known his will as well as his wishes; and if this were so, I was clearly called upon to carry out the latter. For reasons of my own I mentioned this second vision in the presence of my Cousin Geoffrey and his wife, as well as that of the other members of the party. I gave no details, but spoke of the vividness of the apparition. Again Mrs. Forrester showed a tremor of apprehension, and a deadly pallor in her face. Geoffrey started too, and

then I glanced anxiously towards Lucia. She was smiling, and maintained through all my assertions and remarks a gay incredulity. My resolves were taken forthwith. I felt her to be guiltless of any participation in a conspiracy to suppress the proofs of my claim to a portion of the property; and an hour or two later I had asked her to be my wife. She had been pleasant, if a little coquettish, with me all the morning, and on the other hand had treated Lerrington with a provoking nonchalance which quickened his perceptions to recall some important engagement in town. He said good-bye, and was off from the Hall by an early train.

III.

"YOU may make what changes in it you please, but it won't change it for me, Lucia. I will never occupy the apartment."

We were standing in the long corridor at Forrest Hall. *We* implies enough. She was my wife now, and thought she had a right to do anything with me. Her designs in the present instance turned fortunately towards a transformation in the house—not in its master. Yet even here I rebelled. When she proposed that Uncle Geoffrey's room and dressing-

closet should no longer be shut up, but put to some practical use, I uttered the above protest. Though the vision seen in the apartment had pointed only to a path of brightness, still there was mystery associated with it which left a sense of awe on my mind that might be always overshadowing.

The Forrest Hall mansion fell to my share in the new division of the property which had been made on the production of the codicil to the will, and my Cousin Geoffrey had gone abroad then with his wife, leaving bride and bridegroom to settle down in their home-life and happiness.

"There are rooms enough in the house," I added now, "to exercise your taste upon, Lucia. Those in the west wing are newer and brighter. Leave these in the peace which is a rightful enjoyment of the antiquated."

"George, you are superstitious," said the young bride decisively. "It is not right to humour you in a weakness. I could never have fancied you were so silly—a believer in dreams."

"Life is a dream, if you like," I interposed. "But for me there is as much reality in one episode of it which concerns the night, as in any lit up by the clearest sunshine. We may argue on this subject, but that won't alter what is conviction more than impression."

Lucia looked pained. She did not meet me with her usual raillery, nor turn, on the other hand, to reasoning. There was something of a distinct truthfulness in her nature which shrank from letting a misapprehension lie in the mind of another which it was in her power to dispel.

A minute later and I felt her hand stealing within my arm, and she was drawing me towards the closed door of Uncle Geoffrey's chamber. Within its precincts, while her sweet eyes anon asked pardon for a deception and again sank in bashful confusion from my glance, I learnt a full explanation of the strange experiences of the past—of all that I had seen in the mirror. The narration took my fair confessor back to the date of my first visit to Forrest Hall, after her father had become master of it. On the eve of my arrival, in making some arrangements in her room, she chanced to come across an ornamental album, which our uncle had placed in her hands on the very day of his death. He had murmured something about a special gift to her, and that he had remembered her wishes. She thought he was wandering at the time, and, being only occupied with watchful attendance on him, she had put it away and not thought of it since. She opened the book now casually, and in doing so a paper fell from between the leaves—the very one which came finally into my

possession. What followed was told with some rapidity, indeed confusion; but I pressed for no particulars, believing without a word that, however others might have acted, Lucia herself was free from reproach. It appeared that her father had made objections to the document on the score of illegality, and had represented that it was better to put it aside, and not raise up family questionings and contentions. She had held firmly to the view that I should see it in any case, and for this purpose she kept it resolutely in her own hands. Her mother especially urged upon her to give it up; and, owing to the last clause in it, declared there would be something unmaidenly on her part in bringing it forward. Lucia admitted that this plea embarrassed her in a measure. Still she would give no definite assurance as to her suppression of the paper; and she found then that her course of opposition to both parents was resented in an unexpected manner. She was kept a prisoner to her room during my stay; and it was only on one occasion, when I was supposed to be absent for the day, that she was allowed exercise in the grounds. She was on the point of returning to the house when I caught a glimpse of her there, and feeling that she could not well enter into explanations with me in a hurried moment, she had fled in confusion.

"And later?" I said. "How was it you were able to welcome me at my next visit?"

"I promised," she returned, "that I would not give you the paper—and I did not do so."

"Who did, then?"

"No one. You found it yourself."

"Then I am still to believe in ghostly intervention? I may not assume you 'a spirit, yet a woman too'?"

"As you please," she murmured, and then, quick and light as the words fell from her, she glided off from the mirror-room in which we were standing, and disappeared within the dressing-room. I followed her, to find her gone; and while I gazed around me, in something of the old bewilderment, she was back with me again, having entered by the outer door from the corridor.

"What is the secret?" I said. "If you want the rooms to be opened up, you must throw light on them to begin with."

"I am afraid there is not much penetration in your nature," was the reply. "You would make neither an inventor nor explorer. I found out things for myself. You should be as clever."

"I am not as inquisitive, I know."

"*I* know it, at all events," she broke in gaily. "If you had only examined the quaint old snuff-box

in the first instance, instead of admiring yourself in the mirror, there would have been no need of a vision. But you were too stupid."

"Too vain, I thought?"

"Both, if you like."

"I should prefer neither, and as the imputations are so unfounded we needn't quarrel over them. You are quicker than I am, I allow. Will the concession make you complaisant?"

The touch of flattery did its work, and I was enabled to gain a confirmation of my recent surmise that it was she who had personated my Uncle Geoffrey. Only one point after this remained to be cleared up; and although she amused herself for some time in leaving the discovery of the matter to my own ingenuity, she grew reasonable presently. Touching some hidden spring in the oak-panelling beside the chimney-corner, a door flew back and she gained access to an inner chamber, which opened in its turn on the corridor. In this way she had made her escape from the dressing-closet whenever she found that my watchfulness of her movements extended beyond the scene disclosed in the mirror.

"What did Uncle Geoffrey mean by saying that he had remembered your wishes, Lucia?" I asked finally.

"Inquisitorial still?" she exclaimed. "An inquiring mind that sees for itself, but does not question, is better. However, if you are dull, I suppose I must only be indulgent. I did not like injustice, sir, that was all."

And with this admission I had to be satisfied. There was no need, indeed, to press for more. My uncle's will had been found, his wishes had been followed. What further could I ask?



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