

# DREAMLAND AND GHOSTLAND.

VOL. II.

"Like the dream
That o'ertook me at my waking hour,
This morn; and dreams they say are then divine."

DRYDEN: *Don Sebastian*, Act I. sc. i.

"As morning rises, dreams are true."

DANTE: *Inferno*, Canto xxvi. line 7.
BEN JONSON: *Love Restored*, a Song.
BRUCE: *Elegy, written in Spring.*

"A vision after midnight, when dreams are true."

HORACE: Book I. Sat. 10.



# 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.* II.

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BREAD STREET HILL, LONDON,
*Bungay, Suffolk.*



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# DREAMLAND AND GHOSTLAND.

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## THE THREE OVERHEARD WHISPERS.

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE FIRST WHISPER.

NIGHT after night the music clashed in our rear. It was very pleasant and interesting, as we lounged about in our little garden, or took coffee in the small building that served us for a summer-house. We were living in Paris, and, for the sake of economy, quite close to the barriers, for the rents get wonderfully cheaper as you clear away from the Champs Elysées and the Faubourg. Now close to our residence there was some place of public entertainment, the Salle d'Artois, I think they called it. We did not much like the proximity, but there was never any noise or disturbance, and the crash of the music through the summer air was at times pleasant enough.

It is astonishing what children in respect to amusement our heroic neighbours are. In the pettiest locality they get up some parody of a theatre or some imitative Mabille. I am bound to say, however, that our Salle d'Artois was a considerable ornament to our avenue, which converged, like many other identical avenues close by, to the main boulevard and the perpetual *rond point.* There was a revolving gate to the salle, or jardin, before which the inevitable gendarme lounged, and on each side there was a bowery expanse of foliage, and in the foliage were niched statues, claspedly holding lamps that shed a mild, seductive lustre. The general notion conveyed by the whole was that this illuminated pathway led you on to some ideal hall of dazzling delight; but we knew by the view from our back windows that the place was a mere barn, and that it belonged to that numerous class of entertainments of which the best part is to be seen on the outside and for nothing. A very moderate price—half a franc, I think—would give admission, and of this half-franc half was to be returned to the ticket-holder in the way of *consummation.* It was, in fact, a mushroom sort of concert or casino place, of which so many spring up in the outskirts of Paris, and which provided a kind of rough entertainment for local patrons who wanted to do things cheap, and to be saved a journey into Paris.

The salle might be necessary for those people in *Les Ternes* who insisted upon some kind of amusement every night, and who, rather than not have it, would shoot for nuts or ride on horses in a whirligig. We Britishers do not require much amusement, and when we take it we like it of the very best. I don't know how often I had passed the alluring portal of the salle with its coloured lights. I don't know how often I hadn't had the benefit of its rapid dance music. But I can truly say that the remotest intention of visiting this choice place of amusement never crossed my mind. Neither can I explain to myself up to this day how I ever came to do so.

I remember that it had been very hot all that day; that I had stopped at home trying all sorts of combinations with the ice and eau de Seltz, which had the invariable effect of making things in general much hotter; that in the evening I had gone to two or three places where that day was the reception-day; that I had come back and, as my custom was, had smoked and taken coffee, looked through the 'Moniteur du Soir' and 'Le Petit Journal,' favourite publications in our economical quarter of the city. After that, in the cool of the evening, I took my little constitutional turn round the garden, smelling the wallflowers that were our chief horticultural ornament. Then I paused. It was *onze heures.* Being

a man of regular habits, as an ordinary matter I should have gone in-doors, have tampered with my constitution with some more iced effervescing drink, and composed myself towards slumber with a book. But the music was crashing so emphatically that, to the dismay of the concierge, who, relying on my regular habits, had gone to bed, I sallied forth into the boulevard. "I declare," I said to myself, "I will look up our little salle to-night. There's nobody who will know me. And I've heard the music so often that they ought to see the colour of my money."

Near the entrance there was a narrow lane—about a stone's throw off. I think I see it now, narrow, and so dark from the huge buildings that lined it. And in the lane that night—I remember it so well—was a private cabriolet, with a dark-coloured panel, and two servants in livery, waiting in a leisurely way, as servants wait who have waited long and have long to wait. Then I paid my coin and the enchanted portal received me. I advanced up the fairy path, which came to an abrupt termination at the first curve. I emerged on a mere shed, uncovered and opening on a bit of ground, the general effect being entirely sordid, the sordid effect harmonizing with all the accompaniments. There was some dancing going on, of an irregular and free-and-easy kind,

a few only indulging in terpsichorean vagaries, while many more, seated at little or long tables, looked critically on. Not a few men were in blouses, and some women in caps, a genuine *ouvrière* class, which had been working hard all day, steadily looking forward to their evening's relaxation. Then there were some very dressy young men, with companions equally ornamented. Cigars and cigarettes were freely going. Beer appeared to be the popular beverage—the black beer or the bière de Strasburg, or that cheap fizzing beer of Paris which I suppose a good restaurant would hardly admit. Such as had Bordeaux, or vin ordinaire, were mollifying it with water and sugar. There were also one or two cadaverous men who even at that hour were partaking of the infernal absinthe. One young man I especially noticed, who was very quietly dressed, but whose very superior appearance seemed tacitly recognized. He was smoking a cigarette and sipping some maraschino.

Then the band played a fine piece of music, and played it finely too; an overture to some little-known opera of Rossini's. Afterwards one of the band went round collecting coins in a saucer—another evidence of the lowly aims of the establishment. I gave largesse, remembering that this was not the first of my obligations to the musicians. The maraschino

man, whose offering was expected with ill-repressed anxiety, dropped in the delicate, glittering, slight five-franc gold piece. Presently a functionary announced that Mademoiselle Rose would favour the company with a song, and there was the heavy thud or knock which in France so ungracefully announces a new phase in an entertainment.

When Mademoiselle came forward I gave a start; for if ever Mademoiselle was equivalent to Miss, it was so here. And when she began to sing, though the pronunciation was French, the accent was English. She sang sweetly, but without much force, as sentimental a French song as such an audience could be expected to bear. I watched her face with much anxiety. It was a very pretty face, and, to my pleased astonishment, it had an expression of goodness and honesty about it, on which I am afraid I had no right to count in such a place and amid such a company. Her dress was fastened up to her throat, close fitting, and very neat and simple. Her manner was altogether lady-like—not the imitation lady-like of many minor professionals, but genuinely and unaffectedly so. I confess I began to entertain a very lively feeling of interest for the young cantatrice. I thought I should be glad to make her acquaintance. My motive was entirely Platonic and philanthropic. I belong to the uninteresting order of Benedicts, and

my notion was that I should like my wife to make friends with this young girl, who perhaps had no English friends, and who was certainly very unfavourably situated, and save her from what I felt must be a miasmatic moral of atmosphere.

When she had finished singing, she made her curtsey and took her seat at a little table near the buffet of the salon. It appeared, then, that she was not likely to retire to a green-room—indeed it was hard to see where anything at all corresponding to a green-room might have a geographical position—but, with an opera cloak thrown over her shoulders, continued an object of public admiration. I moved towards her table, and, relying on the integrity of my intentions, was about to make a self-introduction to her. I was anticipated, however, by the gentleman whom I had noticed as the only gentleman in the place, who finished his maraschino, threw away his cigarette, and came over and sat by her side. She gave him a winning smile of welcome—they were evidently no strangers—and entered into that close conversation that would evidently tolerate no intrusion. They were talking French, which she evidently understood quite well. I waited a little longer, in the expectation that she might sing again, but there were no signs that this was likely to happen. Then, as it drew towards midnight, I left the place.

But somehow I did not care to turn in even then. I paced up and down the boulevard, smoking my cigar in the balmy starlight night. Several times I passed the entry of the jardin. The people were coming out, and by and by they came out in a considerable number. Then I knew the entertainment was come to a close. The carriage was still standing at the entry of the dark narrow lane, but the servants were manifestly getting under weigh for departure. I went leisurely along to the end of the avenue, and then turned once more, taking the same path. The carriage had now emerged from the lane into the boulevard, but was creeping on at a very slow pace, and presently became stationary. Turning up from the boulevard into the avenue, I came suddenly on a young girl and a man close by a bench beneath some linden trees. They were not sitting, but standing. They did not vouchsafe me any notice, but I recognized at once the songstress of the evening and the gentlemanly young Frenchman. She was leaning her head on his shoulder, and sobbing grievously as if her heart would burst. To me it seemed—but the action was so momentary that I could not be sure—that he was pointing with his hand towards the carriage that was now within sight. Of course I could not venture to say a word, or even to pause, but as I walked very deliberately past them, I

heard a convulsive sob, and then in English, in a low tone—quite a whisper—

"*Oh, no, no! It cannot be until Friday!*"

When I again turned back to resume my customary round, the door of the cabriolet was being opened by a servant, and methought it was the same young man who was entering, but I could not be certain. The young girl was sitting absorbed in thought on a bench—not the same bench, but another higher up the avenue. With a sudden impulse I moved to address her, and respectfully raised my hat. As soon as she saw me, an expression of the greatest terror passed into her face, and she arose, and fled like lightning down the boulevard, and was soon lost amid the stems of trees.

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## CHAPTER II.

### THE SECOND WHISPER.

I CONFESS that, before I went to sleep that night, my mind was full of speculations on this little scene. At first I was full of commiseration about this young girl, concerning whom it was quite clear that she was lonely and that she was unhappy. Next my imaginative faculty set to work weaving a tissue of romance to suit the somewhat strange events that

I had witnessed. I mentally resolved that I would make a point of dropping in at the Salle d'Artois for the next few nights, and observe how matters in general were progressing. In the morning, over the practical business of *déjeuner à la fourchette*, the little romance of last night lost all its colouring. There was nothing so remarkable that an English girl should be singing at a place of entertainment, that she should have a French sweetheart, and that her French sweetheart should make her cry. I had no business in the world to obtain a surreptitious view of those tears. Then I did not see how I could carry my evening's investigations any further. That night we were going out to dinner to meet at the apartment of some English friends who invariably kept us very late. The night following we had the offer of a private box at the Théâtre Français—an offer too good to be refused. I must postpone any inquiry, or rather let the matter drop altogether. Everybody gets familiar with the experience of letting a thing drop. There is some clue to a difficulty, but we cannot carry it out; some fresh pursuit, but we have no time to prosecute it; an interesting correspondence, but we must give it up; a new introduction, but we cannot stay to see whither it may lead; and as grapes, hanging so high that we don't care to take the trouble of climbing for them, are probably

sour, I told myself that the salle was a brutal hole not worth entering again, and that anything I thought remarkable about the girl was simply the result of my own frivolous fancy.

I may as well tell the reader what was my business and mode of life in Paris. I was a journalist, doing French work for English papers and English work for French papers. I occupied the dignified position of Paris correspondent to the 'Coketown Daily Press,' a flaming Radical diurnal journal which was published in one of our great industrial centres. The proprietors insisted that I should give my casual conversations with great ministers of state and retail all the gossip that I might hear at the Imperial ball at the Tuileries. As a matter of fact, I very rarely went *au château*, and my visits were limited to occasions when, the Court being absent from Paris, I obtained the usual order to go over the palace. Still I occasionally played a game of billiards with one of the attachés of our embassy, and I also knew a set of journalists to whom bits of political information occasionally oozed out. One of them, being of a metaphysical tone of mind, told me that he could "project himself" into any political situation, and having arrived at all the data at command, he thought himself justified in making details out of his own inventive faculty. Availing myself of these hints, I proclaimed to my

Coketown constituents plans of the Emperor for promoting the gradual growth of constitutionalism and the gradual approach of his frontiers to the Rhine. For the Parisian journal I edited and expounded the English news, and occasionally wrote an article on any subject of interest that might arrive.

To any one familiar with the tear and fret, the hurry and worry, of a London newspaper, the change to Parisian journalism was most delightful. My paper was an evening paper, and that saved the night-work. Occasionally, if it was a saint's day or fête day, and the workmen wanted a holiday, we omitted our usual issue, and it did not make much difference. Then the way of transacting business was highly pleasing to the journalistic temperament. The hours between eleven and one are perhaps the busiest to our nation of shopkeepers; but to the Parisians it is a time of great ease and negligence. They take their breakfasts at cafés and afterwards peruse the papers, sip *le petit verre*, and ogle the women that pass by. If I wanted to find my newspaper manager, M. Alphonse Kock, about midday, I knew that I had only to go to a certain café on the Boulevard des Italiens, and I should find him picking his grapes or smoking his cigarette with a glass of liqueur by his side. It was about noon that I thus sought *mon cher ami*, Alphonse, to see if he

wanted a few paragraphs for his evening issue, or could give me any sparkling items whereby the 'Coketown Daily Express' might astonish the provincial mind.

"There's a girl run away from a convent," he said. "They brought a paragraph to the office last night. You English people always like to know any scandal about a convent."

"There's a good deal of scandal about them at times," I said, argumentatively.

"Ah yes, perhaps, poor little beggars!" said Alphonse. "I don't think it does for us to notice this sort of thing in our paper. Catholic opinion is, after all, very strong in Paris."

"Anything very sensational?" I inquired. "Did the superior have her whipped and kept on bread and water? did some gendarme, through a grating, espy her in a dungeon? did some one pick up a piece of linen torn from her nightdress with an imploring entreaty written in blood?"

"Oh, no," said Alphonse, laughing; "you will not have to write another chapter of the 'Mysteries of Paris.' It is some convent where there is a large and good school, but they don't say the name of it. If I recollect aright, it was neither novice nor nun, but some teacher, who had a right to go out a good deal, and went out one day and didn't come back.

It's rather a spiteful paragraph, and calculated to get up a little scandal and gossip. But the ground won't do for us to tread on. But will you have the paragraph?"

But as the paragraph did not seem to be sensational, I declined the offer and was soon at work on the funds and the Suez Canal, and, what was a still more important matter, inquiring whether the Empress really intended to put down the chignon, a point on which Coketown would naturally feel very anxious.

So I went about my usual avocations that day, and that matter of last night had quite faded away from my mind. It was my custom in those days to go and hear the band play in the gardens of the Tuileries. This lasted from five to six o'clock. It was a pleasant conclusion to the labours of the day, and gave plenty of time to dress for dinner afterwards. You paid two sous for your chair, and then a seat was provided for you in that open circular space in the midst of which the band was stationed. You heard the music better, to be sure, and you had a seat; but the heat was not so much mitigated as if you were in one of the alleys directly under the trees. The sun was very fierce that summer day, and I was driven to give up my seat. I went to a tree where I could rest myself partially, and also peruse a programme, being, as I call myself, "con-

stitutionally tired," which my enemies construe as being "habitually lazy." In the path behind me two ladies were pacing restlessly about. Once or twice they would pause, apparently to listen to the music, and then at once they resumed an eager conversation with which the music had nothing to do. I confess that I had a momentary feeling of irritation against these ladies. If people don't care for music why do they come to musical places? They were my own countrywomen, and I morosely thought that only English people would be guilty of such bad taste. What business had they there chatting and jabbering instead of listening to the music?

Paris was at this time overflowing with English visitors, though many of the French residents were away. The Legislative sittings were just coming to a conclusion. But as these two Englishwomen once more promenaded down the path, they hardly appeared to be summer visitants belonging to any excursion of pleasure. I had done them an injustice. It was not mere "chat and jabber," as I had termed it. On the face of at least one of them there was an expression of terrible anxiety. The eye was wild, and the arm wildly struck out almost in an attitude of despair. As they once more passed by me, the elder one was speaking, and I heard her say in a compressed whisper of intense emotion, "*I should*

*break my heart if she has eloped from the convent with any Frenchman.*"

So saying, they turned abruptly from the alley, and went through a deserted path in the direction of the river.

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## CHAPTER III.

### THE THIRD WHISPER.

THE next night, my wife and I, and the young attaché, were at the Théâtre Français, at the Palais Royal, occupying a state box.

This was not one of the little amenities, as might be supposed, of journalism. The box had been lent to the embassy, and the embassy had given it to the attaché, and the attaché had placed it at our disposal, subject to the pleasant condition of his own excellent company.

It was a most delicious box, such as you often get in Paris, but never in London. The London box retreats into bareness, ugliness, and shadow; but behind the sittings in this box there was a perfect miniature drawing-room—a salon, cosy with couches and glittering with mirrors, where any number of one's friends might come round and chat between the acts.

The *parterre* was quite filled, not, as in the London

pit, with a plentiful sprinkling of women and children, but with a critical audience of staid men, including, doubtless, a troop of *claqueurs;* but, nevertheless, sure to give eventually a clear discerning verdict on the merits of a new piece. It was a great night at the Français. There was a new piece by an eminent author, and this was also the *début* of a new pupil. Consequently, the house was completely filled, and M. Alphonse Kock and his backers were there in great force that night.

The actress was a great success; she was one who, all her industrious and innocent life, had been working for and looking forward to this night. The piece was so good that in a very brief time it was plagiarized for the London and New York stage.

In the interval between the third and fourth acts, I had taken up my *lorgnette* and glanced through the house, and in the stage-box I saw the aristocratic young fellow who had been talking with the pretty English singing-girl at the Salle d'Artois.

That had been on the Monday night. On the Tuesday night we had been out to dinner as I have mentioned. On Wednesday I had been concocting my lucubrations for the Coketown daily paper, which heard "from our own correspondent" (great emphasis on the *own*), and to-day we were having this dramatic treat at the Français.

"Do you know," I said to the attaché, "who that man is in the upper stage-box opposite, with the bouquet, which I suppose he designs for Mademoiselle Reine?"

"Very likely," returned my diplomatic friend. "Papillon will be quite in love with Mademoiselle Reine. He's a terrible fellow, they say. Would you like to know him?" he continued. "I can introduce you presently. I shall meet him at supper on the boulevards."

"Who is he?" I said.

"Don't you know him? he belongs to the Jockey Club, and is quite a great man just now. His father made all his money on the Bourse; but he is aristocratic-looking enough for the Faubourg St. Germain."

"He is one of the Imperialist lot, then, I suppose; a new man and a rich?"

"Oh yes, he is rich enough, if he doesn't gamble it all away. He has got money and his wife has money."

"You don't mean to tell me that that young fellow is married?"

"Oh yes, he is. But when his wife has had a month or two at Paris he sends her home into Normandy, and stays on as a bachelor. Lots of men do that. Paris is so expensive that they cut the season down as much as they can."

"Is he a nice fellow?"

"Nice enough, according to Paris notions; but not very nice according to your English notions. A selfish lot, I expect. Very gentlemanly, but all on the surface, like most of them."

I am very punctual and domestic as a rule, but having seen this young fellow under such very different circumstances the other night, I felt a curiosity to meet him. I accordingly accepted the attaché's offer to go with him to the supper at the Maison Dorée.

I put my wife safely into the carriage which we had waiting for us, and strolled with my friend, the Honourable Mr. R——, along the boulevards to the café where we should meet Papillon. There were one or two men from the Jockey Club there, the successful dramatist of the evening, and the attaché with some diplomatic friends, who relieved the labours of the chancellerie with social relaxation at the Maison Dorée.

The supper was pleasant enough, as little Parisian suppers always are. But it is unnecessary that I should speak of it unless in reference to our gay young friend, Monsieur Papillon.

I was introduced to him, and he received me with the utmost *empressement*. His smile and his shrug were of the stereotyped Parisian character. I

acknowledged, however, that his handsome face, his rich complexion, and his kindling eye would very probably make him a lady-killer, and his slightly-broken English speech, which on the whole he spoke exceedingly well, and his foreign accent would prove little hindrance to his killing English ladies. It was easy to see, from the little he said in conversation, that he was devoted to pleasure and had an utter abnegation of all principle. And so much is this the ordinary state of things in Paris, that I have sometimes wondered whether it might not be for the ultimate good of the world that Paris might be held beneath the Atlantic Ocean for a quarter of an hour.

Monsieur Papillon stared rather hard at me, as if haunted by some recollection of my face, but apparently he could not identify it. I had a momentary thought of reminding him of the Salle d'Artois; but, less from any reasonings on the subject than from an instinct, I mentally decided that it would be better not to do so.

He was certainly the most juvenile and joyous of Benedicts, and wore his married chains as lightly as if they were roses. He made one or two jocular allusions to "madame ma femme," stowed away safely in the department of Calvados. As supper became prolonged, Monsieur Papillon said he would

send away his carriage. Presently he told one of the waiters to send his servant in to him. At once a rather ill-looking fellow entered, whom I immediately recognized as having seen the other night amusing himself with the coachman while the carriage was waiting in that dark by-street in *Les Ternes.*

Monsieur Papillon beckoned the man to him and spoke quietly a few words, in that quiet subdued tone in which people speak to servants when they do not wish to attract attention or to disturb company. Now it so happened that I sat next but one to this gentleman, my diplomatic young friend being interposed between us. I confess that I leaned back in my chair, and using him, as far as I could, as a screen, I sought to make out anything he might be saying. The attaché spoke to me, and I gave him a mechanical answer. I strained every nerve to hear what I could of that whispered conversation. At last, slightly raising his voice, but without departing from a whisper, he said—

"*Remember—the Maison Dupont at Fontainbleau.*"

Soon after I departed. The fun of the party was growing too fast and furious for me. I was *very* married, and not able to regard connubial tie so slightly as that butterfly Papillon. It was a point of minor morals with me that I should get to bed

by midnight. At midnight also the Salle d'Artois closed. Somehow there was an impulse on my mind that I would go and survey the ground and see what the pretty English singer was doing with herself.

A *voiture de remise* took me quickly, and I arrived at the suburban place of amusement a good twenty minutes before it closed. But the company was thinning, and in a moment I saw that the principal person I sought was not there. I took some refreshment, and then tried, not unsuccessfully, to imitate the ways of those people who make a point of maintaining friendly relations with waiters and proprietors, in the cafés they frequent.

"Had mademoiselle, the pretty Englishwoman, been singing that night?"

"Yes, but she was gone. She was gone at eleven hours."

"Would she be there to-morrow night?"

"No—this was her last night. Her engagement was terminated."

"How was that?" I asked next. "She sang very nicely. Did not monsieur the proprietor think so?"

"Yes, certainly, she did sing very well—for an Englishwoman. But the public required novelties, and it did not do to keep the same singer long before them."

"Had she been there very long?"

"Not very long."

Here the man went away, and to my mind he did not seem to care to discuss the merits of the young lady who had just passed away from his employ.

That night I looked amid the contents of the parcel which M. Kock had sent me from the office for the paragraph to which he had referred, but I could not find it.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### IN THE FOREST OF FONTAINBLEAU.

THE next morning while I was dressing I took a sheet of paper and wrote down the three whispers which I had overheard in the course of the last three days.

They were, of course—

(a) "*Oh no, no! It cannot be until Friday.*"

(b) "*I should break my heart if she has eloped from the convent with any Frenchman.*"

(c) "*Remember—the Maison Dupont at Fontainbleau.*"

The curious notion had somehow wrought itself into my mind that it was possible that these three

overheard whispers might stand in a certain relation and connection to each other.

It was just possible, but the chances were utterly against the truth of such a theory. There was indeed a certain speciousness in the idea. It might not be difficult to invent a framework of circumstances into which these three whispers might be tesselated and inwrought. But it was much more easy to suppose that the different whispers belonged to different sets of circumstances standing in no sort of connection to each other. Of course, on any doctrine of chances, the odds were tremendously against the theory of any such correlation as I was supposing. Taking the three sentences in their chronological consecutiveness, what on earth could a Friday have to do with an elopement from a convent? and what on earth could an elopement from a convent have to do with any particular locality at Fontainbleau? And how extremely unlikely it must be that a gay, frivolous, and not over-reputable place like the Salle d'Artois could stand in any sort of connection with the staid solemnity of a convent! I had indeed, it is true, certain information, beyond these whispers which might have a possible connection with their subject-matter. There had certainly been an escape from a convent. Here Kock's newspaper paragraph possibly corroborated and identified the second whisper. But

I could not see in what possible connection the remark (b) could stand to (a) and (c). It was possible that (a) and (c) might stand in a definite relationship. The chances of a coincidence between the two were immeasurably better than the chances of a coincidence between the three. The existence of that charming gentleman Monsieur Papillon was a connecting link between the two. Was it also possible that his existence could be adumbrated in the second whisper? *i.e.*, "I should break my heart if she has eloped from the convent with a Frenchman." And now the subject, which had been gradually growing on my mind, made me feel quite hot and feverish. It seemed to me that some woeful drama was being enacted that day in which, quite involuntarily, I was called upon to play a principal part. And this very day, of which the golden moments were slipping away so fast, was Friday, the day on which something was to happen, the scene of which was laid at Fontainbleau. I flung down impatiently a set of numbers, which had just come in by post, of the 'Coketown Daily Press,' although they contained some choice examples of my most careful observations and reasonings in politics.

"There is sometimes," I said to my wife, "a destiny in the overhearing of whispers. Do you remember the cranes of Ibycus?"

But my wife did not recollect the cranes of Ibycus.

"Ibycus," I said, "was a poet, who, travelling through a wild country, fell in company with two evilly-disposed men, who set upon him to rob and murder him, in which design they succeeded only too well. The dying poet looked around for succour but saw nothing but some cranes hovering in the air. 'Oh! ye cranes,' he said, 'avenge Ibycus!' A month or two later his two murderers were in an open-air theatre, and some cranes were visible not far off. 'Behold,' whispered one man to another, 'the cranes of Ibycus!' Now this remark was overheard. Ibycus was bound to this city, and there was surprise and consternation that he had not arrived. It was manifest that these two men, whose physiognomy was probably hardly in their favour, knew something about Ibycus. They were seized examined separately, and the truth coming out, were both executed. Now these providential cranes brought murderers to justice. But it is manifest, my dear, that the casual overhearing of a speech was the moving cause of the discovery, though the cranes have always absorbed the credit."

"Well," said my wife, "your overheard whispers gave a time, which is to-day, and a locality, which is Fontainbleau. There may be something worse

than murder going on. Why don't you go down to Fontainbleau to-day?"

I was astonished at the direct simplicity of this suggestion, which had not occurred to my mind.

"Because," I answered, "I don't see how a convent can have anything to do with Friday or with Fontainbleau."

"But I thought you gentlemen, if you had a lot of data, did not mind having an $x$ in it, but sought to solve its value in an equation."

This was really clever in the wife, and I thought there was something clever in the notion. Still I was by no means prepared to fling away a day on spec and make perchance a bootless excursion. "But don't wait dinner," was my *ultimatum*, "for after all I might go down to Fontainbleau."

I presently gained the knifeboard of the Courbevoie omnibus and took three sous' worth of danger down to the Louvre. Then I continued to walk down the Rue Rivoli, bethinking myself that it was all in the direction of the railway station whence I must start for Fontainbleau.

But how astonished I was when, just as I had gained the beautiful tower of St. Jacques, I came upon the very two women who had so greatly interested me in the garden of the Tuileries the day before yesterday.

Without the delay of a second I advanced to them and took off my hat. I turned to the elder one, who still had evident marks of grief and agitation on her countenance, and said—

"Madam, will you allow me to speak to you for a few minutes on a very important matter?"

She gave a little shriek. "It must be about Clara, Mrs. Burns. Oh, sir, tell me where is my daughter?"

I asked them if they would step across the road, and enter into the little enclosure around the Tower. We sat down on one of the pleasant benches close by Pascal's statue. The air was scented with flowers, the little children were playing about with their *bonnes*, and there was the fountain's musical ripple.

"Is your daughter," I asked, "a tall, handsome girl—sings well—has fair hair and complexion, but dark eyes—about nineteen?"

"It must be she. It is the very same. Oh, sir! where is she?"

But I was phlegmatically obliged to say that I had not the least idea of her whereabouts.

They were so downcast at this that I ventured to explain that I thought it possible we might be put on the right track to find her. Then I soon succeeded in getting their little story from them.

The elder lady was the widow of a London mer-

chant, who, having always kept up a costly and luxurious establishment, had left his family only poorly off, owing to a great depreciation in the value of his property. There were several daughters, and it was necessary that at least one or two of them should become governesses, which was hard upon girls who were accustomed to a gay and rather fast life. Mrs. Burns, an Anglo-Parisian friend of Mrs. Broadhurst's, had suggested to her that her daughter should enter a Dominican convent, where a school was kept, on what are called in England "mutual terms." The young lady was to give lessons in English, and receive some lessons in French. Board and lodging were to be provided for her, but no stipend was to be given. After a time Miss Clara Broadhurst grew exceedingly dissatisfied with her position. The early hours and the plain fare of the convent did not suit her. She had a great notion that she deserved a stipend. She had also a great notion that she had better go upon the stage, or that she might do well as a singer at public concerts. Although the living at the convent was so plain, and the rules so stringent, Miss Broadhurst was not called upon in any degree to be treated as a Roman Catholic inmate would be treated; and all her school work being finished in the morning, she had full range of liberty between the early dinner and the early

tea. There appeared to be no doubt but a great deal of this time was spent in the Bois de Boulogne. It appeared that she had made several undesirable acquaintances in Paris, in the case of English and French ladies against whom Mrs. Burns could not actually allege anything, but of whom she disapproved as companions of the daughter of her friend. Latterly Miss Broadhurst had been dropping hints to her mother that she had an opening in life much more to her taste than teaching in a French convent. Then her letters grew rarer, and then they ceased Later still she disappeared from the convent. She had gone out one afternoon as usual, and had never come back. It had evidently been a step studiously contemplated, for all her clothing and effects, for some days past, had gradually been in course of removal.

[I may here state, what subsequently transpired—that she had obtained an engagement to sing at the Salle d'Artois. I was never able rightly to make out whether she had formed the acquaintance of Monsieur Papillon previous to or during this musical engagement, but have reason to suspect that the former was the case.]

Mrs. Broadhurst had immediately been telegraphed for by her friend Mrs. Burns to come to Paris; and in a state almost of distraction she had been making

inquiries everywhere in Paris about her daughter, but had not hitherto met with any success in the search.

Such is a brief outline of the hurried story which they told me, and they now looked impatiently towards me to see what consolation or guidance I could offer them. My own mind was in a state of utter incertitude. I was uncertain even on the question of identification—whether the girl I had seen was really the Clara Broadhurst who was missing. But here they were positive, and would allow no expression of doubt. I then told my trembling and astonished listeners that, assuming the identity, I knew that their Clara was intimate and apparently deeply in love with a Frenchman; that I had heard her mention this present Friday to him in a way that looked like an assignation with him; that I knew that on this very day her engagement to sing in public terminated; and I also knew that on this very day the Frenchman was going down to Fontainbleau. The almost irresistible inference was that she was going to accompany him to that place. I also told them that it was my intention to go to Fontainbleau that very day; but I did not think it necessary to say that I was going there simply on account of the young lady unknown, for then they might be building still higher expectations that

might prove fallacious. I discovered that if we moved off at once we should be in time for as early a train as Monsieur Papillon was at all likely to take. We caught our train, and in about three quarters of an hour I and my two sudden and unexpected companions arrived at Fontainbleau.

The reader will probably recollect that long straight road, with its rows of straight trees, between the station and the town of Fontainbleau. We looked eagerly to see who might be our companions in the train; but no one whom I could recognize alighted at the station. When we got into the town, and had alighted at an ugly-looking hotel, I persuaded them to have some refreshment, and I endeavoured to calm Mrs. Broadhurst's intense nervous excitement. Then I lighted a cigar, and strolled about, settling our plan of operations. My first object was to discover where the Maison Dupont might happen to be. I easily ascertained that it was a very respectable boarding-house, kept by M. Dupont, a respectable and responsible man, situated about twenty minutes' ride from the town, on the verge of the forest. Finding that some hours must elapse before the arrival of the next train, I persuaded them to visit the palace and grounds; showed them the spot where the first Napoleon kissed the eagles, and took his farewell; showed them the pond where the third

Napoleon tumbled topsy-turvy among the great carp; pointed out the Empress's gondola, which I believed was the very same that Lord Byron had used at Venice, and, in fact, exhausted all my little store of Napoleonic reminiscences. The ladies, however, were hardly in a state of mind that permitted them to do justice to my agreeable and improving vein of anecdote. I thought it best, therefore, to dismiss all notions of sight-seeing, and confine ourselves strictly to the immediate business of the day. Mrs. Broadhurst and I were immediately to proceed to the Maison Dupont, and Mrs. Burns was to return to the station and watch for the runaways. It was curious how the impression that they would arrive had now become rooted in our minds.

We drove leisurely to the locality that had been indicated to me, obtaining glimpses of flowery spaces and deep forest glades. When we arrived at the Maison Dupont, we were ushered into the pleasant presence of Madame Dupont, and, as I had agreed with my companion, I took charge of this sufficiently difficult and embarrassing business.

I asked Madame Dupont if she had any room for any more inmates.

Madame Dupont was very full and was expecting fresh arrivals. Still there was one chamber unoccupied.

Mrs. Broadhurst at once said that she would be glad to engage the room for herself.

Might I ask who were the new arrivals? We were daily expecting some friends of ours who were going to sketch in the forest.

She thought it was for a gentleman and his sister. The name was Bertrand. Her two best bedrooms were taken for them, by telegraph. They had also wanted a private sitting-room, but she had only the use of the public rooms to offer them, but for the day at least they would have these rooms pretty well to themselves.

I will now put down in chronological order the few remarkable events of that afternoon.

Good Mrs. Burns waited for many anxious hours at that uninteresting station. It had been arranged that if they came and proceeded anywhere else than to the Maison Dupont she should follow them, and at once communicate with us by a messenger. But if they went to the Maison Dupont her mission was at an end, and she was to return to the hotel, where we would communicate with her.

The eight o'clock train from Paris duly arrived, and then, sure as fate, Mrs. Burns recognized her young acquaintance, Clare Broadhurst, leaning on the arm of a young dandified Frenchman.

"Why, Clara," said the good lady, "what brings

you here, and how d'ye do? They told me that you had returned to England. Didn't you like the convent?"

"Madame," said Clara, very haughtily, and speaking in French, "I am sorry that I have no time to speak to you now. I may tell you that I am engaged to marry this gentleman, Monsieur Bertrand, of Marseilles, and have come here on a visit to some of his friends."

The gentleman had calmly ignored the stout English lady, and was hailing a voiture. Clara made a curtsey and swept past her. Mrs. Burns was petrified with astonishment. But she heard the word Dupont in the direction.

When Monsieur and his interesting companion arrived at the Maison Dupont, they were met by the smiling landlady, who told them that she was so sorry that she had no private room for them. There was only a gentleman in a *salon*, and she understood that he was going almost directly, as soon as he had done some little business for a friend.

There was a gentleman sitting at the window, with his hat in one hand and that day's 'Galignani' in the other. This individual was the esteemed Paris correspondent of the 'Coketown Daily Express.'

As he entered I rose from my seat and faced him. "Ah, Monsieur Papillon," I exclaimed, "I am so

happy; what an extraordinary encounter! I had the pleasure of meeting you in very agreeable company last night on the Boulevards."

He shook hands with me hurriedly and gave a forced laugh. "*Vous avez tort, Monsieur.* I am M. Bertrand, of Marseilles, much at your service. What do you say—Papillon? it is one good joke. They call me that because I am light-hearted."

"Just as you like," I answered; "it is of no importance, but I don't think our mutual friend, the Hon. Mr. B., of the English Embassy, would take such a liberty with either of us as to make an introduction under false colours."

I noticed that he bit his lips and appeared greatly disgusted. His companion turned first towards him and then towards me her large inquiring eyes.

"Ah, B., he is what you do call one funny dog."

"And so are you, Monsieur Papillon," I answered. "But how is madame, your wife—and the charming little infant in Calvados?"

He changed colour very much, and muttered a *mille tonnerres.* Then he seized his companion's resisting hand, and said, smilingly, "*Voilà madame.*"

"No, no, no," I said, laughingly. "That is not Madame Papillon. Unless I am greatly mistaken, that is *Miss Clara Broadhurst.*"

She started up, almost as if shot. "Oh, sir! and

do you know me? And is not this gentleman M. Bertrand, of Marseilles?"

"My child," I answered, "his name is Papillon. He is a member of the Jockey Club at Paris. His place is in the north of France, where he has left his wife."

She cast on him a look of the most indignant reproach. Then she burst into a flood of tears and began to moan. "Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do? My mother, my poor mother! Oh, I wish I had never come to Paris! Oh, my mother, where are you?"

"I am here, my child," said Mrs. Broadhurst, and she calmly glided from the *petite salon* adjoining, and folded her weeping daughter in her arms.

When I went up to Paris a few hours later by the night mail, among the gentlemen in the smoking compartment I recognized, with much satisfaction, my young friend, M. Papillon. He was very affable and offered me a light.

Miss Clara Broadhurst afterwards sang in a London concert-room. After a very short term of professional life, however, she married a very worthy man. I wonder, however, whether he—or indeed either of them—altogether knew about the curious incident of the *Three Overheard Whispers.*

## J. HABAKUK JEPHSON'S STATEMENT.*

In the month of December in the year 1873 the British ship *Dei Gratia* steered into Gibraltar, having in tow the derelict brigantine, *Marie Celeste*, which had been picked up in latitude 38° 40′, longitude 17° 15′ West. There were several circumstances in connection with the condition and appearance of this abandoned vessel which excited considerable comment at the time, and aroused a curiosity which has never been satisfied. What these circumstances were was summed up in an able article which appeared in the 'Gibraltar Gazette.' The curious can find it in the issue for January 4, 1874, unless my memory deceives me. For the benefit of those, however, who may be unable to refer to the paper in question, I shall subjoin a few extracts which touch upon the leading features of the case.

"We have ourselves," says the anonymous writer

* Originally published in 'The Cornhill Magazine.'

in the 'Gazette,' "been over the derelict *Marie Celeste*, and have closely questioned the officers of the *Dei Gratia* on every point which might throw light on the affair. They are of opinion that she had been abandoned several days, or perhaps weeks, before being picked up. The official log, which was found in the cabin, states that the vessel sailed from Boston to Lisbon, starting upon October 16. It is, however, most imperfectly kept, and affords little information. There is no reference to rough weather, and, indeed, the state of the vessel's paint and rigging excludes the idea that she was abandoned for any such reason. She is perfectly water-tight. No signs of a struggle or of violence are to be detected, and there is absolutely nothing to account for the disappearance of the crew. There are several indications that a lady was present on board, a sewing-machine being found in the cabin and some articles of female attire. These probably belonged to the captain's wife, who is mentioned in the log as having accompanied her husband. As an instance of the mildness of the weather, it may be remarked that a bobbin of silk was found standing upon the sewing-machine, though the least roll of the vessel would have precipitated it to the floor. The boats were intact, and slung upon the davits, and the cargo, consisting of tallow and American clocks, was un-

touched. An old-fashioned sword of curious workmanship was discovered among some lumber in the forecastle, and this weapon is said to exhibit a longitudinal striation on the steel, as if it had been recently wiped. It has been placed in the hands of the police, and submitted to Dr. Monaghan, the analyst, for inspection. The result of his examination has not yet been published. We may remark, in conclusion, that Captain Dalton, of the *Dei Gratia*, an able and intelligent seaman, is of opinion that the *Marie Celeste* may have been abandoned a considerable distance from the spot at which she was picked up, since a powerful current runs up in that latitude from the African coast. He confesses his inability, however, to advance any hypothesis which can reconcile all the facts of the case. In the utter absence of a clue or grain of evidence, it is to be feared that the fate of the crew of the *Marie Celeste* will be added to those numerous mysteries of the deep which will never be solved until the great day when the sea shall give up its dead. If crime has been committed, as is much to be suspected, there is little hope of bringing the perpetrators to justice."

I shall supplement this extract from the 'Gibraltar Gazette' by quoting a telegram from Boston, which went the round of the English papers, and represented the total amount of information which had

been collected about the *Marie Celeste.* "She was," it said, "a brigantine of 170 tons burden, and belonged to White, Russell, & White, wine importers of this city. Captain J. W. Tibbs was an old servant of the firm, and was a man of known ability and tried probity. He was accompanied by his wife, aged thirty-one, and their youngest child, five years old. The crew consisted of seven hands, including too coloured seamen, and a boy. There were three passengers, one of whom was the well-known Brooklyn specialist on consumption, Dr. Habakuk Jephson, who was a distinguished advocate for Abolition in the early days of the movement, and whose pamphlet entitled 'Where is thy Brother?' exercised a strong influence on public opinion before the war. The other passengers were Mr. J. Harton, a writer in the employ of the firm, and Mr. Septimius Goring, a half-caste gentleman from New Orleans. All investigations have failed to throw any light upon the fate of these fourteen human beings. The loss of Dr. Jephson will be felt both in political and scientific circles."

I have now epitomized for the benefit of the public all that has been hitherto known concerning the *Marie Celeste* and her crew, for the past ten years have not in any way helped to elucidate the mystery. I have now taken up my pen with the

intention of telling all that I know of the ill-fated voyage. I consider that it is a duty which I owe to society, for symptoms which I am familiar with in others lead me to believe that before many months my tongue and hand may be alike incapable of conveying information. Let me remark, as a preface to my narrative, that I am Joseph Habakuk Jephson, Doctor of Medicine of the University of Harvard, and ex-Consulting Physician of the Samaritan Hospital of Brooklyn.

Many will doubtless wonder why I have not proclaimed myself before, and why I have suffered so many conjectures and surmises to pass unchallenged. Could the ends of justice have been served in any way by my revealing the facts in my possession I should unhesitatingly have done so. It seemed to me, however, that there was no possibility of such a result; and when I attempted, after the occurrence, to state my case to an English official, I was met with such offensive incredulity that I determined never again to expose myself to the chance of such an indignity. I can excuse the discourtesy of the Liverpool magistrate, however, when I reflect upon the treatment which I received at the hands of my own relatives, who, though they knew my unimpeachable character, listened to my statement with an indulgent smile as if humouring the delusion of

a monomaniac. This slur upon my veracity led to a quarrel between myself and John Vanburger, the brother of my wife, and confirmed me in my resolution to let the matter sink into oblivion—a determination which I have only altered through my son's solicitations. In order to make my narrative intelligible, I must run lightly over one or two incidents in my former life which throw light upon subsequent events.

My father, William K. Jephson, was a preacher of the sect called Plymouth Brethren, and was one of the most respected citizens of Lowell. Like most of the other Puritans of New England, he was a determined opponent to slavery, and it was from his lips that I received those lessons which tinged every action of my life. While I was studying medicine at Harvard University, I had already made a mark as an advanced Abolitionist; and when, after taking my degree, I bought a third share of the practice of Dr. Willis, of Brooklyn, I managed, in spite of my professional duties, to devote a considerable time to the cause which I had at heart, my pamphlet, 'Where is thy Brother?' (Swarburgh, Lister, & Co., 1859) attracting considerable attention.

When the war broke out I left Brooklyn and accompanied the 113th New York regiment through the campaign. I was present at the second battle of

Bull's Run and at the battle of Gettysburg. Finally I was severely wounded at Antietam, and would probably have perished on the field had it not been for the kindness of a gentleman named Murray, who had me carried to his house and provided me with every comfort. Thanks to his charity, and to the nursing which I received from his black domestics, I was soon able to get about the plantation with the help of a stick. It was during this period of convalescence that an incident occurred which is closely connected with my story.

Among the most assiduous of the negresses who had watched my couch during my illness there was one old crone who appeared to exert considerable authority over the others. She was exceedingly attentive to me, and I gathered from the few words that passed between us that she had heard of me, and that she was grateful to me for championing her oppressed race.

One day as I was sitting alone in the verandah, basking in the sun and debating whether I should rejoin Grant's army, I was surprised to see this old creature hobbling towards me. After looking cautiously around to see that we were alone, she fumbled in the front of her dress and produced a small chamois leather bag which was hung round her neck by a white cord.

"Massa," she said, bending down and croaking the words into my ear, "me die soon. Me very old woman. Not stay long on Massa Murray's plantation."

"You may live a long time yet, Martha," I answered. "You know I am a doctor. If you feel ill, let me know about it, and I will try to cure you."

"No wish to live—wish to die. I'm gwine to join the heavenly host." Here she relapsed into one of those half-heathenish rhapsodies in which negroes indulge. "But, massa, me have one thing must leave behind me when I go. No able to take it with me across the Jordan. That one thing very precious, more precious and more holy than all thing else in the world. Me, a poor old black woman have this because my people, very great people, 'spose they was back in the old country. But you cannot understand this same as black folk could. My fader give it me and his fader give it him, but now who shall I give it to? Poor Martha hab no child, no relation, nobody. All round I see black man very bad man. Black woman very stupid woman. Nobody worthy of the stone. And so I say, Here is Massa Jephson who write books and fight for coloured folk—he must be good man, and he shall have it, though he is white man and nebber can know what it mean or where it came from." Here

the old woman fumbled in the chamois leather bag and pulled out a flattish black stone with a hole through the middle of it. "Here, take it," she said, pressing it into my hand, "take it. No harm nebber come from anything good. Keep it safe—nebber lose it!" and with a warning gesture the old crone hobbled away in the same cautious way as she had come, looking from side to side to see if we had been observed.

I was more amused than impressed by the old woman's earnestness, and was only prevented from laughing during her oration by the fear of hurting her feelings. When she was gone I took a good look at the stone which she has given me. It was intensely black, of extreme hardness, and oval in shape—just such a flat stone as one would pick up on the seashore if one wished to throw a long way. It was about three inches long, and an inch and a half broad at the middle, but rounded off at the extremities. The most curious part about it were several well-marked ridges which ran in semi-circles over its surface, and gave it exactly the appearance of a human ear. Altogether I was rather interested in my new possession, and determined to submit it, as a geological specimen, to my friend Professor Shroeder of the New York Institute, upon the earliest opportunity. In the mean time I thrust

it into my pocket, and rising from my chair started off for a short stroll in the shrubbery, dismissing the incident from my mind.

As my wound had nearly healed by this time, I took my leave of Mr. Murray shortly afterwards. The Union armies were everywhere victorious and converging on Richmond, so that my assistance seemed unnecessary and I returned to Brooklyn. There I resumed my practice and married the second daughter of Josiah Vanburger, the well-known wood engraver. In the course of a few years I built up a good connection and acquired considerable reputation in the treatment of pulmonary complaints. I still kept the old black stone in my pocket, and frequently told the story of the dramatic way in which I had become possessed of it. I also kept my resolution of showing it to Professor Shroeder, who was much interested both by the anecdote and the specimen. He pronounced it to be a piece of meteoric stone, and drew my attention to the fact that its resemblance to an ear was not accidental, but that it was most carefully worked into that shape. A dozen little anatomical points showed that the worker had been as accurate as he was skilful. "I should not wonder," said the Professor, "if it were broken off from some larger statue, though how such hard material could be so perfectly

worked is more than I can understand. If there is a statue to correspond I should like to see it!" So I thought at the time, but I have changed my opinion since.

The next seven or eight years of my life were quiet and uneventful. Summer followed spring and spring followed winter without any variation in my duties. As the practice increased I admitted J. S. Jackson as partner, he to have one-fourth of the profits. The continued strain had told upon my constitution, however, and I became at last so unwell that my wife insisted upon my consulting Dr. Kavanagh Smith, who was my colleague at the Samaritan Hospital. That gentleman examined me and pronounced the apex of my left lung to be in a state of consolidation, recommending me at the same time to go through a course of medical treatment and to take a long sea-voyage.

My own disposition, which is naturally restless, predisposed me strongly in favour of the latter piece of advice, and the matter was clinched by my meeting young Russell of the firm of White, Russell, & White, who offered me a passage in one of his father's ships, the *Marie Celeste,* which was just starting from Boston. "She is a snug little ship," he said, "and Tibbs, the captain, is an excellent fellow. There is nothing like a sailing ship for an

invalid." I was very much of the same opinion myself, so I closed with the offer on the spot.

My original plan was that my wife should accompany me on my travels. She has always been a very poor sailor, however, and there were strong family reasons against her exposing herself to any risk at the time, so we determined that she should remain at home. I am not a religious or an effusive man; but oh, thank God for that! As to leaving my practice I was easily reconciled to it, as Jackson my partner was a reliable and hard-working man.

I arrived in Boston on October 12, 1873, and proceeded immediately to the office of the firm in order to thank them for their courtesy. As I was sitting in the counting-house waiting until they should be at liberty to see me, the words *Marie Celeste* suddenly attracted my attention. I looked round and saw a very tall, gaunt man who was leaning across the polished mahogany counter asking some questions of the clerk at the other side. His face was turned half towards me, and I could see that he had a strong dash of negro blood in him, being probably a quadroon or even nearer akin to the black. His curved aquiline nose and straight lank hair showed the white strain; but the dark restless eye, sensuous mouth, and gleaming teeth all told of his African origin. His complexion was of a sickly,

unhealthy yellow, and as his face was deeply pitted with small-pox, the general impression was so unfavourable as to be almost revolting. When he spoke, however, it was in a soft, melodious voice, and in well-chosen words, and he was evidently a man of some education.

"I wished to ask a few questions about the *Marie Celeste*," he repeated, leaning across to the clerk. "She sails the day after to-morrow, does she not?"

"Yes, sir," said the young clerk, awed into unusual politeness by the glimmer of a large diamond in the stranger's shirt front.

"Where is she bound for?"

"Lisbon."

"How many of a crew?"

"Seven, sir."

"Passengers?"

"Yes, two. One of our young gentlemen, and a doctor from New York."

"No gentlemen from the South?" asked the stranger eagerly.

"No, none, sir."

"Is there room for another passenger?"

"Accommodation for three more," answered the clerk.

"I'll go," said the quadroon decisively; "I'll go,

I'll engage my passage at once. Put it down, will you—Mr. Septimius Goring, of New Orleans."

The clerk filled up a form and handed it over to the stranger, pointing to a blank space at the bottom. As Mr. Goring stooped over to sign it I was horrified to observe that the fingers of his right hand had been lopped off, and that he was holding the pen between his thumb and the palm. I have seen thousands slain in battle and assisted at every conceivable surgical operation, but I cannot recall any sight which gave me such a thrill of disgust as that great brown sponge-like hand with the single member protruding from it. He used it skilfully enough, however, for, dashing off his signature, he nodded to the clerk and strolled out of the office just as Mr. White sent out word that he was ready to receive me.

I went down to the *Marie Celeste* that evening, and looked over my berth, which was extremely comfortable considering the small size of the vessel. Mr. Goring, whom I had seen in the morning, was to have the one next mine. Opposite was the captain's cabin and a small berth for Mr. John Harton, a gentleman who was going out in the interests of the firm. These little rooms were arranged on each side of the passage which led from the main-deck to the saloon. The latter was a comfortable room,

the panelling tastefully done in oak and mahogany, with a rich Brussels carpet, and luxurious settees. I was very much pleased with the accommodation and also with Tibbs the captain, a bluff, sailor-like fellow, with a loud voice and hearty manner, who welcomed me to the ship with effusion, and insisted upon our splitting a bottle of wine in his cabin. He told me that he intended to take his wife and youngest child with him on the voyage, and that he hoped with good luck to make Lisbon in three weeks. We had a pleasant chat and parted the best of friends, he warning me to make the last of my preparations next morning as he intended to make a start by the midday tide, having now shipped all his cargo. I went back to my hotel, where I found a letter from my wife awaiting me, and after a refreshing night's sleep returned to the boat in the morning. From this point I am able to quote from the journal which I kept in order to vary the monotony of the long sea-voyage. If it is somewhat bald in places I can at least rely upon its accuracy in details as it was written conscientiously from day to day.

*October* 16.—Cast off our warps at half-past two and were towed out into the bay, where the tug left us, and with all sail set we bowled along at about nine knots an hour. I stood upon the poop watching

the low land of America sinking gradually upon the horizon until the evening haze hid it from my sight. A single red light, however, continued to blaze balefully behind us, throwing a long track like a trail of blood upon the water, and it is still visible as I write, though reduced to a mere speck. The captain is in a bad humour, for two of his hands disappointed him at the last moment, and he was compelled to ship a couple of negroes who happened to be on the quay. The missing men were steady, reliable fellows who had been with him several voyages, and their non-appearance puzzled as well as irritated him. Where a crew of seven men have to work a large sailing ship the loss of two experienced seamen is a serious one, for though the negroes may take a spell at the wheel or swab the decks, they are of little or no use in rough weather. Our cook is also a black man, and Mr. Septimius Goring has a little darkie servant, so that we are rather a piebald community. The accountant, John Harton, promises to be an acquisition, for he is a cheery, amusing young fellow. Strange how little wealth has to do with happiness! He has all the world before him and is seeking his fortune in a far land, yet he is as transparently happy as a man can be. Goring is rich, if I am not mistaken, and so am I; but I know that I have a lung, and Goring has some deeper trouble still, to

judge by his features. How poorly do we both contrast with the careless, penniless clerk!

*October* 17.—Mrs. Tibbs appeared upon deck for the first time this morning—a cheerful, energetic woman, with a dear little child just able to walk and prattle. Young Harton pounced on it at once and carried it away to his cabin, where no doubt he will lay the seeds of future dyspepsia in the child's stomach. Thus medicine doth make cynics of us all. The weather is still all that could be desired, with a fine fresh breeze from the west-sou'-west. The vessel goes so steadily that you would hardly know that she was moving were it not for the creaking of the cordage, the bellying of the sails, and the long white furrow in our wake. Walked the quarter-deck all morning with the captain, and I think the keen fresh air has already done my breathing good, for the exercise did not fatigue me in any way. Tibbs is a remarkably intelligent man, and we had an interesting argument about Maury's observations on ocean currents, which we terminated by going down into his cabin to consult the original work. There we found Goring, rather to the captain's surprise, as it is not usual for passengers to enter that sanctum unless specially invited. He apologized for his intrusion, however, pleading his ignorance of the usages of ship life; and the good-natured sailor

simply laughed at the incident, begging him to remain and favour us with his company. Goring pointed to the chronometers, the case of which he had opened and remarked that he had been admiring them. He has evidently some practical knowledge of mathematical instruments, as he told at a glance which was the most trustworthy of the three, and also named their price within a few dollars. He had a discussion with the captain too upon the variation of the compass, and when we came back to the ocean currents he showed a thorough grasp of the subject. Altogether he rather improves upon acquaintance, and is a man of decided culture and refinement. His voice harmonizes with his conversation, and both are the very antithesis of his face and figure.

The noon-day observation shows that we have run two hundred and twenty miles. Towards evening the breeze freshened up and the first mate ordered reefs to be taken in the top-sails and top-gallant sails in expectation of a windy night. I observe that the barometer has fallen to twenty-nine. I trust our voyage will not be a rough one as I am a poor sailor, and my health would probably derive more harm than good from a stormy trip, though I have the greatest confidence in the captain's seamanship and in the soundness of the vessel. Played

cribbage with Mrs. Tibbs after supper, and Harton gave us a couple of tunes on the violin.

*October* 18.—The gloomy prognostications of last night were not fulfilled, as the wind died away again, and we are lying now in a long greasy swell, ruffled here and there by a fleeting cat's-paw which is insufficient to fill the sails. The air is colder than it was yesterday, and I have put on one of the thick woollen jerseys which my wife knitted for me. Harton came into my cabin in the morning and we had a cigar together. He says that he remembers having seen Goring in Cleveland, Ohio, in '69. He was, it appears, a mystery then as now, wandering about without any visible employment and extremely reticent on his own affairs. The man interests me as a psychological study. At breakfast this morning I suddenly had that vague feeling of uneasiness which comes over some people when closely stared at, and, looking quickly up, I met his eyes bent upon me with an intensity which amounted to ferocity, though their expression instantly softened as he made some conventional remark upon the weather. Curiously enough, Harton says that he had a very similar experience yesterday upon deck. I observe that Goring frequently talks to the coloured seamen as he strolls about—a trait which I rather admire, as it is common to find half-breeds ignore their dark

strain and treat their black kinsfolk with greater intolerance than a white man would do. His little page is devoted to him, apparently, which speaks well for his treatment of him. Altogether, the man is a curious mixture of incongruous qualities, and unless I am deceived in him will give me food for observation during the voyage.

The captain is grumbling about his chronometers, which do not register exactly the same time. He says it is the first time that they have ever disagreed. We were unable to get a noonday observation on account of the haze. By dead reckoning, we have done about a hundred and seventy miles in the twenty-four hours. The dark seamen have proved as the skipper prophesied, to be very inferior hands, but as they can both manage the wheel well they are kept steering, and so leave the more experienced men to work the ship. These details are trivial enough, but a small thing serves as food for gossip aboard ship. The appearance of a whale in the evening caused quite a flutter among us. From its sharp back and forked tail, I should pronounce it to have been a rorqual, or "finner" as they are called by the fishermen.

*October* 19.—Wind was cold, so I prudently remained in my cabin all day, only creeping out for dinner. Lying in my bunk I can, without moving,

reach my books, pipes, or anything else I may want, which is one advantage of a small apartment. My old wound began to ache a little to-day, probably from the cold. Read 'Montaigne's Essays' and nursed myself. Harton came in in the afternoon with Doddy, the captain's child, and the skipper himself followed, so that I held quite a reception.

*October* 20 *and* 21.—Still cold, with a continual drizzle of rain, and I have not been able to leave the cabin. This confinement makes me feel weak and depressed. Goring came in to see me, but his company did not tend to cheer me up much, as he hardly uttered a word, but contented himself with staring at me in a peculiar and rather irritating manner. He then got up and stole out of the cabin without saying anything. I am beginning to suspect that the man is a lunatic. I think I mentioned that his cabin is next to mine. The two are simply divided by a thin wooden partition which is cracked in many places, some of the cracks being so large that I can hardly avoid, as I lie in my bunk, observing his motions in the adjoining room. Without any wish to play the spy, I see him continually stooping over what appears to be a chart and working with a pencil and compasses. I have remarked the interest he displays in matters connected with navigation, but I am surprised that he should take the

trouble to work out the course of the ship. However, it is a harmless amusement enough, and no doubt he verifies his results by those of the captain.

I wish the man did not run in my thoughts so much. I had a nightmare on the night of the 20th, in which I thought my bunk was a coffin, that I was laid out in it, and that Goring was endeavouring to nail up the lid, which I was frantically pushing away. Even when I woke up, I could hardly persuade myself that I was not in a coffin. As a medical man, I know that a nightmare is simply a vascular derangement of the cerebral hemispheres, and yet in my weak state I cannot shake off the morbid impression which it produces.

*October* 22.—A fine day, with hardly a cloud in the sky, and a fresh breeze from the sou'-west which wafts us gaily on our way. There has evidently been some heavy weather near us, as there is a tremendous swell on, and the ship lurches until the end of the fore-yard nearly touches the water. Had a refreshing walk up and down the quarter-deck, though I have hardly found my sea-legs yet. Several small birds—chaffinches, I think—perched in the rigging.

4.40 P.M.—While I was on deck this morning I heard a sudden explosion from the direction of my

cabin, and, hurrying down, found that I had very nearly met with a serious accident. Goring was cleaning a revolver, it seems, in his cabin, when one of the barrels which he thought was unloaded, went off. The ball passed through the side partition and imbedded itself in the bulwarks in the exact place where my head usually rests. I have been under fire too often to magnify trifles, but there is no doubt that if I had been in the bunk it must have killed me. Goring, poor fellow, did not know that I had gone on deck that day, and must therefore have felt terribly frightened. I never saw such emotion in a man's face as when, on rushing out of his cabin with the smoking pistol in his hand, he met me face to face as I came down from deck. Of course, he was profuse in his apologies, though I simply laughed at the incident.

11 P.M.—A misfortune has occurred so unexpected and so horrible that my little escape of the morning dwindles into insignificance. Mrs. Tibbs and her child have disappeared—utterly and entirely disappeared. I can hardly compose myself to write the sad details. About half-past eight Tibbs rushed into my cabin with a very white face and asked me if I had seen his wife. I answered that I had not. He then ran wildly into the saloon and began groping about for any trace of her, while I followed

him, endeavouring vainly to persuade him that his fears were ridiculous. We hunted over the ship for an hour and a half without coming on any sign of the missing woman or child. Poor Tibbs lost his voice completely from calling her name. Even the sailors, who are generally stolid enough, were deeply affected by the sight of him as he roamed bareheaded and dishevelled about the deck, searching with feverish anxiety the most impossible places and returning to them again and again with a piteous pertinacity. The last time she was seen was about seven o'clock, when she took Doddy on to the poop to give him a breath of fresh air before putting him to bed. There was no one there at the time except the black seaman at the wheel, who denies having seen her at all. The whole affair is wrapped in mystery. My own theory is that while Mrs. Tibbs was holding the child and standing near the bulwarks it gave a spring and fell overboard, and that in her convulsive attempt to catch or save it, she followed it. I cannot account for the double disappearance in any other way. It is quite feasible that such a tragedy should be enacted without the knowledge of the man at the wheel, since it was dark at the time, and the peaked skylights of the saloon screen the greater part of the quarter-deck. Whatever the truth may be it is a terrible catastrophe,

and has cast the darkest gloom upon our voyage. The mate has put the ship about, but of course there is not the slightest hope of picking them up. The captain is lying in a state of stupor in his cabin. I gave him a powerful dose of opium in his coffee that for a few hours at least his anguish may be deadened.

*October* 23.—Woke with a vague feeling of heaviness and misfortune, but it was not until a few moments' reflection that I was able to recall our loss of the night before. When I came on deck I saw the poor skipper standing gazing back at the waste of waters behind us which contains everything dear to him upon earth. I attempted to speak to him, but he turned brusquely away, and began pacing the deck with his head sunk upon his breast. Even now, when the truth is so clear, he cannot pass a boat or an unbent sail without peering under it. He looks ten years older than he did yesterday morning. Harton is terribly cut up, for he was fond of little Doddy, and Goring seems sorry too. At least he has shut himself up in his cabin all day, and when I got a casual glance at him his head was resting on his two hands as if in a melancholy reverie. I fear we are about as dismal a crew as ever sailed. How shocked my wife will be to hear of our disaster! The swell has gone down

now, and we are doing about eight knots with all sail set and a nice little breeze. Hyson is practically in command of the ship, as Tibbs, though he does his best to bear up and keep a brave front, is incapable of applying himself to serious work.

*October* 24.—Is the ship accursed? Was there ever a voyage which began so fairly and which changed so disastrously? Tibbs shot himself through the head during the night. I was awakened about three o'clock in the morning by an explosion, and immediately sprang out of bed and rushed into the captain's cabin to find out the cause, though with a terrible presentiment in my heart. Quickly as I went, Goring went more quickly still, for he was already in the cabin stooping over the dead body of the captain. It was a hideous sight, for the whole front of his face was blown in, and the little room was swimming in blood. The pistol was lying beside him on the floor, just as it had dropped from his hand. He had evidently put it to his mouth before pulling the trigger. Goring and I picked him reverently up and laid him on his bed. The crew had all clustered into his cabin, and the six white men were deeply grieved, for they were old hands who had sailed with him many years. There were dark looks and murmurs among them too, and one of them openly declared that the ship was

haunted. Harton helped to lay the poor skipper out, and we did him up in canvas between us. At twelve o'clock the fore-yard was hauled aback, and we committed his body to the deep, Goring reading the Church of England burial service. The breeze has freshened up, and we have done ten knots all day and sometimes twelve. The sooner we reach Lisbon and get away from this accursed ship the better pleased shall I be. I feel as though we were in a floating coffin. Little wonder that the poor sailors are superstitious when I, an educated man, feel it so strongly.

*October* 25.—Made a good run all day. Feel listless and depressed.

*October* 26.—Goring, Harton, and I had a chat together on deck in the morning. Harton tried to draw Goring out as to his profession, and his objects in going to Europe, but the quadroon parried all his questions and gave us no information. Indeed he seemed to be slightly offended by Harton's pertinacity, and went down into his cabin. I wonder why we should both take such an interest in this man! I suppose it is his striking appearance, coupled with his apparent wealth, which piques our curiosity. Harton has a theory that he is really a detective, that he is after some criminal who has got away to Portugal, and that he chooses this

peculiar way of travelling that he may arrive unnoticed and pounce upon his quarry unawares. I think the supposition is rather a far-fetched one, but Harton bases it upon a book which Goring left on deck, and which he picked up and glanced over. It was a sort of scrap-book it seems, and contained a large number of newspaper cuttings. All these cuttings related to murders which had been committed at various times in the States during the last twenty years or so. The curious thing which Harton observed about them, however, was that they were invariably murders the authors of which had never been brought to justice. They varied in every detail, he says, as to the manner of execution and the social status of the victim, but they uniformly wound up with the same formula that the murderer was still at large, though, of course, the police had every reason to expect his speedy capture. Certainly, the incident seems to support Harton's theory, though it may be a mere whim of Goring's, or, as I suggested to Harton, he may be collecting materials for a book which shall outvie De Quincy. In any case it is no business of ours.

*October* 27, 28.—Wind still fair, and we are making good progress. Strange how easily a human unit may drop out of its place and be forgotten! Tibbs is hardly ever mentioned now; Hyson has

taken possession of his cabin, and all goes on as before. Were it not for Mrs. Tibbs's sewing-machine upon a side-table we might forget that the unfortunate family had ever existed. Another accident occurred on board to-day, though fortunately not a very serious one. One of our white hands had gone down the after-hold to fetch up a spare coil of rope, when one of the hatches which he had removed came crashing down on the top of him. He saved his life by springing out of the way, but one of his feet was terribly crushed, and he will be of little use for the remainder of the voyage. He attributes the accident to the carelessness of his negro companion who had helped him to shift the hatches. The latter, however, puts it down to the roll of the ship. Whatever be the cause it reduces our short-handed crew still further. This run of ill luck seems to be depressing Harton, for he has lost his usual good spirits and joviality. Goring is the only one who preserves his cheerfulness. I see him still working at his chart in his own cabin. His nautical knowledge would be useful should anything happen to Hyson—which God forbid!

*October* 29, 30.—Still bowling along with a fresh breeze. All quiet and nothing of note to chronicle.

*October* 31.—My weak lungs combined with the exciting episodes of the voyage have shaken my

nervous system so much that the most trivial incident affects me. I can hardly believe that I am the same man who tied the external iliac artery, an operation requiring the nicest precision, under a heavy rifle fire at Antietam. I am as nervous as a child. I was lying half dozing last night about four bells in the middle watch trying in vain to drop into a refreshing sleep. There was no light inside my cabin, but a single ray of moonlight streamed in through the port-hole throwing a silvery flickering circle upon the door. As I lay I kept my drowsy eyes upon this circle, and was conscious that it was gradually becoming less well defined as my senses left me, when I was suddenly recalled to full wakefulness by the appearance of a small dark object in the very centre of the luminous disc. I lay quietly and breathlessly watching it. Gradually it grew larger and plainer, and then I perceived that it was a human hand which had been cautiously inserted through the chink of the half-closed door—a hand which, as I observed with a thrill of horror, was not provided with fingers. The door swung cautiously backwards, and Goring's head followed his hand. It appeared in the centre of the moonlight, and was framed as it were in a ghastly uncertain halo, against which his features showed out plainly. It seemed to me that I had never seen

such an utterly fiendish and merciless expression upon a human face. His eyes were dilated and glaring, his lips drawn back so as to show his white fangs, and his straight black hair appeared to bristle over his low forehead like the hood of a cobra. The sudden and noiseless apparition had such an effect upon me that I sprang up in bed trembling in every limb, and held out my hand towards my revolver. I was heartily ashamed of my hastiness when he explained the object of his intrusion, as he immediately did in the most courteous language. He had been suffering from toothache, poor fellow! and had come in to beg some laudanum, knowing that I possessed a medicine chest. As to a sinister expression he is never a beauty, and what with my state of nervous tension and the effect of the shifting moonlight it was easy to conjure up something horrible. I gave him twenty drops, and he went off again with many expressions of gratitude. I can hardly say how much this trivial incident affected me. I have felt unstrung all day.

A week's record of our voyage is here omitted, as nothing eventful occurred during the time, and my log consists merely of a few pages of unimportant gossip.

*November* 7.—Harton and I sat on the poop all the morning, for the weather is becoming very warm

as we come into southern latitudes. We reckon that we have done two-thirds of our voyage. How glad we shall be to see the green banks of the Tagus, and leave this unlucky ship for ever! I was endeavouring to amuse Harton to-day and to while away the time by telling him some of the experiences of my past life. Among others I related to him how I came into the possession of my black stone, and as a finale I rummaged in the side pocket of my old shooting coat and produced the identical object in question. He and I were bending over it together, I pointing out to him the curious ridges upon its surface, when we were conscious of a shadow falling between us and the sun, and looking round saw Goring standing behind us glaring over our shoulders at the stone. For some reason or other he appeared to be powerfully excited, though he was evidently trying to control himself and to conceal his emotion. He pointed once or twice at my relic with his stubby thumb before he could recover himself sufficiently to ask what it was and how I obtained it—a question put in such a brusque manner that I should have been offended had I not known the man to be an eccentric. I told him the story very much as I had told it to Harton. He listened with the deepest interest and then asked me if I had any idea what the stone was. I said I had not, beyond that it was

meteoric. He asked me if I had ever tried its effect upon a negro. I said I had not. "Come," said he, "we'll see what our black friend at the wheel thinks of it." He took the stone in his hand and went across to the sailor and the two examined it carefully. I could see the man gesticulating and nodding his head excitedly as if making some assertion, while his face betrayed the utmost astonishment, mixed I think with some reverence. Goring came across the deck to us presently, still holding the stone in his hand. "He says it is a worthless, useless thing," he said, "and fit only to be chucked overboard," with which he raised his hand and would most certainly have made an end of my relic had the black sailor behind him not rushed forward and seized him by the wrist. Finding himself secured Goring dropped the stone and turned away with a very bad grace to avoid my angry remonstrances at his breach of faith. The black picked up the stone and handed it to me with a low bow and every sign of profound respect. The whole affair is inexplicable. I am rapidly coming to the conclusion that Goring is a maniac or something very near one. When I compare the effect produced by the stone upon the sailor, however, with the respect shown to Martha on the plantation, and the surprise of Goring on its first production, I cannot but come to the conclusion that

I have really got hold of some powerful talisman which appeals to the whole dark race. I must not trust it in Goring's hands again.

*November* 8, 9.—What splendid weather we are having! Beyond one little blow, we have had nothing but fresh breezes the whole voyage. These two days we have made better runs than any hitherto. It is a pretty thing to watch the spray fly up from our prow as it cuts through the waves. The sun shines through it and breaks it up into a number of miniature rainbows—"sun-dogs," the sailors call them. I stood on the fo'csle-head for several hours to-day watching the effect, and surrounded by a halo of prismatic colours. The steersman has evidently told the other blacks about my wonderful stone, for I am treated by them all with the greatest respect. Talking about optical phenomena we had a curious one yesterday evening which was pointed out to me by Hyson. This was the appearance of a triangular well-defined object high up in the heavens to the north of us. He explained that it was exactly like the Peak of Teneriffe as seen from a great distance —the peak was, however, at that moment at least five hundred miles to the south. It may have been a cloud, or it may have been one of those strange reflections of which one reads. The weather is very warm. The mate says that he never knew it so

warm in these latitudes. Played chess with Harton in the evening.

*November* 10.—It is getting warmer and warmer. Some land birds came and perched in the rigging to-day, though we are still a considerable way from our destination. The heat is so great that we are too lazy to do anything but lounge about the decks and smoke. Goring came over to me to-day and asked me some more questions about my stone; but I answered him rather shortly, for I have not quite forgiven him yet for the cool way in which he attempted to deprive me of it.

*November* 11, 12.—Still making good progress. I had no idea Portugal was ever as hot as this, but no doubt it is cooler on land Hyson himself seems surprised at it, and so do the men.

*November* 13.—A most extraordinary event has happened, so extraordinary as to be almost inexplicable. Either Hyson has blundered wonderfully, or some magnetic influence has disturbed our instruments. Just about daybreak the watch on the fo'csle-head shouted out that he heard the sound of surf ahead, and Hyson thought he saw the loom of land. The ship was put about, and, though no lights were seen, none of us doubted that we had struck the Portuguese coast a little sooner than we had expected. What was our surprise to see the scene

which was revealed to us at break of day! As far as we could look on either side was one long line of surf, great green billows rolling in and breaking into a cloud of foam. But behind the surf what was there! Not the green banks nor the high cliffs of the shores of Portugal, but a great sandy waste which stretched away and away until it blended with the sky-line. To right and left, look where you would, there was nothing but yellow sand, heaped in some places into fantastic mounds, some of them several hundred feet high, while in other parts were long stretches as level apparently as a billiard-board. Harton and I, who had come on deck together, looked at each other in astonishment, and Harton burst out laughing. Hyson is exceedingly mortified at the occurrence, and protests that the instruments have been tampered with. There is no doubt that this is the mainland of Africa, and that it was really the Peak of Teneriffe which we saw some days ago upon the northern horizon. At the time when we saw the land birds we must have been passing some of the Canary Islands. If we continued on the same course, we are now to the north of Cape Blanco near the unexplored country which skirts the great Sahara. All we can do is to rectify our instruments as far as possible and start afresh for our destination.

8.30 P.M.—Have been lying in a calm all day.

The coast is now about a mile and a half from us. Hyson has examined the instruments but cannot find any reason for their extraordinary deviation.

This is the end of my private journal, and I must make the remainder of my statement from memory. There is little chance of my being mistaken about facts which have seared themselves into my recollection. That very night the storm which had been brewing so long burst over us, and I came to learn whither all those little incidents were tending which I had recorded so aimlessly. Blind fool that I was not to have seen it sooner! I shall tell what occurred as precisely as I can.

I had gone into my cabin about half-past eleven, and was preparing to go to bed, when a tap came at my door. On opening it, I saw Goring's little black page, who told me that his master would like to have a word with me on deck. I was rather surprised that he should want me at such a late hour, but I went up without hesitation. I had hardly put my foot on the quarter-deck before I was seized from behind, dragged down upon my back, and a handkerchief slipped round my mouth. I struggled as hard as I could, but a coil of rope was rapidly and firmly wound round me, and I found myself lashed to the davit of one of the boats, utterly powerless to do or say anything, while the point of a knife pressed

to my throat warned me to cease my struggles. The night was so dark that I had been unable hitherto to recognize my assailants, but as my eyes became accustomed to the gloom, and the moon broke out through the clouds that obscured it, I made out that I was surrounded by the two negro sailors, the black cook, and my fellow-passenger Goring. Another man was crouching on the deck at my feet, but he was in the shadow and I could not recognize him.

All this occurred so rapidly that a minute could hardly have elapsed from the time I mounted the companion until I found myself gagged and powerless. It was so sudden that I could scarce bring myself to realize it, or to comprehend what it all meant. I heard the gang round me speaking in short, fierce whispers to each other, and some instinct told me that my life was the question at issue. Goring spoke authoritatively and angrily—the others doggedly and all together, as if disputing his commands. Then they moved away in a body to the opposite side of the deck, where I could still hear them whispering, though they were concealed from my view by the saloon skylights.

All this time, the voices of the watch on deck chatting and laughing at the other end of the ship were distinctly audible, and I could see them gathered in a group, little dreaming of the dark doings which

were going on within thirty yards of them. Oh! that I could have given them one word of warning, even though I had lost my life in doing it! but it was impossible. The moon was shining fitfully through the scattered clouds, and I could see the silvery gleam of the surge, and beyond it the vast weird desert with its fantastic sand-hills. Glancing down, I saw that the man who had been crouching on the deck was still lying there, and as I gazed at him, a flickering ray of moonlight fell full upon his upturned face. Great Heaven! even now, when more than twelve years have elapsed, my hand trembles as I write that, in spite of distorted features and projecting eyes, I recognized the face of Harton, the cheery young clerk who had been my companion during the voyage. It needed no medical eye to see that he was quite dead, while the twisted handkerchief round the neck, and the gag in his mouth, showed the silent way in which the hell-hounds had done their work. The clue which explained every event of our voyage came upon me like a flash of light as I gazed on poor Harton's corpse. Much was dark and unexplained, but I felt a great dim perception of the truth.

I heard the striking of a match at the other side of the skylights, and then I saw the tall, gaunt figure of Goring standing up on the bulwarks and holding

in his hands what appeared to be a dark-lantern. He lowered this for a moment over the side of the ship, and, to my inexpressible astonishment, I saw it answered instantaneously by a flash among the sand-hills on shore, which came and went so rapidly, that unless I had been following the direction of Goring's gaze, I should never have detected it. Again he lowered the lantern, and again it was answered from the shore. He then stepped down from the bulwarks, and in doing so slipped, making such a noise, that for a moment my heart bounded with the thought that the attention of the watch would be directed to his proceedings. It was a vain hope. The night was calm and the ship motionless, so that no idea of duty kept them vigilant. Hyson, who after the death of Tibbs was in command of both watches, had gone below to snatch a few hours' sleep, and the boatswain, who was left in charge, was standing with the other two men at the foot of the foremast. Powerless, speechless, with the cords cutting into my flesh and the murdered man at my feet, I awaited the next act in the tragedy.

The four ruffians were standing up now at the other side of the deck. The cook was armed with some sort of a cleaver, the others had knives, and Goring had a revolver. They were all leaning against the rail and looking out over the water as if

watching for something. I saw one of them grasp another's arm and point as if at some object, and following the direction I made out the loom of a large moving mass making towards the ship. As it emerged from the gloom I saw that it was a great canoe crammed with men and propelled by at least a score of paddles. As it shot under our stern the watch caught sight of it also, and raising a cry hurried aft. They were too late, however. A swarm of gigantic negroes clambered over the quarter, and led by Goring swept down the deck in an irresistible torrent. All opposition was overpowered in a moment, the unarmed watch were knocked over and bound, and the sleepers dragged out of their bunks and secured in the same manner. Hyson made an attempt to defend the narrow passage leading to his cabin, and I heard a scuffle, and his voice shouting for assistance. There was none to assist, however, and he was brought on to the poop with the blood streaming from a deep cut in his forehead. He was gagged like the others, and a council was held upon our fate by the negroes. I saw our black seamen pointing towards me and making some statement, which was received with murmurs of astonishment and incredulity by the savages. One of them then came over to me, and plunging his hand into my pocket took out my black stone and held it up. He then handed

it to a man who appeared to be a chief, who examined it as minutely as the light would permit, and muttering a few words passed it on to the warrior beside him, who also scrutinized it and passed it on until it had gone from hand to hand round the whole circle. The chief then said a few words to Goring in the native tongue, on which the quadroon addressed me in English. At this moment I seem to see the scene. The tall masts of the ship with the moonlight streaming down, silvering the yards and bringing the network of cordage into hard relief; the group of dusky warriors leaning on their spears; the dead man at my feet; the line of white-faced prisoners, and in front of me the loathsome half-breed, looking in his white linen and elegant clothes a strange contrast to his associates.

"You will bear me witness," he said in his softest accents, "that I am no party to sparing your life. If it rested with me you would die as these other men are about to do. I have no personal grudge against either you or them, but I have devoted my life to the destruction of the white race, and you are the first that has ever been in my power and has escaped me. You may thank that stone of yours for your life. These poor fellows reverence it, and indeed if it really be what they think it is they have cause. Should it prove when we get ashore that they are mistaken,

and that its shape and material is a mere chance, nothing can save your life. In the mean time we wish to treat you well, so if there are any of your possessions which you would like to take with you, you are at liberty to get them." As he finished he gave a sign and a couple of the negroes unbound me though without removing the gag. I was led down into the cabin, where I put a few valuables into my pockets, together with a pocket-compass and my journal of the voyage. They then pushed me over the side into a small canoe, which was lying beside the large one, and my guards followed me, and shoving off began paddling for the shore. We had got about a hundred yards or so from the ship when our steersman held up his hand, and the paddlers paused for a moment and listened. Then on the silence of the night I heard a sort of dull, moaning sound, followed by a succession of splashes in the water. That is all I know of the fate of my poor shipmates. Almost immediately afterwards the large canoe followed us, and the deserted ship was left drifting about—a dreary, spectre-like hulk. Nothing was taken from her by the savages. The whole fiendish transaction was carried through as decorously and temperately as though it were a religious rite.

The first grey of daylight was visible in the east as we passed through the surge and reached the shore.

Leaving half a dozen men with the canoes, the rest of the negroes set off through the sand-hills leading me with them, but treating me very gently and respectfully. It was difficult walking, as we sank over our ankles into the loose, shifting sand at every step, and I was nearly dead-beat by the time we reached the native village, or town, rather, for it was a place of considerable dimensions. The houses were conical structures not unlike bee-hives, and were made of compressed sea-weed cemented over with a rude form of mortar, there being neither stick nor stone upon the coast nor anywhere within many hundreds of miles. As we entered the town an enormous crowd of both sexes came swarming out to meet us, beating tomtoms and howling and screaming. On seeing me they redoubled their yells and assumed a threatening attitude which was instantly quelled by a few words shouted by my escort. A buzz of wonder succeeded the war-cries and yells of the moment before, and the whole dense mass proceeded down the broad central street of the town, having my escort and myself in the centre.

My statement hitherto may seem so strange as to excite doubt in the minds of those who do not know me, but it was the fact which I am now about to relate which caused my own brother-in-law to insult me by disbelief. I can but relate the occurrence in

the simplest words, and trust to chance and time to prove their truth. In the centre of this main street there was a large building, formed in the same primitive way as the others, but towering high above them; a stockade of beautifully polished ebony rails was planted all round it, the framework of the door was formed by two magnificent elephant's tusks sunk in the ground on each side and meeting at the top, and the aperture was closed by a screen of native cloth richly embroidered with gold. We made our way to this imposing-looking structure, but on reaching the opening in the stockade the multitude stopped and squatted down upon their hams, while I was led through into the enclosure by a few of the chiefs and elders of the tribe, Goring accompanying us, and in fact directing the proceedings. On reaching the screen which closed the temple—for such it evidently was—my hat and my shoes were removed, and I was then led in, a venerable old negro leading the way carrying in his hand my stone, which had been taken from my pocket. The building was only lit up by a few long slits in the roof, through which the tropical sun poured, throwing broad golden bars upon the clay floor, alternating with intervals of darkness.

The interior was even larger than one would have imagined from the outside appearance. The walls

were hung with native mats, shells, and other ornaments, but the remainder of the great space was quite empty, with the exception of a single object in the centre. This was the figure of a colossal negro, which I at first thought to be some real king or high priest of titanic size, but as I approached it I saw by the way in which the light was reflected from it that it was a statue admirably cut in jet-black stone. I was led up to this idol, for such it seemed to be, and looking at it closer I saw that though it was perfect in every other respect, one of its ears had been broken short off. The grey-haired negro who held my relic mounted upon a small stool, and stretching up his arm fitted Martha's black stone on to the jagged surface on the side of the statue's head. There could not be a doubt that the one had been broken off from the other. The parts dovetailed together so accurately that when the old man removed his hand the ear stuck in its place for a few seconds before dropping into his open palm. The group round me prostrated themselves upon the ground at the sight with a cry of reverence, while the crowd outside, to whom the result was communicated, set up a wild whooping and cheering.

In a moment I found myself converted from a prisoner into a demi-god. I was escorted back through the town in triumph, the people pressing

forward to touch my clothing and to gather up the dust on which my foot had trod. One of the largest huts was put at my disposal, and a banquet of every native delicacy was served me. I still felt, however, that I was not a free man, as several spearmen were placed as a guard at the entrance of my hut. All day my mind was occupied with plans of escape, but none seemed in any way feasible. On the one side was the great arid desert stretching away to Timbuctoo, on the other was a sea untraversed by vessels. The more I pondered over the problem the more hopeless did it seem. I little dreamed how near I was to its solution.

Night had fallen, and the clamour of the negroes had died gradually away. I was stretched on the couch of skins which had been provided for me, and was still meditating over my future, when Goring walked stealthily into the hut. My first idea was that he had come to complete his murderous holocaust by making away with me, the last survivor, and I sprang up upon my feet, determined to defend myself to the last. He smiled when he saw the action, and motioned me down again while he seated himself upon the other end of the couch.

"What do you think of me?" was the astonishing question with which he commenced our conversation.

"Think of you?" I almost yelled. "I think you

the vilest, most unnatural renegade that ever polluted the earth. If we were away from these black devils of yours I would strangle you with my hands!"

"Don't speak so loud," he said, without the slightest appearance of irritation. "I don't want our chat to be cut short. So you would strangle me, would you?" he went on, with an amused smile. "I suppose I am returning good for evil, for I have come to help you to escape."

"You!" I gasped, incredulously.

"Yes, I," he continued. "Oh, there is no credit to me in the matter. I am quite consistent. There is no reason why I should not be perfectly candid with you. I wish to be king over these fellows—not a very high ambition, certainly, but you know what Cæsar said about being first in a village in Gaul. Well, this unlucky stone of yours has not only saved your life, but has turned all their heads, so that they think you are come down from heaven, and my influence will be gone until you are out of the way. That is why I am going to help you to escape, since I cannot kill you"—this in the most natural and dulcet voice, as if the desire to do so were a matter of course.

"You would give the world to ask me a few questions," he went on, after a pause; "but you are too proud to do it. Never mind, I'll tell you one of

two things, because I want your fellow white men to know them when you go back—if you are lucky enough to get back. About that cursed stone of yours, for instance. These negroes, or at least so the legend goes, were Mahometans originally. While Mahomet himself was still alive, there was a schism among his followers, and the smaller party moved away from Arabia and eventually crossed Africa. They took away with them, in their exile, a valuable relic of their old faith in the shape of a large piece of the black stone of Mecca. The stone was a meteoric one, as you may have heard, and in its fall upon the earth it broke into two pieces. One of these pieces is still at Mecca. The smaller piece was carried away to Barbary, where a skilful worker modelled it into the fashion which you saw to-day. These men are the descendants of the original seceders from Mahomet, and they have brought their relic safely through all their wanderings until they settled in this strange place, where the desert protects them from their enemies."

"And the ear?" I asked, almost involuntarily.

"Oh, that was the same story over again. Some of the tribe wandered away to the south a few hundred years, and one of them, wishing to have good luck for the enterprise, got into the temple at night and carried off one of the ears. There has

been a tradition among the negroes ever since that the ear would come back some day. The fellow who carried it was caught by some slaver no doubt, and that was how it got into America, and so into your hands—and you have had the honour of fulfilling the prophecy."

He paused for a few minutes, resting his head upon his hands, waiting apparently for me to speak. When he looked up again, the whole expression of his face had changed. His features were firm and set, and he changed the air of half levity with which he had spoken before for one of sternness and almost ferocity.

"I wish you to carry a message back," he said, "to the white race, the great dominating race whom I hate and defy. Tell them that I have battened on their blood for twenty years, that I have slain them until even I became tired of what had once been a joy, that I did this unnoticed and unsuspected in the face of every precaution which their civilization could suggest. There is no satisfaction in revenge when your enemy does not know who has struck him. I am not sorry, therefore, to have you as a messenger. There is no need why I should tell you how this great hate became born in me. See this," and he held up his mutilated hand; "that was done by a white man's knife. My father was white, my

mother was a slave. When he died she was sold again, and I, a child then, saw her lashed to death to break her of some of the little airs and graces which her late master had encouraged in her. My young wife too, oh, my young wife!" a shudder ran through his whole frame. "No matter! I swore my oath and I kept it. From Maine to Florida, and from Boston to San Francisco, you could track my steps by sudden deaths which baffled the police. I warred against the whole white race as they for centuries had warred against the black one. At last, as I tell you, I sickened of blood. Still the sight of a white face was abhorrent to me, and I determined to find some bold free black people and to throw in my lot with them, to cultivate their latent powers, and to form a nucleus for a great coloured nation. This idea possessed me and I travelled over the world for two years seeking for what I desired. At last I almost despaired of finding it. There was no hope of regeneration in the slave-dealing Soudanee, the debased Fantee, or the Americanized negroes of Liberia. I was returning from my quest when chance brought me in contact with this magnificent tribe of dwellers in the desert, and I threw in my lot with them. Before doing so, however, my old instinct of revenge prompted me to make one last visit to the United States, and I returned from it in the *Marie Celeste*.

"As to the voyage itself your intelligence will have told you by this time that, thanks to my manipulation, both compasses and chronometers were entirely untrustworthy. I alone worked out the course with correct instruments of my own, while the steering was done by my black friends under my guidance. I pushed Tibbs's wife overboard. What! You look surprised and shrink away. Surely you had guessed that by this time. I would have shot you that day through the partition, but unfortunately you were not there. I tried again afterwards, but you were awake. I shot Tibbs. I think the idea of suicide was carried out rather neatly. Of course when once we got on the coast the rest was simple. I had bargained that all on board should die; but that stone of yours upset my plans. I also bargained that there should be no plunder. No one can say we are pirates. We have acted from principle, not from any sordid motive."

I listened in amazement to the summary of his crimes which this strange man gave me, all in the quietest and most composed of voices, as though detailing incidents of every-day occurrence. I still seem to see him sitting like a hideous nightmare at the end of my couch, with the single rude lamp flickering over his cadaverous features.

"And now," he continued, "there is no difficulty

about your escape. These stupid adopted children of mine will say that you have gone back to heaven from whence you came. The wind blows off the land. I have a boat all ready for you, well stored with provisions and water. I am anxious to be rid of you, so you may rely that nothing is neglected. Rise up and follow me."

I did what he commanded, and he led me through the door of the hut. The guards had either been withdrawn or Goring had arranged matters with them. We passed unchallenged through the town and across the sandy plain. Once more I heard the roar of the sea, and saw the long white line of the surge. Two figures were standing upon the shore arranging the gear of a small boat. They were the two sailors who had been with us on the voyage.

"See him safely through the surf," said Goring. The two men sprang in and pushed off, pulling me in after them. With mainsail and jib we ran out from the land and passed safely over the bar. Then my two companions without a word of farewell sprang overboard, and I saw their heads like black dots on the white foam as they made their way back to the shore, while I scudded away into the blackness of the night. Looking back I caught my last glimpse of Goring. He was standing upon the summit of a sandhill, and the rising moon behind him threw his

gaunt angular figure into hard relief. He was waving his arms franticly to and fro; it may have been to encourage me on my way, but the gestures seemed to me at the time to be threatening ones, and I have often thought that it was more likely that his old savage instinct had returned when he realized that I was out of his power. Be that as it may, it was the last that I ever saw or ever shall see of Septimius Goring.

There is no need for me to dwell upon my solitary voyage. I steered as well as I could for the Canaries, but was picked up upon the fifth day by the British and African Steam Navigation Company's boat *Monrovia*. Let me take this opportunity of tendering my sincerest thanks to Captain Stornoway and his officers for the great kindness which they showed me from that time till they landed me in Liverpool, where I was enabled to take one of the Guion boats to New York.

From the day on which I found myself once more in the bosom of my family I have said little of what I have undergone. The subject is still an intensely painful one to me, and the little which I have dropped has been discredited. I now put the facts before the public as they occurred, careless how far they may be believed, and simply writing them down because my lung is growing weaker, and I feel

the responsibility of holding my peace longer. I make no vague statement. Turn to your map of Africa. There above Cape Blanco where the land trends away north and south from the westernmost point of the continent, there it is that Septimius Goring still reigns over his dark subjects, unless retribution has overtaken him; and there, where the long green ridges run swiftly in to roar and hiss upon the hot yellow sand, it is there that Harton lies with Hyson and the other poor fellows who were done to death in the *Marie Celeste.* Δ

# MADAMA VALERIA.

## AN ITALIAN GHOST-STORY.

### CHAPTER I.

#### AT THE PALAZZO ALBERGATI.

Egidio Albergati and I were sworn friends though we differed widely in character and in tastes. His Italian impulsiveness was as unlike my English reserve as are the climates of our respective countries, but we got on excellently together, nevertheless.

Perhaps our friendship was owing to an incident which occurred while he and I were bathing near Genoa. Egidio was seized with cramp when we were about a mile from shore, and I towed him in. Not a very heroic effort after all; but Egidio was never tired of recounting it for the benefit of his mother and sister. The latter was a lovely young girl of seventeen, with the most beautiful dark eyes, and the sweetest smile I had ever seen. Ah, Stella!

you were rightly named—if ever woman was created to be the star of a man's life, you were that woman. The second time I saw Stella Albergati my fate was sealed: I was hopelessly in love with my friend's beautiful sister. Every day I blessed the chance which had enabled me to save Egidio's life; for that fortunate circumstance had given me a claim to the friendship of his family—a claim which they were only too ready to admit.

The Countess thanked me with tears in her eyes, and invoked the blessings of Heaven on the "saviour of her son," as she persisted in calling me. My lovely Stella was less profuse in her thanks, but her soft eyes were more eloquent than words, and I was amply repaid for that half-hour's tussle with the waves, on that hot August day, off the coast of Genoa.

Egidio himself swore eternal friendship with me, and as I really liked the impulsive, warm-hearted young Italian, I was ready enough to meet him half-way. The young Count Albergati was the last of his name and race, and his mother frequently urged him to marry; but Egidio always laughed and said he meant to put off the evil day as long as he could; he loved his liberty, he was wont to say, when hard pressed, why should he resign it yet? he was but five-and-twenty; there was plenty of

time. It was all very well for Egidio to excuse himself thus; but I, being in the Count's confidence, knew better. He was desperately in love with Bianca Fiaraja—a beautiful young singer who had recently made her *début* at the Scala, and had turned the heads of all the "golden youth" of Milan with her flute-like voice, her bright smiles and brighter glances.

She was a brilliant blonde, with eyes blue as the Mediterranean, and hair golden as the sunbeams of her native land. Egidio was fairly bewitched; he haunted the theatre night after night; he spent a small fortune in bouquets to fling at the feet of his divinity, but he seemed to advance very slowly in the favour of the fair prima donna, who, indeed, counted her admirers by hundreds, and her lovers—or rather her would-be lovers, for Bianca was as proud as she was beautiful, by dozens.

Matters were at this pass with my friend when I arrived at Milan, during the last days of the Carnival. Egidio had made me promise to stay at the Palazzo Albergati during my sojourn in the city; indeed, I did not require much pressing, for the prospect of spending a few days under the same roof with Stella made the blood course quicker through my veins, and my heart beat high with love and hope. I had been wandering about from

place to place since I parted with Egidio at Genoa; but whether I mooned about Roman picture-galleries, or idled away my days in studios and my evenings at the opera, my thoughts always turned to the grim old Palazzo at Milan where I first saw Stella. I could not forget her, and I soon gave up trying to do so. In my way I was as hopelessly enslaved as Egidio himself, but my insular reserve forbade me to pour out my secret into my friend's ear as he had done into mine.

When I arrived at the Palazzo, the young Count received me with much *empressement*, and many expressions of pleasure; but I thought he looked ill and careworn—his handsome face had lost much of its former vivacity, his dark eyes were dull and heavy, and the hand he gave me was burning hot.

When I asked him if he ailed anything he shook his head and smiled. I thought the smile a very forlorn one, but, as he seemed unwilling to pursue the subject, I began to talk on other topics. He brightened a little as I told him of my recent travels, and by and by I ventured to ask if he was still an admirer of Bianca Fiaraja.

"She is a heartless coquette!" he burst out, vehemently, his face darkening, and an angry spark kindling in his eyes, "a vain, unfeeling—"

"Then you love her no longer," I remarked quickly,

as he paused, at a loss for words to express the conflicting feelings struggling in his breast.

"Love her!" he cried passionately, "I love her to distraction!"

"But," I remonstrated gravely, "if you think her heartless, surely—"

"That does not alter the matter. I repeat that I love her to distraction," he went on recklessly; "she has bewitched me."

"Is there any one else she prefers to you?"

"Yes," he rejoined fiercely; "she has, as you know, many lovers, but there is *one*—" he paused, and his fine features worked with passion—"one whom she seems to favour. You know Antonio Ubaldini?"

Yes, I knew the man of whom he spoke. Ubaldini was a handsome, dissipated young Roman Count, who had lately taken up his residence in Milan, and I knew nothing good of him. I said as much, and Egidio proceeded in a calmer tone.

"She seems to favour him, and yet, *Paolo mio*," so Egidio always called me; my name is Paul Chevenix, a cognomen he declared to be utterly unpronounceable, "sometimes I think her heart is really mine after all. Can those blue eyes look so softly at me if she is utterly indifferent to my love? Can she smile as she does when—when— Oh, how I envy you your English coldness," he went on, smiling

with something of his old gaiety of manner, "you are a very icicle, *per Bacco.* Are you English ever in love?"

Ah, Egidio, my friend, never trust to appearances. Cold, reserved, unimpassioned as I seemed, my love for Stella was as passionate, perhaps more tender, and certainly more lasting, than your frantic infatuation for Bianca. But I only smiled as he ran on about his love and his despair, his jealousy and his hopes. Poor fellow! he seemed quite oblivious of the flight of time—rather to my chagrin, for I was secretly burning to be conducted to the *salone,* where I knew the Countess and Stella usually sat.

At last my forbearance—I cannot truthfully say my patience—was rewarded; Egidio at last led the way to the Countess's apartments.

The Palazzo Albergati was a square, massive, and very ancient building, standing in one of the narrow side-streets of the city; heavy iron gates shut it away from the busy hum and bustle of the outer world, and when those great gates closed behind you, you seemed to be transported back to the Middle Ages, when the Visconti ruled in Milan, and Lombardy was a great power in the peninsula. The Albergati of to-day are not rich, and many rooms in their grand old Palazzo are dreary, dismantled, and desolate. The arras which draped the

walls of some of these unused chambers was dropping to pieces, the painted ceilings were half-hidden by cobwebs, and dust lay thick on the carved, velvet-covered chairs and inlaid marble tables. But the portion of the building occupied by the Countess, her son, and daughter was in decent repair; the rooms looked bright and cheerful with blazing wood fires; the marble floors were covered with carpets, and many precious works of art—heirlooms in the Albergati family—covered the walls. These rooms, however, were few in number—the *salone*, a small dining-room, Egidio's apartments, and a suite of rooms above—the latter occupied by the Countess and her daughter.

"I am so sorry, Paolo," said Egidio, as we crossed the wide corridor which separated his rooms from the *salone*, "that we have been obliged to put you in the older portion of the building, but I think you will find your apartments comfortable. I bade Battista brighten them up, and I know you admire our old lumber. *Diamine!* the bed looks as if my ancestor, Piero Albergati, the old villain who murdered his wife somewhere about the sixteenth century, had slept in it!" And with a careless laugh, Egidio opened the door of the *salone* and ushered me in.

## CHAPTER II.

### ONLY A DREAM.

THE Countess was a handsome woman of commanding stature, and with the remains of great beauty. She rose to receive me with her usual stately grace; I bowed low over the white, heavily-ringed hand she extended, and then I turned to greet Stella. I thought her beauty had a new glow, a new charm; her large eyes were radiant—dared I think my presence had brightened them?—her rich complexion, her lovely ripe red lips, her little pearly teeth, her raven hair, seemed more rarely beautiful than when I last saw her. I know not if she perceived the emotion I could not conceal, in spite of my "insular coldness," as I bowed before her, but she smiled very sweetly, and I was content.

I need not say that my first evening at the Palazzo Albergati was one of unmixed pleasure. Stella talked little, but was it not enough to watch the ever-varying expression of her lovely face? I was content to listen to Egidio's gay rattle about the Carnival—that season of reckless, extravagant fooling, so dear to the Italian heart—content to listen to the

Countess's graver talk about society in Rome and Milan—content to answer all her questions about her various friends in the former city, if only I might be permitted to steal an occasional glance at Stella's face as she bent over her embroidery. Once during the evening I was allowed to hold a skein of silk while she wound it, and then, as the Countess and Egidio were talking with animation on the other side of the hearth, I ventured to whisper a hope that I had not been quite forgotten during my absence in Rome, that Stella had sometimes remembered her brother's friend. I received no audible answer, but the deep blush, the bright smile, the tremor of the little hand winding the silk, told me that my hopes were not quite futile.

I retired to my bed that night in a very blissful frame of mind. I was far too happy to be depressed by the somewhat gloomy magnificence of the apartments prepared for me. Both rooms were large and very lofty, hung with tapestry, and furnished in a style which might, for all I knew, be coeval with the ancestor mentioned by Egidio. The bed-room opened into the sitting-room, and huge wood-fires were lighted in both, which somewhat counteracted the gloomy effect of the great carved oak bed with its funereal hangings of dark crimson velvet. But, as I said, Stella's smile and Stella's blush had cast

such a roseate glow over everything that I thought it all delightful. I drew a chair before the crackling wood-fire, and sat down to indulge in a pleasant reverie before turning in. The reverie lasted until the fire had sunk low, and the striking of a neighbouring clock warned me that it was midnight.

I shivered slightly as I drew away from the fire, and slowly began to undress. The room had looked cheerful enough while the red glow of the fire brightened it, but now, with no other light than that given by a pair of tall wax-candles on the dressing-table, and a shaded reading-lamp on a small side-table, it looked undeniably gloomy. The heavy curtains which draped the bed seemed full of mysterious shadows, the figures on the arras looked animate in the dim light, and I fancied a chill breath of air passed through the chamber making the candles flicker oddly.

Pshaw! it could only be fancy; the heavy doors, the solid window-frames, could admit no draught. But I shivered again as I extinguished the lights and got into bed. Fortunately I am one of those healthily constituted people to whom sleep comes easily. My head scarcely touched the pillow before I fell into a deep, dreamless slumber. I suppose I must have been asleep an hour or more, when something, I have no idea what, roused me, and I sat up

in bed, broad awake. The fire was quite out and the room in total darkness. I am not a constitutionally nervous man, but I must confess that an odd, eerie sort of feeling had taken possession of me. I remembered that Egidio had told me that my apartments were in the older portion of the Palazzo, and that old Palazzos are sometimes supposed to be haunted. Was my room haunted? In broad daylight such an idea would never have entered my head, but at night, in the impenetrable darkness of that room, the thought forced itself on me more than once. I fancied I heard a faint rustling noise close to me, and again the cold breath seemed to fan my cheek. Determined at last to prove whether or not it was fancy I sprang out of bed and struck a light. No; the room looked gloomy enough, but that was all. I saw nothing but the reflection of my own pale face in the mirror. What a fool I had been to be scared like a mere school-boy by a noise that was doubtless caused by rats. Yes; of course that old house must be infested by the noisy little rodents, and so the sounds I had heard were easily explained. There was a night-lamp at the bed-side, which I had omitted to light, not being in the habit of burning one. I kindled it now, however, for I was still vaguely uneasy, and the pitchy darkness of the room was little calculated to allay my uneasiness. Shivering

with cold, for now the fire was out the room felt chill as a vault, I crept back to bed and soon fell asleep.

But that time my sleep was not dreamless. I dreamt—if such a nightmare vision can be called a dream—that the room, for in my dream I seemed to be perfectly conscious that I was in my room at the Palazzo Albergati, was suddenly illumined by a ghostly glare of intense light, and that the figure of a woman, dressed in draperies of heavy black lace, came to my bed-side, and stood for some moments looking down at me. Never shall I forget the chilling, nameless horror that crept over me as she slowly bent down and as slowly lifted the heavy lace which shrouded her features. Great heaven! the lifted veil disclosed the features of Stella, but changed and disfigured by a fearful look of hatred. I lay spell-bound and moveless for some moments—spell-bound under the gaze of those vengeful eyes, and in those moments I saw every detail of the woman's face and dress, I noted even the bunch of yellow japonica flowers in her jetty hair. Then with a mighty effort I wrenched myself free from that horrible fascination, and with a stifled cry I awoke. "Thank Heaven, it is only a dream!" was my first thought, as I opened my eyes. The night-lamp burnt dimly, but one rapid glance round the room told me that neither ghost nor goblin was there.

The dream had been so horrible, so blood-curdling —the glance of those eyes had been so diabolical in their hatred, that I was determined to run no risk of a repetition of it that night. I remembered seeing a small case of books on one of the tables in my sitting-room; I would read until morning dawned. In spite of the piercing cold of that February night I carried out my resolution. The fire was quite out, and I had no means of rekindling it, so wrapping myself in my dressing-gown and a heavy fur-trimmed travelling-cloak I passed into the sitting-room, lighted the reading-lamp, and choosing a volume of Tasso's 'Gerusalemme Liberata,' I applied myself diligently to the study of my favourite poet, until the grey light of morning shone in at the window, and Egidio's faithful old valet and general factotum rapped at the door with my shaving-water and my morning cup of coffee.

## CHAPTER III.

### AT THE OPERA.

THOUGH Egidio questioned me closely as to the cause of my heavy eyes and unusual pallor, I managed to evade all his queries. For some indefinable reason

I shrank from telling him about the strange dream that had troubled my rest. Stella looked at me with such sweet compassion as she murmured something about hoping the signore had slept well in that great, gloomy room, that somehow the mystery and horror of the past night vanished as if by magic. The bright smile she shed on me, the warm touch of the little hand she gave me to kiss—for that pretty custom still remans in Italy—drove all unpleasant things from my mind. I forgot the vengeful gaze of the phantom-woman as I met the full, soft radiance of Stella's beautiful eyes; and long before night closed in again the remembrance of my dream had faded from my thoughts.

Egidio was in high spirits all that day, and in the evening he insisted on my accompanying him to the Scala, because Bianca Fiaraja was to sing in a new opera. I yielded to his entreaties with some unwillingness when I learnt that the Countess and Stella were not to go with us. I fancy that some whisper had reached the former about her son's infatuation for the lovely young prima donna, for a slight frown darkened her brow when Egidio mentioned at dinner where we were going. With an assumption of carelessness, he asked if the Countess meant to occupy the family *paleo* that night.

"*No, figlio mio,*" said the Countess, shortly, "your

sister and I attend the Marchesa Tornaguinci's reception this evening."

I thought that Stella looked a trifle disappointed, but she said nothing. Italian young ladies have small opportunity of asserting themselves, and the young Countess was still treated as a child by her relatives.

That night the grand opera-house was crammed from floor to ceiling. The Carnival was at its height, and Milan was full of visitors of all nations. It was a brilliant scene; and as the music of the overture filled the noble building with a flood of harmony, I could but feel the bright influences of the place and hour. I talked and laughed with Egidio and his friends; I quite forgot my superstitious fancies of the past night. The new opera was a complete success, and Bianca Fiaraja, radiant in smiles and diamonds, was applauded with a fervour and enthusiasm unusual in that musical but critical city. Even such a matter-of-fact Englishman as I, was carried away by the charm of the young singer's beauty and grace: Egidio was strangely moved; his eyes shone with almost wild brightness, his cheeks were flushed, his whole aspect betrayed an intense and overmastering excitement. Now and again I saw him cast an angry glance at a box on the grand tier, and as my eyes followed his I divined at once the cause of his

emotion. The Count Antonio Ubaldini was the occupant of the box, and he was making himself somewhat conspicuous by his energy in applauding, and by his audible expressions of admiration for the heroine of the evening. On the velvet cushions of the box reposed a bouquet of the huge dimensions proper to such tributes in Italy. The bouquet was composed entirely of deep crimson camellias, save for the white flowers which formed the name, *Bianca*, in the centre.

When Egidio's eyes fell on this, his eyes positively blazed with jealous fury, and I heard him mutter a fiery Italian oath under his breath, as he clenched his long, slender right hand. I had seen Ubaldini once or twice before, but it struck me for the first time that his handsome face had a somewhat sinister expression; the lips were too thin and closely compressed, the fine eyes were placed too near together, and the delicately pencilled brows ran in a slightly oblique line, a defect that imparted a Mephistophelian look to the whole countenance. As I gazed at him a cold shiver ran down my spine, and a sort of presentiment of coming danger took possession of my mind. I saw Egidio and Ubaldini exchange several defiant glances during the evening, but it was not until the curtain fell at the close of the opera, that my friend's smothered feelings of resentment broke

out. Ubaldini stood up in his box and leant forward, applauding with all his might, and crying, "*Brava! Bravissima! Bravissima, bella Bianca!*" as the prima donna stepped from behind the heavy curtain to bow her acknowledgments for the rain of flowers showered on her, and the thunders of applause which rent the air. The huge bouquet flung by Ubaldini's unerring hand fell right at her feet, and whether its size and beauty attracted her, or whether the letters of her name caught Bianca's eye, I know not, but she picked it up, and holding it in both hands smiled brightly. That was too much for Egidio. Poor fellow! I saw his olive cheek whiten suddenly; he rose from his seat and abruptly left the theatre. I hastened to follow, and before he had crossed the outer vestibule I overtook him.

"*Ah, Paolo mio!*" he said, taking my arm, and pressing it convulsively, "she loves him, I know it. Did you see her look up and smile when he threw his *maledetto* bouquet?"

"She certainly smiled," I replied, soothingly; for his agitation and distress were painful to witness; "but I am not so sure that she smiled at him."

"Don't you think so?" he answered, despondingly. "Paolo, she never looked at me once during the evening; not even when I threw the crown of white roses, the flowers she says she loves

best. She did not even deign to pick up *my* offering!"

It was very true; she had not. But then Egidio had thrown it quite early in the evening, at the conclusion of Bianca's *aria d'entrate*, when her *rôle* demanded her fullest attention. I told him so, but he refused to be comforted, and we walked home almost in silence. But before we reached the gates of the Palazzo his mood suddenly changed from depression to fury. He uttered the most fearful threats against Ubaldini, and swore that if he supplanted him with Bianca he would have his life. I had the greatest difficulty in preventing him rushing off there and then to Ubaldini's house.

"I will have vengeance," he kept repeating, excitedly, "the traitor! And he was once my friend!"

At last I persuaded him to wait until morning; there could be no harm in that, I urged. It was already past midnight; the Countess and Stella would have returned, they might perhaps be waiting for him now. The mention of his mother and sister had the effect I meant it should have. He grew calmer, and I at length succeeded in getting him into the house. The ladies had, however, retired; but Battista informed us that the *signori* would find supper prepared for them in the Count's own apartments. Thither we proceeded, and found that

the faithful old servant had arranged a dainty meal on a table drawn close up to the blazing fire, which crackled and roared on the open hearth. The room looked cosy and inviting, for the heavy crimson velvet curtains were drawn over the windows, and the supper-table was lighted with wax candles in old-fashioned silver girandoles; flowers and fruit lent their colour and fragrance to the simple but well-cooked meal. Egidio, however, would touch nothing, though he drank thirstily two or three glasses of claret. Battista watched his young master with an anxious expression on his withered old face.

"The Signor Count has no appetite to-night," he said sadly, "and yet he would find those cutlets excellent. I cooked them myself."

"I don't doubt their excellence, Battista," replied Egidio, wearily, "but I cannot eat to-night."

Again I saw the faithful servant's eyes dwell inquiringly on his master's face, but he said no more, and soon retired, wishing us "buona notti" with his usual grave politeness. When he was gone the Count drew his chair closer to the fire, shivering slightly as he did so.

"I will not endure this suspense longer," he said suddenly, after a silence of some minutes, during which he gazed moodily at the leaping yellow flames.

"I will speak to Bianca to-morrow, I will bid her choose between us."

"And you will make Bianca your wife—if she loves you?" I asked sharply, for I knew he was proud of his ancient name.

"Why not?" he answered irritably; "she is beautiful, gifted, pure as an angel. Is she not my equal?"

"But the Countess?"

"My mother must bow to my decision," he replied sternly. I had never before heard him speak so of his mother, whom he used to treat with the utmost deference and affection. "A man may certainly choose his own wife. I love Bianca as I never loved before and never shall love again—that is enough."

There was truth in what he said, and I could but acknowledge that he was right, though I knew the bitter disappointment such a marriage would be to his mother. Loving Stella as I did, and knowing the wonderful power love has over a man, my heart sided with him, although my reason told me that the fair prima donna was in point of truth no fit mate for Egidio Albergati—the last of one of the noblest and oldest families in Lombardy.

We talked no more that night. Egidio sat for some minutes still gazing into the fire, and mutter-

ing threats against his rival, but at last roused himself and wished me good night with something of his usual cheerfulness.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### A VISION OF THE NIGHT.

I RETIRED to my own room in a somewhat depressed frame of mind. I was uneasy on Egidio's account, for I could not forget the sinister expression of Antonio Ubaldini's eyes, or the treacherous smile which hovered on his thin lips when he met Egidio's angry glances. That man looked capable of any cruelty, I thought, shivering again with the same odd presentiment of coming danger which had crept over me at the opera. My room too, in spite of a blazing fire and lighted candles, had a curiously depressing effect on me, for the remembrance of my strange dream of the previous night returned with added vividness; perhaps because during the day I had succeeded in completely banishing it from my mind. Now that I was again alone in that antique chamber, with its funereal hangings and gloomy magnificence of carved oak and curious arras, I was oppressed with a sense of isolation. In that

rambling old building I was as utterly alone, as completely cut off from the rest of mankind, as if I had been the sole inhabitant of a deserted city. Such was my feeling at any rate, as I wrapped myself in my dressing-gown and drew a chair to the fire. I had a strange reluctance to go to bed; that horrid dream of mine seemed still to linger about the heavy faded curtains. I looked at my watch; it was past one o'clock, but I felt no inclination for sleep—sleep might bring a renewal of that dreadful nightmare vision of the dark woman with the yellow flowers in her hair. No; I would smoke another cigar before I betook myself to that hearse-like couch. The "soothing weed" might have the effect of composing my nerves. I smoked my cigar, and another, and yet another, but still I did not feel disposed for bed, although I began to feel drowsy; so I threw on a few more pieces of wood, of which Battista had thoughtfully provided a goodly store, and composed myself for a nap. I had hardly done so when I suddenly started up, every sense alert under the influence of a supernatural horror and *expectancy*—the word exactly expresses my then state of mind. I expected something, I knew not what. All my faculties were strained to a painful attention, every nerve thrilled as I waited with outward calm but inward dread for what was about

to happen. A cold, chilling blast suddenly swept through the room, though window and door were fast—a blast icy as that which sweeps off the *mer-de-glace;* the candles flickered a moment and then died down in their sockets, but the room was not dark; a ghastly glare suddenly illumined it—a light as brilliant but not evanescent as the lightning-flash; its unearthly radiance showed every detail of the carved furniture, every figure on the arras, every fold in the heavy draperies of the bed. While I was yet gazing round in mute bewilderment, a low, musical, but most fiendish laugh sounded close behind me. Shaking in every limb, dreading I knew not what, I turned and met the goblin eyes of the woman of my dream. Yes; there she stood before me, to all appearance instinct with the same life which animated my own veins; yet I knew that the beautiful form was not of earth, that the unholy fire which burnt in those dark eyes was not kindled by the passion and hatred of a living woman's soul. And yet—oh horror! how like the face was to Stella's. The rich southern loveliness, the low, broad brow, the slight, graceful yet queenly form—I had even seen Stella wear those yellow japonica flowers in her hair. As I gazed at her in mute amazement, the phantom laughed—a low, mocking, devilish laugh which showed all her pearly teeth,

and echoed round the room until it seemed as if a hundred fiends joined in a hideous chorus. Then she raised both hands, and I saw her count slowly on her finger—one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, *nine;* at the number nine she paused, and in a low, distinct voice she uttered the words, *One more.* Then she laughed again, and her eyes were fixed on me with the strange, mocking, seductive gaze I remembered so well as the crowning horror of that horrible dream. As I looked at her—for her eyes held me spell-bound—I felt something give way in my brain; I suppose the strain on my nerves was too great, for I fell forward on the ground in a dead faint.

How long I lay there, I know not—probably some hours, for the faint grey of dawn was stealing into the room when I came to myself. With a dim, confused sense that something had happened, though I could not remember what, I rose to my feet. My limbs were stiff and chilled; my brain felt numb and stupefied, and I staggered to a chair, for my head was dizzy, no doubt partly from the effect of my fall. After a while my scattered senses returned, my brain grew clear, and I tried to think calmly of the strange vision I had witnessed. I never doubted that I had seen what is popularly termed a ghost; but what the apparition portended I knew not. I had never heard that the Palazzo was haunted, nor

had I ever heard that the Albergati possessed that undesirable heirloom—a "family ghost." My musings were soon interrupted by a soft tap at the door. I started convulsively, for my nerves were still painfully unstrung, but I remembered it was probably only Battista with the coffee, so I called out "*Avanti*," rather irritably, I am afraid. The door opened and the old valet entered with his tray.

"Eh, signore!" he exclaimed, as he caught sight of me, "is anything the matter? You look as white as death, and, *Madre di Dio*, you have never been to bed," he added, setting down his tray and glancing at the unpressed pillows of my forsaken couch; "has the signore been ill?"

Battista's face had grown paler as he proceeded, and I thought I detected a look of uneasiness not unmingled with fear on his honest countenance.

"Shut the door, Battista," I said, glancing round nervously, "the morning air feels cold."

"But it is not the morning air that chills the signore," he said gravely, when he had done as I bade him.

"No," I answered shortly. "Battista, is this room haunted?"

"Haunted! The signore is joking."

"My good fellow, do I look like it?" I retorted tartly, for I saw that the old servant's cheeks were

pale as ashes, and that his hands trembled as he busied himself with the little coffee-service.

Battista was genuinely frightened, but he tried to put a bold face on the matter, and said with a forced smile,

"Ah, I see, the signore has perhaps heard the story of Madama Valeria, and he fancied—"

"Pshaw! I have never heard a word about Madama Valeria," I interrupted brusquely; "but last night the spirit of a woman—a handsome, dark-eyed woman with yellow flowers in her hair—"

"Hush, hush, signore! for the love of heaven," cried the old servant, laying his hand on my arm, "don't let any one hear your words," he panted, glancing fearfully round the room, as though the very walls had ears. He was pale to the lips, and trembled violently. His agitation was so painful, his distress so great, that I was convinced that the apparition I had seen on the previous night had visited the Palazzo Albergati before.

"This is not the first time such a thing has happened?" I inquired with a keen glance.

"Heaven help us, no," he replied in a low voice; "eight times has that horrible phantom appeared; this, if the signore did not dream, makes the ninth time."

The *ninth* time! I shuddered; it was the number

checked off by the phantom hand—the woman had paused at the number nine.

"And have these appearances been followed by any disaster—any?"

"Ah, signore," cried the old man, falling on his knees and burying his face in his hands, "whenever Madama Valeria is seen it means death to one of the Albergati." Here Battista fairly broke down, and sobbed aloud.

I am not superstitious, at least I was not then, and I tried to argue the man out of his terror, but he only shook his head, and refused to be comforted.

"It means death," he repeated in a broken whisper. "Eight times Madama Valeria has appeared, and each time the head of the family has met a violent death. There is a curse on the family, signore; for two hundred years no Count Albergati has died on his bed like a Christian."

"But what has Madama Valeria to do with it?" I asked wondering.

"Ah, signore, it is a terrible tale; I cannot tell it now, my heart is too heavy. The *signor conte* too—*poverino,* whom I carried in my arms, must he die so young, so beloved?"

"Nonsense, Battista," I said sternly, "the Signor Count is perfectly well; he is in no danger that I know of." I spoke boldly enough, for I wished to

calm the old man's agitation, but my heart sank as I recalled Antonio Ubaldini's sinister smile. Did danger threaten Egidio from that quarter? If so, I determined not to lose sight of him all that day and the next; he should not be exposed to Ubaldini's ill-will alone.

Battista made no reply, but conquering his emotion as best he could, and after exacting a promise that I would not tell any one what I had seen, he quitted the room with a slow, heavy step, leaving me to drink my coffee and ponder over the strange story I had heard.

## CHAPTER V.

### "SHE LOVES ME!"

It may be imagined with what painful feelings I met Egidio that morning. He, on the contrary, was in brilliant spirits, and he rallied me gaily on my woe-begone appearance, declaring that I had fallen a victim to some Milanese beauty, who had bewitched me with her dark eyes. I reddened guiltily at the accusation; I had indeed fallen a victim to a fair Milanese, but Egidio never guessed that Stella was the witch who had me in thrall.

That morning my thoughts were too painfully pre-

occupied for me to respond with readiness to the Count's witty sallies at my expense. Even later in the day, when we joined the ladies in the *salone*, Stella's bright presence for once failed to dissipate the gloom which hung over me like a pall. I was silent, distrait, and, I doubt not, a very stupid companion. But Stella with the tact of her sex and nation divined that I was not in the mood for conversation, and skilfully diverted Egidio's attentions from me to herself, by engaging him in a lively conversation about the various guests at the Marchesa Tornaguinci's reception.

Towards midday I noticed that Egidio's feverish and somewhat forced gaiety gave place to a suppressed excitement and nervous irritability, strangely unlike his habitual good-humour. At last, on the plea of smoking a cigarette in his own room, he quitted the *salone*. Battista's words still haunted me, I felt unwilling to lose sight of him; I dreaded I knew not what. Fearing he might leave the Palazzo without me, I murmured an excuse to the ladies and followed the Count to his own rooms.

He was writing when I entered—writing with feverish haste and eagerness. He looked up quickly at the sound of the opening door.

"Ah, Paolo," he said, with a forced smile, "you see I am determined to know my fate to-day. You

remember what I said last night. I am writing to Bianca to beg for an interview this afternoon."

Again that odd presentiment of coming danger crept over me.

"Well, *amico mio*," I said, after a moment's silence, "since you have made up your mind, I suppose there is no use arguing with you."

"Not the least," he answered quickly. He finished his note, sealed it, and then took up his hat.

"You are going to leave the note yourself?" I asked, divining his intention.

"Yes; I won't trust it to any one else."

"But you will let me accompany you?"

"Why not, *caro mio?*" he replied lightly.

So we left the Palazzo together, and bent our steps in the direction of the prima donna's house, where Egidio left his note, saying he would call for an answer in an hour's time.

That hour was, I think, one of the longest and most anxious I have ever lived through. Egidio was pale as death, his lips trembled with repressed emotion, his eyes shone with a feverish brightness. We did not exchange half a dozen words during our walk; but even the longest hour must come to an end.

"At last," muttered the Count, looking at his watch, "the hour is up, Paolo."

We retraced our steps to the signorina's door.

"Yes;" the servant said, in answer to Egidio's inquiry, "the signorina would see the Signor Count; would he be so good as to enter?"

A look of such radiant joy lit my friend's face that I shook off the reserve of my nation and grasped his hand impulsively.

"Good luck go with you, Egidio," I said, and turned away and left him.

But the same impulse which had impelled me to follow him from the *salone* now constrained me to wait until his interview with Bianca should come to an end. I had a curious reluctance to leave him, so I paced the long narrow street for more than an hour, keeping a watchful eye on the prima donna's house all the time.

It was the last day of the Carnival, what we in England should call Shrove Tuesday; a day when the mad gaiety of that wild season culminates in a burst of reckless mirth and folly, before the sober Lenten-time puts a stop to the revels.

That night I knew the streets would be given over to a mob of masquers, whose mad pranks sometimes pass all bounds. Egidio, like most Italians, dearly loved the excitement and wild frolic of the *veglione*, and as he would listen to no excuse of mine, I had promised to accompany him. He was to wear a scarlet domino and mask—I, sober black. As I

slowly paced up and down I momentarily regretted having promised to "play the fool," as I mentally termed it; masked balls were not particularly to my taste. But still I had promised, so there was an end to the matter.

At last my patient watch was over Egidio emerged from the dark door-way of the prima donna's house. One glance at his radiant face told me how his wooing had sped.

"Wish me joy, Paolo!" he cried, grasping both my hands. "I am the happiest man on earth—she loves me! Bianca loves me!"

In his joy and pride he unconsciously raised his voice as he uttered the last sentence.

"Hush," I whispered quickly, for a man suddenly turned the corner of the street, passing so close by us that his sleeve brushed mine, "you will be overheard."

Unless I was very much mistaken I had seen that handsome, sinister face before—it was Antonio Ubaldini.

Egidio, however, was too full of his new happiness to notice who had passed us; and taking my arm, he turned in the opposite direction. He talked rapidly as we went along, but I did not hear one word he said, for my mind was full of anxious thoughts. I felt certain that Ubaldini had heard those incautious

words, for in that moment's glance at his face I saw the look of rage and hatred which disfigured it. Ubaldini was not exactly the man one would care to have for a friend, much less an enemy, but now—heaven help Egidio, if he ever crossed his path! The look Ubaldini bent on him was positively fiendish in its malice. Should I warn my friend of his danger? No; the warning would only do harm. Egidio's hot Italian blood would be fired, his reckless temper would prompt him to defy his rival openly, and then who could tell what would happen?

Clearly my only course was to silently watch over his safety, trusting to luck and my English thews and sinews, to bring me safely through any danger I might incur on his behalf.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE VEGLIONE.

ALL the rest of that day Egidio seemed possessed with a spirit of restlessness. He was almost boisterously happy; he talked, and laughed, and jested with every one we met. His handsome face was flushed with excitement, and his eyes shone unnaturally bright. I was very far from sharing his good spirits, and more than once he rallied me on my

*melanconico Inglese*; in fact my uneasiness increased hourly.

Once during the afternoon we again passed the street where Bianca Fiaraja lived, and if my eyes did not deceive me, I saw Antonio Ubaldini emerge from, her house and walk rapidly away. Darkness was closing in, and that usually quiet spot was already crowded with masquers in every variety of grotesque attire. Fortunately Egidio, whose attention was occupied in trying to distinguish the face of some one he fancied he knew in the crowd, did not see Ubaldini, or matters must have come to a crisis there and then. The affair puzzled me a good deal. Was it possible that Bianca was playing Egidio false? I could not believe it, and yet Ubaldini's visit to her house looked suspicious.

I was still turning the matter over in my mind, when we returned to the Palazzo to don our dominos and masks. We were to dine at one of the cafés in the Galleria, so I did not see Stella again that day—I little thought under what different circumstances we should meet again!

After dinner we went to the theatre, where the *veglione* ball was in full swing. I need not enlarge on the gay scene, or describe the brilliant dresses of the masquers. Enough that the ball was considered a success. To me it seemed a dreary business, for

Stella was not there—*veglione* balls not being patronized by ladies of the higher classes—and I was not sorry when Egidio at last declared himself weary of the whole thing, and proposed that we should go home. I agreed willingly, and we left the theatre together. The streets were alive with people, talking, laughing, shrieking snatches of songs at the top of their voices. It was, in short, a regular saturnalia of discordant noise and wild riot.

Egidio's gaiety had quite evaporated. He linked his arm in mine as he hurried through the mob of excited revellers outside the theatre.

"Come along, Paolo," he said, wearily; "I am sick of all this noise and turmoil; let us go home by the Via —" (he mentioned the street where Bianca lived), "I should like to see the light burning in her window; she promised me that she would keep within-doors this evening, because I hated the idea of her being out among all this *canaglia*."

It was a glorious night, cold but clear, and the brilliant moonlight silvered the delicate pinnacles of the Duomo as we crossed the broad Piazzo. The great silent mass of buildings seemed to stand sentinel over the city, then given over to folly, watching for the dawn that would usher in another of the Church's solemn fasts. I glanced at my watch as we passed a gas-lamp; it was past mid-

night. Egidio proposed that we should take a short cut down one of the quieter thoroughfares, and we accordingly turned into a very dark, narrow, ill-paved and worse lighted street to the left of the Corso.

We had not gone ten paces before I became aware that we were being stealthily followed by three men in black masks and dominos. I did not like the look of the thing, though it was just possible that they meant us no serious mischief, only intending to play one of those practical jokes peculiar to the Carnival season. The road was, as I have said, dark and narrow, and I noticed that those three masquers kept carefully under the shadow of the houses. Before I could warn Egidio that we were being followed, I heard a low whistle from one of the men, and looking quickly over my shoulder I saw that they were silently joined by two or three others. The affair now had an undeniably ugly look. The narrow street had no opening to right or left; the tall houses looked dark and deserted, for not a single light shone in any of the windows—it might have been a city of the dead for aught of life stirring. We seemed cut off from all help by those high, frowning walls.

"Egidio," I said, under my breath, "look out for yourself; those men behind mean us no good."

Before the words were well out of my mouth

we were surrounded. Heavy blows rained thick and fast on my head and shoulders. I noticed that the band seemed led by one who took little part in the struggle which then ensued, but stood somewhat apart, awaiting the result of the unequal combat. Once or twice I tried to reach this silent ringleader; I had an impression which I wished to verify, that this masked leader of the band was Ubaldini. All my efforts to reach him were, however, frustrated by his companions. We were of course hopelessly outnumbered, but Egidio and I fought back to back for some moments. Our assailants were armed with stout sticks: we had none but nature's weapons, consequently the upshot of the business may be easily guessed. Though two or three well-planted blows from my clenched fist had placed a couple of the rascals *hors-de-combat*, the struggle was too unequal for it to be long undecided. Egidio got separated from me in the *mêlée*, and I vainly tried to regain my position near him. Fighting with the energy of despair, I contrived at length to get my back against the wall of one of the houses; there I made a stand. In old college days I had borne my part in many a town and gown row; and I needed all my science that night in the gay city of Milan.

For some minutes I held my enemies at bay, but several ugly blows dealt by those stout staves had

fallen on my head, and my brain began to reel; still I was able to keep my feet. How Egidio had fared since we were separated I knew not; but taking advantage of a momentary pause in the attack of the three ruffians pitted against me, I saw that he and the mysterious leader were engaged in a desperate but unequal struggle. Egidio, whose mask had fallen off, and whose white face was plainly visible in the brilliant moonlight, was bleeding profusely from a wound in the head, and once or twice I saw him stagger. I made a frantic attempt to join him, but my assailants seemed to divine my intention and pressed on me with redoubled vigour. A few minutes more and I was beaten to the ground, felled by a heavy blow on the temple. Stunned, bleeding, I tried to regain my feet; but a second blow finished me. I remember no more.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE VENGEANCE OF MADAMA VALERIA.

When consciousness returned to me I was in bed in a strange chamber, with a Sister of Mercy installed by my bed-side, and all the paraphernalia of a sick-room arranged with perfect neatness and system. I put my hand to my head and tried to

collect my scattered senses. Was that horrible scene in the street another dream?

"Have I been ill?" I said aloud. My own voice startled me; it was so weak and hollow. The nurse, a gentle, pale-faced woman, came forward and told me that I had been very ill, but that with Heaven's blessing I should soon be well again. While she was still speaking the doctor entered the room, and from him I resolved to get the information I wanted.

"Doctor," I said, feebly raising myself in bed, "tell me have you seen the Conte Albergati, and is he well?"

"*Ah, povcrino!*" answered the doctor, shaking his head, as he took a chair by the bed and calmly felt my pulse. "You were his friend, I know—and—"

"You speak in the *past* tense," I interrupted; "do you mean that—that—"

"The Count Albergati is no more," said he, mournfully. "If you will promise not to excite yourself—"

"For Heaven's sake speak out!" I burst out impatiently, for his hesitation half-maddened me.

"It is feared that the Count perished by the hand of an assassin," he said slowly; "he was found dead—stabbed to the heart—not five paces from the spot where the signore himself lay insensible."

"And his assassin is?"

"That no one knows for certain, but suspicion points to the Count Ubaldini, who was known to be his bitter enemy, and who disappeared on the night of the *veglione*, and has never been heard of since."

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When I was well enough to rise from my bed, I received a visit from the Countess Albergati, who, half-choked by tears and sobs, told me the sequel of the tragedy in which Fate had decreed I should play so prominent a part. Bianca Fiaraja, the innocent cause of so much sorrow, had flown to the Palazzo as soon as the rumour of Egidio's death reached her ears, and flinging herself at the Countess's feet had implored her pardon. The poor girl was almost beside herself with grief and remorse, and in her half-delirious anguish told her that Ubaldini had forced himself into her presence on the afternoon of that fatal day and taxed her with her love for Albergati. When Bianca proudly avowed her love, and added that she was now Egidio's promised wife, Ubaldini swore to be revenged, and left her a prey to a thousand fears. She had sent a note to the Palazzo to warn her lover of his danger, but it had been delivered too late.

Ubaldini, as the doctor had already told me,

disappeared the next day, and in spite of all the Countess's efforts to trace him, he had not been heard of since. Unfortunately I was not able to swear positively that he was the leader of the band of ruffians who attacked us, although I felt morally certain that it was so.

My own case, the Countess informed me, was at first considered hopeless. While still insensible, I had been conveyed to the nearest inn, from whence it was found inadvisable to move me. For many days I lay between life and death; but, she added, now that I was convalescent, I must be removed to their villa near Genoa, where she and Stella would do all in their power to nurse me back to health; she had not forgotten that I had saved her son's life once, and nearly lost my own in his quarrel.

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It was not until many months afterwards—not until Stella was my wife, and installed as the mistress of my home in an English county—that I heard the story of Madama Valeria. I did not venture to tell her of the apparition I had seen on the night before Egidio's death until time had somewhat dulled the shock of that dreadful event.

Stella grew very pale as she listened to my story.

"It is only too true," she said in a low voice; "there is a curse on our family. But," she added,

the tears springing to her eyes, "Madama Valeria's vengeance is consummated at last. Egidio was the last of his name; the race of Albergati is extinct."

"But who was this Madama Valeria?" I asked, gently stroking Stella's raven hair. "Have you ever heard, *carissima*, that you resemble her exactly, in face and form? not in character, of course," I added hastily, "since, from what I saw, I should scarcely think her disposition angelic."

"People say I am like the portrait of her, which still hangs in one of the rooms at the Palazzo," said Stella sadly; "it often makes me very unhappy that it is so."

"My dearest, why should it? *You* are good as you are beautiful, so why grieve over a chance resemblance. But let me hear Madama Valeria's story; I have long wished to know it."

"At the end of the sixteenth century my ancestor, Piero Albergati, the head of our house," began Stella gravely, "married Valeria, the only daughter of a wealthy Spanish noble. It was not a happy marriage, for the Count Piero was many years older than his young wife, and was a man of jealous, suspicious temper, while she was haughty, wilful, and passionate. She had been the spoilt darling of her parents, and when she married Count Piero she determined to have her own way in everything, but he was equally

determined to have his. Theirs was in all respects a most unsuitable union. Valeria loved gaiety, admiration, and flattery; and above all, she hated the solemn state and ceremony in which her husband liked to live. The Count was desperately jealous of his young wife, and would hardly suffer her to speak to any of the gay young Milanese nobles who crowded round her whenever she appeared in public. Matters went on in this way for some time; the Countess living in a state of ill-concealed discontent, secretly hating the husband who ruled her with a rod of iron, and longing to break out into open rebellion against him; the Count always watchful, jealous, and distrustful. At last in an evil hour Valeria met a certain Cavaliere Andrea Strozzi, a young Roman noble, then on a diplomatic mission to Milan. He was handsome, gallant, accomplished—in every respect the opposite of her grim, tyrannical husband, and Valeria soon learnt to love him with all the warmth and passion of her heart. They met in secret; Andrea, made bold by love, asked her to fly with him from Milan, Valeria consented; and everything was soon arranged for their flight. It is supposed that the Countess's waiting-woman, who was in her mistress's confidence, betrayed the secret of their intended elopement to the Count. But the latter dissembled so well that his wife never guessed

the woman's treachery. On the evening of the day on which the fatal step was to be taken the Count, with many expressions of friendship, bade the Cavaliere to supper in the Countess's apartments. Andrea fearing to awaken suspicion by a refusal, made his appearance at the Palazzo at the hour appointed, though doubtless not without secret misgivings, for a guilty conscience—"

"Makes cowards of us all," I interrupted, smiling at my little moralist's grave face.

"Quite true; your immortal William never wrote a truer line," said Stella, whose English studies were progressing in the most satisfactory manner under my guidance.

"Count Piero received Andrea with smiles and fair words," resumed my wife; her charming face wearing a very grave expression as she proceeded. "He bade him welcome to his house, and leading him by the hand brought him into the presence of the Countess, who, as you may imagine, was half-dead with terror and rage. Supper was spread in Valeria's apartments—those occupied by you during your stay at the Palazzo, Paolo—and the Count, so tradition says, was in high spirits during the meal, pressing Andrea to partake of the delicate viands and rare wines with which the table was spread. At last the servants quitted the room, and the three

were left alone. Then the Count filled an immense jewelled goblet to the brim, passed it to the Countess, and bade her offer it to their guest. Valeria, whose fears were allayed by her husband's seeming good-humour obeyed, and Andrea drained the goblet to the dregs. As he set it down empty, the Count laughed long and loud, and springing to his feet, he cried: 'Woman, your lover dies by your hand; that wine was *poisoned!*' It was too true; and the poison did its work with awful rapidity. Andrea rose to his feet, gazed wildly round for a moment, staggered, and fell in convulsions at Valeria's feet. The wretched woman flung herself on his body in a wild outburst of grief; shrieking aloud, she beat her breast and tore her long black hair as she pressed her lips to Andrea's livid brow. In a few moments all was over. Andrea died in fearful agony in her arms, and then Valeria rose to her feet and faced her husband. The servants, alarmed by her shrieks, burst into the room. In their presence she accused her husband of the murder of his guest, and in the same breath called down the curse of heaven on him and on all his descendants until the name of Albergati should be no more. 'The head of your house shall always die of violent death; happiness shall never be your portion; misfortune shall dog your footsteps. My hatred and my curse

shall follow you to your life's end; and when the worms have eaten this body, my spirit shall haunt you. Even after death I will pursue your accursed race with my just vengeance. When danger hovers over the head of your house, I will return to earth and exult over one more victim. And now, Piero Albergati, traitor, coward, murderer, I can die, and defy you even in death!' Plucking her husband's dagger from its sheath, the Countess plunged it in her bosom, and fell on the body of her lover, dead.

"It was not until many years after Madama Valeria's death, when their only son lay dead on the field of battle, that the Count Piero confessed his crime. The curse had already begun to work, and the wretched woman's own son was the first victim of her vengeance. Tradition says that the Countess's spirit appeared to her husband the night before the young Count's death, and again to a faithful servant of the family before Count Piero himself fell beneath the dagger of an assassin. And so, through nine generations the sins of the father have been visited upon the children, until Madama Valeria's vengeance has at last been sated."

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The world often wonders why the beautiful and gifted Bianca Fiaraja has never married. Titled suitors have wooed her, but in vain, for she is faithful

to the memory of her dead lover. Ubaldini's crime was never proved, but he did not reappear in Milan. Years afterwards a rumour reached me that one of the band of hired ruffians, who set on us the night of the *veglione* ball, confessed that Ubaldini had instigated the attack, and had himself plunged the dagger in Egidio's heart. But all trace of the miscreant had long since been lost, and my poor friend's murderer, for all I know, still cumbers the earth.

The Countess Albergati never recovered the shock of her son's untimely end. She died within a year of my marriage to Stella; and so the name of Albergati is extinct, and Madama Valeria's vengeful spirit is at rest.

# A BLIND MAN'S NOTIONS ABOUT GHOSTS.

"I dreamt, my lady came and found me dead,
Strange dream! that gives a dead man leave to think."

Now I am often tempted to alter Romeo's words and read,

"Strange dream! that gives a blind man leave to see;"

for it will surprise no one to hear that in my dreams I see as plainly now as before my infirmity overtook me. Yet, conscious that I am blind, I still behold in my sleep people and places with whom and with which I was once familiar. Yet, knowing I cannot see, I still see; and without any surprise at this odd contradiction. This is only one more proof that of all the marvellous phenomena of life, dreaming is, perhaps, the most marvellous.

"Strange state of being; for 'tis still to be:
Senseless, to feel, and with sealed eyes to see."

Thus much can be truly said for us all; but, remembering that my eyes are always sealed, in one

way the marvel is increased; for sleeping or waking, I live, as it were, in a world of dreams, never, of course, seeing anything in either state through the medium of the optic nerve. The difference, consequently, between the sleeping and the waking state is, in this respect, not so marked as might at first be expected; for, unless by an effort I remind myself that I am blind, I see my friend, after a fashion, while I am broad awake and talking to him, nearly as vividly as I should do at times in a dream; the fact that in reality I cannot see him in either state being scarcely more present to me in one than in the other. Indeed, in accordance with the perversity of dreams generally, I seem to be more intuitively conscious of my deprivation of sight whilst dreaming than at any other time, although, as I have hinted, the knowledge of the strange anomaly inspires no wonder; whereas, naturally it does when, being awake, I remind myself of my infirmity. Until I do this, however, the familiar voice, the mere peculiar touch of the hand, is sufficient to bring the personality of my friend instantly before me. I mean I have a visual image of him, not necessarily in his exact likeness (that could hardly be; for perhaps he is one whose acquaintance I have made since the curtain fell), but an image, an entity, a being with eyes, nose, and mouth, like the rest of

us; not distinct in form of feature, colour of hair, and the rest, but still sufficiently so in some general way to become physiologically identified with the man I know, to stand for me as the presentment of that man; and each friend I have known since my blindness offers to me some special presentment. And this image, vague, indefinite, as it may be, starts into my presence the moment my friend opens his lips; and thus he will appear the same blurred, indefinable, but still perfectly recognizable and unmistakable being when I chance to dream of him. Nay, when I do dream of him he often becomes endowed with more definite personal characteristics; and thus the image in the dream becomes so far more real than that person's image whilst talking to him when awake. With those, however, whom I have known in earlier days, and can remember clearly, the illusion is, of course, more complete, and, as it were, stronger in a dream than when they are with me in my waking hours. When one of these speaks to me, there he at once stands out before me as he used to do. Time has made no ravages with him; and unconsciously I behold not only his features, but his expression—the kindling eye, the dilating nostril, the cheery smiling lips. These are all apparently visible. Yet, let me but pull myself up for a moment, and say, "Where is this

creature?" and lo, he has but little more substantiality than when I encounter him in my sleep, perhaps not so much. Being but an air-drawn vision, a phantom of the mind, an image imprinted only on what I may call the retina of my mind in both cases, he has more visible existence in my slumbers than anywhere else. Hence, I am inclined to urge, in a much more literal sense than the expression is generally used, the life of a person who has become blind is but a dream. Literally he is, or his existence is, "such stuff as dreams are made on, and his little life is rounded with a sleep." Of course I refer to visual images.

I have often been asked to set down as clearly as I can some of my ideas on these points, and to describe the sensations I have in dreaming; and while I am complying I am led into a few speculations as to what are called ghostly apparitions, because I am inclined to think that no people see so many ghosts as the blind. If I have made myself clear in what I have written above, it can be understood that all that is ever visible to the blind, all that their mind's eye can ever compass or conjure up, must be ghostly, "like the baseless fabric of a vision," fading, ever fading, and yet being ever renewed. They, too, being mortal, like the rest, are influenced, but in a greater degree, by what we hear

spoken of as the inner life of a man. Now the blind exist exclusively—I mean so far as visual images are concerned—in an inner life, the outer darkness throwing them eternally in upon themselves; seeing by the light that is within them, not, perhaps, always introspectively, but—I had almost written materially, positively—their very surroundings are, as it were, in themselves, because what they know of their surrounding is inwardly or self-evolved. Their room, or, which is the same thing to them, the aspect of it, is only within themselves, entirely a mental picture. Lacking sight, the most superior sense, they draw but the merest suspicion from without of what really is, what really exists; for their touch, their smell, their hearing, give them but a hint; the substantiality is created by themselves, in their own especial and peculiar manufactory, lying deep in the remotest recesses of their consciousness. The hardness of the wall, the softness of the pillow, the smoothness of satin, the roughness of frieze, the harshness or the contrary of a voice, the sweetness of the rose, or pungency of the pipe, are but so many crude bits of raw material, out of which the blind, within themselves, build up the actual presentment of the substantiality; and this being so, much of the very aspect of these substantialities must depend on the medium, on the action of the machinery through

which the slight materials of which it is composed pass in the process of manufacture; and ere it is realized as a complete whole in the mind of the manufacturer, or, in other words, the look of the substantiality, reality, embodiment—call it what we will—must depend on the temperament and character of the blind builder. As with other men, upon his temperament will depend his conception of his environment and the general circumstances of his existence. By his temperament, as with other men, they will be shaped and coloured; and still, as with other men, upon his interpretation of them must depend the amount of pleasure and happiness he will get out of his life; only that, unlike other men, his actual conception of his surrounding cannot be definite. At the best, they must be phantasmic, and consequently more open to misinterpretation and more liable to change. Then, again, he still being mortal, has his moods, attributable perhaps to health, perhaps to a varying temper, which will modify, alter, twist, exaggerate, contort, as the case may be.

Granting then that these, roughly speaking, are necessarily some of the conditions upon which a blind man is condemned to pass through the world, is it not just possible that the man happily possessed of all his faculties and being of a favourable tempera-

ment, that is, nervous, sensitive highly imaginative, and, of course, still subject to the influence of health; is it not possible, I say, that such an one, who declares that he has seen a ghost or has experienced some strange vision or presentment, of which a distinct vision was a part, has been for the moment either dreaming, as the blind dream, or, being awake, has seen as the blind see?—the blind, to whom all is but a vision, and to whom all their fellow-creatures are merely ghosts. I do not know, but it seems to me that hosts of nervous, sensitive, imaginative people, and those who are often what we call absent, dreamy, thoughtful mooners, may be overtaken at times by some condition which is akin to that of blindness. They withdraw themselves so entirely within themselves as to be utterly unconscious of the precise nature of their surroundings, making no use, for the time, of their optic nerve; they live in a world of their own, just as the blind do, constructing it and peopling it, as the blind do, from their inner consciousness and previously acquired knowledge; a dream-world, in short, in which "all things are possible."

I may be told there is nothing new in this, and that everybody is aware that this state is common among the seeing; but I believe that it is of far greater intensity in some cases than is supposed;

and it is this very intensity—just this very reality of the unreality—which makes the temporary visionary world, which some seeing people create for themselves within themselves, exactly like the world of ghosts and spectres, dreams and phantasms, in which the blind, perforce, perpetually dwell.

We hear of marvellous ghost stories, more or less well authenticated; and some time ago one of our newspapers teemed with records of ghostly personal experiences, any one of which almost might serve to illustrate my notion. But without selecting any special one, let us take the gist of what a certain class of these point to—the commonest class—that is, where some beloved one, far away, appears, so to speak, *in propriâ personâ*, and in more or less substantial form, of course to the intense astonishment and terror—to use the mildest term—of the witness. Later on it is discovered that this beloved one has at that identical moment been in great peril of his or her life, or has actually died. This, I say, is the pith of the commonest sort of ghost story, and has formed the basis of many popular traditions, novels, and dramas, that of the *Corsican Brothers* being a notable example; and, in a way, its very commonness seems to make it confirmatory of what few people doubt, viz. that the mind of one person may be under the sway of another, either through intense sympathy or

love, or through a superior strength of will, and which sway is not appreciably lessened by what we understand as physical distance. Given, then, the existence of this sway in some particular case of a seeing person, and where the natural conditions are favourable to him—favourable, that is, in that he is either ordinarily or temporarily, through a low state of health, nervous and sensitive, and is, moreover, normally what is called a person who lives in the clouds—and it shall be quite possible for him, according to my notion, to pass into a mental state entirely consonant with that of the blind. Oblivious of all facts around him, wrapped up in his own thoughts—and which, if not consciously, are, nevertheless, tending towards the absent one whom he dominates or is dominated by, or between whom and himself there exists some sort of bond—he sits brooding or is lying in bed, when, hey, presto! he suddenly thinks he sees the absent one standing before him, palpably, unmistakably, and precisely as a blind man would do in similar circumstances. Of course, the mental condition of both is not easy to define, but it is, I fancy, very much akin—much more so than we at first might think. To the blind man the presence would be a positive reality—as real, that is, as anything he ever sees; and if, in a way, the man not blind is reduced to the same position for the time, as I feel

inclined to insist he is, the ghost is as much a reality to the one as to the other; at any rate, it takes the same hold, making the same impressions, and producing the same mental results. The only difference would be, when the first effect of the surprise, momentary or prolonged, had passed, the blind man would start to his feet, and, recalling himself to himself, would find the vision replaced by some common tangible objects, and the usual blank which is ever before him. The seeing one, on the contrary, pulling himself together, would, with his true sight—by the exercise of his optic nerve—dispel the vision, and find it replaced by his ordinary surroundings, a consciousness of which he would recover instantly; but he would still assert that he had seen a ghost. And truly he has; *but he has been blind while he saw it!* His physical retina has been obscured as thoroughly as his blind brother's; but the "mental retina" has carried the truth home to the mind of each with equal force. In each case the ghost has existed—has been created—within themselves; and if it be a verity to the blind, as I have endeavoured to show it is, why should it not be to the seeing? It has been built up out of a previously acquired knowledge of the reality, the impress of which is mysteriously, but indelibly, graven on some of those tablets of the sensations called memory, and which we carry about

with us without thinking of them, because, as is said, they take up so little room. These deeply imprinted characters have leaped suddenly into a sort of definite shape and meaning, when summoned by circumstances accidentally, but imperceptibly, associated with them, and have become the ghost of their original form and substance.

With reference, however, to this previously acquired knowledge of the reality, I am of course supposing the case of a blind man who has not always been afflicted. To speak colloquially, he must not have been blind from birth, but must, of course, at some time in his life have had the opportunity of knowing, visually, what things are like; otherwise he could not form for himself any idea of the aspect of the absent one, any more than he could form any idea of colour or light, and, consequently, could not be conscious of a ghost in the sense of which I am speaking of one. Therefore, on the precise nature of his mental pictures, I do not pretend to speculate. He would have no visual images, though probably he would get an equivalent ghost out of an imagined utterance of a voice, or by the fancy that his sensitive finger-tips were in contact with a familiar form. I mean that a man born blind might dream or imagine whilst awake, as vividly as when asleep (always supposing him to be of a favourable temperament), that

he had heard his friend speaking to him, that he recognized his voice, and that he felt his familiar form beneath his hand as he passed it over face or figure. In this way even he would see or be conscious of a ghost, but it would be an aural or a tactual one, or perhaps both. The mental embodiment or substance would be constructed equally, in a way, from previously acquired knowledge through the sense of hearing and feeling—knowledge acquired from what his ears or fingers had taught him, by listening to, or coming in contact with, the fellow-creatures with whom he was familiar. This, however, is a digression. I return therefore to my notion that the seeing man who beholds a ghost does so only when he is reduced, mentally, to the same level as that in which I and the rest of the blind have to pass our lives. He, just as we do, summons from the past, spectral appearances, such as are *our* daily and only companions. With the present as it positively exists in his immediate environment, he, being in a ghostly mood, has no more to do than we have. He sees simply as we see, with this advantage: that he can at will dispel his phantom troop by letting in upon them the fierce light of the actual, which we can never do. The plain fact, therefore, being in so many words that those who see ghosts are for the moment blind dreamers (whether awake or asleep is of no

consequence), there is nothing very extraordinary in their sometimes dreaming about, and therefore seeing, any one with whom their minds are linked. And if they chance so to dream and so to see a ghost on some momentous occasion, there is nothing very extraordinary in that occasion tallying at times with a crisis in the life of the absent one, for, for the moment, they are dreamers with "sealed eyes." It may be the coincidence in many instances alone which brings this about, but, being rather a startling one, it is not unnatural that it should be set down as supernatural. On the other hand, I do not pretend to say that it is never supernatural, or that it is not due to this mysterious link between mind and mind, and which is not affected by distance. It may be: I am not discussing this side of the question. I only am disposed to contend that the mere apparition is the air-drawn spectre created out of a previous knowledge of realities during a temporary, abnormal, mental, and physical condition, corresponding to that which is normal with the blind.

There is another way of looking at the subject from my point, and of speculating on it further by a transposition of the conditions. Just as ordinary folks possessed of their eyes must, as I assume, when they behold a ghost, be more or less reduced to a state of dream-like blindness, so may the blind be

brought into a sort of ghost-seeing mood by a dream-like restoration to sight. The "strange dream that gives a blind man leave to see" may be illustrated by a story, said to be well authenticated, of a lady, who, having lost her sight for many years, imagined suddenly that for several moments her vision had been restored to her. She was sitting with her family, whose appearance she, of course, well remembered, in her drawing-room, and with the aspect of which she had also been previously acquainted, when she declared with a terrified start, precisely as if she had seen a ghost, that she could see where and with whom she was sitting. She rose from her chair, and in sudden amazement exclaimed, "Why, I can see you all plainly, as I used to do!" and covering her eyes with her hands for a moment, she had half ejaculated a thanksgiving, when she dropped back into her seat moaning out that she was blind again. Nothing would ever convince her that she had not been temporarily re-endowed with sight. But her assertion, when tested by a physical examination of her eyes by the oculist, was proved to have been, beyond all doubt, without foundation. The physical condition of her optic nerves made it absolutely impossible that her sight could ever have come back to her, even for an instant, save by a miracle. She nevertheless maintained that what she had

stated was true; and nothing could ever shake her belief.

The explanation given by the oculist, with whom I have conversed, was exactly that which I should have expected. The poor lady, sitting comfortably in her easy-chair, "with all appliances and means to boot," had just for one second dozed, and, in that momentary sleep, had been visited by a dream of extraordinary vividness, in which her mental retina had received and conveyed to her mind an exact presentment of the scene, practically identical with that by which she was surrounded. In short, she had seen a ghost or ghosts. The phenomena of dreaming are too mysterious to allow of much useful speculation on the subject; but it is fair to assume that it was only the coincidence of her dreaming a dream that practically corresponded in character with the reality of her environment at the moment —that it was her family she beheld, pretty much as they were in reality grouped about her—that made her imagine that her sight had been restored. Had she, instead, dreamt in that moment, however vividly, of some entirely different scene, she never could have been beguiled into the belief that her eyesight had returned. She would have accepted the vision as a vision and nothing more. The accident alone, I repeat, of her having dreamt of her family estab-

lished the illusion in her mind. Whether or not the presence of those near and dear to her influenced the nature of her dream no one can say. I think it possibly did, upon the principle above alluded to of the influence of the strong mental bond of union likely to exist between people closely allied to each other by blood and affection—the "Corsican Brothers" principle, in fact. Anyway, whatever it was which caused her to dream as she did—whatever it was which created in her mind the sense of seeing what she saw—the vision itself could have been nought else but a ghostly one; and it was only its intense vividness, confirmed by the literal facts which accidentally existed at the moment, that convinced her of its reality.

Now, supposing the lady had not been blind, and had had her momentary dream, and some one, observing her nod and her eyes close, had said, "Aunt, or mother, you are going to sleep," she would have indignantly rejected the aspersion upon her politeness, and would have said, as people do in similar circumstances, "Nonsense; I saw you all as I see you now. I have never lost sight of you for a moment; going to sleep, indeed—absurd!" And again, had a vision of equal vividness and brevity during a momentary doze visited the couch or chair of any one with all her senses intact; and had it chanced to consist of a

scene in which figured some absent one, and who might have happened, by coincidence, at that same moment to have been going through some crisis in his fate, why the dreamer, being for the instant, according to my notion, reduced to the level of a blind person, would have declared she had seen a ghost. Roundly speaking, then, everybody and everything that we see with our "mind's eye," when awake or asleep, partakes, I submit, so closely of the character of those apparitions which are said to be ghosts, that it is, after all, a mere question of degree in their vividness and our imaginativeness as to the effect they produce on us, or as to how much we believe in their supernatural origin. Therefore, so far from not believing in ghosts, I believe we all see them—constantly. Unless, however, some special coincidence chances to give to any vividly mind-drawn picture an especial significance, we are so accustomed to live in their midst that we take no heed of their existence. In dreamland, or in real-land, "with sealed eyes to see," is no such marvel, then, when all is said and done; for, if we are but rightly attuned in mood, temperament, and disposition, we attach importance more or less great to any circumstances that coincide; and the stronger the coincidence and the larger our capacity for drawing mental pictures, the more and the stronger our belief

in the so-called ghosts—the more and the stronger our inclination to attribute their appearance to the supernatural.

Not until we test their substantiality—the seeing man with his actual eyes, the blind man with his fingers—do we arrive at the truth that they are nothing but phantoms of the brain, existing merely on our mental retina, and having nothing to do with our physical one. But, having arrived at this fact, I may say, with Prospero, "these our actors, as I foretold you, are all spirits, and are melted into air—into thin air."

# A COACHFUL OF GHOSTS.

## THE STORY OF A NOBLE HOUSE IN THE REIGN OF TERROR.

### CHAPTER I.

"MONSIEUR LE VICOMTE DE MAURY." This announcement made one evening in January 1792, at the outer drawing-room door of the Château de Grou, had rather a singular effect on six well-bred people who were sitting there.

The old Marquise, enthroned in a high arm-chair beside the yawning chimney with its wood-fire, made an exclamation, and threw a half-fierce, half-laughing glance at her son the Marquis, who started up from the table where he was playing backgammon with his wife's cousin, the Chevalier de Mazan. The younger Marquise, a thin precise-looking woman of five-and-forty, pinched her mouth up into its most forbidding expression, and raised her eyes with a frown from the tapestry-frame over which she and her daughter-in-law, the Comtesse de Grou, were bending and blinding themselves. The Comte,

seeing his father's hasty movement, got up too from his chair in the background, and came forward one or two steps with a dignified slowness which was in itself a reproof to his perturbed relations.

There was no time to say or do anything. The visitor, welcome or not, walked forward into the room and met these six pair of eyes, curious, angry, contemptuous, cold, astonished, haughty. Not one friendly look, not one sign of welcome. The visitor's cheeks, already ruddy from the cold air outside, took a deeper shade as he exchanged formal bows with the inmates of this inhospitable salon. His appearance at least did not deserve such a reception. A handsome, spirited-looking young man, a head and shoulders taller than the other gentlemen present, with one of those expressive faces that give unprejudiced people an instant feeling of liking and confidence. At the Château de Grou, however, M. de Maury was regarded as an enemy, for several reasons, and it was not without hesitation that the old Marquise brought herself to treat him as an equal, and politely motioned him to a chair.

"Sit down, monsieur, I beg of you," said she. "You are out late this evening, but perhaps it is the fashion. It is long since I lived in Paris, and I do not know what they do there now."

"Pardon me, madame, for appearing at such a

strange hour," said M. de Maury. "But, as you may imagine, it is only an affair of the greatest importance that has brought me here at all."

"Indeed! And to what do we owe this unusual honour?" said the Marquise blandly.

"Madame, it is—it may be—a matter of life and death."

"Is it possible? Before we come to anything so very serious, may one ask for the last news from Paris? I should not care to leave the world in a state of ignorance. What are your good friends the patriots doing now, monsieur?"

"There is no special news this week, madame. It is still disturbed, of course, but the people will calm down in time. If the Constitution we have made is allowed to work, we shall have peace and prosperity, in which all our past confusion will be forgotten."

"Then, monsieur, we shall all have to pray for bad memories," said the Chevalier.

"What is your saint, your hero, doing? M. de Lafayette—what do you call him—Motier?" said the Marquis, laughing. "By the bye, let me apologize for my ill-trained servants, who gave you your title at the door. The fact is, monsieur, I forget who you are. Citoyen—"

"Bernard Lavinge," said the young man, smiling a little. "One must be willing to sacrifice empty

distinctions at the wish of the nation. But, monsieur —let me ask you—was anything great and sublime ever done without a touch of absurdity in the doing it?"

"Perhaps not; but one wants the sublimity to excuse the absurdity," said the Marquis. "And to speak candidly, I have seen absurdities enough, and horrors enough, in these last two years; but my very strongest spectacles have not availed to detect the sublimity."

"There is something sublime on the tapis now, however," said the old Marquise. "A matter of life and death. Will Monsieur de Maury break it to us before he enters on the subject of Monsieur de Lafayette?"

"Madame," began Bernard, with a little hesitation.

His eyes wandered once or twice round the room, as if to reassure themselves of something.

"Do not disturb yourself," said Madame de Grou. "All our hearts are strong enough to bear bad news. At least, I can promise that you will see no weakness."

The Vicomte bowed.

"A report has reached us, madame," he said, "that you are thinking of emigration. It has spread itself in the town and in the neighbouring villages. People say that you mean to drive away in state in your large coach with all your household, without any

attempt at concealment. Mesdames et messieurs," he went on, rising from his chair, and looking earnestly round on all the dimly-lit faces, "believe what I say, and do not distrust me. In the present state of people's minds, you cannot attempt anything more dangerous. Your carriage will not be allowed to pass. Seeking liberty, you will find yourselves in prison. I warn you honestly, and as a friend."

There was a moment's pause after the young man had spoken.

"And, as a friend, what would you advise us to do?" said the Marquis.

"Ah, cher monsieur, thank you a thousand times! Will you indeed trust me, and take my advice? Then let me implore you to stay here, and not to think of emigration. You are comparatively safe here. There are still some who respect you. And my father's influence will do a great deal for your protection. Ah, let me hear that you have given up all thoughts of this mad and dangerous scheme."

The Chevalier glanced at the Comte and laughed a little sneeringly, as he leaned over the backgammon board. The Marquis smiled too.

"And this is your new French liberty!" he said. "A man cannot drive away from his house in his own carriage without being stopped and imprisoned. Curious, truly!"

"One has not far to seek for an explanation in this case, my dear Marquis," said the Chevalier de Mazan, nodding his head with a side-glance at M. de Maury. "In fact, you may take it as a general rule that, where the people rise unexpectedly, they are egged on to it by some person superior in birth to themselves—some person with a motive. But such persons are too apt to spoil their own game by a lurking wish to stand well with all parties."

Monsieur de Mazan was generally considered the genius, the wit, and the wise man of the family. Everybody hung upon his words, smiled, and looked to see how they were taken by the object of them.

"I am glad to think," said Bernard, "that Monsieur de Grou does not share in the vile suspicions of monsieur his cousin. He has known me too long—"

"And have I had any reason to increase my esteem with my knowledge?" said the Marquis, with a little bow.

The young man was about to answer, when an appearance at the door which separated the salon from another room beyond checked the words upon his lips.

A girl, dressed in white, very slim and graceful, with a small fair face and large frightened blue eyes, stood still in the tapestry-framed doorway, and gazed at him. His low bow seemed to bring her back to

herself. She answered it with a sweeping courtesy, and glided round with light steps on the polished floor, behind the two younger Mesdames de Grou and their frame, to a corner behind the old Marquise's chair.

"Have you brought me my fan, Léonore?" said the old woman.

"Here it is, madame," said the girl, in a low voice, putting it into her hand.

But while she spoke and moved she never took her eyes away from the Vicomte de Maury, who stood opposite to her with his face to the whole circle. Her entrance seemed to silence them all for a moment. The Chevalier still smiled, with a snake-like contentment, keeping his black eyes fixed on Bernard; but the Marquis looked a little disturbed, and his face twitched angrily.

The young Comtesse de Grou, a weak, impatient-looking little person, glanced up at her husband, who was standing near her, with an expression which said, "Finish this scene, for pity's sake!" And the Comte, stepping forward with a Louis-Quatorze air, ventured to ask M. de Maury whether they might expect any further information.

"I have warned your family of their danger, monsieur," replied Bernard quietly, "and I still hope, not without avail. I must endure your suspicions, which I might have expected. I am happy to know

that there is one person, at least, who will not share in them."

"Never, never!" came a quick half-whisper from behind the Marquise's chair.

Bernard bowed gratefully.

"Allons, this is too much!" said the Chevalier, in a low tone, to M. de Grou. "Will you complete this business, or must I?"

But the old Marquise was doing it for them.

"Adieu, then, monsieur," she said, rising. "We beg to offer you our thanks. If your warning is founded on fact, we probably shall never meet again. I would only ask you to use your influence and that of monsieur votre père to make our stay in prison as short as possible."

M. de Maury bowed low, and walked out of the room. The Marquis waved his son back, and followed him himself.

"Listen to me a moment, mon cher," he said, drawing him aside in the ante-room. "I believe myself that you are honest in your way. But you see you are in bad odour with De Mazan and the ladies. He is jealous of you, and they are all on his side."

"Pardon, monsieur—not *all*, or where would be his jealousy?"

"Ah! I did not count the demoiselle herself. But

listen: I will give you a chance, on my own responsibility. Emigrate with us. Trust yourself to that same dangerous coach. When we are safe over the frontier, you can quarrel with De Mazan—shoot him, if you like—and then you have your chance."

"You are very good, monsieur, but my lot is cast in with France. As to that coach—if you would but believe the danger!—ah, let me at least save mademoiselle your niece!"

"It is impossible," said the Marquis, turning away. "I have given my word to De Mazan. I cannot break it if I would."

"What horror, what barbarity! To sacrifice such a life—"

"Let us say no more. Some one is coming. I thank you for your good intentions. Adieu, adieu!"

The Marquis de Grou tripped back into the salon looking quite old and grave, and the Vicomte de Maury left the château.

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## CHAPTER II.

Mdlle. Léonore de Grou d'Isambert was an important person in her family. Her father had married—an unusual step for a younger son, and, what was more extraordinary still, had made a love-

match with—the heiress of the Isamberts, thus possessing himself of a fine château and a large estate, and becoming quite independent of his own people. But he did not long enjoy his good fortune. He and his wife both died young, and their one child was taken charge of by her grandmother, the old Marquise de Grou.

Léonore was a quiet, timid girl, and her submission to the stately, severe, domineering old lady was unusually complete and unquestioning, even for that country and that time. She was to marry M. de Mazan, a cold-hearted man of the world, more than twenty years older than herself. Clever, well-bred, aristocratic, an altogether delightful person, said the De Grou chorus whenever he was mentioned. Only the little Marquis sometimes held his peace; there were one or two points on which he differed with his wife's brilliant cousin. Nothing that signified, of course; only slight doubts whether it was really possible to be cruel, grasping, ungenerous, and yet hold the front rank among gentlemen.

No regular contract had yet been made between M. de Mazan and Mdlle. d'Isambert, but every one understood that the match was to be, and approved of it. Those fine estates could not be in better hands than the Chevalier's. His connection with the family was also an advantage. Léonore was

already eighteen, and the marriage might have taken place before this, had it not been for the great disturbances in France, which had a restraining effect on the Chevalier's eagerness.

Her château was near Paris, in the thick of the Revolution; and he thought it might be as well to wait for quieter times, and not to hamper himself just now with a young unwilling bride. Her family would take care that she did not escape him.

And this emigration scheme would take her away from the influence of young Bernard de Maury. His father, the Comte de Maury, the De Grou's nearest neighbour, had never been very friendly with them, having a way of considering his humanity before his nobility, quite against all their traditions. But till within the last year or two Bernard had been a frequent guest at the Château de Grou; the Marquis liked him, and an old childish friendship between him and Léonore had advanced into something not the less sweet because it was hopeless, and because in its language there were few spoken words.

Even now Bernard was not without his allies in the château, though perhaps they were not very powerful ones. There was an old woman, Pernette Flicquet by name, who had been nurse to Mdlle. d'Isambert, Léonore's mother, and to Léonore herself.

It was in her charge that Léonore had come from Isambert to Grou, after her mother's death.

Pernette's daughter Jeanneton had also come in the suite of the little demoiselle, and not long after had received permission from the Marquis to marry Luc Bienbon, a garde-chasse of M. de Maury's. Pernette had at once established herself in antagonism to the old Marquise, who often threatened to turn her off, but always ended by granting a contemptuous forgiveness, knowing that the sharp, plainspoken, republican old woman was almost indispensable to Léonore.

"Allez!" said Madame de Grou, "Pernette talks all the nonsense you can imagine, but she is good at heart. Who cares for her and her tongue? Let her stay."

If Pernette and her daughter could have poisoned M. de Mazan, and given their young lady to Bernard de Maury, they would have been troubled with few scruples. But the great Grou household was too much for them, and till now they had only grumbled.

The preparations for driving off in the family coach went on quite openly. The ladies superintended the packing of their wardrobes, and Pernette, with sour acquiescence, received the Marquise's order to get ready Mdlle. d'Isambert's best gowns and jewellery.

"Hé!" said Pernette, "a fine present for the

nation! Madame is determined it shall have everything. Now if I had my will, we should bury a few chests in the courtyard."

"For you to dig up when we are gone, my good Pernette?" said Madame de Grou.

"As madame pleases. But where mademoiselle goes, certainly I go," answered Pernette coolly.

"What! You mean to venture yourself in this dangerous coach? Seriously, have you heard any of these reports—that we shall drive ourselves straight to the guillotine? Or is it all in Monsieur le Vicomte de Maury's imagination?"

At that moment Pernette's heart was softened towards the old lady, who seemed to appeal to her as a friend, looking at her with eyes full of human anxiety, but not a touch of fear.

"Madame la Marquise knows what those dogs of villagers are," said she. "I have only heard from my daughter what her husband says—that it is a great danger. M. le Vicomte has more sense than most of these gentlemen. He knows what he is talking about."

"But we do not trust him," said the Marquise, shaking her head. "He and his father are false and dishonourable. Go, Pernette, do as I tell you, and send mademoiselle to me."

"Ah, these poor nobles!" said Pernette, as she

trotted off to do her duty. "I have but half a heart for the patriots. But if we can save the sweetest of them all, the others must go their own way."

Certainly the household had no lack of warnings. During the next day or two, the dogs of the château howled almost unceasingly; the Grou ghost, a white flying figure, who used sometimes to sweep with a rustle of wings and garments over the head of any one who found himself benighted outside the walls, was suddenly endued with a voice, and screamed and sobbed at night round the towers, like an Irish Banshee: so the story goes.

Mdlle. d'Isambert had a strange and rather terrible dream, which she told to Pernette, and also to her grandmother. They both laughed; but the dream left its impression, and had its consequence.

"Madame," said Léonore to the Marquise, "I dreamed that the large coach with the six brown horses was drawn up yonder, under our windows, on the green beyond the moat."

"And why not at the door?" said Madame de Grou.

"Indeed, I do not know. It stood there, and you were all getting in. *I saw you, one by one, as I looked out of my window—you, my aunt, my uncle, my cousins, and Monsieur le Chevalier.*"

"And not yourself? That was droll enough."

"I was in my room—the door was locked and the window was barred, so that I could not get out. Ah, how terrified I was! I called to you, but you did not hear. I ran up and down the room; I shook the door; I tried to squeeze myself through the bars of the window. I thought I was left alone in the château—you had all forgotten me. The coach moved off round the grass—it was night, you know, and there were lanterns burning, and I saw frost sparkling on the ground. Then I tried again, and pushed myself through the bars, and clambered down the wall through the ivy—I do not know how. Then I ran through the cold wet grass, and overtook the coach just as it turned to go down the hill. I sprang to the door and held on with both hands, and cried out to you to take me in. Ah, now comes the frightful part of the dream! The people in the coach—they were not you—it was full of GHOSTS—*strange luminous forms, through which I saw their skeletons.* Heavens! what a terrible sight! I fell backwards into the grass; and then I awoke."

For once Léonore forgot her awe of her grandmother, crouched down by her side, and hid her face against her stiff satin gown. Madame de Grou looked down at her with a smile of mixed affection and contempt.

"A wonderful dream, truly!" said she. "But it

has not been the custom of our family to dream terrors, any more than to feel them. However, my dear Léonore, console yourself. Your safety is very important; and when we emigrate, you certainly will not be forgotten or left behind. Foolish girl, have a little more courage, and learn to laugh at your dreams. Stand up: there is some one coming."

"Shall you tell the others, madame?" asked Léonore, rising to her feet.

"I certainly shall not repeat such absurdities," answered Madame de Grou. "And if you must have your terrors, pray keep them to yourself."

The young Comtesse came tripping into the room, to ask some question of her grandmother; and Léonore, who was not fond of her cousin, withdrew into a window, and looked out across the wintry landscape. The château stood high perched on a hill, with woods behind, and a broad slope of park-land, crossed by avenues, dividing it from the little town of Grou, which crept and established itself up the sides of the valley. Behind the long blue ridge opposite was the village of Maury and its château, smaller and less important than Grou, but held for many centuries by a race without any stain upon their name, foremost always in the wars and councils of the province. But now they were traitors to their order; and if a lady of Grou let her eyes wander

across the faint smoke and dark roofs in the valley to those heights beyond, which always caught the last western sun, it would have been an insult to suppose that her well-trained thoughts could stray as far as the Château de Maury.

## CHAPTER III.

It had never been the custom of the lords of Grou to shut their gates against anybody; they were far too proud to be suspicious. Thus there were peasants going in and out of the courtyard at all hours, and thus Luc and Jeanneton were able to pay as many visits as they pleased to their good mother Pernette.

On one of those days of suspense, before any attempt was made to carry out the emigration plan, at about five in the evening, Léonore was sitting in the window of her own room. She had escaped from the salon half an hour before, and had been trying to strengthen and console herself by reading the 'Imitation,' but now the fast-fading light obliged her to lay the book down. Her long white fingers were folded over its brown cover, and her face was turned towards the window.

The sky was very clear, but the landscape was already shrouded in twilight: nothing was plainly to

be seen but the ridge of distant hills, which could only bring sad thoughts to her mind. In the pale, unconscious, immovable face there was a desolate resignation; at eighteen Léonore had nothing to hope for: her fate was fixed; even a wish was wrong and forbidden.

She would hardly have confessed what it was that she wanted; after all, her life was like the lives of all other French young ladies. And if it was not arranged quite to please her, why, was it not right to give up one's own will? was this world ever a happy place? Certain high precepts of the book she had been reading were in her mind as she sat, and made her ashamed of her discontent, but a little more despairing too: how could she ever reach such heights of willing self-denial?

"My pretty one will be perished, sitting here," said the voice of old Pernette. "And she will lose all her senses if she dreams too much over that book of madame's."

"It is a very beautiful good book, Pernette," said Léonore, slowly rousing herself, and turning her blue eyes from the window to her old nurse's anxious withered face.

"That may be," said Pernette. "I can't read, as Mademoiselle knows, and I am quite contented. I never saw anything but sighs and frowns come from

reading those books. Madame la Marquise is always in a demon of a temper after she has done her reading. Mademoiselle has the temper of an angel, on the contrary, but she will make herself sad and dismal, and that is all the worse for her poor servants. Now she is not in a good-humour, and I came to beg her to do something for me."

"What is it, then, Pernette? My humours make no difference to you," said Léonore, smiling very sweetly.

"Mademoiselle, my daughter Jeanneton is in the garden at the foot of the turret-stairs. She has a special message, which she will give to no one but our little princess herself. Will she be wrapped up in this great cloak, and go down to speak to poor Jeanneton?"

"Why could not she come here?" asked Léonore. But she got up, and Pernette hastily put the cloak round her shoulders.

"Dame, she was in a hurry. She had a reason of her own, ma petite."

Mademoiselle d'Isambert, accustomed to trust her old nurse implicitly, followed her out of the room, and down a winding staircase, which opened by a little turret-door into a corner of the garden between the walls and the moat. A few evergreens made a shelter, and close by there was a bridge of planks

laid over the moat for the convenience of the servants, who were thus able to take the shortest way to the village.

Jeanneton, in her high starched cap, jacket, and short petticoats, was standing on the grass outside the turret-door.

"What have you to say to me, Jeanneton?" said Léonore's low sweet voice in the doorway.

"Would mademoiselle step outside? There was a person who—wished to speak to her—" stammered the femme Bienbon—la Bienbonne, as her neighbours called her.

"Quick, petite!" whispered Pernette. "Yonder—in the shadow of those bushes! It is an affair of life and death!"

Though Léonore was timid, she was by no means a coward, and she stepped down from the doorway and glided across the grass, like a slender ghost in the twilight, till she reached the bushes that Pernette pointed out to her. A man was standing there, withdrawn in the shadow. He started forward and kissed her hand.

"Ah, monsieur, is it you?" exclaimed Léonore, under her breath.

"Do not be angry with your poor friend, mademoiselle. Léonore, you know me very well. You trust me, do you not?"

"You need not ask that."

She raised her pale face, looking at him wistfully. Her own strong feelings had suddenly driven out all thought of the proprieties, of her stern grandmother, of the Chevalier, of the stiff and horrified circle at the château. Her ruling thoughts now were of pride in her lover, and joy in his presence. He was so different from all the other gentlemen she knew, with his frank manners and generous instincts. To compare him with M. de Mazan, it was indeed "Hyperion to a satyr;" but Léonore's devout comparison was of the Archangel Michael to his great adversary.

One need hardly say that, for anything either of them knew, it might have been a warm summer evening when they stood there under the bush. But after a minute or two a little of the girl's anxious timidity came back to her.

"Is it safe for you to be here?" she whispered. "Why did you come?"

"Léonore, first, will you do as I ask you? Promise me that."

"Ah, if I could, mon ami; but I dare not! It is very wicked of me to be here now. But you know those women cheated me. And I am not really sorry, for I longed to thank you for coming that night to warn us, like a good true friend."

"Then they have not changed their plans? It is still to be THAT TERRIBLE COACH?"

"O yes; and I think it will end in our all dying. I dreamt of it—" and she shivered—"I won't tell you my dream, though you would not laugh at it as my grandmother did. But are you angry, Bernard, that I cannot make you that promise? What did you want me to do? I will do it if I can."

"Let me take you away with me, now, into safety. You must consent. If you care for me in the least, you will."

"And leave the others to their fate?" she said, after a moment's pause.

"It is the fate they have chosen for themselves," he answered passionately. "Why should these people, in their obstinate running on death, be allowed to drag you with them? It is a horror—an unheard-of tyranny! If you can refuse me now, you never loved me! Come, my angel."

"How is it that you can save me, and not them?" said Léonore, holding back from him.

"Because you will be safe at Maury. My father will welcome you as his daughter. And the people have no rage against you—how could they have? But in such times the innocent go with the guilty. You will come with me?"

"Do not ask me—I cannot!"

"Ah, then pardon my mistake! I had a foolish notion that you cared for me, mademoiselle," said Bernard, setting his teeth, and beginning to walk away.

"Bernard, stay! If my life would save yours, you would soon see— What am I saying? Be patient, and listen to me. I am very miserable; but one's duty must come first—you always used to think so. How could I leave my grandmother to go through this danger alone? I have belonged to her all my life—how could I steal away and desert her now like a coward? I always was stupid and cowardly; I know it very well. But this thing I will not do, it is too dishonourable. I am bound to my family, and I must stay with them. Ah, let us both try and bear it bravely. Go away and forget me; that is the best thing you can do."

"Then you will stay here and forget me?" said De Maury.

Léonore shook her head, while her tears ran fast.

"Well, my queen, my fairy, my crowned saint," he said, suddenly falling on one knee, "this I swear to you! If you will not save yourself, you shall be saved! You are not angry with me for that? But as to your anger, I see I must risk it."

"If you run yourself into danger for my sake, I shall indeed be angry.—Ah, Jeanneton, what is it?"

"Mademoiselle, Madame la Marquise is coming up-stairs!"

"Heavens! Adieu, Bernard! If she knew of this, she would kill me!"

M. de Maury watched the white flying figure cross the grass, and dart in at the tower-door. Then he pulled his slouched hat over his face, and slowly and carefully left the precincts of the château. He almost forgot his disappointment, on his way down the hill, in the necessity of making fresh plans. And whatever future dangers and difficulties might be, it was inspiriting to find how thoroughly worthy she was—this gentle timid maiden of Grou—of a brave man's devotion.

## CHAPTER IV.

THE next afternoon a family council was held in the salon. Léonore, who had not been called to it, was sitting by the wood-fire in her grandmother's large room, busy with some embroidery, when her cousin, the young Comtesse, came in and joined her. She walked up to the fire and stood there shivering.

Léonore had never had much sympathy with this youngest of the Mesdames de Grou, whose ways were often those of a child without its attractiveness; but

now, lifting her eyes to her face, she saw there something quite new. The Comtesse was flushed and agitated, and was looking down at her cousin with a tearful trembling nervousness.

"What is it, ma cousine?" said Léonore. "Have you been in the salon? What have they decided?"

"Something dreadful!" said the Comtesse. "I declare to you, if I live through this night, it will be only to die of terror afterwards. Yes, I know I ought to be ashamed of myself. You may well look surprised; you thought you were the only coward in the house—at least, our grandmother always says so. But here is another to keep you company."

"What is it all about?" said Léonore.

"We start to-night, child—imagine! Figure to yourself what a terrible scene it will be! AND THE COACH IS NOT TO COME TO THE DOOR, BUT TO BE DRAWN UP ON THE GREEN YONDER; and we shall drive away by the cart-road into the country, so as to avoid the town altogether. Madame Grandmother and Xavier de Mazan have arranged it all. What do you think of it? To me it seems a detestable plan; but what is my little voice! M. de Grou, of course, obeys his mother, and Madame de Grou has no opinion at all; and François never will disagree with Xavier; so there we are. But if you chose to speak to Xavier, it might make some difference."

"My dear, you are quite mistaken. I am nobody."

Léonore had laid her needle down, and was gazing at the red logs. The short afternoon would soon die away into twilight; then would come the evening, AND THEN LIFE OR DEATH! The Comtesse stood beside her cousin, a strange contrast to Léonore's dreamy grace, with her stiff little figure, high heels, and mountain of thickly-powdered hair.

"But why do you dislike this plan so much?" said Léonore, without looking up.

"Oh, because I hate the dark," said the Comtesse petulantly. "I am afraid of it, I tell you, and all the horrid flashing lights; I think it is much more dangerous than daylight. So cold too. I wish we could stay here. I don't believe any one would hurt us. They would be a set of ungrateful monsters if they did. Tell me the truth now, Léonore: do you think we shall be allowed to pass?"

"I don't know—no, I think not."

"Then it will be the fault of those odious De Maury's."

The little Comtesse quailed before the angry flash of her cousin's eyes, generally so soft and timid.

"You have no right to say a word against them! If they could save us, we should be safe, though certainly we have not deserved anything from them.

De Maury—if nobility went by worth, theirs would be the noblest name in France."

The Comtesse shrugged her shoulders, threw up her hands, and laughed.

"Well, Léonore, that is very fine, my dear child. You are quite enthusiastic. But if one may venture to advise you, don't let Xavier de Mazan hear anything like that."

"I do not care what he hears; it makes no difference to me," said Léonore. "If one must die, must give up all, it is at least a blessing to have known something good and noble on earth."

"Mon Dieu, my cousin," said the Comtesse more seriously, "is it right for a demoiselle to talk in this way? I assure you one might almost imagine that you were in love with that young De Maury. But I will not be so unkind as to repeat what you say. Only pray take care, and control yourself a little."

"Why should I hide it, especially now?" said Léonore, looking up into her cousin's face with shining eyes, but without any change of colour or variation of voice. "If you have found it out for yourself, so be it. I love him with all my heart! And I would rather die to-night than escape safely out of the country and be married—ah!"

Her voice suddenly failed, and she hid her face in her hands, with something between a groan and a cry.

"Léonore, you freeze me with horror!" said her cousin. "Heavens! is it possible that I should have lived to hear such words from a relation—from a demoiselle de Grou? You feel shame, do you not? You well may. Unwomanly, degraded! I cannot believe my ears! The girl must be mad!"

"No," said Léonore. "But I have told the truth, perhaps for the first time in my life, and I am glad of it."

"And I am sorry," said the Comtesse, with dignity, "to find you so unworthy of your name. I will try to forget what you have said, unfortunate girl. A year hence, if we live, you will be thankful to me for not reminding you of it."

A rustle, and a few measured taps upon the boards, told Léonore that her cousin was leaving the room. She sat still, with her face hidden, cold and stiff with a misery too great for tears. After some time she heard a distant bustle in the château, and sounds of her grandmother returning. In her present state of mind, feeling unable to meet her, she left her frame there by the fire, and went through her own room and up some steps into a little room in the turret, where there was no furniture but a table, a prie-dieu chair, and a crucifix on the wall.

Here, in summer, Léonore was accustomed to spend a good deal of her time; no heat could pene-

trate those old white walls, and only at a certain time in the morning did the sun force his way through the ivy veil of the single loophole-window, and throw a tender garland of leafy shadows round the crucifix. But now the little room was very cold, and already in twilight. Léonore knelt down, hoping presently to feel stronger and calmer. Then she would go to her grandmother, and once more entreat her to take Bernard's advice, and give up this wild scheme. Perhaps she might listen; if not, by to-morrow at this time where might they not be?

## CHAPTER V.

LÉONORE knelt on, her forehead bowed upon the chair, her clasped hands stretched out and drooping forward. The sun was gone down, the hills of Maury had lost their last rosy tints, and the stars were beginning to come out; but it was quite dark in the little oratory, and her prayers had passed insensibly into dreams. At first they were peaceful and pleasant ones, but after a time they changed, and her terrible dream of a few nights before came back to her with more than its first horror: THE COACH DRAWN UP IN THAT STRANGE PLACE—an idea which Madame de Grou had, indeed, boldly utilized—her own agony

and terror at being left behind; her escape down the wall; HER OVERTAKING THE COACH AND SEEING THE GHOSTS, WHO NOW SEEMED TO STRETCH OUT THEIR LONG RATTLING HANDS TO SEIZE HER AND DRAG HER IN AMONG THEM—it was all too terrible, and Léonore awoke screaming, and found herself, cold, weary, faint, and trembling, on her knees in the turret-room.

She had no means of knowing the time, but felt sure that she had slept there for hours, it was so very dark and cold. Getting up with difficulty, she moved to the door and tried to open it, but could not succeed; it seemed to be fastened on the outside. Then she knocked, and called "Pernette" in a voice that seemed to refuse to be heard, feeling all the time as if she was dreaming on still; and then, as there was no answer, she sat down where she had been kneeling before, and leaning her chin on her hands, gazed up at the narrow window. Through its thick greenish glass she could just discern one star, large and bright, looking in upon her in her loneliness, and suddenly bringing to her mind what Bernard had said the evening before, "If you will not save yourself, you shall be saved." She had not thought much about that; it seemed so impossible: she must submit to the same fate as her relations, and no one could save her from it. Still the words

roused an instinct of life in her weary mind; she no longer thought she was dreaming, and began to wonder what they were all doing, how she was to get out, whether they had all gone away hours ago, and left her behind. No, that could not be.

Then she noticed some strange shadows and flashes of light which were falling now and then on the arched stone sides of the window, and glimmering on the glass. Sounds began to reach her ears—a rattle of harness, a creaking of wheels, a buzz of many voices. Léonore sprang to her feet, full of a new waking terror of being left behind. Could her grandmother have forgotten her, after all, and Pernette too? Might the door have been locked by mistake, and would she be left here to starve?—for there was no scrambling out of that window, as in her dream! That would be more dreadful than the guillotine. Again she knocked on the door, called, listened, but could hear nothing, and felt sure that the door at the foot of the stairs must be fastened, as well as this. The reality was more dreadful than any dream. Locked up and forgotten! The peasants would perhaps burn the château, and there would be no escape for her, unless by any chance Bernard knew that she was still there, and came to look for her. Ah, it was too terrible!

She stood shivering in the dark, and did not know

what to think or what to do. After watching the lights and shadows on the window as they flashed and fell, an idea occurred to her: she might at least see what they meant. She dragged and pushed the heavy table underneath the window, lifted the chair upon it, and so managed to climb up on the deep sloping window-sill. Clasping the bar with one hand, she opened the window with the other, and plunged it among the frosted ivy-leaves, tearing them from their stalks and scattering them. Then, bending her head forward, she could see the green beyond the moat, and on it a dark mass under a sky of stars, with torches flickering and men crowding about it. It was the Marquis's great coach! The harness-chains rattled, as the horses stamped and tossed their heads, but feet of horses and men were silent on the grass, and Léonore, looking down at them, shivered not only with cold, for the scene was like a wild unearthly dream. The people seemed to be in great haste, running backwards and forwards between the coach and the side-door of the château. Presently the servants stood aside, two advancing with flaring torches in their hands, and six people, two-and-two, came stepping carefully across the grass to the coach-door.

Léonore could not see their faces, but she knew each one well. First, the old Marquise and her son;

then the younger Marquise and her son the Comte; then the Comtesse and the Chevalier de Mazan.

Léonore leaned forward as far as she could, and waved her hand into the frosty darkness, crying out in a voice that trembled and failed,

"Madame, are you going away without me? I am locked up here: you are leaving me behind!"

Perhaps the voice was hardly strong enough to reach her grandmother's ear; yet the old Marquise stopped suddenly and turned back from the coach-door as she was about to get in. There was a pause, a little hurried talk among the group of Léonore's relations. But their momentary hesitation was soon over; to the girl's amazement they got into the coach one after another, the servants drew back, the postillions cracked their whips, and with many a groan and rumble the great vehicle moved off round the grass in the direction of a rough cart-road into the country, by which they hoped to escape any pursuit.

It was Léonore's dream, REPEATED FOR THE THIRD TIME, only she was a prisoner, and reality, fortunately for her, would not let her even try to overtake them. She still clung to her window till the last sound of the coach was lost in the distance, and even afterwards; for, tiring as her cramped posture was, it at least gave her a sight of the stars,

and of the dim world on which they were shining. She clung there till another sound rose slowly on her ears—the angry roar of a crowd coming up from the village. They came nearer and nearer, crowding up the hill, till she could see the flare of the torches they carried, and hear their voices, which seemed to die away into a low resolute growl as they approached the château. But a few words were carried to her by a light cold wind which swept over their heads, and then rustled the leaves beside her window:

"FIRE, FIRE! BURN THE WILD BEASTS IN THEIR DEN!"

Léonore felt her brain reeling, and her senses failing suddenly. She let herself slip from the window-sill to the table, and then to the floor, where she fell down heavily and lay still.

## CHAPTER VI.

MADEMOISELLE D'ISAMBERT woke from her fainting-fit to find herself outside the château, on the edge of the moat, in the dark shadow of those same trees and bushes under which she had met her lover the evening before. He was beside her now, supporting her head on his arm, and her hair and face

were wet with the cold water that he had been splashing over her. Cold it was indeed, for the moat was partly frozen, but perhaps it answered his purpose all the better.

"Léonore," he whispered, "keep yourself perfectly still. We are in great danger, but I shall save you. Can you stand up? I am afraid to let you lie on this grass."

With the instinct of obedience that seldom failed her, she rose at once, and stood leaning on his arm. But the things she had seen were not to be forgotten, even in the peace and safety of his presence.

"THEY ALL WENT AWAY IN THE COACH," she whispered, "AND LEFT ME BEHIND. Did my grandmother forget me? O, what could it mean?"

"Patience! You will know all some day; and your grandmother will be glad too," said Bernard, his voice trembling a little as if he was deeply moved.

"Are they safe, do you think? I wonder why she went without me. I wish I knew. What are all those people doing out there? They have not burnt the château yet?"

"No. When they are gone, I will take you away to a safe place."

Bernard stood quite still, holding her fast, and listening intently to all the strange noises that broke upon

the beautiful night, the hoarse voices, the tramping feet, the wild laughter and cries of triumph, inside and outside of the whole building. Lights were flashing in the windows, and many of the mob were busy destroying and pulling to pieces the stately rooms; but many, too, were waiting outside for something, and presently a horrid yell announced that it was coming. The Vicomte de Maury knew very well what it was, and drew his rescued treasure a little closer. To her it was still like a dream; only now, under all the terror, there was a vague sense of happiness.

Slowly rumbling along the uneven road, heavy wheels were approaching the château. The horses' feet could not be distinguished from the tramp of many men that accompanied them. It was with a certain frightful solemnity, worthy of the Great Revolution, that THE MARQUIS DE GROU'S COACH WAS ESCORTED BACK TO HIS OWN DOOR. From their hiding-place Bernard and Léonore saw it come slowly up, saw the crowd part to receive it, saw it stop where it had stopped before, and, by the lights that were glaring and flickering all about, saw the door opened, and THOSE SIX PEOPLE MADE TO DESCEND. Not that any force was necessary, for each one of them, even the little Comtesse de Grou, stepped out with as calm and proud a grace as if he

or she were arriving at Versailles, instead of drawing nearer to the guillotine. Only the old Marquise, as her son gravely offered her his hand to walk into the house, waved him back and turned towards the mob with an air of fearless command.

"Where is that old traitress, Pernette Flicquet? Can any of you tell me? What has she done with my granddaughter, Mdlle. d'Isambert?"

She waited a moment, but met with no answer, and the Marquis, taking her hand, led her once more across their own threshold.

"Ah, let me go to her! I must, I must!" exclaimed Léonore.

"No, Léonore, you shall not," said Bernard de Maury.

She was half fainting again, and the strong young man lifted her in his arms like a child, and carried her across the moat by the plank-bridge, down the hill and across the valley to his father's house, while all the good patriots of the neighbourhood were occupied in sacking the Château de Grou, before escorting its owners away

To Prison and the Guillotine!

*The one that was saved of that doomed family* found herself a prisoner too, but her gaolers were the Vicomte de Maury, old Pernette, and Jeanneton. It

was not till many days after that terrible night that she was calm and well enough to listen to the history of how it all happened.

Of course she had been locked in the oratory by friendly hands. The departure of the coach had been hurried on by a rumour which came up that evening from the village, that the people of Grou, led on by a patriot from the nearest large town, would be at the château in an hour's time. The coach was ordered round at once, the last arrangements were hurried through, and only just before starting did the Marquise discover that her granddaughter was missing. The turret-door was locked, and the key had disappeared. Pernette too was nowhere to be found.

The Marquise declared at first that nothing would induce her to start without Léonore; but all the rest of her family were of a different opinion, and even the Chevalier could not see any reason for sacrificing six valuable lives.

Then the little Comtesse had stepped forward, and had said in the hearing of them all: "I do not think you need disturb yourself, madame. Léonore has probably escaped to Maury. It was only this evening that she confessed to me her love for M. le Vicomte." After this the Marquise seemed half stunned, and made no further resistance to going with the rest.

When the coach had driven off, Pernette came out of the cupboard hidden with tapestry, where she had sat and listened, admitted M. de Maury at the turret-door, and guided him to the room where they found Léonore insensible: THUS SHE WAS SAVED IN SPITE OF HERSELF.

* * * * *

The grandchildren of Madame la Comtesse de Maury, *née* de Grou d'Isambert, tell this story to their friends as they show them the old château, still grand, though defaced and half-ruined by its experiences of revolution. And then, as we stand looking out on the green parterre beyond the moat, which is now drained and planted as a garden, a fair young Léonore de Maury, with the large frightened blue eyes of her grandmother, looks at us and says, in suddenly lowered tones, "AND—WILL YOU BELIEVE ME?—TO THIS DAY, ON FROSTY MORNINGS IN JANUARY, ONE SEES THE TRACES OF A COACH AND SIX UPON THE GRASS OUT THERE."

It seems impossible to doubt her word, but English love of evidence makes us ask the young lady if she has seen these spectral impressions herself. Up go her pretty hands, shoulders, and eyebrows, in despair at our incredulity.

"Mais oui! certainement!"

And after that, what is one to say?

# THE ARGUMENT IN FAVOUR OF GHOSTS.

I HAVE always been under the strong impression that the argument in favour of ghosts has failed to receive a sufficient amount of serious attention. The Spiritualists complained greatly that Faraday would not bestow any serious attention on the phenomena whose existence they alleged. For the rapping department of Spiritualism I have personally as much contempt as Faraday could have; but I think it a great pity that when a scientific issue was sought, the challenge was not seriously taken up. I think there is a much stronger argument in favour of the ghosts themselves than there is for their spirit-rapping. For instance, if Milton and Shakespeare condescend, by an elaborate but clumsy process of knocks, to make some extremely commonplace observations, I must greatly regret that their mental calibre has so deeply degenerated since the days they were in the flesh. And, indeed, if their remarks were of a better quality, I should still prefer limiting myself to their human publications. I

grieve to say that there are still some sonnets of Shakespeare's about which my mind is not made up, and still some of the obscurer prose writings of Milton with which I am unacquainted. I should therefore venture to say to the rapping spirit: "Illustrious rapper, I shall be exceedingly obliged to you for your communications as soon as I have finished the works composed by you while in a former state of existence. As soon as I have mastered those, I shall be grateful for any further communications." Milton, by the way, may not unfairly be claimed as a Spiritualist. We remember his words:

> "Millions of spiritual beings walk the earth
> Unseen, both when we sleep and when we wake."

At Christmas-time, whether we believe in ghosts or not, we talk over ghost stories—talk over them, telling story after story, giving tradition upon tradition; very bold while the logs are heaped high and the wassail cup is going round; but perhaps the boldest slightly shy as he creeps along the long shadowy corridors of a country house, and into big bedrooms where everything is shrouded in deep gloom, out of which, *anything* might come. A great deal of the conversation consists in ghost stories, more or less authenticated—generally, I am bound to say, *less* so—which each person has to relate. It

is observable that every individual gives the story at secondhand. Nevertheless, I have met with one or two persons who have told a ghost story straight off. The remarkable ghost story relating to the late Theodore Alois Buckley, chaplain of Christ Church, Oxford, the translator of a good many Greek and Latin works for Bohn's series, is familiar to very many. Similarly I knew a most admirable and homely clergyman who used to tell what I may call a domestic ghost story. An old gentleman of his acquaintance dropped in to smoke a pipe with him one afternoon, and gave him some excellent and seasonable advice. Two items were that he should never omit to have family prayers, and to say grace before dinner. The third item he always kept to himself. It transpired afterwards that his old friend had died at the very time when he entered the room and commenced the conversation. There is something like this in the ingenious story fabricated by De Foe of the apparition of Mrs. Veal, in order to get a circulation for Drelincourt 'On Death.'

I observed that in all our argumentation there was a constant reference to the Good Book. Although some of our modern philosophers desire to improve it off the face of the earth, and think that we have reached a stage of civilization in which it may be safely laid aside, it somehow seems that

every discussion of this kind is incomplete without it. Indeed our young people showed a creditable knowledge of chapter and verse. Of course we heard of the old lady at Endor raising the ghost, and of people fancying that there might be the angel of Peter. However, I do not enter into the theological argument. Nevertheless, it may be fairly observed that Scriptural authority is not to be alleged against the theory, but, on the contrary, so far as it goes, is in its favour.

The real argument is of a threefold character.

First, there is no *à priori* improbability against the theory. Rather, like the Biblical argument, the probability is in its favour.

Secondly, there is an enormous amount of uniform tradition in its favour.

Thirdly, there are various cases sufficiently authenticated according to the rules of evidence.

Now, without caring to be dogmatic, I venture to say that these considerations constitute an argument well worthy of attention in favour of the ghost theory.

I do not venture to expand the argument, familiar to very many, that in every material body there is a spiritual body intermingled; and that when the material body decays there is a spiritual body which is liberated from the thraldom of the flesh. I

believe that Mr. Sergeant Cox is one of the most eloquent exponents of this theory. According to him, the disembodied spirit is in a sense embodied, although the embodiments are not recognizable by our senses. But this does not signify, as there are many most potent real things which we cannot see, such as currents of the air and electricity. It is allowable to suppose that for good and sufficient reasons these forms may at times be permitted to be visible. We may believe that the blessed spirits will have something else and better to do than to take up that tangled skein of earthly affairs of which they must be heartily tired. Dean Ramsay tells a curious story of two old Scotchwomen, one of whom was dying: "And if ye see our Jean in heaven, ye'll jest tell her we all be bidin' well." "Hist, woman," returned the worthy saint, "I can't go cleckin' all over heaven after your Jean." *O sancta simplicitas!* Without being anthropomorphic, we may believe, on the one hand, that while the liberated spirits will not do our errands, on the other hand, there may be great crises and emergencies for humanity, or for their dear ones—"*si quid mortalia tangunt*"—when they will have the will, if they have the desire, to manifest themselves. The first argument may be thus briefly summarized: Unless we are sheer atheists we believe that souls are immortal; then

there is the probability that they have ethereal bodies capable of visibility, and the possibility that they may at times be visible to ourselves.

Of the vast mass of tradition existing on the subject it is unnecessary to speak, There is no century or country, no family, hardly any individual, where some traditions of the kind are not to be found. The most simple and rudimentary form of the supernatural appearance is the dream; "for the dream is from Jove." Every night of the year there are multitudes of us who see visions and dream dreams with a remarkable fidelity which no waking effort could achieve; all the old surroundings revive in marvellous detail; the form of him who, himself beloved, loved us, comes forth with gracious voice and benignant aspect. Now no doubt these dreams are mainly reminiscences, the revival of old scenes photographed for ever upon the brain. But we need not suppose that this phantasmagoric procession that sweeps through the chambers of the mind is altogether purposeless and unreal. Have none of us found the rush of revived affections, the solemn influence of the revival of old impressions, the coming forth from hidden rooms of the mind of matters that had altogether escaped our recollection, "the burial-places of memory give up their dead"? The *quod semper quod ubique, quod ab omnibus* of

theologians especially applies to ghost stories. There is a universal *consensus* in their favour. The mass of tradition is simply overwhelming. To treat the general instinct and conviction of mankind with contempt is both unhistorical and unphilosophical. The spiritual machinery of our greatest dramatists, the most stirring legends, yes, and some chapters of authentic history, must disappear if we reject the unwavering tradition. If the old proverb is true that there is no smoke without fire, how are we to account for the uniform existence of the body of accepted tradition on the subject, without at least admitting the existence of a nucleus of truth? Many of our readers have read of Lord Lytton's *Scin Læca*, and there are various corresponding traditions in Norse and Scandinavian literature. I believe that the 'Strange Story' embodied some of Bulwer Lytton's deepest convictions, not to say experiences. Talleyrand used to say that there was something wiser than the wisest person, more eloquent than the eloquent, more far-sighted than the shrewdest, and that was prevailing sentiment and public opinion. It is to the detecting and reproducing of this floating public opinion that the 'Times' has owed its marvellous success. I do not take the sentence as entirely true; for there have been times when the opinions of a Bacon or a Shakespeare or an

Aristotle have been pretty well worth the thoughts of all other writers put together. But this universal feeling and constant abiding tradition has always been, with Lord Beaconsfield, "on the side of the angels," on the side of supernatural appearances.

Next, what is the amount of positive testimony, of evidence that will sustain cross-examination, that we have in favour of the popular theory? In our scientific day we can only proceed according to facts accurately stated and vigorously sifted. It is utterly unscientific to laugh the theory out of court, and to pooh-pooh all the witnesses. Science has only been able to make its sure advances by accepting facts, when shown to be facts, even of the most contrariant character, satisfied that they will be reconciled on a higher plane. If the evidence given on behalf of alleged supernatural occurrences cannot be received, there is an end of such things as evidence on the one side and conviction on the other. Many an important litigation has been settled on less conclusive testimony than supports many an instance of apparition or second sight. What is especially remarkable is, that these ghost stories, as we may call them generically, instead of vanishing away in the increasing light of the nineteenth century, may almost be said to show an increasing frequency; at least there are increasing facilities in their becoming known. In the recent

memoirs of Lady Georgiana Chatterton she mentions how, when she sat by the side of her dead mother, her soul was filled with a solemn gladness, and she was convinced that her mother's spirit was with her. She gives also some remarkable and authentic instances of second-sight. I myself, within the range of my own personal knowledge, could give some remarkable instances of this kind. In recent cases, such as have happened within the last few years or months, there is generally an unconquerable and natural aversion on the part of the living to publishing details respecting their deceased relatives. Just to mention a few salient cases. No one can question either the good sense or good faith of John Wesley. He entertained the strongest belief in the supernatural, and his narrative of the weird occurrences at Epworth has always been accepted as authentic. I need not allude to the cycle of spiritualistic phenomena in connection with Swedenborg. There is a remarkable account of Richardson, in his northern voyages, finding the words written on a blank sheet of paper, "Steer north;" and doing thus he saved a number of lives. There has been the dream about shipwrecked sailors which has led to a boat being pushed off next day to neighbouring rocks, and there rescuing the sufferers just in time. Various cases of second-sight stand upon indis-

putable authority. While residing at Cardiff I knew the case of a policeman stabbed by a butcher; the poor widow had seen the whole thing in a dream the night before. The remarkable instance of a gentleman in Cornwall seeing by second-sight the assassination of Mr. Perceval in the lobby of the House of Commons is firmly established. But finally, to return to our friends the ghosts; and, indeed, I call them our friends, for, to quote pious old Ruddle (to whom a "visible and suppliant ghost" foretold the Plague of London six months before), "what pleasures and improvements do such deny themselves who scorn and avoid all opportunity of intercourse with souls separate, and the spirits glad and sorrowful, which inhabit the unseen world!" Take the historical ghost of "the bad" Lord Lyttelton. This story has been lately told by two authors with great carefulness—the Rev. F. G. Lee and Mr. Percy Fitzgerald; and the late Lord Lyttelton, than whom a more honourable and able man never existed, devoted great pains to its thorough investigation. The pith of the story is that, three days before his death, he saw in his house, in Hill Street, Berkeley Square, a fluttering bird, and afterwards a woman appeared to him in white apparel, and said to him, "Prepare to die; you will not exist three days." The remarkable thing

about this story is the number and variety of independent witnesses to the truth of the occurrence. The extraordinary story of the apparition of a member of the Hell-fire Club of one of the colleges at Oxford—in imitation of Wilkes's Club at Medmenham Abbey—was related to the writer when an undergraduate at Oxford, and since then the evidence has been sifted and arranged. The figure of an undergraduate was seen scaling the college at the very moment when the man had fallen down in the midst of a drunken orgy. Of course many supernatural stories admit of a perfectly naturalistic interpretation. For instance, in that charming story of 'Marmorne' (is it possible that it can have been written by the present Lord Lytton?) there is a man playing the ghost, who receives a bullet in his shoulder, which leads to the discovery of a murderous conspiracy. Moreover, a very serious chapter might be written on cases of insanity or death caused by foolish people simulating the honours of ghostdom.

At all events we, sitting cosily over our Christmas hearth and telling our mutual ghost stories, fully indorse the expression that "there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy;" and are resolved that we will not speak unsympathizingly or carelessly of the doctrine of apparitions.

# MY ADVENTURE.

## THE STORY OF A GRANTED WISH.

"To know the misery of a granted prayer." I believe the line is Pope's. I am sure it is some old author, for I read it during my stay at Dullerton, and no books of modern date ever find their way to that dreary place. Dullerton, justly named—for it was the quietest, cleanest, dreariest country town in England. I spent three years there with an old aunt, and hope I may never visit the place again. It sounds ungrateful to say this, for Aunt Anne was very good to me, but it was such a change from the gay and happy, albeit somewhat Bohemian, life I led in London with my father. He was an artist, not a very successful one, I believe; but we had enough to satisfy our modest requirements, and I certainly was happy enough till that unlucky day that my father accepted an offer to travel for three years with a nobleman, who fancied he had a taste for painting, and wished to study in Italy under my

father's direction. Of course it was a very advantageous thing in a pecuniary point of view, but I did not think of that during the years I spent under Aunt Anne's wing at Dullerton during my father's absence from England. There was nothing to see, nothing to do, nothing to think about. I was too thorough a cockney to care for country pursuits, and, besides, we lived in a country *town*, not a village. Aunt Anne's house was in the High-street, one of those neat white houses with green blinds and a brass knocker that one always sees in such a street, with a strip of garden as big as a pocket-handkerchief at the back. Here I lived—or *vegetated*—for three long years. And all that time I was sighing for an adventure—something to happen, something to break the monotony of existence. The reader shall hear how I gained my wish at last, and learned to endorse the truth of the words with which I began my story.

"Blessed is the life that has no history," Aunt Anne would say, with a sigh and a smile, as I used to wish for something, anything, to happen, to make a little variety in my life. "You'll find the truth of that one day, Ella."

Poor soul, she had had her "adventures" in life, and had not found the experience agreeable. After twenty years' devotion to a reprobate husband,—

twenty years spent wandering about the world in quest of the "fortune" men of his class never find,—she was only too thankful to settle down in her widowhood at cheap quiet Dullerton, and enjoy the little annuity that a relative had bequeathed to her. After her troublous life she was contented to sit in peace and knit in her neat parlour from year's end to year's end; but I, who was young and restless, and, like the bears, "had all my troubles before me," was less tractable. If it had not been for the organ at the church I think I must have run away, or died of sheer *ennui*. We had a fine old church at Dullerton, almost as large as a small cathedral (excuse the Irishism). It was rich in brasses and fine tombs; I used often to wish I had known the place before so many of its inhabitants had died, for it must have been livelier before the church was so full. I really believe there were more male effigies in the tombstones than living young men in the town—probably *living* people did not care to stay in so dull a place. The church, though very fine, was sadly out of repair, but its restoration was a thing not to be thought of in a poor town like ours. The churchwardens did a little vamping-up here and there, but as long as the roof held together further repairs were not dreamed about. Consequently even some of the

tombs wanted looking to, and our vicar occasionally made feeble efforts to have them attended to; but as he was no richer than the rest of us, the effort generally ended in talk.

One thing the church possessed, a very good organ. It had been bequeathed to the parish by a Dullerton man who had been educated at a local charity school. He left the place and made his fortune "in foreign parts," remembering his native town with this handsome legacy. I was passionately fond of music, and when our good easy vicar gave me *carte blanche* to use this organ, I found life at Dullerton more endurable. As an artist's daughter I could not be insensible to the beauty of the church itself, and between practising on the organ, sketching the interior of the church, and making myself intimately acquainted with the tombs and brasses, I spent a great part of the day in the sacred edifice. One cold winter's afternoon I remember having a peculiarly dismal fit. I had been indoors for two or three days in consequence of a heavy fall of snow, and when, late in the afternoon, the weather began to clear, I felt I must go out if only for an hour. Aunt Anne, sitting peacefully knitting by the side of the fire, expressed mild astonishment at my restlessness; but as usual I got my own way, and issued forth cloaked and muffled to obtain the "breath of

air" for which I had petitioned. Having once got out I thought I would make the most of my liberty and try just one chant on that dear old organ. The church would hardly be colder than outdoors, and I was warmly muffled up. Calling at the vicarage for the key of the church, I went on my wilful way, little thinking how soon my longing for an "adventure" was to be satisfied. It was growing dusk as I unlocked the heavy door and stepped inside the church; so dusk, indeed, that I missed my footing at the step inside, and slipped, falling against the door in my effort to save myself. The door slammed to, *leaving the key in the lock outside.* So here I was a prisoner. I sat down on the step and felt excessively foolish. Here was a pretty state of things. How on earth was I to get out? The door, like everything else, was out of repair, and depended on the key for opening it; there was no latch within. I tried to turn the key through the keyhole, but only succeeded in breaking my nails. Then I remembered reading in my childhood how a similar misadventure befell the famous Goody Two Shoes, and how she made her case known by ringing the bells. But, alas, our belfry was approached by a flight of turret steps, terminated by a door, which I found—*locked.* Old Saunders, the sexton, was a careful man, and had, doubtless, the key safe in his

pocket at home. Goody Two Shoes' experiences were therefore of no service to me.

The church was about ten minutes' walk from any habitation, and no one was likely to pass it, so I might have shouted for ever without attracting attention, even could my voice have penetrated through the stout oaken door. I once thought of escaping by the windows, but they were all too high from the ground, and even in this emergency I should have hesitated at breaking a pane of the rare old glass. My only hope was that Aunt Anne would become alarmed and miss me, although as she had no idea I had gone to the church she might send in every wrong direction before seeking me in the right one. I had promised to return the key at the vicarage as I went home, but it was doubtful if my nonappearance that evening would excite surprise. Mr. Scott, our old bachelor vicar, was one of the most absent of men, and, if he was immersed in his books, had probably forgotten the key and myself by this time. My only hope of rescue lay in Aunt Anne. As I rose from the step where I had been sitting reflecting on the situation, I began to feel that "adventures," after all, were not without alloy. I thought so still more some hours later. Despite my wraps I began to feel very cold, and as some hours might yet elapse before

I was set free, I began to make myself as comfortable as I could under the circumstances. Fortunately for me Dullerton folks were chilly people, and every seat had a loose scrap of drugget or carpet. I recollected these and the hassocks, and arranged myself a snug nest by the chancel, where I could command a full view of the west door, in case any one came to look for me. There I lay down among the dusty carpets, and felt warm again. It was not a cheerful position, however, and I would gladly have exchanged it for Aunt Anne's snug parlour with all its dulness. I was neither a nervous nor a superstitious girl, but the church looked so weird and "eerie" in the waning light; the dim aisles fading away into darkness, strange grotesque shadows falling in the nave, all around so very still. I felt such uncomfortably "creepy" sensations coming over me that I shut my eyes to exclude outside objects, and, as people often do in such cases, soon fell asleep.

I must have slept some hours, for on waking I found the moon shining. I now began to feel very uneasy. How was it that I had not yet been missed? Was I to be condemned to "make a night of it" in the church? It was a blessing that the next day was Sunday, I thought ruefully; at any rate, I was sure to be found when Saunders came

to open the doors. But this was small comfort for the present moment, when I began to feel not only cold, but hungry. I lay looking down the long vista of the nave, at all the familiar tombs I knew so well: the knights and ladies lying stiff and still, with solemn-faced rows of children kneeling at their sides, and strange animals, like nothing in nature, lying at their feet. The white figures looked ghastly enough in the uncertain light (for clouds were obscuring the moon ever and anon), and I began to think, by way of cheerful and appropriate meditation, of all the strange stories I had heard in my childhood; of white-robed figures seen flitting down dusky aisles, of spectral banquets spread in churchyards, and last, but not least, of the weird German ghost-stories,—Lenore and her midnight ride with her spectre lover, Goethe's horrible poem of the 'Lost Shroud,' and similar pleasant tales. I sat up and tried to shake off the uncomfortable sensations creeping over me, and told myself how absurd I was to think of such rubbish. As I raised myself my glance fell on a large square tomb nearly opposite, standing back in the side aisle. I knew every stone in the church, and that special tomb was an old eyesore to me; for though it was clearly intended to bear a recumbent effigy, the figure was now wanting, probably having been removed at the

time of the Civil Wars, when Cromwell's soldiers had been quartered in the church to its great injury. Some stone effigies, much dilapidated, had long been lying in the vaults of the church, and Mr. Scott had often talked of putting one on this tomb; but, like everything in the way of repairs or alterations, the work ended in talk. Yet as I looked across now, I distinctly saw a figure lying on the slab. "Mr. Scott has actually filled up that blank tomb at last," I thought, as I strained my eyes to distinguish what kind of figure he had selected for the post. "It is a great chance if he has found the original effigy," I reflected; "very probably he has put some crusading knight over the grave of a bishop, or an Elizabethan lawyer over a mediæval lady. I know the tomb had no name or date on it, and I believe the effigies were all, more or less, battered about—well, at any rate, the figure will have to be satisfied, for it cannot get up and walk back to the vault;" and I thought of Don Giovanni and the scene where the statue of the commodore stalks in. I was sorry I had done so afterwards, for I kept glancing at the tomb with the idea how horrible it would be if that quiet figure *should* move. Of course I knew this was absurd and impossible; but I was in a mood to terrify myself with all kinds of foolish fancies. The moon was shining very

brightly at one moment, and disappearing behind clouds the next; but by the uncertain light I could distinctly make out the shadowy outline of the new figure. Its legs were crossed, I was sure; therefore it must be a Crusader. But it was not in armour; in fact, I could not satisfactorily make out what its costume was. The only distinct part about it was the crossed legs, for a pillar hid the upper part of the body from my view. Looking steadily at it, I fancied (was it only fancy?) that *the legs moved!* As this pleasant idea occurred to me, the moon again disappeared; another few seconds and it shone out again, and I ventured to look across once more to reassure myself. There was no movement in the rigid form; *but the legs were crossed no longer.* Could I have been mistaken in thinking they had ever been so? Impossible! I had noted the circumstance so particularly. Yet they were most certainly uncrossed now. Again the light waned, and again appeared. This time I lay looking with all my power, unable to move or stir. Was I going mad, or did my eyes play me false? Slowly, but unmistakably, did the figure begin to stir; it moved restlessly on its stony couch, and finally *sat upright,* clear and distinct in the moonlight. I cannot attempt to describe the terror that seized on me at this fearful sight. My heart throbbing, and my

eyes strained, I lay as if fascinated, unable to take my eyes off the object of my terror. This was certainly no trick of imagination, but a fearful reality. Never have I experienced moments of such mental agony as when I lay cowering among my wrappings, with straining eyeballs fixed on that fearful thing—ghost, demon, what?—moving opposite. Presently it rose and stood upright in the aisle, looking around as if in search of something. I tried to draw one of the druggets over my head, for I could not bear the sight longer; but as I moved a yell rang through the stillness, and the figure *rushed at me.* How I found power to rise I know not, but I have a remembrance of a mad flight down the nave and round the aisles, with that fearful pursuer behind—on, on, like a vision in a dreadful dream; and then another fiendish yell, a clutch of cold fingers at my throat, and—darkness and vacancy!

"My dear madam, I assure you it is only a fainting fit; our dear young patient will be quite herself again in a few moments," were the first words that fell on my ear as I opened my eyes again to consciousness. I knew the bland tones of little Dr. Grey, our local Esculapius, and their friendly and familiar sound was so reassuring that I struggled feebly into a sitting posture, and looked round to

find myself still in the church, but the centre of an excited group of all the magnates of Dullerton. Poor Aunt Anne knelt at my side sobbing so hysterically that she spilt on the floor the glass of water she tried to carry to my lips. Dr. Grey, affable as ever (he would have been affable at an earthquake), was feeling my pulse; Mr. Scott, Saunders, and quite a small crowd stood around.

"O my child, my poor dear child," sobbed Aunt Anne in incoherent self-reproach, "I shall never, never forgive myself—what you have undergone—and all my carelessness—but could any one have imagined such a thing happening?"

"Is it—" I began, shuddering, as the events of the past came back on me with all their horror.

"Calm yourself, my dear young lady," interrupted Dr. Grey; "we will not think anything about the disagreeable shock we have undergone; there was nothing supernatural, only a very unfortunate accident; but we are all safe now, and we shall go home and have a good night's rest, and forget all this annoyance."

It was some time, however, before I enjoyed that "good night's rest," for my nerves had undergone a serious shock; and some days passed before I was even able to hear the explanation of "my adventure."

It appears that, after I had gone out, Aunt Anne's

next-door neighbour sent a request that she would take tea with her, as she was not quite well and wanted cheering up. Kind-hearted Aunt Anne obeyed the summons of course, but on her return home about half-past nine o'clock was greatly alarmed to find I was not yet in. Molly, the maid, had taken for granted I had joined her at her friend's, and therefore felt no anxiety till her mistress returned alone. Like all lonely women, Aunt Anne turned to the first *man* available in all sudden calamities; and Mr. Scott being close at hand, she hurried off to him in her alarm, while Molly started for the cottage of Jim Bates, our local policeman. Roused from his studies, Mr. Scott remembered that I had borrowed the key for the purpose of going to the church some hours previously, and thither he and Aunt Anne hurried. Molly on her part encountered Jim Bates in the street with a crowd at his heels. I was not the only person who had disappeared that evening. A pauper lunatic in our workhouse, who had long been suspected of homicidal tendencies, had suddenly committed a murderous assault on another of the inmates, and escaped during the subsequent confusion. For some hours Jim Bates and his assistants had been scouring the neighbourhood in search of this dangerous maniac, till at last some one recollected that Saunders and

his wife were cleaning in the church at the time he effected his escape, and that it was just possible he had slipped in there and been locked in. This, in fact, proved to be the case. The lunatic must have been lurking in the church when I entered it; with the restlessness of an infirm brain he had wandered about, mimicking the attitudes of the quiet effigies around, and it was while thus "posing" for a Crusader that he first attracted my attention. My involuntary movement first drew his attention to *me*, and roused him to another outburst of maniacal fury. I have little doubt that I owe my life to the providential entry of the party without, who heard my screams and the lunatic's yell, and rushed in just as he had clutched me. The poor creature was overpowered with great difficulty, and taken back to the workhouse; he did not survive many days, dying in one of his paroxysms.

It was some time before I recovered from the effects of that terrible night; and even now, though thirty years have rolled away, the sight of a marble cross-legged Crusader on a tombstone always gives me an uncomfortable sensation.

I have certainly never again wished to encounter "adventures;" my one experience has fully satisfied me.

# THE MYSTERY OF THE MESS-ROOM.

## A TRUE STORY.

In the month of April 187—, a group of officers were assembled at chato-hazri, under the pleasant shade of a couple of luxuriant mango-trees. On the white cloth that covered the table were eatables of various kinds, the most inviting being some melons —water, as well as musk—which smelt deliciously. Overhead, deftly slung from a wooden framework, with lazy even beat, oscillated a light deep-fringed punkha. It was pulled by a semi-somnolent Hindoo coolie, attired in little else save his own bronze-coloured skin; yet, such was the force of habit, he did not give one the impression of being at all too scantily clad. A short distance off—ten yards or so —stood a large handsome bungalow;—this was the mess-house of the officers who belonged to the —— Regiment of Lancers, quartered just now at Mirabad, one of the pleasantest stations in the north-western provinces of India.

The group referred to were in their white summer

uniform, which, in the glare of the fierce sunlight, rather dazzled and distressed the eye; but in the shadow of the dark-green overhanging foliage the effect was both cool and picturesque.

The leave season had just commenced, and the young fellows, while refreshing the inner man, were gaily reckoning up their chances of visiting the various hill-stations—Simla, Mussoorie, Nynetal, or even going as far as that famous paradise of sportsmen, Cashmere; exception, however, must be made in respect of two of their number, who, comparatively silent, were seated a little apart, and on whose countenances there was no sign of merriment visible.

Suddenly a horse's hoofs pattered along the drive leading to the bungalow, and a second later the rider came in view. He dismounted a short distance from the party, and, handing his horse to a servant, approached the chato-hazri table.

"Well, doctor?" interrogatively said one of the quieter men, addressing the new-comer.

"Not well; indeed, just the contrary, I am sorry to say," replied Dr. Anderson gravely: "poor Mrs. Morgan is dead."

There was a slight pause.

"Terrible business for Morgan," presently remarked the first speaker, in a thoughtful voice; "she was all in all to him. I'm afraid he'll go to the bad."

Some years ago, when Thomas Morgan first joined the —— Lancers as their veterinary surgeon, the verdict of the officers, not given hastily, but after due deliberation, was that he was by no means an acquisition to the corps; in truth, the more severely critical, if asked their private opinion, would have had but little hesitation in pronouncing him coarse, self-sufficient, and unsteady.

As time passed, the general impression regarding the vet's character became confirmed; moreover, it seemed as if he were deteriorating to even a lower level. Then Morgan unexpectedly did that which raised him a hundred per cent. in the estimation of every one. He married a woman whom almost any man would have been proud to call his wife.

Handsome, ladylike, and accomplished, Mrs. Morgan also possessed tact and discrimination, and in a little while she became quite a favourite in the regiment. That a man of Morgan's calibre should have persuaded a woman of this stamp to marry him was something in his favour; soon, too, it became abundantly clear that the lady thoroughly understood her husband's weak points, for she managed him with so much judgment that the improvement in him became marked; indeed, after a few months of married life, the vet surgeon was voted quite altered, and rather "a good fellow."

And now, as the doctor had stated, a bitter affliction had befallen the husband; the wife, whom he had so loved and looked up to, had died, after giving birth to a still-born child, and he, unstable and weak-principled, was left alone, a prey to intense grief. Under the circumstances, therefore, it was not surprising that the men at the breakfast-table who heard the observation, "Poor Morgan will certainly go to the bad," should feel that the dismal prediction was only too likely to be verified.

An interval of two or three years has elapsed since the sad event chronicled above, and I now come to the incident on which the interest of this narrative chiefly depends. At this time the —— Lancers were quartered at Aldershot, having returned home from their foreign service in India. The mess-house of the regiment was situated in the centre of the front row of the block of buildings known as the West Cavalry Barracks. These face the Avenue Road, and are only a few hundred yards to the east of All Saints', the garrison church. The mess-room was a large lofty apartment, rectangular in shape, with one of its lesser sides almost occupied by a great arched window, which was heavily curtained. In the centre of the room was a long dining-table; it stood in such a position that an individual sitting

at the top-end would be facing the window, and, of course, one sitting at the bottom would have his back towards it.

One evening, rather late in October, a number of officers were seated in this mess-room at dinner. At the top of the table, filling the post of president, was Lieutenant Robert Norris, the orderly officer of the day. He was a pleasant, fair-haired young fellow, and on this occasion seemed particularly cheerful, for early next day he was to start for Ireland on a month's leave. To his right sat a guest of his, Captain Wilson: the latter had come down to Aldershot on a visit to his friend, and intended accompanying Norris across the Channel on the ensuing morning. There was no one at the foot of the table, but the chairs on either side of the vice-president's were occupied, one by Dr. Anderson, the senior surgeon of the regiment, the other by a young officer of the same corps called Beamish. In the intermediate seats were a few other men whose names it is unnecessary to specify. It ought also to be mentioned that the evening twilight outside was only partially excluded, the curtains being but half drawn.

The conversation had been brisk and lively, the most prominent Aldershot topics had been discussed, and there had occurred one of those momentary

intervals of silence, which are not uncommon during dinner, when the company was startled by the loud exclamation of one of its members.

"Good God, man, are you ill? what on earth is the matter?"

The speaker was young Beamish. He was addressing his *vis-à-vis*, Dr. Anderson, towards whom all eyes were at once turned.

There was a white, scared look on the surgeon's face, and he was staring at the window with eyes half out of their sockets. It was evident he had received a shock of some kind.

"No—nothing," he answered, with an effort; "but —ah! did you see *that woman?*"

"See a woman—where?" asked the other wonderingly.

"*I* saw her all right, Anderson," exclaimed Norris, from the top of the table—"rather pallid-looking, and dressed in a sort of bridal dress that seemed slightly stained; she certainly looked in at us as she walked past the window."

"What unmitigated nonsense!" cried Beamish energetically. "You're both mad—the window is at least thirty feet from the ground, and there is no balcony outside, but merely a narrow ledge, along which it would be impossible for any one, except a ghost, to walk."

"By Jove! I never thought of that," said Norris, starting up impulsively. He ran to the window and began pushing aside the curtains. "But you saw her too, Anderson," he continued, in an amazed tone, "and, somehow, the features seemed familiar."

"Yes," replied the surgeon; "I certainly saw a woman dressed in white pass quite close by to the window and glance in for an instant. But it was the strange woeful expression in the eyes as they met mine that startled and disturbed me. I fancied I recognized in her some one I knew; yet, for the life of me, I can't call to mind who she is."

The doctor, who had quite recovered his composure, spoke in a clear collected voice. He, too, now rose from his seat and approached the window. Then there ensued a scene of considerable excitement, in which surprise and curiosity were largely blended. The dinner-table was quickly deserted, the window thrown open, and all the servants summoned. The premises were examined, and all kinds of nooks and corners invaded and ransacked, for the discovery of the intruder, the more especially as Beamish suggested somebody might be attempting to play off a practical joke on them. The search, however, proved fruitless. There was no trace of the mysterious female who had given so rude a shock to one of the party and ruffled the serenity of all.

Of course, almost with one accord, they scouted the notion that the apparition could possibly have an immaterial personality. *Who ever heard of a spectre in a mess-room?* The idea was preposterous —absurd; and then, how idle and objectless seemed a visitation whose purpose no one could recognize! They were either the victims of a hoax, or, as was more likely, of a spectral or optical illusion. So far the officers. The question, however, might fairly be asked, which of the following contingencies was the more improbable—the appearance of a disembodied spirit, given that disembodied spirits exist; or that two individuals, of totally different types, in the perfect possession of their senses, sitting far apart, should, amid the distraction of dinner, brilliant lights, and gay conversation, conjure up, exactly at the same moment, a spectral illusion, which, in face, figure, and dress, should be absolutely identical? Moreover, as will be shown a little later, the vision was not so entirely without purpose as at first sight they judged it to be.

To resume. The commotion gradually subsided, and the officers again took their seats, but their cheerfulness seemed to have vanished and the talk flagged; if a stray remark were passed, it led to nothing.

"I wonder if the apparition portends misfortune

to either of you two?" said Beamish, derisively glancing towards Norris and Anderson.

Neither answered.

Presently Wilson addressed his host.

"You have to visit the Guards to-night. When do you start?"

"After midnight," answered Norris briefly.

"I'll go round with you."

But the other wouldn't hear of it. However, nothing untoward happened, and early next morning the two friends left for Ireland.

A month later, his leave having expired, Norris rejoined his regiment.

On arriving, one of the first persons he encountered was the surgeon, with whom of course he entered into conversation.

After a little he said rather abruptly,

"Ah, Anderson, how about the apparition? did you unravel the mystery of its appearance?"

"I thought you knew; surely you have heard all about it?" replied his companion, with an air of surprise.

"Not a word, not a syllable," said the other. "To tell the truth, the matter has troubled me but little; still, I'm glad it admits of a rational explanation."

"A rational explanation!" echoed the doctor, with a queer smile. He drew from his pocket a large

gold locket, and having opened it he handed it to his friend. "Just look at that," he continued.

"Good heavens!" cried Norris, gazing at the miniature, "it is the spectre! Why, it is the portrait of Mrs. Morgan, who died in India! I'm more puzzled than ever."

"I suppose, then, I'd better begin at the beginning and explain," said the surgeon. "As you are aware, Morgan—who has been steadily going downhill since his wife's death—was induced, about two months ago, to leave Aldershot on sick-leave for change of air and scene. Well, after that extraordinary experience of ours at dinner, I passed a restless uncomfortable night, sleeping very badly; I therefore got up earlier than usual, intending to take a brisk walk before going to hospital. Soon after I left the barracks I met Burke, Morgan's servant, and casually asked if he had any news of his master. To my astonishment he informed me that Morgan had returned to Aldershot four days ago, and at the present moment was lying in his quarters seriously unwell. Of course I went to him immediately, and then the true state of affairs at once became clear. Morgan, perhaps hardly responsible for his actions, had concealed his arrival that he might, unchecked, give free rein to his intense craving for stimulants, and now he was so ill that I had very little hope

of his recovery. After doing all I could for him, I was turning to leave the room, when my eyes fell on the large coloured photograph of his wife, that stood on a side-table. Then, in an instant, like a flash came the conviction that Mrs. Morgan and the apparition were identical, and that it was her features, seen distinctly as she walked past the window, that I had been trying in vain to recall; in the likeness she was dressed as a bride in white. You know I was with the poor lady in her last illness, and I take it the meaning of the vision was to call my attention to the fact that her husband was dying uncared for and alone, within a few hundred yards of where we were dining so merrily."

"It is a strange occurrence, the very strangest in my experience," said Norris thoughtfully. "I remember the photo you mention quite well; this one in the locket is the same, only reduced in size. I believe I knew more of Morgan than most of the others, as our rooms opened into the same corridor, and I was, in a way, his next neighbour; perhaps that may be one reason why I also saw the apparition. How long is it since Morgan died?"

"He expired a fortnight ago," replied the surgeon —"quietly, I am thankful to say, and with his faculties clear."

# HALF A MINUTE LATE.

## I.

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"PUNCTUALITY is the soul of business.

"I am aware that one of the Seven Wise Men, either of Greece or of Gotham, has preferred to read 'Punctuality is the thief of time.' And, on the whole, I am disposed to agree with the wise man. 'A proverb,' says another wise man, 'is the folly of many and the stupidity of one.'

"Punctuality is a bad habit. I say so distinctly. All habits are bad, because when they are not good they injure, and when they are good they are bad, because they deprive a good action of the merit of free-will and degrade it into mere slavery. But of all habits, punctuality stands first and foremost in point of utter badness. Defend me from a punctual man! He is arrogant! He considers himself absolved from all other virtues, because he has one for which a clerk or journeyman is paid. He is worse than arrogant—he is an arrogant slave, so

degraded as to brag of his slavery. He has no sympathy with free men. He is sordid and mean. To save a wretched minute he will miss a joy. He will put an end to the most interesting conversation to keep an appointment with a lawyer or a tailor—and he is a fool for his pains, because neither lawyers nor tailors are punctual men, not even in sending in their bills. He is doubly a fool indeed, for he deliberately gives himself a bad character. He expects others to be punctual for his sake, which is selfish. If he is ill-tempered, as cultivators of the pettifogging virtues mostly are, he quarrels with them; he is incapable of imagining that human nature is not regulated by clockwork; in fact, and in short, and to sum up all, the punctual man is of necessity an arrogant, mean-minded, degraded, haggling fool!"

* * * * *

Harold Maynard was standing, in evening dress, with one hand upon the bell-pull, and holding in the other the evening paper, from which, during the interval between touching the bell-rope and pulling, he read this choice extract of wisdom—an extract from one of those bold dashes at paradox that newspaper readers are supposed to digest comfortably after one o'clock P.M. In the morning, telegrams; in the evening, paradox, is the due order of the day's news.

There was no earthly reason why Harold Maynard should not have pulled so soon as his fingers had closed upon the cord. Though it was only in a lodging-house, the wire was in excellent order, and the cord unstrained. Indeed, the bell-hanger had put everything to rights only yesterday, and Harold was not one of those angry men who ring twenty times apiece for twenty things in a day. No, he might have rung instantly; but his eye had fallen upon these few lines of print, which surely out-paradoxed paradox; and he read them through, naturally enough, before he pulled.

Demons do not, as a rule, write in newspapers, nor was this special journal distinguished for demoniac energy. The passage would not have attracted him had it been of the usual style of that journal. But I think, if the passage was not written by a demon, some demon must have been at the elbow of the writer when it was penned.

Why did he write it? Probably he would have laughed at the question, and thought of pay-day. But how many people ever know why they do anything? For that matter, "Why am I born?" as a famous American lecturess on woman's rights commenced an eloquent peroration, with the sole effect of drawing from a little boy in the gallery the only possible answer, "I give it up, if you put it as a

co-nundrum." . Probably we do nothing for the purpose with which we do it. And the writer of the article, thinking of pay-day, and never having heard of this particular reader, was tricked by some jocular demon into writing what made Harold Maynard just half a minute late in pulling the bell.

For it was just half a minute, to a tick of the clock, between his touching the bell-rope and giving the pull.

It must have been for this purpose and no other that the article had been written; for the writer would have stared at learning that his paradox could have had any effect whatever upon man, woman, or child.

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## II.

HAROLD MAYNARD was a young man of about thirty, tall, broad-shouldered, and well made, a man of much muscle and with some brains. He had many excellent qualities, and not the least of them was that he thought less of his good points than others thought of them. He could ride a horse and pull an oar, and both without bragging or thinking that life was bestowed upon him for such things. He thought a great many of his friends very good fellows, and they returned the compliment. He was proud only of two things: a character for being always

up to time—neither too late nor, still worse, too soon—and of a very strong admiration for Letty Despard.

Of that he was very proud—as a man should be of loving a girl whom he thinks worthy the love of better men than he. He was proud of it even though hope did not go hand in hand with pride. It was not that he thought it impossible for her to care for him. On the contrary, ever since that evening when he had asked a blossom of tuberose from her after waltzing with her twice, and after she had refused it three times, and had ended by dropping it by accident when he was near enough to pick it up and secrete it, he had felt—in the subtle way one feels such things—that she was to be won. Won? Yes—but maintained? That was another thing.

Love has been defined as "an insane desire to support somebody else's daughter." And that was just what Harold Maynard could not do. It was as much as he could do to support himself alone, and he was not an extravagant man. He knew the value of time perfectly; and time is money, as all the world knows. Ah! if it only were, and if he could only pay into his banking account half the spare time he had on his hands! Though very much the reverse of the sort of man who looks at both sides of a sixpence, and lingeringly feels the edge before parting with it, he was a rigid economist; rather

than lose a minute, of the value, say, of three halfpence, he would charter a special train from Edinburgh to London at seven shillings a mile. It may be that his very form of economy left him poor, and far richer in the wealth that is measured by minutes than that which is measured by pounds sterling.

At any rate, he was very much in love, and, in respect of fortune, like the gourmand and the goose —he found it too much for one, but by no means enough for two. And Letty Despard was very far from being a romance heroine, to be kept for nothing a year. She could eat and drink as a healthy girl should be able, and could dress—to perfection.

Many days, and many nights too, had Harold Maynard consumed in trying to find something to do. Many a man of his age and of twice his ability will know what that means who has neither the will of iron, nor the key of gold, nor the spoon of silver. Fortune is not a bird to come for whistling; she needs the salted tail. And how to salt her before catching her is a problem that puzzles others than children. I need not enumerate the plans that he laid out for life, how well they promised, how surely they came to nothing. It seemed to him as if Fortune were a ball rolled before him by an invisible imp, ever at his toes, never in his fingers. He did not despair, for love means hope; and he was not

weary of the chase, for he was young and strong; but it did seem hard sometimes to feel time slipping away, and yet bringing him no nearer to the end. He felt himself the sport of an altogether peculiar destiny. All men's destinies feel peculiar—to themselves. And it was all the harder on a man who was always up to time, and never lost an instant—especially when he was expecting to meet Letty.

But it is a long lane that has no turning. Just as he was beginning the most keenly to feel that the world did not want another pair of strong shoulders when it already had so many—that is to say, at the most unexpected moment possible—he received a letter that made his heart beat faster than if it had been signed Letitia Despard, instead of being dashed off in bold male hieroglyphics that gave reading it the excitement of discovering a mystery.

"Dear Maynard,—O you blind burrage and honey running in the may of braid! Oil Despard by thunder hangs a filling jingo Hong-Kong—aged penny, cold congregation, strong in treacle—lungs, hurry in trances, plundering indefensible: so Yorick the merry man. Wing with me, wit, sing sharp to-day. Sting white, the irons not.

"And believe me, evening shrine,

"T. L. WINTER."

Tom Winter did not live in Hanwell; he simply had a heroic contempt for pot-hooks and hangers.

"Has he no respect for other people's time?" thought Maynard; but the name of Despard was written legibly enough, and compelled attention to a letter that would otherwise have been turned into a spill. For that purpose, Maynard selected an unreceipted bill from his bootmaker, lighted his pipe and sat down to see if that would help him. And after a fair amount of study, he managed to make out as follows, omitting impossibilities:

"Dear Maynard,—Do you mind turning an honest penny in the way of trade? Old Despard, my uncle, wants a fellow to go to Hong-Kong—good pay, good appointment . . . . business habits, punctuality indispensable; so you're the very man. Dine with me at six sharp to-day. Strike while the iron's hot,

"And believe me ever thine,

"T. L. WINTER."

And he made out from a postscript over the page:

"If you accept you will sail by the *Ganges* from East India Dock, on Thursday. Mem.: Old Despard dines with me. He will take you, if you will go."

If he would accept! Why, here was an opening into the very heart of dreamland. Old Despard was not only the uncle of Tom Winter, but the father of Letty, and a rich China merchant into the bargain. Into dreamland? Nay, into the land of certainty. Maynard was pretty safe to do himself credit with any employer, if he only had elbow-room. Whittington and the good apprentice are not the only men who have married their master's daughter. As a penniless failure he had no chance of being old Despard's son-in-law; as a trusted employé, working under old Despard's very eyes, if he had no chance he would be a fool. There was but one answer:

"Dear Tom,—Of course: and thank you. At six sharp—to the minute: you know what that means with me.

"Thine always,

"H. M."

Twenty minutes to dress—fifteen minutes for a hansom to Tom Winter's. He measured it accurately. He was not more, not one second more, than half a minute late in pulling the bell.

"Fetch me a hansom!" he said to the girl.

## III.

He was in ample, even superfluous, time for a dinner engagement, as we blind mortals measure such things. Five minutes' grace is allowed to the most notoriously punctual man; nobody ever thought of half a minute. Maynard sat back in the cab with a good conscience on the score of his favourite virtue, and let no feeling of hurry interfere with his future as it lay panorama-wise before him. His start in life was assured; for he knew Tom Winter, who always understated everything, and whose letter meant that his appointment was secure. Old Despard liked him, he knew, as a man. And Letty, he knew, liked him in the same capacity. It was only Monday as yet; before Thursday came he would have ample time to turn his hope of Letty—so far as she was concerned—into certainty. He had never yet said the words "I love you" in plain speech, but in the plainer speech that lovers know the words had been said and answered. Looks and instincts only needed translating.

Suddenly the hansom stopped, as hansoms will so long as cabmen believe that narrow byways are shorter cuts than broad thoroughfares. A cart-horse had just fallen in front, and blocked the way. Maynard pushed up the trap over his head.

"Can't you go round another way? I'm in a hurry, and it looks like a long job here."

"Well, it ain't my fault. I didn't make the block. It would have been behind us instead of afore if we'd been half a minute sooner, that's all."

Nor had the half-minute grown into more than a minute over, when the block was removed and the cabman was touching his horse with the lash to make believe he was making up for lost time. And a minute and a half is not worth minding—scarcely even in the matter of catching a train. It was full five minutes to six still, and he was not more than six minutes and a half at the outside from Tom Winter's. Had he been on his way to meet Letty anywhere the smallest delay would have put him out of temper. As it was, not even his principle of punctuality was offended. "That's the best of being in good time," he even said to himself, with self-gratulation. "One doesn't spoil one's digestion beforehand with hurries and worries. One can look after the hours, and leave the half-minutes to take care of themselves." The cabman had named the half-minute, or it would never have occurred to him.

"Hulloh!"

I write it, not because it represents by any means what the cabman said, but because his real speech

must be expurgated to be presentable; and "Hulloh," though not the whole truth, was really one word among many. The horse was pulled back hard against the splash-board, and Maynard thought he heard a cry, set in the cabman's volley of hard words like a lost heart in a storm.

It was just beginning to darken, and a street mist had been coming on that made the gas-lamps flare yellow and double the darkness. Maynard was out of the cab in an instant to see what mischief he had done. It was only too clear.

Among the hoofs of the horse lay a figure—whether woman, girl, or child, he could not tell at first. In the by-road and in the dark a smaller crowd had sprung out of the pavement than usual, and he managed to raise, without much interference, her who had been so nearly run over, and with no more than some two minutes' delay. She was of small weight, and Maynard's muscles soon had her into the cab, leaning back into the farther corner.

"To the nearest hospital," he called out to the cabman, following her. "How far?"

"Not more than four minutes."

"Then look alive. Do it in three."

He was not thinking of himself as he urged extra speed, nor of Hong-Kong, nor even of Letty, nor of how, by compound interest, the first half-minute had

now become seven and a half; so that the five minutes' grace before meat had expired by the time he was near the hospital. He might have unwittingly caused the death of a fellow-creature for aught he knew. She was not dead yet, that he could make out—only stunned; blood was running from under the hair over one of her temples, and she was ghastly pale. She was too close for him to see more in the alternate darkness and flare of the night: he could only support her with his arm, regardless of delay. He did not even say to himself, "What a bore!"

By the better light in the hall of the hospital he and the house-surgeon together saw a young girl, not more than eighteen years old, still insensible and bleeding, still as pale as death, and dressed very plainly—poorly even, though not like the poor. Her features were small, good, and a lady's; but her set lips and closed eyes placed her for the present beyond criticism. She was long in coming to. But the surgeon brought her round at last. She opened her eyes, and said, in a very sweet voice,

"Mother, where am I?"

The surgeon held her pulse as he said, "Don't be afraid. You've had a little accident in the street, that's all, and you've been brought to St. Martin's—the best place for you." He spoke with a little more

tenderness and less quickness than are affected by men who have to deal with cases wholesale; and, now that she had opened her eyes and spoken, there was an indescribably pathetic air about her that made it impossible to speak to her merely as a case, or otherwise than tenderly. Maynard looked inquiringly at the surgeon. It is certainly more unpleasant to run down some people than others.

She suddenly put her hands to her head. "In a hospital! An accident! Oh, for God's sake let me go!" And she tried to rise.

"Not yet. Be a good girl. We'll see to-morrow. You can't go now. We will see to your friends."

A clock struck a quarter past six. The half-minute had rolled itself on into fifteen. Harold Maynard had committed the unpardonable sin of a punctual man. He had been guilty of an act of charity, which means inevitable loss of time. Surely he might have sent her to St. Martin's in charge of a policeman. And now here was time flying without his hearing the flutter of a feather.

The girl fell back with a moan, and her eyes filled with despair. Harold felt conscience-stricken. What had he done? And, having brought new trouble into the world, what could he do? what should he not do? And it is only fair to say that, if the girl with the sweet face and the sweet voice had been

some broken-down and utterly uninteresting old crossing-sweeper, he would have felt the same, and for a while have forgotten even Letty Despard.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" he said gently and ashamed, touching her wrist slightly with his fingers.

"Only—help me to go home. I *must* go home."

Harold looked at the surgeon. The surgeon shook his head, and signified "Impossible just now."

"Can I see your friends?—can I let them know?"

"I have a mother, and she—is dying. And she has no friends but me; I—I have none but her. She is *dying*—alone. I went out for help, and—"

The girl's agony was beyond tears.

"Good God!" said Harold. "I will go—trust me, my poor girl. Tell me where she lives—her name. Will you trust me?"

The girl's eyes gave him a long look. Apparently they were satisfied; and they thanked him in that simplest and honestest of languages that has no tongue.

"20 Powys-place—the third floor. Mrs.—Despard."

The clock struck a quarter to seven. From the half-minute had grown forty-five.

## IV.

NEVERTHELESS, more than unpleasant as was this interruption to the plans of a punctual man, whose career was dependent upon his being "up to time," and who had taken the special precaution of pledging himself thereto—nevertheless, the hospital was not so far from Powys-place, nor Powys-place from Tom Winter's lodgings, as to prevent Maynard's catching old Despard before he rose from table; and though to prefer the affairs of a stranger to one's own is unbecoming in a business man, and speaks ill for him to would-be employers, it is like the police-magistrate's opinion of drunkenness—no excuse, but a palliation. For the moment the name of Despard did not strike him; it was so constantly running in his mind in connection with Letty that it came rather as an echo to his thoughts than as an interruption. He took another hansom, and threw away another double fare.

Powys-place was not so aristocratic as its name. It was nothing better, indeed, than a street of shabby not to say doubtful, lodging-houses in the neighbourhood of a railway station, where respectable people might lodge, but most assuredly not of their own free will. It says much for the girl that Harold, who knew the world, did not take her character from

that of her surroundings. Not that his instinct was singular, for pure eyes tell their own tale. He found No. 20, and knocked at the door. It was opened by a red-faced man in shirt-sleeves, smoking a long churchwarden.

"Mrs. Despard?" said Harold doubtfully.

"Third floor back," said the man gruffly, and disappeared into a darkness of dust and onions.

Harold groped his way to the third floor back, listened, heard no sound, and then entered, as noiselessly as he could, without knocking. For a while he could hardly see for the rushlight that darkened the little room with its glimmer. He hardly knew what to do. He had not till now realized what is meant by the word "alone." If the light showed him a dying woman, how should he approach the bed and speak to her, and what should he say? The house was as silent as if uninhabited, and he was not inclined to seek the help of the red-faced man who had opened the door. True, he might affect to be a doctor brought to the bedside by the girl, see what ought to be done, and account for the girl's absence in the best way possible. But whatever he might do, the situation was trying for any but a sister of mercy. For half a second he wished he had not come.

He listened in the half-darkness, and fancied he

heard the sound of breathing. The situation was ghastly altogether—alone in a light worse than darkness, in a poor room in a neighbourhood without an affectation of character, and by the bedside of a dying woman, when he should by rights have been dining himself into a career. Presently the wind began to howl, and a dog to howl in answer. The howl of a dog at night is bad for people with nerves, but, under such circumstances, bad even for those fortunate people who have none.

Harold approached the bed as softly as a perversely-creaking board would let him, and said quietly,

"The doctor, Mrs. Despard."

There was no answer. He had heard breathing but an instant ago, and now the bed might be empty, for any sound he could hear. He listened again; he heard nothing but the howl of the dog and of the wind.

He took up the rushlight and brought it to the bedside, shading it with his hand. Then by degrees he lessened the shadow thus thrown over the bed until he could see all that was to be seen. There was not much to see. Only a dead woman—nothing more.

What was he to do now? To leave the corpse alone with the wind and the other night-ghosts would

be sheer barbarity. He must provide a watcher somehow, if only the man with the pipe and the red face—and then at the risk of having to find a watcher for the watcher, lest any little valuables the dead woman might by any chance leave behind her should find an unintended legatee. No doubt there must be a woman in the house—and yet if there had been, Mrs. Despard would hardly have been left to die alone. He closed the door behind him, turned the key, and carried the rushlight down-stairs. He met nobody, and the rooms he passed were either dark or empty. At last he found the head of the kitchen stairs. These also he descended, and found himself in a labyrinth of sculleries—so it seemed.

"Hoy, there!" growled a voice from somewhere that smelled like beer. "Who are you?"

"And where are you? Mrs. Despard is dead."

"So's Queen Anne. I could have told you that an hour ago."

"Why didn't you, then?"

"Because you didn't ask me. That's why."

"Is there any woman in the house to see to her?"

"There's the young woman, I suppose."

"Miss Despard? She has been hurt by a cab, and is in the hospital."

"Well, then, she's all right. And the old lady's

all right. And I'm all right—they've paid to Saturday. I don't mind a body in the house, not I. I'll see to it in the morning."

"There's no other woman in the house? No neighbours you could send for?"

"You seem to think a mighty lot of a dead body, young gentleman. Bless you, you wouldn't if you was me. You're a doctor, I suppose. Then look here—I'll make a bargain. Dead men don't tell no tales, nor dead women either, and there ain't a soul knows the old lady but her daughter, and she won't know but what she's buried when she gets out of hospital. You take the body for two sovereigns. Done? You'll get a whole woman to cut up, and I sha'n't be bothered."

"May I ask," said Harold, "who you are?" His tone was not amiable.

"Who I am? You're a green hand, I reckon, for a medical man, not to hear of Knaggs. I'm Knaggs. And I can get you an arm or a leg most days—and bones any time. But a whole body isn't an every-day thing."

It was useless to argue with a ghoul.

"Who is—was, Mrs. Despard?"

"A decayed gentlewoman, I suppose. That's what they call her sort. If she weren't a good bit decayed I wouldn't have had her for a lodger. But

she scraped her rent together—or she wouldn't have had me for a landlord."

"It is not a common name—Despard."

"Nor's Knaggs."

"You can tell me nothing of her? Nor of the girl?"

"Bless us, I've told you enough, haven't I? I know no harm of the girl. She's got a few pounds to keep out of the workhouse. I didn't ask how she came by 'em. I took 'em, as they came due."

Every natural instinct rose up in Harold. It was nothing to him, but he could not bear the thought of that sweet-faced, pure-eyed girl coming out of St. Martin's to find her mother dead—but not buried, and unable to find so much as a mound of turf to mourn over. Without another word to Mr. Knaggs he returned to the room he had left, and himself became a watcher of the dead—he himself could not have told, and indeed he never asked himself, why. He closed the eyes of the dead woman, and covered her face decently.

Then—it was a ghastly process—he set himself to rob the dead for the sake of the living. In that house of ghouls, with the wind howling round, he felt almost like a murderer as he searched the room for any articles of value to prevent their falling into dishonest hands. He did not find much—only the portrait of a handsome young man, brown-haired

and brown eyed: a miniature, well painted, and set in a black-velvet case and frame. This he took; and then, with a sort of conscious sacrilege, drew from the dead fourth finger the woman's only ornament—a wedding ring.

He sat down at the window, drew up the blind and did not think it sacrilege to light a cigar.

"Only half a minute"—he remembered the words of his first cabman. And at that moment the clock from near St. Martin's struck one. Only half a minute late—only seven hours and a quarter. The snow-ball rolled and grew.

Harold Maynard was growing hungry. But he felt like a sentinel at his post, and it was too late even to dream of dinner now. So he dreamed of Letty and looked at the stars.

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## V.

It was a glorious relief when he woke from his dream, threw open the window, and let in the sun. He locked the door, carried away the key, gave it, with all needful information, to the sergeant on duty at the nearest police-station, breakfasted, and then went straight to the hospital.

"How is the girl?" he asked the surgeon. "I saw her mother—she is dead. Ought the girl to be told?"

"It would kill her—that's all. She is very weak and ill—and in my opinion she wants food as much as anything."

So there was nothing for it but to let her wait for the bad news. It was needless even to relieve her mind with kindly equivocation, for she was in a high fever before noon. And so, at last, Harold was left free to attend to his own affairs—and it was high time. He had missed his appointment: this was Tuesday, and on Thursday the *Ganges* was to sail.

Obviously the best thing he could do was to call at once on old Despard: and Tuesday was a good day, because he was always at home on Tuesday, and there was the chance of seeing Letty alone into the bargain. He must see her alone before sailing for Hong-Kong, and his heart told him that no loss of half a minute, or half a thousand minutes, could hurt him there. He had lost a dinner, but he had breakfasted, and there was an end. The sun shone, and the world was beautiful again—all but for the sad face of a girl whose mother had just died alone. And that, as he drew nearer to Letty, was smiled out by the sun.

It is a curious fact that when a man is in love the sun shines even when it rains—unless indeed it rains when the sun shines. But to-day the sun really shone.

And it was high time—for Hong-Kong or for

anywhere. Harold had but one sovereign left in the world to call his own, and one that he had borrowed on Saturday from Tom Winter. But it was all right now. With Hong-Kong and Letty before him he could afford to be as poor as Job, or even as Midas, who was the poorest mortal ever known.

By good fortune, or rather by punctual management, he found old Despard at home. The China merchant was a tall, rather fine-looking man, with signs of port and portliness, handsome brown eyes and iron-gray hair—a commercial captain, every inch of him. People said he was difficult to deal with, and ill-tempered when the gout was upon him; but that is a not uncommon failing, or rather was not when wine was wine, and men drank it without fear instead of taking it in timid nips all day. Old Despard's toes were often tender, but his stomach was sound.

He had a library, though he never read: and here he received Maynard.

"Take a seat, pray. Your business, if you please?"

"I was to have had the pleasure of meeting you at my friend Winter's."

"Indeed?"

"I was prevented—but it was to arrange about my going out for you to Hong-Kong."

"Ah, well. Is this your letter? H. M.—yes;

Harold Maynard. Never sign initials, Mr. Maynard. I never do. I was informed you were a punctual man. In my business punctuality is indispensable."

"I pride myself on punctuality."

"An excellent pride. And you say in your letter you know what a minute means. Your letter is a written undertaking to be at a certain place at a certain time. I don't remember meeting you at my nephew's."

"Nothing could have vexed me more. But—well, I ran, or my cab ran, over a girl in the street, and I had to see her to a hospital—"

"That was not business, Mr. Maynard. There is a time for all things. You should not have done so."

"What else could I have done?"

"Kept your appointment. But too late is too late, if it's only by half a minute, Mr. Maynard. Not having met you I have this morning engaged another gentleman, who, I trust, will not waste my time in running over girls in the streets of Hong-Kong. Time presses, and the *Ganges* never delays an hour."

That wretched half-minute! It seemed turning into a live thing. How could he have supposed that an errand of common charity would have cost him so much more than a dinner? And here, just because he had delayed in pulling a bell-rope for an inappreciable space of time, he was as far from

Hong-Kong as London, as far from Letty as from Hong-Kong; with only two sovereigns in the world, and one borrowed, and with no prospect of earning more.

The sun went out of the day. It was a cruel blow. But there was nothing to be done. After all, it was fair enough that old Despard should have supposed him indifferent, and have engaged another employé under the pressure of time. He could not even complain. He could only put a brave face over his heavy heart, and say, "I'm very sorry. Good-day."

But, as it happened, he had left his hat in the drawing-room. And, on returning there to fetch it, found not only his hat, but Letty—so radiantly lovely that the sun came back again. He had never seen her so beautiful; and there was a shy joy in her face as she turned to him that contrasted bitterly with his own sad look of a beaten man.

But—was he beaten? Could he feel beaten when the girl whom he loved was there before him? Repulsed at one point, could he not do all things for her? Only he must have hope—he was no poet, to be willing to live for a dream. He must feel something to win. That she was more than half won, he knew; but the word had never been said, and now, in his disappointment, he was longing and hungering for the word that would console him for all.

"Letty," he said, "I didn't mean to see you to-day, but—I'm glad. To see you, I mean. I'm not glad, other ways. It's hard that a wretched cabman should have—Well, it seems I must try again in England, after all."

"Well," she said sweetly, "I suppose you don't very much mind?"

"Not mind?"

"I suppose if you'd minded—very much, you know—you would have seen papa yesterday? I heard all about it, and—yes, I was very, very glad you were going to Hong-Kong. But, of course, if you can do better in England I shall be gladder still."

"Letty! What chance is there in England?"

"You know best, Harold."

"You know I don't know. And you know why—why I was so anxious to go to China."

"Indeed I don't know."

"Letty! Don't you know what I live for?"

"If you had cared—so very much—I think you'd have managed to dine with cousin Tom and papa."

"I couldn't, dear—Letty, I mean. It was not my fault—the devil seems to be in everything. I miss my appointment. I lose my employment. And now you tell me that it was my fault, and that I don't care."

"If you had cared you would have done what you cared," said Letty, with the sweetest obstinacy.

"But I had to look after a girl—"

"Yes?"

"My cab nearly killed her."

"Well?"

"Well! What would you have done?"

"It depends on how much I cared for her, I suppose—if I was a man."

"Letty! I never saw her in all my life before."

"Then it was odd you cared about her so much as to give up everything for her."

"Letty . . . . I love you . . . . Will you be my wife . . . . some day?"

Letty had been charmingly composed. But the question was sudden, and it was at least a second before she recovered her composure. Well—she did like Harold Maynard very much indeed. He danced and flirted to perfection. He loved her. He was handsome and strong, and made love straight out, in the right way. She sighed. But—but—but—what was a girl to say to a man who not only had no money, and would only waste her youth in a long engagement, but was so obstinately unlucky as to throw away the one chance he had of winning her? "Yes" gave a little flutter in her heart; it almost spread its wings—but—

"O, I *am* so sorry, Harold!" she said, with the most touching sweetness. And that meant No.

Could he have liberated the fluttering "Yes" even yet if he had refused to take her answer? Perhaps; but something prevented him.

It was the now gigantic ghost of that half-minute —a half-minute no more, no more even an hour, a day, a year—but a whole life, fortune, Letty, and all. The details might be absurd, but massed together they had swelled into a mountain, and the absurdities were the mocking grins of its gnomes. "Only half a minute!" Only destiny.

But one effect of such combined assaults of Fate upon a weak man is to make him weaker; upon a strong man to make him stronger. They are the tests of manhood and of will. The loss of Letty might be unbearable, but it had to be borne. The world must still go on, though for Harold all buying and no selling, all hunger and no food. Something *must* be done. He had said so a thousand times for Letty's sake; now he must say it once for all, and for his own. But even his pressing need did not keep him from calling at the hospital the next day with the girl's miniature and ring.

She could see him now. He sat down by her bedside and looked for a moment into the sweet pure eyes, wondering what he should say to them. They were very different from Letty's eyes. He

could not imagine them looking coldly upon a beaten lover—he could imagine them lighting up with sympathetic joy or softening into comfort. He longed to know by what name to call her. But, meanwhile, how should he tell her that she was alone in the world?

He looked at her gravely, and laid the ring before her.

"It is well with her now," he said. He took her hand that she might not feel all alone, and turned away his face that she might weep freely. The tears came, and then she sobbed bitterly; but her hand clung to his as if it had been a child's, and with a touch as innocent. The tears came into his own eyes.

"I will see you again," was all else he said to her. He felt he was giving her strength by being there; and soon she would have to face the world all alone.

"What is her name?" he asked a nurse.

"Alice Despard."

"Will she get well?" he asked the surgeon.

"Who can tell?" But he looked—"No."

Harold returned to his lodgings well-nigh heart-broken. The lost half-minute had lost him fortune, love, hope almost, and had killed the sweetest face and voice he had ever seen or heard.

But when he reached home, his room was occupied—by a policeman, and a companion in plain clothes. The latter said, before he could ask their business,

"You are Harold Maynard. I am a constable. And I arrest you on the charge of wilful murder."

"What in Heaven's name do you mean?"

"The murder of Jane Despard. And you'd better come along quietly, as you must, and not say a word."

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## VI.

HAROLD MAYNARD—and wilful murder!

Think of yourself, you who read this, and couple your own name with two such words if you can. And then you will conceive the effect of such a charge upon such a man, who was as incapable of such a crime, even in imagination, as you.

And yet who shall say after this that the evidence of circumstance may not bear with crushing force against the most innocent of men?

The surgeon called in by the police had found that the woman in Knaggs's house in Powys-place, Jane Despard by name, had been suffocated, not by nature, but by man, who does everything so much more

artistically than she. Suspicion at first fell naturally upon the landlord. But he in the first place volunteered an ineffectual search of the premises, and, while still in custody, gave certain information that put a different complexion on affairs. A gentleman had come from St. Martin's Hospital while the poor lady lay dying. That gentleman was easily identified, by inquiries at the hospital, as Harold Maynard. Very slight inquiries were enough to make manifest that Harold Maynard was a very poor man, with the position of a gentleman to keep up, with many debts, no employment, and no means. He had been seen at the hospital in possession of a missing wedding-ring—that in itself was nothing. And at his lodgings was found a miniature, the property of the murdered woman. That was not much more. But—

The detective in plain clothes, who was sharp enough, had taken the trouble to dissect the miniature. And between the portrait and the back he found—Bank of England notes to the amount of two thousand pounds! Motive enough for murder and to spare, in the eyes of the law. *Cui bono?*

And he who possessed the miniature, and had never delivered it out of his own hands, had been alone with the murdered woman during ample time for murder and robbery. If he had come with a charitable motive, with what motive had he carried

away two thousand pounds? Temptation makes the thief, not the thief the temptation—as all the world knows.

It was a very triumph of detectivism. Why should a sane man rob a dead woman of a miniature that could be nothing to him if he did not know what lay behind? And the notes were old notes—a hoard well-nigh as old as the miniature must have been. There was no difficulty in finding them: no secret trick: the only thing was to have the idea. And even as the idea had at once struck the detective, so surely it must have struck Harold Maynard.

And so he was in the cell of the police-station, with a consciousness of innocence and a conviction that the proofs against him were overwhelming. He had a night's leisure to think over all things. Why was he charged with murder? Because, omitting minor steps, he had been alone with the dying Mrs. Despard. Why had he been there? Because he had run over a girl in the street mist. Why had he run over her? Because he had been driving over just that part of the road where she was crossing. Why so? Because he had been delayed by a block. And why delayed? Because he had not arrived at the spot just half a minute before. And why not? Because he had started half a minute late from his

own door. Why? Because half a minute had passed between his touching his bedroom bell-rope and giving it a pull.

And finally, why? Because some unknown journalist had written a paradoxical article in an evening newspaper.

*Messieurs et mesdames,* such things are happening every day and all day long. Are there any little things in the world? Are there any great things?

> "Alas, how easily things go wrong!
> A sigh too much, or a kiss too long,
> There follows a mist and a weeping rain"—

But too often has that been quoted and misquoted. Half a minute late, indeed! Half a second, half the tick of a watch, and half that, and half that again. Life is made up of such things. Sighs and kisses are Brobdingnagian in comparison to the straws that do the undone work of Archimedes' lever and move the world. I would prove in the twinkling of an eye that the oak grows from the acorn, and the forest from a grain of mustard-seed. Not all our lost half-minutes end in murder. But they may, ay, and do, end in worse—in blunders never to be redeemed, in life-long estrangements, in missed opportunities, in all the thousand ills that souls are heirs to. Half-minutes have lost battles, and overthrown empires, and missed trains.

But these reflections, though philosophical enough in their way, and though he had leisure to make them, in no wise helped Harold Maynard. What was his defence to be?

He might feel sure enough in his own mind that Knaggs, the professional resurrectionist, was more likely to make sure of a body, during the absence of Alice, than he to make sure of a hundred thousand pounds. But nothing was found on Knaggs, while two thousand pounds were found upon him. The world is never tired of asking *Cui bono?* The world mostly mistranslates it, indeed, but that is the way of the world. And here it applied only too well.

In short, there was but one person in the whole world who believed in Harold Maynard—and that was she who of all people in the world had most reason to disbelieve in him, and to feel the need for revenge—upon the guilty, if possible, but in any case upon somebody. Stories of murders will find their way everywhere, even among people who never read: even into the wards of hospitals. Letty might forget that she had ever cared for a murderer in a deep flirtation with Tom Winter, who may have had his own reasons for so generously banishing a dangerous rival to Hong-Kong. Mr. Despard might set down murder as the natural and necessary outcome of being late for dinner—a less heinous offence, but far

more fertile of general discomfort than murder. But Alice, on her sick-bed, with a glorious contempt for logic and the law of evidence, refused with an obstinacy only equalled by Letty's to understand how so kind a man could be a murderer—and of her own mother: it was too horribly impossible. She gave no reason for the faith that was in her: her instinct told her to believe, and she believed. And after all, is not that the only sort of belief worth having? Defend us from those who believe in us only when they have good cause: give us those who insist on believing in us because they love us, right or wrong. That sort of belief seldom errs.

Alice had burned with fever; now she burned with anxiety. She had been mourning for the dead; now fear for the living well-nigh swallowed up her mourning. She clutched at every feather of news. The new fever had a strange effect upon her health. I will not say that the surgeon who had given her over was disappointed to find his predictions falsified, but he must for ever after have had less faith in his own opinion. From the moment she heard of the charge against Harold Maynard her pulse began to beat less quickly, her heart more strongly, and a certain unsuspected elasticity of nature gave her a rebound from her illness. Her cheeks were no longer pale, but the colour of health began to glow

into them. And so it went with her till she was discharged—cured, and without a penny in the world. And yet she did not believe herself to be the rightful and defrauded heiress to two thousand pounds. If she had, she must have thought her hero a thief, and if a thief the murderer of her own mother: and she refused to believe anything of the kind, or rather was incapable of believing.

At last the day arrived when Harold Maynard—gentleman, of no occupation: an ill-omened designation—was to be brought up at Bow-street, before the magistrate, charged with the murder of one Jane Despard.

Despard is not a particularly common name, though, oddly enough, it occurs twice in this history, as that of a rich China merchant and of a poor lodger in Powys-place. It would therefore have been natural enough for its owner not to have been present on the bench during the examination. Men, as a rule, are not fond of having their names aired under such conditions. But pointing morals is a favourite pastime, however unwilling modest people may be to adorn tales. He who first thought of the idle apprentice and his virtuous contrast could have found no better illustration of the virtue of punctuality. Old Despard could see it all before him laid out like a map from the beginning. There was Tom Idle

before him in the dock, and beside him on the bench John Goodchild in the person of Tom Winter. Of course Letty was not there: but that was in consequence of a sacrifice of curiosity to the proprieties. Perhaps she might appear under a veil when the trial came, but she could hardly take part with self-respect in the vulgarities of a police-court: and besides, her father would not allow her.

All this happened but a short time ago, as a few fairly long memories for these hurried times will call to mind. But the passion for remands, for exhausting the funds of prisoners in preliminary investigations, and for turning a simple matter of business into a display of vanity and mutual admiration all round, had not come fully into fashion. It was quite possible that the examination of Harold Maynard might last no more than three weeks: some people said three days: a few thought even one day would be enough, as the prisoner was without counsel. But that remained to be seen. A clever prisoner, who wished to take full advantage of his situation, might give a good deal of trouble and delay, though without the advantage of legal training.

Harold Maynard felt his position there as an innocent man would—that is to say, he was overwhelmed with the shame popularly supposed to be one of the punishments peculiar to guilt by those who know

nothing about the matter. Fear of death is a mere nothing to such shame, when the warm blood boils against the injustice of circumstances, not of man. He was alive to the actual peril in which he was standing, though not so much as to his name being bruited about as a murderer; to what Letty, the lost, would think of him; and last, but by no means least, how Alice would see her mother's murderer in the man who had been planning, even in the midst of his own difficulties, how he could in some way make up to her for the many cruelties of destiny. But, as he was waiting and watching, with no more than just one shadowy touch of a halter round his neck, the ticking of the clock grew louder and louder, till it seemed to become visible as well as audible. The half-minutes could be seen. But they all seemed to obey and follow one arch-half-minute, that appeared to grin at him from the clock-face with a diabolical grin. He had raised that, and no other, and it had haunted him and was destroying him. He might have lost any other half-minute in the universe with impunity—this alone had been fatally gifted, and this alone he had made his enemy. And it had grown and grown till it had filled up the whole measure of all life and death, and bade fair to open the gate of eternity.

The evidence, in spite of all that could be done,

did not take long. Indeed, the witnesses were few —the surgeon, the detective, and one or two others. Mr. Knaggs was not in court, but the prisoner's own statements as to admitting his presence in Powys-place at the time alleged made up for the want of that witness. It seemed likely that the examination of the prisoner would be concluded in a single day. And it was actually approaching conclusion and committal, when—

"May I say something?" said a sweet young voice from behind the dock.

"Certainly."

Harold Maynard looked at the new witness—and the fatal half-minute descended from the clock-face, no longer a grinning imp, but tragically incarnate in Alice Despard. She was about to come forward as avenger—the harshest and sharpest scourge that Fate or time could ever find for him now.

And yet—as their eyes met—who shall explain electric sympathies? Though his reason told him this, he knew otherwise. There is marvellous magic at times in that sudden flash from eye to eye. She had obviously come but lately from her bed in the hospital: her glow looked hardly natural, and as if the fever were still in her veins. Harold felt a strange pride in her thrill through him, as if he would rather meet his doom from her hands than

from any that were meaner. If it were not love that ran through the air of the police-court from eyes to eyes, there can be no such thing: and love conscious, and visible. Love, thank Heaven, is not like Letty, and is blind to vulgarities, though clear-sighted about other things.

"Who are you?"

"Alice Despard."

"The daughter of—"

"Yes, sir."

"And what have you to say?"

"The prisoner is not guilty."

Of course all the people laughed at the notion of a young girl, a mere witness, taking upon herself the function of a jury—as if every one of those who laughed had not been privately doing the same thing. The magistrate himself smiled for a moment.

"Tell me why you think so?"

"I don't think. I know it, sir."

That might be delightful nonsense to the court, but it was none to Harold Maynard. It was consolation in extremity.

"What are you?"

"I taught till—till she became ill: then I had to wait on her. I had a little money: it did not last for long. But long enough, sir—nearly. We had to live as—as we best could at the end."

"You mean, I suppose, that the money found on the prisoner could not be yours, your mother's, because she had none? Is that what you mean?"

"Yes, sir."

But it so happened that the force of her argument was considerably weakened by the fact that a pauper had lately died with two hundred pounds in notes hidden in an old stocking. The old lady might have been a miser, but still the point was something.

"Have you anything more to say?"

"Yes, sir—he is not guilty. The money was not ours, and he closed her eyes and watched her all night through. He came to see me at the hospital and brought me her wedding-ring, on my finger now. He—"

"Then—" began the magistrate.

But a new witness rose from near him on the bench.

"I have something to say before you think of committal."

It was old Despard.

"Well?"

"My name is John Despard, merchant, of London and Hong-Kong. I'm well known. And I say that neither the prisoner nor the—Mrs. Despard, nor anybody could have known of the notes. Nobody ever touched them, and it was not the prisoner who secreted them."

"Who then?"

"It was I—thirty years ago. That portrait is of me. I placed the notes there with my own hands."

Let it be clearly understood, that not Harold Maynard, but old Despard is the hero of this history. Harold had done nothing heroic. He had only wasted half a minute, and looked after a girl whom he had nearly killed. For the rest, he had been a hero in no more than the sense in which the heroes of Greek trage lies were heroes—in being the foot-ball of the three Fates whenever they were disposed for a game. But for old Despard to get up in open court, though but in Bow-street, and tell his story, was a piece of genuine heroism for a martyr to gout, who hated everybody near his toes and cared nothing for a soul beyond them.

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## VII.

Not that he told all in court—for he was a man who kept to the point, and a great deal concerned him only.

When that picture of the brown-eyed, brown-faced young man was curiously handed along the bench for inspection under the eye of the police-sergeant, its guardian, what dim but never-to-be-forgotten

springtides returned to the heart of the still brown-eyed but iron-haired man!—springtides when the sun was bright for him also, and when gout was unknown. Did he remember for whom that picture had been painted, and when? Did he remember his first love? Why, men will forget their last sooner—especially when the first and the last are one and the same. For Letty's mother had not been particularly lovable; and that perhaps accounted a little for Letty, apart from her beauty. But Jane Morris had been eminently lovable—and she accounted for Alice, the girl with the one virtue of standing up for the man she loved, without rhyme, reason, or power to help him, just because he was down. Of course old Despard, then young Despard—very young—had married Jane Morris, who of course had not a penny. And of course the old Despard of those days parted them; and the course of true love not the less for being married love, ran rough, and the old story ran in the old groove; and the husband had to go out to China in a slow sailer, and the wife was to be cared for at home. It was then that young Despard sent his wife his picture stuffed with bank-notes—all he had—and worked his way out before the mast by way of compensation, and was reported dead—to his wife: and she disappeared in trying to live; and when the young man came back in those un-letter-

writing slow-sailing days it was to find her dead as well as gone : so he was told.

And now it seemed that the very money had been thrown away. It was more than strange to find himself face to face, then and there, with his own old young self of thirty years ago. And there in the witness-box stood Jane's child; yes, as like Jane at her age as his own child could be, and—well, he forgot the gout, and was a man.

"The prisoner is discharged."

That woke old Despard from his reverie, and his waking left him very much ashamed. He had made a fool of himself in public—a thing he had never done in his life before, though in private no doubt as frequently as most men. He had raked up the ghosts of dead days, and set them up as targets for a Bow-street jeer. He had opened his heart; he would have opened his purse sooner.

"The carriage," he growled savagely to Tom Winter. "And bring me the girl. I can't speak to her here."

"You mean to adopt her—to acknowledge her?"

"What's that to you?"

## VIII.

"No, sir, thank you."

It was Alice speaking to old Despard.

"You won't? Don't you know you are my daughter—my first wife's daughter? Do you think I'll let you go out teaching again, or live differently from Letty?"

"Am I your daughter?"

"Whose else should you be? You're as like me in the nose as two peas; but you've got Jane's gray eyes. And that fellow—that unpunctual fellow Maynard—I'm half sorry I got him off after spoiling a good dinner; that fellow closing Jane's eyes! I wish with all my heart I'd let him be hanged."

"It was being with her, sir, that kept him—"

"As if I didn't know that! As if that made me like him any the better! As if I didn't know that I ought to have—no, it wouldn't have done; he'd have been losing his confounded time in Hong-Kong. I'll get him something somewhere, and let him go to the devil his own way; and you'll come with me."

"Sir—"

"And don't call me sir."

"I have promised—to go—with him."

Letty, had she been standing side by side with her

sister before the glass, would not have been pleased with the comparison just then.

"With him? Who's him?"

"Mr. Maynard asked me to marry him, and I said yes."

"And when, pray, did Mr. Maynard ask you to marry him? Why, you haven't seen him one minute since he was discharged."

Alice smiled. Was old Despard so obsolete a lover as to forget what one minute, nay, what half a minute, can do?

"I see. He thinks he is going to get one of old Despard's daughters, after all. Then all I can say is, if you go with him you don't get a penny from me. I'll give that very two thousand to a hospital —St. Martin's, if you like—but—"

Alice smiled once more. How could she tell that what her father hinted about her lover might not be true? But she did tell—somehow.

"How do you mean to live?" asked old Despard, who caught the smile, and was not soothed.

"I don't know."

"You don't know? Then, by the Lord Harry, you *shall* know! I'll—I'll—I'll—confound you, I'll send you both to Hong-Kong!"

## IX.

On the deck, not of the *Ganges*, but of the *Euphrates*, Harold Maynard and Alice his wife were standing arm in arm, watching the every-day wonders of the sea, and feeling the every-day wonders of love in one another. He was on his way to fortune, after all.

Suddenly there was a commotion near them. A wave had carried something under the stern, and a boat had been lowered.

It was only a glass bottle. But that means much five hundred miles from shore.

The captain of the *Euphrates* opened it, and read:

"Lat.—, long.—. *Ganges* of London, for Hong-Kong, sinking with all hands. Boats swamped. Forward to Preston & Co., Southampton."

That was all. Harold looked gravely at his wife. She knew all that was passing in his mind.

If he had *not* been HALF A MINUTE LATE he would have sailed in the *Ganges*, have never seen Alice, and been at this very moment at the bottom of the sea.

## HOW I CAME TO BELIEVE IN A GHOST.

HAVING advertised for "quiet farm-house apartments" in North Devon, in order to give myself a couple of months of absolute quiet in which to finish a piece of work that had occupied me during the previous winter, I soon after found myself comfortably settled at Coombe Farm, where I appeared to have found everything I required, viz. freedom from all interruption, and a lovely country in which to find refreshment and invigoration of both body and mind when my day's work was over.

Of this work I need say no more than that it had to do with pen and paper, and was in no wise laborious, being a labour of love. The great attraction to me at Coombe Farm was this—the rooms appropriated to my use were two newly-built rooms, added on at one end of the house, so that I was shut off from all household noises. The sitting-room was of fair size, the bedroom beyond, and opening out

of it, was large and airy, and could only be entered through my sitting-room.

On the first three days after my arrival, the pure strong air made me so drowsy towards the evening, that I actually went to sleep the moment I got into bed. On the fourth night, however, habit resumed its sway, and I settled myself comfortably among the pillows for an hour's reading, as is my usual custom. I was soon deep in 'The Rise of Silas Lapham.' Howell's novels are not exciting, but there is some excellent writing in the first volume of this story, and I was enjoying it thoroughly, when my attention was attracted by some movement at the side of the bed. I turned and looked; and to my intense astonishment there lay, on the counterpane of old-fashioned patch-work, close to my body —a hand.

Nothing else—not even an arm—a small, well-formed female hand, pale and delicate-looking like an invalid's; unmistakably a lady's hand, by the slim fingers with dainty tips and well-cared-for nails. I gazed at it for a considerable time in blank wonder. Where on earth had it come from? Then it struck me that the wrist did not end suddenly, as would be the case if it were a real hand severed from the arm, and in some mysterious and unaccountable way conveyed to my bedside. Then I began to laugh

inwardly at myself. Of course it could not be a real hand, it was an hallucination; my liver was out of order, or my stomach, or nerves; and yet I felt quite well, in fact, I never felt better in my life. I lay and stared at it calmly, noting the texture of the skin, the shape of the nails, etc. I had ample time to wonder at its very natural appearance, and apparent solidity, and was just thinking of trying whether I could feel it also, when it suddenly vanished. "Now what can be the cause of this illusion?" I asked myself; but as I felt too perfectly healthy to be uneasy about myself, I soon forgot it in a sound slumber.

The next day by the late post, I received a copy of a work, to the appearance of which I had been looking forward with keen interest. I incontinently plunged into its pages, read it while eating my supper, over my pipe, scarcely laid it down even to undress, and resumed its perusal in bed; so that, save for one brief instant while settling myself, my mind never once recurred to the curious incident of the night before. I was so completely absorbed in what I was reading, that only when I was sufficiently roused to turn my head did I become conscious that for some moments my outward eye had seen a fluttering movement at the side of the bed.

When I looked, there lay the hand as before

motionless, and resting lightly on the counterpane.

This time I felt slightly uncomfortable. There must be something wrong with me. I would take a pill. But what sort of pill? I had no sensations to guide me in my selection, and I had never heard of any pills made up to dispel spectral illusions. I resolved to go through my medicine chest, which, as it consisted solely of two boxes of Richardson's pills, would not take long a doing. I would take a No. 9 to-night, and if that did not serve me, a 53 to-morrow.

Just as I had made up my mind to this for me severe course of medicine, the hand vanished. I got out of bed, took my pill valiantly, and then resumed my reading until sleep came upon me.

The next night, having finished the book in which I was so much interested during the day, I returned to the story of 'Silas Lapham.' I admit I was not on this occasion altogether oblivious of the appearance of the two previous nights; therefore the very first flutter of something in the air at the side of the bed attracted my attention, and I saw the hand fall quietly down and light upon the quilt, where it lay motionless for several seconds.

Then there ran through it a slight movement, a tension of the muscles, as if about to move. It

seemed to make an effort to gather itself up, as if to point at something; but the effort failed, and the hand faded from before my eyes. It did not simply vanish as before, but for an appreciable space of time I was able to watch it slowly melting into nothingness—as it were, disintegrating itself. As soon as it had entirely disappeared I sprang out of bed, and in desperation swallowed two "53 pills."

"If that does not cure me, what shall I do?" I asked myself, with the perplexity of a healthy person who suddenly finds himself affected by some mysterious ailment, which, while scarcely serious enough to authorize the calling in of a doctor, is yet distinctly disagreeable.

It did *not* cure me. Next night the hand was not only there as usual, but as I sat staring at it, rose in the air, and when about three feet above me, gathered itself into the form of an index, pointing at some thing or some point over my head.

I began to feel uneasy. Up to this no thought of anything supernatural had crossed my mind; but when I saw the armless, bodiless hand floating about, there suddenly flashed into my mind a vivid description of the so-called "materialized hands," given me by a friend of mine, who at one time had seen a good deal of the famous medium Home. Not that this

helped me in the least; on the contrary, it enlarged the field of conjecture.

I did not believe in ghosts, put but little faith even in the best attested marvels of spiritualism, and held myself to be a most unlikely person to be favoured with manifestations of any sort. Still I felt in such good health both of body and mind, that it was hard to believe in a physical reason for the appearance.

That evening a happy thought struck me. Having some knowledge of the laws which are supposed to govern hauntings, ghosts, and other world phenomena generally, I knew that if the appearance was of that nature it would probably be confined to that room; whereas if it arose within myself, I should see it anywhere. I therefore resolved to pass that night on the capacious sofa in my sitting-room. I did so, and saw nothing. Still I declined to believe in its ghostly origin. Richardson's pills had done their work; I was healed. Certainly this was far more probable than that spectral hands should come hovering about me at night—I, who had never been to a *séance*, nor in any way meddled with the supernatural in all my life.

So I returned to my bed. The hand appeared as before, and pointed at a spot above my head (the tester of the bed apparently) in a persistent way

that positively irritated me. By this time, having got the idea that it *might* be something supernatural fairly into my head, I felt no desire at all to try the test of touch; so I simply sat and gazed at it as long as it remained, and when it had vanished, got out of bed and looked to see if I could discover anything worthy of being so perseveringly pointed out by a spectral hand come all the way from the other world, as it would seem, especially to do so.

I could see nothing unusual or in any way remarkable about the old-fashioned mahogany bedstead, of the style known as "half-tester," with low footboard, massive cornice, and hangings of dark chintz.

It stood with its head against the wall, or rather partition, which divided my two rooms, and which was made of varnished boards only. The wood having shrunk, the cracks allowed both light and sound to pass freely through. There could be no sliding panel, no secret hiding-place there. To the left of the bed was the door; on the right stood a large and massive chest of drawers. If I add that the window faced the foot of the bed, I need trouble the reader with no further details. It was a comfortable but commonplace room; the furniture rather "out of fashion" than "old-fashioned," bright and cheerful, not at all the place one would expect to meet with anything ghostly.

I returned to bed, and as usual was not again disturbed, though I did not fall asleep as readily as I generally do.

The next morning I received a letter from the very man whose experiences with "Home" had so lately been brought to my recollection. It was written from London, dated the previous day, and ran thus—

"DEAR GEORGE,

"I went to your diggings last night, and was sorry not to find you there. As I want a little rest and quiet myself, I'll look you up, and will be with you to-morrow night.

"Yours truly,

"HOWARD."

We were old college chums; a year before he had left London on a pleasure trip to India, and I had not heard of his return. Still, though his presence would retard my labours, it was a pleasant surprise—under the circumstances.

Perhaps he could suggest some remedy for the—Hand, which I quite felt had now arrived at the dignity of a capital H. While awaiting his arrival that evening I turned the thing over in my mind, and finally resolved to say nothing about my ex-

periences. I would put him in my room to sleep; and seeing how interested he had always been in what he said was falsely called the supernatural, and the wish I had often heard him express, that he could see a ghost, or, as he called it, "a spirit," in this I considered I was doing him a kindness. I was not afraid that anything he might see would alarm or disturb him; he was too well used to dark *séances* and materialization *séances* for that; and if he, being perfectly ignorant of anything extraordinary having been seen in that room, then saw what I had seen, his evidence to me at least would be conclusive; whereas, if I even gave him a hint, the theory of "expectancy" or "sympathetic influence," might be thought to account for it.

Shortly before my usual supper hour my friend arrived. I was heartily glad to see him; and as soon as our meal was over, we lit our pipes and settled ourselves for a grand talk. We had nearly exhausted the subject of his trip, when I led gently up to the subject in which I now felt a great interest, by asking him if he met any of the new style spiritualists, calling themselves Theosophists or Occultists, who seem to have originally arisen in India, and to thrive best there.

"Not 'new style spiritualists,' my dear fellow," he answered, "quite the reverse; they are entirely at

variance with all the fundamental doctrines of spiritualism, and their own doctrines are far older."

He then went on to tell me how he had met many of these Theosophists; that he was much interested in their teachings, although they had upset many of his most cherished ideas, and considerably altered his views with regard to spiritualistic phenomena.

"Do you still believe in the genuineness of Home's materialized hands and faces, of which you once gave me so graphic a description?" I asked.

"Yes; as phenomena. But I no longer believe that a disembodied human soul made his or her hand and face, by some process inconceivable to us, visible to my grosser sense. But this is too wide a subject to enter upon at this late hour; another time, my dear fellow, we will discuss it."

I had for some time noticed that my friend seemed uneasy. He repeatedly glanced over his shoulder to the door of the bedroom, which was standing open. On my asking if he felt a draught, he said No, but at the same time rose and shut it. His reference to the lateness of the hour I accepted as a hint that he was tired, and accordingly suggested that we should separate. I then accompanied him into the bedroom, saw that he had all he wanted, and bidding him good night, left him to repose and—the Hand!

Next morning, entering the sitting-room at my usual hour (no very early one), I was surprised to find him lying wrapped in my dressing-gown and covered with a rug sound asleep on the sofa. As soon as he was fairly awake he said, "Your bed was delightfully comfortable, my dear fellow, but sleep in it I could not; so I came out here, where I slept splendidly—as you had occasion to observe."

I frankly confess that I did not put implicit faith in this statement. Had he seen the Hand? (I had *not*, by the bye—another bit of evidence against its being hallucination.) Had he seen it? and had it driven him out of his bed, and bedroom? What a laugh I should have against him if I could discover this to have been the case. We spent the morning wandering about the country, and towards noon, feeling warm and rather tired, we stretched ourselves on the grass in the cool shade of some trees, and fell into a fragmentary conversation, which a little skilful leading on my part guided into the desired channel, namely, the "occult," I feeling sure, that while on such subjects any revelation he might have to make regarding the night before would certainly come out.

"Materialization," said he, "is the lowest form of spiritual phenomena, by whatever agency produced. I have got beyond all that. You have of course

heard and read something of mesmerism, electro-biology, and clairvoyance; they give one glimpses into a higher world of spirit than the average spiritualists. Mind-reading does the same. Do you know," he went rambling on, "I believe theosophy is right about the extra senses. I believe the race is just beginning to develop a new sense. Have you heard of those sensitives, who, by contact with a person, can read their history, or by simply entering a house or room can see and feel all that has happened within it?"

I smiling shook my head. "I am a materialist by nature and a sceptic by training," I answered.

"George," he said earnestly, "I have been much among people who see, feel, and know things that few of us even dream of. I have myself experienced such strange things—"

Here he stopped and paused awhile. I felt somewhat disturbed. "It is coming," I thought; "he is going to confess he has seen the Hand." In one way this certainly would be satisfactory, as showing that I was not a victim to any cerebral or other disease; yet it would require me to believe in at least one ghost, spirit, supernatural appearance, or whatever he would please to style it, and this was just what I had ever refused most steadily to do.

After a moment he resumed—

"You will perhaps laugh at me, but I believe I am developing a new sense. At times, with certain people or in certain places, a strange feeling comes upon me. The sensation is of different degrees of intensity, but it is always of the same kind; I yield to it if circumstances are favourable, and generally learn why I felt it, and what it meant."

"My dear fellow, you are interesting—but vague," I said playfully.

"I can't put it clearly," he said; "it is so difficult to express. Sometimes I see, sometimes I hear too, but most often I only feel."

"Feel what?" I asked impatiently.

"Feel if anything, of importance that is, either for good or evil has been done, or even conceived or thought of by the person I am with, or in whose house or room I am. If there has been great trial and suffering either mental or physical undergone in any place, I become aware of it. As, for instance,—I did not mean to tell you, but I may as well confess—your rooms had a curious effect on me last night. Your bedroom in particular. I felt something—some influence coming out of it, through the open door, as we sat chatting, and when I went into the bedroom I felt it most strongly. It kept me awake; and as I did not wish to yield to it, I very soon got up, dressed, and went out for a stroll.

Returning an hour later, I established myself on the sofa, as you saw."

"Did you feel it this morning?" I inquired.

"Not much. It would not be likely to make itself strongly felt unless I were to remain for some time undisturbed by the magnetism of other persons going in and out."

"Well now, Howard, I tell you what I will do; if you will sleep—or try to—in that room to-night, and if you feel the influence, yield to it, and see something tangible, I'll promise to believe in anything you like to tell me henceforward for ever."

In this I was not quite fair; for unless he saw a hand—in short, what I had seen myself—I am afraid I should have put less faith in his experiences than before.

"What a bribe!" he laughed. "I should like to convince you, but sometimes I feel withheld from yielding to the influence, and in that case would fly the spot rather than yield. Still, I do not think that will be the case here. I resisted last night only because I was tired; such experiences being somewhat trying to the nervous system, one must be in good form to bear them without inconvenience. I will do my best to-night, and see what comes of it."

"Why at night?" I queried. "Deeds of darkness—"

"In a case like this," he interrupted, "simply because only at night does the atmosphere of the room remain for any length of time unchanged by the magnetism of other persons entering."

That night, when I thought Howard would be fairly in bed, I left the room which I was then occupying, and returning to my sitting-room stretched myself on the sofa.

I scarcely know why I did this, but I felt that I should like to be on the spot if anything particular happened, and I knew that nothing very much could happen without my both seeing and hearing a good deal of it through the cracks in the partition. Through them also the room in which I lay was faintly illuminated by the light which I had advised Howard to keep burning. How long I lay in the silence I do not know—it seemed a long time—and I started when I heard my friend's voice speaking in a low tone. Rising quietly and placing my ear to a crack, I heard him say in a slightly tremulous voice, as if nervous and excited—

"If you can only make me understand what it is, I will do it for you gladly."

There was a long pause, and then he said—

"If you will come again I shall be here, and I will do anything I can to help you."

Another silence. Then I heard him lie down, and the light was extinguished.

"Was Howard *touched?*" I asked myself. "Who on earth could he be talking to? Not the Hand surely." This idea so nearly made me laugh that I retreated in some haste to my own room, where I lay for some time awake, giggling inwardly at a mental picture of my grave-faced friend sitting solemnly upright in bed, in earnest conversation with a lady's hand fluttering about in the air.

As soon as we were seated at breakfast on the following morning, I asked him how he had fared during the night.

"I have had the most extraordinary experience of my life," he replied gravely.

"Dear me!" I exclaimed, "what was it? I am expiring of curiosity."

"No sooner had I entered the bedroom, than the sensation I told you of came upon me strongly. It was not an evil nor unpleasant influence that filled the room; and feeling that, I gave myself up to it, and by the time I had been a quarter of an hour in bed, I was in a very fit state to receive impressions.

"I was lying, as is my habit, with closed eyes, keeping my mind as nearly as possible blank, when I suddenly felt impelled to open them. Doing so, they

fell upon a human hand lying on the bed close to me—a small delicate woman's hand."

"Just so; exactly," murmured I.

"Then I perceived that above and around it was gathered a cloud-like shape, misty and undefined; as I gazed, it gradually took substance, form, and colour, and there stood before me, as substantial (to all appearance) as you are—the figure of a young woman."

"Good Lord!" I ejaculated.

"I need hardly say," he continued, "that I was intensely excited—"

"I should say so, indeed!" I remarked; for this was more than I had dreamed of in my wildest moments.

"But former experiences having to some extent accustomed me to startling occurrences, I kept my wits together, and waited for what might come next."

"What was she like?" I asked.

"The face was pale and thin, with a look of sorrow and care upon it; the eyes large, dark, and hollow, with deep shadows about them; it was the face of a sick woman, but she must have been lovely in life and health, for the features were exquisitely formed, and a thick cloud of crisply waving, bright yellow hair fell about her throat, and clustered in soft masses

on her forehead and temples. She wore a loose garment of a pale, cloudy gray colour, falling in soft folds to the ground. There was a touch of white and a knot of deep red ribbon at the neck—'

"Stop there, Howard!" I cried. "That's too much," (for I really believed he was drawing on his imagination). "A ghost with a knot of red ribbons! I have heard of a ghost in diamonds and old point, but they were family heir-looms, which gives them dignity, and the disembodied one may have had strong reasons for the frivolity; but red ribbons, bought at Jones's the draper's, sixpence three-farthings the yard!—I draw the line there."

"George," remonstrated the seer, "I do not feel in the least like joking, and you ought not to say that in earnest, for you have known me long and intimately, and I am sure you never heard me exaggerate or tell any but a plain unvarnished tale; therefore, I expect you to believe me now."

This was so true, and said with so much gentle dignity, that I begged his pardon, and requested him to proceed. Still, I found the red ribbons hard to swallow, and mentally resolved that if ever I related this story, I would leave them out.

"She stood looking at me," he continued, "with an anxious, eager look in her eyes, and her right hand still resting on the bed; then she slowly raised

it, and pointed with the forefinger apparently at the tester of the bed—anyway considerably above my head. So pointing, and keeping her eyes on mine, she moved round to the foot of the bed, and stood there still pointing.

"I then addressed her, and asked what she wanted of me.

"There was no reply, no sign; she stood still, with her fixed gaze on me. I then told her that if she could make me understand what it was she desired, I would gladly do it, if I could.

"The pale lips moved in a faint smile, the head bent slightly as if in assent, and then she paled and faded away before my eyes. Ere she had quite vanished, I said if she would come again, I should be here, and would try to help her. And she will come, I know; and she will find the power of in some way communicating to me what it is she has on her mind which will not let her rest."

"But how is it you are so sure she wants anything?"

"You would not ask me had you seen her. The look of anxious entreaty in her face as she pointed upwards was unmistakable; though why she points there I cannot imagine. The partition is quite incapable of hiding anything; and the back of the bed equally so, as it is hung only with

unlined chintz. I examined it all carefully this morning."

We then turned some portion of our attention to our rapidly cooling breakfast; and I, beginning to get over my first emotion of wonder, related my own smaller experience, and tacitly acknowledged that I was almost ready to admit the existence of "ghosts." He was surprised to learn that I had seen anything, and glad to find that what I had seen fully supported his story.

I should opine that a ghost-seer, whose ghosts are never seen by any one but himself, must sometimes have bad times in face of a sceptical and unsympathizing world, occasionally finding it wisest to hold his tongue about them.

"As you have seen so much, it is evident you will not prevent the spirit showing itself; so I propose we both watch for it to-night," said Howard.

"By all means," said I. "But tell me how you—who, with your many and highly elaborated theories, ought to be able to—account for my seeing only a very solid-looking hand? I suppose the whole of the spirit was always there?"

"You are not gifted with what I call the 'extra sense,' which enables me to perceive spirit forms. To make herself perceptible to you she would have to materialize, and I suppose she had not the power

or means—or whatever it is that is required—to materialize her whole form. She would at once feel that I was able to perceive her without much effort on her part, and so showed herself in what I call—to express an intermediate state between the natural condition of spirit, and the state of materialization—a state of 'condensation.'"

"The form, though so clear and distinct to me, could not, I think, have been seen by you. I suppose you never before saw anything supernatural, as it is called? Come," he added, laughing, "you have been sly about this business; be frank now and confess it, if you have."

"I admit the soft impeachment; I have been sly. But honestly, this is quite my first experience; I put it down to a disordered interior, and physicked myself accordingly."

This amused my mystical friend immensely.

"Who is this 'condensed' lady, or who *was* she; and why does she come here?"

"That remains to be learned; and with your leave, when the spirit has done all she can, we will make inquiries as to who has lived or died in these rooms, and see if we can hear anything of a woman answering to her description. We might get very strong evidence in support of her statement if she makes any."

"Good gracious!" I exclaimed, "you don't mean to say you expect her to talk to you?—to sit down and have a chat like any living woman?" I asked in derision.

"Why, no, not quite that; but she will, I think, speak to me in a way I shall understand. I seem to feel more than hear, and to know more than either, what they want to tell me," he explained.

For the remainder of that day, to use a vulgar expression, I hardly knew whether "I was on my head or my heels." My ideas were much upset, and my mind distraught; indeed, I was obliged to lay aside my work until the little affair should be over, as I ran the risk of spoiling it; for, like King Charles's head in the memorial, a ghost threatened to get into it at every line.

When the usual hour for retiring arrived, we both went into the bedroom.

"As it is a lady we hope to receive, we must not undress," I facetiously remarked, as I seated myself in an arm-chair by the window.

Howard removed his coat, and donning my dressing-gown, lay down on the bed. At first we talked a little, but he soon requested me to be silent. After a while I began to feel a little nervous and fidgety. I started at every familiar farm-yard sound. I wished the room was more brightly lit, although

we had brought in our lamp, which gave a good light, and generally wanted the thing over.

Suddenly I saw the "Hand" poised in the air, as it would be if the body to which it belonged were standing by the bedside.

My friend had raised himself, and was gazing intently into what was to me the empty air, seemingly about where the face belonging to the Hand would probably be. There was a curious look in his eyes, which were widely open, and they looked larger and darker than usual, as if the pupils were dilated. Soon the Hand, which I noticed was not nearly so solid-looking as on previous occasions, moved round to the foot of the bed, and then rose up quickly into the air, pointing with outstretched finger towards the bed-tester. Up to this moment, though I had been interested, astonished, and even excited, I had not felt a touch of any other emotion.

The reader may have wondered at the entire absence of such words as "fear," "awe," "horror;" such expressions as "cold chills," "creeping sensations," "freezing of the blood," &c., so essential to ghost stories proper; but I prefer to tell about my own only ghost in my own way; that is, simply and truthfully, and I am doing so. Indeed, how could I be expected to experience such distressing sensations?

A dainty little woman's hand is under no circumstances calculated to inspire them in a man's breast, and as to that crowning, indescribable emotion which even strong-minded people declare seizes on them in the presence of the veriest and most harmless trifle of clearly supernatural origin, I had not felt a trace of it—up to this moment.

But now, as the Hand rose in the air, it came between me and the lamp placed at the side of the bed, and I distinctly saw between me and its light, the outlines of a woman's arm and figure—misty, vapour-like, perfectly transparent, yet quite clear and distinct, much as if a figure had been cut out of fine pale-coloured gauze, and invisibly suspended in the air. It was only visible to me when the light was behind it; where the foot-board of the bed intervened I lost it entirely, consequently I saw only a three-quarters' figure. But it was quite enough. A curious sensation came over me. I felt that I was in the presence of something not of this world; something that scientists could neither weigh, measure, nor analyze; of the laws of whose being we know so little, that our imagination has absolutely limitless range. It filled me with wonder, not without a touch of awe. The conviction stealing upon me, that there, before my eyes, was evidence of an existence without the body of a world which, though

unseen, unfelt, unknown, might be not only near, but absolutely about and with us always.

How long the figure stood thus, with myself gazing on it in almost breathless expectancy, I know not. At last it moved aside, all but the hand vanishing from my sight; and it growing each instant more transparent, relinquished its pointing attitude, seemed to return towards the figure, and with a little waving gesture as of farewell, disappeared as if hidden by folds of drapery.

Howard lay back on his pillows with a sigh, and closed his eyes. There was a dead stillness in the room for some moments. I then rose and approached him. He was pale, and his forehead damp. When I spoke he opened his eyes.

"I am all right," he said; "a little exhausted, that is all. It was so hard to understand her. Let us go into the other room, and I will tell you what I have learned."

Having established ourselves comfortably on the big sofa, each with a pipe to soothe our excited nerves, he began—

"For some time I could only feel her distress and anxiety; then I knew she feared some cruel wrong and injustice, was afraid of something being taken from her. At last I understood that she had hidden that thing in the room, that I must find it, and do

with it what she had desired to do, but could not. I also felt that I should know what that was when I found the thing. Then she pointed to the tester of the bed. I asked, was I to find it there? She smiled; I felt that I was right, and that she thanked me. She then waved her hand and went."

"Do you really expect to find anything?" I inquired.

"I do," he replied. "You see, if during the last days of her life the poor woman's mind was full of a purpose, which she either could not carry out in life, or, more probably, died suddenly before she had done so, in her dying moments this would be her one thought, her one regret. She would carry it with her beyond the grave, and the strength of it would bring her back again and again to earth, until chance or her own efforts had accomplished her purpose. If there *is* nothing in that room—why, the whole thing becomes absurd."

"Quite so," I agreed. "That is precisely what I always thought the 'ghostly' business was. However, suppose we go and search at once, beginning with the bed tester?"

"Very good," said Howard. So lighting our two chamber candles we re-entered the bedroom, and I got up on the chest of drawers. Not finding myself high enough, Howard brought a footstool, mounted

on which, with a candle in my hand, I tried if I could see anything, but the whole surface of the tester was covered thickly with flue. I then passed my hand along the back of the side piece of the mahogany cornice, and found that a narrow deep space or groove ran through it, but I could feel nothing there but flue.

"There is nothing at this side," I said. "Now how shall I reach the front?"

Making an effort, I reached as far as I could, and found I was able to investigate the first few inches of the groove in the front piece of cornice. Here I felt something, a little projection, stiff, yet yielding. I carefully drew it out. It was an envelope doubled lengthwise and covered with dust.

"It is only an old letter, I dare say," I cried, jumping down.

But Howard pointed out, that though addressed, it bore neither stamp nor post-mark; that it was open, and had never been closed. So we again adjourned to the parlour, and in the clear light of the lamp eagerly and carefully investigated it.

It was addressed in a female hand to C. Meredith, Esq., 14 Montpelier Gardens, Kensington, W., and contained a marriage certificate between Harry Courteney on the one part, and Rosa Meredith on the other; and the marriage had been celebrated at

a place the name of which was quite unknown to us both.

"Now," said I, "as the practical man of this 'Society for Physical Research' (limited), I shall take matters into my own hands, and to-morrow will commence a severe cross-examination of every soul about the place; and until I have wormed out every particle of evidence they have in them, I shall not cease from my labours."

I will not trouble the reader with details, but will only ask him to believe that it was conducted with the skill of detective and Queen's counsel combined; and as my profession has made me familiar with the methods employed by both these skilful elicitors of evidence, I think I may claim to have done it thoroughly. Of course I began in the most casual way possible, arousing in their minds no suspicion that I had any special motive for being interested in their former lodgers. I thus obtained an immense amount of information as to the last party occupying my rooms. In brief, this was what I learned.

Early the previous summer a Mr. and Mrs. Smith coming to the farm quite by chance, took their rooms for two months, entering at once into occupation, and paying in advance. The lady was young, very pretty, but delicate, and seemed unhappy. Mr. Smith was much away, even at first; afterwards he

was nearly always absent. When the two months drew to an end Mr. Smith proposed to take the rooms for another couple of months, as Mrs. Smith was expecting to be confined; and it was arranged that a relation of the farmer's, who was a nurse, should attend the lady during her illness.

As the time drew near the poor lady seemed much depressed, and after the birth of a still-born infant, never recovered her strength. Mr. Smith's conduct at this time was the subject of severe remark on the part of every member of the household, the nurse insisting that he, at least, hastened his wife's end. This woman, whom I had contrived to see, naturally gave me the most valuable details. One portion of it I will give the reader in her own words.

"No, sir, I never saw any papers," said she, in answer to a leading question of mine. "I once heard them talking about some paper though. You know, sir, the partition is thin, and as Mr. Smith was talking to his wife in the bedroom, and I was warming some broth over the fire in the sitting-room, I could not help over-hearing. He said, 'Once for all, will you give me that paper?' 'No,' she said, 'I will not.' 'You fool,' he said, 'don't you know it's only a copy? Any one can get another for half-a-crown or so.' 'Yes,' said she, 'if they know where to go for it.' Then there was some more said which I did not

hear, and then she cried out in an excited way, 'I cannot trust you—if I were to die they would never know the truth—*you* would not tell them.' Then she burst out crying, and he dashed through the sitting-room swearing to himself.

"No, sir, I don't know what sort of a paper it was, nor where she had it, nor what she did with it. One day soon after I went into her room, and found her with her desk open by her, sitting on the side of the bed, all flushed and panting. I was put about, and asked her what she had been doing to tire herself, and she said, 'Never mind, nurse, I'm easier in my mind now, and some day perhaps, nearer the end, I'll ask you to do something for me.' I fancied she might have burned or torn up the paper they quarrelled about, but I saw no signs of it. Poor thing, I often think that when she was took for death (which was very sudden and quite unexpected) she had something on her mind, but she could not speak it, if there was.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Smith came home a few hours after her death, and most unfeeling he behaved too. He went into the room, and I heard him routing among her things for an hour and more. Then he called me in, 'You can have all Mrs. Smith's things,' he said, 'anything I want I have taken.' Then he asked me if I'd seen any letters or papers among her

things. I told him no. Then he wanted to know if she had sent anything away lately, and I said I'd never seen her write or receive a letter the whole time I was with her."

This worthy woman described the poor lady as having dark eyes, short, thick wavy golden hair, and as wearing for weeks before her death a "*grey cashmere dressing-gown tied with red ribbon.*" Some weeks after the death an old gentleman, accompanied by a young lady ('Mrs. Smith's sister I should have said from the likeness,' remarked my landlady), came to the farm, and made many inquiries about Mrs. Smith, who, they said, was an old friend and a connection of theirs. They were very anxious to know where Mr. Smith was to be found; but he had left no address, so they could not be enlightened. They were painfully affected at the account given them of the lady's illness and death; and on leaving, the old gentleman left his card, entreating them, if they ever heard or saw anything of Mr. Smith to let him know. This card the farmer had preserved. It was shown me, and bore the name and address of C. Meredith, 14 Montpelier Gardens, Kensington, W. I need scarcely say that the certificate was carefully forwarded, just as it was discovered, to Mr. Meredith, with the simple statement that it had been found by the next tenants of the rooms occupied by Mr.

and Mrs. Smith; and not knowing what else to do, they had forwarded it to the address on the envelope in which it was enclosed when found.

After that memorable night Howard was affected by no further sensations. "The influence had gone from the room," he said. Certainly neither of us ever saw the "Hand" again. And now, reader, do you not think I am justified in believing in just this one ghost?




*Richard Clay and Sons, London and Bungay.*

## RECORD OF TREATMENT, EXTRACTION ETC.

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Deacidification *Magnesium Bi - Carbonate*

Jan 2001

Adhesives *Wheat Starch Paste*
*Animal Glue ( Bind )*

Lined / Laminated

Chemicals / Solvents

Cover Treatment

Other Remarks