

SELECTED BY JOHN GAWSWORTH

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# THE BEST SHORT STORIES OF M. P. SHIEL



*Opinions on M. P. Shiel's work :*

"Colossal . . . brilliant."

—H. G. WELLS

"A flaming genius. At his best he is not to be touched."

—HUGH WALPOLE

"If by genius we mean amazing ideas, flashes of real imagination, wild originality, then we must grant it him."

—J. B. PRIESTLEY

"He tells of a wilder wonderland than Poe dreamed of."

—ARTHUR MACHEN

"Sensible people ought to have a complete set of Shiel."

—REBECCA WEST

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VICTOR GOLLANCZ

## M. P. SHIEL

On February 17th, 1947, aged 81, the Irish romantic novelist, M. P. Shiel, died at Chichester. He was writing with unique *verve* right up to the end.

One day his twenty-five novels, or many of them, will be reprinted. Meanwhile, John Gawsworth provides in this volume a preliminary selection of twelve of the Best Short Stories of this "master of the written word", a selection which must inevitably challenge comparison with the tales of Dupin's creator and the *Contes Cruels* of De l'Isle Adam.

Of the three "Prince Zaleski" adventures which begin this collection, FRANK SWINNERTON has written that they have always been recognised as "detective stories of the first water"; while SIR JOHN SQUIRE has found them "strange and fascinating", and DOROTHY L. SAYERS declared that their "curious and elaborate beauty recaptures in every arabesque sentence the very accents of Edgar Allen Poe".



## M. P. SHIEL

*insert* America has long acclaimed M. P. Shiel; and, since his death, still continues to do so. Recently, a new edition of "The Purple Cloud" appeared there, its film rights were purchased by Paramount, two volumes of Short Stories went to press, and a Bibliography. A contract for an Omnibus has also been signed.

Here, in England, a Third Programme appreciation of his major works has been broadcast, and the preparation of an authorised Biography by his literary Executor has been announced.



THE BEST SHORT STORIES  
OF M. P. SHIEL

THE WORKS OF M. P. SHIEL

- 1895 PRINCE ZALESKI  
1896 THE RAJAH'S SAPPHIRE (With W. T. Stead)  
1896 SHAPES IN THE FIRE  
1898 THE YELLOW DANGER  
1899 CONTRABAND OF WAR  
1899 COLD STEEL  
1900 THE MAN-STEALERS  
1901 THE LORD OF THE SEA  
1901 THE PURPLE CLOUD  
1902 THE WEIRD O' IT  
1903 UNTO THE THIRD GENERATION  
1904 THE EVIL THAT MEN DO  
1905 THE YELLOW WAVE  
1905 THE LOST VIOL  
1906 THE LAST MIRACLE  
1908 THE WHITE WEDDING  
1909 THE ISLE OF LIES  
1909 THIS KNOT OF LIFE  
1911 THE PALE APE  
1913 THE DRAGON (Republished as *The Yellow Peril*, 1929)  
1919 THE HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION (Translated from Charles  
Henry Schmitt)  
1923 CHILDREN OF THE WIND  
1927 HOW THE OLD WOMAN GOT HOME  
1928 HERE COMES THE LADY  
1929 ABOUT MYSELF  
1929 DR. KRASINSKI'S SECRET  
1930 THE BLACK BOX  
1933 SAY *AU R'VOIR*, BUT NOT GOOD-BYE  
1933 THIS ABOVE ALL (Republished as *Above All Else*, 1943)  
1935 THE INVISIBLE VOICES (With John Gawsworth)  
1936 POEMS (Edited by John Gawsworth)  
1937 THE YOUNG MEN ARE COMING!



THE BEST SHORT STORIES  
OF M. P. SHIEL

Selected by

JOHN GAWSWORTH

LONDON

VICTOR GOLLANCZ LTD

1948

PRINTED IN ENGLAND

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY PURNELL AND SONS, LTD. (T.U.)  
PAULTON (SOMERSET) AND LONDON

## FOREWORD

"SENSIBLE PEOPLE OUGHT to have a complete set of Shiel," Rebecca West has wisely written.

Unfortunately, at this frustrating moment, and until arrangements can be made for their reissue, the possession of all M. P. Shiel's thirty published volumes is impracticable for anyone who is not a fanatical first-edition collector. I have sought to provide here, as an immediate memorial to him, a preliminary selection of the best of his forty-four known stories, omitting, naturally, any sample of the eight further collaborations in this *genre* that we attempted together, and published, in his last years.

This has not been a simple selection to make, since, apart from there being ample admirable material for two representative volumes, there also exist either variant or "revised" texts of some twenty of his stories, which demanded collation and comparison with their printed originals.

That "revised" texts are frequently not "improved" texts is generally accepted. Lascelles Abercrombie, when preparing the collected Oxford edition of his own "Poems" decided that he possessed "a very positive conviction that they must take their chance as they were written, under the impulse in which they originated." "Even if I could correct their faults," he wrote, "it would almost certainly be by introducing something worse—disharmony of mood and spirit." A like decision, I feel, should also be taken with Shiel's texts. In all cases, except two, therefore, I have republished his primal printing; for, from an examination of all variations, it was clear that on occasions he "revised" *down*, generally to suit some inferior momentary market. Such versions, forced upon him by economic necessity, and often debasing his unique genius, naturally should have no place in any selection of his Best Stories.

JOHN GAWSWORTH

June 1947





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# THE RACE OF ORVEN





## THE RACE OF ORVEN

NEVER WITHOUT GRIEF and pain could I remember the fate of Prince Zaleski—victim of a too importunate, too unfortunate Love, which the fulgor of the throne itself could not abash; exile perforce from his native land, and voluntary exile from the rest of men! Having renounced the world, over which, lurid and inscrutable as a falling star, he had passed, the world quickly ceased to wonder at him; and even I, to whom, more than to another, the workings of that just and passionate mind had been revealed, half forgot him in the rush of things.

But during the time that what was called the "Pharanx labyrinth" was exercising many of the heaviest brains in the land, my thought turned repeatedly to him; and even when the affair had passed from the general attention, a bright day in Spring, combined perhaps with a latent mistrust of the *dénoûment* of that dark plot, drew me to his place of hermitage.

I reached the gloomy abode of my friend as the sun set. It was a vast palace of the older world standing lonely in the midst of woodland, and approached by a sombre avenue of poplars and cypresses, through which the sunlight hardly pierced. Up this I passed, and seeking out the deserted stables (which I found all too dilapidated to afford shelter) finally put up my *calèche* in the ruined sacristy of an old Dominican chapel, and turned my mare loose to browse for the night on a paddock behind the domain.

As I pushed back the open front door and entered the mansion, I could not but wonder at the saturnine fancy that had led this wayward man to select a brooding-place so desolate for the passage of his days. I regarded it as a vast tomb of Mausolus in which lay deep sepulchred how much genius, culture, brilliancy, power! The hall was constructed in the manner of a Roman *atrium*, and from the oblong pool of turgid water in the centre a troop of fat and otiose rats fled weakly squealing at my approach. I mounted by broken marble steps to the corridors

running round the open space, and thence pursued my way through a mazeland of apartments—suite upon suite—along many a length of passage, up and down many stairs. Dust-clouds rose from the uncarpeted floors and choked me; incontinent Echo coughed answering *ricochets* to my footsteps in the gathering darkness, and added emphasis to the funereal gloom of the dwelling. Nowhere was there a vestige of furniture—nowhere a trace of human life.

After a long interval I came, in a remote tower of the building and near its utmost summit, to a richly-carpeted passage, from the ceiling of which three mosaic lamps shed dim violet, scarlet and pale-rose lights around. At the end I perceived two figures standing as if in silent guard on each side of a door tapestried with the python's skin. One was a post-replica in Parian marble of the nude Aphrodite of Cnidus; in the other I recognized the gigantic form of the negro Ham, the prince's only attendant, whose fierce, and glistening, and ebon visage broadened into a grin of intelligence as I came nearer. Nodding to him, I pushed without ceremony into Zaleski's apartment.

The room was not a large one, but lofty. Even in the semi-darkness of the very faint greenish lustre radiated from an open censerlike *lampas* of fretted gold in the centre of the domed encausted roof, a certain incongruity of barbaric gorgeousness in the furnishing filled me with amazement. The air was heavy with the scented odour of this light, and the fumes of the narcotic *cannabis sativa*—the base of the *bhang* of the Mohammedans—in which I knew it to be the habit of my friend to assuage himself. The hangings were of wine-coloured velvet, heavy, gold-fringed and embroidered at Nurshedabad. All the world knew Prince Zaleski to be a consummate *cognoscente*—a profound amateur—as well as a savant and a thinker; but I was, nevertheless, astounded at the mere multitudinousness of the curios he had contrived to crowd into the space around him. Side by side rested a palæolithic implement, a Chinese "wise man," a Gnostic gem, an amphora of Græco-Etruscan work. The general effect was a *bizarrerie* of half-weird sheen and gloom. Flemish sepulchral brasses companied strangely with runic tablets, miniature paintings, a winged bull, Tamil scriptures on lacquered leaves of the talipot, mediæval reliquaries richly gemmed,

Brahmin gods. One whole side of the room was occupied by an organ whose thunder in that circumscribed place must have set all these relics of dead epochs clashing and jingling in fantastic dances. As I entered, the vaporous atmosphere was palpitating to the low, liquid tinkling of an invisible musical box. The prince reclined on a couch from which a draping of cloth-of-silver rolled torrent over the floor. Beside him, stretched in its open sarcophagus which rested on three brazen trestles, lay the mummy of an ancient Memphian, from the upper part of which the brown cerements had rotted or been rent, leaving the hideousness of the naked, grinning countenance exposed to view.

Discarding his gemmed chibouque and an old vellum reprint of Anacreon, Zaleski rose hastily and greeted me with warmth, muttering at the same time some commonplace about his "pleasure" and the "unexpectedness" of my visit. He then gave orders to Ham to prepare me a bed in one of the adjoining chambers. We passed the greater part of the night in a delightful stream of that somnolent and half-mystic talk which Prince Zaleski alone could initiate and sustain, during which he repeatedly pressed on me a concoction of Indian hemp resembling *hashish*, prepared by his own hands, and quite innocuous. It was after a simple breakfast the next morning that I entered on the subject which was partly the occasion of my visit. He lay back on his couch, volumed in a Turkish *beneesh*, and listened to me, a little wearily perhaps at first, with woven fingers, and the pale inverted eyes of old anchorites and astrologers, the moony greenish light falling on his always wan features.

"You knew Lord Pharanx?" I asked.

"I have met him in 'the world.' His son Lord Randolph, too, I saw once at Court at Peterhof, and once again at the Winter Palace of the Tsar. I noticed in their great stature, shaggy heads of hair, ears of a very peculiar conformation, and a certain aggressiveness of demeanour—a strong likeness between father and son."

I had brought with me a bundle of old newspapers, and comparing these as I went on, I proceeded to lay the incidents before him.

"The father," I said, "held, as you know, high office in a late Administration, and was one of our big luminaries in politics;



he has also been President of the Council of several learned societies, and author of a book on Modern Ethics. His son was rapidly rising to eminence in the *corps diplomatique*, and lately (though, strictly speaking, *unebenbürtig*) contracted an affiance with the Prinzessin Charlotte Mariana Natalia of Morgen-üppigen, a lady with a strain of indubitable Hohenzollern blood in her royal veins. The Orven family is a very old and distinguished one, though—especially in modern days—far from wealthy. However, some little time after Randolph had become engaged to this royal lady, the father insured his life for immense sums in various offices both in England and America, and the reproach of poverty is now swept from the race. Six months ago, almost simultaneously, both father and son resigned their various positions *en bloc*. But all this, of course, I am telling you on the assumption that you have not already read it in the papers."

"A modern newspaper," he said, "being what it mostly is, is the one thing insupportable to me at present. Believe me, I never see one."

"Well, then, Lord Pharanx, as I said, threw up his posts in the fulness of his vigour, and retired to one of his country seats. A good many years ago, he and Randolph had a terrible row over some trifle, and, with the implacability that distinguishes their race, had not since exchanged a word. But some little time after the retirement of the father, a message was despatched by him to the son, who was then in India. Considered as the first step in the *rapprochement* of this proud and selfish pair of beings, it was an altogether remarkable message, and was subsequently deposited to in evidence by a telegraph official; it ran:

"*Return. The beginning of the end is come.*"

Whereupon Randolph did return, and in three months from the date of his landing in England, Lord Pharanx was dead."

"*Murdered?*"

A certain something in the tone in which this word was uttered by Zaleski puzzled me. It left me uncertain whether he had addressed to me an exclamation of conviction, or a simple question. I must have looked this feeling, for he said at once:

"I could easily, from your manner, surmise as much, you know. Perhaps I might even have foretold it, years ago."

"Foretold—what? Not the murder of Lord Pharanx?"



"Something of that kind," he answered with a smile; "but proceed—tell me all the facts you know."

Word-mysteries of this sort fell frequent from the lips of the prince. I continued the narrative.

"The two, then, met, and were reconciled. But it was a reconciliation without cordiality, without affection—a shaking of hands across a barrier of brass; and even this hand-shaking was a strictly metaphorical one, for they do not seem ever to have got beyond the interchange of a frigid bow. The opportunities, however, for observation were few. Soon after Randolph's arrival at Orven Hall, his father entered on a life of the most absolute seclusion. The mansion is an old three-storied one, the top floor consisting for the most part of sleeping-rooms, the first of a library, drawing-room, and so on, and the ground-floor, in addition to the dining and other ordinary rooms, of another small library, looking out (at the side of the house) on a low balcony, which, in turn, looks on a lawn dotted with flower-beds. It was this smaller library on the ground-floor that was now divested of its books, and converted into a bedroom for the earl. Hither he migrated, and here he lived, scarcely ever leaving it. Randolph, on his part, moved to a room on the first floor immediately above this. Some of the retainers of the family were dismissed, and on the remaining few fell a hush of expectancy, a sense of wonder, as to what these things boded. A great enforced quiet pervaded the building, the least undue noise in any part being sure to be followed by the angry voice of the master demanding the cause. Once, as the servants were supping in the kitchen on the side of the house most remote from that which he occupied, Lord Pharanx, slippered and in dressing-gown, appeared at the doorway, purple with rage, threatening to pack the whole company of them out of doors if they did not moderate the clatter of their knives and forks. He had always been regarded with fear in his own household, and the very sound of his voice now became a terror. His food was taken to him in the room he had made his habitation, and it was remarked that, though simple before in his gustatory tastes, he now—possibly owing to the sedentary life he led—became fastidious, insisting on *recherché* bits. I mention all these details to you—as I shall mention others—not because they have the least

connection with the tragedy as it subsequently occurred, but merely because I know them, and you have requested me to state all I know."

"Yes," he answered, with a suspicion of *ennui*, "you are right. I may as well hear the whole—if I must hear a part."

"Meanwhile, Randolph appears to have visited the earl at least once a day. In such retirement did he, too, live that many of his friends still supposed him to be in India. There was only one respect in which he broke through this privacy. You know, of course, that the Orvens are, and, I believe, always have been, noted as the most obstinate, the most crabbed of Conservatives in politics. Even among the past-enamoured families of England, they stand out conspicuously in this respect. Is it credible to you, then, that Randolph should offer himself to the Radical Association of the Borough of Orven as a candidate for the next election in opposition to the sitting member? It is on record, too, that he spoke at three public meetings—reported in local papers—at which he avowed his political conversion; afterwards laid the foundation-stone of a new Baptist chapel; presided at a Methodist tea-meeting; and taking an abnormal interest in the debased condition of the labourers in the villages round, fitted up as a class-room an apartment on the top floor at Orven Hall, and gathered round him on two evenings in every week a class of yokels, whom he proceeded to cram with demonstrations in elementary mechanics."

"Mechanics!" cried Zaleski, starting upright for a moment, "mechanics to agricultural labourers! Why not elementary chemistry? Why not elementary botany? *Why* mechanics?"

This was the first evidence of interest he had shown in the story. I was pleased, but answered:

"The point is unimportant; and there really is no accounting for the vagaries of such a man. He wished, I imagine, to give some idea to the young illiterates of the simple laws of motion and force. But now I come to a new character in the drama—the chief character of all. One day a woman presented herself at Orven Hall and demanded to see its owner. She spoke English with a strong French accent. Though approaching middle life she was still beautiful, having wild black eyes, and creamy-pale face. Her dress was tawdry, cheap, and loud, showing signs of

wear; her hair was unkempt; her manners were not the manners of a lady. A certain vehemence, exasperation, unreprieve distinguished all she said and did. The footman refused her admission; Lord Pharanx, he said, was invisible. She persisted violently, pushed past him, and had to be forcibly ejected; during all which the voice of the master was heard roaring from the passage red-eyed remonstrance at the unusual noise. She went away gesticulating wildly, and vowing vengeance on Lord Pharanx and all the world. It was afterwards found that she had taken up her abode in one of the neighbouring hamlets, called Lee.

"This person, who gave the name of Maude Cibras, subsequently called at the Hall three times in succession, and was each time refused admittance. It was now, however, thought advisable to inform Randolph of her visits. He said she might be permitted to see him, if she returned. This she did on the next day, and had a long interview in private with him. Her voice was heard raised as if in angry protest by one Hester Dyett, a servant of the house, while Randolph in low tones seemed to try to soothe her. The conversation was in French, and no word could be made out. She passed out at length, tossing her head jauntily, and smiling a vulgar triumph at the footman who had before opposed her ingress. She was never known to seek admission to the house again.

"But her connection with its inmates did not cease. The same Hester asserts that one night, coming home late through the park, she saw two persons conversing on a bench beneath the trees, crept behind some bushes, and discovered that they were the strange woman and Randolph. The same servant bears evidence to tracking them to other meeting-places, and to finding in the letter-bag letters addressed to Maude Cibras in Randolph's hand-writing. One of these was actually unearthed later on. Indeed, so engrossing did the intercourse become, that it seems even to have interfered with the outburst of radical zeal in the new political convert. The *rendezvous*—always held under cover of darkness, but naked and open to the eye of the watchful Hester—sometimes clashed with the science lectures, when these latter would be put off, so that they became gradually fewer, and then almost ceased."



"Your narrative becomes unexpectedly interesting," said Zaleski; "but this unearthed letter of Randolph's—what was in it?"

I read as follows:

"DEAR MDLLE. CIBRAS,—I am exerting my utmost influence for you with my father. But he shows no signs of coming round as yet. If I could only induce him to see you! But he is, as you know, a person of unrelenting will, and meanwhile you must confide in my loyal efforts on your behalf. At the same time, I admit that the situation is a precarious one: you are, I am sure, well provided for in the present will of Lord Pharanx, but he is on the point—within, say, three or four days—of making another; and exasperated as he is at your appearance in England, I know there is no chance of your receiving a *centime* under the new will. Before then, however, we must hope that something favourable to you may happen; and in the meantime, let me implore you not to let your only too just resentment pass beyond the bounds of reason.

"Sincerely yours,  
"RANDOLPH."

"I like the letter!" cried Zaleski. "You notice the tone of manly candour. But the *facts*—were they true? *Did* the earl make a new will in the time specified?"

"No,—but that may have been because his death intervened."

"And in the old will, *was* Mdlle. Cibras provided for?"

"Yes,—that at least was correct."

A shadow of pain passed over his face.

"And now," I went on, "I come to the closing scene, in which one of England's foremost men perished by the act of an obscure assassin. The letter I have read was written to Maude Cibras on the 5th of January. The next thing that happens is on the 6th, when Lord Pharanx left this room for another during the whole day, and a skilled mechanic was introduced into it for the purpose of effecting some alterations. Asked by Hester Dyett, as he was leaving the house, what was the nature of his operations, the man replied that he had been applying a patent arrangement to the window looking out on the balcony, for the better protection of the room against burglars, several robberies having

recently been committed in the neighbourhood. The sudden death of this man, however, before the occurrence of the tragedy, prevented his evidence being heard. On the next day—the 7th—Hester, entering the room with Lord Pharanx's dinner, fancies, though she cannot tell why (inasmuch as his back is towards her, he sitting in an arm-chair by the fire), that Lord Pharanx has been 'drinking heavily.'

"On the 8th a singular thing befell. The earl was at last induced to see Maude Cibras, and during the morning of that day, with his own hand, wrote a note informing her of his decision, Randolph handing the note to a messenger. That note also has been made public. It reads as follows:

"'MAUDE CIBRAS.—You may come here to-night after dark. Walk to the south side of the house, come up the steps to the balcony, and pass in through the open window to my room. Remember, however, that you have nothing to expect from me, and that from to-night I blot you eternally from my mind: but I will hear your story, which I know beforehand to be false. Destroy this note.

PHARANX.'"

As I progressed with my tale, I came to notice that over the countenance of Prince Zaleski there grew little by little a singular fixed aspect. His small, keen features distorted themselves into an expression of what I can only describe as an abnormal *inquisitiveness*—an inquisitiveness most impatient, arrogant, in its intensity. His pupils, contracted each to a dot, became the central *puncta* of two rings of fiery light; his little sharp teeth seemed to gnash. Once before I had seen him look thus greedily, when, grasping a Troglodyte tablet covered with half-effaced hieroglyphics—his fingers livid with the fixity of his grip—he bent on it that strenuous inquisition, that ardent questioning gaze, till, by a species of mesmeric dominancy, he seemed to wrench from it the arcanum it hid from other eyes; then he lay back, pale and faint from the too arduous victory.

When I had read Lord Pharanx's letter, he took the paper eagerly from my hand, and ran his eyes over the passage.

"Tell me—the end," he said.

"Maude Cibras," I went on, "thus invited to a meeting with the earl, failed to make her appearance at the appointed time. It happened that she had left her lodgings in the village early that very morning, and, for some purpose or other, had travelled to the town of Bath. Randolph, too, went away the same day in the opposite direction to Plymouth. He returned on the following morning, the 9th; soon after walked over to Lee; and entered into conversation with the keeper of the inn where Cibras lodged; asked if she was at home, and on being told that she had gone away, asked further if she had taken her luggage with her; was informed that she had, and had also announced her intention of at once leaving England. He then walked away in the direction of the Hall. On this day Hester Dyett noticed that there were many articles of value scattered about the earl's room, notably a tiara of old Brazilian brilliants, sometimes worn by the late Lady Pharanx. Randolph—who was present at the time—further drew her attention to these by telling her that Lord Pharanx had chosen to bring together in his apartment many of the family jewels; and she was instructed to tell the other servants of this fact, in case they should notice any suspicious-looking loafers about the estate.

"On the 10th, both father and son remained in their rooms all day, except when the latter came down to meals; at which times he would lock his door behind him, and with his own hands take in the earl's food, giving as his reason that his father was writing a very important document, and did not wish to be disturbed by the presence of a servant. During the forenoon, Hester Dyett, hearing loud noises in Randolph's room, as if furniture was being removed from place to place, found some pretext for knocking at his door, when he ordered her on no account to interrupt him again, as he was busy packing his clothes in view of a journey to London on the next day. The subsequent conduct of the woman shows that her curiosity must have been excited to the utmost by the undoubtedly strange spectacle of Randolph packing his own clothes. During the afternoon a lad from the village was instructed to collect his companions for a science lecture the same evening at eight o'clock. And so the eventful day wore on.

"We arrive now at this hour of 8 p.m. on this 10th day of



January. The night is dark and windy; some snow has been falling, but has now ceased. In an upper room is Randolph engaged in expounding the elements of dynamics; in the room under that is Hester Dyett—for Hester has somehow obtained a key that opens the door of Randolph's room, and takes advantage of his absence upstairs to explore it. Under her is Lord Pharanx, certainly in bed, probably asleep. Hester, trembling all over in a fever of fear and excitement, holds a lighted taper in one hand, which she religiously shades with the other; for the storm is gusty, and the gusts, tearing through the crevices of the rattling old casements, toss great flickering shadows on the hangings, which frighten her to death. She has just time to see that the whole room is in the wildest confusion, when suddenly a rougher puff blows out the flame, and she is left in what to her, standing as she was on that forbidden ground, must have been a horror of darkness. At the same moment, clear and sharp from right beneath her, a pistol-shot rings out on her ear. For an instant she stands in stone, incapable of motion. Then on her dazed senses there supervenes—so she swore—the consciousness that some object is moving in the room—moving apparently of its own accord—moving in direct opposition to all the laws of nature as she knows them. She imagines that she perceives a phantasm—a strange something—globular—white—looking, as she says, 'like a good-sized ball of cotton'—rise directly from the floor before her, ascending slowly upward, as if driven aloft by some invisible force. A sharp shock of the sense of the supernatural deprives her of ordered reason. Throwing forward her arms, and uttering a shrill scream, she rushes towards the door. But she never reaches it: midway she falls prostrate over some object, and knows no more; and when, an hour later, she is borne out of the room in the arms of Randolph himself, the blood is dripping from a fracture of her right tibia.

"Meantime, in the upper chamber the pistol-shot and the scream of the woman have been heard. All eyes turn to Randolph. He stands in the shadow of the mechanical contrivance on which he has been illustrating his points; leans for support on it. He essays to speak, the muscles of his face work, but no sound comes. Only after a time is he able to gasp: 'Did you hear something—from below?' They answer 'yes' in chorus; then one of the lads



takes a lighted candle, and together they troop out, Randolph behind them. A terrified servant rushes up with the news that something dreadful has happened in the house. They proceed for some distance, but there is an open window on the stairs, and the light is blown out. They have to wait some minutes till another is obtained, and then the procession moves forward once more. Arrived at Lord Pharanx's door, and finding it locked, a lantern is procured, and Randolph leads them through the house and out on the lawn. But having nearly reached the balcony, a lad observes a track of small woman's-feet in the snow; a halt is called, and then Randolph points out another track of feet, half obliterated by the snow, extending from a coppice close by up to the balcony, and forming an angle with the first track. These latter are great big feet, made by ponderous labourers' boots. He holds the lantern over the flower-beds, and shows how they have been trampled down. Someone finds a common scarf, such as workmen wear; and a ring and a locket, dropped by the burglars in their flight, are also found by Randolph half buried in the snow. And now the foremost reach the window. Randolph, from behind, calls to them to enter. They cry back that they cannot, the window being closed. At this reply he seems to be overcome by surprise, by terror. Some one hears him murmur the words, 'My God, what can have happened now?' His horror is increased when one of the lads bears to him a revolting trophy, which has been found just outside the window; it is the front phalanges of three fingers of a human hand. Again he utters the agonised moan, 'My God!' and then, mastering his agitation, makes for the window; he finds that the catch of the sash has been roughly wrenched off, and that the sash can be opened by merely pushing it up: does so, and enters. The room is in darkness: on the floor under the window is found the insensible body of the woman Cibras. She is alive, but has fainted. Her right fingers are closed round the handle of a large bowie-knife, which is covered with blood; parts of the left are missing. All the jewellery has been stolen from the room. Lord Pharanx lies on the bed, stabbed through the bedclothes to the heart. Later on a bullet is also found imbedded in his brain. I should explain that a trenchant edge, running along the bottom of the sash, was the obvious means by which the fingers of Cibras had

been cut off. This had been placed there a few days before by the workmen I spoke of. Several secret springs had been placed on the inner side of the lower horizontal piece of the window-frame, by pressing any one of which the sash was lowered; so that no one, ignorant of the secret, could pass out from within, without resting the hand on one of these springs, and so bringing down the armed sash suddenly on the underlying hand.

"There was, of course, a trial. The poor culprit, in mortal terror of death, shrieked out a confession of the murder just as the jury had returned from their brief consultation, and before they had time to pronounce their verdict of 'guilty.' But she denied shooting Lord Pharanx, and she denied stealing the jewels; and indeed no pistol and no jewels were found on her, or anywhere in the room. So that many points remain mysterious. What part did the burglars play in the tragedy? Were they in collusion with Cibras? Had the strange behaviour of at least one of the inmates of Orven Hall no hidden significance? The wildest guesses were made throughout the country; theories propounded. But no theory explained *all* the points. The ferment, however, has now subsided. To-morrow morning Maude Cibras ends her life on the gallows."

Thus I ended my narrative.

Without a word Zaleski rose from the couch, and walked to the organ. Assisted from behind by Ham, who foreknew his master's every whim, he proceeded to render with infinite feeling an air from the *Lakmé* of Delibes; long he sat, dreamily uttering the melody, his head sunken on his breast. When at last he rose, his great expanse of brow was clear, and a smile all but solemn in its serenity was on his lips. He walked up to an ivory *escritoire*, scribbled a few words on a sheet of paper, and handed it to the negro with the order to take my trap and drive with the message in all haste to the nearest telegraph office.

"That message," he said, resuming his place on the couch, "is a last word on the tragedy, and will, no doubt, produce some modification in the final stage of its history. And now, Shiel, let us sit together and confer on this matter. From the manner in which you have expressed yourself, it is evident that there are points which puzzle you—you do not get a clean *coup d'oeil* of the whole regiment of facts, and their causes, and their

consequences, as they occurred. Let us see if out of that confusion we cannot produce a coherence, a symmetry. A great wrong is done, and on the society in which it is done is imposed the task of making it translucent, of *seeing* it in all its relations, and of punishing it. But what happens? The society fails to rise to the occasion; on the whole, it contrives to make the opacity more opaque, does not see the crime in any human sense; is unable to punish it. Now this, you will admit, whenever it occurs, is a woeful failure: woeful I mean, not very in itself, but very in its significance: and there must be a precise cause for it. That cause is the lack of something not merely, or specially, in the investigators of the wrong, but in the world at large—shall we not boldly call it the lack of culture? Do not, however, misunderstand me: by the term I mean not so much attainment in general, as *mood* in particular. Whether or when such mood may become universal may be to you a matter of doubt. As for me, I often think that when the era of civilization begins—as assuredly it shall some day begin—when the races of the world cease to be credulous, ovine mobs and become critical, human nations, then will be the ushering in of the ten thousand years of a *clairvoyant* culture. But nowhere, and at no time during the very few hundreds of years that man has occupied the earth, has there been one single sign of its presence. In individuals, yes—in the Greek Plato, and I think in your English Milton and Bishop Berkeley—but in humanity, never; and hardly in any individual outside those two nations. The reason, I fancy, is not so much that man is a hopeless fool, as that Time, so far as he is concerned, has, as we know, only just begun: it being, of course, conceivable that the creation of a perfect society of men, as the first requisite to a *régime* of culture, must nick to itself a longer loop of time than the making of, say, a stratum of coal. A loquacious person—he is one of your cherished ‘novel’ writers, by the way, if that be indeed a Novel in which there is nowhere any pretence at novelty—once assured me that he could never reflect without swelling on the greatness of the age in which he lived, an age the mighty civilization of which he likened to the Augustan and Periclean. A certain stony gaze of anthropological interest with which I regarded his frontal bone seemed to strike the poor man dumb, and he took a hurried departure. Could he have been



ignorant that ours is, in general, greater than the Periclean for the *very* reason that the Divinity is neither the devil nor a bungler; that three thousand years of human consciousness is not nothing; that a whole is greater than its part, and a butterfly than a chrysalis? But it was the assumption that it was therefore in any way great in the abstract that occasioned my profound astonishment, and indeed contempt. Civilization, if it means anything, can only mean the art by which men live musically together—to the lutings, as it were, of Pan-pipes, or say perhaps, to triumphant organbursts of martial, marching dithyrambs. Any formula defining it as 'the art of lying back and getting elaborately tickled,' should surely at this hour be *too* primitive—*too* Opic—to bring anything but a smile to the lips of grown white-skinned men; and the very fact that such a definition can still find undoubting acceptance in all quarters may be an indication that the true *ιδέα* which this condition of being must finally assume is far indeed—far, perhaps, by ages and æons—from becoming part of the general conception. Nowhere since the beginning has the gross problem of living ever so much as approached solution, much less the delicate and intricate one of living *together*: *à propos* of which your body corporate not only still produces criminals (as the body-natural fleas), but its very elementary organism cannot so much as catch a really athletic one as yet. Meanwhile *you* and *I* are handicapped. The individual travaileth in pain. In the struggle for quality, powers, air, he spends his strength, and yet hardly escapes asphyxiation. He can no more wriggle himself free of the psychic gravitations that invest him than the earth can shake herself loose of the sun, or he of the omnipotences that rivet him to the universe. If by chance one shoots a downy hint of wings, an instant feeling of contrast puffs him with self-consciousness: a tragedy at once: the unconscious being "the alone complete." To attain to anything, he must needs screw the head up into the atmosphere of the future, while feet and hands drip dark ichors of despair from the crucifying cross of the crude present—a *horrid strain!* Far up a nightly instigation of stars he sees: but he may not strike them with the head. If earth were a boat, and mine, I know well toward what wild azimuths I would compel her helm: but gravity, gravity—chiefest curse of Eden's sin!—is hostile.

When indeed (as is ordained), the old mother swings herself into a sublimer orbit, we on her back will follow: till then we make to ourselves Icarian 'organa' in vain. I mean to say that it is the plane of station which is at fault: move that upward, you move all. But meantime is it not Goethe who assures us that 'further reacheth no man, make he what stretching he will'? For Man, you perceive, is not many, but One. It is absurd to suppose that England can be free while Poland is enslaved; Paris is *far* from the beginnings of civilization whilst Toobooloo and Chicago are barbaric. Probably no ill-fated, microcephalous son of Adam ever tumbled into a mistake quite so huge, so infantile, as did Dives, if he imagined himself rich while Lazarus sat pauper at the gate. Not many, I say, but one. Even Ham and I here in our retreat are not alone; we are embarrassed by the uninvited spirit of the present; the adamant root of the mountain on whose summit we stand is based ineradicably in the low world. Yet, thank Heaven, Goethe was not *quite* right—as, indeed, he proved in his proper person. I tell you, Shiel, I *know* whether Mary did or did not murder Darnley; I know—as clearly, as precisely, as a man can know—that Beatrice Cenci was not 'guilty' as certain recently-discovered documents 'prove' her, but that the Shelley version of the affair, though a guess, is the correct one. It is possible, by taking thought, to add one cubit—or say a hand, or a dactyl—to your stature; you *may* develop powers slightly—very slightly, but distinctly, both in kind and degree—in advance of those of the mass who live in or about the same cycle of time in which you live. But it is only when the powers to which I refer are shared by the mass—when what, for want of another term, I call the age of the Cultured Mood has at length arrived—that their exercise will become easy and familiar to the individual; and who shall say what presciences, prisms, *séances*, what introspective craft, Genie apocalypses, shall not *then* become possible to the few who stand spiritually in the van of men.

"All this, you will understand, I say as some sort of excuse for myself, and for you, for any hesitation we may have shown in loosening the very little puzzle you have placed before me—one which we certainly must not regard as difficult of solution. Of course, looking at all the facts, the first consideration that must

inevitably rivet the attention is that arising from the circumstance that Viscount Randolph has strong reasons to wish his father dead. They are avowed enemies; he is the *fiancé* of a princess whose husband he is probably too poor to become, though he will very likely be rich enough when his father dies; and so on. All that appears on the surface. On the other hand, we—you and I—know the man: he is a person of gentle blood, as moral, we suppose, as ordinary people, occupying a high station in the world. It is impossible to imagine that such a person would commit an assassination, or even countenance one, for any or all of the reasons that present themselves. In our hearts, with or without clear proof, we could hardly believe it of him. Earls' sons do not, in fact, go about murdering people. Unless, then, we can so reason as to discover other motives—strong, adequate, irresistible—and by 'irresistible' I mean a motive which must be *far* stronger than even the love of life itself—we should, I think, in fairness dismiss him from our mind.

"And yet it must be admitted that his conduct is not free of blame. He contracts a sudden intimacy with the acknowledged culprit, whom he does not seem to have known before. He meets her by night, corresponds with her. Who and what is this woman? I think we could not be far wrong in guessing some very old flame of Lord Pharanx's of *Théâtre des Variétés* type, whom he has supported for years, and from whom, hearing some story to her discredit, he threatens to withdraw his supplies. However that be, Randolph writes to Cibras—a violent woman, a woman of lawless passions—assuring her that in four or five days she will be excluded from the will of his father; and in four or five days Cibras plunges a knife into his father's bosom. It is a perfectly natural sequence—though, of course, the *intention* to produce by his words the actual effect produced might have been absent; indeed, the letter of Lord Pharanx himself, had it been received, would have tended to produce that very effect; for it not only gives an excellent opportunity for converting into action those evil thoughts which Randolph (thoughtlessly or guiltily) has instilled, but it further tends to rouse her passions by cutting off from her all hopes of favour. If we presume, then, as is only natural, that there was no such intention on the part of the earl, we *may* make the same presumption in the case of the son.



Cibras, however, never receives the earl's letter: on the morning of the same day she goes away to Bath, with the double object, I suppose, of purchasing a weapon, and creating an impression that she has left the country. How then does she know the exact *locale* of Lord Pharanx's room? It is in an unusual part of the mansion, she is unacquainted with any of the servants, a stranger to the district. Can it be possible that Randolph *had told her*? And here again, even in that case, you must bear in mind that Lord Pharanx also told her in his note, and you must recognise the possibility of the absence of evil intention on the part of the son. Indeed, I may go further and show you that in all but every instance in which his actions are in themselves *outré*, suspicious, they are rendered, not less *outré*, but less suspicious, by the fact that Lord Pharanx himself knew of them, shared in them. There was the cruel barbing of that balcony window; about it the crudest thinker would argue thus to himself: "Randolph practically incites Maude Cibras to murder his father on the 5th, and on the 6th he has that window so altered in order that, should she act on his suggestion, she will be caught on attempting to leave the room, while he himself, the actual culprit being discovered *en flagrant délit*, will escape every shadow of suspicion." But, on the other hand, we know that the alteration was made with Lord Pharanx's consent, most likely on his initiative—for he leaves his favoured room during a whole day for that very purpose. So with the letter to Cibras on the 8th—Randolph despatches it, but the earl writes it. So with the disposal of the jewels in the apartment on the 9th. There had been some burglaries in the neighbourhood, and the suspicion at once arises in the mind of the crude reasoner: Could Randolph—finding now that Cibras has 'left the country,' that, in fact, the tool he had expected to serve his ends has failed him—could he have thus brought those jewels there, and thus warned the servants of their presence, in the hope that the intelligence might so get abroad and lead to a burglary, in the course of which his father might lose his life? There are evidences, you know, tending to show that the burglary did actually at last take place, and the suspicion is, in view of that, by no means unreasonable. And yet, militating against it, is our knowledge that it was Lord Pharanx who '*chose*' to gather the jewels



round him; that it was in his presence that Randolph drew the attention of the servant to them. In the matter, at least, of the little political comedy the son seems to have acted alone; but you surely cannot rid yourself of the impression that the radical speeches, the candidature, and the rest of it, formed all of them only a very elaborate, and withal clumsy, set of preliminaries to the *class*. Anything, to make the perspective, the sequence of *that* seem natural. But in the class, at any rate, we have the tacit acquiescence, or even the co-operation, of Lord Pharanx. You have described the conspiracy of quiet which, for some reason or other, was imposed on the household; in that reign of silence the bang of a door, the fall of a plate, becomes a domestic tornado. But have you ever heard an agricultural labourer in clogs or heavy boots ascend a stair? The noise is terrible. The tramp of an army of them through the house and overhead, probably jabbering uncouthly together, would be insufferable. Yet Lord Pharanx seems to have made no objection; the novel institution is set up in his own mansion, in an unusual part of it, probably against his own principles; but we hear of no murmur from him. On the fatal day, too, the calm of the house is rudely broken by a considerable commotion in Randolph's room just overhead, caused by his preparation for 'a journey to London.' But the usual angry remonstrance is not forthcoming from the master. And do you not see how all this more than acquiescence of Lord Pharanx in the conduct of his son deprives that conduct of half its significance, its intrinsic suspiciousness?

"A hasty reasoner then would inevitably jump to the conclusion that Randolph was guilty of something—some evil intention—though of precisely what he would remain in doubt. But a more careful reasoner would pause: he would reflect that as the father was implicated in those acts, and as he was innocent of any such intention, so might possibly, even probably, be the son. This, I take it, has been the view of the officials, whose logic is probably far in advance of their imagination. But supposing we can adduce one act, undoubtedly actuated by evil intention on the part of Randolph—one act in which his father certainly did *not* participate—what follows next? Why, that we revert at once to the view of the hasty reasoner, and conclude that *all* the other acts in the same relation were actuated by the same evil

motive; and having reached that point, we shall be unable longer to resist the conclusion that those of them in which his father had a share *might* have sprung from a like motive in *his* mind also; nor should the mere obvious impossibility of such a condition of things have even the very least influence on us, as thinkers, in causing us to close our mind against its logical possibility. I therefore make the inference, and pass on.

“Let us then see if we can by searching find out any absolutely certain deviation from right on the part of Randolph, in which we may be quite sure that his father was not an abettor. At eight on the night of the murder it is dark; there has been some snow, but the fall has ceased—how long before I know not, but so long that the interval becomes sufficiently appreciable to cause remark. Now the party going round the house come on two tracks of feet meeting at an angle. Of one track we are merely told that it was made by the small foot of a woman, and of it we know no more; of the other we learn that the feet were big and the boots clumsy, and, it is added, the marks were *half obliterated by the snow*. Two things then are clear: that the persons who made them came from different directions, and probably made them at different times. That, alone, by the way, may be a sufficient answer to your question as to whether Cibras was in collusion with the ‘burglars.’ But how does Randolph behave with reference to these tracks? Though he carries the lantern, he fails to perceive the first—the woman’s—the discovery of which is made by a lad; but the second, half hidden in the snow, he notices readily enough, and at once points it out. He explains that burglars have been on the warpath. But examine his horror of surprise when he hears that the window is closed; when he sees the woman’s bleeding fingers. He cannot help exclaiming, ‘My God! what has happened *now*?’ But why ‘now’? The word cannot refer to his father’s death, for that he knew, or guessed, beforehand, having heard the shot. Is it not rather the exclamation of a man whose schemes destiny has complicated? Besides, he should have *expected* to find the window closed: no one except himself, Lord Pharanx, and the workman, who was now dead, knew the secret of its construction; the burglars therefore, having entered and robbed the room, one of them,

intending to go out, would press on the ledge, and the sash would fall on his hand with what result we know. The others would then either break the glass and so escape; or pass through the house; or remain prisoners. That immoderate surprise was therefore absurdly illogical, after seeing the burglar-track in the snow. But how, above all, do you account for Lord Pharanx's silence during and after the burglar's visit—if there was a visit? He was, you must remember, alive all that time; *they* did not kill him; certainly they did not shoot him, for the shot is heard after the snow has ceased to fall,—that is, after, long after, they have left, since it was the falling snow that had half obliterated their tracks; nor did they stab him, for to this Cibras confesses. Why then, being alive, and not gagged, did he give no token of the presence of his visitors? There were in fact no burglars at Orven Hall that night."

"But the track!" I cried, "the jewels found in the snow—the neckerchief!"

Zaleski smiled.

"Burglars," he said, "are plain, honest folk who have a just notion of the value of jewellery when they see it. They very properly regard it as mere foolish waste to drop precious stones about in the snow, and would refuse to company with a man weak enough to let fall his neckerchief on a cold night. The whole business of the burglars was a particularly inartistic trick, unworthy of its author. The mere facility with which Randolph discovered the buried jewels by the aid of a dim lantern, should have served as a hint to an educated police not afraid of facing the improbable. The jewels had been *put* there with the object of throwing suspicion on the imaginary burglars; with the same design the catch of the window had been wrenched off, the sash purposely left open, the track made, the valuables taken from Lord Pharanx's room. All this was deliberately done by someone—would it be rash to say at once by whom?"

"Our suspicions having now lost their whole character of vagueness, and begun to lead us in a perfectly definite direction, let us examine the statements of Hester Dyett. Now, it is immediately comprehensible to me that the evidence of this woman at the public examinations was looked at askance. There can be no doubt that she is a poor specimen of humanity, an undesirable



servant, a peering, hysterical caricature of a woman. Her statements, if formally recorded, were not believed; or if believed, were believed with only half the mind. No attempt was made to deduce anything from them. But for my part, if I wanted specially reliable evidence as to any matter of fact, it is precisely from such a being that I would seek it. Let me draw you a picture of that class of intellect. They have a greed for information, but the information, to satisfy them, must relate to actualities; they have no sympathy with fiction; it is from their impatience of what seems to be that springs their curiosity of what *is*. Clio is their muse, and she alone. Their whole lust is to gather knowledge through a hole, their whole faculty is to *peep*. But they are destitute of imagination, and do not lie; in their passion for realities they would esteem it a sacrilege to distort history. They make straight for the substantial, the indubitable. For this reason the *Peniculi* and *Ergasili* of Plautus seem to me far more true to nature than the character of Paul Pry in Jerrold's comedy. In one instance, indeed, the evidence of Hester Dyett appears, on the surface of it, to be quite false. She declares that she sees a round white object moving upward in the room. But the night being gloomy, her taper having gone out, she must have been standing in a dense darkness. How then could she see this object? Her evidence, it was argued, must be designedly false, or else (as she was in an ecstatic condition) the result of an excited fancy. But I have stated that such persons, nervous, neurotic even as they may be, are not fanciful. I therefore accept her evidence as true. And now, mark the consequence of that acceptance. I am driven to admit that there must, from some source, have been light in the room—a light faint enough, and diffused enough, to escape the notice of Hester herself. This being so, it must have proceeded from around, from below, or from above. There are no other alternatives. Around there was nothing but the darkness of the night; the room beneath, we know, was also in darkness. The light then came from the room above—from the mechanic class-room. But there is only one possible means by which the light from an upper can diffuse a lower room. It *must* be by a hole in the intermediate boards. We are thus driven to the discovery of an aperture of some sort in the flooring of that upper chamber. Given this, the mystery

of the round white object 'driven' upward disappears. We at once ask, why not *drawn* upward through the newly-discovered aperture by a string too small to be visible in the gloom? Assuredly it was drawn upward. And now having established a hole in the ceiling of the room in which Hester stands, is it unreasonable—even without further evidence—to suspect another in the flooring? But we actually have this further evidence. As she rushes to the door she falls, faints, and fractures the lower part of her leg. Had she fallen *over* some object, as you supposed, the result might have been a fracture also, but in a different part of the body; being where it was, it could only have been caused by placing the foot inadvertently in a hole while the rest of the body was in rapid motion. But this gives us an approximate idea of the *size* of the lower hole; it was at least big enough to admit the foot and lower leg, big enough therefore to admit that 'good-sized ball of cotton' of which the woman speaks: and from the lower we are able to conjecture the size of the upper. But how comes it that these holes are nowhere mentioned in the evidence? It can only be because no one ever saw them. Yet the rooms must have been examined by the police, who, if they existed, must have seen them. They therefore did not exist: that is to say, the pieces which had been removed from the floorings had by that time been neatly replaced, and, in the case of the lower one, covered by the carpet, the removal of which had caused so much commotion in Randolph's room on the fatal day. Hester Dyett would have been able to notice and bring at least one of the apertures forward in evidence, but she fainted before she had time to find out the cause of her fall, and an hour later it was, you remember, Randolph himself who bore her from the room. But should not the aperture in the top floor have been observed by the class? Undoubtedly, if its position was in the open space in the middle of the room. But it was not observed, and therefore its position was not there, but in the only other place left—behind the apparatus used in demonstration. That then was *one* useful object which the apparatus—and with it the elaborate hypocrisy of class, and speeches, and candidature—served: it was made to act as a curtain, a screen. But had it no other purpose? That question we may answer when we know its name and its nature. And it is not beyond our powers to conjecture this with something

like certainty. For the only 'machines' possible to use in illustration of simple mechanics are the screw, the wedge, the scale, the lever, the wheel-and-axle, and Atwood's machine. The mathematical principles which any of these exemplify would, of course, be incomprehensible to such a class, but the first five most of all, and as there would naturally be some slight pretence of trying to make the learners understand, I therefore select the last; and this selection is justified when we remember that on the shot being heard, Randolph leans for support on the 'machine,' and stands in its shadow; but any of the others would be too small to throw any appreciable shadow, except one—the wheel, and axle—and that one would hardly afford support to a tall man in the erect position. The Atwood's machine is therefore forced on us; as to its construction, it is, as you are aware, composed of two upright posts, with a cross-bar fitted with pulleys and strings, and is intended to show the motion of bodies acting under a constant force—the force of gravity, to wit. But now consider all the really glorious uses to which those same pulleys may be turned in lowering and lifting unobserved that 'ball of cotton' through the two apertures, while the other strings with the weights attached are dangling before the dull eyes of the peasants. I need only point out that when the whole company trooped out of the room, Randolph was the last to leave it, and it is not now difficult to conjecture why.

"Of what, then, have we convicted Randolph? For one thing, we have shown that by marks of feet in the snow preparation was made beforehand for obscuring the cause of the earl's death. That death must therefore have been at least expected, fore-known. Thus we convict him of expecting it. And then, by an independent line of deduction, we can also discover the *means* by which he expected it to occur. It is clear that he did not expect it to occur when it did by the hand of Maude Cibras—for this is proved by his knowledge that she had left the neighbourhood, by his evidently genuine astonishment at the sight of the closed window, and, above all, by his truly morbid desire to establish a substantial, an irrefutable *alibi* for himself by going to Plymouth on the day when there was every reason to suppose she would do the deed—that is, on the 8th, the day of the earl's invitation. On the fatal night, indeed, the same morbid eagerness to build



up a clear *alibi* is observable, for he surrounds himself with a cloud of witnesses in the upper chamber. But that, you will admit, is not nearly so perfect a one as a journey, say, to Plymouth would have been. Why then, expecting the death, did he not take some such journey? Obviously because on *this* occasion his personal presence was necessary. When, *in conjunction* with this, we recall the fact that during the intrigues with Cibras the lectures were discontinued, and again resumed immediately on her unlooked-for departure, we arrive at the conclusion that the means by which Lord Pharanx's death was expected to occur was the personal presence of Randolph *in conjunction* with the political speeches, the candidature, the class, the apparatus.

"But though he stands condemned of foreknowing, and being in some sort connected with, his father's death, I can nowhere find any indication of his having personally accomplished it, or even of his ever having had any such intention. The evidence is evidence of complicity—and nothing more. And yet—and yet—even of *this* we began by acquitting him unless we could discover, as I said, some strong, adequate, altogether irresistible motive for such complicity. Failing this, we ought to admit that at some point our argument has played us false, and led us into conclusions wholly at variance with our certain knowledge of the principles underlying human conduct in general. Let us therefore seek for such a motive—something deeper than personal enmity, stronger than personal ambition, *than the love of life itself!* And now, tell me, at the time of the occurrence of this mystery, was the whole past history of the House of Orven fully investigated?"

"Not to my knowledge," I answered; "in the papers there were, of course, sketches of the earl's career, but that I think was all."

"Yet it cannot be that their past was unknown, but only that it was ignored. Long, I tell you, long and often, have I pondered on that history, and sought to trace with what ghastly secret has been pregnant the destiny, gloomful as Eerbus and the murk of black-peplosed Nux, which for centuries has hung its pall over the men of this ill-fated house. Now at last I know. Dark, dark, and red with gore and horror is that history; down the silent corridors of the ages have these blood-soaked sons of Atreus fled shrieking before the pursuing talons of the dread



Eumenides. The first earl received his patent in 1535 from the eighth Henry. Two years later, though noted as a rabid 'king's man,' he joined the Pilgrimage of Grace against his master, and was soon after executed, with Darcy and some other lords. His age was then fifty. His son, meantime, had served in the king's army under Norfolk. It is remarkable, by the way, that females have all along been rare in the family, and that in no instance has there been more than one son. The second earl, under the sixth Edward, suddenly threw up a civil post, hastened to the army, and fell at the age of forty at the battle of Pinkie in 1547. He was accompanied by his son. The third in 1557, under Mary, renounced the Catholic faith, to which, both before and since, the family have passionately clung, and suffered (at the age of forty) the last penalty. The fourth earl died naturally, but suddenly, in his bed at the age of fifty during the winter of 1566. At midnight *of the same day* he was laid in the grave by his son. This son was later on, in 1591, seen by *his* son to fall from a lofty balcony at Orven Hall, while walking in his sleep at high noonday. Then for some time nothing happens; but the eighth earl dies mysteriously in 1651 at the age of forty-five. A fire occurring in his room, he leapt from a window to escape the flames. Some of his limbs were thereby fractured, but he was in a fair way to recovery when there was a sudden relapse, soon ending in death. He was found to have been poisoned by *radix aconiti indica*, a rare Arabian poison not known in Europe at that time except to *savants*, and first mentioned by Acosta some months before. An attendant was accused and tried, but acquitted. The then son of the House was a Fellow of the newly-founded Royal Society, and author of a now-forgotten work on Toxicology, which, however, I have read. No suspicion, of course, fell on *him*."

As Zaleski proceeded with this retrospect, I could not but ask myself with stirrings of the most genuine wonder, whether he could possess this intimate knowledge of *all* the great families of Europe! It was as if he had spent a part of his life in making special study of the history of the Orvens.

"In the same manner," he went on, "I could detail the annals of the family from that time to the present. But all through they have been marked by the same latent tragic elements; and I

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have said enough to show you that in each of the tragedies there was invariably something large, leering, something of which the mind demands explanation, but seeks in vain to find it. Now we need no longer seek. Destiny did not design that the last Lord of Orven should any more hide from the world the guilty secret of his race. It was the will of the gods—and he betrayed himself. ‘Return,’ he writes, ‘the beginning of the end is come.’ What end? *The end*—perfectly well known to Randolph, needing no explanation for *him*. The old, old end, which in the ancient dim time led the first lord, loyal still at heart, to forsake his king; and another, still devout, to renounce his cherished faith, and yet another to set fire to the home of his ancestors. You have called the two last scions of the family ‘a proud and selfish pair of beings’; proud they were, and selfish too, but you are in error if you think their selfishness a personal one: on the contrary, they were singularly oblivious of self in the ordinary sense of the word. Theirs was the pride and the selfishness of *race*. What consideration, think you, other than the weal of his house, could induce Lord Randolph to take on himself the shame—for as such he certainly regards it—of a conversion to radicalism? He would, I am convinced, have *died* rather than make this pretence for merely personal ends. But he does it—and the reason? It is because he has received that awful summons from home; because ‘the end’ is daily coming nearer, and it must not find him unprepared to meet it; it is because Lord Pharanx’s senses are becoming *too* acute; because the clatter of the servants’ knives at the other end of the house inflames him to madness; because his excited palate can no longer endure any food but the subtlest delicacies; because Hester Dyett is able from the posture in which he sits to conjecture that he is intoxicated; because, in fact, he is on the brink of the dreadful malady which physicians call ‘*General Paralysis of the Insane*.’ You remember I took from your hands the newspaper containing the earl’s letter to Cibras, in order to read it with my own eyes. I had my reasons, and I was justified. That letter contains three mistakes in spelling: ‘here’ is printed ‘hear,’ ‘pass’ appears as ‘pas,’ and ‘room’ as ‘rume.’ Printers’ errors, you say? But not so—one might be, two in that short paragraph could hardly be, three would be impossible. Search the whole paper through,

and I think you will not find another. Let us reverence the theory of probabilities: the errors were the writer's, not the printer's. General Paralysis of the Insane is known to have this effect on the writing. It attacks its victims about the period of middle age—the age at which the deaths of all the Orvens who died mysteriously occurred. Finding then that the dire heritage of his race—the heritage of madness—is falling or fallen on him, he summons his son from India. On himself he passes sentence of death: it is the tradition of the family, the secret vow of self-destruction handed down through ages from father to son. But he must have aid: in these days it is difficult for a man to commit the suicidal act without detection—and if madness is a disgrace to the race, equally so is suicide. Besides, the family is to be enriched by the insurances on his life, and is thereby to be allied with royal blood; but the money will be lost if the suicide be detected. Randolph therefore returns and blossoms into a popular candidate.

“For a time he is led to abandon his original plans by the appearance of Maude Cibras; he hopes that *she* may be made to destroy the earl; but when she fails him, he recurs to it—recurs to it all suddenly, for Lord Pharanx's condition is rapidly becoming critical, patent to all eyes, could any eye see him—so much so that on the last day none of the servants are allowed to enter his room. We must therefore regard Cibras as a mere addendum to, an extraneous element in, the tragedy, not as an integral part of it. She did not shoot the noble lord, for she had no pistol; nor did Randolph, for he was at a distance from the bed of death, surrounded by witnesses; nor did the imaginary burglars. The earl therefore shot himself; and it was the small globular silver pistol, such as this”—here Zaleski drew a little embossed Venetian weapon from a drawer near him—“that appeared in the gloom to the excited Hester as a ‘ball of cotton,’ while it was being drawn upward by the Atwood's machine. But if the earl shot himself he could not have done so *after* being stabbed to the heart. Maude Cibras, therefore, stabbed a dead man. She would, of course, have ample time for stealing into the room and doing so after the shot was fired, and before the party reached the balcony window, on account of the delay on the stairs in procuring a second light; in going to the earl's door;

in examining the tracks, and so on. But having stabbed a dead man, she is not guilty of murder. The message I just now sent by Ham was one addressed to the Home Secretary, telling him on no account to let Cibras die to-morrow. He well knows my name, and will hardly be silly enough to suppose me capable of using words without meaning. It will be perfectly easy to prove my conclusions, for the pieces removed from, and replaced in, the floorings can still be detected, if looked for; the pistol is still, no doubt, in Randolph's room, and its bore can be compared with the bullet found in Lord Pharanx's brain; above all, the jewels stolen by the 'burglars' are still safe in some cabinet of the new earl, and may readily be discovered. I therefore expect that the *dénoûment* will now take a somewhat different turn."

That the *dénoûment* did take a different turn, and pretty strictly in accordance with Zaleski's forecast, is now matter of history, and the incidents, therefore, need no further comment from me in this place.



THE STONE OF THE EDMUNDSBURY  
MONKS





## THE STONE OF THE EDMUNDSBURY MONKS

“RUSSIA,” SAID PRINCE ZALESKI to me one day, when I happened to be on a visit to him in his darksome sanctuary—“Russia may be regarded as land surrounded by ocean; that is to say, she is an island. In the same way, it is sheer gross irrelevancy to speak of *Britain* as an island, unless indeed the word be understood as a mere *modus loquendi* arising out of a rather poor geographical pleasantry. Britain, in reality, is a small continent. Near her—a little to the south-east—is situated the large island of Europe. Thus, the enlightened French traveller passing to these shores should commune within himself: ‘I now cross to the Mainland’; and retracing his steps: ‘I now return to the fragment rent by wrack and earthshock from the Mother-country.’ And this I say not in the way of paradox, but as the expression of a sober truth. I have in my mind merely the relative depth and extent—the *non-insularity*, in fact—of the impressions made by the several nations on the world. But this island of Europe has herself an island of her own: the name of it, Russia. She, of all lands, is the *terra incognita*, the unknown land; till quite lately she was more—she was the undiscovered, the unsuspected land. She *has* a literature, you know, and a history, and a language, and a purpose—but of all this the world has hardly so much as heard. Indeed, she, and not any Antarctic Sea whatever, is the real Ultima Thule of modern times, the true Island of Mystery.”

I reproduce these remarks of Zaleski here, not so much on account of the splendid tribute to my country contained in them, as because it ever seemed to me—and especially in connection with the incident I am about to recall—that in this respect at least he was a genuine son of Russia; if she is the Land, so truly was he the Man, of Mystery. I who knew him best alone knew that it was impossible to know him. He was a being little of the present: with one arm he embraced the whole past; the fingers of the other heaved on the vibrant pulse of

the future. He seemed to me—I say it deliberately and with forethought—to possess the unparalleled power not merely of dis-entangling in retrospect, but of unravelling in prospect, and I have known him to relate *coming* events with unimaginable minuteness of precision. He was nothing if not superlative: his diatribes, now culminating in a very *extravaganza* of hyperbole—now sailing with loose wing through the downy, witched, Dutch cloud-heaps of some quaintest tramontane Nephelococcugia of thought—now laying down law of the Medes for the actual world of to-day—had oft-times the strange effect of bringing back to my mind the very singular old-epic epithet, ἡρεμόεν—*airy*—as applied to human thought. The mere grip of his memory was not simply extraordinary, it had in it a token, a hint, of the strange, the pythic—nay, the sibylline. And as his reflecting intellect, moreover, had all the lightness of foot of a chamois kid, unless you could contrive to follow each dazzlingly swift successive step, by the sum of which he attained his Alp-heights, he inevitably left on you the astounding, the confounding impression of mental omnipresence.

I had brought with me a certain document, a massive book bound in iron and leather, the diary of one Sir Jocelin Saul. This I had abstracted from a gentleman of my acquaintance, the head of a firm of inquiry agents in London, into whose hand, only the day before, it had come. A distant neighbour of Sir Jocelin, hearing by chance of his extremity, had invoked the assistance of this firm; but the aged baronet, being in a state of the utmost feebleness, terror, and indeed hysterical incoherence, had been able to utter no word in explanation of his condition or wishes, and, in silent abandonment, had merely handed the book to the agent.

A day or two after I had reached the desolate old mansion which the prince occupied, knowing that he might sometimes be induced to take an absorbing interest in questions that had proved themselves too profound, or too intricate, for ordinary solution, I asked him if he was willing to hear the details read out from the diary, and on his assenting, I proceeded to do so.

The brief narrative had reference to a very large and very valuable oval gem enclosed in the substance of a golden chalice, which chalice, in the monastery of St. Edmundsbury, had once

lain centuries long within the Loculus, or inmost coffin, wherein reposed the body of St. Edmund. By pressing a hidden pivot, the cup (which was composed of two equal parts, connected by minute hinges) sprang open, and in a hollow space at the bottom was disclosed the gem. Sir Jocelin Saul, I may say, was lineally connected with—though, of course, not descendant from—that same Jocelin of Brakelonda, a brother of the Edmundsbury convent, who wrote the now so celebrated *Jocelini Chronica*: and the chalice had fallen into the possession of the family, seemingly at some time prior to the suppression of the monastery about 1537. On it was inscribed in old English characters of unknown date the words:

“Shulde this Ston stalen bee,  
Or shuld it chaunges dre,  
The Houss of Sawl and hys Hed anoon shal de.”

The stone itself was an intaglio, and had engraved on its surface the figure of a mythological animal, together with some nearly obliterated letters, of which the only ones remaining legible were those forming the word “Has.” As a sure precaution against the loss of the gem, another cup had been made and engraved in an exactly similar manner, inside of which, to complete the delusion, another stone of the same size and cut, but of comparatively valueless material, had been placed.

Sir Jocelin Saul, a man of intense nervousity, lived his life alone in a remote old manor-house in Suffolk, his only companion being a person of Eastern origin, named Ul-Jabal. The baronet had consumed his vitality in the life-long attempt to sound the too fervid Maelstrom of Oriental research, and his mind had perhaps caught from his studies a tinge of their morbidness, their esotericism, their insanity. He had for some years past been engaged in the task of writing a stupendous work on Pre-Zoroastrian Theogonies, in which, it is to be supposed, Ul-Jabal acted somewhat in the capacity of secretary. But I will give *verbatim* the extracts from his diary:

“June 11.—This is my birthday. Seventy years ago exactly I slid from the belly of the great Dark into this Light and Life. My God! My God! it is briefer than the range of an hour, fleeter than a mid-day trance. Ul-Jabal greeted me warmly—seemed



to have been looking forward to it—and pointed out that seventy is of the fateful numbers, its only factors being seven, five, and two: the last denoting the duality of Birth and Death; five, Isolation; seven, Infinity. I informed him that this was also my father's birthday; and *his* father's; and repeated the oft-told tale of how the latter, just seventy years ago to-day, walking at twilight by the churchyard-wall, saw the figure of *himself* sitting on a grave-stone, and died five weeks later riving with the pangs of hell. Whereat the sceptic showed his two huge rows of teeth.

"What is his peculiar interest in the Edmundsbury chalice? On each successive birthday when the cup has been produced, he has asked me to show him the stone. Without any well-defined reason I have always declined, but to-day I yielded. He gazed long into its sky-blue depth, and then asked if I had no idea what the inscription 'Has' meant. I informed him that it was one of the lost secrets of the world.

"*June 15.*—Some new element has entered into our existence here. Something threatens me. I hear the echo of a menace against my sanity and my life. It is as if the garment which enwraps me has grown too hot, too heavy for me. A notable drowsiness has settled on my brain—a drowsiness in which thought, though slow, is a thousandfold more fiery-vivid than ever. Oh, fair goddess of Reason, desert not me, thy chosen child!

*June 18.*—Ul-Jabal?—that man is *the very Devil incarnate!*

*June 19.*—So much for my bounty, all my munificence, to this poisonous worm. I picked him up on the heights of the Mountain of Lebanon, a cultured savage among cultured savages, and brought him here to be a prince of thought by my side. What though his plundered wealth—the debt I owe him—has saved me from a sort of ruin? Have not *I* instructed him in the sweet secret of Reason?

"I lay back on my bed in the lonely morning watches, my soul heavy as with the distilled essence of opiates, and in vivid vision knew that he had entered my apartment. In the twilight gloom his glittering rows of shark's teeth seemed impacted on my eyeball—I saw *them*, and nothing else. I was not aware when he vanished from the room. But at daybreak I crawled on hands and knees to the cabinet containing the chalice. The viperous murderer! He has stolen my gem, well knowing that with it he has stolen my life. The stone is gone—gone, my precious gem.

A weakness overtook me, and I lay for many dreamless hours naked on the marble floor.

“Does the fool think to hide ought from my eyes? Can he imagine that I shall not recover my precious gem, my stone of Saul?

“*June 20.*—Ah, Ul-Jabal—my brave, my noble Son of the Prophet of God! He has replaced the stone! He would not slay an aged man. The yellow ray of his eye, it is but the gleam of the great thinker, not—not—the gleam of the assassin. Again, as I lay in semi-somnolence, I saw him enter my room, this time more distinctly. He went up to the cabinet. Shaking the chalice in the dawning, some hours after he had left, I heard with delight the rattle of the stone. I might have known he would replace it; I should not have doubted his clemency to a poor man like me. But the strange being!—he has taken the *other* stone from the *other* cup—a thing of little value to any man! Is Ul-Jabal mad or I?

“*June 21.*—Merciful Lord in Heaven! he has *not* replaced it—not *it*—but another instead of it. To-day I actually opened the chalice, and saw. He has put a stone there, the same in size, in cut, in engraving, but different in colour, in quality, in value—a stone I have never seen before. How has he obtained it—whence? I must brace myself to probe, to watch; I must turn myself into an eye to search this devil’s-bosom. My life, this subtle, cunning Reason of mine, hangs in the balance.

“*June 22.*—Just now he offered me a cup of wine. I almost dashed it to the ground before him. But he looked steadfastly into my eye. I flinched: and drank—drank.

“Years ago, when, as I remember, we were at Balbec, I saw him one day make an almost tasteless preparation out of pure black nicotine, which in mere wanton lust he afterwards gave to some of the dwellers by the Caspian to drink. But the fiend would surely never dream of giving to me that browse of hell—to me an aged man, and a thinker, a seer.

“*June 23.*—The mysterious, the unfathomable Ul-Jabal! Once again, as I lay in heavy trance at midnight, has he invaded, calm and noiseless as a spirit, the sanctity of my chamber. Serene on the swaying air, which, radiant with soft beams of vermil and violet light, rocked me into variant visions of heaven, I reclined and regarded him unmoved. The man has replaced



the valueless stone in the modern-made chalice, and has now stolen the false stone from the other, which *he himself* put there! In patience will I possess this my soul, and watch what shall betide. My eyes shall know no slumber!

"*June 24.*—No more—no more shall I drink wine from the hand of Ul-Jabal. My knees totter beneath the weight of my lean body. Daggers of lambent fever race through my brain incessant. Some fibrillary twitchings at the right angle of the mouth have also arrested my attention.

"*June 25.*—He has dared at open mid-day to enter my room. I watched him from an angle of the stairs pass along the corridor and open my door. But for the terrifying, death-boding thump, thump of my heart, I should have faced the traitor then, and told him that I knew all his treachery. Did I say that I had strange fibrillary twitchings at the right angle of my mouth, and a brain on fire? I have ceased to write my book—the more the pity for the world, not for me.

"*June 26.*—Marvellous to tell, the traitor, Ul-Jabal, has now placed *another* stone in the Edmundsbury chalice—also identical in nearly every respect with the original gem. This, then, was the object of his entry into my room yesterday. So that he has first stolen the real stone and replaced it by another; then he has stolen this other and replaced it by yet another; he has beside stolen the valueless stone from the modern chalice, and then replaced it. Surely a man gone rabid, a man gone dancing, foaming, raving mad!

"*June 28.*—I have now set myself to the task of recovering my jewel. It is here, and I shall find it. Life against life—and which is the best life, mine or this accursed Ishmaelite's? If need be, I will do murder—I, with this withered hand—so that I get back the heritage which is mine.

"To-day, when I thought he was wandering in the park, I stole into his room, locking the door on the inside. I trembled exceedingly, knowing that his eyes are in every place. I ransacked the chamber, dived among his clothes, but found no stone. One singular thing in a drawer I saw: a long, white beard, and a wig of long and snow-white hair. As I passed out of the chamber, lo, he stood face to face with me at the door in the passage. My heart gave one bound, and then seemed wholly to cease its

travail. Oh, I must be sick unto death, weaker than a bruised reed! When I woke from my swoon he was supporting me in his arms. 'Now,' he said, grinning down at me, 'now you have at last delivered all into my hands.' He left me, and I saw him go into his room and lock the door upon himself. What is it I have delivered into the madman's hands?

"*July 1.*—Life against life—and his, the young, the stalwart, rather than mine, the mouldering, the sere. I love life. Not *yet* am I ready to weigh anchor, and reeve halliard, and turn my prow over the watery paths of the wine-brown Deep. Oh no. Not yet. Let *him* die. Many and many are the days in which I shall yet see the light, walk, think. I am averse to end the number of my years: there is even a feeling in me at times that this worn body shall never, never taste of death. The chalice predicts indeed that I and my house shall end when the stone is lost—a mere fiction *at first*, an idler's dream *then*, but now—now—that the prophecy has stood so long a part of the reality of things, and a fact among facts—no longer fiction, but Adamant, stern as the very word of God. Do I not feel hourly since it has gone how the surges of life ebb, ebb ever lower in my heart? Nay, nay, but there is hope. I have here beside me an Arab blade of subtle Damascene steel, insinuous to pierce and to hew, with which in a street of Bethlehem I saw a Syrian's head cleft open—a gallant stroke! The edges of this I have made bright and white for a nuptial of blood.

"*July 2.*—I spent the whole of the last night in searching every nook and crack of the house, using a powerful magnifying lens. At times I thought Ul-Jabal was watching me, and would pounce out and murder me. Convulsive tremors shook my frame like earthquake. Ah me, I fear I am all too frail for this work. Yet dear is the love of life.

"*July 7.*—The last days I have passed in carefully searching the grounds, with the lens as before. Ul-Jabal constantly found pretexts for following me, and I am confident that every step I took was known to him. No sign anywhere of the grass having been disturbed. Yet my lands are wide, and I cannot be sure. The burden of this mighty task is greater than I can bear. I am weaker than a bruised reed. Shall I not slay my enemy, and make an end?

"July 8.—Ul-Jabal has been in my chamber again! I watched him through a crack in the panelling. His form was hidden by the bed, but I could see his hand reflected in the great mirror opposite the door. First, I cannot guess why, he moved to a point in front of the mirror the chair in which I sometimes sit. He then went to the box in which lie my few garments—and opened it. Ah, I have the stone—safe—safe! He fears my cunning, ancient eyes, and has hidden it in the one place where I would be least likely to seek it—in *my own trunk*! And yet I dread, most intensely I dread, to look.

"July 9.—The stone, alas, is not there! At the last moment he must have changed his purpose. Could his wondrous sensitiveness of intuition have made him feel that my eyes were looking in on him?

"July 10.—In the dead of night I knew that a stealthy foot had gone past my door. I rose and threw a mantle round me; I put on my head my cap of fur; I took the tempered blade in my hands; then crept out into the dark, and followed. Ul-Jabal carried a small lantern which revealed him to me. My feet were bare, but he wore felted slippers, which to my unfailing ear were not utterly noiseless. He descended the stairs to the bottom of the house, while I crouched behind him in the deepest gloom of the corners and walls. At the bottom he walked into the pantry: there stopped, and turned the lantern full in the direction of the spot where I stood; but so agilely did I slide behind a pillar, that he could not have seen me. In the pantry he lifted the trap-door, and descended still further into the vaults beneath the house. Ah, the vaults—the long, the tortuous, the darksome vaults—how had I forgotten them? Still I followed, rent by seismic shocks of terror. I had not forgotten the weapon: could I creep near enough, I felt that I might plunge it into the marrow of his back. He opened the iron door of the first vault and passed in. If I could lock him in?—but he held the key. On and on he wound his way, holding the lantern near the ground, his head bent down. The thought came to me *then*, that, had I but the courage, one swift sweep, and all were over. I crept closer, closer. Suddenly he turned round, and made a quick step in my direction. I saw his eyes, the murderous grin of his jaw. I know not if he saw me—thought forsook me. The weapon fell with



clatter and clangor from my grasp, and in panic fright I fled with extended arms and the headlong swiftness of a stripling, through the black labyrinths of the caverns, through the vacant corridors of the house, till I reached my chamber, the door of which I had time to fasten on myself before I dropped, gasping, panting for very life, on the floor.

"*July 11.*—I had not the courage to see Ul-Jabal to-day. I have remained locked in my chamber all the time without food or water. My tongue cleaves to the roof of my mouth.

"*July 12.*—I took heart and crept downstairs. I met him in the study. He smiled on me, and I on him, as if nothing had happened between us. Oh, our old friendship, how it has turned into bitterest hate! I had taken the false stone from the Edmundsbury chalice and put it in the pocket of my brown gown, with the bold intention of showing it to him, and asking him if he knew aught of it. But when I faced him, my courage failed again. We drank together and ate together as in the old days of love.

"*July 13.*—I cannot think that I have not again imbibed some soporiferous drug. A great heaviness of sleep weighed on my brain till late in the day. When I woke my thoughts were in wild distraction, and a most peculiar condition of my skin held me fixed before the mirror. It is dry as parchment, and brown as the leaves of autumn.

"*July 14.*—Ul-Jabal is gone! And I am left a lonely, a desolate old man! He said, though I swore it was false, that I had grown to mistrust him! that I was hiding something from him! that he could live with me no more! No more, he said, should I see his face! The debt I owe him he would forgive. He has taken one small parcel with him—and is gone!

"*July 15.*—Gone! gone! In mazelike dream I wander with uncovered head far and wide over my domain, seeking I know not what. The stone he has with him—the precious stone of Saul. I feel the life-surge ebbing, ebbing in my heart."

Here the manuscript abruptly ended.

Prince Zaleski had listened as I read aloud, lying back on his Moorish couch and breathing slowly from his lips a heavy reddish vapour, which he imbibed from a very small, carved, bismuth pipette. His face, as far as I could see in the green-grey

crepuscular atmosphere of the apartment, was expressionless. But when I had finished he turned fully round on me, and said:

"You perceive, I hope, the sinister meaning of all this?"

"*Has it a meaning?*"

Zaleski smiled.

"Can you doubt it? in the shape of a cloud, the pitch of a thrush's note, the *nuance* of a sea-shell you would find, had you only insight *enough*, inductive and deductive cunning *enough*, not only a meaning, but, I am convinced, a quite endless significance. Undoubtedly, in a human document of this kind, there is a meaning; and I may say at once that this meaning is entirely transparent to me. Pity only that you did not read the diary to me before."

"Why?"

"Because we might, between us, have prevented a crime, and saved a life. The last entry in the diary was made on the 15th of July. What day is this?"

"This is the 20th."

"Then I would wager a thousand to one that we are too late. There is still, however, the one chance left. The time is now seven o'clock: seven of the evening, I think, not of the morning; the houses of business in London are therefore closed. But why not send my man, Ham, with a letter by train to the private address of the person from whom you obtained the diary, telling him to hasten immediately to Sir Jocelin Saul, and on no consideration to leave his side for a moment? Ham would reach this person before midnight, and understanding that the matter was one of life and death, he would assuredly do your bidding."

As I was writing the note suggested by Zaleski, I turned and asked him:

"From whom shall I say that the danger is to be expected—from the Indian?"

"From Ul-Jabal, yes; but by no means Indian—Persian."

Profoundly impressed by this knowledge of detail derived from sources which had brought me no intelligence, I handed the note to the negro, telling him how to proceed, and instructing him before starting from the station to search all the procurable papers of the last few days, and to return in case he found in



any of them a notice of the death of Sir Jocelin Saul. Then I resumed my seat by the side of Zaleski.

"As I have told you," he said, "I am fully convinced that our messenger has gone on a bootless errand. I believe you will find that what has really occurred is this: either yesterday, or the day before, Sir Jocelin was found by his servant—I imagine he had a servant, though no mention is made of any—lying on the marble floor of his chamber, dead. Near him, probably by his side, will be found a gem—an oval stone, white in colour—the same in fact which Ul-Jabal last placed in the Edmundsbury chalice. There will be no marks of violence—no trace of poison—the death will be found to be a perfectly natural one. Yet, in this case, a particularly wicked murder has been committed. There are, I assure you, to my positive knowledge forty-three—and in one island in the South Seas, forty-four—different methods of doing murder, any one of which would be entirely beyond the scope of the introspective agencies at the ordinary disposal of society.

"But let us bend our minds to the details of this matter. Let us ask first, *who* is this Ul-Jabal? I have said that he is a Persian, and of this there is abundant evidence in the narrative other than his mere name. Fragmentary as the document is, and not intended by the writer to afford the information, there is yet evidence of the religion of this man, of the particular sect of that religion to which he belonged, of his peculiar shade of colour, of the object of his stay at the manor-house of Saul, of the special tribe amongst whom he formerly lived. 'What,' he asks, when his greedy eyes first light on the long-desired gem, 'what is the meaning of the inscription "Has"?'—the meaning which *he* so well knew. 'One of the lost secrets of the world,' replies the baronet. But I can hardly understand a learned Orientalist speaking in that way about what appears to me a very patent circumstance: it is clear that he never earnestly applied himself to the solution of the riddle, or else—what is more likely, in spite of his rather high-flown estimate of his own 'Reason'—that his mind, and the mind of his ancestors, never was able to go farther back in time than the Edmundsbury Monks. But *they* did not make the stone, nor did they dig it from the depths of the earth in Suffolk—they got it from someone, and it is not difficult to

say with certainty from whom. The stone, then, might have been engraved by that someone, or by the someone from whom *he* received it, and so on back into the dimnesses of time. And consider the character of the engraving—it consists of a *mythological animal*, and some words, of which the letters 'Has' only are distinguishable. But the animal, at least, is pure Persian. The Persians, you know, were not only quite worthy competitors with the Hebrews, the Egyptians, and later on the Greeks, for excellence in the glyptic art, but this fact is remarkable, that in much the same way that the figure of the *scarabæus* on an intaglio or cameo is a pretty infallible indication of an Egyptian hand, so is that of a priest or a grotesque animal a sure indication of a Persian. We may say, then, from that evidence alone—though there is more—that this gem was certainly Persian. And having reached that point, the mystery of 'Has' vanishes: for we at once jump at the conclusion that that too is Persian. But Persian, you say, written in English characters? Yes, and it was precisely this fact that made its meaning one of what the baronet childishly calls 'the lost secrets of the world': for every successive inquirer, believing it part of an English phrase, was thus hopelessly led astray in his investigation. 'Has' is, in fact, part of the word 'Hasn-us-Sabah,' and the mere circumstance that some of it has been obliterated, while the figure of the mystic animal remains intact, shows that it was executed by one of a nation less skilled in the art of graving in precious stones than the Persians—by a rude, mediæval Englishman, in short—the modern revival of the art owing its origin, of course, to the Medici of a later age. And of this Englishman—who either graved the stone himself, or got someone else to do it for him—do we know nothing? We know, at least, that he was certainly a fighter, probably a Norman baron, that on his arm he bore the cross of red, that he trod the sacred soil of Palestine. Perhaps, to prove this, I need hardly remind you who Hasn-us-Sabah was. It is enough if I say that he was greatly mixed up in the affairs of the Crusaders, lending his irresistible arms now to this side, now to that. He was the chief of the heterodox Mohammedan sect of the Assassins (this word, I believe, is actually derived from his name); imagined himself to be an incarnation of the Deity, and from his inaccessible rock-fortress of Alamut in

the Elburz exercised a sinister influence on the intricate politics of the day. The Red Cross Knights called him Shaikh-ul-Jabal—the Old Man of the Mountains, that very nickname connecting him infallibly with the Ul-Jabal of our own times. Now three well-known facts occur to me in connection with this stone of the House of Saul: the first, that Saladin met in battle, and defeated, and *plundered*, in a certain place, on a certain day, this Hasn-us-Sabah, or one of his successors bearing the same name; the second, that about this time there was a cordial *rapprochement* between Saladin and Richard the Lion, and between the Infidels and the Christians generally, during which a free interchange of gems, then regarded as of deep mystic importance, took place—remember ‘The Talisman,’ and the ‘Lee Penny’; the third, that soon after the fighters of Richard, and then himself, returned to England, the Loculus or coffin of St. Edmund (as we are informed by the *Jocelini Chronica*) was *opened by the Abbot* at midnight, and the body of the martyr exposed. On such occasions it was customary to place gems and relics in the coffin, when it was again closed up. Now, the chalice with the stone was taken from this loculus; and is it possible not to believe that some knight, to whom it had been presented by one of Saladin’s men, had in turn presented it to the monastery, first scratching uncouthly on its surface the name of Hasn to mark its semi-sacred origin, or perhaps bidding the monks to do so? But the Assassins, now called, I think, ‘al Hasani’ or ‘Ismaili’—‘that accursed *Ishmaelite*,’ the baronet exclaims in one place—still live, are still a flourishing sect impelled by fervid religious fanaticisms. And where think you is their chief place of settlement? Where, but on the heights of that same ‘Lebanon’ on which Sir Jocelin ‘picked up’ his too doubtful scribe and literary helper?

“It now becomes evident that Ul-Jabal was one of the sect of the Assassins, and that the object of his sojourn at the manor-house, of his financial help to the baronet, of his whole journey perhaps to England, was the recovery of the sacred gem which once glittered on the breast of the founder of his sect. In dread of spoiling all by over-rashness, he waits, perhaps for years, till he makes sure that the stone is the right one by seeing it with his own eyes, and learns the secret of the spring by which the chalice is opened. He then proceeds to steal it. So far all is clear enough.



Now, this too is conceivable, that, intending to commit the theft, he had beforehand provided himself with another stone similar in size and shape—these being well known to him—to the other, in order to substitute it for the real stone, and so, for a time at least, escape detection. It is presumable that the chalice was not often *opened* by the baronet, and this would therefore have been a perfectly rational device on the part of Ul-Jabal. But assuming this to be his mode of thinking, how ludicrously absurd appears all the trouble he took to *engrave* the false stone in an exactly similar manner to the other. *That* could not help him in producing the deception, for that he did not contemplate the stone being *seen*, but only *heard* in the cup, is proved by the fact that he selected a stone of a different *colour*. This colour, as I shall afterwards show you, was that of a pale, brown-spotted stone. But we are met with something more extraordinary still when we come to the last stone, the white one—I shall prove that it was white—which Ul-Jabal placed in the cup. Is it possible that he had provided *two* substitutes, and that he had engraved these *two*, without object, in the same minutely careful manner? Your mind refuses to conceive it; and *having* done this, declines, in addition, to believe that he had prepared even one substitute; and I am fully in accord with you in this conclusion.

“We may say then that Ul-Jabal had not *prepared* any substitute; and it may be added that it was a thing altogether beyond the limits of the probable that he could *by chance* have possessed two old gems exactly similar in every detail down to the very half-obliterated letters of the word ‘Hasn-us-Sabah.’ I have now shown, you perceive, that he did not make them purposely, and that he did not possess them accidentally. Nor were they the baronet’s, for we have his declaration that he had never seen them before. Whence then did the Persian obtain them? That point will immediately emerge into clearness, when we have sounded his motive for replacing the one false stone by the other, and, above all, for taking away the valueless stone, and then replacing it. And in order to lead you up to the comprehension of this motive, I begin by making the bold assertion that Ul-Jabal had not in his possession the real St. Edmundsbury stone at all.

"You are surprised; for you argue that if we are to take the baronet's evidence at all, we must take it in this particular also, and he positively asserts that he saw the Persian take the stone. It is true that there are indubitable signs of insanity in the document, but it is the insanity of a diseased mind manifesting itself by fantastic exaggeration of sentiment, rather than of a mind confiding to itself its own delusions as to matters of fact. There is therefore nothing so certain as that Ul-Jabal did steal the gem; but these two things are equally evident: that by some means or other it very soon passed out of his possession, and that when it had so passed, he, for his part, believed it to be in the possession of the baronet. 'Now,' he cries in triumph, one day as he catches Sir Jocelin in his room—'*now* you have delivered all into my hands.' 'All,' what, Sir Jocelin wonders. 'All,' of course, meant the stone. He believes that the baronet has done precisely what the baronet afterwards believes that *he* has done—hidden away the stone in the most secret of all places, in his own apartment, to wit. The Persian, sure now at last of victory, accordingly hastens into his chamber, and 'locks the door,' in order, by an easy search, to secure his prize. When, moreover, the baronet is examining the house at night with his lens, he believes that Ul-Jabal is spying his movements; when he extends his operations to the park, the other finds pretexts to be near him. Ul-Jabal dogs his footsteps like a shadow. But supposing he had really had the jewel, and had deposited it in a place of perfect safety—such as, with or without lenses, the extensive grounds of the manor-house would certainly have afforded—his more reasonable *rôle* would have been that of unconscious *nonchalance*, rather than of agonised interest. But, in fact, he supposed the owner of the stone to be himself seeking a secure hiding-place for it, and is resolved at all costs on knowing the secret. And again in the vaults beneath the house Sir Jocelin reports that Ul-Jabal 'holds the lantern near the ground, with his head bent down': can anything be better descriptive of the attitude of *search*? Yet each is so sure that the other possesses the gem, that neither is able to suspect that both are seekers.

"But, after all, there is far better evidence of the non-possession of the stone by the Persian than all this—and that is the murder of the baronet, for I can almost promise you that our messenger



will return in a few minutes. Now, it seems to me that Ul-Jabal was not really murderous, averse rather to murder; thus the baronet is often in his power, swoons in his arms, lies under the influence of narcotics in semi-sleep while the Persian is in his room, and yet no injury is done him. Still, when the clear necessity to murder—the clear means of gaining the stone—presents itself to Ul-Jabal, he does not hesitate a moment—indeed, he has already made elaborate preparations for that very necessity. And when was it that this necessity presented itself? It was when the baronet put the false stone in the pocket of a loose gown for the purpose of confronting the Persian with it. But what kind of pocket? I think you will agree with me, that male garments, admitting of the designation ‘gown,’ have usually only outer pockets—large, square pockets, simply sewed on to the outside of the robe. But a stone of that size *must* have made such a pocket bulge outwards. Ul-Jabal must have noticed it. Never before has he been perfectly sure that the baronet carried the long-desired gem about on his body; but now at last he knows beyond all doubt. To obtain it, there are several courses open to him: he may rush there and then on the weak old man and tear the stone from him; he may ply him with narcotics, and extract it from the pocket during sleep. But in these there is a small chance of failure; there is a certainty of near or ultimate detection, pursuit—and this is a land of Law, swift and fairly sure. No, the old man must die: only thus—thus surely, and thus secretly—can the outraged dignity of Hasn-us-Sabah be appeased. On the very next day he leaves the house—no more shall the mistrustful baronet, who is ‘hiding something from him,’ see his face. He carries with him a small parcel. Let me tell you what was in that parcel: it contained the baronet’s fur cap, one of his ‘brown gowns,’ and a snow-white beard and wig. Of the cap we can be sure; for from the fact that, on leaving his room at midnight to follow the Persian through the *house*, he put it on his head, I gather that he wore it habitually during all his waking hours; yet after Ul-Jabal has left him he wanders *far and wide* ‘with uncovered head.’ Can you not picture the distracted old man seeking ever and anon with absent mind for his long-accustomed head-gear, and seeking in vain? Of the gown, too, we may be equally certain: for it was the procuring

of this that led Ul-Jabal to the baronet's trunk; we now know that he did not go there to *hide* the stone, for he had it not to hide; nor to *seek* it, for he would be unable to believe the baronet childish enough to deposit it in so obvious a place. As for the wig and beard, they had been previously seen in his room. But before he leaves the house Ul-Jabal has one more work to do: once more the two eat and drink together as in 'the old days of love'; once more the baronet is drunken with a deep sleep, and when he wakes, his skin is 'brown as the leaves of autumn.' That is the evidence of which I spake in the beginning as giving us a hint of the exact shade of the Oriental's colour—it was the yellowish-brown of a sered leaf. And now that the face of the baronet has been smeared with this indelible pigment, all is ready for the tragedy, and Ul-Jabal departs. He will return, but not immediately, for he will at least give the eyes of his victim time to grow accustomed to the change of colour in his face; nor will he tarry long, for there is no telling whether, or whither, the stone may not disappear from that outer pocket. I therefore surmise that the tragedy took place a day or two ago. I remembered the feebleness of the old man, his highly neurotic condition; I thought of those 'fibrillary twitchings,' indicating the onset of a well-known nervous disorder sure to end in sudden death; I recalled his belief that on account of the loss of the stone, in which he felt his life bound up, the chariot of death was urgent on his footsteps; I bore in mind his memory of his grandfather dying in agony just seventy years ago after seeing his own wraith by the churchyard-wall; I knew that such a man could not be struck by the sudden, the terrific shock of seeing *himself* sitting in the chair before the mirror (the chair, you remember, had been *placed* there by Ul-Jabal) without dropping down stone dead on the spot. I was thus able to predict the manner and place of the baronet's death—if he *be* dead. Beside him, I said, would probably be found a white stone. For Ul-Jabal, his ghastly impersonation ended, would hurry to the pocket, snatch out the stone, and finding it not the stone he sought, would in all likelihood dash it down, fly away from the corpse as if from plague, and, I hope, straightway go and—hang himself."

It was at this point that the black mask of Ham framed itself

between the python-skin tapestries of the doorway. I tore from him the paper, now two days old, which he held in his hand, and under the heading, "Sudden death of a Baronet," read a nearly exact account of the facts which Zaleski had been detailing to me.

"I can see by your face that I was not altogether at fault," he said, with one of his musical laughs; "but there still remains for us to discover whence Ul-Jabal obtained his two substitutes, his motive for exchanging one for the other, and for stealing the valueless gem; but, above all, we must find where the real stone was all the time that these two men so sedulously sought it, and where it now is. Now, let us turn our attention to this stone, and ask, first, what light does the inscription on the cup throw on its nature? The inscription assures us that if 'this stone be stolen,' or if it 'chaunges dre,' the House of Saul and its head 'anoon' (*i.e.* anon, at once) shall die. 'Dre,' I may remind you, is an old English word, used, I think, by Burns, identical with the Saxon '*dreogan*,' meaning to 'suffer.' So that the writer at least contemplated that the stone might 'suffer changes.' But what kind of changes—external or internal? External change—change of environment—is already provided for when he says, 'shulde this Ston stalen bee'; 'chaunges,' therefore, in *his* mind, meant internal changes. But is such a thing possible for any precious stone, and for this one in particular? As to that, we might answer when we know the name of this one. It nowhere appears in the manuscript, and yet it is immediately discoverable. For it was a 'sky-blue' stone; a sky-blue, sacred stone; a sky-blue, sacred, Persian stone. That at once gives us its name—it was a *turquoise*. But can the turquoise, to the certain knowledge of a mediæval writer, 'chaunges dre'? Let us turn for light to old Anselm de Boot: that is he in pig-skin on the shelf behind the bronze Hera."

I handed the volume to Zaleski. He pointed to a passage which read as follows:

"Assuredly the turquoise doth possess a soul more intelligent than that of man. But we cannot be wholly sure of the presence of Angels in precious stones. I do rather opine that the evil spirit doth take up his abode therein, transforming himself into an angel of light, to the end that we put our trust not in God, but



in the precious stone; and thus, perhaps, doth he deceive our spirits by the turquoise: for the turquoise is of two sorts: those which keep their colour, and those which lose it.”<sup>1</sup>

“You thus see,” resumed Zaleski, “that the turquoise was believed to have the property of changing its colour—a change which was universally supposed to indicate the fading away and death of its owner. The good de Boot, alas, believed this to be a property of too many other stones beside, like the Hebrews in respect of their urim and thummim; but in the case of the turquoise, at least, it is a well-authenticated natural phenomenon, and I have myself seen such a specimen. In some cases the change is a gradual process; in others it may occur suddenly within an hour, especially when the gem, long kept in the dark, is exposed to brilliant sunshine. I should say, however, that in this metamorphosis there is always an intermediate stage: the stone first changes from blue to a pale colour spotted with brown, and, lastly, to a pure white. Thus, Ul-Jabal having stolen the stone, finds that it is of the wrong colour, and soon after replaces it; he supposes that in the darkness he has selected the wrong chalice, and so takes the valueless stone from the other. This, too, he replaces, and, infinitely puzzled, makes yet another hopeless trial of the Edmundsbury chalice, and, again baffled, again replaces it, concluding now that the baronet has suspected his designs, and substituted a false stone for the real one. But *after* this last replacement, the stone assumes its final hue of white, and thus the baronet is led to think that two stones have been substituted by Ul-Jabal for his own invaluable gem. All this while the gem was lying serenely in its place in the chalice. And thus it came to pass that in the Manor-house of Saul there arose a somewhat considerable Ado about Nothing.”

For a moment Zaleski paused; then, turning round and laying his hand on the brown forehead of the mummy by his side, he said:

<sup>1</sup> “Assurément la turquoise a une ame plus intelligente que l’ame de l’homme. Mais nous ne pouvons rien établir de certain touchant la presence des Anges dans les pierres precieuses. Mon jugement seroit plustot que le mauvais esprit, qui se transforme en Ange de lumiere se loge dans les pierres precieuses, à fin que l’on ne recoure pas à Dieu, mais que l’on repose sa creance dans la pierre precieuse; ainsi, peut-être, il deçoit nos esprits par la turquoise: car la turquoise est de deux sortes, les unes qui conservent leur couleur et les autres qui la perdent.”—*Anselm de Boot*, Book II.

"My friend here could tell you, an he would, a fine tale of the immensely important part which jewels in all ages have played in human history, human religions, institutions, ideas. He flourished some five centuries before the Messiah, was a Memphian priest of Amsu, and, as the hieroglyphics on his coffin assure me, a prime favourite with one Queen Amyntas. Beneath these mouldering swaddlings of the grave a great ruby still cherishes its blood-guilty secret on the forefinger of his right hand. Most curious is it to reflect how in *all* lands, and at *all* times, precious minerals have been endowed by men with mystic virtues. The Persians, for instance, believed that spinelle and the garnet were harbingers of joy. Have you read the ancient Bishop of Rennes on the subject? Really, I almost think there must be some truth in all this. The instinct of universal man is rarely far at fault. Already you have a semi-comic 'gold-cure' for alcoholism, and you have heard of the geophagism of certain African tribes. What if the scientist of the future be destined to discover that the diamond, and it alone, is a specific for cholera, that powdered rubellite cures fever, and the chrysoberyl gout? It would be in exact conformity with what I have hitherto observed of a general trend towards a certain inborn perverseness and whimsicality in Nature."

*Note.*—As some proof of the fineness of intuition evidenced by Zaleski, as distinct from his more conspicuous powers of reasoning, I may here state that some years after the occurrence of the tragedy I have recorded above, the skeleton of a man was discovered in the vaults of the Manor house of Saul. I have not the least doubt that it was the skeleton of Ul-Jabal. The teeth were very prominent. A rotten rope was found loosely knotted round the vertebræ of his neck.



THE S.S.



## THE S.S.

"Wohlgeborne, gesunde Kinder bringen viel mit. . . .

"Wenn die Natur verabscheut, so spricht sie es laut aus: das Geschöpf, das falsch lebt, wird früh zerstört. Unfruchtbarkeit, kümmerliches Dasein, frühzeitiges Zerfallen, das sind ihre Flüche, die Kennzeichen ihrer Strenge."<sup>1</sup>

GOETHE.

Ἀργος δὲ ἀνδρῶν ἐξηρώθη οὔτω, ὥστε οἱ δοῦλοι αὐτῶν ἔσχον πάντα τὰ πρήγματα, ἀρχόντες τε καὶ διέποντες, ἐς δ' ἐπῆβησαν οἱ τῶν ἀπολομένων παῖδες.<sup>2</sup> HERODOTUS.

TO SAY THAT there are epidemics of suicide is to give expression to what is now a mere commonplace of knowledge. And so far are they from being of rare occurrence, that it has even been affirmed that every sensational case of *felo de se* published in the newspapers is sure to be followed by some others more obscure: their frequency, indeed, is out of all proportion with the *extent* of each particular outbreak. Sometimes, however, especially in villages and small townships, the wildfire madness becomes an all-involving passion, emulating in its fury the great plagues of history. Of such kind was the craze in Versailles in 1793, when about a quarter of the whole population perished by the scourge; while that at the *Hôtel des Invalides* in Paris was only a notable one of the many which have occurred during the present century. At such times it is as if the optic nerve of the mind throughout whole communities became distorted, till in the noseless and black-robed Reaper is discerned an angel of very loveliness. As a brimming maiden, out-worn by her virginity, yields half-fainting to the dear sick stress of her desire—with just such faintings, wanton fires, does the soul, over-taxed by the continence of living, yield voluntary to the grave, and adulterously make of Death its paramour.

<sup>1</sup> "Well-made, healthy children bring much into the world along with them. . . .

"When Nature abhors, she speaks it aloud: the creature that lives with a false life is soon destroyed. Unfruitfulness, painful existence, early destruction, these are her curses, the tokens of her displeasure."

<sup>2</sup> "And Argos was so depleted of Men (i.e. after the battle with Cleomenes) that the slaves usurped everything—ruling and disposing—until such time as the sons of the slain were grown up."

“When she sees a bank  
Stuck full of flowers, she, with a sigh, will tell  
Her servants, what a pretty place it were  
To bury lovers in; and make her maids  
Pluck 'em, and strew her over like a corse.”<sup>1</sup>

The *mode* spreads—then rushes into rage: to breathe is to be obsolete: to wear the shroud becomes *comme il faut*, this cerecloth acquiring all the attractiveness and *éclat* of a wedding-garment. The coffin is not too strait for lawless nuptial bed; and the sweet clods of the valley will prove no barren bridegroom of a writhing progeny. There is, however, nothing specially mysterious in the operation of a pestilence of this nature: it is as conceivable, if not yet as explicable, as the contagion of cholera, mind being at least as sensitive to the touch of mind as body to that of body.

It was during the ever-memorable outbreak of this obscure malady in the year 1875 that I ventured to break in on the calm of that deep Silence in which, as in a mantle, my friend Prince Zaleski had wrapped himself. I wrote, in fact, to ask him what he thought of the epidemic. His answer was in the laconic words addressed to the Master in the house of woe at Bethany: “Come and see.”

To this, however, he added in postscript: “But what epidemic?”

I had momentarily lost sight of the fact that Zaleski had so absolutely cut himself off from the world, that he was not in the least likely to know anything even of the appalling series of events to which I had referred. And yet it is no exaggeration to say that those events had thrown the greater part of Europe into a state of consternation, and even confusion. In London, Manchester, Paris, and Berlin, especially, the excitement was intense. On the Sunday preceding the writing of my note to Zaleski, I was present at a monster demonstration held in Hyde Park, in which the Government was held up on all hands to the popular derision and censure—for it will be remembered that to many minds the mysterious accompaniments of some of the deaths daily occurring conveyed a still darker significance than that implied in mere self-destruction, and seemed to point to a succession of pur-

<sup>1</sup> Beaumont and Fletcher: *The Maid's Tragedy*.



poseless and hideous murders. The demagogues, I must say, spoke with some wildness and incoherence. Many laid the blame at the door of the police, and urged that things would be different were *they* but placed under municipal, instead of under imperial, control. A thousand panaceas were invented, a thousand aimless censures passed. But the people listened with vacant ear. Never have I seen the populace so agitated, and yet so subdued, as with the sense of some impending doom. The glittering eye betrayed the excitement, the pallor of the cheek the doubt, the haunting *fear*. None felt himself quite safe; men recognized shuddering the grin of death in the air. To tingle with affright, and to know not why—that is the transcendentalism of terror. The threat of the cannon's mouth is trivial in its effect on the mind in comparison with the menace of a Shadow. It is the pestilence that walketh *by night* that is intolerable. As for myself, I confess to being pervaded with a nameless and numbing awe during all those weeks. And this feeling appeared to be general in the land. The journals had but one topic; the party organs threw politics to the winds. I heard that on the Stock Exchange, as in the Paris *Bourse*, business decreased to a minimum. In Parliament the work of law-threshing practically ceased, and the time of Ministers was nightly spent in answering volumes of angry "Questions", and in facing motion after motion for the "adjournment" of the House.

It was in the midst of all this commotion that I received Prince Zaleski's brief "Come and see". I was flattered and pleased: flattered, because I suspected that to me alone, of all men, would such an invitation, coming from him, be addressed; and pleased, because many a time in the midst of the noisy city street and the garish, dusty world, had the thought of that vast mansion, that dim and silent chamber, flooded my mind with a drowsy sense of the romantic, till, from very excess of melancholy sweetness in the picture, I was fain to close my eyes. I avow that that lonesome room—gloomy in its lunar bath of soft perfumed light—shrouded in the sullen voluptuousness of plushy, narcotic-breathing draperies—pervaded by the mysterious spirit of its brooding occupant—grew more and more on my fantasy, till the remembrance had for me all the cool refreshment shed by a midsummer-night's dream in the dewy

deeps of some Perrhœbian grove of cornel and lotos and ruby stars of the asphodel. It was, therefore, in all haste that I set out to share for a time in the solitude of my friend.

Zaleski's reception of me was most cordial; immediately on my entrance into his sanctum he broke into a perfect torrent of wild, enthusiastic words, telling me with a kind of rapture that he was just then laboriously engaged in co-ordinating to one of the calculi certain new properties he had discovered in the parabola, adding with infinite gusto his "firm" belief that the ancient Assyrians were acquainted with all our modern notions respecting the parabola itself, the projection of bodies in general, and of the heavenly bodies in particular; and must, moreover, from certain inferences of his own in connection with the Winged Circle, have been conversant with the fact that light is not an ether, but only the vibration of an ether. He then galloped on to suggest that I should at once take part with him in his investigations, and commented on the timeliness of my visit. I, on my part, was anxious for his opinion on other and far weightier matters than the concerns of the Assyrians, and intimated as much to him. But for two days he was firm in his tacit refusal to listen to my story; and, concluding that he was disinclined to undergo the agony of unrest with which he was always tormented by any mystery which momentarily baffled him, I was, of course, forced to hold my peace. On the third day, however, of his own accord he asked me to what epidemic I had referred. I then detailed to him some of the strange events which were agitating the mind of the outside world. From the very first he was interested: later on that interest grew into a passion, a greedy soul-consuming quest after the truth, the intensity of which was such at last as to move me even to pity.

I may as well here restate the facts as I communicated them to Zaleski. The concatenation of incidents, it will be remembered, started with the extraordinary death of that eminent man of science, Professor Schleschinger, consulting laryngologist to the *Charité* Hospital in Berlin. The professor, a man of great age, was on the point of contracting his third marriage with the beautiful and accomplished daughter of the Herr Geheimrath Otto von Friedrich. The contemplated union, which was entirely one of those *marriages de convenance* so common in good society,

sprang out of the professor's ardent desire to leave behind him a direct heir to his very considerable wealth. By his first two marriages, indeed, he had had large families, and was at this very time surrounded by quite an army of little grandchildren, from whom (all his direct descendants being dead) he might have been content to select his heir; but the old German prejudices in these matters are strong, and he still hoped to be represented on his decease by a son of his own. To this whim the charming Ottilie was marked by her parents as the victim. The wedding, however, had been postponed owing to a slight illness of the veteran scientist, and just as he was on the point of final recovery from it, death intervened to prevent altogether the execution of his design. Never did death of man create a profounder sensation; *never was death of man followed by consequences more terrible.* The *Residenz* of the scientist was a stately mansion near the University in the *Unter den Linden* boulevard, that is to say, in the most fashionable *Quartier* of Berlin. His bedroom from a considerable height looked out on a small back garden, and in this room he had been engaged in conversation with his colleague and medical attendant, Dr. Johann Hofmeier, to a late hour of the night. During all this time he seemed cheerful, and spoke quite lucidly on various topics. In particular, he exhibited to his colleague a curious strip of what looked like ancient papyrus, on which were traced certain grotesque and apparently meaningless figures. This, he said, he had found some days before on the bed of a poor woman in one of the horribly low quarters that surround Berlin, on whom he had had occasion to make a *post-mortem* examination. The woman had suffered from partial paralysis. She had a small young family, none of whom, however, could give any account of the slip, except one little girl, who declared that she had taken it "from her mother's mouth" after death. The slip was soiled, and had a fragrant smell, as though it had been smeared with honey. The professor added that all through his illness he had been employing himself by examining these figures. He was convinced, he said, that they contained some archaeological significance; but, in any case, he ceased not to ask himself how came a slip of papyrus to be found in such a situation,—on the bed of a dead Berlinerin of the poorest class? The story of its



being taken from the *mouth* of the woman was, of course, unbelievable. The whole incident seemed to puzzle, while it amused him; seemed to appeal to the instinct—so strong in him—to investigate, to probe. For days, he declared, he had been endeavouring, in vain, to make anything of the figures. Dr. Hofmeier too, examined the slip, but inclined to believe that the figures—rude and uncouth as they were—were only such as might be drawn by any schoolboy in an idle moment. They consisted merely of a man and a woman seated on a bench, with what looked like an ornamental border running round them. After a pleasant evening's scientific gossip, Dr. Hofmeier, a little after midnight, took his departure from the bedside. An hour later the servants were roused from sleep by one deep, raucous cry proceeding from the professor's room. They hastened to his door; it was locked on the inside; all was still within. No answer coming to their calls, the door was broken in. They found their master lying calm and dead on his bed. A window of the room was open, but there was nothing to show that any one had entered it. Dr. Hofmeier was sent for, and was soon on the scene. After examining the body, he failed to find anything to account for the sudden demise of his old friend and chief. One observation, however, had the effect of causing him to tingle with horror. On his entrance he had noticed, lying on the side of the bed, the piece of papyrus with which the professor had been toying in the earlier part of the day, and had removed it. But, as he was on the point of leaving the room, he happened to approach the corpse once more, and bending over it, noticed that the lips and teeth were slightly parted. Drawing open the now stiffened jaws, he found—to his amazement, to his stupefaction—that, neatly folded beneath the dead tongue, lay just such another piece of papyrus as that which he had removed from the bed. He drew it out—it was clammy. He put it to his nose,—it exhaled the fragrance of honey. He opened it,—it was covered by figures. He compared them with the figures on the other slip,—they were just so similar as two draughtsmen hastily copying from a common model would make them. The doctor was unnerved: he hurried homeward, and immediately submitted the honey on the papyrus to a rigorous chemical analysis: he suspected poison—a subtle poison—as the means



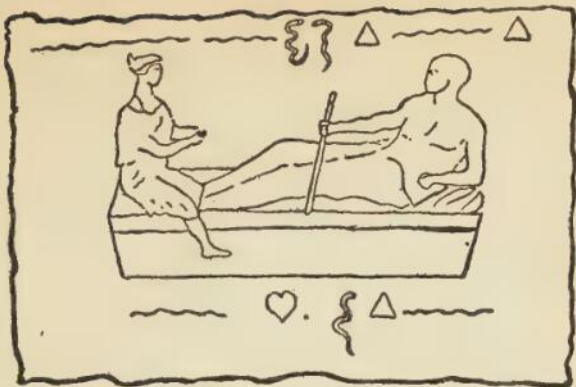
of a suicide, grotesquely, insanely accomplished. He found the fluid to be perfectly innocuous,—pure honey, and nothing more.

The next day Germany thrilled with the news that Professor Schleschinger had destroyed himself. For suicide, however, some of the papers substituted murder, though of neither was there an atom of actual proof. On the day following, three persons died by their own hands in Berlin, of whom two were young members of the medical profession; on the day following that, the number rose to nineteen, Hamburg, Dresden, and Aachen joining in the frenzied death-dance; within three weeks from the night on which Professor Schleschinger met his unaccountable end, eight thousand persons in Germany, France, and Great Britain, died in that startlingly sudden and secret manner which we call “tragic,” many of them obviously by their own hands, many, in what seemed the servility of a fatal imitativeness, with figured, honey-smeared slips of papyrus beneath their tongues. Even now—now, after years—I thrill intensely to recall the dread remembrance; but to live through it, to breathe daily the mawkish, miasmatic atmosphere, all vapid with the suffocating death—ah, it was terror too deep, nausea too foul, for mortal bearing. Novalis has somewhere hinted at the possibility (or the desirability) of a simultaneous suicide and voluntary return by the whole human family into the sweet bosom of our ancient Father—I half expected it was coming, had come, *then*. It was as if the old, good-easy, meek-eyed man of science, dying, had left his effectual curse on all the world, and had thereby converted civilization into one omnivorous grave, one universal charnel-house.

I spent several days in reading out to Zaleski accounts of particular deaths as they had occurred. He seemed never to tire of listening, lying back for the most part on the silver-cushioned couch, and wearing an inscrutable mask. Sometimes he rose and paced the carpet with noiseless foot-fall, his steps increasing to the swaying, uneven velocity of an animal in confinement as a passage here or there attracted him, and then subsiding into their slow regularity again. At any interruption in the reading, he would instantly turn to me with a certain impatience, and implore me to proceed; and when our stock of matter failed, he broke out into actual anger that I had not

brought more with me. Henceforth the negro, Ham, using my trap, daily took a double journey—one before sunrise, and one at dusk—to the nearest townlet, from which he would return loaded with newspapers. With unimaginable eagerness did both Zaleski and I seize, morning after morning, and evening after evening, on these budgets, to gloat for long hours over the ever-lengthening tale of death. As for him, sleep forsook him. He was a man of small reasonableness, scorning the limitations of human capacity; his palate brooked no meat when his brain was headlong in the chase; even the mild narcotics which were now his food and drink seemed to lose something of their power to mollify, to curb him. Often rising from slumber in what I took to be the dead of night—though of day or night there could be small certainty in that dim dwelling—I would peep into the domed chamber, and see him there under the livid-green light of the censer, the leaden smoke issuing from his lips, his eyes fixed unweariedly on a square piece of ebony which rested on the coffin of the mummy near him. On this ebony he had pasted side by side several woodcuts—snipped from the newspapers—of the figures traced on the pieces of papyrus found in the mouths of the dead. I could see, as time passed, that he was concentrating all his powers on these figures; for the details of the deaths themselves were all of a dreary sameness, offering few salient points for investigation. In those cases where the suicide had left behind him clear evidence of the means by which he had committed the act, there was nothing to investigate; the others—rich and poor alike, peer and peasant—trooped out by thousands on the far journey, without leaving the faintest footprint to mark the road by which they had gone.

This was perhaps the reason that, after a time, Zaleski discarded the newspapers, leaving their perusal to me, and turned his attention exclusively to the ebon tablet. Knowing as I full well did the daring and success of his past spiritual adventures,—the subtlety, the imagination, the imperial grip of his intellect—I did not at all doubt that his choice was wise, and would in the end be justified. These woodcuts—now so notorious—were all exactly similar in design, though minutely differing here and there in drawing. The following is a facsimile of one of them taken by me at random:



The time passed. It now began to be a grief to me to see the turgid pallor that gradually overspread the always ashen countenance of Zaleski; I grew to consider the ravaging life that glared and blazed in his sunken eye as too volcanic, demonic, to be canny: the mystery, I decided at last—if mystery there were—was too deep, too dark, for him. Hence perhaps it was, that I now absented myself more and more from him in the adjoining room in which I slept. There one day I sat reading over the latest list of horrors, when I heard a loud cry from the vaulted chamber. I rushed to the door and beheld him standing, gazing with wild eyes at the ebony tablet held straight out in front of him.

“By Heaven!” he cried, stamping savagely with his foot. “By Heaven! Then I certainly *am* a fool! *It is the staff of Phæbus in the hand of Hermes!*”

I hastened to him. “Tell me,” I said, “have you discovered anything?”

“It is possible.”

“And has there really been foul play—murder—in any of these deaths?”

“Of that, at least, I was certain from the first.”

“Great God!” I exclaimed, “could any son of man so convert himself into a fiend, a beast of the wilderness——”

“You judge precisely in the manner of the multitude,” he answered somewhat petulantly. “Illegal murder is always a



mistake, but not necessarily a crime. Remember Corday. But in cases where the murder of one is really fiendish, why is it qualitatively less fiendish than the murder of many? On the other hand, had Brutus slain a thousand Cæsars—each act involving an additional exhibition of the sublimest self-suppression—he might well have taken rank as a saint in heaven.”

Failing for the moment to see the drift or the connection of the argument, I contented myself with waiting events. For the rest of that day and the next Zaleski seemed to have dismissed the matter of the tragedies from his mind, and entered calmly on his former studies. He no longer consulted the news, or examined the figures on the tablet. The papers, however, still arrived daily, and of these he soon afterwards laid several before me, pointing, with a curious smile, to a small paragraph in each. These all appeared in the advertisement columns, were worded alike, and read as follows:

“A true son of Lycurgus, *having news*, desires to know the *time* and *place* of the next meeting of his Phyle. Address Zaleski, at R—— Abbey, in the county of M——.”

I gazed in mute alternation at the advertisement and at him. I may here stop to make mention of a very remarkable sensation which my association with him occasionally produced in me. I felt it with intense, with unpleasant, with irritating keenness at this moment. It was the sensation of being borne aloft—aloft—by a force external to myself—such a sensation as might possibly tingle through an earthworm when lifted into illimitable airy heights by the strongly-daring pinions of an eagle. It was the feeling of being hurried out beyond one’s depth—caught and whiffed away by the all-compelling sweep of some rabid vigour into a new, foreign element. Something akin I have experienced in an “express” as it raged with me—winged, rocking, cecstatic, shrilling a dragon Aha!—round a too narrow curve. It was a sensation very far from agreeable.

“To that,” he said, pointing to the paragraph, “we may, I think, shortly expect an answer. Let us only hope that when it comes it may be immediately intelligible.”

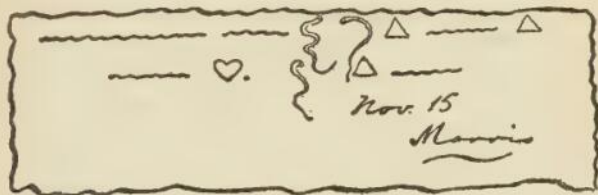
We waited throughout the whole of that day and night, hiding our eagerness under the pretence of absorption in our books. If by chance I fell into an uneasy doze, I found him on



waking ever watchful, and poring over the great tome before him. About the time, however, when, could we have seen it, the first grey of dawn must have been peeping over the land, his impatience again became painful to witness: he rose and paced the room, muttering occasionally to himself. This only ceased, when, hours later, Ham entered the room with an envelope in his hand. Zaleski seized it—tore it open—ran his eye over the contents—and dashed it to the ground with an oath.

"Curse it!" he groaned. "Ah, curse it! unintelligible—every syllable of it!"

I picked up the missive and examined it. It was a slip of papyrus covered with the design now so hideously familiar, except only that the two central figures were wanting. At the bottom was written the date of the 15th of November—it was then the morning of the 12th—and the name "Morris." The whole, therefore, presented the following appearance:



My eyes were now heavy with sleep, every sense half-drunken with the vapour-like atmosphere of the room, so that, having abandoned something of hope, I tottered willingly to my bed, and fell into a profound slumber, which lasted till what must have been the time of the gathering in of the shades of night. I then rose. Missing Zaleski, I sought through all the chambers for him. He was nowhere to be seen. The negro informed me with an affectionate and anxious tremor in the voice that his master had left the rooms some hours before, but had said nothing to him. I ordered the man to descend and look into the sacristy of the small chapel wherein I had deposited my *calèche*, and in the field behind, where my horse should be. He returned with the news that both had disappeared. Zaleski, I then concluded, had undoubtedly departed on a journey.

I was deeply touched by the demeanour of Ham as the hours

went by. He wandered stealthily about the rooms like a lost being. It was like matter sighing after, weeping over, spirit. Prince Zaleski had never before withdrawn himself from the *surveillance* of this sturdy watchman, and his disappearance now was like a convulsion in their little cosmos. Ham implored me repeatedly, if I could, to throw some light on the meaning of this catastrophe. But I too was in the dark. The Titanic frame of the Ethiopian trembled with emotion as in broken, childish words he told me that he felt instinctively the approach of some great danger to the person of his master. So a day passed away, and then another. On the next he roused me from sleep to hand me a letter which, on opening, I found to be from Zaleski. It was hastily scribbled in pencil, dated "London, Nov. 14th," and ran thus:

"For my body—should I not return by Friday night—you will, no doubt, be good enough to make search. *Descend* the river, keeping constantly to the left; consult the papyrus; and stop at the *Descensus Æsopi*. Seek diligently, and you will find. For the rest, you know my fancy for cremation: take me, if you will, to the crematorium of *Père-Lachaise*. My whole fortune I decree to Ham, the Lybian."

Ham was all for knowing the contents of this letter, but I refused to communicate a word of it. I was dazed, I was more than ever perplexed, I was appalled by the frenzy of Zaleski. Friday night! It was then Thursday morning. And I was expected to wait through the dreary interval uncertain, agonized, inactive! I was offended with my friend; his conduct bore the interpretation of mental distraction. The leaden hours passed all oppressively while I sought to appease the keenness of my unrest with the anodyne of drugged sleep. On the next morning, however, another letter—a rather massive one—reached me. The covering was directed in the writing of Zaleski, but on it he had scribbled the words: "This need not be opened unless I fail to reappear before Saturday." I therefore laid the packet aside unread.

I waited all through Friday, resolved that at six o'clock, if nothing happened, I should make some sort of effort. But from six I remained, with eyes strained towards the doorway, until

ten. I was so utterly at a loss, my ingenuity was so entirely baffled by the situation, that I could devise no course of action which did not immediately appear absurd. But at midnight I sprang up—no longer would I endure the carking suspense. I seized a taper, and passed through the doorway. I had not proceeded far, however, when my light was extinguished. Then I remembered with a shudder that I should have to pass through the whole vast length of the building in order to gain an exit. It was an all but hopeless task in the profound darkness to thread my way through the labyrinth of hall and corridors, of tumble-down stairs, of bat-haunted vaults, of purposeless angles and involutions; but I proceeded with something of a blind obstinacy, groping my way with arms held out before me. In this manner I had wandered on for perhaps a quarter of an hour, when my fingers came into distinct momentary contact with what felt like cold and humid human flesh. I shrank back, unnerved as I already was, with a murmur of affright.

“Zaleski?” I whispered with bated breath.

Intently as I strained my ears, I could detect no reply. The hairs of my head, catching terror from my fancies, erected themselves.

Again I advanced, and again I became aware of the sensation of contact. With a quick movement I passed my hand upward and downward.

It was indeed he. He was half-reclining, half-standing against a wall of the chamber: that he was not dead, I at once knew by his uneasy breathing. Indeed, when, having chafed his hands for some time, I tried to rouse him, he quickly recovered himself, and muttered: “I fainted; I want sleep—only sleep.” I bore him back to the lighted room, assisted by Ham in the latter part of the journey. Ham’s ecstasies were infinite; he had hardly hoped to see his master’s face again. His garments being wet and soiled, the negro divested him of them, and dressed him in a tightly-fitting scarlet robe of Babylonish pattern, reaching to the feet, but leaving the lower neck and fore-arm bare, and girt round the stomach by a broad gold-orphreyed *ceinture*. With all the tenderness of a woman, the man stretched his master thus arrayed on the couch. Here he kept an Argus guard while Zaleski, in one deep unbroken slumber of a night and a day,



reposed before him. When at last the sleeper woke, in his eye,—full of divine instinct,—flitted the wonted falchion-flash of the whetted, two-edged intellect; the secret, austere, self-conscious smile of triumph curved his lip; not a trace of pain or fatigue remained. After a substantial meal on nuts, autumn fruits, and wine of Samos, he resumed his place on the couch; and I sat by his side to hear the story of his wandering. He said:

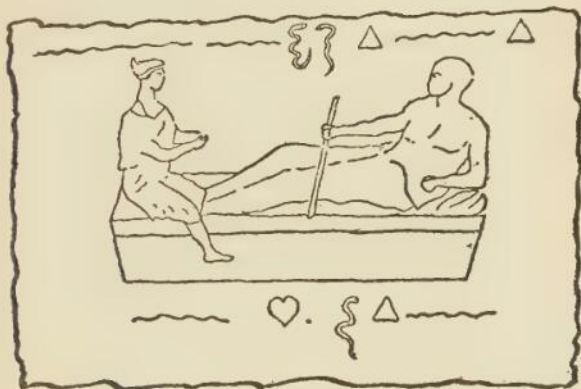
“We have, Shiel, had before us a very remarkable series of murders, and a very remarkable series of suicides. Were they in any way connected? To this extent, I think—that the mysterious, the unparalleled nature of the murders gave rise to a morbid condition in the public mind, which in turn resulted in the epidemic of suicide. But though such an epidemic has its origin in the instinct of imitation so common in men, you must not suppose that the mental process is a *conscious* one. A person feels an impulse to go and do, and is not aware that at bottom it is only an impulse to go and do *likewise*. He would indeed repudiate such an assumption. Thus one man destroys himself, and another imitates him—but whereas the former uses a pistol, the latter uses a rope. It is rather absurd, therefore, to imagine that in any of those cases in which the slip of papyrus has been found in the mouth after death, the cause of death has been the slavish imitativeness of the suicidal mania—for this, as I say, is never *slavish*. The papyrus then—quite apart from the unmistakable evidences of suicide invariably left by each self-destroyer—affords us definite and certain means by which we can distinguish the two classes of deaths; and we are thus able to divide the total number into two nearly equal halves.

“But you start—you are troubled—you never heard or read of murder such as this, the simultaneous murder of thousands over wide areas of the face of the globe; here you feel is something outside your experience, deeper than your profoundest imaginings. To the question ‘by whom committed?’ and ‘with what motive?’ your mind can conceive no possible answer. And yet the answer must be, ‘by man, and for human motives,’—for the Angel of Death with flashing eye and flaming sword is himself long dead; and again we can say at once, by no *one* man, but by many, a cohort, an army of men; and again, by no *common* men, but by men hellish (or heavenly) in cunning, in



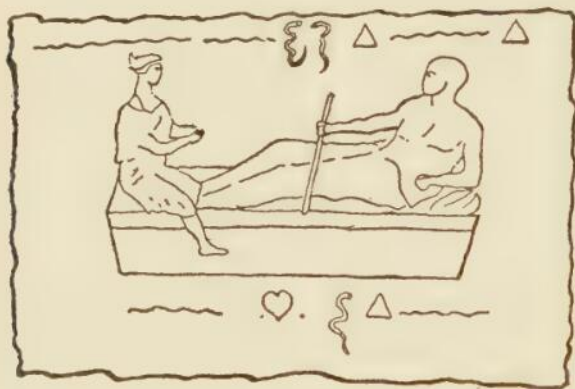
resource, in strength and unity of purpose; men laughing to scorn the flimsy prophylactics of society, separated by an infinity of self-confidence and spiritual integrity from the ordinary easily-crushed criminal of our days.

"This much at least I was able to discover from the first; and immediately I set myself to the detection of motive by a careful study of each case. This, too, in due time, became clear to me,—but to motive it may perhaps be more convenient to refer later on. What next engaged my attention was the figures on the papyrus, and devoutly did I hope that by their solution I might be able to arrive at some more exact knowledge of the mystery.



"The figures round the border first attracted me, and the mere *reading* of them gave me very little trouble. But I was convinced that behind their meaning thus read lay some deep esoteric significance; and this, almost to the last, I was utterly unable to fathom. You perceive that these border figures consist of waved lines of two different lengths, drawings of snakes, triangles looking like the Greek delta, and a heart-shaped object with a dot following it. These succeed one another in a certain definite order on all the slips. What, I asked myself, were these drawings meant to represent—letters, numbers, things, or abstractions? This I was the more readily able to determine because I have often, in thinking over the shape of the Roman

letter S, wondered whether it did not owe its convolute form to an attempt on the part of its inventor to make a picture of the *serpent*; S being the sibilant or hissing letter, and the serpent the hissing animal. This view, I fancy (though I am not sure), has escaped the philologists, but of course you know that all letters were originally *pictures of things*, and of what was S a picture, if not of the serpent? I therefore assumed, by way of trial, that the snakes in the diagram stood for a sibilant letter, that is, either C or S. And thence, supposing this to be the case, I deduced: firstly, that all the other figures stood for letters; and secondly, that they all appeared in the form of pictures of the things of which those letters were originally meant to be pictures.

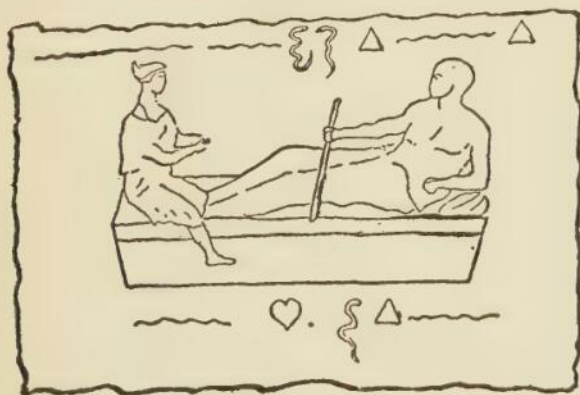


Thus the letter 'm,' one of the four 'liquid' consonants, is, as we now write it, only a shortened form of a waved line; and as a waved line it was originally written, and was the character by which *a stream of running water* was represented in writing; indeed it only owes its name to the fact that when the lips are pressed together, and 'm' uttered by a continuous effort, a certain resemblance to the murmur of running water is produced. The longer waved line in the diagram I therefore took to represent 'm'; and it at once followed that the shorter meant 'n,' for no two letters of the commoner European alphabets differ *only* in length (as distinct from shape) except 'm' and 'n,' and

'w' and 'v'; indeed, just as the French call 'w' 'double-ve,' so very properly might 'm' be called 'double-en.' But, in this case, the longer not being 'w,' the shorter could not be 'v': it was therefore 'n.' And now there only remained the heart and the triangle. I was unable to think of any letter that could ever have been intended for the picture of a heart, but the triangle I knew to be the letter A. This was originally written without the cross-bar from prop to prop, and the two feet at the bottom of the props were not separated as now, but joined; so that the letter formed a true triangle. It was meant by the primitive man to be a picture of his primitive house, this house being, of course, hut-shaped, and consisting of a conical roof without walls. I had thus, with the exception of the heart, disentangled the whole, which then (leaving a space for the heart) read as follows:

“mn {<sup>ss</sup><sub>cc</sub> anan . . . san.”

But “c” before “a” being never a sibilant (except in some few so-called “Romance” languages), but a guttural, it was for



the moment discarded; also as no word begins with the letters “mn”—except “mnemonics” and its fellows—I concluded that a vowel must be omitted between these letters, and thence

that all vowels (except "a") were omitted; again, as the double "s" can never come after "n" I saw that either a vowel was omitted between the two "s's," or that the first word ended after the first "s." Thus I got

"m ns sanan . . . san,"

or, supplying the now quite obvious vowels,

"mens sana in . . . sano."

The heart I now knew represented the word "corpore," the Latin word for "heart" being "cor," and the dot—showing that the word as it stood was an abbreviation—conclusively proved every one of my deductions.

"So far all had gone flowingly. It was only when I came to consider the central figures that for many days I spent my strength in vain. You heard my exclamation of delight and astonishment when at last a ray of light pierced the gloom. At no time, indeed, was I wholly in the dark as to the *general* significance of these figures, for I saw at once their resemblance to the sepulchral reliefs of classical times. In case you are not minutely acquainted with the *technique* of these stones, I may as well show you one, which I myself removed from an old grave in Tarentum."

He took from a niche a small piece of close-grained marble, about a foot square, and laid it before me. On one side it was exquisitely sculptured in relief.

"This," he continued, "is a typical example of the Greek grave-stone, and having seen one specimen you may be said to have seen almost all, for there is surprisingly little variety in the class. You will observe that the scene represents a man reclining on a couch; in his hand he holds a *patera*, or dish, filled with grapes and pomegranates, and beside him is a tripod bearing the viands from which he is banqueting. At his feet sits a woman—for the Greek lady never reclined at table. In addition to these two figures a horse's head, a dog, or a serpent may sometimes be seen; and these forms comprise the almost invariable pattern of all grave reliefs. Now, that this was the real model from which the figures on the papyrus were taken I could not doubt, when I



considered the seemingly absurd fidelity with which in each murder the papyrus, smeared with honey, was placed under the tongue of the victim. I said to myself: it can only be that the assassins have bound themselves to the observance of a strict and narrow ritual from which no departure is under any circumstances permitted—perhaps for the sake of signalling the course of events to others at a distance. But what ritual? That question I was able to answer when I knew the answer to these others,—why *under the tongue*, and why *smeared with honey*? For no reason, except that the Greeks (not the Romans till very late in their history) always placed an *obolos*, or penny, beneath the tongue of the dead to pay his passage across the Stygian river of ghosts; for no reason, except that to these same Greeks honey was a sacred fluid, intimately associated in their minds with the mournful subject of Death; a fluid with which the bodies of the deceased were anointed, and sometimes—especially in Sparta and the Pelasgic South—embalmed; with which libations were poured to Hermes Psuchopompos, conductor of the dead to the regions of shade; with which offerings were made to all the chthonic deities, and the souls of the departed in general. You remember, for instance the melancholy words of Helen addressed to Hermione in *Orestes*:

Καὶ λαβὲ χάς τὰσδ' ἐν χεροῖν κόμας τ' ἐμὰς.  
 ἔλθοῦσα δ' ἀμφὶ τὸν Κλυταιμνήστρας τάφον  
 μελίκρατ' ἄφες γάλακτος οἰνωπὸν τ' ἄχνην.

And so everywhere. The ritual then of the murderers was a *Greek* ritual, their cult a Greek cult—preferably, perhaps, a South Greek one, a Spartan one, for it was here that the highly conservative peoples of that region clung longest and fondliest to this semi-barbarous worship. This then being so, I was made all the more certain of my conjecture that the central figures on the papyrus were drawn from a Greek model.

“Here, however, I came to a standstill. I was infinitely puzzled by the rod in the man’s hand. In none of the Greek grave-reliefs does any such thing as a rod make an appearance, except in one well-known example where the god Hermes—generally represented as carrying the *caduceus*, or staff, given him by Phœbus—appears leading a dead maiden to the land of

night. But in every other example of which I am aware the sculpture represents a man *living*, not dead, banqueting *on earth*, not in Hades, by the side of his living companion. What then could be the significance of the staff in the hand of this living man? It was only after days of the hardest struggle, the cruellest suspense, that the thought flashed on me that the idea of Hermes leading away the dead female might, in this case, have been carried one step farther; that the male figure might be no living man, no man at all, but *Hermes himself* actually banqueting in Hades with the soul of his disembodied *protégée*! The thought filled me with a rapture I cannot describe, and you witnessed my excitement. But, at all events, I saw that this was a truly tremendous departure from Greek art and thought, to which in general the copyists seemed to cling so religiously. There must therefore be a reason, a strong reason, for vandalism such as this. And that, at any rate, it was no longer difficult to discover; for now I knew that the male figure was no mortal, but a god, a spirit, a DÆMON (in the Greek sense of the word); and the female figure I saw by the marked shortness of her drapery to be no Athenian, but a Spartan; no matron either, but a maiden, a lass, a LASSIE; and now I had forced on me lassie dæmon, *Lacedæmon*.

"This then was the badge, the so carefully-buried badge, of this society of men. The only thing which still puzzled and confounded me at this stage was the startling circumstance that a *Greek* society should make use of a *Latin* motto. It was clear that either all my conclusions were totally wrong, or else the motto *mens sana in corpore sano* contained wrapped up in itself some acroamatic meaning which I found myself unable to penetrate, and which the authors had found no Greek motto capable of conveying. But at any rate, having found this much, my knowledge led me of itself one step further; for I perceived that, widely extended as were their operations, the society was necessarily in the main an *English*, or at least an English-speaking one—for of this the word "lassie" was plainly indicative: it was easy now to conjecture London, the monster-city in which all things lose themselves, as their headquarters; and at this point in my investigations I despatched to the papers the advertisement you have seen."

"But," I exclaimed, "even now I utterly fail to see by what

mysterious processes of thought you arrived at the wording of the advertisement; even now it conveys no meaning to my mind."

"That," he replied, "will grow clear when we come to a right understanding of the baleful *motive* which inspired these men. I have already said that I was not long in discovering it. There was only one possible method of doing so—and that was, by all means, by any means, to find out some condition or other common to every one of the victims before death. It is true that I was unable to do this in some few cases, but where I failed, I was convinced that my failure was due to the insufficiency of the evidence at my disposal, rather than to the actual absence of the condition. Now, let us take almost any two cases you will, and seek for this common condition: let us take, for example, the first two that attracted the attention of the world—the poor woman of the slums of Berlin, and the celebrated man of science. Separated by as wide an interval as they are, we shall yet find, if we look closely, in each case the same pathetic tokens of the still uneliminated *striae* of our poor humanity. The woman is not an old woman, for she has a 'small young' family, which, had she lived, might have been increased: notwithstanding which, she has suffered from hemiplegia, 'partial paralysis.' The professor, too, has had not one, but two, large families, and an 'army of grand-children'; but note well the startling, the hideous fact, that *every one of his children is dead!* The crude grave has gaped before the cock to suck in *every one* of those shrunk forms, so indigent of vital impulse, so pauper of civism, lust, so draughty, so vague, so lean—but not before they have had time to dower with the ah and wo of their infirmity a whole wretched "army of grand-children." And yet this man of wisdom is on the point, in his old age, of marrying once again, of producing for the good of his race still more of this poor human stuff. You see the lurid significance, the point of resemblance,—you see it? And, O heaven, is it not too sad? For me, I tell you, the whole business has a tragic pitifulness too deep for words. But this brings me to the discussion of a large matter. It would, for instance, be interesting to me to hear what you, a modern European, saturated with all the notions of your little day, what *you* consider the supreme, the all-important question for the nations of Europe at this moment. Am I far wrong in assuming that you would



rattle off half a dozen of the moot points agitating rival factions in your own land, select one of them, and call that 'the question of the hour'? I wish I could see as you see; I wish to God I did not see deeper. In order to lead you to my point, what, let me ask you, what *precisely* was it that ruined the old nations—that brought, say Rome, to her knees at last? Centralization, you say, top-heavy imperialism, dilettante pessimism, the love of luxury. At bottom, believe me, it was not one of these high-sounding things—it was simply war; the sum total of the battles of centuries. But let me explain myself: this is a novel view to you, and you are perhaps unable to conceive how or why war was so fatal to the old world, because you see how little harmful it is to the new. If you collected in a promiscuous way a few millions of modern Englishmen and slew them all simultaneously, what, think you, would be the effect from the point of view of the State? The effect, I conceive, would be indefinitely small, wonderfully transitory; there would, of course, be a momentary lacuna in the boiling surge: yet the womb of humanity is full of sap, and uberant; Ocean-tide, wooed of that Ilithyia whose breasts are many, would flow on, and the void would soon be filled. But the effect would only be thus insignificant, if, as I said, your millions were taken promiscuously (as in the modern army), not if they were *picked* men—in *that* case the loss (or gain) would be excessive, and permanent for all time. Now, the war-hosts of the ancient commonwealths—not dependent on the mechanical contrivances of the modern army—were necessarily composed of the very best men: the strong-boned, the heart-stout, the sound in wind and limb. Under these conditions the State shuddered through all her frame, thrilled adown every filament, at the death of a single one of her sons in the field. As only the feeble, the aged, bided at home, their number after each battle became larger in *proportion to the whole* than before. Thus the nation, more and more, with ever-increasing rapidity, declined in bodily, and of course spiritual, quality, until the *end* was reached, and Nature swallowed up the weaklings whole; and thus war, which to the modern state is at worst the blockhead and indecent *affaires d'honneur* of persons in office—and which, surely, before you and I die will cease altogether—was to the ancient a genuine and remorselessly fatal scourge.



“And now let me apply these facts to the Europe of our own time. We no longer have world-serious war—but in its place we have a scourge, the effect of which on the modern state is *precisely the same* as the effect of war on the ancient, only,—in the end,—far more destructive, far more subtle, sure, horrible, disgusting. The name of this pestilence is Medical Science. Yes, it is most true, shudder—shudder—as you will! Man’s best friend turns to an asp in his bosom to sting him to the basest of deaths. The devastating growth of medical, and especially surgical, science—that, if you like, for us all, is ‘the question of the hour!’ And what a question! of what surpassing importance, in the presence of which all other ‘questions’ whatever dwindle into mere academic triviality. For just as the ancient State was wounded to the heart through the death of her healthy sons in the field, just so slowly, just so silently, is the modern receiving deadly hurt by the botching and tinkering of her unhealthy children. The net result is in each case the same—the altered ratio of the total amount of reproductive health to the total amount of reproductive disease. They recklessly spent their best; we sedulously conserve our worst; and as they pined and died of anæmia, so we, unless we repent, must perish in a paroxysm of black-blood apoplexy. And this prospect becomes more certain, when you reflect that the physician as we know him is not, like other men and things, a being of gradual growth, of slow evolution: from Adam to the middle of the last century the world saw nothing even in the least resembling him. No son of Paian *he*, but a fatherless, full-grown birth from the incessant matrix of Modern Time, so motherly of monstrous litters of ‘Gorgon and Hydra and Chimæras dire’; you will understand what I mean when you consider the quite recent date of, say, the introduction of anæsthetics or antiseptics, the discovery of the knee-jerk, bacteriology, or even of such a doctrine as the circulation of the blood. We are at this very time, if I mistake not, on the verge of new insights which will enable man to laugh at disease—laugh at it in the sense of over-ruling its natural tendency to produce death, not by any means in the sense of destroying its ever-expanding *existence*. Do you know that at this moment your hospitals are crammed with beings in human likeness suffering from a thousand obscure and subtly-

ineradicable ills, all of whom, if left alone, would die almost at once, but ninety in the hundred of whom will, as it is, be sent forth 'cured,' like missionaries of hell, and the horrent shapes of Night and Acheron, to mingle in the pure river of humanity the poison-taint of their protean vileness? Do you know that in your schools one-quarter of the children are already purblind? Have you gauged the importance of your tremendous consumption of quack catholicons, of the fortunes derived from their sale, of the spread of modern nervous disorders, of toothless youth and thrice loathsome age among the helot-classes? Do you know that in the course of my late journey to London, I walked from Piccadilly Circus to Hyde Park Corner, during which time I observed some five hundred people, of whom twenty-seven only were perfectly healthy, well-formed men, and eighteen healthy, beautiful women? On every hand—with a thrill of intensest joy, I say it!—is to be seen, if not yet commencing civilisation, then progress, progress—wide as the world—toward it: only here—at the heart—is there decadence, fatty degeneration. Brain-evolution—and favouring airs—and the ripening time—and the silent Will of God, of God—all these in conspiracy seem to be behind, urging the whole ship's company of us to some undreamable luxury of glory—when lo, this check, artificial, evitable. Less death, more disease—that is the sad, the unnatural record; children especially—so sensitive to the physician's art—living on by hundreds of thousands, bearing within them the germs of wide-spreading sorrow, who in former times would have died. And if you consider that the proper function of the doctor is the strictly limited one of curing the curable, rather than of self-gloriously perpetuating the incurable, you may find it difficult to give a quite rational answer to this simple question: *why?* Nothing is so sure as that to the unit it is a cruelty; nothing so certain as that to humanity it is a wrong; to say that such and such an one was sent by the All Wise, and must *therefore* be not merely permitted, but elaborately coaxed and forced, to live, is to utter a blasphemy against Man at which even the ribald tongue of a priest might falter; and as a matter of fact, society, in just contempt for this species of argument, never hesitates to hang, for its own imagined good, its heaven-sent catholics, protestants, sheep, sheep-stealers, etc. What then, you ask,

would I do with these unholy ones? to save the State would I pierce them with a sword, or leave them to the slow throes of their agonies? Ah, do not expect me to answer that question—I do not know what to answer. The whole spirit of the present is one of a broad and beautiful, if quite thoughtless, humanism, and I, a child of the present, cannot but be borne along by it, coerced into sympathy with it. ‘Beautiful’ I say: for if anywhere in the world you have seen a sight more beautiful than a group of hospital *savants* bending with endless scrupulousness over a little pauper child, concentrating upon its frailty the whole human skill and wisdom of ages, so have not I. Here have you the full realization of a parable diviner than that of the man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. Beautiful then; with at least surface beauty, like the serpent *lachesis mutus*; but, like many beautiful things, deadly too, *inhuman*. And, on the whole, an answer will have to be found. As for me, it is a doubt which has often agitated me, whether the central dogma of Judaism and Christianity alike can, after all, be really one of the inner verities of this our earthly being—the dogma, that by the shedding of the innocent blood, and by that alone, shall the race of man find cleansing and salvation. Will no agony of reluctance overcome the necessity that one man die, ‘so that the whole people perish not’? Can it be true that by nothing less than the ‘three days of pestilence’ shall the land be purged of its stain, and is this old divine alternative about to confront us in new, modern form? Does the inscrutable Artemis indeed demand offerings of human blood to suage her anger? Most sad that man should ever need, should ever have needed, to foul his hand in the *μυσαγὸν αἷμα* of his own veins! But what is, is. And can it be fated that the most advanced civilisation of the future shall needs have in it, as the first and chief element of its glory, the most barbarous of all the rituals of barbarism—the immolation of hecatombs which wail a muling human wail? Is it indeed part of man’s strange destiny through the deeps of Time that he one day bow his back to the duty of pruning himself as a garden, so that he run not to a waste wilderness? Shall the physician, the *accoucheur*, of the time to come be expected, and commanded, to don the ephod and breast-plate, anoint his head with the oil of gladness, and add to the function of healer the function of Sacrificial Priest? These you



say, are wild, dark questions. Wild enough, dark enough. We know how Sparta—the 'man-taming Sparta' Simonides calls her—answered them. Here was the complete subordination of all unit-life to the well-being of the Whole. The child, immediately on his entry into the world, fell under the control of the State: it was not left to the judgment of his parents, as elsewhere, whether he should be brought up or not, but a commission of the Phyle in which he was born decided the question. If he was weakly, if he had any bodily unsightliness, he was exposed on a place called Taygetus, and so perished. It was a consequence of this that never did the sun in his course light on man half so godly stalwart, on woman half so houri-lovely, as in stern and stout old Sparta. Death, like all mortal, they must bear; disease, once and for all, they were resolved to have done with. The word which they used to express the idea 'ugly,' meant also 'hateful,' 'vile,' 'disgraceful'—and I need hardly point out to you the significance of that fact alone; for they considered—and rightly—that there is no sort of natural reason why every denizen of earth should not be perfectly hale, integral, sane, beautiful—if only very moderate pains be taken to procure this divine result. One fellow, indeed, called Nancleidas, grew a little too fat to please the sensitive eyes of the Spartans: I believe he was periodically whipped. Under a system so very barbarous, the super-sweet, egoistic voice of the club-footed poet Byron would, of course, never have been heard: one brief egoistic 'lament' on Taygetus, and so an end. It is not, however, certain that the world could not have managed very well without Lord Byron. The one thing that admits of no contradiction is that it cannot manage without the holy citizen, and that disease, to men and to nations, can have but one meaning, annihilation near or ultimate. At any rate, from these remarks, you will now very likely be able to arrive at some understanding of the wording of the advertisements which I sent to the papers."

Zaleski, having delivered himself of this singular *tirade*, paused: replaced the sepulchral relief in its niche: drew a drapery of silver cloth over his bare feet and the hem of his antique garment of Babylon: and then continued:

"After some time the answer to the advertisement at length arrived; but what was my disgust to find that it was perfectly

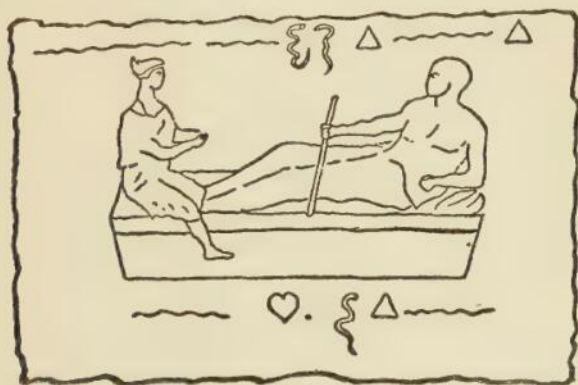


unintelligible to me. I had asked for a date and an address: the reply came giving a date, and an address, too—but an address wrapped up in cypher, which, of course, I, as a supposed member of the society, was expected to be able to read. At any rate, I now knew the significance of the incongruous circumstance that the Latin proverb *mens sana etc.* should be adopted as the motto of a Greek society; the significance lay in this, that the motto *contained an address*—the address of their meeting-place, or at least, of their chief meeting-place. I was now confronted with the task of solving—and of solving quickly, without the loss of an hour—this enigma; and I confess that it was only by the most violent and extraordinary concentration of what I may call the dissecting faculty, that I was able to do so in good time. And yet there was no special difficulty in the matter. For looking at the motto as it stood in cypher, the first thing I perceived was that, in order to read the secret, the heart-shaped figure must be left out of consideration, if there was any *consistency* in the system of cyphers at all, for it belonged to a class of symbols quite distinct from that of all the others, not being, like them, a picture-letter. Omitting this, therefore, and taking all the other vowels and consonants whether actually represented in the device or not, I now got the proverb in the form *mens sana in . . . pore sano*. I wrote this down, and what instantly struck me was the immense, the altogether unusual, number of *liquids* in the motto—six in all, amounting to no less than one-third of the total number of letters! Putting these all together you get *mnnnnr*, and you can see that the very appearance of the ‘m’s’ and ‘n’s’ (especially when *written*) running into one another, of itself suggests a stream of water. Having previously arrived at the conclusion of London as the meeting-place, I could not now fail to go on to the inference of *the Thames*; there, or near there, would I find those whom I sought. The letters ‘mnnnnr,’ then, meant the Thames: what did the still remaining letters mean? I now took these remaining letters, placing them side by side: I got *aaa, sss, ee, oo, p* and *i*. Juxtaposing these nearly in the order indicated by the frequency of their occurrence, and their place in the Roman alphabet, you at once and inevitably get the word *Æsopi*. And now I was fairly startled by this symmetrical proof of the exactness of my own deductions in other respects, but, above all, far above all,

by the occurrence of that word 'Æsopi.' For who was Æsopus? He was a slave who was freed for his wise and witty sallies: he is therefore typical of the liberty of the wise—their moral manumission from temporary and narrow law; he was also a close friend of Cræsus: he is typical, then, of the union of wisdom with wealth—true wisdom with real wealth, lastly, and above all, he was thrown by the Delphians from a rock on account of his wit: he is typical, therefore, of death—the shedding of blood—as a result of wisdom, this thought being an elaboration of Solomon's great maxim, 'in much wisdom is much sorrow.' But how accurately all this fitted in with what would naturally be the doctrines of the men on whose track I was! I could no longer doubt the justness of my reasonings, and immediately, while you slept, I set off for London.

"Of my haps in London I need not give you a very particular account. The meeting was to be held on the 15th, and by the morning of the 13th I had reached a place called Wargrave, on the Thames. There I hired a light canoe, and thence proceeded down the river in a somewhat zig-zag manner, narrowly examining the banks on either side, and keeping a sharp outlook for some board, or sign, or house, that would seem to betoken any sort of connection with the word 'Æsopi.' In this way I passed a fruitless day, and having reached the shipping region, made fast my craft, and in a spirit of *diablerie* spent the night in a common lodging-house, in the company of the most remarkable human beings, characterized by an odour of alcohol, and a certain obtrusive *bonne camaraderie* which the prevailing fear of death could not altogether repress. By dawn of the 14th I was on my journey again—on, and ever on. Eagerly I longed for a sight of the word I sought: but I had misjudged the men against whose cunning I had measured my own. I should have remembered more consistently that they were no ordinary men. As I was destined to find, there lay a deeper, more cabalistic meaning in the motto than any I had been able to dream of. I had proceeded on my pilgrimage down the river a long way past Greenwich, and had now reached a desolate and level reach of land stretching away on either hand. Paddling my boat from the right to the left bank, I came to a spot where a little arm of the river ran up some few yards into the land. The place wore a

especially dreary and deserted aspect: the land was flat, and covered with low shrubs. I rowed into this arm of shallow water and rested on my oar, wearily bethinking myself what was next to be done. Looking round, however, I saw to my surprise that at the end of this arm there was a short narrow pathway—a winding road—leading from the river-bank. I stood up in the boat and followed its course with my eyes. It was met by another road also winding among the bushes, but in a slightly different direction. At the end of this was a little, low, high-roofed, round house, without doors or windows. And then—and then—tingling now with a thousand raptures—I beheld a pool of water near this structure, and then another low house, a counterpart of the



first—and then, still leading on in the same direction, another pool—and then a great rock, heart-shaped—and then another winding road—and then another pool of water. All was a model—*exact to the minutest particular*—of the device on the papyrus! The first long-waved line was the river itself; the three short-waved lines were the arm of the river and the two pools; the three snakes were the three winding roads; the two triangles representing the letter A were the two high-roofed round houses; the heart was the rock! I sprang, now thoroughly excited, from the boat, and ran in headlong haste to the end of the last lake. Here there was a rather thick and high growth of bushes, but



peering among them, my eye at once caught a white oblong board supported on a stake: on this, in black letters, was marked the words, 'DESCENSUS ÆSOPI.' It was necessary, therefore, to go *down*: the meeting-place was subterranean. It was without difficulty that I discovered a small opening in the ground, half hidden by the underwood; from the orifice I found that a series of wooden steps led directly downwards, and I at once boldly descended. No sooner, however, had I touched the bottom than I was confronted by an ancient man in Hellenic apparel, armed with the Greek *ziphos* and *peltè*. His eyes, accustomed to the gloom, pierced me long with an earnest scrutiny.

"'You are a Spartan?' he asked at length.

"'Yes,' I answered promptly.

"'Then how is it you do not know that I am stone deaf?'

"I shrugged, indicating that for the moment I had forgotten the fact.

"'You *are* a Spartan?' he repeated.

"I nodded with emphasis.

"'Then, how is it you omit to make the sign?'

"Now, you must not suppose that at this point I was nonplussed, for in that case you would not give due weight to the strange inherent power of the mind to rise to the occasion of a sudden emergency—to stretch itself long to the length of an event; I do not hesitate to say that *no* combination of circumstances can defeat a vigorous brain fully alert, and in possession of itself. With a quickness to which the lightning-flash is tardy, I remembered that this was a spot indicated by the symbols on the papyrus: I remembered that this same papyrus was always placed under the *tongue* of the dead; I remembered, too, that among that very nation whose language had afforded the motto, to 'turn up the thumb' (*pollicem vertere*) was a symbol significant of death. I touched the under surface of my tongue with the tip of my thumb. The aged man was appeased. I passed on, and examined the place.

"It was simply a vast circular hall, the arched roof of which was supported on colonnades of what I took to be pillars of porphyry. Down the middle and round the sides ran tables of the same material; the walls were clothed in hangings of sable velvet, on which, in infinite reproduction, was embroidered in



cypher the motto of the society. The chairs were cushioned in the same stuff. Near the centre of the circle stood a huge statue of what really seemed to me to be pure beaten gold. On the great ebon base was inscribed the word *ΔΥΚΥΡΤΟΣ*. From the roof swung by brazen chains a single misty lamp.

"Having seen this much I reascended to the land of light, and being fully resolved on attending the meeting on the next day or night, and not knowing what my fate might then be, I wrote to inform you of the means by which my body might be traced.

"But on the next day a new thought occurred to me: I reasoned thus: 'these men are not common assassins; they wage a too rash warfare against diseased life, but not against life in general. In all probability they have a quite immoderate, quite morbid reverence for the sanctity of healthy life. They will not therefore take mine, *unless* they suppose me to be the only living outsider who has a knowledge of their secret, and therefore think it absolutely necessary for the carrying out of their beneficent designs that my life should be sacrificed. I will therefore prevent such a motive from occurring to them by communicating to another their whole secret, and—if the necessity should arise—*letting them know* that I have done so, without telling them who that other is. Thus my life will be assured.' I therefore wrote to you on that day a full account of all I had discovered, giving you to understand, however, on the envelope, that you need not examine the contents for some little time.

"I waited in the subterranean vault during the greater part of the next day; but not till midnight did the confederates gather. What happened at that meeting I shall not disclose, even to you. All was sacred—solemn—full of awe. Of the choral hymns there sung, the hierophantic ritual, liturgies, pæans, the gorgeous symbolisms—of the wealth there represented, the culture, art, self-sacrifice—of the mingling of all the tongues of Europe—I shall not speak; nor shall I repeat names which you would at once recognize as familiar to you—though I may, perhaps, mention that the 'Morris,' whose name appears on the papyrus sent to me is a well-known *littérateur* of that name. But this in confidence, for some years at least.

"Let me, however, hurry to a conclusion. My turn came to speak. I rose undaunted, and calmly disclosed myself; during

the moment of hush, of wide-eyed paralysis that ensued, I declared that fully as I coincided with their views in general, I found myself unable to regard their methods with approval—these I could not but consider too rash, too harsh, too premature. My voice was suddenly drowned by one universal, earth-shaking roar of rage and contempt, during which I was surrounded on all sides, seized, pinioned, and dashed on the central table. All this time, in the hope and love of life, I passionately shouted that I was not the only living being who shared in their secret. But my voice was drowned, and drowned again, in the whirling tumult. None heard me. A powerful and little-known anæsthetic—the means by which all their murders have been accomplished—was now produced. A cloth, saturated with the fluid, was placed on my mouth and nostrils. I was stifled. Sense failed. The incubus of the universe blackened down upon my brain. How I tugged at the mandrakes of speech! was a locked pugilist with language! In the depth of my extremity the half-thought, I remember, floated, like a mist, through my fading consciousness, that now perhaps—now—there was silence around me; that *now*, could my palsied lips find dialect, I should be heard, and understood. My whole soul rose focused to the effort—my body jerked itself upwards. At that moment I knew my spirit truly great, genuinely sublime. For I *did* utter something—my dead and shuddering tongue *did* babble forth some coherency. Then I fell back, and all was once more the ancient Dark. On the next day when I woke, I was lying on my back in my little boat, placed there by God knows whose hands. At all events, one thing was clear—I *had* uttered something—I was saved. With what of strength remained to me I reached the place where I had left your *calèche*, and started on my homeward way. The necessity to sleep was strong upon me, for the fumes of the anæsthetic still clung about my brain; hence, after my long journey, I fainted on my passage through the house, and in this condition you found me.

“Such then is the history of my thinkings and doings in connection with this ill-advised confraternity: and now that their cabala is known to others—to how many others *they* cannot guess—I think it is not unlikely that we shall hear little more of the Society of Sparta.”

# XÉLUCHA





## XÉLUCHA

"He goeth after her . . . and knoweth not . . ."

(FROM A DIARY)

THREE DAYS AGO! by heaven, it seems an age. But I am shaken—my reason is debauched. A while since, I fell into a momentary coma precisely resembling an attack of *petit mal*. "Tombs, and worms, and epitaphs"—that is my dream. At my age, with my physique, to walk staggers, like a man stricken! But all that will pass: I must collect myself—my reason is debauched. Three days ago! it seems an age! I sat on the floor before an old cista full of letters. I lighted upon a packet of Cosmo's. Why, I had forgotten them! they are turning sere! Truly, I can no more call myself a young man. I sat reading, listlessly, rapt back by memory. To muse is to be lost! of *that* evil habit I must wring the neck, or look to perish. Once more I threaded the mazy sphere-harmony of the minuet, reeled in the waltz, long pomps of candelabra, the noonday of the bacchanal, about me. Cosmo was the very tsar and maharajah of the Sybarites! the Priap of the *détraqués*! In every unexpected alcove of the Roman Villa was a couch, raised high, with necessary foot-stool, flanked and canopied with *mirrors* of clarified gold. Consumption fastened upon him; reclining at last at table, he could, till warmed, scarce lift the wine! his eyes were like two fat glow-worms, coiled together! they seemed haloed with vaporous emanations of phosphorus! Desperate, one could see, was the secret struggle with the Devourer. But to the end the princely smile persisted calm; to the end—to the last day—he continued among that comic crew unchallenged choragus of all the rites, I will not say of Paphos, but of Chemos! and Baal-Peor! Warmed, he did not refuse the revel, the dance, the darkened chamber. It was utterly black, rayless; approached by a secret passage; in shape circular; the air hot, haunted always by odours of balms, bdellium, hints of dulcimer and flute; and radiated

round with a hundred thick-strewn ottomans of Morocco. Here Lucy Hill stabbed to the heart Caccofogo, mistaking the scar of his back for the scar of Soriac. In a bath of malachite the Princess Eglâ, waking late one morning, found Cosmo lying stiffly dead, the water covering him wholly.

"But in God's name, *Mérimée*!" (so he wrote), "to think of *Xélucha* dead! *Xélucha*! Can a moon-beam, then, perish of suppurations? Can the rainbow be eaten by worms? Ha! ha! ha! laugh with me, my friend: '*elle dérangerà l'Enfer*'! She will introduce the *pas de tarantule* into Tophet! *Xélucha*, the feminine! *Xélucha* recalling the splendid harlots of history! Weep with me—*manat rara meas lacrima per genas*! expert as Thargelia; cultured as Aspatia; purple as Semiramis. She comprehended the human tabernacle, my friend, its secret springs and tempers, more intimately than any *savant* of Salamanca who breathes. *Tarare*—but *Xélucha* is not dead! Vitality is not mortal; you cannot wrap flame in a shroud. *Xélucha*! where then is she? Translated, perhaps—rapt to a constellation like the daughter of Leda. She journeyed to Hindostan, accompanied by the train and appurtenance of a Begum, threatening descent upon the Emperor of Tartary. I spoke of the desolation of the West; she kissed me, and promised return. Mentioned you, too, *Mérimée*—'her Conqueror'—'*Mérimée, Destroyer of Woman.*' A breath from the conservatory rioted among the ambery whiffs of her forelocks, sending it singly a-wave over that thulite tint you know. Costumed cap-à-pie, she had, my friend, the dainty little completeness of a daisy mirrored bright in the eye of the browsing ox. A simile of Milton had for years, she said, inflamed the lust of her Eye: 'The barren plains of Sericana, where Chinese drive with sails and wind their cany wagons light.' I, and the Sabæans, she assured me, wrongly considered Flame the whole of being; the other half of things being Aristotle's quintessential light. In the Ourania Hierarchia and the Faust-book you meet a completeness: burning Seraph, Cherûb full of eyes. *Xélucha* combined them. She would reconquer the Orient for Dionysius, and return. I heard of her blazing at Delhi; drawn in a chariot by lions. Then this rumour—probably false. Indeed, it comes from a source somewhat turgid. Like Odin, Arthur, and the rest, *Xélucha*—will reappear."

Soon subsequently, Cosmo lay down in his balneum of malachite, and slept, having drawn over him the water as a coverlet. I, in England, heard little of Xélucha: first that she was alive, then dead, then alighted at old Tadmor in the Wilderness, Palmyra now. Nor did I greatly care, Xélucha having long since turned to apples of Sodom in my mouth. Till I sat by the cista of letters and re-read Cosmo, she had for some years passed from my active memories.

The habit is now confirmed in me of spending the greater part of the day in sleep, while by night I wander far and wide through the city under the sedative influence of a tincture which has become necessary to my life. Such an existence of shadow is not without charm; nor, I think, could many minds be steadily subjected to its conditions without elevation, deepened awe. To travel alone with the Primordial cannot but be solemn. The moon is of the hue of the glow-worm; and Night of the sepulchre. Nux bore not less Thanatos than Hupnos, and the bitter tears of Isis redundate to a flood. At three, if a cab rolls by, the sound has the augustness of thunder. Once, at two, near a corner, I came upon a priest, seated, dead, leering, his legs bent. One arm, supported on a knee, pointed with rigid accusing forefinger obliquely upward. By exact observation, I found that he indicated Betelgeux, the star "a" which shoulders the wet sword of Orion. He was hideously swollen, having perished of dropsy. Thus in all Supremes is a *grotesquerie*; and one of the sons of Night is—Buffo.

In a London square deserted, I should imagine, even in the day, I was aware of the metallic, silvery-clinking approach of little shoes. It was three in a heavy morning of winter, a day after my rediscovery of Cosmo. I had stood by the railing, regarding the clouds sail as under the sea-legged pilotage of a moon wrapped in cloaks of inclemency. Turning, I saw a little lady, very gloriously dressed. She had walked straight to me. Her head was bare, and crisped with the amber stream which rolled lax to a globe, kneaded thick with jewels, at her nape. In the redundance of her décolleté development, she resembled Parvati, mound-hipped love-goddess of the luscious fancy of the Brahmin.

She addressed to me the question:

"What are you doing there, darling?"

Her loveliness stirred me, and Night is *bon camarade*. I replied:

"Sunning myself by means of the moon."

"All that is borrowed lustre," she returned, "you have got it from old Drummond's *Flowers of Sion*."

Looking back, I cannot remember that this reply astonished me, though it should—of course—have done so. I said:

"On my soul, no; but you?"

"You might guess whence *I* come!"

"You are dazzling. You come from Paz."

"Oh, farther than that, my son! Say a subscription ball in Soho."

"Yes? . . . and alone? in the cold? on foot . . .?"

"Why, I am old, and a philosopher. I can pick you out riding Andromeda yonder from the ridden Ram. They are in error, M'sieur, who suppose an atmosphere on the broad side of the moon. I have reason to believe that on Mars dwells a race whose lids are transparent like glass; so that the eyes are visible during sleep; and every varying dream moves imaged forth to the beholder in tiny panorama on the limpid iris. You cannot imagine me a mere *fille*! To be escorted is to admit yourself a woman, and that is improper in Nowhere. Young Eos drives an *équipage à quatre*, but Artemis 'walks' alone. Get out of my borrowed light in the name of Diogenes! I am going home."

"Far?"

"Near Piccadilly."

"But a cab?"

"No cabs for *me*, thank you. The distance is a mere nothing. Come."

We walked forward. My companion at once put an interval between us, quoting from the *Spanish Curate* that the open is an enemy to love. The Talmudists, she twice insisted, rightly held the hand the sacredest part of the person, and at that point also contact was for the moment interdict. Her walk was extremely rapid. I followed. Not a cat was anywhere visible. We reached at length the door of a mansion in St. James's. There was no light. It seemed tenantless, the windows all uncurtained, pasted across, some of them, with the words, To Let. My companion, however, flitted up the steps, and, beckoning, passed



inward. I, following, slammed the door, and was in darkness. I heard her ascend, and presently a region of glimmer above revealed a stairway of marble, curving broadly up. On the floor where I stood was no carpet, nor furniture: the dust was very thick. I had begun to mount when, to my surprise, she stood by my side, returned; and whispered:

"To the very top, darling."

She soared nimbly up, anticipating me. Higher, I could no longer doubt that the house was empty but for us. All was a vacuum full of dust and echoes. But at the top, light streamed from a door, and I entered a good-sized oval saloon, at about the centre of the house. I was completely dazzled by the sudden resplendence of the apartment. In the midst was a spread table, square, opulent with gold plate, fruit dishes; three ponderous chandeliers of electric light above; and I noticed also (what was very *bizarre*) one little candlestick of common tin containing an old soiled curve of tallow, on the table. The impression of the whole chamber was one of gorgeousness not less than Assyrian. An ivory couch at the far end was made sun-like by a head-piece of chalcedony forming a sea for the sport of emerald ichthyotauri. Copper hangings, panelled with mirrors in iasperated crystal, corresponded with a dome of flame and copper; yet this latter, I now remember, produced upon my glance an impression of actual grime. My companion reclined on a small Sigma couch, raised high to the table-level in the Semitic manner, visible to her saffron slippers of satin. She pointed me a seat opposite. The incongruity of its presence in the middle of this arrogance of pomp so tickled me, that no power could have kept me from a smile: it was a grimy chair, mean, all wood, nor was I long in discovering one leg somewhat shorter than its fellows.

She indicated wine in a black glass bottle, and a tumbler, but herself made no pretence of drinking or eating. She lay on hip and elbow, *petite*, resplendent, and looked gravely upward. I, however, drank.

"You are tired," I said, "one sees that."

"It is precious little than *you* see!" she returned, dreamy, hardly glancing.

"How! your mood is changed, then? You are morose."

"You never, I think, saw a Norse passage-grave?"

"And abrupt."

"Never?"

"A passage-grave? No."

"It is worth a journey! They are circular or oblong chambers of stone, covered by great earthmounds, with a 'passage' of slabs connecting them with the outer air. All round the chamber the dead sit with head resting upon the bent knees, and consult together in silence."

"Drink wine with me, and be less Tartarean."

"You certainly seem to be a fool," she replied with perfect sardonic iciness. "Is it not, then, highly romantic? They belong, you know, to the Neolithic age. As the teeth fall, one by one, from the lipless mouths—they are caught by the lap. When the lap thins—they roll to the floor of stone. Thereafter, every tooth that drops all round the chamber sharply breaks the silence."

"Ha! ha! ha!"

"Yes. It is like a century-slow, circularly-successive dripping of slime in some cavern of the far subterrene."

"Ha! ha! This wine seems heady! They express themselves in a dialect largely dental."

"The Ape, on the other hand, in a language wholly guttural."

A town-clock tolled four. Our talk was holed with silences, and heavy-paced. The wine's yeasty exhalation reached my brain. I saw her through mist, dilating large, uncertain, shrinking again to dainty compactness. But amorousness had died within me.

"Do you know," she asked, "what has been discovered in one of the Danish *Kjökkenmöddings* by a little boy? It was ghastly. The skeleton of a huge fish with human——"

"You are most unhappy."

"Be silent."

"You are full of care."

"I think you a great fool."

"You are racked with misery."

"You are a child. You have not even an instinct of the meaning of the word."

"How! Am I not a man? I, too, miserable, careful?"

"You are not, really, *anything*—until you can create."

"Create what?"

"Matter."

"That is foppish. Matter cannot be created, nor destroyed."

"Truly, then, you must be a creature of unusually weak intellect. I see that now. Matter does not exist, then, there is no such thing, really—it is an appearance, a spectrum—every writer not imbecile from Plato to Fichte has, voluntary or involuntary, proved that for good. To create it is to produce an impression of its reality upon the senses of others; to destroy it is to wipe a wet rag across a scribbled slate."

"Perhaps. I do not care. Since no one can do it."

"No one? You are mere embryo——"

"Who then?"

"*Anyone*, whose power of Will is equivalent to the gravitating force of a star of the First Magnitude."

"Ha! ha! ha! By heaven, you choose to be facetious. Are there then wills of such equivalence?"

"There have been three, the founders of religions. There was a fourth: a cobbler of Herculaneum, whose mere volition induced the cataclysm of Vesuvius in 79, in direct opposition to the gravity of Sirius. There are more fames than *you* have ever sung, you know. The greater number of disembodied spirits, too, I feel certain——"

"By heaven, I cannot but think you full of sorrow! Poor wight! come, drink with me. The wine is thick and boon. Is it not Setian? It makes you sway and swell before me, I swear, like a purple cloud of evening——"

"But you are mere clayey ponderance!—I did not know that!—you are no companion! your little interest revolves round the lowest centres."

"Come—forget your agonies——"

"What, think you, is the portion of the buried body first sought by the worm?"

"The eyes! the eyes!"

"You are *hideously* wrong—you are so *utterly* at sea——"

"My God!"

She had bent forward with such rage of contradiction as to approach me closely. A loose gown of amber silk, wide-sleeved, had replaced her ball attire, though at what opportunity I

could not guess; wondering, I noticed it as she now placed her palms far forth upon the table. A sudden wafture as of spice and orange-flowers, mingled with the abhorrent faint odour of mortality over-ready for the tomb, greeted my sense. A chill crept upon my flesh.

"You are so *hopelessly* at fault——"

"For God's sake——"

"You are so *miserably* deluded! Not the eyes *at all!*"

"Then, in heaven's name, what?"

Five tolled from a clock.

"*The Uvula!* the soft drop of mucous flesh, you know, suspended from the palate above the glottis. They eat through the face-cloth and cheek, or crawl by the lips through a broken tooth, filling the mouth. They make straight for it. It is the *deliciae* of the vault."

At her horror of interest I grew sick, at her odour, and her words. Some unspeakable sense of insignificance, of debility, held me dumb.

"You say I am full of sorrows. You say I am racked with woe; that I gnash with anguish. Well, you are a mere child in intellect. You use words without realization of meaning like those minds in what Leibnitz calls 'symbolical consciousness.' But suppose it were so——"

"It is so."

"You know nothing."

"I see you twist and grind. Your eyes are very pale. I thought they were hazel. They are of the faint bluishness of phosphorus shimmerings seen in darkness."

"That proves nothing."

"But the 'white' of the sclerotic is dyed to yellow. And you look inward. Why do you look so palely inward, so woe-worn, upon your soul? Why can you speak of nothing but the sepulchre, and its rottenness? Your eyes seem to me wan with centuries of vigil, with mysteries and millenniums of pain."

"Pain! but you know so *little* of it! you are wind and words! of its philosophy and *rationale* nothing!"

"Who knows?"

"I will give you a hint. It is the sub-consciousness in conscious creatures of Eternity, and of eternal loss. The least prick of a



pin not Pæan and Æsculapius and the powers of heaven and hell can utterly heal. Of an everlasting loss of pristine wholeness the conscious body is sub-conscious, and 'pain' is its sigh at the tragedy. So with all pain—greater, the greater the loss. The hugest of losses is, of course, the loss of Time. If you lose that, any of it, you plunge at once into the transcendentalisms, the infinitudes, of Loss; if you lose *all of it*——”

“But you so wildly exaggerate! Ha! ha! You rant, I tell you, of commonplaces with the woe——”

“Hell is where a clear, untrammelled Spirit is sub-conscious of lost Time; where it boils and writhes with envy of the living world; *hating* it for ever, and all the sons of Life!”

“But curb yourself! Drink—I implore—I *implore*—for God’s sake—but *once*——”

“To *hasten* to the snare—that is woe! to drive your ship upon the *lighthouse* rock—that is *Marah*! To wake, and feel it irrevocably true that you went after her—and *the dead were there*—and her guests were in the depths of hell—and *you did not know it!*—though you *might* have. Look out upon the houses of the city this dawning day: not one, I tell you, but in it haunts some soul—walking up and down the old theatre of its little Day—goaded imagination by a thousand childish tricks, vraisemblances—elaborately duping itself into the momentary fantasy *that it still lives*, that the chance of life is not for ever and for ever lost—yet riving all the time with under-memories of the wasted Summer, the lapsed brief light between the two eternal glooms—riving I say and shriek to you! —riving, *Mérimée, you destroying fiend*——”

She had sprung—*tall* now, she seemed to me—between couch and table.

“*Mérimée!*” I screamed, “—*my* name, harlot, in your maniac mouth! By God, woman, you terrify me to death!”

I too sprang, the hairs of my head catching stiff horror from my fancies.

“Your name? Can you imagine me ignorant of your name, or anything concerning you? *Mérimée!* Why, did you not sit yesterday and read of me in a letter of Cosmo’s?”

“Ah-h . . .,” hysteria bursting high in sob and laughter from my arid lips—“Ah! ha! ha! *Xélucha!* My memory grows palsied and grey, *Xélucha!* pity me—my walk is in the very

valley of shadow!—senile and sere!—observe my hair, Xélucha, its grizzled growth—trepidant, Xélucha, clouded—I am not the man you knew, Xélucha, in the palaces—of Cosmo! You are Xélucha!”

“You rave, poor worm!” she cried, her face contorted by a species of malicious contempt. “Xélucha died of cholera ten years ago at Antioch. I wiped the froth from her lips. Her nose underwent a green decay before burial. So far sunken into the brain was the left eye——”

“You are—you are Xélucha!” I shrieked; “voices now of thunder howl it within my consciousness—and by the holy God, Xélucha, though you blight me with the breath of the hell you are, I shall clasp you,—living or damned——”

I rushed toward her. The word “Madman!” hissed as by the tongues of ten thousand serpents through the chamber, I heard; a belch of pestilent corruption puffed poisonous upon the putrid air; for a moment to my wildered eyes there seemed to rear itself, swelling high to the roof, a formless tower of ragged cloud, and before my projected arms had closed upon the very emptiness of inanity, I was tossed by the operation of some Behemoth potency far-circling backward to the utmost circumference of the oval, where, my head colliding, I fell, shocked, into insensibility.

. . . . .

When the sun was low toward night, I lay awake, and listlessly observed the grimy roof, and the sordid chair, and the candlestick of tin, and the bottle of which I had drunk. The table was small, filthy, of common deal, uncovered. All bore the appearance of having stood there for years. But for them, the room was void, the vision of luxury thinned to air. Sudden memory flashed upon me. I scrambled to my feet, and plunged and tottered, bawling, through the twilight into the street.

VAILA





## VAILA

E caddi come l'uome cui sonno piglia.—DANTE.

A GOOD MANY YEARS ago, a young man, student in Paris, I was informally associated with the great Corot, and eye-witnessed by his side several of those cases of mind-malady, in the analysis of which he was a past master. I remember one little girl of the Marais, who, till the age of nine, in no way seemed to differ from her playmates. But one night, lying a-bed, she whispered into her mother's ear: "Maman, can you not hear the *sound of the world*?" It appears that her recently-begun study of geography had taught her that the earth flies, with an enormous velocity, on an orbit about the sun; and that *sound of the world* to which she referred was a faint (quite subjective) musical humming, like a shell-murmur, heard in the silence of night, and attributed by her fancy to the song of this high motion. Within six months the excess of lunacy possessed her.

I mentioned the incident to my friend, Haco Harfager, then occupying with me the solitude of an old place in S. Germain, shut in by a shrubbery and high wall from the street. He listened with singular interest, and for a day seemed wrapped in gloom.

Another case which I detailed produced a profound impression upon my friend. A young man, a toy-maker of S. Antoine, suffering from chronic congenital phthisis, attained in the ordinary way his twenty-fifth year. He was frugal, industrious, self-involved. On a winter's evening, returning to his lonely garret, he happened to purchase one of those vehemently factious sheets which circulate by night, like things of darkness, over the Boulevards. This simple act was the herald of his doom. He lay a-bed, and perused the *feuille*. He had never been a reader; knew little of the greater world, and the deep hum of its travail. But the next night he bought another leaf. Gradually he acquired interest in politics, the large movements, the roar of life. And this interest grew absorbing. Till late into the night, and every night, he lay poring over the furious mendacity, the turbulent

wind, the printed passion. He would awake tired, spitting blood, but intense in spirit—and straightway purchased a morning leaf. His being lent itself to a retrograde evolution. The more his teeth gnashed, the less they ate. He became sloven, irregular at work, turning on his bed through the day. Rags overtook him. As the greater interest, and the vaster tumult, possessed his frail soul, so every lesser interest, tumult, died to him. There came an early day when he no longer cared for his own life; and another day, when his maniac fingers rent the hairs from his head.

As to this man, the great Corot said to me:

"Really, one does not know whether to laugh or weep over such a business. Observe, for one thing, how diversely men are made! There are minds precisely so sensitive as a cupful of melted silver; *every* breath will roughen and darken them: and what of the simoon, tornado? And that is not a metaphor but a simile. For such, this earth—I had almost said this universe—is clearly no fit habitation, but a Machine of Death, a baleful Vast. *Too* horrible to many is the running shriek of Being—they *cannot* bear the world. Let each look well to his own little whisk of life, say I, and leave the big fiery Automaton alone. Here in this poor toy-maker you have a case of the ear: it is only the neurosis, Oxyecoia. Splendid was that Greek myth of the Harpies: by *them* was this man snatched—or, say, caught by a limb in the wheels of the universe, and so perished. It is quite a grand exit, you know—translation in a chariot of flame. Only remember that the member first involved was *the pinna*: he bent *ear* to the howl of Europe, and ended by himself howling. Can a straw ride composedly on the primeval whirlwinds? Between chaos and our shoes wobbles, I tell you, the thinnest film! I knew a man who had this peculiarity of aural hyperæsthesia: that every sound brought him minute information of the matter causing the sound; that is to say, he had an ear bearing to the normal ear the relation which the spectroscope bears to the telescope. A rod, for instance, of mixed copper and iron impinging, in his hearing, upon a rod of mixed tin and lead, conveyed to him not merely the proportion of each metal in each rod, but some strange knowledge of the essential meaning and spirit, as it were, of copper, of iron, of tin, and of lead. Of course, he went mad; but, beforehand, told me

this singular thing: that precisely such a sense as his was, according to his *certain* intuition, employed by the Supreme Being in his permeation of space to apprehend the nature and movements of mind and matter. And he went on to add that *Sin*—what we call *sin*—is only the movement of matter or mind into such places, or in such a way, as to give offence or pain to this delicate diaplacsis (so I must call it) of the Creator; so that the 'Law' of Revelation became, in his eyes, edicts promulgated by their Maker merely in self-protection from aural pain; and divine punishment for, say murder, nothing more than retaliation for unease caused to the divine aural consciousness by the matter in a particular dirk or bullet lodged, at a particular moment, in a non-intended place! Him, too, I say, did the Harpies whisk aloft."

My recital of these cases to my friend, Harfager, I have mentioned. I was surprised, not so much at his acute interest—for he was interested in all knowledge—as at the obvious pains which he took to conceal that interest. He hurriedly turned the leaves of a volume, but could not hide his panting nostrils.

From first days when we happened to attend the same seminary in Stockholm, a tacit intimacy had sprung between us. I loved him greatly; that he so loved me I knew. But it was an intimacy not accompanied by many of the usual interchanges of close friendships. Harfager was the shyest, most isolated, insulated, of beings. Though our joint *ménage* (brought about by a chance meeting at a midnight *séance* in Paris) had now lasted some months, I knew nothing of his plans, motives. Through the day we pursued our intense readings together, he rapt quite back into the past, I equally engrossed upon the present; late at night we reclined on couches within the vast cave of an old fireplace Louis Onze, and smoked to the dying flame in a silence of wormwood and terebinth. Occasionally a *soirée* or lecture might draw me from the house; except once, I never understood that Harfager left it. I was, on that occasion, returning home at a point of the Rue St. Honoré where a rush of continuous traffic rattled over the old coarse pavements retained there, when I came suddenly upon him. In this tumult he stood abstracted on the trottoir in a listening attitude, and for a moment seemed not to recognise me when I touched him.

Even as a boy I had discerned in my friend the genuine Noble,



the inveterate patrician. One saw that in him. Not at all that his personality gave an impression of any species of loftiness, opulence; on the contrary. He did, however, give an impression of incalculable *ancientness*. He suggested the last moment of an æon. No nobleman have I seen who so bore in his wan aspect the assurance of the inevitable aristocrat, the essential prince, whose pale blossom is of yesterday, and will perish to-morrow, but whose root fills the ages. This much I knew of Harfager; also that on one or other of the bleak islands of his patrimony north of Zetland lived his mother and a paternal aunt; that he was somewhat deaf; but liable to transports of pain or delight at variously-combined musical sounds, the creak of a door, the note of a bird. More I cannot say that I then knew.

He was rather below the middle height, and gave some promise of stoutness. His nose rose highly aquiline from that species of forehead called by phrenologists "the musical," that is to say, flanked by temples which incline *outward* to the cheek-bones, making breadth for the base of the brain; while the direction of the heavy-lidded, faded-blue eyes, and of the eyebrows, was a downward *droop* from the nose of their outer extremities. He wore a thin chin-beard. But the astonishing feature of his face were the ears: they were nearly circular, very small, and flat, being devoid of that outer volution known as the *helix*. The two tiny discs of cartilage had always the effect of making me think of the little ancient round shields, without rims, called *clipeus* and *peltè*. I came to understand that this was a peculiarity which had subsisted among the members of his race for some centuries. Over the whole white face of my friend was stamped a look of woeful inability, utter gravity of sorrow. One said "Sardanapalus," frail last of the great line of Nimrod.

After a year I found it necessary to mention to Harfager my intention of leaving Paris. We reclined by night in our accustomed nooks within the fireplace. To my announcement he answered with a merely polite "Indeed!" and continued to gloat upon the flame; but after an hour turned upon me, and said:

"Well, it seems to be a hard and selfish world."

Truisms uttered with just such an air of new discovery I had occasionally heard from him; but the earnest gaze of eyes, and



plaint of voice, and despondency of shaken head, with which he now spoke shocked me to surprise.

"*À propos* of what?" I asked.

"My friend, do not leave me!"

He spread his arms. His utterance choked.

I learned that he was the object of a devilish malice; that he was the prey of a hellish temptation. That a lure, a becking hand, a lurking lust, which it was the effort of his life to eschew (and to which he was especially liable in solitude), continually enticed him; and that thus it had been almost from the day when, at the age of five, he had been sent by his father from his desolate home in the sea.

And whose was this malice?

He told me his mother's and aunt's.

And what was this temptation?

He said it was the temptation to return—to fly with the very frenzy of longing—back to that dim home.

I asked with what motives, and in what particulars, the malice of his mother and aunt manifested itself. He replied that there was, he believed, no specific motive, but only a determined malevolence, involuntary and fated; and that the respect in which it manifested itself was to be found in the multiplied prayers and commands with which, for years, they had importuned him to seek again the far hold of his ancestors.

All this I could in no way comprehend, and plainly said as much. In what consisted this horrible magnetism, and equally horrible peril, of his home? To this question Harfager did not reply, but rose from his seat, disappeared behind the drawn curtains of the hearth, and left the room. He presently returned with a quarto tome bound in hide. It proved to be Hugh Gascoigne's *Chronicle of Norse Families*, executed in English black-letter. The passage to which he pointed I read as follows:

"Nowe, of thise two brethrene, tholder (the elder), Harold, beying of seemely personage and prowess, did goe pilgrimage into Danemarke, wher from he repayred againward hoom to Hjaltlande (Zetland), and wyth hym fette (fetched) the amiabil Thronda for hyss wyf, which was a doughter of the sank (blood) royall of danemark. And his yonger brothir, Sweyne, that was

sad and debonayre, but far surmounted the other in cunning, receyued him with all good chere. Butte eftsones (soon after) fel sweyne sick for alle his lust that he hadde of Thronda his brothir's wyfe. And whiles the worthy Harold, with the grenehede (greenness) and foyle of yowthe, ministred a bisy cure aboute the bedde wher Sweyne lay sick, lo, sweyne fastened on him a violent stroke with swerde, and with no lenger taryinge enclosed his hands in bondes, and cast him in the botme of a depe holde. And by cause harold wold not benumb (deprive) hymself of the gouernance of Thronda his wif, Sweyne cutte off boeth his ere[s], and putte out one of his iyes, and after diverse sike tormentes was preste (ready) to slee (slay) hym. But on a daye, the valiant Harold, breking hys bondes, and embracinge his aduersary, did by the sleight of wrastlyng ouerthrowe him, and escaped. Nat-with-standyng, he foltred whan he came to the Somburgh Hed not ferre (far) fro the Castell, and al-be-it that he was swifte-foote, couth ne farder renne (run) by reson that he was faynte with the longe plag[u]es of hyss brothir. And whiles he ther lay in a sound (swoon) did Sweyne come sle (sly) and softe up on hym, and whan he had striken him with a darte, caste him fro Samburgh Hede in to the See.

"Nat longe hereafterward did the lady Thronda (tho she knew nat the manere of her lordes deth, ne, veryly, yf he was dead or on live) receyve Sweyne in to gree (favour), and with grete gaudying and blowinge of beamous (trumpets) did gon to his bed. And right soo they two wente thennes (thence) to sojourn in ferre partes.

"Now, it befel that sweyne was mynded by a dreame to let bild him a grete maunsion in Hialtland for the hoom-cominge of the ladye Thronda; where for he called to hym a cuninge Maistreworckman, and sente him hye (in haste) to englond to gather thralis for the bilding of this lusty Houss, but hym-self sojourned wyth his ladye at Rome. Thenne came his worckman to london, but passinge thennes to Hialtland, was drent (drowned) he, and his feers (mates), and his shippe, alle and some. And after two yeres, which was the tyme assygned, Sweyne harfager sente lettres to Hialtlande to vnderstonde how his grete Houss did, for he knew not the drenchyng of the Architecte; and eftsones he receiued answer that the Houss *did wel*, and was bildinge on the

Ile of Vaila; but that ne was the Ile wher-on Sweyne had appoynted the bilding to be; and he was aferd, and nere fel doun ded for drede, by cause that, in the lettres, he saw before him the mannere of wrytyng of his brothir Harold. And he sayed in this fourme: 'Surely Harolde is on lyue (alive), elles (else) ben thise lettres writ with gostlye hande.' And he was wo many dayes, seeing that this was a dedely stroke. Ther-after, he took him-selfe back to Hjalt-land to know how the matere was, and ther the old Castell on Somburgh Hede was brek doun to the erthe. Thenn Sweyne was wode-worthe, and cryed, 'Jhesu mercy, where is al the grete Hous of my faders becomen? allas! thys wycked day of desteynye.' And one of the peple tolde him that a hoost of worckmen fro fer partes hadde brek it doun. And he sayd: 'who hath bidde them?' but that couth none answer. Thenne he sayd agayn; 'nis (is not) my brothir harold on-lyue? for I haue biholde his writinge'; and that, to, colde none answer. Soo he wente to Vaila, and saw there a grete Houss stonde, and whan he looked on hyt, he saye[d]: 'this, sooth, was y-bild by my brothir Harolde, be he ded, or bee he on-lyue.' And ther he dwelte, and his ladye, and his sones and hys sones sones vntyl now. For that the Houss is rewthelesse (ruthless) and withoute pite; where-for tis seyed that up on al who dwel there faileth a wycked madness and a lecherous agonie; and that by waye of the eres doe they drinck the cuppe of the furie of the erelesse Harolde, til the tyme of the Houss bee ended."

I read the narrative half-aloud, and smiled.

"This, Harfager," I said, "is very tolerable romance on the part of the good Gascoigne; but has the look of indifferent history."

"It is, nevertheless, genuine *history*," he replied.

"You believe that?"

"The house still stands solidly on Vaila."

"The brothers Sweyn and Harold were literary for their age, I think?"

"No member of my race," he replied, with a suspicion of hauteur, "has been illiterate."

"But, at least, you do not believe that mediæval ghosts superintend the building of their family mansions?"



"Gascoigne nowhere says that; for to be stabbed is not necessarily to die; nor, if he did say it, would it be true to assert that I have any knowledge on the subject."

"And what, Harfager, is the nature of that 'wicked madness,' that 'lecherous agonie,' of which Gascoigne speaks?"

"Do you ask me?" He spread his arms. "What do I know? I know nothing! I was banished from the place at the age of five. Yet the cry of it still reverberates in my soul. And have I not *told* you of agonies—even within myself—of inherited longing and loathing. . . ."

But, at any rate, I answered, my journey to Heidelberg was just then indispensable. I would compromise by making absence short, and rejoin him quickly, if he would wait a few weeks for me. His moody silence I took to mean consent, and soon afterward left him.

But I was unavoidably detained; and when I returned to our old quarters, found them empty. Harfager had vanished.

It was only after twelve years that a letter was forwarded me—a rather wild letter, an excessively long one—in the well-remembered hand of my friend. It was dated at Vaila. From the character of the writing I conjectured that it had been penned *with furious haste*, so that I was all the more astonished at the very trivial nature of the voluminous contents. On the first half page he spoke of our old friendship, and asked if, in memory of that, I would see his mother who was dying; the rest of the epistle, sheet upon sheet, consisted of a tedious analysis of his mother's genealogical tree, the apparent aim being to prove that she was a genuine Harfager, and a cousin of his father. He then went on to comment on the extreme prolificness of his race, asserting that since the fourteenth century, over four millions of its members had lived and died in various parts of the world; three only of them, he believed, being now left. That determined, the letter ended.

Influenced by this communication, I travelled northward; reached Caithness; passed the stormy Orkneys; reached Lerwick; and from Unst, the most bleak and northerly of the Zetlands, contrived, by dint of bribes to pit the weather-worthiness of a lug-sailed 'sixern' (said to be identical with the 'langschips' of the Vikings) against a flowing sea and a darkly-



brooding heaven. The voyage, I was warned, was, at such a time, of some risk. It was the Cimmerian December of those inter-boreal latitudes. The weather here, they said, though never cold, is hardly ever other than tempestuous. A dense and dank sea-born haze now lay, in spite of vapid breezes, high along the water, enclosing the boat in a vague domed cavern of doleful twilight and sullen swell. The region of the considerable islands was past, and there was a spectral something in the unreal aspect of silent sea and sunless dismalness of sky which produced upon my nerves the impression of a voyage *out* of nature, a cruise *beyond* the world. Occasionally, however, we careered past one of those solitary 'skerries,' or sea-stacks, whose craggy sea-walls, cannonaded and disintegrated by the inter-shock of the tidal wave and the torrent currents of the German Ocean, wore, even at some distance, an appearance of frightful ruin and havoc. Three only of these I saw, for before the dim day had well run half its course, sudden blackness of night was upon us, and with it one of those tempests, of which the winter of this semi-polar sea is, throughout, an ever-varying succession. During the haggard and dolorous crepuscule of the next brief day, the rain did not cease; but before darkness had quite supervened, my helmsman, who talked continuously to a mate of seal-maidens, and waterhorses, and *grülies*, paused to point to a mound of gloomier grey in the weather-bow, which was, he assured me, Vaila.

Vaila, he added, was the centre of quite a system of those *rösts* (dangerous eddies) and cross-currents, which the action of the tidal wave hurls hurrying with complicated and corroding swirl among the islands; in the neighbourhood of Vaila, said the mariner, they hurtled with more than usual precipitancy, owing to the palisade of lofty sea-crag which barbicanted the place about; approach was, therefore, at all times difficult, and by night fool-hardy. With a running sea, however, we came sufficiently near to discern the mane of surf which bristled high along the beetling coast-wall. Its shock, according to the man's account, had oft-times more than all the efficiency of a bombing of real artillery, slinging tons of rock to heights of several hundred feet upon the main island.

When the sun next feebly climbed above the horizon to totter with marred visage through a wan low segment of funereal

murk, we had closely approached the coast; and it was then for the first time that the impression of some *spinning* motion in the island (born no doubt of the circular movement of the water) was produced upon me. We effected a landing at a small *voo*, or sea-arm, on the western side; the eastern, though the point of my aim, being, on account of the swell, out of the question for that purpose. Here I found in two feal-thatched *skeoes* (or sheds), which crouched beneath the shelter of a far over-hanging hill, five or six poor peasant-seamen, whose livelihood no doubt consisted in periodically trading for the necessaries of the great house on the east. Beside these there were no dwellers on Vaila; but with one of them for guide, I soon began the ascent and transit of the island. Through the night in the boat I had been strangely aware of an oppressive booming in the ears, for which even the roar of the sea round all the coast seemed quite insufficient to account. This now, as we advanced, became fearfully intensified, and with it, once more, the unaccountable conviction within me of *spinning* motions to which I have referred. Vaila I discovered to be a land of hill and precipice, made of fine granite and flaggy gneiss; at about the centre, however, we came upon a high table-land sloping gradually from west to east, and covered by a series of lochs, which sullenly and continuously flowed one into the other. To this chain of sombre, black-gleaming water I could see no terminating shore, and by dint of shouting to my companion, and bending close ear to his answering shout, I came to know that there *was* no such shore: I say *shout*, for nothing less could have prevailed over the steady bellowing as of ten thousand bisons, which now resounded on every hand. A certain trembling, too, of the earth became distinct. In vain did the eye seek in its dreary purview a single trace of tree or shrub; for, as a matter of course, no kind of vegetation, save peat, could brave, even for a day, that perennial agony of the tempest which makes of this turbid and benighted zone its arena. Darkness, an hour after noon, commenced to overshadow us; and it was shortly afterward that my guide, pointing down a precipitous defile near the eastern coast, hurriedly set forth upon the way he had come. I frantically howled a question after him as he went; but at this point the human voice had ceased to be in the faintest degree audible.

Down this defile, with a sinking of the heart, and a most singular feeling of giddiness, I passed. Having reached the end, I emerged upon a wide ledge which shuddered to the immediate onsets of the sea. But all this portion of the island was, in addition, subject to a sharp continuous ague evidently not due to the heavy ordnance of the ocean. Hugging a point of cliff for steadiness from the wind, I looked forth upon a spectacle of weirdly morne, of dismal wildness. The opening lines of *Hecuba*, or some drear district of the *Inferno*, seemed realized before me. Three black 'skerries,' encompassed by a fantastic series of stacks, crooked as a witch's fore-finger, and giving herbergage to shrill routs of osprey and scart, to seal and walrus, lay at some fathoms' distance; and from its race and rage among them, the sea, in arrogance of white, tumultuous, but inaudible wrath, ramped terrible as an army with banners toward the land. Leaving my place, I staggered some distance to the left: and now, all at once, a vast amphitheatre opened before me, and there burst upon my gaze a panorama of such heart-appalling sublimity, as imagination could never have conceived, nor can now utterly recall.

"A vast amphitheatre" I have said; yet it was rather the shape of a round-Gothic (or Norman) doorway which I beheld. Let the reader picture such a door-frame, nearly a mile in breadth, laid flat upon the ground, the curved portion farthest from the sea; and round it let a perfectly smooth and even wall of rock tower in perpendicular regularity to an altitude not unworthy the vulture's eyrie; and now, down the depth of this Gothic shape, and *over all its extent*, let bawling oceans dash themselves triumphing in spendthrift cataclysm of emerald and hoary fury,—and the stupor of awe with which I looked, and then the shrinking *fear*, and then the instinct of instant flight, will find easy comprehension.

This was the thrilling disembovement of the lochs of Vaila.

And within the arch of this Gothic cataract, volumed in the world of its smoky torment and far-excursive spray, stood a palace of brass . . . circular in shape . . . huge in dimension.

The last gleam of the ineffectual day had now almost passed, but I could yet discern, in spite of the perpetual rain-fall which bleakly nimbused it as in a halo of tears, that the building was low in proportion to the vastness of its circumference; that it was



roofed with a shallow dome; and that about it ran two serried rows of shuttered Norman windows, the upper row being of smaller size than the lower. Certain indications led me to assume that the house had been built upon a vast natural bed of rock which lay, circular and detached, within the arch of the cataract; but this did not quite emerge above the flood, for the whole ground-area upon which I looked dashed a deep and incense-reeking river to the beachless sea; so that passage would have been impossible, were it not that, from a point near me, a massive bridge, thick with algæ, rose above the tide, and led to the mansion. Descending from my ledge, I passed along it, now drenched in spray. As I came nearer, I could see that the house, too, was to half its height more thickly bearded than an old hull with barnacles and every variety of brilliant seaweed; and—what was very surprising—that from many points near the top of the brazen wall huge iron chains, slimily barbarous with the trailing tresses of ages, reached out in symmetrical divergent rays to points on the ground hidden by the flood: the fabric had thus the look of a many-anchored ark; but without pausing for minute observation, I pushed forward, and dashing through the smooth circular waterfall which poured all round from the eaves, by one of its many small projecting porches, entered the dwelling.

Darkness now was around me—and sound. I seemed to stand in the very throat of some yelling planet. An infinite sadness descended upon me; I was near to the abandonment of tears. “Here,” I said, “is Kohreb, and the limits of weeping; not elsewhere is the valley of sighing.” The tumult resembled the continuous volleying of many thousands of cannon, mingled with strange crashing and bursting uproars. I passed forward through a succession of halls, and was wondering as to my further course, when a hideous figure, bearing a lamp, stalked rapidly towards me. I shrank aghast. It seemed the skeleton of a tall man, wrapped in a winding-sheet. The glitter of a tiny eye, however, and a sere film of skin over part of the face, quickly reassured me. Of ears, he showed no sign. He was, I afterwards learned, Aith; and the singularity of his appearance was partially explained by his pretence—whether true or false—that he had once suffered *burning*, almost to the cinder-stage, but had miraculously recovered. With an expression of malignity, and strange excited



gestures, he led the way to a chamber on the upper stage, where having struck light to a vesta, he pointed to a spread table and left me.

For a long time I sat in solitude. The earthquake of the mansion was intense; but all sense seemed swallowed up and confounded in the one impression of sound. Water, water, was the world—nightmare on my chest, a horror in my ears, an intolerable tingling on my nerves. The feeling of being infinitely drowned and ruined in the all-obliterating deluge—the impulse to gasp for breath—overwhelmed me. I rose and paced; but suddenly stopped, angry, I scarce knew why, with myself. I had, in fact, found myself walking with a certain *hurry*, not usual with me, not natural to me. The feeling of giddiness, too, had abnormally increased. I forced myself to stand and take note of the hall. It was of great size, and damp with mists, so that the tattered, but rich, mediæval furniture seemed lost in its extent: its centre was occupied by a broad low marble tomb bearing the name of a Harfagar of the fifteenth century; its walls were old brown panels of oak. Having drearily observed these things, I waited on with an intolerable consciousness of loneliness; but a little after midnight the tapestry parted, and Harfager with hurried stride, approached me.

In twelve years my friend had grown old. He showed, it is true, a tendency to corpulence; yet, to a knowing eye, he was, in reality, tabid, ill-nourished. And his neck protruded from his body; and his lower back had quite the forward curve of age; and his hair floated about his face and shoulders in a disarray of awful whiteness. A chin-beard hung grey to his chest. His attire was a simple robe of bauge, which, as he went, waved affaunt from his bare and hirsute shins, and he was shod in those soft slippers called *rivlins*.

To my surprise, he spoke. When I passionately shouted that I could gather no fragment of sound from his moving lips, he clapped both palms to his ears, and thereupon renewed a vehement siege to mine: but again without result. And now, with a seemingly angry fling of the hand, he caught up the taper, and swiftly strode from the chamber.

There was something singularly unnatural in his manner—something which irresistibly reminded me of the skeleton, Aith:

an excess of zeal, a fever, a rage, a *loudness*, an eagerness of walk, a wild extravagance of gesture. His hand constantly dashed the hair-whiffs from his face. Though his countenance was of the saffron of death, the eyes were turgid and red with blood—heavy-lidded eyes, fixed in a downward and sideward intentness of gaze. He presently returned with a folio of ivory and a stylus of graphite hanging from a cord about his garment.

He rapidly wrote a petition that I would, if not too tired, take part with him in the funeral obsequies of his mother. I shouted assent.

Once more he clapped palms to ears; then wrote: "Do not shout: no whisper in any part of the building is inaudible to me."

I remembered that, in early life, he had seemed slightly *deaf*.

We passed together through many apartments, he shading the taper with his hand. This was necessary; for, as I quickly discovered, in no part of the shivering fabric was the air in a state of rest, but seemed for ever commoved by a curious agitation, a faint windiness, like the echo of a storm, which communicated a gentle universal trouble to the tapestries. Everywhere I was confronted with the same past richness, present raggedness of decay. In many of the chambers were old marble tombs; one was a museum piled with bronzes, urns; but broken, imbedded in fungoids, dripping wide with moisture. It was as if the mansion, in ardour of travail, sweated. An odour of decomposition was heavy on the swaying air. With difficulty I followed Harfager through the labyrinth of his headlong passage. Once only he stopped short, and with face madly wild above the glare of the light, heaved up his hand, and uttered a single word. From the shaping of the lips, I conjectured the word, "Hark!"

Presently we entered a very long black hall wherein, on chairs beside a bed near the centre, rested a deep coffin, flanked by a row of tall candlesticks of ebony. It had, I noticed, this singularity, that the foot-piece was absent, so that the soles of the corpse were visible as we approached. I beheld, too, three upright rods secured to the coffin-side, each fitted at its summit with a small silver bell of the kind called *morrice* pendent from a flexible steel spring. At the head of the bed, Aith, with an appearance of irascibility, stamped to and fro within a small area. Harfager, having rapidly traversed the apartment to the coffin, deposited the taper upon

a stone table near, and stood poring with crazy intentness upon the body. I too, looking, stood. Death so rigorous, Gorgon, I had not seen. The coffin seemed full of tangled grey hair. The lady was, it was clear, of great age, osseous, scimitar-nosed. Her head shook with solemn continuity to the vibration of the house. From each ear trickled a black streamlet; the mouth was ridged with froth. I observed that over the corpse had been set three thin laminæ of polished wood, resembling in position, and shape, the bridge of a violin. Their sides fitted into grooves in the coffin-sides, and their top was of a shape to exactly fit the inclination of the two coffin-lids when closed. One of these laminæ passed over the knees of the dead lady; another bridged the abdomen; the third the region of the neck. In each of them was a small circular hole. Across each of the three holes passed vertically a tense cord from the morrice-bell nearest to it; the three holes being thus divided by the three cords into six vertical semicircles. Before I could conjecture the significance of this arrangement, Harfager closed the folding coffin-lid, which in the centre had tiny intervals for the passage of the cords. He then turned the key in the lock, and uttered a word, which I took to be, "Come."

At his summons, Aith, approaching, took hold of the handle at the head; and from the dark recesses of the hall a lady, in black, moved forward. She was very tall, pallid, and of noble aspect. From the curvature of the nose, and her circular ears, I conjectured the lady Swertha, aunt of Harfager. Her eyes were red, but if with weeping I could not determine.

Harfager and I, taking each a handle near the coffin-foot, and the lady bearing before us one of the candlesticks, the procession began. As we came to the doorway, I noticed standing in a corner yet two coffins, inscribed with the names of Harfager and his aunt. We passed at length down a wide-curving stairway to the lower stage; and descending thence still lower by narrow brazen steps, came to a portal of metal, at which the lady, depositing the candlestick, left us.

The chamber of death into which we now bore the coffin had for its outer wall the brazen outer wall of the whole house at a point where this approached nearest the cataract, and must have been deep washed by the infuriate caldron without. The earthquake here was, indeed, intense. On every side the vast extent of surface



was piled with coffins, rotted or rotting, ranged upon tiers of wooden shelves. The floor, I was surprised to see, was of brass. From the wide scampering that ensued on our entrance, the place was, it was clear, the abode of hordes of water-rats. As it was inconceivable that these could have corroded a way through sixteen brazen feet, I assumed that some fruitful pair must have found in the house, on its building, an ark from the waters; though even this hypothesis seemed wild. Harfager, however, afterwards confided to me his suspicion, that they had, for some purpose, been *placed* there by the original architect.

Upon a stone bench in the middle we deposited our burden, whereupon Aith made haste to depart. Harfager then rapidly and repeatedly walked from end to end of the long sepulchre, examining with many an eager stoop and peer, and upward strain, the shelves and their props. Could he, I was led to wonder, have any doubts as to their security? Damp, indeed, and decay pervaded all. A piece of woodwork which I handled softened into powder between my fingers.

He presently beckoned to me, and with yet one halt and uttered "Hark!" from him, we traversed the house to my chamber. Here, left alone, I paced long about, fretted with a strange vagueness of anger; then, weary, tumbled to a horror of sleep.

In the far interior of the mansion even the bleared day of this land of heaviness never rose upon our settled gloom. I was able however, to regulate my *levées* by a clock which stood in my chamber. With Harfager, in a startlingly short time, I renewed more than all our former intimacy. That I should say *more*, is itself startling, considering that an interval of twelve years stretched between us. But so, in fact, it was; and this was proved by the circumstances that we grew to take, and to pardon, freedoms of expression and manner which, as two persons of more than usual reserve, we had once never dreamed of permitting to ourselves in reference to each other. Down corridors that vanished either way in darkness and length of perspective remoteness we linked ourselves in perambulations of purposeless urgency. Once he wrote that my step was excruciatingly deliberate. I replied that it was just such a step as fitted my then mood. He wrote: "You have developed an aptitude to *fret*." I was profoundly offended,



and replied: "There are at least more fingers than one in the universe which *that* ring will wed."

Something of the secret of the unhuman sensitiveness of his hearing I quickly surmised. I, too, to my dismay, began, as time passed, to catch hints of loudly-uttered words. The reason might be found, I suggested, in an increased excitability of the auditory nerve, which, if the cataract were absent, the roar of the ocean, and bombast of the incessant tempest about us, would by themselves be sufficient to cause; in which case, his own aural interior must, I said, be inflamed to an exquisite pitch of hyperpyrexial fever. The affection I named to him as the *Paracusis Willisii*. He frowned dissent, but I, undeterred, callously proceeded to recite the case, occurring within my own experience, of a very deaf lady who could hear the fall of a pin in a rapidly-moving railway-train.<sup>1</sup> To this he only replied: "Of ignorant persons I am accustomed to consider the mere scientist as the most profoundly ignorant."

Yet that he should affect darkness as to the highly morbid condition of his hearing I regarded as simply far-fetched. Himself, indeed, confided to me his own, Aith's, and his aunt's proneness to violent paroxysms of *vertigo*. I was startled; for I had myself shortly before been twice roused from sleep by sensations of reeling and nausea, and a conviction that the chamber furiously spun with me in a direction from right to left. The impression passed away, and I attributed it, perhaps hastily (though on well-known pathological grounds), to some disturbance in the nerve-endings of the "labyrinth," or inner ear. In Harfager, however, the conviction of wheeling motions in the house, in the world, attained so horrible a degree of certainty, that its effects sometimes resembled those of lunacy or energuminal possession. Never, he said, was the sensation of giddiness wholly absent; seldom the feeling that he stared with stretched-out arms over the verge of abysmal voids which wildly wooed his half-consenting foot. Once, as we went, he was hurled, as by unseen powers, to the ground; and there for an hour

<sup>1</sup> Such cases are known, or at least easily comprehensible, to every medical man. The concussion on the deaf nerves is said to be the cause of the acquired sensitiveness. Nor is there any *limit* to such sensitiveness when the concussion is abnormally increased.

sprawled, cold in a flow of sweat, with distraught bedazzlement and amaze in eyes that watched the racing house. He was constantly racked, moreover, with the consciousness of sounds so very peculiar in their nature, that I could account for them upon no other hypothesis than that of *tinnitus* highly exaggerated. Through the heaped-up roar, there sometimes visited him, he said, the high lucid warbling of some Orphic bird, from the pitch of whose impassioned madrigals he had the inner consciousness that it came from a far country, was of the whiteness of snow, and crested with a comb of mauve. Else he was aware of accumulated human voices, remotely articulate, contending in volubility, and finally melting into chaotic musical tones. Or, anon, he was stunned by an infinite and imminent crashing, like the huge crackling of a universe of glass about his ears. He said, too, that he could often see, rather than hear, the parti-coloured whorls of a mazy sphere-music deep, deep, within the black dark of the cataract's roar. These impressions, which I ardently protested *must* be purely entotic, had sometimes upon him a pleasing effect, and long would he stand and listen with raised hand to their seduction; others again inflamed him to the verge of angry madness. I guessed that they were the origin of those irascibly uttered "Harks!" which at intervals of about an hour did not fail to break from him. In this I was wrong: and it was with a thrill of dismay that I shortly came to know the truth.

For, as once we passed together by an iron door on the lower stage, he stopped, and for several minutes stood, listening with an expression most keen and cunning. Presently the cry "Hark!" escaped him; and he then turned to me, and wrote upon the tablet: "You did not hear?" I had heard nothing but the monotonous roar. He shouted into my ear in accents now audible to me as an echo heard far off in dreams: "You shall see."

He lifted the candlestick; produced from the pocket of his garment a key; unlocked the door. We entered a chamber, circular, very loftily domed in proportion to its extent, and apparently empty, save that a pair of ladder-steps leaned against its wall. Its flooring was of marble, and in its centre gloomed a pool, resembling the impluvium of Roman atriums, but round in shape; a pool evidently deep, full of an unctuous miasmal

water. I was greatly startled by its present aspect; for as the light burned upon its jet-black surface, I could see that this had been quite recently *disturbed*, in a manner for which the shivering of the house could not account, inasmuch as *ripples* of slimy ink sullenly rounded from the centre toward its marble brink. I glanced at Harfager for explanation. He signed to me to wait, and for about an hour, with arms in their accustomed fold behind his back, perambulated. At the end of that time he stopped, and standing together by the margin, we gazed into the water. Suddenly his clutch tightened upon my arm, and I saw, not without a thrill of horror, a tiny ball, doubtless of lead, but smeared blood-red by some chymical pigment, fall from the direction of the roof and disappear into the centre of the black depths. It hissed, on contact with the water, a thin puff of vapour.

"In the name of all that is sinister!" I cried, "what thing is this you show me?"

Again he made me a busy and confident sign to wait; snatched then the ladder-steps toward the pool; handed me the taper. I, mounting, held high the flame, and saw hanging from the misty centre of the dome a form—a sphere of tarnished old copper, lengthened out into balloon-shape by a down-looking neck, at the end of which I thought I could discern a tiny orifice. Painted across the bulge was barely visible in faded red characters the hieroglyph:

"harfager-hous: 1389-188 "

Something—I know not what—of *eldritch* in the combined aspect of spotted globe, and gloomy pool, and contrivance of hourly hissing ball, gave expedition to my feet as I slipped down the ladder.

"But the meaning?"

"Did you see the writing?"

"Yes. The meaning?"

He wrote: "By comparing Gascoigne with Thrunster, I find that the mansion was *built* about 1389."

"But the final figures?"

"After the last 8," he replied, "there is another figure, nearly, but not quite, obliterated by a tarnish-spot."



"What figure?"

"It cannot be read, but may be surmised. The year 1888 is now all but passed. It can only be the figure 9."

"You are *horribly* depraved in mind!" I cried, flaring into anger. "You assume—you dare to *state*—in a manner which no mind trained to base its conclusions upon fact could hear with patience."

"And you, on the other hand, are simply absurd," he wrote. "You are not, I presume, ignorant of the common formula of Archimedes by which, the diameter of a sphere being known, its volume may be determined. Now, the diameter of the sphere in the dome there I have ascertained to be four and a half feet; and the diameter of the leaden balls about the third of an inch. Supposing then that 1389 was the year in which the sphere was full of balls, you may readily calculate that not many fellows of the four million and odd which have since dropped at the rate of one an hour are now left within it. It could not, in fact, have contained many more. The fall of balls *cannot* persist another year. The figure 9 is therefore forced upon us."

"But you assume, Harfager," I cried, "most wildly you assume! Believe me, my friend, this is the very wantonness of wickedness! By what algebra of despair do you know that the last date *must* be such, was intended to be such, as to correspond with the stoppage of the horologe? And, even if so, what is the significance of the whole. It has—it can have—*no significance*! Was the contriver of this dwelling, of all the gnomes, think you, a being pulsing with omniscience?"

"Do you seek to madden me?" he shouted. Then furiously writing: "I know—I swear that I know—nothing of its significance! But is it not evident to you that the work is a stupendous hour-glass, intended to record the hours not of a day, but of a cycle? and of a cycle of five hundred years?"

"But the whole thing," I passionately cried, "is a baleful phantasm of our brains! an evil impossibility! How is the fall of the balls regulated? Ah, my friend, you wander—your mind is debauched in this bacchanal of tumult."

"I have not ascertained," he replied, "by what internal mechanism, or viscous medium, or spiral coil, dependent no doubt for its action upon the vibration of the house, the balls



are retarded in their fall; that is a matter well within the cunning of the mediæval artisan, the inventor of the watch; but this at least is clear, that one element of their retardation is the minuteness of the aperture through which they have to pass; that this element, by known, though recondite, statical laws, will cease to operate when no more than three balls remain; and that, consequently, the last three will fall at nearly the same moment."

"In God's name!" I exclaimed, careless what folly I poured out, "but your mother is *dead*, Harfager! You dare not deny that there remain but you and the lady Swertha!"

A contemptuous glance was all the reply he then vouchsafed me.

But he confided to me a day or two later that the leaden balls were a constant bane to his ears; that from hour to hour his life was a keen waiting for their fall; that even from his brief slumbers he infallibly startled into wakefulness at each descent; that, in whatever part of the mansion he happened to be, they failed not to find him out with a clamorous and insistent *loudness*; and that every drop wrung him with a twinge of physical anguish in the inner ear. I was therefore appalled at his declaration that these droppings had now become to him as the life of life; had acquired an intimacy so close with the hue of his mind, that their cessation might even mean for him the shattering of reason. Convulsed, he stood then, face wrapped in arms, leaning against a pillar. The paroxysm past, I asked him if it was out of the question that he should once and for all cast off the fascination of the horologe, and fly with me from the place. He wrote in mysterious reply: "A *threefold* cord is not easily broken." I started. How threefold? He wrote with bitterest smile: "To be enamoured of pain—to pine after aching—to dote upon Marah—is not that a wicked madness?" I was overwhelmed. Unconsciously he had quoted Gascoigne: a wycked madness! a lecherous agonie! "You have seen the face of my aunt," he proceeded; "your eyes were dim if you did not there behold an impious calm, the glee of a blasphemous patience, a grin behind her daring smile." He then spoke of a prospect, at the infinite terror of which his whole nature trembled, yet which sometimes laughed in his heart in the aspect of a maniac *hope*. It was the

prospect of any considerable increase in the volume of sound about him. At *that*, he said, the brain must totter. On the night of my arrival the noise of my booted tread, and, since then, my occasionally raised voice, had caused him acute unease. To a sensibility such as this, I understood him further to say, the luxury of torture involved in a large sound-increase in his environment was an allurement from which no human strength could turn; and when I expressed my powerlessness even to conceive such an increase, much less the means by which it could be effected, he produced from the archives of the house some annals, kept by the successive heads of his race. From these it appeared that the tempests which continually harried the lonely latitude of Vaila did not fail to give place, at periodic intervals of some years, to one sovereign *ouragan*—one Sirius among the suns—one *ultimate* lyssa of elemental atrocity. At such periods the rains descended—and the floods came—even as in the first world-deluge; those *rösts*, or eddies, which at all times encompassed Vaila, spurning then the bands of lateral space, shrieked themselves aloft into a multitudinous death-dance of water-spouts, and like snaky Deinotheria, or say towering monolithic in a stonehenge of columned and cyclopean awe, thronged about the little land, upon which, with converging *débâcle*, they discharged their momentous waters; and the lochs to which the cataract was due thus redoubled their volume, and fell with redoubled tumult. It was, said Harfager, like a miracle that for twenty years no such great event had transacted itself at Vaila.

And what, I asked, was the third strand of that threefold cord of which he had spoken?

He took me to a circular hall, which, he told me, he had ascertained to be the geometrical centre of the circular mansion. It was a very great hall—so great as I think I never saw—so great that the amount of segment illumined at any one time by the taper seemed nearly flat. And nearly the whole of its space from floor to roof was occupied by a pillar of brass, the space between wall and cylinder being only such as to admit of a stretched-out arm.

“This cylinder, which seems to be solid,” wrote Harfager, “ascends to the dome and passes beyond it; it descends hence to the floor of the lower stage, and passes through that; it descends

thence to the brazen flooring of the vaults, and *passes through that* into the rock of the ground. Under each floor it spreads out laterally into a vast capital, helping to support the floor. What is the precise quality of the impression which I have made upon your mind by this description?"

"I do not know!" I answered, turning from him; "propound me none of your questions, Harfager. I feel a giddiness . . ."

"Nevertheless you shall answer me," he proceeded; "consider the *strangeness* of that brazen lowest floor, which I have discovered to be some ten feet thick, and whose under-surface, I have reason to believe, is somewhat above the level of the ground; remember that the fabric is at no point *fastened* to the cylinder; think of the *chains* that ray out from the outer walls, seeming to anchor the house to the ground. Tell me, what impression have I *now* made?"

"And is it for this you wait?" I cried—"for *this*? Yet there may have been no malevolent intention! You jump at conclusions! Any human dwelling, if solidly based upon earth, would be at all times liable to overthrow on such a land, in such a situation, as this, by some superlative tempest! What if it were the intention of the architect that in such eventuality the chains should break, and the house, by yielding, be saved?"

"You have no lack of charity at least," he replied; and we returned to the book we then read together.

He had not wholly lost the old habit of study, but could no longer constrain himself to sit to read. With a volume, often tossed down and resumed, he walked to and fro within the radius of the lamp-light; or I, unconscious of my voice, read to him. By a strange whim of his mood, the few books which now lay within the limits of his patience had all for their motive something of the *picaresque*, or the foppishly speculative: Quevedo's *Tacaño*; or the mundane system of Tycho Brahe; above all, George Hakewill's *Power and Providence of God*. One day, however, as I read, he interrupted me with the sentence, seemingly *à propos* of nothing: "What I *cannot* understand is that you, a scientist, should believe that the physical life ceases with the cessation of the breath"—and from that moment the tone of our reading changed. He led me to the crypts of the library in the lowest part of the building, and hour after hour, with a



certain *furor* of triumph, overwhelmed me with volumes evidencing the longevity of man after "death." A sentence of Haller had rooted itself in his mind; he repeated, insisted upon it: "sapientia denique consilia dat quibus longævitas obtineri queat, nitro, opio, purgationibus subinde repetitis . . ."; and as opium was the elixir of long-drawn life, so death itself, he said, was that opium, whose more potent nepenthe lulled the body to a peace not all-insentient, far within the gates of the gardens of dream. From the *Dhammapada* of the Bhuddist canon, to Zwinger's *Theatrum*, to Bacon's *Historia Vitæ et Mortis*, he ranged to find me heaped-up certainty of his faith. What, he asked, was my opinion of Baron Verulam's account of the dead man who was heard to utter words of prayer; or of the leaping bowels o' the dead *condamné*? On my expressing incredulity, he seemed surprised, and reminded me of the writhings of dead serpents, of the *visible* beating of a frog's heart many hours after "death." "She is not dead," he quoted, "but *sleepeth*." The whim of Bacon and Paracelsus that the principle of life resides in a subtle spirit or fluid which pervades the organism he coerced into elaborate proof that such a spirit must, from its very nature, be incapable of any *sudden* annihilation, so long as the organs which it permeates remain connected and integral. I asked what limit he then set to the persistence of sensibility in the physical organism. He replied that when slow decay had so far advanced that the nerves could no longer be called nerves, or their cell-origins cell-origins, or the brain a brain—or when by artificial means the brain had for any length of time been disconnected at the cervical region from the body—*then* was the king of terrors king indeed, and the body was as though it had not been. With an indiscretion strange to me before my residence at Vaila, I blurted the question whether all this *Aberglaube* could have any reference, in his mind, to the body of his mother. For a while he stood thoughtful, then wrote: "Had I not reason to believe that my own and my aunt's life in some way hinged upon the final cessation of hers, I should still have taken precautions to ascertain the progress of the destroyer upon her mortal frame; as it is, I shall not lack even the minutest information." He then explained that the rodents which swarmed in the sepulchre would, in the course of time, do their full work upon her; but would be unable



to penetrate to the region of the throat without first gnawing their way through the three cords stretched across the holes of the laminæ within the coffin, and thus, one by one, liberating the three morrisco bells to a tinkling agitation.

The winter solstice had passed; another year opened. I slept a deep sleep by night when Harfager entered my chamber, and shook me. His face was ghastly in the taper-light. A transformation within a few hours had occurred upon him. He was not the same. He resembled some poor wight into whose unexpected eyes—at midnight—have glared the sudden eye-balls of Terror.

He informed me that he was aware of singular intermittent straining and creaking sounds, which gave him the sensation of hanging in aerial spaces by a thread which must shortly snap to his weight. He asked if, for God's sake, I would accompany him to the sepulchre. We passed together through the house, he craven, shivering, his step for the first time laggard. In the chamber of the dead he stole to and fro examining the shelves, furtively intent. His eyes were sunken, his face drawn like death. From the footless coffin of the dowager trembling on its bench of stone, I saw an old water-rat creep. As Harfager passed beneath one of the shortest of the shelves which bore a single coffin, it suddenly fell from a height with its burthen into fragments at his feet. He screamed the cry of a frightened creature, and tottered to my support. I bore him back to the upper house.

He sat with hidden face in the corner of a small room doddering, overcome, as it were, with the extremity of age. He no longer marked with his usual "Hark!" the fall of the leaden drops. To my remonstrances he answered only with the words, So soon! so soon! Whenever I sought I found him there. His manhood had collapsed in an ague of trepidancy. I do not think that during this time he slept.

On the second night, as I approached him, he sprang suddenly straight with the furious outcry: "The first bell tinkles!"

And he had hardly larynxed the wild words when, from some great distance, a faint wail, which at its origin must have been a most piercing shriek, reached my now feverishly sensitive ears. Harfager at the sound clapped hands to ears, and dashed

insensate from his place, I following in hot pursuit, through the black breadth of the mansion. We ran until we reached a round chamber, containing a candelabrum, and arrased in faded red. In an alcove at the furthest circumference was a bed. On the floor lay in swoon the lady Swertha. Her dark-grey hair in disarray wrapped her like an angry sea, and many tufts of it lay scattered wide, torn from the roots. About her throat were livid prints of strangling fingers. We bore her to the bed, and, having discovered some tincture in a cabinet, I administered it between her fixed teeth. In the rapt and dreaming face I saw that death was not, and, as I found something appalling in her aspect, shortly afterwards left her to Harfager.

When I next saw him his manner had assumed a species of change which I can only describe as hideous. It resembled the officious self-importance seen in a person of weak intellect, incapable of affairs, who goads himself with the exhortation, "to business! the time is short—I must even bestir myself!" His walk sickened me with a suggestion of *ataxie locomotrice*. I asked him as to the lady, as to the meaning of the marks of violence on her body. Bending ear to his deep and unctuous tones, I heard, "A stealthy attempt has been made upon her life by the skeleton, Aith."

My unfeigned astonishment at this announcement he seemed not to share. To my questions, repeatedly pressed upon him, as to the reason for retaining such a domestic in the house, as to the origin of his service, he could give no lucid answer. Aith, he informed me, had been admitted into the mansion during the period of his own long absence in youth. He knew little of him beyond the fact that he was of extraordinary physical strength. *Whence* he had come, or how, no living being except the lady Swertha had knowledge; and she, it seems, feared, or at least persistently declined, to admit him into the mystery. He added that, as a matter of fact, the lady, from the day of his return to Vaila, had for some reason imposed upon herself a silence upon all subjects, which he had never once known her to break except by an occasional note.

With a curious, irrelevant *impressement*, with an intensely voluntary, ataxic strenuousness, always with the air of a drunken man constraining himself to ordered action, Harfager now set

himself to the ostentatious adjustment of a host of insignificant matters. He collected chronicles and arranged them in order of date. He tied and ticketed bundles of documents. He insisted upon my help in turning the faces of portraits to the wall. He was, however, now constantly interrupted by paroxysms of vertigo; six times in a single day he was hurled to the ground. Blood occasionally gushed from his ears. He complained to me in a voice of piteous wail of the clear luting of a silver *piccolo*, which did not cease to invite him. As he bent sweating upon his momentous futilities, his hands fluttered like shaken reeds. I noted the movements of his muttering and whimpering lips, the rheum of his far-sunken eyes. The decrepitude of dotage had overtaken his youth.

On a day he cast it utterly off, and was young again. He entered my chamber, roused me from sleep; I saw the mad *gaudium* in his eyes, heard the wild hiss of his cry in my ear:

"Up! It is sublime. The *storm!*"

Ah! I had known it—in the spinning nightmare of my sleep. I felt it in the tormented air of the chamber. It had come, then. I saw it lurid by the lamplight on the hell of Harfager's distorted visage.

I glanced at the face of the clock. It was nine—in the morning. A sardonic glee burst at once into being within me. I sprang from the couch. Harfager, with the naked stalk of some maniac old prophet, had already rapt himself away. I set out in pursuit. A clear deepening was manifest in the quivering of the edifice; sometimes for a second it paused still, as if, breathlessly, to listen. Occasionally there visited me, as it were, the faint dirge of some far-off lamentation and voice in Ramah; but if this was subjective, or the screaming of the storm, I could not say. Else I heard the distinct note of an organ's peal. The air of the mansion was agitated by a vaguely puffy unease. About noon I sighted Harfager, lamp in hand, running along a corridor. His feet were bare. As we met he looked at me, but hardly with recognition, and passed by; stopped, however, returned, and howled into my ear the question: "Would you *see?*" He beckoned before me. I followed to a very small window in the outer wall closed with a slab of iron. As he lifted a latch the metal flew inward with instant impetuosity and swung him far, while a blast of



the storm, braying and booming through the aperture with buccal and reboant bravura, caught and pinned me against an angle of the wall. Down the corridor a long crashing *bouleversement* of pictures and furniture ensued. I nevertheless contrived to push my way, crawling on the belly, to the opening. Hence the sea should have been visible. My senses, however, were met by nothing but a reeling vision of tumbled blackness, and a general impression of the letter O. The sun of Vaila had gone out. In a moment of opportunity our united efforts prevailed to close the slab.

"Come"—he had obtained fresh light, and beckoned before me—"let us see how the dead fare in the midst of the great desolation and *dies iræ*!" Running, we had hardly reached the middle of the stairway, when I was thrilled by the consciousness of a momentous shock, the bass of a dull and far-reverberating thud, which nothing conceivable save the huge simultaneous thumping to the ground of the whole piled mass of the coffins of the sepulchre could have occasioned. I turned to Harfager, and for an instant beheld him, panic flying in his scuttling feet, headlong on the way he had come, with stopped ears and wide mouth. Then, indeed, fear overtook me—a tremor in the midst of the exultant daring of my heart—a thought that *now* at least I must desert him in his extremity, now work out my own salvation. Yet it was with a most strange hesitancy that I turned to seek him for the last time—a hesitancy which I fully felt to be selfish and diseased. I wandered through the midnight house in search of light, and having happened upon a lamp, proceeded to hunt for Harfager. Several hours passed in this way. It became clear from the state of the atmosphere that the violence about me was being abnormally intensified. Sounds as of distant screams—unreal, like the screamings of spirits—broke now upon my ear. As the time of evening drew on, I began to detect in the vastly augmented baritone of the cataract something new—a shrillness—the whistle of an ecstasy—a malice—the menace of a rabies blind and deaf. It must have been at about the hour of six that I found Harfager. He sat in an obscure apartment with bowed head, hands on knees. His face was covered with hair, and blood from the ears. The right sleeve of his garment had been rent away in some renewed attempt, as I imagined, to manipulate a



window; the slightly-bruised arm hung lank from the shoulder. For some time I stood and watched the mouthing of his mumblings. Now that I had found him I said nothing of departure. Presently he looked sharply up with the cry "Hark!"—then with imperious impatience, "Hark! Hark!"—then with rapturous shout, "The second bell!" And *again*, in instant sequence upon his cry, there sounded a wail, vague but unmistakably real, through the house. Harfager at the moment dropped reeling with vertigo; but I, snatching a lamp, hasted forth, trembling, but eager. For some time the high wailing continued, either actually, or by reflex action of my ear. As I ran toward the lady's apartment, I saw, separated from it by the breadth of a corridor, the open door of an armoury, into which I passed, and seized a battle-axe; and, thus armed, was about to enter to her aid, when Aith, with blazing eye, rushed from her chamber by a further door. I raised my weapon, and, shouting, flew forward to fell him; but by some chance the lamp dropped from me, and before I knew aught, the axe leapt from my grasp, myself hurled far backward. There was, however, sufficiency of light from the chamber to show that the skeleton had dashed into a door of the armoury: that near me, by which I had procured the axe, I instantly slammed and locked; and hasting to the other, similarly secured it. Aith was thus a prisoner. I then entered the lady's room. She lay half-way across the bed in the alcove, and to my bent ear loudly croaked the *râles* of death. A glance at the mangled throat convinced me that her last hours were surely come. I placed her supine upon the bed; curtained her utterly from sight within the loosened festoons of the hangings of black, and inhumanly turned from the fearfulness of her sight. On an *escritoire* near I saw a note, intended apparently for Harfager: "I mean to defy, and fly. Think not from fear—but for the glow of the Defiance itself. *Can you come?*" Taking a flame from the candela-brum, I hastily left her to solitude, and the ultimate throes of her agony.

I had passed some distance backward when I was startled by a singular sound—a clash—resembling in *timbre* the clash of a tambourine. I heard it rather loudly, and that I should *now* hear it at all, proceeding as it did from a distance, implied the employment of some prodigious energy. I waited, and in two minutes

it again broke, and thenceforth at like regular intervals. It had somehow an effect of pain upon me. The conviction grew gradually that Aith had unhung two of the old brazen shields from their pegs; and that, holding them by their handles, and smiting them viciously together, he thus expressed the frenzy which had now overtaken him. I found my way back to Harfager, in whom the very nerve of anguish now seemed to stamp and stalk about the chamber. He bent his head; shook it like a hail-tormented horse; with his deprecating hand brushed and barred from his hearing each recurrent clash of the brazen shields. "Ah, when—when—when——" he hoarsely groaned into my ear, "will that rattle of hell choke in her throat? I will myself, I tell you—with my own hand!—Oh God . . ." Since the morning his auditory inflammation (as, indeed, my own also) seemed to have heightened in steady proportion with the roaring and screaming chaos round; and the *râles* of the lady hideously filled for him the measured intervals of the grisly cymbaling of Aith. He presently hurled twinkling fingers into the air, and with wide arms rushed swiftly into the darkness.

And again I sought him, and long again in vain. As the hours passed, and the slow Tartarean day deepened toward its baleful midnight, the cry of the now redoubled cataract, mixed with the throng and majesty of the now climactic tempest, assumed too definite and intentional a *shriek* to be longer tolerable to any mortal reason. My own mind escaped my governance, and went its way. Here, in the hot-bed of fever, I was fevered; among the children of wrath, was strong with the strength, and weak with the feebleness of delirium. I wandered from chamber to chamber, precipitate, bemused, giddy on the up-buoyance of a joy. "As a man upon whom sleep seizes," so had I fallen. Even yet, as I approached the region of the armoury, the noisy ecstasies of Aith did not fail to clash faintly upon my ear. Harfager I did not see, for he too, doubtless, roamed a headlong Ahasuerus in the round world of the house. At about midnight, however, observing light shine from a door on the lower stage, I entered and found him there. It was the chamber of the dropping horologe. He half-sat, swaying self-hugged, on the ladder-steps, and stared at the blackness of the pool. The last flicker of the riot of the day seemed dying in his eyes. He cast no glance as I approached. His hands,

his bare right arm, were red with new-shed blood; but of this, too, he appeared unconscious. His mouth gaped wide to his pantings. As I looked, he leapt suddenly high, smiting hands, with the yell, "The last bell tinkles!" and galloped forth, a-rave. He therefore did not see (though he may have understood by hearing) the spectacle which, with cowering awe, I immediately thereupon beheld: for from the horologe there slipped with hiss of vapour a ball into the torpid pool: and while the clock once ticked, another; and while the clock yet ticked, another! and the vapour of the first had not *utterly* passed, when the vapour of the third, intermingling, floated with it into grey tenuity aloft. Understanding that the sands of the house were run, I, too, flinging maniac arms, rushed from the spot. I was, however, suddenly stopped in my career by the instinct of some stupendous doom emptying its vials upon the mansion; and was quickly made aware, by the musketry of a shrill crackling from aloft, and the imminent downpour of a world of waters, that a water-spout had, wholly or partly, hurled the catastrophe of its broken floods upon us, and crashed ruining through the dome of the building. At that moment I beheld Harfager running toward me, hands buried in hair. As he flew past, I seized him. "Harfager! save yourself!" I cried—"the very fountains, man,—by the living God, Harfager"—I hissed it into his inmost ear—"the *very fountains of the Great Deep . . .!*" Stupid, he glared at me, and passed on his way. I, whisking myself into a room, slammed the door. Here for some time, with smiting knees, I waited; but the impatience of my frenzy urged me, and I again stepped forth. The corridors were everywhere thigh-deep with water. Rags of the storm, irrageous by way of the orifice in the shattered dome, now blustered with hoiden wantonness through the house. My light was at once extinguished; and immediately I was startled by the presence of *another* light—most ghostly, gloomy, bluish—most soft, yet wild, phosphorescent—which now perfused the whole building. For this I could in no way account. But as I stood in wonder, a gust of greater vehemence romped through the house, and I was instantly conscious of the harsh *snap* of something near me. There was a minute's breathless pause—and then—quick, quick—ever quicker—came the throb, and the snap, and the pop, in vastly wide circular succession, of the anchoring chains



of the mansion before the urgent shoulder of the hurricane. And again a second of eternal calm—and then—deliberately—its hour came—the ponderous palace *moved*. My flesh writhed like the glutinous flesh of a serpent. Slowly moved, and stopped:—then was a sweep—and a swirl—and a pause! then a swirl—and a sweep—and a pause!—then steady industry of labour on the monstrous brazen axis, as the husbandman plods by the plough; then increase of zest, assuetude of a fledgeling to the wing—then intensity—then the last light ecstasy of flight. And now, once again, as staggering and plunging I spun, the thought of escape for a moment visited me: but this time I shook an impious fist. “No, but God, no, no,” I cried, “I will no more wander hence, my God! I will even perish with Harfager! Here let me waltzing pass, in this Ball of the Vortices, Anarchie of the Thunders! Did not the great Corot call it translation in a chariot of flame? But this is gaudier than that! redder than that! This is jaunting on the scoriac tempests and reeling bullions of hell! It is baptism in a sun!” Recollection gropes in a dimmer gloaming as to all that followed. I struggled up the stairway now flowing a steep river, and for a long time ran staggering and plunging, full of wild words, about, amid the downfall of ceilings and the wide ruin of tumbling walls. The air was thick with splashes, the whole roof now, save three rafters, snatched by the wind away. In that blue sepulchral moonlight, the tapestries flapped and trailed wildly out after the flying house like the streaming hair of some ranting fakeer stung gyratory by the gadflies and tarantulas of distraction. The flooring gradually assumed a slant like the deck of a sailing ship, its covering waters flowing all to accumulation in one direction. At one point, where the largest of the porticoes projected, the mansion began at every revolution to bump with horrid shiverings against some obstruction. It bumped, and while the lips said one-two-three, it three times bumped again. It was the levity of hugeness! it was the mænadism of mass! Swift—ever swifter, swifter—in ague of urgency, it reeled and raced, every portico a sail to the storm, vexing and wracking its tremendous frame to fragments. I, chancing by the door of a room littered with the *débris* of a fallen wall, saw through that wan and livid light Harfager sitting on a tomb. A large drum was beside him, upon which, club grasped in bloody hand, he feebly and per-



sistently beat. The velocity of the leaning house had now attained the *sleeping* stage, that ultimate energy of the spinning-top. Harfager sat, head sunk to chest; suddenly he dashed the hairy wrappings from his face; sprang; stretched horizontal arms; and began to spin—dizzily!—in the same direction as the mansion!—nor less sleep-embathed!—with floating hair, and quivering cheeks, and the starting eye-balls of horror, and tongue that lolled like a panting wolf's from his bawling degenerate mouth. From such a sight I turned with the retching of loathing, and taking to my heels, staggering and plunging, presently found myself on the lower stage opposite a porch. An outer door crashed to my feet, and the breath of the storm smote freshly upon me. An *élan*, part of madness, more of heavenly sanity, spurred in my brain. I rushed through the doorway, and was tossed far into the limbo without.

The river at once swept me deep-drowned toward the sea. Even here, a momentary shrill din like the splitting asunder of a world reached my ears. It had hardly passed, when my body collided in its course upon one of the basalt piers, thick-cushioned by sea-weed, of the not all-demolished bridge. Nor had I utterly lost consciousness. A clutch freed my head from the surge, and I finally drew and heaved myself to the level of a timber. Hence to the ledge of rock by which I had come, the bridge was intact. I rowed myself feebly on the belly beneath the poundings of the wind. The rain was a steep rushing, like a shimmering of silk, through the air. Observing the same wild glow about me which had blushed through the broken dome into the mansion, I glanced backward—and saw that the dwelling of the Harfagers was a memory of the past; then upward—and lo, the whole northern sky, to the zenith, burned one tumbled and fickly-undulating ocean of gaudy flames. It was the *aurora borealis* which, throeing at every aspen instant into rays and columns, cones and obelisks, of vivid vermil and violet and rose, was fairly whiffed and flustered by the storm into a vast silken oriflamme of tresses and swathes and breezes of glamour; whilst, low-bridging the horizon, the flushed beams of the polar light assembled into a changeless boreal corona of bedazzling candor. At the augustness of this great phenomenon I was affected to blessed tears. And with them, the dream broke!—the infatuation passed!—a hand

skimmed back from my brain the blind films and media of delusion; and sobbing on my knees, I jerked to heaven the arms of grateful oblation for my surpassing Rephidim, and marvel of deliverance from all the temptation—and the tribulation—and the tragedy—of Vaila.

TULSAH





## TULSAH

[*Translation of a Scorched Hindoo MS.*]

MOST WONDERFUL, I often think, must have been the dower of vitality originally vouchsafed me. The passage of one hundred and twenty years has not availed to bleach a single hair of these raven masses. My memory is still, as it was, almost more than that of men. Undimmed is my eye. Yet the end is surely near. A hundred and twenty was the age at which the great Boodh, prince of Oude, passed into unending muckut; at such age, too, died he whom they called my father, and, they say, *his* father also; and, for what I know—but such speculations are frivolous.

It is singular that none of my subjects ever heard of, or even suspected, the undoubted connection which exists between Boodh and my race. He was one of its sons, and one of its fathers. Here in the profundity and gloom of this subterrene, I now for the first time in modern days commit this tremendous secret to parchment.

I have spoken of my memory: yet on one side at least the tree is bare of blossom or leaf. All my first youth has passed from me as completely as though I never *had* a first youth. Many and many are the days which I have spent, unconscious of the universe, rapt in contemplation of this mystery. But no intensest effort could bring one ray of remembrance. I can recall, indeed, the circumstance of my awaking to self-knowledge; but as to all that preceded it, there is the blackness of darkness. In a chamber hollowed out of the face of the natural rock I opened my eyes. I lay on my back in a coffin of red stone. A reddish cloth, studded with jewels, enwrapped my body, but the convolutions extended far below my feet, as though the swaddling had been intended for one of much greater stature than I. The coffin itself was large enough to contain the body of a man. Long I lay, first in listless dream, then with the burgeoning consciousness of entity. I rose from the coffin; I cast off the cerements; I crawled from the

chamber of rock. I looked at my limbs, the limbs of a well-grown boy, and saw that they were perfect, and withy, and beautifully brown. I could have exclaimed at all the marvel and delight. But the lion's voice broke upon my ear. I at once felt terror, understanding him an enemy. The sun was setting. I was in the midst of the jungle of the unfathomable forest.

I passed during the night through the million-fold life of the wild. I exulted when I eluded the mad elephant and the prowling tiger-cat by the sinuousness of my limbs; I looked without fear upon the ape and the untamed zebu; but when I saw the *serpent*—heinously leprous—then hatred and loathing thrilled me, and I climbed, breathless in panic, to the branches of a tree.

With the light of the morning I came, on the edge of the forest, to a stately town, full of æry edifices, traceried light as vision; it lay in a valley enclosed by a circle of high blue mountains, down which brawled many a rill; the whole mirrored in an oval lake which nearly occupied the rest of the valley. It was at this sight that, so far as I can now remember, the conception of *Time* first arose in my brain: I went back æon upon æon, and connected this city with memories, penumbral but real, and old, it seemed, as the world. The town is situated in the centre of Hindostan, is exceedingly ancient, a kingdom by itself, unvisited.

An aged priest met me on the outskirts. He looked with a quick intentness upon my face, and spoke some words to me. I did not understand, nor could I answer him. He led me to the temple where he ministered, and for three years concealed me in its recesses from the eyes of all. At the end of this time he made me lead him to the chamber of rock, and commanded me to point out the coffin in which I had opened my eyes. This satisfied him fully: it was the coffin of the maharajah of the city, who, he told me, had died a year before my awaking. The maharajah was then very old; he had acquired, it was said, the sum of human wisdom. His people had, by his own explicit directions, instead of burning the body, laid it to its rest in the sarcophagus, at the spot where conscious life, as far as I could recollect, was first born within me. Adjeebah, the Brahmin *gooroo* who had instructed me, announced me as the son, hidden by him till then, of the dead rajah. None could doubt it: to doubt would have been the insanity

of unbelief: I was the living likeness of the dead! A day came when I mounted the throne of the palace as sovereign of Lovanah amid the acclamations of the people.

Among the first things I learned was that all my ancestors had been known and revered during life as men who had attained the holy calm of yug; that a long tradition had handed it down that, without exception, they had left the cares of durbar (or state) to their ministers, in order to muse in the interior palace upon the deep things of wisdom. The same instinct rose spontaneously and irresistibly within me. I became a species of Yati, resolving to search out knowledge and the nature of things, if so be I might arrive at the comprehension of the ultimate mystery. The years fled rapidly. Many languages I learned; the wisdom of the Hellenes; the zoomorphism of the Egyptians; the heights of the pyramids of Chufu and Shafra. In intense meditations passed my leaden days. I read in the Hebrew scroll of that Melchisedec, King of Salem, priest of the Most High God, without father, without mother, having neither beginning of days nor end of life. I learned how Boodh, too, who was of my kin, was delivered of his mother Maia in a manner most marvellous. I was convulsed at the thrilling secrets of the world; my tongue shuddered, my eye rolled, in ecstasy on ecstasy. I tracked the vanity and sublimity of Man to their hiding-place; I sought out the meanings of religions, whence they come, whither they go.

I lighted, many years after my accession to the kingdom, upon a document, deep among the mouldering archives, and yellow with the accumulation of ages. Having read it, I swooned upon the agate floor, and lay through the long day and night as dead. It was a narrative inscribed on biblion, and by it I learned the dark fate which befel the first of my race. He was called Obal, and went out from his home a century before ever that Abram, from whom the Hebrews sprang as the sands of the sea, had yet departed out of Haran. The object of his pilgrimage was to know wisdom, and learn the modes of men. He travelled onward till he reached Hur of the Chaldees, one of the first cities built by the hand of the mason and the smith. It was in Mesopotamia, which was called Naharaïm. Here dwelled the votaries of that Zabaism from which is derived the Parsee hierology. The doctrine has its origins deep in the roots of the universe. Loosely allied



to it is phallic, and—very much more intimately—*serpent*, worship: for, inasmuch as the mist of constellations in the farthest heaven assumes the form of a *serpent* in its uneasy writhings, here have we a connection—profound enough, terrible enough—between Flame and the Serpent; and since Flame is torture, so is the Serpent the fit emblem of Hell. Hence the wisdom of the Hebrew serpent-myth of the temptation and fall of man; and hence, too, came it, that the Zabians, worshipping in the first instance the heavenly hosts of fire, were also worshippers of the snaky uncleanness. At Hur the heart of Obal was seduced by the specious beauty of Star and Moon: he became a devotee to the fire and the serpent. For many years he lived there a life of study and peace; not till he was a very old man did the consummation of Fate overtake him. In a forecourt of a temple of Ashtoreth he saw a maiden priestess whose loveliness kindled his sere heart. Her name was Tamar. She was vowed to chastity. How foul the crime to draw her from the service of the Goddess Obal knew. But he seems to have been a man of daring eye and headlong lust. He found occasion to speak with the maiden; the abomination of love became mutual between them; he wedded her. Had he not been a great man in Hur, he, with the apostate woman, would without doubt have been stoned to death. But they lived—so long, and so securely—that it seemed as though the heavens were oblivious of the sacrilege. At last Tamar died. Obal was full of years. On the night preceding her journey to the tomb, the patriarch slept by her side—for the last time—on the couch of ivory where she stiffly lay. He slept. In the morning his eunuchs, coming to the chamber, found him dead. His face, his staring eyes, were black with imprisoned blood. Around his throat had coiled itself a serpent, red of colour, as though a flame perfused its veins. The body of Tamar was not seen.

I have said that I swooned upon the floor, and lay as dead. This was singular, for I had so far travelled upon the road of knowledge as to be aware of the ancientness and universality of superstition, manifesting itself always by a certain historical metabolism. The tendency of my mind was indeed toward the exact. While the Jookaja believes that nothing exists but knowledge, things being only the forms thereof; and the Medheemuck that both knowledge and things, are *sun*, or cipher, and the All



itself but a visionary vesture half concealing the eternal Glare; I, admitting the seemliness of these syntheses of dogma, must say that my own mental trend was the other way, toward a full belief in matter, and the truthfulness of the senses. I was therefore more and more inclined to assert that no impression of life is explicable save by facts in their essence "natural." *And yet* this unauthenticated tale of the old and vanished world rent my soul, "like a veil," in twain. Let me not attempt to explain this mystery. Here is a secret too dark—too dark—for speech. The nations of the far West blab of a Deity who travails and travails and travails for ever—just as though the bursting brain of a man could realize that thought and live! The yellow Brahmin, on the other hand, shaves his head, and with light heart full of craft, discusses a lazy Brimmah, omniscient, but clothed in inertia as in a mantle. I will say nothing. It is a subject *full* of fear. In the one doctrine at least is safety: in the other—could it be realized—is the frenzy eternal. Let me not therefore be understood to maintain this other: for who would believe if I say that *memory* was the secret of the effect which the tale of Obal wrought upon me? Would I not sputter the babblings of a maniac, did I assert that—vaguely, but really—afar off, but with no dubiety—I remembered—from beginning to end—ah! but at *this* mystery let silence cover with her hand the mouth of rashness!

I now set myself diligently to the study of the race of kings who had reigned since the beginnings of time over Lovanah. The facts which confronted me were startling. It was then that I first learned that the Boodh, who, like Obal, had left his home mad with the passion for wisdom, was of us. Of fifty kings in the direct line I found that all had lived to ages far beyond the ordinary span of human life; that more than half had taken as wives, not Hindoos, but believers in the Zend-Avesta, followers of Zoroaster, *fire-worshippers*; that at least ten had deserted their kingdom, and wandered far over Asia—in obscurity, poor—hounded by the criminal lust of our race for the *cabala* of knowledge; that at least twenty-five—among them my own predecessor—had met their death by the stings of venomous serpents; that all of them had married; and that the death of not one of them had preceded in order of time the death of his consort.

It was when I had understood the sinister meaning of these

things that, in the dim chamber which I had made my abode, I fell upon my face to the ground, and swore in my heart three oaths, to which I called every power of the Universe to witness; I would moderate, and, if necessary, quench, the zeal to know which inflamed me; I would never for any purpose wander abroad from the land, from the house in which I then found myself; no daughter of man would I ever espouse. This I swore, and thus did I resolve to break in my person the continuity of that destiny which hunted my race.

I called to my presence my *dewan* and two other ministers of state, and ordered them to publish abroad a proclamation offering a reward of ten rupees of silver to the slayer of every serpent within my dominion.

"Your father published the identical proclamation," answered the chief minister.

I started.

"And," said another, "its only visible result was an enormous increase in the number of serpents in the district."

"An increase," added the third, "which was above all conspicuous in the multiplication of an unknown species, distinguished by its very remarkable colour, and extreme rancour."

These announcements did not fail to have their full effect upon me. I had then arrived at the age of perhaps fifty. From thenceforth I shut myself from mankind with even greater persistency than ever, and to lull into quiescence my too restive brain, I now abandoned my body to the delight of the lotus pipe, and the peace of the sleepy *bhang*. As the Jain, tangled in a mesh of religious frivolities, never slaying a living thing, seeks by strong crying to Parswanath, and the practice of self-torment, to enter forcibly into *nirvana*; so I, by another and a broader gate, entered the *nirvana* of vision. Thirty years passed over me as a watch in the night, opaline with vague prismic hues. I was a confirmed hermit: in a year hardly two of my servants saw my face: the active memory of me passed from men. I still studied—sought—thought—but over the intensity of research was shed the appeasing glamour of the long, long, trance, the hyperborean dream.

I walked one night in an out-court of the palace, and admired that "crooked serpent" which trails in everlasting length athwart

the heaven. It was the first time for many years that I had passed from the gloom of my chamber. I was alone. The sound of voices in a neighbouring field reached my ear. I walked pensive toward a gate, and chanced to see a concourse of people standing some little distance away. Long it was since I had mingled with my fellow: I walked quietly toward the crowd, and saw it grouped round a funeral-pile, on which lay stretched the body of a man. It was a *suttee*. In their midst stood a very young woman—most god-like tall—surpassing lovely—delirious with opiates; her body perfumed; her head sprinkled with sandal-powder; the wife of the dead man, who had devoted herself to the flames which were to consume him. Tulsah!—dame of my life—sovereign mistress of my destiny—Tulsah! then first, under the moon, did my eye light upon that serpentine form, that iridescent grace! I beheld how with wavy ease she ascended the pyre—the imponderable limbs of spirit composed themselves beside the shape of the dead—her eyes closed; from a corner of the resinous pile I saw the red flame dart upward, upward! Already I was aged—but strong too, and lithe: I dashed forward—with victorious energy I tore her from the lick of the tongues of the fire, and to the murmuring mob I cried aloud:

“Back, fools—I am the Maharajah!”

I know not what extremity of change now accomplished itself within me. My disenchained spirit danced and danced in the ecstasy of a new youth. True, I had vowed—I had vowed. But Tulsah had that dear quality of the eyes to which the Greek artists gave the name τὸ ὑγρόν, ‘liquidity.’ This impression they produced in their statues by a slight raising of the underlid. Man is folly itself. Let this one fact only be considered: those same Greeks believed that they alone of the nations possessed the thing they called *philosophia*—the love of the subtleties of wisdom; and even while they were thus believing, the Vedic Hymns had been sung; the Brahmin had codified the intricate activities of the Attributes Sut, Raj, and Tum; and the Boodh had denied that Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahadeva were emanations of the Spirit of God. Such is the inborn vanity and shallowness of man.

And I, too, was vain and shallow! My oath I flung to the winds. The passions of a youth, intensified a million-fold, pulsated



within my bosom. My zenana, so long tenantless, at last received an inmate—and her name was Tulsah!

Little cared I for the prejudices—deep, religious, though they were—of my uncultured people, who declared that I had robbed her from the dead. I loved to recline through the sluggish hours by her side, and watch the ichor that swelled and swelled her veins. Surely her skin was not the skin of the Hindoos: but I cannot remember that I ever definitely learned her origin. I know only that Tulsah adored me. We passed our lives together in the twilight of a perfect and happy solitude; and never did I surfeit of her ethereal presence, or tire of gazing upon the strangely delicate streaks of reddish hue which mingled with her jet-black hair, or upon the torpidly-indolent and sinuous movements of her exquisitely soft, and supple, and undulating form.

In an evil hour one day, when, heavy with opiates, I lay in waking trance, by her side I revealed to her the history of the tragedy of the patriarch Obal.

She listened to the whole with agitation, with heaving bosom, and an intense alertness for which I could not account.

“He seduced her,” she said after a long time, speaking bitingly, and gazing afar—“he seduced her from her devotion to the heavenly hosts——”

“Ay!—Tulsah!—he snatched her from her ministry upon the eternal flames——”

“And you——”

“I, my Tulsah? *I! I!*”

“Yes—you—*you* snatched me, a devotee to the flames, from the very flames themselves——”

I folded her panting to my lean bosom.

“Angel! angel!” I shrieked, “yet does the Power not live whose craft could prevail to change thy dear perfection into the viper’s tooth!”

In such manner we spent our life. The years multiplied themselves and passed. Tulsah approached the borders of age. Her beauty waned—markedly waned. As she grew older the sinuosity of her muscular and osseous systems became, I must say it, too pronounced to be longer fascinating. A singular affection of the skin covered her body with a multitude of regularly-shaped small dull-red erythemata. Her eyes reddened, uttering a rheumy mucus. I



looked for the whitening of her hair. My disappointment was bitter. The heavy surges which, once black, billowed like a torrent to her feet, and wide overflowed the floor like the surf of a sea of ink, gradually at first—then rapidly—took on the gorgeous, and the *farouche*, and the unhuman semblance of a mantle of vivid flame.

She died. With my own hand I swaddled her corpse, and helped to place it upon the pyre. Death among our Eastern nations is surely never a comely sight: yet it was with sorrow rather than with loathing that I looked for the last time upon the wan face of my Tulsah.

We were alone together in a court of the palace. The fulsome gloat of moon and stars shone over and about us. I held a torch to the pile: a sheet of flame shot up, crackling, around the beloved sacrifice.

To this day I know not how it was: either the fire consumed its victim with a rapidity inconceivable, or a suspension of consciousness, due to the anodynes which I had that day freely imbibed, deprived me of sight: but from the moment when I applied the torch to the moment when I again looked at the pile was an interval which seemed so short as to be inappreciable; and yet within it, in sharp disproof of my estimate of its length, both the pyre and its occupant had passed, utterly consumed, from before my eyes.

I stood amazed, gazing at the column of blue smoke which rolled up from the very small heap of ashes into the air: and now a new impression—born perhaps of my own fantasy—or born of the despotism of drugs—or born of the more dread despotism of reality—an impression this time of absolute terror—forced itself upon my mind. I beheld, or thought so—the blue of the ascending reek turn to the sanguine hue of Sardius; and now with a spasmodic jerk the whole high and solid pillar of the reddened smoke split itself into innumerable dismemberment; and I saw every wreath, and curl, and tortured tendril stand apart in definite isolation, and shape itself into a changing snaky form, till the whole vast nest, coalescing, writhed together in infinite implication, with hollow eye, and extruded fang.

Aghast at the illusion, I hurried from the spot. I entered the palace. Through a secret corridor I passed to the chamber where

Tulsah and I had spent the years of our love. A light shed itself from a vessel of oil in the ceiling. I sank doddering to a seat, and covered my face. Hours went by, and still I sat. All the past was around me—she herself. How like a dream the whole mystery of her coming, her abiding, her going! Tulsah!—I groaned her name. I lifted up my voice weeping. “Where now remote in some green sanctity of ocean cave or azure fold of space broods thy ethereal presence?” I rose to throw my despairs upon the couch where she had been wont to lie, when, in the gloom, I saw—with the palsy of horror saw—coiled thick upon the bed, with gorge erect above a foul vast base of clotted wreaths, and palpitant through all its mucous swelth, the fat and lazar loathliness of a monstrous Snake, whose ruby eyes regarded me.

I ran from the palace! A secret portal led me to the borders of the forest. Here I came upon the traces of a highway, the windings of which I followed. The rising sun of the next day found me still fugitive—hasting in wildest panic—already many a mile from the towers of Lovanah.

I had thus broken the second of my vows, which bound me to my home. It was not till long afterwards that this thought occurred to me. But there remained the third: never, by my own seeking, to penetrate the ultimate secret of the world: and by this I have faithfully abided.

. . . . .

Ten years passed and left me, as they found me, vagabond over India. I journeyed from city to city, meditating on the manners of men, and begging my bread from the charitable. I have wandered in the streets of that Benares to which Boodh first retired from the world; I have stood beneath the great granite mosque of Jumna Musjid at Delhi; and through all the cities of the north I have passed.

But my pilgrimage was very far from purposeless. I sought with intense scrupulousness—as for hid treasures—after something. I hoped to find a retreat in which, with absolute security from the designs of destiny, I might lay me down, and die the natural death of the rest of men.

I came at last, in the vale of Cashmere, to a lonely Hindoo

temple—one of the great vihâras—consisting of an oblong chamber. The roof was supported by two rows of huge stone pillars connected by vaulted architraves, and at the farthest end, semicircular in shape, stood a colossus of the seated Boodh. The temple had been chiselled out of the base of the Himalaya.

Though a burning lamp hung from a pillar, the sanctuary seemed deserted. I entered, and passed up the broad central nave. At the extremity, near the statue, where the vihâra might be expected to end, I happened to find an open door. I walked through it, and descended a long stairway which brought me to a second temple; all was now the intensity of darkness; but happening to meet with another door-way, I descended still farther—down and down—until, in this way, I had traversed six stairways of equal descent. I must by this time have travelled a very considerable distance both into the interior of the mountain and the depths of the earth.

Yet another series of steps, and I came to a passage, at the end of which was a circular apartment: here was clearly the termination of this great excavation. From its roof hung a lamp which distilled a vermilion light. I could see from the appearance of the chamber that it had been unvisited perhaps for ages, and I was unable to conjecture by what means the lamp was kept alive, except it were by means of feeding pipes from the far outermost temple of all; but, at any rate, it showed me that the key-contrivance of the door of the chamber was *on the outside*. With the deliberate purpose of there ending my days, I passed into the apartment, and pulled the door toward me. I heard with joy the click of the fastening which sealed my fate.

In the room is a small stone table and a stool. I had brought with me parchment, and the materials for writing. This history, as far as it has now gone, has by these means been recorded. I shall leave it to moulder beside my bones. As the half-pleasurable pangs of hunger, and the languor of coming disease, invade my body, I may add yet a phrase or two.

. . . . .

I have now observed that this chamber is not of stone, as far at least as its interior lining is concerned. It is certainly extraordinary; but there can be no doubt that the flooring and ceiling

are of wood, and that the circular sides are of old iron-plate panelled at regular intervals with narrow wooden laminæ. The faintness of the lamp's scarlet glow doubtless prevented me from noticing this singularity from the first.

. . . . .

I have brought with me a quantity of opium. On the lap of an ocean of rainbows will I embark when the great hour comes.

. . . . .

The opium works well in stanching the current of the blood, and in overdriving the spent heart to its final throbbings. It will thus quicken the action of the hunger. The past five or six hours I have spent in a coma full of luxuriousness.

. . . . .

Spare me! Spare me! frail man that I am! This chamber, in which—with my own hand—I have imprisoned myself, *is the nethermost hell itself!* Happening to rise from my seat, I saw—in the shadow thrown by the table—a sight! the skeleton of a man; having a burnt appearance; old as the mountain; dismembered now in the lower limbs, the ribs in fragments; but the cervical vertebræ still cohering, and around them—coiled—in perfect preservation, in hideous symmetry, the vertebræ of a great——No! not that word again! I dashed my body against the door of my prison; for a full hour of frenzy beat my life against its adamant: then fell to the ground.

. . . . .

As I lay on the floor, my senses having returned to me, I seemed to hear a very faint sound, proceeding apparently from beneath the casing of wood. I bent down my ear. It was a gentle crepitant sound, as though a rat gnawed the wood.

But this it could hardly have been which made me leap up with an alacrity so frantic. The action was involuntary; but I soon recognized its reason. On placing the palm of my hand upon the boarding, a marked degree of *warmth* communicated itself to my skin. I have also touched the iron casing of the chamber all round, and find the same condition.

. . . . .



This apartment must be at a great depth in the bowels of the earth. Can it be that huge geologic forces, volcanic in character, are tumbling in Acherontic travail around me? The heat of the floor and walls slowly but steadily increases.

Seventy years ago I made a threefold vow. Forty years ago I broke the first, and wedded. Ten years ago I broke the second, and left my home. Three days ago I broke, thou seeing God, the third, when, with my own hand, I closed upon me this tomb of woe. For now—at last!—I know—with clear precision—the ultimate, the flaming, the maddening secret of being.

It is old: it has been heard from the beginning; but heard as an incredible tale. Upon no heart of man has its intolerable incubus ever rested as now it rests upon mine; no eyeball has its excess of light so scorched and blasted into ashes. And this I say in foolish and feeble words; that there is knowledge, and there may be things; but gibbering spectres of this One Thing only: *an Eye that glares and glares for ever!* And wise are they who call it Hammon, Brimmah, Zeu-Ya, and Ra, and Allah; but wiser they who say *Saranyû* (i.e. "Erinyes," Counteraction).

I will write even to the bitter and fiery end.

The scraping and gnawing sound has multiplied itself a million-fold, and is now clamorous and constant. At every point beneath the flooring—along the length of every wooden panel—over all the wooden ceiling, it is heard. An army of creatures boring, *boring* their invincible way to reach me. . . .

The floor I can no longer touch with my feet; the table of stone itself grows hot; the iron casing of the chamber, even under the scarlet gleam of the lamp, now emits the redding glow of heated metal. . . .

Tulsah!—that name again!—the fiery furnace of intensest hell—ah bitter, *bitter* love! to the centre it blazes. And now—ah

now—from a thousand apertures—around, above, beneath—a thousand small and crimson serpent-heads extrude! convulsive—O bile of God!—in ecstasy—they expel and retract their salamandrine necks! Crimson, crimson, is their name! But what a Babel of hissing! Once, in sleep, did I not see her tongue loll black and long—And now—wage, wage of lawless love!—now—O Majesty—they come—that flaming fault in worms—now—ten thousand forked and jagged——(three words of doubtful meaning follow).

## PHORFOR





## PHORFOR

*Αἶ! αἶ! τὰν Κυθέρειαν!*

They reckon ill who leave *Me* out!  
When me they fly—I am the Wings!  
I am the Doubter and the Doubt;  
And I the hymn the Brahmin sings.  
R. W. EMERSON.

AT THAT MORE sombre season called Opora, which fills the interval between the rising of Sirius and the rising of Arcturus, when the cycled year dying as the phoenix, forest-leaves glow red-reflective of the conflagration, and birds fly migratory from the world-wide majesty of the pyre—I passed on horse-back over the blue and high-surging undulations of the Orchat Mountains, whose broad swell is as the Eastern heave of a jewelled bosom; thence through lower-lying slopes, and delicious groves of citron, almond, and maple; and thence through a seine of streams, over-waved by that bulbous Nile-lily which the Greeks called “lotus”; till, entering the domain of Phorfor, I drew up, as night fell, at the entrance of the far-reaching castle by the sea.

The ancient home! I had worn its dark forests as an easy old garment; listened through the whole dead summer-day by its brook-banks to the abstracted talk of my cousins Sergius and Areta, children then like me; splashed in the waters of its day. But a sudden pride, quickened by another's malice, impelled me to wide wanderings over the world, from which, after too many years, I now returned with little won—a knowledge of constitutions, modes, of the swellings of cities, artfulness of art; and a longing beyond language for heavenly message of the eyes of Areta, and the benign wisdom of the lips of Sergius.

A letter of announcement had preceded me by some days. An old serving-man waited me at the entrance. I recognized him well, but to my smile he returned no answering smile. In silence he led the way, doddering with prone neck and angled

knees, through a series of lofty glooms, till in the recesses he stopped before a high, embossed, and arched brazen gateway, to the curtained wicket of which he pointed, bowed, and retired.

I passed inwards. Here sight groped with somewhat more surety; though a thick odour of the smoke of myrrh smothered out the atmosphere. On a cushion on the ground I saw Areta sit: an easel before her. On the easel a square of ivory, in the centre of which, by medium of *coccus*, the scarlet dye of the kermes-berry, she stained a small head. The brush was between her fingers. Wide and wild over the marble *dalles* of the flooring were spent the light purplish largesses of her hair. Her back was towards me.

"Areta!"

Eagerly she painted. But she was conscious of my voice, for, without turning, she said in a thick, hurried murmur:

"You are come, then. See—*your* work."

She pointed with the handle, and continued her task.

I, looking, saw in misty distances of the chamber—a bed. But how *my* work? I drew gently near it. It was strewn with splinters of fragrant agalloch-wood. I saw a noble, cold forehead. The body was robed in splendid volutions of cloth-of-gold; the red lamp of a ruby glowed large at his breast; the head was crowned with daphne: an expression all this, as I knew, of Count Zinzendorf's whim, that death, so far from being the chill passage through any valley of any shadow, is, without metaphor, a jubilant bursting from sleep at day-break. But how *my* work? Wherein was *I* guilty? That question I asked myself. A coffin of sarcophagic limestone lay on chairs beside the low bed.

Eagerly Areta painted. From behind I saw that the effort was to preserve the august likeness in death; and already I was able to predict failure: no truth could an eye so wild interpret to a hand so unstable. I sat near her in the numbness of awe, and hours of the night rolled over us.

Later, I crept from the room. As I passed through one of the outer halls, a stupendous stalking figure moved diagonally across a far corner of it. The light was dim, but his step slow, and my eyes searched him fully. I knew the Elder, Theodore. A simple garment of blood-red silk, with amice of orphreyed black, tuned on the marble an intermittent musing to his strides.

A mist of hair, crowned with the fanon, floated in wide white vagueness over his back. A great veil of yellow cloth covered his face, as a veil covered the face of the Prophet of Khorassan. I cannot at this moment picture forth all that passed within me at this sight: the intense impressions of first youth stamped themselves once more deep upon me. Once more it was Theodore, the omnipotent, that I saw. And though his head was immobile aversion as he passed through, I knew that he knew my presence.

I inquired of the old serving-man who attended me in my room at supper an hour later as to the arrangements for the burial of Sergius. He answered, "At the next rise of dawn he was to have been interred in the vaults of the rock-chapel."

"*Was to have been?*"

"But since your arrival—within the hour, in fact—the Elder Theodore has come in person from the Tower, and suggested to the lady Areta that the body be embalmed."

I started, understanding enmity—a deadly thrust at my own heart.

"And she?"

"Eagerly consented. The constant presence of the body will be her unhoped consolation. The Elder, skilled, sir, in all designs, has himself undertaken the work, and the cofined frame has even now been conveyed by boat across the water to the Tower."

I retired weary to my bed. But though morning was near, sleep was an ambition merely. I lay and swept clean the house of memory, building in the deep the old life up again. Of Sergius I thought, and his singular likeness to the boy, Christ; his questionings, answers, parables; his sibylline intensity of interest in sounds, and strata, and the shapes of things, and the hues of birds; how eagerly he accepted anything out of the ordinary course as a doubly-direct revelation of Omnipotence to himself. After a time, every appearance was to him a rune: like old augurs and æonoscopi, he followed with musing eye the course of all winged creatures. The fragments of a rainbow had pythic meanings for him. He contrasted the notes from the vocal organs of many living things; showed how this sound or odour was really identical with that appearance, and how the difference of their mode of occurrence was not intrinsic, but due merely to the



differentiation of our own sense-organs. His little museum was full of strangely sorted specimens of this and that: seeds, zoolites, spotted eggs, fuci, spawn, spongiadæ, chips of chert, bars of bast. Once, having spent the night in the forest, he came at dawn to where I, enfolding Areta, sat on the sea-terrace. His white brow was radiant. He told how all the night he had listened in a thicket to the song of a nightingale: a song which, he said, *was not her native*. I long remembered the impression which the quaint high things he thereupon uttered made upon us. And I thought of his smooth-mindedness, as of that Jesus whom he aped. If by chance he encountered rudeness, dullness, it was good to see with how light-like a power he appeased it. I would often cavil at the obscure and loosely-metred *extravaganzas* which he sometimes sang to us; and always would he graciously pause to show how under the appearance of ease lay a strenuously-reached fitness; how beyond the cloud was light. "To what metre," he asked one day, "do earth-sent angels tune the dithyrambs of their exultation?" "To a metre," I answered, "which 'ear hath not heard,' nor can hear." But he: "Oh yes! heard indeed, but with scentless and purblind ears." He then took jewels of different sizes and colours; laid them in a line. All the syllables of each foot of the metre he marked by stones of the same hue; the *length* of the syllables he indicated by the varying sizes of the stones. No sooner had he done this, than Areta, perceiving a vision of some beauty in the combination, clapped hands; while I, observing indeed a picturesqueness, ended. "You here see," said Sergius, "that the first foot is a trochee (long followed by short syllable), while the last is an iambus (short followed by long): a symbolism, you will at once say, of the fall and rising again of Man; and, if you compare nearly all the Shemitic dialect-versions of the hymn I have in my mind, you will find the same general alternation: a beginning of long-and-short, and an ending of short-and-long, or long-and-long." And then, with exquisite clearness of rhythm, he proceeded to chaunt in Hebrew an improvization of the angel-song of the Gospel, beginning, "Fear not," and ending, "shall be called the Son of God." Night-dews gathered in the eyes of Areta as the melody rose from him; myself not all unmoved. Nor did Sergius ever leave the reason restive. He pointed out now, for



example, the coincidence that in the Greek version, too, of the words their alpha is a trochee, and their omega an iambus, and so even in later versions, as the Latin, French, English, and many others. It was at moments such as this that Areta would rescue her hand from mine with a rashness almost angry, and sidling towards her brother, lean a passionate face to peace on his bosom; and many hours, many longing days, might pass, before her dear favour returned to me. In such constant rivalry for her lived Sergius and I. I have won her from him by a hairataghan of agates, a cameo of onyx, or a bird from the sunset, spoil of my skill with the bow; and he back again by the solution of some problem in ciphers or lines, by a psalm, or earnest chansonnette. A very slight divergence, I remember, once occurred in the march of their thought. It was the custom at the time for one or other to read aloud by a deep-shadowed brook in the wood, the "Giornale di un Viaggio di Constantinopoli in Polonia," by the idealist mathematician Ruggiero Boscovich: a book of books for my cousins. During one such *séance*, Areta set up claim to Boscovich as supporting the cosmothetic view of the impressions of the senses, her own strongly marked leaning being toward that subjective idealism of Fichte which attributes the orderly succession of sensible changes to the nature of the individual mind in which they are perceived. To Sergius, on the contrary all was directly God—every event, sight, sound, God's quite special act: and hence it was, perhaps, that in *his* eyes the Bishop of Cloyne loomed immense, as the greatest who ever breathed. The divergence, I say, was slight, for to neither mind, as a thing of course, did any such idea as the absolute existence or agency of matter ever occur: yet Sergius frowned at the interruption—a sign in him of strong displeasure. Boscovich, he said, austere, was "*other than she thought.*" Morning redness over-swept Areta: a vice caught her nether lip. For a week she abandoned herself wholly to me. Deep in the glens and bowers we wandered, hiding through the night in the darkness of caves, folded together. Sergius was a mateless bittern by the pool. One other singularity I may mention as often noticed in my love: her bird-like flightiness of motion, giving sometimes the impression of translation through space. Walking with her along the path of the wood, I have lifted my head to a squirrel's perch, or stooped to a fallen

catkin, and turning again, lo, have seen her rapt well beyond me, beckoning airily perhaps from the summit of a rising ground. Her computations, too, of the dial's variations were not always in strict harmony with common notions; when, after my long absence, I returned as related to Phorfor, she said, "You are come, then," and the murmur had precisely that intonation with which one speaks of an interval of hours.

I lay in the darkness, and I swept clean the house of memory. Of the Elder Theodore I thought. We children called his name in pious, lower voices. Vast powers over nature, vast mystery of lore, we gave to him. Our imagination crossed itself at him. Only at night, on every seventh day, in the reluctant gloom of the rock-chapel, did we come at sight of the hem of his garment; for our awful lids would not lift to his veiled face. Here, kneeling, we took from his hands the elements of the Holy Supper; whereupon he made haste to disappear into the black *adyta* of the sanctuary. He was, Sergius hinted, of Aramæan, or Syro-Chaldean race; or else he derived from among the priests of the Cophti. The veiling of the face might be due to some disease of the blood which rendered him all too chill a horror for the glance of a fellow-mortal. The Tower was his solitary abode: a tall structure rising from the sea of our land-locked bay, about two stone-throws from the beach; it tapered upward pyramid-wise in seven brick terraces, each lacquered in a glaring colour. By day it cast on the vapouring purple water the reflection of a gaudy basking lizard. Above all was the observatory. There the sun sometimes fired through narrow openings a tangled refulgence of sextants, armillary spheres, gimbals, the cannon of a telescope, azimuth compasses, pictured charts. In the deepest night we opened the eyes and thrillingly knew that the Elder pored into the ever-written red-letter scroll of the past and the to-come. Neither I nor the orphans ever understood what had been his precise relation to their parents; that they had revered him above mortal we understood; also that the guardianship of our lives was in some sort bequeathed to his hands. But was it by childish sure instinct, or a series of trivial and now forgotten incidents, that I came to know that *I* was by no means included in the scheme of Theodore's providence? that I, the waif, the Hagarson, might become, perhaps was, an obstacle to the unfolding

of that elaborate forethought? This consciousness at any rate grew gradually mine. When at last I fled from Phorfor, I was a missile from the suggestion, tense, compelling, secret, of the Elder of the Tower.

Thus I built in the deep. But with the morning I despatched a note to Areta, asking if I might hope that day for the sight of her face, but for a word from her. She apparently did not receive, or read, the paper; for I waited without reply. The galleries, park, gardens, fed my memory with here an ancestral effigy, there a grove or stream. Another day passed, and another. But at the fourth dusk, a boat lay moored at the water-steps of the terrace. Its benches sustained in a glazed coffin of light pagodite the body of Sergius already cured to perpetuity by a miracle of asphaltum, natron, bitumens; a dwarf rower of dark skin held the skulls of the bow; fastened to the stern by a twine floated a little shallop of mother-of pearl. I, standing near, waited. Areta in purity of white came slowly from the portico of the hall, walking down an aisle of the double xystum of Corinthian columns which lined the terrace; palms on either hand over-shaded her; and she came the full and sudden moon through the palms, walking in shining. My hand touched my mouth; I was at once abashed and excited at her developed splendour. As she passed, she extended laterally her left hand, without seeming to see me. I burned it with a kiss. She descended the stairway, looked upon the steadfast face of Sergius, and stepped into the shallop. I following, the dwarf began to paddle.

Here the sands and the low cliffs all along the two folded claws of the bay are of a very pale pink colouring; the sea being an extremely vivid purple resembling the hue of the dye called Phœnician, and remarkably shallow throughout. Here and there the cliffs project bluffly quite into the bay, thus blocking the continuity of the sand. The water is but very slightly brackish. A bright-hued sea-weed, scallops, and star-fish visibly carpet the bottom; while moon leaved water-growths cluster into groups of silvery greenness over the surface. From the terrace our rower slowly conveyed us a hundred yards to the left, and there turned into a opening in the coast-rock about four feet wide through all its length; up this the sea, far-winding, slumbers in breathless



gloom, covered thick with the drowsy grace of Egyptian lotus-lily. Three wide steps near the end of the inlet lead into a low square chapel excised from the mountain-rock, its roof being supported by the ebony columns of twin stylobats.

Areta had not spoken. Her face was the uttermost expression of a rigid woe. Arrived at the chapel entrance, she looked up, and stepped readily from the shallop. The dwarf and I bore the now lightened body in its shell to trestles near a purple catafalque before the altar-rail. On the craped altar itself a taper on either side of the pyx nimbused itself with a little sphere of little rays, giving all of light we had. The black hangings of gold-fringed velvet made the distant places of the excavation a vastness of darkness.

Areta, seating herself on the altar-step near the body, motioned to us to leave her. I, seeming to obey, retired; ordered the dwarf back to the Tower; and took my place in the obscurity of a recess. Hence I could watch her tearless pain. She leaned her head on the rail sideways, and watched obliquely the steadfast dead. She did not move. As the spaces of the night marched by, the taper-flames began to leap duskily, and one of them puffed suddenly out. She rose then; and opening a cista behind the altar, obtained two others; and was about to light them, when I, buying up the opportunity, stepped boldly forth. I took the tapers and lit them, and adjusted them to the candlesticks. She showed no surprise at my bodily presence near her. We sat together on the altar-step by the coffin; together we gazed. The face before us was unchanged and Sergius's own; a mournful richness of gold involved him. Her hand did not refuse the ring of warmth in which till morning I fostered it.

When the deeper shadows had thinned to a twilight in the chapel, she rose and walked to the doorway. I, entering with her paddled in the shallop down the winding way, and so out to the sea. The sun was now bright above the circling blue mountains of Phorfor; nature looked wide-eyed in pricked alertness; the water a flushed and many-gifted soul under the blaze of light and the roughening reel of routs of zephyrs, morning home-returners. White, long-necked birds, scarlet-legged, flew hither and thither, uttering a swancall akin to the viola-note. I watched anxiously to read the countenance of Areta. For a moment the



throes of vacillation had her; for a moment she struggled to maintain the grey face of grief—but a single sobbing gasp of laughter burst suddenly forth from her bosom, and instantly the hilarity of the sky, and the frolic of the world was in her look. She hurriedly buried a crimson face in the draperies of her arm.

To this I had looked forward with the precision of certainty—if she remained at all the same Areta that I knew. Never was Areta other than the unfailing exactest mirror of environment; a condition which no doubt arose from her belief—so deep as to be part of herself—that environment was, in fact, the exact mirror of herself; and this again from her disbelief in the existence of matter. Now, it is no doubt true that most cultivated people of the outer world accept such non-existence as an intellectual thesis, whether tentatively in the form presented by Malebranche, Geulinx, and the so-called Cartesian school; or in the form of the absolute phenomenalism of Hume, Browne, and the middle German teaching; but in most minds, as I imagine, a lingering half-faith in Locke's "thing in its real essence" (Kant's 'thing in itself') must persist to the end, for the very reason that the fancy, by long habit of youth, has already grown to hold the earth-rock genuine solid, and the sun very "substance." To my cousins, however, even from the first dawn of thought, all was pure spirit; the one "substance" the consciousness of their own inner souls; the world a thin picture on the senses, resolvable as mirage. And this knowledge, so far from being an affair of the mere reasoning understanding, was their very life itself. To them no other possibility suggested itself. The slightest change in the environment of Areta would indicate to her a preceding change in her own mental being. Sergius, looking up, would question the causing Mind; she, looking inward, asked, How has the alteration been produced in *me*? I remember them thus affected by the disappearance of many things around them. In the bursting Spring I have known Areta a wild ass's colt on the hills with twinkling feet and bacchant stare; in the chiller season puritan and wise. That her consciousness should now evolve a gay picture of nature, she, feeling the discord with her sorrow for Sergius, doubtless marked as a strangeness in herself.

Having arrived at the terrace-steps, she raised her face, and leapt to the land. I proceeded to make fast the shallop, but on

reaching the top of the landing-stage, saw her already beneath the pediment of the portico, on the point of disappearing within the castle. There I heard that she had retired to a distant part, and would be seen no more until sunset.

It was dark when she reappeared at the waterside. We then proceeded as before to the chapel, and renewed our silent vigil. Her face had lost nothing of its hard misery. She seemed not to know me, though I clasped her hand. With the intrusion of the morning, I suggested that we should return to the castle. She slowly turned her head, and with the raised eyebrows of surprise, looked at me fully; then, frowning, said, "Leave me! leave me!"

I could not but obey. Later I heard that on the preceding day a side-apartment of the chapel, of which there were many, had been fitted up as a chamber for her. This then was to be her constant abode of gloom.

In the evening I returned. She frowned, but did not deny me place by her side. There watching through the slow circle of the night, I was near happiness, for I was near her. Yet she was far from me. So months, many months, passed over us. Every sun divided us, but with the drawings of the moon we flowed together again. Upon the steadfast face of Sergius our gazes fell.

. . . . .

Rarely at midnight would the Elder Theodore step from a boat at the entrance, and walking toward the sacarium, reappear huge at the altar with chrism and plaque and chalice, bearing the Host and Wine of the Eucharist. Blessed then it was, as we knelt, to see the face of Areta, adoring spirit's more than woman's. We sang no hymn; a few muffled Greek words rumbled like the echo of a reverberation from Theodore; whereupon his feet resought the way they had come. Areta might then melt somewhat; speak a word to me; her kindled pity for the Redeemer's trouble seeming to suage into twilight the starlessness of her own crude night. She might produce from her chamber books, and I at her bidding would read, perhaps von Hardenberg's Hymn to the Night commencing: "Once when I was shedding bitter tears; standing by the grave which hid the Form of my Life; chased by unutterable woes; forward could not go nor backward; lo, from the azure distance fell chill breaths of Twilight; and the

band of Birth, the fetter of Life, was rent asunder; thou, Night's inspiration, Slumber of Heaven, overcamest me; to a cloud of dust that grave expanded; through the cloud I beheld the transfigured features of my Beloved"; or the mystical aphorisms of *Siris* would fit her mood; or Arthur Collier's ideality in *Clavis Universalis*. And sometimes with the passing months I would tremble to see her wan face dimple fleetingly into the very smile of Areta; and noticing one night her spinning-wheel of electrum—quick-gleaming alloy of gold and silver—stand by contrivance of my artifice with violet-dark wool on distaff near the coffin, she did at length stretch out doubting fingers, and commence a woven undertaking. And the droning incessant circle bred a stirring in the roots of speech. At last—I shot a glance of triumph at Sergius—she yielded to the impulse of words.

"He had long, you know, been ailing: phthisis was his worm. And the intense contemplation of sleepless weeks was its fattening aliment. For the last few months of life the spirit might be said to sway half-disembodied; but eschewing his bed, he still studied and roamed. I never left him. You know the unspeakable sympathies which from our dual birth united us; but now for the first time our two souls lost definiteness, and hovered into one. I was lifted at times into awful heights to share his apocalypse of the world. Nothing seemed any longer secret to him. The illusion of Time, for instance, ceased to cloud him: he knew the past and the future. He re-arranged his little museum, changing the relative position of this and that, into a quite wonderful beauty; then locked the door, and threw the key into a hot sulphur-spring in the forest. Once, as he lay in languid sleep at noonday, I heard him twice call your name, 'Numa! Numa!' When he woke he said, 'Numa, I know, is moved toward us again; but I could wish he were now here; I could then commit you, with confidence, to him.' Speech was now a gasping difficulty with him, and I wondered especially that he should speak so of you and me. He seemed to forecast—I know not what. Soon subsequent, absolute powerlessness confined him to an easy-chair in the chamber where you first saw his body. I read to him through the day from the Hebrew scriptures, from his beloved Bishop Berkeley, and the hymns of Pindar. At every sunset he swooned to sleep; and slept happily to the next noon.



Once, surprising from a mid-day trance, he dictated to me runningly in Hebrew three of those his imponderable metrical *capriccios*, and then fell back wearily to instant sleep again. I had followed him far, but as to these last words, the meaning was of subtler element than my spirit, and out-soared me. They may have been simple prophecy of quite simple events; they may have been parable or rhapsody, or prayer. His dear hand could no longer lift the pencil's weight; his eyes were two twice-illuminated moons. A little yellow bird called Beatrix, which it had been his whim to overpaint to a sombre grey hue, fluttered constantly in his breast, shrilling his name. He had so trained it from its motherless birth. I have everywhere sought it since his death, but in vain. At the beginning of the last week he again sighed your name; and henceforth every noon hoped aloud for you. On the third day he minutely directed me to draw a Key on paper, which, when it was finished, I immediately recognized as the 'key' figured in Wilhelm Meister's *Wanderjahre*; beneath this he told me to write the opening words of the angels' song in the Gospel of Luke beginning 'Fear not.' These two, the former above the latter, were to be inlaid in gold on the headpiece of his inner coffin; and this, as you see, has been properly accomplished by the Elder. On the next day he called me close; I kneeling before him, his hand rested upon my head. 'I do not doubt,' he said in the whisper of the dying wind, 'that he for whom I wait will come speedily. The hoofs of the rider's horse are urgent on the hills. I bless you then, Areta, and say good-bye. Yield yourself utterly to God, little one. Give to every passion its wine, to every pulse its throb, to every song its dance. *He*, in truth, is pulse and blood, song and singer. Yield freely to him. If you would be perfect in divinity, let the Wind, passing, win from the whole intense gamut of your chords a wafture of richest perfected humanity. Ah, little sister, quick—my harp! my harp!' Quickly I reached him his kithara; held it before him; handed him the quill plectrum. He faintly delved from it a distant air—ah me, an air known even in the highest cycle of heaven—which since childhood I had not heard from him. He then had measured it to the Gospel words: 'Fear not . . . he shall be great . . . and shall be called the Son of God.' Ardently did I pray that while the harmony still clung in the web of my consciousness I



might have opportunity to transcribe it into musical signs; but at that moment a hot messenger entered with your note of announcement. Even while I glanced through it, Sergius knew its meaning; and having uttered a sigh of rest, the visual body slid from him."

"But the melody?"

"Passed utterly from me. In vain have I mined into myself for it. If I could hear it again—ah me, but once again—I think that the love and the hope of life, which seem dead within me, might yet—again——"

Sudden tears shed from her uplifted eyes. Her hands clasped rigidly.

So she spoke with me through the slow circle of the nights, spinning. The chiller season passed, and the spring, and the leafiest weeks of summer. She had settled into an unvarying morne mood; words she uttered, only livid in hue, and pregnant always with the odour of the grave from which they winged. But to sit always and watch her loveliness, so sad, so lunar, was already the dizziness of frenzy. She had dressed herself in the mourning of loose purple draperies, made of a very flimsy diaphanous cloth. A fillet of gold circled her head. My blood railed at its channels; with torrent fury I leapt the barriers, and spoke to Areta—of our old loves among the caves and crannies—of the wild hopes which had led me back to Phorfor. I think she did not at all comprehend my meaning; quite simply, with mournful gaze upon the dead, she said: "Our whole love is hid in him now—yours and mine; conscript to the memory of what he was, and to this little all that remains to us of him." It was then that I knew that Sergius, living, was strong; dead, was invincible; and it was then that I called down upon that Argus cunning which, on my coming, had impregnated his body with eternity, the bale of every imprecation.

Yet, I too, won my small triumph. For on an afternoon of beginning autumn, when the sun had sunk not yet below the west-looking harbour-hills, I—induced her with me to the terrace! It was my tingling Marathon. "Bright! bright!" she cried, hiding her face. Blood surged to her lewd limbs; visible to me was the ravelling of the cerements from the risen, pulsing flesh. We sat on a couch of alabaster on the lowest stratum of the

terrace, quite near to the marble balcony-rail overlooking the bay. In the circling pink arms of the sands the purple basin of sea looked a dew-splashed violet cosy in the heart of a rose. Areta lived again. Sweet-linked waftings from the parterres set out staggering-adventurous to reach her, and reached her fainting. The sun, all glory-clouds and shekinahs, like the God of some mad universe belalalah'd *en route*, with cymbals and with dances, flamed down afloat in the *gluth* of a passion which he never assumes but when he would enkindle to mutual ardours the light-thoughted mother-hills of Phorfor.

Areta was simple childhood itself. Looking abroad on the rich vision, she laughed a laugh of perfect *bonne camaraderie*; nested herself snakily at the end of the seat; I reclining at length, watching close the spiritual play of her face. And we really spoke at last of things other than Sergius and his mummy.

"See," I said, "how the sun's rim demarks into seven contrasts of fire the colours of the tower. The glazed bricks have the appearance of red and blue and yellow heat."

Looking, she laughed.

"Mens agitat molem."

"The Elder's mind——"

"No, the sun-god's: kindled by us; and kindling by means of us."

"And in another sense the Elder's, too,—from within."

"In literal truth, yes: man, as Novalis without metaphor said, being a sun, of which his senses are the planets. In the case of such as Theodore above all."

"Singular man!"

"He walks his uplifted way alone: dead to sorrow, hope, desire; in a strict sense king of the world."

"But listen, Areta: you miss the mark here: Theodore, I know, is not dead to desire."

"Not? Then to what desire not dead?"

"The conservation in his hands——"

"Of the meanings of the stars."

"Of the opulent territories of Phorfor."

"Fie! of the revelations of God."

"The keeping of *you* safe——"

"From what?"

"From me."

An oval "O!" of lower comedy answered me.

"And I tell you truth, Areta, the day may come when you will confront the necessity of choosing between me, your cousin, and the Elder Theodore, whose face you never beheld."

"Really so? and whom think you I would choose—my father's prophet, the guiding forefinger of my brother's thought, grey hunter in old alchymies and astrologies—or you, a worldly wanderer, lithe hopper in every grass?"

"I know well whom you would *once* have chosen; but as to now, of course——"

Sweetly she smiled.

"And am I then so greatly changed in—how many years?—six, I think? You are, as of old, '*Numa*'; a light-footed boy, I remember, somewhat empty of thought, lengthened now only by a sixfold growth of the leopard's beard—which also could be sheared."

"Call the beard 'fantasy of your dream,' and me still rubious *Numa*, capricious with you in the long grasses of the valley."

"What other than 'fantasy of my dream'? and yet to *me* very hyacinthine real."

"Card it with carding fingers: I promise you no dream but substance enough."

"If my fingers would but assume the office of the carder's comb! But is feeling then less fantasy than sight? You do not mean this that you say of 'substance.'"

"So men speak and think in the world, Areta."

"You mean among savage tribes?"

"No, but among races considered civilized."

"The graves of their great men must scratch a shallow tracery on this 'world' of yours!"

"Oh, very shallow indeed! There are many conflicting voices, you know; the writings cross and re-cross on the basalt; and as they rather lack the genius of sharp distinction between the really great and the only seeming, so confusion comes, and continual movement in a circle in place of locomotion."

"But you do not mean that they have a genuine conception of a material universe?"

"Extremely genuine and material, in the case of the great majority at least."

"They are not Christian?"

"Oh yes!"

Areta's laugh had a resemblance to the chirping of the cicada: so shining, and lalling, and dry.

"Not Christian: for what account can they possibly render themselves of the many feats of magic performed by Jesus?"

"The feeding of the multitude, and so on? I hardly know. Some disbelieve them; some nebulous-shruggingly neither believe nor disbelieve; some, in a fury of faith, charge them to the conniving *leger-de-main* of Omnipotence."

"The con——! but these last are either hypocrites or self-deluders. They cannot conceive the inconceivable. If nature be phenomenon and nothing else, it is conceivable how one mind may, by its forceful action upon other *minds*, effect in them a sense of variation from the usual succession of phenomena. With such a hypothesis, magic becomes natural and easy. But like only can conceivably act upon like; you cannot, for instance, feed mind with broths, or blood with thoughts. Where therefore you introduce a conception of packed matter, the conceivability of magic—or indeed of any action whatever of spirit, divine or not, upon the phenomena perceived by other spirits—utterly collapses. And in the case of those who only half believe in the eyewitnessed performances of Jesus, there is, of course, no pretension to belief——"

"But there is: many of these last indeed cling on with quite riotous vigour to the *rest* of the torn Book."

The sun had set, Areta's profile looked dullwan, a misty crescent in the sudden dusk. Her drooped lash was as a trait of sea-weed dark on the spume of breakers under the Cyprian moon. Her voice tuned every moment to a lower sadness.

"Yet Jesus was the most ideal of the idealists. 'Matter' to him was less than the dream of a dream. What, for instance, do these persons make of his saying: he that hath his spirit in such and such a way shall announce to the mountain: Be thou plucked-up! and it shall obey him? They must either think that he had a meaning, or hold him for a rhetorician—or, lower still, an orator."

"But the world, Areta," I said, "does not, you understand, call itself a thinking world, but an acting. Very slowly indeed, in



its preoccupation, do the thoughts of its deep ones filter through the whole: and the reason is that pointed out by Des Cartes in *Principia*, and I think also by Malebranche, that the faculties we have are few, and designed for support and pleasure, rather than to penetrate the essence of things."

"But—I like your distinction between thinking and action. If there be nothing but spirit, upon what can action act, and by means of what? There is in truth no action but thought; to aspire is to be an adventurer; to dream is to be practical; to feel is to be a man of affairs; and when your world calls itself an acting one, it may simply use a euphemism for vague or wrong thinking. As for the Cartesian view which you mention, compare with it Berkeley's saner one: that 'some truths there are so *near* and *obvious* that a man need only open his eyes to see them; and such I take this one to be, that all the choir of the heavens and the furniture of the earth, have not any substance without a mind; that their being consists in being perceived.' And now, having proved that, say, *fire* is nothing more than a particular combination of colour and form, and that colour and form can no more exist without a seeing spirit than a sound without an ear, Berkeley, you know, disdains to proceed to prove that this purely notional appearance cannot, for example, *burn*: merely remarking that that at least is *obvious*; and this is certainly the conclusion of Hume, Comte, and the rest. So that the faculties would seem to require no very 'penetrative' acumen for the perception of truths so superficial."

"And yet," said I, baiting my hook, glad at the drone and harping of her voice, "I venture to say that these truths are in fact so far from 'obvious' to the untrained mind, that they may even seem rather ridiculous to it."

"And why? Does the untrained mind then suppose that fire or rock is anything *more* than colour and form? and if so, what? what invisible, inconceivable thing does the colour and form hide from us? They would, at least, make the same impressions upon us, if this singular thing of which we are never cognisant were not there: and we cannot, therefore but assume it to be absent; since, too, we cannot imagine the unimaginable, to *speak* of it is to use words without meaning. If, moreover, a thing perceived be really nothing more than colour and form, the 'untrained

mind' may readily arrive at the certainty that it can neither burn, nor do anything whatever; and hence that no power, as no substance, can be other than spiritual. As to how, in such case, phenomena have the 'power' of producing impressions upon our consciousness, one opinion may differ from another. Singular Jonathan Edwards in his *Original Sin* is, you know, actually driven to assume the constant re-creation of all existing objects for the purpose of reimpresing us at every moment; but to me there seems no necessity for the creation or re-creation of anything; it is only necessary that *we* should be, and should dream. Only in the mysterious loom of the spirit can the woof of the world be spun; for if phenomena were in truth external, how could they, not being spirit, make impressions upon spirit, unlike upon unlike, especially as, being passive, they can do 'nothing whatever'? There may indeed be a law of our mind that every time we are conscious of proximity between a form and colour called 'hand' and a form and colour called 'fire,' we shall also be conscious of pain: as to which, Sergius, you know, declared that every such consciousness of pain was the special act of the Divinity,—thus bringing Him in very deed 'closer than breathing,' 'in our hearts and in our mouths.' But at any rate, we can have no certainty that such law is universal, or that such special acts are inevitable: for is it not too probable that there are fingers in the universe which, plunged into flame, would feel torture indeed, but the torture of Arctic cold? the flame then must be without property, substance: and only substantial the nervous, visionary *ich*. And even for us, the law, if it exists, may not be always strict; the dream of yesterday was well-ordered; but as sometimes happens in the less lucid visions of the night, the phantasmagory of to-morrow may melt and writhe into strange distortions. Nay, on a night, I actually *had* the trance that he, my splendid dead king, held to the furnace a parchment which, like the bush of Moses, burned unconsumed. Ah, but let us return—to him!"

She stood upright, tall and grey. The moon was abroad in the heavens. I, conquering her hand in the trouble of love, kissed it.

"Areta! Areta! this one night grant me, I implore! Do not return. For one night only leave Sergius to his death. Sleep, for me, in the castle!"

She smiled at my zeal with a shaken "No!"

"Only this one night, for me?"

"Shall we not go and sit *together* by him?"

"My first prayer since I have come back to you: ah, Areta!"

"Really your first?"

"You know."

"You make it late."

"Then grant it early!"

"Always wilful of head, little Numa! and a lubricant for persuasiveness!"

It was really night. I, twining round her arm, led her pouting recalcitrant, to the portico. Far within the halls she must needs part from me; mounted on wings the marble stairway, torch in hand; waved me a swift spirit's good-night; calling, 'the *second* may be harder i' the winning!'

I had no hope, no wish for sleep. Plying the paddle of the shallop, I circled many times the basin of the bay, now halting in the shadow of a hill, now basking in the moon's utmost noon. A red light, steadfast to the changing hours, burned through a slit in the topmost Tower. The lap of the ripple on the shelly sands sounded no other than the spasmodic peace, low-sobbed, of an assuaged Tantalus. It was a night tense in an agony of stars, distraught of eye as the patient stricken ox, and dumb with the pains of its passion, as I with the pains of Areta. Her words, the odour of her, her sweet yielding, had purged my blood to the ultimate element of flame; her name was nightmare in my aching gorge. I came to the inlet; passed upward. It was midnight. Here no gloating ardour of the heavens trenched upon the supremacy of Shadow in which the reach of fan-shaped lotus, close-clustering, slept a perfect nepenthe. I stepped from the shallop; entered the chapel. The darkness was complete. Long on the altar-step, on the spot, where she sat, I sat. Aloud now I found utterance to call her name. Then falling to my knees, I overcast the coffin with my arms, my head fallen above his head, beseeching him as a god. "Sergius! if death have ears, solitudes! if ghosts be veined with the ichor of human pitifulness! open your lean and lungless bosom—stretch your adamant arms of Polar ice; grant me, still quick, lustful, craft to wrest her from your



mortality! give her back to me!" A sudden glimmer like a taper-light seemed to glance behind me. I sprang panting to my feet: but all was dark as before. I returned to the shallop, and so out upon the bay. The steeply-slanting constellations, stepping foot and foot with the night, were evidence of its revolving. Having surfeit of the water, I came to land; and finding beneath the portico a hung heptachord, took it, and made a circuit of the spread castle. I was faint with the long sickness of desire; my lips lay dead for lack of the carnal life-flame of her kiss. To the East I stood beneath a square turret in a garden of spices. In a chamber on the second stage I knew that Areta slept. It was beginning morning: night, throeing with dissolution, spread out, like old misers on lamp-lit death-beds of velvet, a gluttony of bulging jewels; a languid, low-looming moon wrapped in elfin satins the crimson of pomegranate, and the grey-green of the tower, and the sardius of asphodel-berries, and the purple of myrtle-fruit. Here in galaxies fire-flies poise uncertain, sun-birds and droning coccinellæ dart. Turtles and nightingales hang their harps upon its willows. Inconsequent hints of zephyrs, loth with the fragrance of clove and jasmine, came with healing in their wings to my parched lips and forehead. I sent up from the lyre a lullaby, tuned to the splash of a fountain which gushed from a basin of cipolin—a cold white spirit in the midst of the garden; muttering; wreathing with aureoles of the lunar rainbow her far-tossed hair of dew. I sent up the melody, and with it my soul, hoping for her face at the window: when a sudden consciousness of danger, a sense of some luminous descending mass, appalled me. My eyes being turned upward, I clearly saw whence it came—from a window of the third stage, that immediately above Areta. I had but time to rush backward before it fell to the earth. It appeared in the moonlight to be a great quantity of grey powder; and almost immediately on contact with the ground, it uttered a fremor of froth, and burst vividly forth into a carmine flame, mingled with writhing tongues of cobalt.

I hurried to the terrace. The red light burned steadfastly in the topmost Tower. Till morning I watched in vain to see a huge expected form emerge from the castle. Expected, I say, and yet with endless doubts; for Theodore's boat was a visible spot of blackness floating by the Tower-wall. I was confounded. Was his



arm, I asked myself, indeed longer than the arm of man? Soon after the full dawn, the dwarf set out from the Tower, broom by side, towards the chapel. I beckoned him to me.

"Is the Elder Theodore," I asked, "now in the Tower?"

He nodded.

"And has been throughout the night?"

"Ha, master! that I do not know."

"You know with what knot you last moored the boat; has she been since removed?"

"Not, for certain."

I loitered for some hour or two among the parterres. It was a dank, secretive morning. The mountains donned grey veils of pudicity, low-lashed matin nuns after the glut and riot of a night. Areta came to the portico, looked abroad, her face sedate. My heart leapt to see the purple mourning gone, and a peplos of saffron in its stead. A broader regency of gold chapleted her head. The mists seemed to rarify at the yellow sun of her. I went and took her hand.

"I heard your sleepless moonings."

"And did not show a face?"

"Being sleepier than you! and their end, moreover, was so abrupt."

I said nothing of my narrow escape.

We walked to the parapet. Just then the dwarf, paddling near the shore, was returning from the chapel.

"Call him that he may take us back," she said.

"Already, Areta—already!"

"It is fitting now. Let us look with quiet joy——"

"Give me till noon."

"Till noon, persistent Numa? Well, till noon. You shall read to me in the castle. Call him that he may fetch the book."

"I will myself bring it. What book?"

"John Norris."

I set off rapidly in the shallop, passing on the way the dwarf, who was making for the terrace. In the chapel I lingered a very long time, and when I returned, returned without the book. I had forgotten it. Strong agitation, half joy, half fear, throbbed within me.

Areta, looking, saw my pale face, and caught its pallor, fore-

knowing. As I sprang to the stage, the dwarf, coming with a weighted basket from the castle, descended the steps to the boat.

"You were even now in the chapel?" I said to him.

"Yes, master."

"Did you miss sight of nothing?"

"Of nothing, sir."

"And all you found as usual?"

"Yes, master."

"What is it? What is it?" cried Areta.

I sprang to her side.

"Areta—love—I know not how—I swear to you—but the coffin and the body of your Sergius have vanished from the chapel."

Never could I have expected such result. With the sudden curvature of a cankered lily, her head drooped forward. Heavy she lay on me as a white column of Corinth aslant in arms of a bower of bindweeds. I bore her to a couch in the castle, and there till the gathering of darkness watched the wanness of her apathy.

She rose, a straining, a luminous strange questioning in her deep eyes; dashed back her hair; Niobe bereft; and instantly fled from the room. Swiftly as I followed, she was already far in the shallop when I reached the landing-stage. Having no boat, I sprang to the sands, and ran along them till stopped by a projecting cliff; thence made my way to the inlet through the sea, which at no point reached me above the middle. On the altar of the chapel a light glowed. Areta, sitting on the altar-step, pored upon chasms, a pity to see. Sergius had left not a rack. It was a second death of the beloved to her; a twice-whetted knife piercing home from breast to back; acuter than at first, suddenness lending point. She was such that her heart was as a quicksand, deep-secreitive of every cherished object. Excision implied always the drawing of blood, and, it might be, the tapping of life. And the vitality of her ideal view of the world was oil to these flames; the loved thing, held the creation of her own soul, grew into the substance of its god, pant of her pulse, beat of her blood. And the embalmed body was all she had possessed of her Sergius; for the unfinished stained head of her attempt had been thrown aside as worthless. Thinking so, I stood near, moved with pity. She lifted her eyes and saw me; flashed a ray of mistrust at me.

"How of the body, Numa?"

I started.

"Were it not well to question as to that the Elder Theodore?"

"The Elder? No! The Elder was in the Tower: I, standing by the parapet, saw no one pass on the water: the dwarf had the boat: left all as usual in the chapel! *his* strength could not have sufficed to move the weight: then *you* went to the chapel——"

Her head followed her wringing hands downwards. I was appalled at the close welding of this chain of inference.

"You suspect me? Areta! With what motive——"

"Alas! it is hard to tell: with no motive but one unworthy our race! Except indeed my fantasy be all awry—my love to him unknowingly estranged—or his to me—some punishment for I know not what——"

She stopped suddenly short, and together we darted wild eyes around the chapel in the infinity of new surprise. A voice in the air, in liquidest falsetto, in breathless impatience, called: 'Sergius! Sergius! Sergius!' And instantly from the depths of the black recess behind the reredos of the altar there slid like slanting light-rays through the air a little creature, a tenuous grey bird, an embodied breeze, a flash of life. It settled, still minstreling its luted sibboleth, to a fluttering rest in the panting bosom of Areta.

"Beatrix! Beatrix!" she called, in a note lucid-high as that of the tiny thing she fondled, "Beatrix! little herald! whisperer of his secret! fledged dove of my comfort! Thou art come then?" Close she hugged it, trouling, laughing, trilling, light-wheeling to the hint of a dance, a maiden-canephorus tripudiary in the comus of the Dionysia. The transit from despair to frolic was perfect. No question she asked as to whence the bird of Sergius had come after so long an interval. It was a heavenly benison—a dear revelation—unaccountable but real: she made no scrutiny. The slim-sloping little bird, nothing but a winged voice, unappeasably garrulous of its Becket vocabulary, throated and throated again its shrill *euion* of Sergius! Sergius!—and every twittered sesame availed to open wide the heart of Areta to ever a fresh flood of Libyan buoyancies. Breast fluttering to breast, she flitted and whirled with the new love to the door of the chapel; and, heedless quite of the old, floated rapidly in the shallop down the inlet. Following, I dimly saw her disappear behind a winding

of the rock; heard yet a last echo of the ceaseless pipe. Then walked drearily backward, as before, through the sea.

After this very many weeks passed away before I again looked upon the face of my love.

I won from the mysterious tongue of an old stepdame almost daily whisperings of her; how she spent herself upon the bird; fed it at every hour from her own hand; slept only tranquilly when it lay warm in the happy valley of her breasts; laughed with it, danced with it, was a wanton in the abandonment of her kisses; never wearied of the hypocrite zeal of its monotone. How sometimes, she would descend by a narrow stair to a side-garden of the castle, high-walled between two buttresses; dally there an hour or two; but how, as the suave winter of Phorfor drew on, her chamber had her always. This I learned. Several letters I wrote to her, protesting my innocence in the matter of the mummy; my constant longing for her; and once received a verbal reply that she would see me shortly. Hope burst at once into flower within me; but after many days of straining outlook, I dropped limp from my watch-tower, and fell to wide listless roamings over the domain. During all this time I was wary as to my life, knowing it in danger; kept circumspect eyes; barred my doors; never slept twice following in the same bed.

When the mourning-doves had once more resumed the practice of their elegies in the copses, I stood often near the small side-garden; and when spring had blown into still freshest summer, I quickened every day more ears at the gate than Typhon guardian-eyes before the garden of the daughters of Hesperus. Areta came at last one noon; I heard her step on the shells of the walk; the call of the bird. Outside I bent listening to her stirrings; listened till, after an hour, she walked back into the castle. At the same hour of the next day she returned. I, procinct with the sword of adventure, tapped at the wicket. She instantly lifted the latch, opened, and was before me, laughing cascades and carillons.

"Little Numa! *you?* say 'little Numa! little Numa!'"

"Sergius! Sergius!" shrilled Beatrix, picking a crush of grapes and rose-buds from her lips, upturned.

She was dressed only in a thin llama Greek robe of umber



brown, and through the shaken folds her limbs glanced, bluish to aspiration's eye, as limbs of new-sprung Aphrodite mirrored fluctuant among brown sea-weed in the Paphian shallows. Her head thrown far back gave me view of the full convex of her throat, white as brandished legs of hamadryads in Apidamian glens by moonlight. Blue-blooded Areta! long-legged!—she was younger than the summer; she was the hopeless Ideal to the spring of the *folie* of perfect loveliness.

We sat beneath an almond-tree in blossom, obstinate snow beneath the universal sweat and glisten of the sun. Before us a monarch-peacock, Argus-tailed, stormed its little hour on the path. The air of the garden was full of roses.

"And Numa has not been to see us!" she cried, billing to Beatrix, larks prattling to the sunlight in her voice.

"Sergius! Sergius!"

"Areta!—you are light with me."

"Not at all: I have been here: you might have come."

"But could I know——"

"You have been brooding upon the death of Sergius! He has been giving way to melancholy broodings upon the death of our sw-e-et, sw-e-et Sergius!"

"Sergius? Sergius?"

"I!—you certainly mistake me as to that. Sergius is dead, Areta—dead as flint—as carrion——"

"He vibrantly lives!"

"Dead, Areta! and so long ago——"

"Fie! you let Time delude you so? It was yesterday as much as a year ago, a thousand æons ago. Time is the counter by which ploughmen—and little sw-e-et Beatrixes—reckon the number of their successive ideas; we surely should feel in subtler algebras."

"That is so, Areta: that I know to be so: yet, as you must see this same Time is the fated element in which we breathe. And Sergius, as men reckon, actually did die——"

"Did I tell you that he dictated three far-meaning fantasias to me just before death? One of them had clear reference to this subject of Time, though of none have I been able to follow more than a footprint or two. Would you hear them?"

"Them—or anything you say to me."

She repeated the compositions, slinging a knee between

catapult arms, looking up, wondering at distance. Two of these, on later familiarity with them, I tried to translate into common English verse from the rhythmic Hebrew in which they were dictated; but I found their metrical parallelism packed with those archaisms and Chaldee-Aramæan enrichments (often obscure) in which the prophets delighted; so that owing to this, as well as to the extreme tenuity of their meaning at all points, I failed in the attempt. In the case of the opener third, however, I may have come somewhat better out of the thicket:

“Shapes in the Fire come and go: an orb from Scorpio swoons—(empurpled woe!) and horns hath she, and eyes, and lethal trance, and voice that, as she hies, the swan’s death-nocturne tunes.

“I see a headlong Messenger: her robe a crocus flame—(confide in *her*!); thrills shake her plumes amain: her passion’s load, the burthen of her pain, is the burthen of A NAME.

“There smiles a lady, veiled, in death; bright angels round her chaunt—(mellifluous breath!); she, from the viith sphere, regards the viith where gleams her lovely bier, and sighs her ancient haunt.

“List to the Organ’s roaring throat! Hymen’s loud *euois* swell—(triumphal note!); this day two souls entwine: their purple orgies drenched in aphrian wine, and Priap loves, a-dell!

“I doze below four lax-zoned moons: nude wails of woman rave—(lugubrious tunes!); nude, by a beach of bones, their pallid pomp in torchlit dolor moans, seeking a new-oped grave.

“Lo!—one I see—a child of man! his outlines laved in light—(complete in plan!); eternal smiles he wears: no clothing on his chiselled lustre bears, and yet is clothed in White.”

So for a long time I sat by Areta; she lithe as phosphorescence, and full of aery, moth-winged words; yet words infect always with the lues of Sergius and his mortality. And the next day she again admitted me to the garden; and so at every noon we sat beneath the almond-tree; and saw the long-trained peacock, proud as a lady, step; and talked together in the interludes of the Corybant *orgia* of Beatrix. Once she came with me beyond the garden-gate. It was a morning magnificently broad and bright.

Defly I snatched the bird from her finger, and before she knew my meaning, ran backwards with it to the castle; passed up a stone stairway, along three corridors, and so to her chamber; saw all windows closed; posited the bird up on her square low bed, of ivory, arabesqued in a fan-tracery of gold; reclosed the door; and flew back to regain her. She, coming to meet me, stood: rather scared to see at first: then, guessing my thought, with the shaken pendulum-shoulders of half-comic reluctance. Further and further that long day did I first, then she, beck like folly-fire into the glades of the forest; umbrageous valleys of Phorfor thick with dews and gloom; Calypso-antrums dishevelled with maiden-hair, for all that diamond intergleams of stalactics pin the frivolous tresses; azure-brown steep-banked rills we knew of old; boskets dim and tremulous and secret as the soul of treasure-finders; and where, at midnight, dumb footfalls beat to syrinxal lutings not of men, and routs of freakish ægipeds chase eye-sidling Kupris under the tense-lipped leer of the witched, subconscious moon. Areta, finding herself in the very lap of summer, was impotent; resigned herself; fled before me, unattainable, calling; was a town-bred *grisette* rolling concupicent in feathery beds of heather. Not till dusk did we return, languid; passed slowly by the terrace; saw the shallop bobbing in the quiet twilight by the landing-stage; and the large boat by the Tower-steps; round in the little garden fell wearily to the seat, she leaning a pale face against the tree-trunk; then, with closed eyes: "Haste and fetch me my little Beatrix."

As I passed along the second of the three angled corridors, I seemed to hear a rustling train on the floor of the third; but when I reached it, found it lonely. Entering the chamber, I looked for the bird; looked long in the agony of interest. Fearing, doubting, I returned to Areta.

Glancing, she saw me come from the door without the bird; and sprang pallid to her feet.

"Areta! the bird——"

Again that under-look of mistrust, heartpiercing!

"Where is she, Numa?"

"It is very singular—she seems to have left—or been taken from—the chamber——"

She, suddenly tragic, cried: "Oh why—why are you here to



plague me! If I but walk with you, talk with you—pain—bitter—falls to me——” drooped then to the seat, face caught in hands, weeping.

Presently she rose, and with grave bent head, walked slowly without speech into the castle.

Diligent search was made for Beatrix, the servants all requisitioned. Areta pined in her chamber; “heart-broken,” said her waiting-woman. Beatrix had swerved like a vision into the breaths of the wind, slipped quite back into the jaws of the abyssm whence she came. On the fifth evening, however, a letter, as I heard, was handed to Areta from the Elder Theodore. Though it was then near midnight, she at once set out alone; passed over the bay to the chapel; and the next morning sent word by the dwarf that daily food should be taken her from the castle, as in the days of her first seclusion.

That night I, too, took boat to the chapel. Areta, I found, had retired to her side-chamber. In front of the altar, on the spot where the body of Sergius once lay, another coffin, a malachite shell, now shimmered dully under a taper-glow; stretched, open, on the old trestles. In the headpiece was gold-inlaid the Key and angel-song, as before. Supine within lay a figure—a marble statue. I wondered at the minute burin, so intimate with the genius of death, subtle to catch in stone the inmost thought of the Azrael. Here was flesh twice mortal; here was Sergius himself, stiff-fixed in a sleep doubly eternal. As the Greeks in the days of their hairiest niceties over-painted every part of their marbles, wreathing the lips in rosy smiles of supernal loveliness; so here, with opposite hope was the figure painted over-all. Too clearly with opposite hope: for I knew not which to say prevailed in naked ghastliness, the stained face and slumbering lids, yellow as fennel; or the beard and lashes, matted black; or the leaden lips, or greenish ears, or livid finger-tips, or winding-sheet of gold.

As I stood regarding this effigy, lo, black velvet hangings parted before a doorway, and Areta, licked below the haunches by curling purplish tongues, loomed cold in a splendid unbroken gown of soft silk, all whiteness, like taper snowbergs, sun-smearcd, clear against the black of Polar precipices.

“You see, Numa,” she said, coolly splenetic in voice, “I am not all alone. The Elder, knowing my loss——”



"Stay, Areta!" I cried, "can it be that you still suspect me of that wanton act?"

"In the *first* case, I seemed to wrong you; in the second I knew not how to imagine—the inference looked so clear——"

"But you cannot believe this! I had no wish to rob you of your Beatrix! Were we not happy together? Can you not see that in all this there is a design deeper than our probing—a force stronger than we? That your suspicion is quite ill-aimed? and your trust?"

"Forgive me then if that be really so." Her voice mellowed. "The objects of our apprehension come and go, melt and harden before us in endless flux, and we are apt to seek for explanation in the activities of other minds, when perhaps it is we that vary in the temper of our loves and hates, passions and wills. At any rate, with the sight we now see before us I am well content; it has been graciously fashioned for me by the Elder's own cunning and will more than replace——"

"But, Areta! you will not look upon this hideousness from day to day—promise me——"

"Numa! it is the very placidity of Sergius in death; full of a mournful greatness. If to your eyes hideous, to mine far from that. But I will sleep now. In the day-time you will come and sit by me."

She turned and went.

As I passed over the water to the castle, a sudden thought took me, as when deserted ships are smitten fervently aback into new lays on a gusty day. It had reference to the Key and Angel-motto ordered by Sergius to be inlaid on his coffin, and it was the fresh sight of these that night which must have pricked me to the thought. A troubled instinct seemed to rise in me that the significance of the device—too well I knew Sergius to doubt that it had significance—might not be deeper than earnest study. I knew that he had *sung* the words to an air of his finding; that he had measured them out in metrical feet. For many days after this I kept close, profoundly engaged upon the task. Long years before, on reading the *Wanderjahre* of Goethe, I had wondered at the introduction of this figure into the work; wondered that so meaningful a writer, with no apparent reason, should plump this seemingly absurd drawing, without intimacy with the context,

into the thick of his seriously-intended book. The 'key' had then seemed to me not only very frivolous, but even rather stupid. But later on I came to the certainty that in Goethe's mind at least (with its strong bias towards the mystical) the figure was alive with some secret meaning; and now assurance was doubled in me; for I knew that this must have been the thought of Sergius also, to the flame-jet of whose genius the hardness of the riddle had doubtless soon solved to fluid clearness.

I reproduce the figure; and it may perhaps be well if I barely indicate the very slow and steep road by which I toiled to some sort of apprehension of the significance given by Sergius (and I presume by Goethe) to this singular key. And first I was led by the extreme non-resemblance of the figure itself to my own ordinary notions of the *genus* key, to ask myself for what reason the author could have chosen to call the drawing a "key" at all; and hence was confronted, in the first place, with the necessity of defining the word "key." What then, I asked myself, is a "key"? "That which opens," I at once answered; and that this is the commonest conception I was convinced by the occurrence in most languages of such metaphors as the "key of the situation," etc.: so Bosphorus was called the "key" of Pontus. But reflection showed me how far is this from a satisfactory definition; for crowbars open, hands, winds, many things; nor do all keys open, as in those cases where the casket or safe, once locked by one key, can only be re-opened by pressure upon a secret spring—a spring which is, in fact, *another* key. And what I needed was a definition inclusive of all keys, and exclusive of all other than keys. I was therefore compelled to step deeper, and then arrive at the

certainty that a key is that rather which *locks*—which alone locks; nor are any exceptions to this truth other than apparent, as when automatic locks fasten keylessly, in all which cases the key-principle is, of course, concealed in the mechanism; and this fact is expressed in the German Schlüssel (key), *i.e.* *locker*, and so with clef, clavis κλεις (all related to English cleave, close, include, etc.). The key, then, I said, locks, welds together; and I thus got the idea of binding force. But looking at the figure, I could not but observe how the



four small circles at the corners of the handle are bound to the large central circle by the two lines running at right angles within the handle; and how the fifth, further away, at the top of the key, is also (less directly) connected with the same large circle by the shaft, or body, itself. Whereupon there arose within me the conception of a sun *binding* to itself five surrounding planets; and instantly I remembered Areta's repetition of von Hardenberg's apothegm that "man is a sun of which his senses are the planets"—*four* senses (of sight, smell, hearing, and taste) closely connected with the cerebral centre of light and thought; and a *fifth* (of feeling) more distantly related to it by its diffusion over the body; there thus took shape in me the double notions of flame and human life: notions, indeed, so closely allied as to be almost one—as is proved not only by their interweaving in all the theosophies that have been, but by the common use in language of such expressions as "glow," "fire" of life; and etymologically by the identity between such words as *breath*, *spirit*, etc., and *purify*, *purge*, *fire*, etc., all connected with Greek *pur* (fire). With the notion, too, of flame is allied (indirectly through the notion of breath) the notion of *music*; especially of such music as is sung, or won from wind instruments. But, says Goethe, in reference to the key: "Does it not remind you of arrows with barbs? God help us!" Arrows with barbs—the unvarying symbol of flight with wings! and having reached this point, a glimmer of the connection between the key and the coffin-motto, "Fear not . . . he shall be great . . ." lit me—the motto *sung* by the *flaming* and *winged* and *human-shaped* messenger to the maiden of Nazareth; and since this motto had yielded to the scrutiny of Sergius a metre, and been hymned by him to a melody, I no longer doubted that in the key would in very deed be found the key to this melody.

Remembering, then, my twin notions of flame and the human being, I set myself to seek in the key itself more definite expression of them; nor was it long before I observed that the whole figure is little more than a reproduction over and over again of the figure ♀; this figure, it will be seen,





is formed by the "binding" lines in the handle with each of the small circles at the corners; and formed again by each of them with the large central circle; and formed again by the shaft with the circles at its top and bottom; above all the whole key, if inverted, is, in its *ensemble* (omitting the barbs or *wings*), a general reproduction of it. But the figure  $\varphi$  is the antique and most elementary conceivable representation of the *wingless* human form, regarded as consisting of head and body; it also represents a burning and haloed candle or torch; a globed lamp; a tailed and flaming comet.

The figure  $\varphi$ , then, I assumed to be the *rationale* and *motif* of the whole key; and having determined this, I could not fail to remember that this very figure is also the obsolete Greek letter *koppa*. Now, *koppa* occurring between *pi* and *rho* would, had it been retained in the alphabet, have occupied the very place which the central *u* now occupies in the word *pur* (fire); it accordingly corresponds with our Latin *q*, and its line extended upward through its circle in fact makes a kind of double-*q*:  $\varphi$ . But as the whole Key, inverted, is *koppa*, so *q*, inverted, is none other than *b*; and the elements of this letter *b* (a semi-circle and a straight line) are actually formed no less than eight times in the key by means of the "binding" lines and the central circle. If, then, the Key indeed represented the key of the melody sung by Sergius, I had at last (remembering the flat delineation of the figure) the tangible result of B flat. And in this conclusion I was confirmed, when I considered that by means of the "binding" lines within the handle, in conjunction with part of the central circle, and part of the curves bounding the whole handle, the elements of the "flat" sign in music are produced no less than eight times over: thus  $\flat$ ; and now I was able to see for what reason these boundary curves had not been made to bulge *outward* (a conformation which would have made the key a perfect *koppa*) instead of inward: for the inward curve was absolutely necessary in order that they might touch the central circle at four points, and so help to produce the eight repetitions of the character  $\flat$ .

It now only remained for me to take the Hebrew version of the words "Fear not," etc., and write down all the successive letters corresponding to the first seven (*a* to *g*) of the Latin alphabet: I



thus obtained my *notes*. *Time* I determined by dividing two such letters, if they occurred consecutively by the semi-quaver, using quaver, minim, or crochet as one or more of the letters subsequent to *g* intervened. (In this convention I counted the Hebrew vowel-points as real letters.) Turning now to the organ, and trying my result in the key of B flat on the treble notes, I won—as any one may henceforth win—an air so Orphic-wild, and—to *my* seeming—so mournful, that it bore me captive as it floated upward; an air, too, at which the ears of memory pricked: I gradually coming to realize that this was no other than the very tune which in early childhood I had heard from Sergius.

All this time I sat often with Areta beside the statue. Autumn and winter supervened. Her quick fictile spirit likened more and more to the marble shape of gloom upon which she looked. “Deaths dreeriment” prevented and pervaded her. She sat and read and wove and gazed. Her mood deepened to resemblance with that of the more hyper-spiritualistic of the Herrnhüters, and the Moravian and Bohemian brethren—the complex religiosity of the Brahmin *yati* basing itself upon the simple Christian faith. Her only books now were Spinoza’s *Ethics*, and the three treatises of Jacob Böhme: The high and deep searching of the three-fold Life of Man according to the Three Principles; the Introduction to the real Knowledge of the Great Mystery; and the Supersensual Life. She reverted to her habit of watching through the night, and sleeping by day; she clothed herself in the black habit of a recluse; the wanness of long fastings made her in the grey darkness of the chapel stranger than water-ladies hair-wringing beneath unnatural gloatings of the moon; her diet was cream thickened with raw crushed Persian apples. I wondered that two environments could so of one make two: such varieties were infinite in Areta! Not now was she the same but lately mænad-irrational with the lechery of spring. One link only seemed to bind her any more to me: her eagerness that I should convert to sympathy with her feeling. It was a quiet settled mania with her. She besieged me with meek persistence at every point.

“Little Numa,” she said, taking my hand in her two, “were you not ever my unrelenting shadow, hot-hunting me whither I fled from you? So now must you follow me where I go—as I *him*.”

She kissed me, once and again, motherly-familiar, on the forehead, I manoeuvring flagrant lips to the tingling transport of her cheek.

"And where that is you know. Is it not"—summoning the *Uebersinnliches Leben* of Böhme—"there where no creature dwelleth? where, having ceased from all thinking and willing, we hear what God unspeakably speaketh? To be real sovereigns of nature and ourselves, must we not be silent and quiet, and then are we as God was before nature and creature. We must learn to distinguish between the thing and that which is only the image of it; that which is properly angelical, and that which is no more than bestial. For"—what says the writing?—"if thou rulest over the creature externally only, and not from the right inward ground of thy renewed nature, then is thy ruling verily in a bestial kind, and a sort of imaginary government; but if thou hast put off the bestial or ferine nature, then thou art come into the Super-imaginariness, which is a state of being above figures and shadows: and so rulest over all, being reunited to thy original in that very source out of which they came; and henceforth nothing on earth can hurt thee, for thou art all things, and nothing is *unlike* thee."

She held my hand: she kissed me—lingeringly—again and yet again, on the brow.

But I: "Yet here you seem wayward, Areta. As for me, I fly from my mast the flag of Sergius. Sergius and Jacob Böhme, it seems clear, looked through eyes of different-coloured irises. For, so far from bidding you cease from all willing, did he not say"—was it not his last word to you—"give to every passion its rein——"

"Sh-h-h!" She extinguished my mouth with swift smothering hand, "you cannot suppose that the maxim will fit *you*—rudderless little Argonaut that you are! Nor yet me. Sergius it fitted: for in him every 'passion' was spiritual, and winged colt born of that instinctive mother-purity of his, which everywhere saw God: to give to such its rein was to be snatched into heaven. But *you*—thick, all clay——"

She swooped like a fishing-bird upon a sighted kiss in my hair.

But I again: "And is clay then, Areta, less divine than spirit?"

Not so, I am certain, did Sergius think. 'Give,' he said, 'to every song its dance'—and to you he said this, specially to you. Ah, Areta! is not body sweet as soul? Does not God beat and burn in both? To feast then must be divine as to fast: to kiss sublime as to pray. For is He not kiss, and kissed, and kisser; prayer and shrine, and pilgrim? So said Sergius."

A disdainful sidling look, pouting resentment, kept her from answer.

One night—it was then beginning spring—she, looking upon the statue-face, said, frowning:

"I somehow seem conscious of some sort of change. Look, Numa, see if the same effect is not wrought upon you, too."

I looked, but shook my head. Yet the change, very gradually growing from day to day, had long been far from unknown to me.

"And with this consciousness of change, Areta, does not your fondness for the marble lessen?"

She seemed astonished.

"How could that come? You appear to cling most persistently to the notion of some inherent reality in the things we see. If I see a thing, which I *know* can be nothing more than the image of my own mind, must I not also know that any seeming change in it is an exact reflection of some real change in me, by some means produced? so that, supposing I love the thing, my relative position to it must be at all times unaltered; and love, so long as it can realize the identity of the thing, follows it through all its modifications, as Boötes hunts Harmaxa, or as the suns in the tail of the Bear follow it through all its circlings round the Polar star."

"But suppose," I said, "you know the *means* by which the change is wrought in you—the definite will of another mind working upon yours; suppose, for instance, the Elder, willing that you should be conscious of change in this statue, effected his purpose, in the fashion taught by experience to be possible and easy, by applying to it a burin, while you slept——"

"In that case, indeed, some loves might spread wings from their object; but as for me, even in that case, I feel sure—and your supposition is as wild as little Numa hunting hares of old on the mountains!"

She caught my head between antipodean hands, and dipped at it a steep kiss, motherly-playful.

Little by little Spring slackened her girdle, swelling nymphic-gravid. Change in the statue now grew amain.

For this, not Theodore, but I, was responsible. Despair at its ghastliness and the deepening gloom of Areta had spurred me at last to come to the chapel during her sleeping-hours, and with furtive tremulous chisel to soften the face into a semblance somewhat more life-like; the chipped part I would then resmear with a hue less lethal, yet not too discrepant. And the effect upon her was very quickly evident.

One noon a mountebank, from a townlet beyond the mountains, arrived laggard at Phorfor. I hurried to the chapel.

Down a side-aisle I ran to her chamber. She slept. I intruded my head between the velvet hangings of the door-way, and called: "Areta! Areta!"

She was as when the first presentiment of morning stirs in the plumage of the eider-duck; strained the ivory coronal of a bare arm lazily round her head; jerked suddenly stark, as in the last throe before death; and lay outlined sideways, hills and a central mountain in Lilliput under the thin green coverlet, eyeing me through imbecile eyes.

"Areta! a punchinello!"

"A punchinello! O joy . . ."

Fleeter than the ether wings of instinct, more oilily than interfluent mercury, she leapt instantly before me, standing hot and rosy, clean-cut through the smoke-puff of a night-veil of gauze. Then quickly scarlet with remembrance——

"Numa! go . . ."

I waited in the chapel, dubious, yet buoyed on the memory of all the craze and fervours which the appearance of a mountebank had meant to Areta, a girl.

She came presently, dressed in black. And mournfully negative, said:

"I cannot go with you."

"How! you will not let the man return——"

"Let him be fed and paid."

"I certainly shall not stir without you, Areta."

She stood looking at the changing statue.



Then rushing furiously downward at its eyebrow a skew and still-born kiss, throttled my wrist. "Come then!" Dragged me toward the door.

We sat beneath the almond tree of the little garden, and the punchinello set his stage and puppets before us; fussy puppets with breath to grin, and caper, and perorate. Areta looked—mostly pale, averted,—with nostrils panting thorough-bred; now and then flushing into crimson; now and then rippling into sheer oblivion of laughter. The new sunlight seemed to wind her with ecstasy. That night I was able to force her to sleep once more in the castle. The greater part of it I spent in chiselling at the statue.

In the morning I returned with her to the chapel, she guilty and silent. We stood by the altar-rail—for a long time stood dumb, gazing on the emptiness where the statue had lain. The spirit of its pallid granite had passed into Areta; only, she just moved her head measurely from side to side, woe-ridden. Two hours before I had left the coffin safe by the rail.

All at once paroxysmal in queenliness, horizontal from shoulder-blade to rosy-armed forefinger-tip, she cried to me—"Oh go! go!—far from Phorfor—whence you came——"

I bowed. The suddenness of high blood had ever been a trait of our race, nor was I all undowered with its quiet-quick arrogance. I bowed—and walked instantly from the chapel, through the sea, to the castle.

So then Areta had dismissed me as a hireling from the ancient home of my family. I passed to my chamber, crammed a few pieces of clothes into a travelling-bag, and descended to the stables at the back. I saddled my horse, and was about to mount, when the dwarf, appearing from behind an angle, shambled briskly toward me, and handed me a parchment.

"From whom?"

"The Elder Theodore, master."

I broke the seal, and read:

"The Lady Areta has now commanded you from Phorfor. I, her protector, suggest that this injunction meet instant obedience.

"THEODORE."

On the document I made haste to scribble in pencil the words: "I shall *not* go: and I defy you, Theodore"; handed then the parchment to the dwarf; unsaddled the horse: and returned to my chamber.

The thought which shadowed me all the day was the wonder that Theodore should know of Areta's "go! go!" He had heard it, then: but how? We two stood alone in the chapel; his boat was by the Tower. Had he asses' ears? My faith in magic, to Areta possible as nature, was small. I sought deeply for explanation. I remembered how, praying one night by the coffined Sergius, a taper-flash seemed to glance behind me in the chapel: yet Theodore's boat was by the Tower. And I thought of the fall of luminous powder as I harped beneath the turret-window: yet the boat was by the Tower. And from what hand had Beatrix flown to us out of the chapel-recesses? How had she disappeared? The boat was then by the Tower.

At midnight I dressed in white, and crawling flat-faced along the marble terrace, reached the landing-stage; thence dropped to the sands; and so, still crouching, entered the sea, four-square; with hands bloody from the barbed star-fish of the bottom, I came to the inlet, fairly sure that I had thus cheated the eyes of Theodore. Having reached the reredos-end of the chapel, I struck light to a taper, and passed straight onward through a draped doorway. Never beyond this point had I dared before, nor, as I knew, had Areta, nor Sergius. A long and steep corridor, with branches veining out every-way stretched before me. After hours of search, I found that the alcoves, vaults, chambers of every shape, both along the main corridor and its ramifications, were past numbering. Many of these were doorless; many had doors, but open, admitting me to examination; one only, near the end of a long and very precipitate corridor which was the branch of a branch, hid from me behind a locked door. The position of this I marked, and judging that the time had now come when the night shudders into a deeper gloominess at the instinct of the near darts of morning, I returned with like secrecy to the castle.

At the next midnight I crawled back with the same furtiveness to the chapel, and made for the marked door. I carried a bunch of old keys, one of which chance at length fitted to the

lock: there was no creaking, and I guessed a well-used mechanism. Within I found a large chamber, black every-way with its own bare rock, and empty. I walked round it, once and again, and met everywhere—nothing. Surprised, I again set out, holding the taper high; but happening now to come nearer one of the corners than before, I stepped upon air; plunged downward into the throat of an abyss; and bumping in my descent upon steep stone gradients, arrived at the bottom all shock and amaze. But I held the taper: in five minutes I was conscious of this. And light was in my pocket. I rekindled the flame, and found myself at the angle of two subterranean galleries. And now truth dawned upon me. For it was clear from their general directions that of these, one led beneath the sea to the Tower, and one beneath the inlet and the land to the vaults of the castle.

Here, too, having passed cautiously along the Tower-gallery, I found a honeycomb—clefts and crannies everyway, veins, chambers. The chief artery itself was full of windings, angles. For about two hours old Erebus blinked in every nook at the innovating flicker of my taper. I went so far sea-ward as to see the steps leading down from the Tower: their length showed me the great depth of the excavation beneath the water. Then back again into the side-catacombs, eyes stepping in my careful feet, a thief in the night, all leers and tremors. Once, far in the labyrinth, I stumbled over some rock-debris. Instantly there was an answering sound: a faint stirring as of shaken plumage, and this barely-whispered, sleepily-voiced interrogatory: "Sergius? Sergius?"

It came from behind a bolted door opposite where I stumbled. I drew the staple; entered; roused grey Beatrix in her hung cage of reeds to a sage lateral interest of round eyes in me; saw the mummy of Sergius in its shell; and near it the statue in its coffin; then, knowing morning near, rebolted the door; returned to the chapel-level; locked the door of the stair-chamber; and with elaborate secrecies made my way to the castle.

Before midnight of the same day I had toilsomely lifted the statue-weight from its coffin, and round its neck fastened a provided rope: with this, having slung the Beatrix-cage upon my back, I dragged draught-cattle-wise, barked at by Cerberus echoes. Progress was slow. The taper, carried in an alternate



resting hand, showed me now, what I had previously noticed indeed, but not in such numbers—large cloth bags, stuffed with some soft substance, laid here and there on the ground of many parts of the labyrinth. Resting, I happened to see a little of the powder which as (I concluded) filled the bags, spilt by chance at my feet; it was grey, and I remembered the descending mass beneath the turret-window. I stooping to examine it, a flake of hot grease fell near. The powder instantly volleyed me such a hoot, that space seemed to split fragmentary round me, and I woke to sense prostrate against the wall, deaf but to the booming buzz of my own waltzing brain, and blind but to the two bluish round ghosts that hovered before me in the darkness. When I had relighted the taper, Beatrix was still fluttering and screaming with fright. I had now passed through the length of the vein, and was near the main artery. I dragged the statue after me up a step, and proceeded slowly on this final stage toward the stair. I had not consumed many yards, however, before there sounded upon my palsied consciousness from behind an angle of the corridor the stalk of an approaching step—and, O Heaven, the rustle of silk. I spun motionless, fled riveted, was fixed in sick gyrations, like the statue of a whirlwind, was everything in a moment and nothing, a circle in flesh, symbol of infinity, sign of zero. But only for one eternal instant: in the next I had extinguished my light, had lifted the statue in my arms, and, shuddering under the incubus, had plunged into the dark orifice of a cranny near me; just as Theodore, holding a candlestick, loomed into view. He came close, tremendous, heavy, veiled, himself a phalanx, a marching pyramid—passed close to my breath, unsuspecting—went yet a few strides beyond: when Beatrix, tempted, called, as if uncertain, "Sergius? Sergius?" Theodore stopped statuesque, angled his head sideward; his ears a pair of scales, zealous to weigh the very dust of sound; and so for a full minute stood. Hearing nothing, he again strode two steps forward; and again the new sound stirred the bird to call, briskly now and loud. Theodore turned, hesitating, came towards me, glanced at the black mouth in which I hid, and passed somewhat beyond. Once more the bird uttered a note, and once more he halted short, the stone monument of an ear, grandly patient, his back towards me broadly immobile. Not



now did I hesitate a moment: my shoes were already done off. Creeping from my retreat, I drew on tiptoe near him, all bloodless, collected, a concentrated corpse, and stretching a sudden head above his shoulder, puffed utterly out the flame of his candle. An "Ah—h— . . ." broke from him like the menace of thunder. I flew back to my cranny, expecting him now to return to the Tower for new light; instead of which he immediately came in my direction, and walked away towards the chapel, blocking my exit! In the chapel, I knew, he would procure a light, and return armed. I, clasping desperation to my bosom, grasped the statue-rope, and tugged towards the Tower; and finding progress all too slow, summoned the cracking thews of Atlas, and lifted the burthen, running, laying it down, running again, until I stood at the foot of the Tower stairway. All this time, Beatrix, wildly swinging in her cage, was two ecstatic winnowing-fans in a granary of chaff. From the step-foot I half hoisted, half dragged, the burthen up the stairway, and had overcome more than threequarters of its steep length, when I beheld Theodore heaving rapidly towards me along the corridor a mountain in travail, steel glinting in his right hand, as when a regiment winks moving on the hillside. Upon the strength of Atlas I piled the fury of Samson—the statue grew light at my maniac tendons. Before the Elder of the Tower had halved the stairs, my head was prising up the trap-door of iron above: it gave sluggishly—I urged and hunted the statue through the aperture—pelted myself madly after it—and slapped down the ponderous metal upon the snapped point of Theodore's blade.

Having spindled the hasp on the top of the trap-door, I found myself in a dark room; but quickly discovering the locked door, the key of which projected inwardly, I opened it, and easily towed the statue over the glazed bricks of the flooring to the boat by the Tower-steps. The wakeful dwarf, dumb at my apparition, gazed upon me with fish-mouth vacant as his eyes. I was soon by the landing-stage, and so with my burthen reached the castle. Looking in the darkest morning from a casement, I dimly discerned Theodore wading to the Tower through the sea—vast as a reef when it awfully forges through the fog athwart the drifting mariner.

. . . . .

I cull some few sentences from a journal which I kept at this time:

*Elaphebolion*, 3rd (*hist.*). Areta, then, will not see me. Will let me go without one last look or word. My note of to-day was the third in which I have declared my power to prove the quite natural means by which her mementoes of Sergius have disappeared. She sends no answer. Her old waiting-woman has been with me again by stealth: is all in my favour, and full of sibilant talk, breathless news. Theodore, it seems, plies Areta with missives: warns her presumably against seeing my face. I work all the night, and nearly all the day, upon the statue and the bird. The thought that I have thereby made the spirit of Areta somewhat brighter will be to my exile like fruit in winter: she will see my hand, my care for her, and remember how I loved.

*Elaph.* 4. This day I have received the first message from Theodore since the incidents in the galleries. My minute outlook seems to have filched him of the hope of assassinating me by cryptic drugs and dirks. And so open murder is to sit arbiter upon us. His parchment was a conjugation of the verb dare: you dare, you have dared! "We cannot *both* abide at Phorfor." Foolish old man! he does not know how soon Phorfor will heave a rid bosom at me. I wrote on the parchment: "*I will not go. Swords punctually at midnight of the 9th in the chief underground gallery of the chapel.*" An hour after the answer came: "It is well."

*Elaph.* 5. I am toiling as before at the statue and the bird.

*Elaph.* 6. By the 9th all will, I conclude, be ready. I shall leave a note for Areta, and set out by dawn of the 10th, provided only that Theodore's sword do not prove longer than my life.

*Elaph.* 7. Areta's room is constantly warm with her: so the old dame reports. The Mahlström of the spring, it is clear, has not caught her in its now widening whorls. The three last troparions of Sergius she has written out afresh, and studies them long. These, and a few books marked with his name, are all she has of him.

*Elaph.* 8. This day I have been pondering upon my appointed meeting with Theodore. An unwillingness has arisen and grown almost compulsory within me. He is an old man; many reasons

come to me. Yet he must not think me dreadful of his power. Time must decide for me.

On the 9th no entry appears. During the evening of that day I sat and wrote my letter of farewell to Areta. The room was the one in which I had chiefly lived of late; vastly domed; tapestried in Utrecht velvet of red, but blood-black under the orbed moon of pink light pendent from the centre. It jutted from the castle on the second stage, somewhat basilica-shaped, the roof being low and flat over the semi-circle at the far end. On one side it looked east towards the mountains, and west over the bay on the other. A palisade of taper stained-windows, Gothic-mullioned, surrounded it. Half the length of the west side was filled by a ponderous organ, the most important of the three in the castle. I sat and wrote my letter, and had not finished, when, hearing an opened door, I looked, and saw, to my confusion, Areta herself stand; simple in silver-white linen *chiton*, zoned with gold-cloth; an azure and rosy diamond in her forehead flirting lissom at hide-and-seek with the various spirit of light.

A thick sadness veiled her face.

"I have come, Numa, in friendship, to bid you farewell—having just heard of your resolve to go from us to-morrow."

"Ah, that is kind. And you do not fear the Elder's malison, I hope?"

"I fear nothing, Numa. But you speak lightly, sir, of the great Theodore."

We sat together on a couch within a small recess. The hangings before us half hid us from the room.

"It is a pity," she said, "that you have so acted as to rouse his gentle mind to displeasure. You and he cannot, it is certain, now live upon the same atmospheres. One must disappear—you are a boy—he hoar with the snows of reverence—ah me!"

"Yet not for the displeasure of Theodore do I go: be sure of that, Areta: but because you, with your own lips, have bid me."

"That was the mere wind of the blow which struck me; the flash of the sword which pierced me. I was deeply wounded, you must know. Forget that, Numa. But now a far stronger reason urges. Theodore is mortally angry with you, sir."

"And because I have committed the sin of loving you."

"Of——? No! of *not* loving me, you mean."

"Areta! why, the pebbles on the beech moan with the torment of their thirst when you pass on them—the callous heart of ocean flares into scarlet flames at you! And how have I shown this impossible lack of love? By removing, of course——"

"Yes, Numa."

"But in that case my only motive must have been jealousy, which is but the yellow mustard-flower of love."

"And some such half-notion it was which has helped me towards softer thoughts of you. Yet it was a base jealousy—of one far nobler than you—and so venomous bitter in its effects——"

"And now, if after all it be not true that I did remove your treasures, Areta?"

"In each case the Elder saw you in the act: in his wisdom, though absent in space, not merely saw, but foreknew: and warned me beforehand that if I laughed with you, went abroad with you, you would be led to do so and so, with such and such motive. All which unheeding, I rushed on, and was punished."

"Have you slept to-day, Areta?"

"Yes."

"Then stay with me to-night—the last—till midnight, at least. It will be a memory to me."

"And why midnight?"

"I may leave you then for a while. Before, I should without advantage pain you by turning all you hold light into the blackness of darkness; your childhood's *eidolon* of truth into the very Isis of lies. But after midnight, if fortune steer my steel, I may to good purpose hold to your eyes lenses rather less distorting."

She did not understand. We sat together silent. The spaces of the night marched by us. She was the grey symbol of apathy beside me, a grey peri in the gloom of the recess, still wearing on her pensive forehead the jewel without name of her lost celestial home. Did she not care that I should leave her lonely in the morning? Was Sergius still the just dead bridegroom of her widowhood? She took from the *sinus* of her dress a small roll, the three new-written fantasias of his deathbed. Pored



over them in the dim light, bent, forgetting me. Then suddenly vocal :

"What, think you, did he mean by 'suns whose rays are *living lutes*'?"

"I cannot tell, Areta. Read the whole."

The cooing doves of her voice were like a bath of lukewarm luxury to my wallowing. She read the poem.

"Sergius best knew his own winged meanings, Areta: they may, as you once said, have been prophecy, or rhapsody, or prayer."

"The *second* was the prayer of a Moses dying at sunset on Pisgah."

She read it, bent grey in the gloom.

"The third seems mere poetry."

"Do not think so!—he never conceived *mere* poetry."

This too she commenced slowly to read:

"Shapes in the Fire come and go:  
an orb from Scorpio swoons—  
(empurpled woe!)  
and horns hath she, and eyes,  
and lethal trance, and voice, that as she hies,  
the swan's death-nocturne tunes.

I see a headlong Messenger:  
her robe a crocus flame—  
(confide in *her*!)  
thrills shake her plumes amain:  
her passion's load, the burthen of her pain,  
is the burthen of A NAME."

"Areta!" I cried, breaking in, ecstatic. A sudden flash seemed to enkindle a whole landscape of truth to me. "Areta, love!" I sprang to my feet. "A crocus flame!—thrills shake her plumes—my God! the burthen of a *name*! You shall see!" Heedfulness died in me, moderation, remembrance, and hurrying to an opposite recess, I dashed aside the draperies, mounted on moveable steps, and threw wide the doors of a high-hung cage. There was a stirring, a meditation, a poisoning, and instantly a little

saffron bird, yellow-bright as orpiment, took flight, clipping with twinkling tongue and wing a ruled and fluid pathway through the air—alighting upon the high white bosom Areta spread to it.

Her face changed to the beaming sunlight of joy. She knew Beatrix, though changed by my earnest lavings from the grave grey of Sergius to her native gold of Canary.

"And thou hast come back to thy Areta's soul"—whispering low—"ah wild, wild aeronaut"—hugging it to her throat—"come back in gaudier robes—and yet I love, I love, I love thee just so, too—no other than just so, little prodigal! But say your master's name—lisp, lisp it to my secret ear—sw-e-et—Sergius!"

"Numa! Numa! Numa!" shrilled Beatrix, recovered in breath, eloquent of the briefer euphony of my own arduously inculcated name.

Areta slid into waltzing with the bird, her head tossed back, laughing.

"O changeling Beatrix! O wanton breeze! O whirling whisp! What, another name, then? No longer deserted Sergius? And does the new-launched burthen loll move lightly, then, on the ebb and flow of its little, little, liquid throat? Ah, it is well! it is well!"

We sat again within the recess, the bird swiftly fickle from her to me, an incessant slim bobbin zealous for the net, a frantic ploughshare in the sands, stitching us together with a million airy threads. Numa was her constant burthen.

"Confide in *her*, Areta! ha, love! can you not now believe that the mighty soul of your brother lovingly foreknew me?"

She looked upon me and smiled.

A huge clock of greenish-black augite under the rosy central lamp tolled midnight.

"It is midnight. Whither was it you spoke of going?"

"Nowhither, Areta. I will not leave you to-night."

The indecision had frozen together into sudden resolve within me. No blood, I decreed, of me or by me, should spill at that final parting-time. Theodore, if he dared, might think one of my race a coward. In the morning he would know me gone for ever.

But I rose, and bearing the steps to one of the high western windows, mounted upon them, and slightly opening a stained

half on one side of the mullion, peeped through. Theodore would probably go to the meeting-place by the underground way, but if he took boat, I was there to wave him signal of my changed purpose. He would not wait to see me leave the terrace in the shallop, knowing that I now knew the subterranean way from the vaults of the castle.

Several minutes passed; then concluding that he had by that time reached the *rendezvous* I commenced to descend; but was arrested—seeing a shadow, the shadow surely of Theodore, pass by a blind of the Tower. Awe and confusion filled me, dread of his dreadful subtlety. What woof did he weave? He was not in the Tower having *returned* from the meeting-place: for this the time since midnight was utterly insufficient. He had not therefore gone at all. But for what reason? As I stood debating, a horrible bursting and cracking, uproars of wrack and shock, earth-heavings, throbbed and thundered at my ear, loosened my knees. Enceladus, compact with tremors, crawled beneath us. The castle, flicked but by the tail of the explosion, shivered as with the coldness of horror. Looking in the direction of the chapel, I saw the wide winging of smoke, flying rocks, a dull lurid flare. Then I knew in my hurrying heart how precipitous was the ruin I had shunned; how stern, majestic the wrath of Theodore. There came a moment of lull—a sickening treachery of peace—and in the next instant the Tower in the sea sent up to heaven a wild shrieking bellow, and from the centre of its summit an infinite clean spear of crimson and blue and greenish flame laddered yells of horrid menace to the stars. The earth-shock, immeasurably fiercer in its effects than its author's thought, had communicated the fury of its fires along the underground gallery to the witches' cauldron of volatile chemicals in which Theodore brewed the sorceries of his dark will. The Tower throed, and frittered, and spat red bricks as a grounded pugilist his bloody teeth. For a moment, on the topmost parapet of all, a hunted monumental form appeared—a veiless face—with a similitude of excrescent horns on the forehead—a face which was but a dead and thick and featureless lump of lavender-leprous flesh, lit and lashed by scorpion whips of flame from his silken robes and wide-burning fleece of hair; but the gallery cracked from under him; he lurched ponderously, and lancing

a far-circling shrill, empurpled, to my fancy, with a strange chaunted hint and cadence of a death-melody, fell—like holocausts slung flaring from the battlements of heaven—old Lucifer hurtling rotary in somersaults of steep combustion through the interspaces. And immediately thereupon the whole fabric burst, and rumbled down upon him, building him a funeral mound of hissing bricks broad above the surface of the water.

Of all this Areta had seen nothing. She stood in the middle of the room, three-eared, with lifted auditory hand.

"O Numa, tell me—what is it?" she cried, wan in voice and face.

I led her by the hand to the recess.

"Listen, Areta, and believe serenely that all is of God—the Elder Theodore is dead."

She doubled, hiding her face in her lap.

"Dead. . . ."

To her it was the dissilience of whole Scorpio from the zodiac.

I, in solemn peace, spoke low, unveiling all. Her face was buried from me; she made no sign; only, when I told how that Theodore had lied to her, she shook her head, quick-sobbing:

"Oh no, no, no. . . ."

For a long time then we sat speechless. Her face I could not see, but I knew it veiled with the crape of tragedy. The spaces of the night marched by us. The clock chimed three.

"What can *he* have thought, seeing all?"

"Sergius?"

"Yes."

"Sergius, I incline to think, probably mastered long before death, to a far greater degree than you or I, Areta, the alphabeta of that dark Sanscrit in which Theodore's soul languaged itself. But he, like Theodore, is dead now; and it can be of little moment to us what he thinks."

There was silence between us for a while, till she, as if reasoning with her own thoughts, said, "But strange! strange!" and began again to read slowly the vision of Sergius:

Shapes in the Fire come and go:  
an orb from Scorpio swoons—  
(empurpled woe!)



and horns hath she, and eyes,  
and lethal trance, and voice that, as she hies,  
the swan's death-nocturne tunes.

I see a headlong Messenger:  
her robe a crocus flame—  
(confide in *her*!)  
thrills shake her plumes amain:  
her passion's load, the burthen of her pain,  
in the burthen of A NAME.

There smiles a lady, veiled, in death;  
bright angels round her chaunt—  
(mellifluous breath!);  
she, from the viith sphere,  
regards the viith where gleams her lovely bier,  
and sighs her ancient haunt.

List to the Organ's roaring throat!  
Hymen's loud *euviois* swell—  
(triumphal note!):  
this day two souls entwine:  
their purple orgies drenched in aphrian wine,  
and Priap loves, a-dell.

"But," I cried aloud, suffused, and, as it were, electrically shocked, by a revelation, "this—this was no voice of man, but of a glowing spirit from heaven!" and rushing to the organ, I furiously filled its mighty frame with wind; sat before the notes, and in victorious euphony, in pealing acclamation, I sent boasting and gaudent through the timid silence of the morning the angel-song of Sergius. The air was his intact; but instead of the sad minor-key, transposition to a major; instead of the solemn serenity, the light step and golden pomp of wedding marches. The bass was my own. Never so shall I play again. Areta was behind me, her hand on my shoulder, trembling; her face pressed hot to mine. Beatrix, long since flown to her sleepy perch, but pricked to sympathy by the practice of her own native art, warbled a continuous drowsy serenade of my

name. All this has self-maturing memory brought me back. But for the time I was lost to sense. Music was a well of living water within me; the broad bosom of the organ shivered at me as when a Pegasus finds its unappeasable rider. I leaned faint upon it when my tyranny was accomplished.

"O Numa"—her two hands on my shoulders, her face a rosy lake-ripple looking up at dawn—"O Numa, you have——"

She stopped.

"And whence, of whence, have you drawn this power over me? You seemed to me a little Numa-god as you played!"

"The piece, you see, is changed in movement and key from the melody as sung by Sergius."

"Changed—and glorified."

A pain went lightning through me.

"You like it better so?"

"Yes—that even *must* be."

"The written music, if I go in the morning, you shall have."

"If you go. But not the pippling of every popinjay is a prophecy, nor the whisper of every wind a warning!"

She laughed, mocking my impotence.

"And do you not see it surely true, Areta, that the great soul of your Sergius lovingly foreknew me?"

Her look rested upon my face: her hand fell to mine.

We sat again within the recess. I opened to her the pit whence I had digged the lost jewel of the melody. Grey spaces of the morning now shivered past like home-turning ghosts. After long intimacy with her, I bent the trickle of our talk to our child's friendships, delights and abandonments together in the deep places of Phorfor. She turned herself from me.

"Children," she said, "are——"

"Yes?"

"Are——"

"Tell me!"

"Sensual."

The word rived her with a shudder; but if of luxury, or if of self-retention, I could not say.

And men too, Areta, and women. Is it not the barm of the Holy Spirit lovingly uneasy in our bodies? So said Sergius."

She made no answer. Stealthy mists of seriousness had again

crept gradually large around her. Contact was no longer possible. She became burrs to me and a battery, memorable to pilgrim fingers. The shadow of some thought in her stretched between us.

Morning threw wide casement after casement: the cock was as a herald with clarion vacillant between hand and lip, tiptoe-parturient with the yet unvoiced evangel: Behold the Bridegroom.

An aged man-servant for whom I had drawn back the lever of a bell, appeared, bearing comfitures on a salver, and a hama of wine. I, pouring a glassful, presented it to her.

"No! the day now begun is marked as a fast-day with me."

"See, Areta, how the night hops away with bedraggled wing, like a faint, wounded raven:

'And now does the cock,  
Half anxious its crow  
Of tribrach and long,  
Shrill: doesn't it GROW. . . .'

my hour then is near: will you not drink me a parting *salve* in this glass?"

This I said craftily, with hope in her answer. Her eyes leapt upon me in eager query.

"Oh . . . you do not mean——"

"Have you not *bid* me go? and you have not yet unbid me."

Her lashes fell in long curvature upon a perfectly pallid cheek. I could see that she debated keenly with herself. After a time she spoke, arguing to her lap:

"Well, if you will go, you will go. I here will give myself utterly to those vigils and tears and prayers which made *her* saintly; prayers, Numa, in which *you* shall not be forgotten."

My heart sank horribly.

In saying "her," she pointed to a picture in oils of a long-dead lady of our race hung on the opposite wall: a middle-aged lady, with meekness in her look, and a radiance of unearthly sunlights in her smile, far known of old beyond the bounds of Phorfor as St. Anna, the blessed.

I, pale as she, held the wind before her.

"Drink for me, Areta!"

"No! why urge me so? I have told you no—no."

The flash of her anger singed me of enterprise. I sat again mouse-quiet by her side.

"To what a point," she said, looking up at the beatitude of St. Anna, "must she not have adventured on the greased mast of spiritual attainment! Her life was a long upward gaze: an eye turned white to heaven. Before death she is said to have been familiar with the facial expressions of many of the winged things of the cycles of the skies. But—how singular—that we should speak of her—to-night!" and she repeated:

"There smiles a lady, veiled, in death:  
bright angels round her chaunt—  
(mellifluous breath!);  
she, from the viii<sup>th</sup> sphere,  
regards the viii<sup>th</sup> where gleams her lovely bier,  
and sighs her ancient haunt.

List to the Organ's roaring throat!  
Hymen's loud *euois* swell—  
(triumphal note!);  
this day two souls entwine:  
their purple orgies drenched in aphrian wine  
and Priap loves, a-dell!

I doze below four lax-zoned moons:  
nude wails of women rave—  
(lugubrious tunes!)  
nude, by a beach of bones,  
their pallid pomp in torchlit dolor moans,  
Seeking a new-oped grave.

Lo!—one I see—a child of man!  
his outlines laved in light—  
(complete in plan!);  
eternal smiles he wears:  
no clothing on his chiselled lustre bears—  
and yet is clothed in White."



"Then, Areta—then——" I cried, frantically stamping to my feet, "*then* was the Sergius we knew indeed true prophet, and sibyl, and seer!"—and flying towards the far semi-circular end of the chamber, I sent hissing apart along a brazen bar the two halves of a silken curtain, and revealed between the divided drapery, standing poseful on an *estrade* in the alcove, a statue of marble. Areta at the sight flew wide-winged towards me, rhythmic-swaying to the throb of timbrel and cymbal, eating up with inconceivable swiftness the vast length of the room. And we looked together, she leaning heavy upon me. Soft glammers of blue and crimson light, levelled by the now high-prospering day-spring through the stained windows, lotioned the head in a dream of colours. Only by the thick-matted black hair could she know it the very block of the Sergius-statue: in all else death had been wonderfully burined into life—the painted cerements all chipped from it, and in their place the white clothing only of its own immaculate marmor.

"But, Numa—it is you! it is you!"

She compressed from my sight a face all inflamed in her two tight hands. Twin-sisters, lake-women, rowed competitive to rhymes in the milky hollows of her breasts!

"It is you, Numa! It is you!"

It was indeed I; I smiling rosy patronage; I nude; express; accomplished Man.

Areta blushed. She was a vomiting Ætna of blushes.

But I violently tore her hands from her face, and I held them in mine, both in both, swinging them. And she, with prudish under-glance, looked up into me, I deep into her.

O broken heart of Love! in her eyes were films, and meanings, and the everlasting and impetuous YEA.

. . . . .

That morning a thievish sprite in my feet led me a-hunt through all the nooks and by-ways of the castle. By a studied plea I had escaped from Areta. Yet Sergius, either with design or without, had left little of himself behind: some sandals I found, a few gowns woven without seam, three books of Bishop Berkeley marked with his name. These I took, and kissing them one by one, worshipping, praising him as a god, I locked them in a

cabinet, and flung the key far. An hour thence, I, rejoined to Areta, was with her in the woods, gathering flowers: she dancing raillery at every rein. Her lips and pure white dress were stained with the dribble of the syrupy magenta wine of the grapes of Phorfor, her eyes all glairy with its tipsy yeast. We had, indeed, tiddled freely of its whispering nectar; and as the garland of ivy and violets with which I had crowned her had toppled aslant on her head, my riotous love had somewhat the look of an awry Bacchante rather drunken among the forest-glades. For many generations no marriage at Phorfor had been dehymenised by any such thing as benefit of clergy, and the laying on of frog-chill agastric hands: nor, as I knew, would Areta have tolerated any such. But from a slight gash in my finger-tip she stained her tongue with my sucked blood; I mine with hers. Then repairing to her chamber with the gathered flowers, we bent to build the Altar of our Covenant: and, truly, it was upper Aiden and the very hair-curling tortion of delight to watch Areta, with what sighing pains, wifely collusions as of Bertha the Good, she took part in the making. It was low and broad by the side of her bed, and directly faced the rising sun. Plushy we made it, and furry, with riches and thicknesses of velvets; over-shading it with canopy of silk; and over and around the velvets we heaped a strew of ivy and violets (the blend worn in chaplets by the *phallophoroi* in the Great Dionysia); and over this we sprinkled poppy-flowers; and over this parsley mixed with barley-groats; and over this tufts of wool; and over all—on the front, and on the back, and on the sides, and on the top—we traced out in characters of the immortal flowers of amaranth this word:

APHRODITE PEITHO

## HUGUENIN'S WIFE





## HUGUENIN'S WIFE

"Ah! bitter-sweet!"—Keats.

HUGUENIN, MY FRIEND—the man of Art and thrills and impulses—the *boulevardier*, the *persifleur*—must, I conclude, be frenzied, when, after years of silence, I received from him this letter:

"*Sdili*', my friend; that is the name by which they now call this ancient Delos. Wherefore has it been written, 'so passeth the glory of the world'.

"Ah! but to me it is—as to *her* it was—still Delos, the Sacred Island, birthplace of Apollo, son of Leto! On the summit of Cynthus I look from my dwelling, and within the wide reach of the Cyclades perceive even yet the offerings of fruit from Syria, from Sicily, from Egypt; I see the boats that bear the sacred envoys of Pan-Ionium to festival—I note the flutter of their robes—on the breeze once more float to me their 'Songs of Deliverance'.

"The island now belongs almost entirely to me. I am, too, almost its sole inhabitant. It is, you know, only four miles long, and half as broad, and I have bought up every available foot of its face. On the flat top of the granite Cynthus I live, and here, my friend, I shall die. Fetters more inexorable and horrible than the limbs of Prometheus ever felt rivet me to this crag.

"A friend! That is the hunger of my sick spirit: a *living man*: of the dead I have enough; of living monsters, ah, too much! A servant or two, who seem persistently to shun me—this is all I possess of human fellowship: yet I dare not implore you, my old companion, to come to the comfort of a sinking man in this place of desolation. . . ."

The epistle continued in this strain of mingled rhapsody and despair, containing, moreover, a long rigmarole on the Pythagorean dogma of the metempsychosis of the soul. Three times did the words "living monsters" occur.

From London to Delos is a journey; yet, conquered during a long vacation by an irresistible impulse and the fond memories of other days, I actually found myself, on a starry night, disembarking on the sands that bound the once renowned harbour of the island, the date of my arrival being just two months before the extraordinary phenomena of which Delos was the scene during the night of August 13th, 1899. I first crossed the ring of flat land that encircles the islet, and then commenced the ascent of the central rise, the air slumbrous with the breath of rose, jasmine, almond, with the cicada crying, the firefly. In forty minutes I had walked into a tangled garden, and placed my hand on the back of a tall man in Attic garments who was pacing there.

With a start he faced me. "O!"—panting, clapping his hands upon his chest, "I was startled! My heart——"

It was Huguenin, yet not he. The beard rolling over his snowy robes of wool was still ebony as ever; but the fluff of hair that floated with every zephyr over his face and neck was a fluff of wool-white. He stared at me with the lifeless and cavernous eyes of a dead man.

When we entered the dwelling, its mere appearance was enough to convince me that in some mysterious way, to some morbid degree, the past had fettered and darkened the intellect of my friend. The mansion was of Hellenic type, but nothing less than mad in extent—a desert more than a habitation, a Greek house multiplied many times over into a series of Greek houses, like objects seen through angular glasses. It consisted of a single storey, though here and there on the flat roof there rose a second layer of apartments, attained by ladders. We walked by a door—opening inwards—into a passage, which took us to a courtyard, or *aulé*, surrounded by Corinthian pillars, and having in the middle an altar of marble to *Zeus Herkeios*. Around this court were ranged chambers, *thalamoi*, hung with velvets; and the whole house—made up of a hundred and a hundred reproductions of such courtyards with their surrounding chambers—formed a trackless Sahara of halls, through whose labyrinths the most crafty could not but fail to thread his way.

"This building," Huguenin said to me, some days after my arrival, "this building—every stone, plank, drapery—was the creation of my wife's wild fancy."

I stared at him.

"You doubt that I have, or had, a wife? Come with me; you shall see her face."

He now led the way through the windowless house, lighted throughout the day and night by the reddish ray shed from many little censer-lamps of terra-cotta filled with *nardinum*, an oil pressed from the blossom of the fragrant grass *nardus* of the Arabs.

I followed Huguenin through a good number of the rooms, noticing that, as he moved slowly onward, he kept his body bent, seeming to seek for something; and this something I found to be a red thread, laid down on the floor to afford a clue for the foot through the mazes of the house. Suddenly he stopped before the door of one of the apartments called *amphithalamoi*, and, himself staying without, motioned me to enter.

Now, I am hardly a man of what might be called a tremulous diathesis, yet it was not without a tremor that I looked round that room. At first I could discern little under the glimmer from a single *lampas* hanging in the middle, but presently a painting in oils, unframed, occupying nearly one side of the room, grew upon my sight: the painting of a woman; and my pulses underwent a strange agitation as I gazed on her face.

She stood robed in a flowing *peplos*, ruby, her head thrown back, one hand and arm pointing starkly outward, upward. The countenance was not merely Grecian—antique Grecian, as distinct from modern—but Grecian in a highly exaggerated and unlikelike degree. Was the woman, I asked myself, more lovely than ever mortal was before—or more loathsome? For Lamia stood there before me—"shape of gorgeous hue, vermilion-spotted, golden, green and blue"—and a kind of surprise held me fixed as the image slowly took possession of my vision. The Gorgon's head! whose hair was snakes; and, as I thought of this, I thought, too, of how from the guttering gore of the Gorgon's head monsters arose; and then, with abhorrence, I remembered Huguenin's ravings as to "monsters." I stepped nearer, in order to analyse the impression almost of dread wrought upon me, and I quickly found—or thought that I found—the key: it lay in the lady's eyes; the very eyes of the tigress: greedy glories of green glaring with radii of gold. I hurried from her.



"Have you seen her?" Huguenin asked me with an eager leer of cunning.

"Yes, Huguenin," I said, "she is very beautiful."

"She painted it herself," he said in a whisper.

"Really?"

"She considered herself—she was—the greatest painter since Apelles."

"But now—where is she?"

He brought his lips to my ear. "Dead. *You*, at any rate, would say so."

Well, to words so apparently senseless I would pay no attention then; but they recurred to me when I unearthed the circumstance that it was his way, at certain intervals, to make furtive visits to distant districts of the dwelling. Our bed-chambers being close together, I could not fail, as time passed, to notice that he would rise in the dead of night, when he supposed me drowsing, and, gathering together the fragments of our last repast, would depart rapidly and soundlessly with them through the vastness of the house, led always in one particular direction by the thread of silk whose crimson lay over the floor.

I now set myself strenuously to the study of Huguenin. The name and nature of his physical sickness, at least, was clear—the affection to which physicians have given the name Cheyne Stoke's Respiration, compelling him to lie back at times in an agony of inhalation, and groan for air. The bones of his cheeks seemed to be near appearing through their sere trumpery of mummy-skin; the alæ of his nose got no repose from their extravagance of expansion and retraction. But even this wreck of a body might, I believed, be rescued, had it not been that to assuage the rage and feverishness of such a *mind* the spheres contained no thyme. For one thing, a belief in some unnamed fate hanging over the little land he lived on haunted him. Again and again he recalled to me all that in the far past had been written in regard to Delos: the notion contained both in the Homeric and the Alexandrian hymns to the Delian Apollo that Delos was *floating*; or that it was only held by chains; or that it had only been thrown up from the ocean as a temporary resting-place for Ortygia in her travail; or that it might *sink* again before the spurning foot of the new-born god. He was never weary,



through hours of pursuing, as if in soliloquy, a species of sleepy exegesis of such scriptures, as we read together. "Do you know," he said to me, "that the Greeks really believed the streams of Delos to rise and fall with the rise and fall of the Nile? Could anything point more strongly to the extraordinary character of this land, its far-extending volcanic constructions, occult geologic eccentricities?" Then he might recite the punning line of the very old Sibylline prophecy——

"And Samos shall be sand, and Delos (the far-seen) sink from sight;"<sup>1</sup>

often, also, having recited it, he would strike from the repining chords of a lyre the theme of a threnody which, as he told me, his wife had composed to suit the line; and when to the funeral mood of this tune—so wild with woe and whining, that I could never listen to it without a thrill—Huguenin added the sadness of his now so hollow voice, the intensity of its effect upon me got to the intolerable degree, and I was glad of that pallid gloaming of the mansion, which partially hid my emotion.

"Remark, however," he said one day, "the meaning of the 'far-seen' as regards Delos: it means 'glorious' 'illustrious'—far-seen to the spiritual rather than to the physical eye, for the island is not very elevated. The words 'sink from sight' must, therefore, be supposed to have the corresponding significance of an extinction of this glory. And now think whether or not this prophecy has not been already fulfilled, when I tell you that this sacrosanct land, which no dog's foot was once permitted to touch, on which no man was permitted to be born or be buried, bears at this moment on its bosom a monster more loathsome than even a demon's brain, I believe, ever conceived. A literal physical fulfilment of the prophecy cannot, I consider, be always wanting."

But all this esotericism was not native to Huguenin: his mind, I was convinced, had been ploughed into by some very potent energy, before this growth had choked it. I enticed him, little by little, to speak of his wife.

She was, he told me, of a very antique Athenian family,

<sup>1</sup> ἔσται καὶ Σάμος ἄμμος ἐσείται Δῆλος ἀδῆλος.

which by constant effort had preserved its purity of blood; and it was while moving through Greece in a world-weary mood that, on reaching one night the village of Castri, there, on the site of the ancient Delphi, in the centre of an angry throng of Greeks and Turks, who threatened to rend her to fragments, he first saw Andromeda his wife. "This incredible courage," he said, "this vast originality was hers, to take upon herself the part of a modern Hypatia—to venture upon the task of the bringing back of the gods, in the midst of fanatics, at the end of a century like the present. The crowd from which I rescued her was howling round her in the vestibule of a temple to Apollo, whose cult she was then and there attempting to set up."

The love of the woman fastened upon her preserver with passionate fervour, and Huguenin, constrained by the vigour of a will not to be resisted, came at her bidding to live in the grey building of her creation at Delos: in which solitude, under which shadow, the man and the woman faced each other. Ere many weeks it was revealed to the husband that he had married a seer of visions and a dreamer of dreams. And visions of what tinge! and dreams of what madness! He confessed to me that he was awed by her; and with this awe was blended a feeling which, if it was not fear, was akin to fear. That he loved her not at all he now knew, while the extravagance of her passion for him he grew to regard as gruesome. Yet his mind took on the hue of hers; he drank in her doctrines; followed her as a satellite. When for days she hid herself from him, he would wander desolate and full of search over his pathless home. Finding that she habitually yielded her body to the delights of certain seeds that grew on Delos, he found the courage to frown, but ended by himself becoming a bond-slave to the drowsy *ganja* of Hindustan. So, too, with the most strange fascination which she exercised over the animal world: he disliked it—dreaded it; regarded it as excessive and unnatural; but looked on only with the furtive eye of suspicion, and said nothing. When she walked she was accompanied by a magnetized *queue* of living things, felines in particular, and birds of large size; while dogs, on the contrary, shunned her, bristling. She had brought with her from the continent a throng of these followers, of which Huguenin had never beheld the half, since they were imprisoned in unknown

nooks of the building; and anon she would vanish, to reappear with new companions. Her kindness to these creatures should, no doubt, have been sufficient to account for her power over them; but Huguenin's mind, already grown morbid, probed darkly after other explanation, the *motif* of this unquietness doubtless lying in his wife's fanaticism on the matter of the Pythagorean dogma of the transmigration of souls. On this theme Andromeda, it was clear, was outrageously deranged. She would stand, he declared, with her arm outstretched, her eyes wild-staring, her body rigid, and in a rapid recitative—like the rapt Pythoness—prophecy of the mutations prepared for the spirit of man, dwelling, above all, with contempt, on the paucity of animal forms in the world, and insisting that the spirit of an original man, disembodied, *should and must* re-embody itself in a correspondingly original form. "And," she would often add, "such forms exist, but the God, willing to save the race from frenzy, hides them from the eyes of common men."

It was long, however, before I could get Huguenin to describe the final catastrophe of his wedded life. He related it in these words: "You now know that Andromeda was among the great painters—you have gazed at her portrait of herself. Well, one day, after dilating, as was her wont, on the paucity of forms she said, 'But you, too, shall be of the initiated: come, you shall see *something*?' She then went swiftly, beckoning, looking back often to smile on me a fond patronage, and I followed, till she stopped before a painting, pointing. I will not attempt—the attempt would be folly—to tell you what thing I saw before me on the canvas; nor can I explain in words the tempest of anger, of loathing and disgust, that stirred within me at the sight; but at that blasphemy of her fancy I raised my hand to strike her head; and to this moment I know not if I struck: the blow, if blow there was, was hardly hard enough to harm a creature far feebler than man. Yet she fell; the film of death spread over her upbraiding eye; one last thing only she spoke, pointing to the uncleanness: 'You may yet see it in the flesh'; and so, still pointing, sped away.

"I bore her body, embalmed in the Greek manner by an artist of Corinth, to one of the smaller apartments on the roof, and saw, as I moved to leave her in her gloom, the mortal smile on her lip



within the open coffin. Two weeks later I went again to visit her. My friend, she had vanished—but for the bones; and from the coffin, above that skull, two eyes—living—the very eyes of Andromeda, but full of a new-born brightness—the eyes, too, of the horror she had painted, whose form I now made out in the darkness—looked out upon me. After I had slammed the door, I fainted on the stair.”

“The suggestion,” I said to him, “which you seem to wish to convey is that of a transition of forms, from man to animal; but, surely, the explanation that the monster, brought by your wife into the house, or born in it, imprisoned unawares by you with the dead, and maddened by famine, fed on the body, is, if not less horrible, yet less improbable.”

He looked doubtingly at me a moment, and then coldly said: “There was no monster imprisoned with the dead.”

But at least, I pleaded, he would see the necessity of flying from the place. He replied with the avowal that it was no longer doubtful to him, from the effect which any neglect to minister to the monster’s wants had upon his own health, that his life was bound up with the life of the being he stayed to maintain; that with the *second* murder which he should perpetrate—nay, with the attempt to perpetrate it, as by flight from the island—his life would be forfeited.

I accordingly formed the idea to effect the deliverance of my friend in spite of himself. Two months had now passed; the end of my visit was drawing near; yet his maladies of brain and body were not relieved: and it pained me to think of leaving him once more alone, a prey to his manias.

That very day, while he slept his damp trances, I started my tramp on the track of the scarlet thread. So far it went, and the halls through which it passed were of such uniformity, and its path was so wound about, that I could not doubt that, the clue once snapped at any point, the voyage to its end could be accomplished only by the most improbable chance. I followed the thread to where it stopped at the foot of a ladder-stair. This I ascended to a door at its top, a door with a hole close to the floor, big enough to admit a plate; but, as I placed my foot on the uppermost step, a whine, complaining low, with a wild likeness to a woman’s wail, sent me skipping, sick, whence I came.



But, some little distance from the steps, I broke the thread, and, gathering it up in my hand as I ran, again broke it near the region of the mansion which we occupied.

"In this way," I said, as I held the mass of thread to the flame of a lamp, "shall a man be saved."

I watched him afterwards through my half-shut eyes, as he departed, haggard and shuddering, hugging himself, on his nightly errand; and my heart galloped in an agony of disquiet while I awaited his coming again.

He was long. But when he came, he came swiftly, softly, into my chamber, and shook me by the shoulder. On his face was a look of unusual coolness, of dignity, of mystery.

"Wake up," he said: "I wish you to leave me to-night."

"But tell me——"

"I will take no refusal. Trust me this once and go. There is a danger here. Two of the fisher-folk of the harbour will convey you over to Rhenea before the morning."

"But danger!" I said—"from what?"

"I cannot tell you: from the destiny, whatever it be, which awaits me. The thread on which my life depends is *snapped*."

"But suppose I tell you——"

"Ah! . . . you hear that?"

He held up his hand and hearkened: it was a sound of howling round the house.

"It is the wind rising," I muttered, starting up.

"But that—which followed: didn't you *feel* it?"

I made him no answer.

He now clasped with his arms a marble column upon which he rested his forehead, while with one foot he kept on patting the floor; in which posture, quite demoralized and craven, he remained for some time, while the wind continued to rise; and suddenly he span towards me with a scream in a rapture of fear.

"Now at least—you *feel* it!"

I could not deny: it was as if the island had rocked a little to and fro on a pivot.

Now thoroughly demoralized myself, I now caught Huguenin's arm, and sought to draw him from the column, which, muttering low, he was again hugging. But he would not stir; and I determined in any event to stay by him, stood hearing the earth-

quake's increase, while he seemed to take no further note of anything, remaining there motionless but for the motion of his foot. In this way some minutes went by, at the end of which the rocking had become strong, rapid and continuous.

There came a second, when captured by a new panic, I sprang to shake him, understanding that some lamp had been dashed down in that passion of the mansion's agitation.

"Why, man!" I cried, "have you parted with every sense? Can't you feel that the house is in flames?"

On this his eyes, which had become dazed and dull, blazed up with a new lunacy.

"Then," he suddenly shouted in a passion of loudness, "I say she *shall* be saved!"

Before I could lay hold of him he had dashed past me into a passage. I followed in hot pursuit through rooms and corridors that seemed to reel in a dream of heat and reek, hoping that he, weak of lung, would fall choked and exhausted. But some energy seemed to lend him strength—on he rushed like the hurricane; some mysterious sense led him—never once did he hesitate.

And after all the long chase, which ever swayed at the rocking of the land, but never stopped, I saw that the intuitions of insanity had not failed the madman—he got to the goal he gasped after. I saw him fly up the ladder, whose foot was in a pool of fire, saw him fly to the door of the tomb of Andromeda already flagrant, and drag it open. But, as he dragged it, there broke out of the room—above the roaring of the conflagration, and of the gale, and of that thousandfold growling of the ground—a shriek, shrill, yet ugly with gutturalness, which congealed me in that heat, and I saw proceeding from the interior a creature whose obscenity and vileness language has no vocabulary to describe. For if I say that it was a cat—of great size—its eyes glaring like a conflagration—its fat frame wrapped in a mass of feathers, grey, vermilion-tipped—with a similitude of miniature wings on it—with a width of tail vast, down-turned, like the tails of birds-of-paradise—how by such words can I express half of all the retching of my nausea, the shame, the hate . . . The fire had ere this reached the thing, and on fire I could see it fly rather than spring at Huguenin's heart, saw its fangs buried in his breast through a haze of feathers raining, he tottering, tearing at the feathery

horror, as backward he toppled from the landing over the spot where a moment before the ladder had stood.

By blessed luck, as I ran thence, I stumbled upon some exit, to find the night outside quite cloudless, star-lit, though all the winds were whistling within the vault of sky that night. In descending, too, to the level, I remarked a rather scorched aspect of some of the leafage, and at one spot saw a series of conical openings in the ground with greenish scoriæ round their edges. Lower still I stood on a bluff, and looking over the sea, witnessed a sight sublime to wildness: for the sea, too hurried to show billow or ripple, and lit up within its depth with a sheen of phosphorescence, was speeding towards Delos. Delos, indeed, seemed to "float", to be swimming like a little doomed fowl counter to the swoop of the boundless.

With the morning's light I passed away from this mysterious shrine of Grecian piety, the final sight that greeted my gaze being the still rising reek of Huguenin's grave.





DARK LOT OF ONE SAUL



## DARK LOT OF ONE SAUL

WHAT I RELATE is from a document found in a Cowling Library chest of records, written in a very odd hand on fifteen strips of a material resembling papyrus, yet hardly papyrus, and on two squares of parchment, which Professor Stannistreet recognises as "trunkfish" skin; the seventeen pages being gummed together at top by a material like tar or pitch. A Note at the end in a different hand and ink, signed "E.G.", says that the document was got out of a portugal (a large variety of cask) by the Spanish galleass *Capitana* between the Bermudas and the island of St. Thomas; and our knowledge that at this point a valley in the sea-bottom goes down to a depth of four thousand fathoms affords, as will be noticed, a rather startling confirmation of the statements made in the document. The narrator, one Saul, was born sixteen to twenty years before the accession of Queen Elizabeth, and wrote about 1601, at the age of sixty, or so; and the correspondence of his statements with our modern knowledge is the more arresting, since, of course, a sailor of that period would only know anything of submarine facts by actual experience. I modify a few of his archaic expressions (guessing at some words where his ink ran):

. . . . .

This pressing paucity of air hath brought me to the writing of that which befel, to the end that I may send forth the writing from the cave in the portugal for the eye of who may find it, my pen being a splinter broken from the elephant's bones, mine ink pitch from the lake, and my paper the bulrush pith. Beginning therefore with my birth, I say that my name in the world was James Dowdy Saul, I being the third child of Percy Dowdy Saul, and of Martha his wife, born at Upland Mead, a farm in the freehold of my father, near the borough of Bideford, in Devon: in what year born I know not, knowing only this, that I was a well-grown stripling upon the coming of Her Grace to the throne.

I 'was early sent to be schooled by Dominie John Fisher in the borough, and had made good progress in the Latin Grammar (for my father would have me to be a clerk), when, at the age of fifteen, as I conjecture, I ran away, upon a fight with Martin Lutter, that was my eldest brother, to the end that I might adopt the sea as my calling. Thereupon for two years I was with the shipmaster, Edwin Occhines, in the balinger, *Dane*, trading with Channel ports; and at his demise took ship at Penzance with the notorious Master Thomas Stukely, who, like many another Devon gentleman, went a-pirating 'twixt Scilly and the Irish creeks. He set up a powerful intimacy with the Ulster gallant, Master Shan O'Neil, who many a time has patted me upon my back; but, after getting at loggerheads with Her Grace, he turned Papist, and set out with Don Sebastian of Portugal upon an African expedition, from the which I felt constrained to withdraw myself.

Thereupon for a year, perhaps two, I was plying lawful traffic in the hoy *Harry Mondroit*, 'twixt the 'Thames' mouth and Antwerp; till, on a day, I fell in at "The Bell" in Greenwich with Master Francis Drake, a youth of twenty-five years, who was then gathering together mariners to go on his brigantine, the *Judith*, his purpose being to take part in Master John Hawkins' third expedition to the settlements in Espaniola.

Master Hawkins sailed from Plymouth in the *Jesus*, with four consorts, in October of the year 1567. After being mauled by an equinox storm in Biscay Bay, we refitted at the Canaries, and, having taken four hundred blacks on the Guinea coast, sailed for the West Indies, where we gained no little gold by our business. We then proceeded to Carthagen and Rio de la Hacha; but it should now be very well known how the *Jesus* lost her rudder, how, the ships' bottoms being fouled, we had perforce to run for San Juan de Ulloa in the Gulf of Mexico; and how, thirteen Spanish galleons and frigates having surprised us there, the Admiral de Baçan made with us a treaty, the which he treacherously broke at high noon-day, putting upon us the loss of three ships and our treasure, the *Minion* and the *Judith* alone escaping: this I need not particularly relate.

The *Judith*, being of fifty tons portage only, and the *Minion* of less than one hundred, both were now crowded, with but little water aboard, and the storechests empty. After lying three days



outside the sand ridge, we set sail on Saturday, the 25th September, having heard tell of a certain place on the east reaches of the Gulf where provisions might be got. This we reached on the 8th October, only to meet there little or nothing to our purpose; whereupon a council was called before Master Hawkins in the *Minion*, where one hundred of us proffered ourselves to land, to the intent that so the rest might make their way again to England on short rations.

The haps of us who landed I will not particularize, though they were various, God wot, remaining in my head as a grievous dream, but a vague one, blotted out, alas, by that great thing which Almighty God hath ordained for a poor man like me. We wandered within the forests, anon shot at by Indians, our food being roots and berries, and within three weeks reached a Spanish station, whence we were sent captives into Mexico. There we were Christianly behaved to, fed, clothed, and then distributed among the plantations—a thing amazing to us who were not ignorant of the pains put upon English sailors in Spain; but in those days no Holy Office was in Mexico, and on this count we were spared, some of us being bound over to be overseers, some to be handicraftsmen in the towns, etc. As for me, after an absence from it of seven months, I once more found myself in the township of San Juan de Ulloa, where, having ever a handy knack in carpentry, I had soon set myself up for a wright.

No one asked me aught as to my faith; I came and went as I thought good; nor was it long but I had got some knowledge of the Spanish tongue, stablished myself in the place, and taken to wife Lina, a wench of good liking, daughter of Señora Gomez of the *confiteria*, or sweetmeat-store; and out of her were born unto me Morales and Salvadora, two of the goodliest babes that ever I have beheld.

I abode in San Juan de Ulloa two years and eleven months: and these be the two years of quietness and happiness that I have had in this my life.

On the 13th afternoon of the month of February in the year 1571 I was wending homeward over the *prado* that separated my carpentry from the *confiteria* of my mother-in-law, when I saw four men approaching me, as to whom I straightway understood

that men of San Juan they were not: one was a Black Friar, so hooded and cowed, that of his countenance nothing was discovered, save the light of his eyes; another was bearded—of the Order of Jesus; another wore the broad chapeau of a notary, and the fourth had the aspect of an alguazil, grasping a bâton in his hand. And, on seeing them, I seemed to give up heart and hope together: for a frigate hulk had cast anchor that morning beyond the sand-ridge, and I conjectured that these men were of her, were ministers of the Holy Office, and had heard of me while I was awork.

I have mentioned that no Inquisition was in Mexico afore 1571: but within the last months it had been bruited in San Juan that King Phillip, being timorous of English meddling in the gold-trade, and of the spread of English heresy, was pondering the setting up of the Holy Office over Espaniola. And so said, so done, in *my* case, at any rate,<sup>1</sup> who, being the sole heretic in that place, was waylaid on the *prado* in the afternoon's glooming, and heard from the alguazil that word of the familiars: "follow on"; to be then led down the little *callejon* that runneth down from the *prado* to the coast, where a cockboat lay in waiting.

To the moment when they pushed me into the boat, I had not so much as implored one more embrace of my poor mate and babes, so dumb was I at the sudden woe: but in the boat I tumbled prone, although too tongue-tied to utter prayer, where-upon an oarsman put paw upon me, with what I took to be a consoling movement: a gesture which set me belching forth into lamenting. But with no long dallying they put out, having me by my arms; and beyond the sand-ridge I was took up the poop's ladder into the frigate, led away to the far end of the fore-castle's vault, and there left with a *rosca* loaf, four onions, and a stoup of water in the sprit room, a very strait place cumbered by the bulk of the bow-sprit's end, and by the ends of a couple of culverins.

I know not yet whither it was the will of my captors to carry me, whether to Europe, or to some port of the Spanish Main; but

<sup>1</sup> It is well known that not one of Saul's ninety-nine companions, who landed from the *Judith* and *Minion*, escaped, but all were hunted, cast into dungeons, tortured, lashed naked through streets, some burned in the *auto da fé*, and some handed over to the Office in Seville to be sentenced to the galleys.

this I know that the next noon when I was led apoop, no land was visible, and the sea had that hard aspect of the mid-sea.

Our ship, the which was called the *San Matteo*, was a hulk of some four hundred tons portage, high afore, and high stuck up apoop, her fore castle having two tiers, and her poop's castle three, with culverins in their ports. Her topsides were so tumbled home, that her breadth at the water may have been double her breadth at her wales, and she had not the newfangled fore-and-abafts of Master Fletcher, such as the *Judith* wore to sail on a wind. But she was costly built, her square sails being every one of the seven of heavy florence, broidered in the belly, and her fifty guns of good brass fabric. She was at this time driving free afore the wind under full spread, but with a rolling so restless as to be jeopardous, I judged. In fact, I took her for a crank pot, with such a tophammer and mass of upper-works, that she could scarce dip to dip her tier of falcons, if the sea should lash.

I was brought up to the master's room, the which was being used as an audience-chamber, and there at a table beheld five men in file. He in the centre, who proved to be both my accuser and judge, presently gave me to know that the evidence against me had been laid before the Qualifiers of the Office—which Qualifiers I understood to be none other than themselves there present—and been approved by the said Qualifiers; and when I had given replies to a catalogue of interrogatories as to my way of life in San Juan, I was then straightway put to the question. My breast, God wot, was rent with terrors, but my bearing, I trust, was distinguished by Christian courage. The interview was but brief: I demurred to kiss the cross; whereupon the President addressed me—he being the Dominic that I saw on the *prado*, a man whose mass of wrinkles, although he was yet young, and his wry smile within a nest of wrinkles, I carry still in my mind. My rudeness, he said, would prove to be but puny: for that during the day I should be put to a second audience in order to move me to a confession, and after to the screws.

For that second audience I waited, but it came not: for, huddled up in a corner 'twixt the sprit's end and a culverin's end, I became more and more aware that the *San Matteo* was labouring in the sea, and by evening mine ears were crowded with the sound of winds, so that I could no more hear the little



sounds of the cook's house, the which was not in the hold, as with English vessels, but in a part of the fore castle abaft my cell. No food was brought me all that day, and I understood that all had enough to trouble them other than my unblest self.

I fell into a deep sleep, nor, I believe, awaked until near the next noon, though between noon and midnight was but little difference in my prison. I now anew knew, as before, of a tumult of winds, and understood by the ship's motion that she was now fleeing afore the gale, with a swinging downhill gait. Toward night, being anhungered, I got to thumping in desperate wise upon my prison, but no signal was given me that any heard me, and doubtless I was unheard in that turmoil of sounds.

And again I fell into forgetfulness, and again about midday, as I conjecture, bounded awake, being now roused by a shout of wind pouncing in upon me through the door, the which a stripling had just opened. He tumbled toward me with a bowl of tum-tum and pork, and, having shot it upon my lap, put mouth to mine ear with the shout: "Eat, Englishman! Thou art doomed for the ship!"

He then fell out, leaving me in a maze. But I think that I had not ended the meal when the meaning of his words was but little uncertain to me, who was versed in the manners of the sea, and of Spanish seamen in especial; and I said within myself "the *San Matteo* is now doubtless near her end; the sun hath gone out of the sky; the course peradventure lost: and I, the heretic, am condemned to be thrown away, as Jonah, to assuage the tempest."

The rest of that day, therefore, I lay upon my face, recommending my spirit, my wife, and my children to my Creator until, toward night, three sailors came in, laid hands on me, and hauled me forth; and I was hardly hauled to the castle's portal, when my old samite coif leapt off my head, and was swept away.

Surely never mortal wretch had bleaker last look at the scheme of being than I that night. There remained some sort of disastrous glimmering in the air, but it was a glimmer that was itself but a mood of gloom. A rust on the nigh horizon that was the sun was swinging on high above the working of the billows, then hurling itself below, with an alternate circular working, as it were a dissolute or sea-sick thing. The skies were, as it were, tinted with inks, and appeared to be no higher beyond the sea



than the mizzen-top, where sea and sky were mixed. I saw that the poop's mast was gone, and the *San Matteo* under two sails only, the mizzen-top sail and the spritsail: yet with these she was careering in desperate wise like a capon in a scare from the face of the tempest, taking in water with an alternate process over her port and starboard wales, and whirled to her top-castles in sprays: so that she was as much within the sea as on it. Our trip from my prison to the poop's castle must have occupied, with halts, no less than twenty minutes of time, so swung were our feet between deep and high: and in that time a multitude of sounds the most drear and forlorn seemed borne from out the bowels of the darkness to mine ears, as screams of craziness, a ding-dong of sea-bells, or cadences of sirens crying, or one sole toll of a funeral-knell. I was as one adream with awe: for I understood that into all that war of waters I was about to go down, alone.

Lashed to the starboard turret of the poop's castle by a cord within the ring at its paunch was a portugal, such as be employed to store pork on big voyages; and, sprawling on the deck, with his paws clutched within a window-sill of the turret, was the Jesuit, his robes all blown into disarray, with him being the ship's master, having a hammer's handle sticking out of his pouch, and four others, the particulars of whose persons mine eyes, as though I had scores of eyes that night, observed of their own act.

As I staggered near in the lax keeping of my guardians, the portugal was cast aslant in his lashing, and I could then descry within it one of those 30-inch masses of iron ballast, such as be named dradoes; by the which I understood that I should not be tossed forth coffinless, as Jonah, but in the portugal: inasmuch as the corpse of many a Jonah hath been known to "chase i' the wake", as mariners relate, to the disaster of them in the ship; and the coffining of such in ballasted casks has long been a plan of the Spanish in especial.

On my coming to the turret, he whom I took to be the master put hand upon me, uttering somewhat which the hurricane drowned in his mouth, though I guessed that he egged me to go into the portugal: and indeed I was speedily heeled up and hustled in. Resistance would have been but little difficult to me, had I willed, but could have resulted only in the rolling overboard

of others with me: nor had I a spirit of resistance, nay, probably lost my consciousness upon entering, for nothing can I remember more, till the top was covered in, save only one segment of it, through which I on my face glimpsed three struggling shapes, and understood that the Jesuit, now upheld 'twixt two of the shipmen, was shouting over me some litany or committal. In the next moment I lay choked in blackness, and had in my consciousness a hammer's banging.

Whether awake or adream, I seemed to recognize the moment when the portugal's mass splashed the ocean; I was aware of the drado's bulk tumbling about the sides, and of double bump of the iron, the one upon my breast, the other upon my right thigh.

Now, this was hardly owing to the water's roughness, for my last glance abroad before going into the portugal had shown me a singular condition of the sea: the ship appeared to have driven into a piece of water comparatively calm, and pallid, a basin perhaps half-a-mile in breadth, on a level rather below the rest of the ocean that darkly rolled round its edge; and the whole seemed to me to move with a slow wheeling: for I had noted it well, with that ten-eyed unwittingness wherewith I noted everything that night, as the mariners' apparel, or the four-square cap of the Jesuit crushed over his nose, or the porky stench of the portugal . . .

Down, swiftly down, and still profounder down, I ripped toward the foundry of things, to where the mountains and downs of the mid-sea drowse. I had soon lost all sense of motion: still, I divined—I knew—with what a swiftness I slid, profoundly drowned, mile on mile, and still down, from the home of life, and hope, and light, and time. I was standing on the drado, no less steadily than if on land, for the drado's weight held the portugal straight on end, the portugal's top being perhaps one inch above my head—for my hands touched it, paddling for some moments as though I was actually adrown, like the paddling pates of a hound in his drowning. But I stood with no gasping for a good span, the portugal was so roomy, and it proved as good-made as roomy, though soon enough some ominous creakings gave me to know that the sea's weight was crushing upon his every square inch with a pressure of tons;

moreover, both my palms being pressed forth against the portugals side, all at once the right palm was pierced to the quick by some nail, driven inward by the squeezing of the sea's weight; and quickly thereupon I felt a drop of water fall upon my top, and presently a drop, and a drop, bringing upon me a deliberate drip, drip: and I understood that the sea, having forced a crack, was oozing through atop.

No shock, no stir was there: yet all my heart was conscious of the hurry of my dropping from the world. I understood—I knew—when I had fared quite out of hue and shape, measure and relation, down among the dregs of creation, where no ray may roam, nor a hope grow up; and within my head were going on giddy divinations of my descent from depth to depth of deader nothingness, and dark after dark.

Groan could I not, nor sigh, nor cry to my God, but stood petrified by the greatness of my perishing, for I felt myself banished from His hand and the scope of His compassion, and ranging every moment to a more strange remoteness from the territories of His reign.

Yet, as my sense was toward whirling unto death, certain words were on a sudden with me, that for many a month, I think, had never visited my head: for it was as if I was now aware of a chorus of sound quiring in some outermost remoteness of the heaven of heavens, whence the shout of ten thousand times ten thousand mouths reached to me as a dream of mine ear: and this was their shout and the passion of their chanting: "If I ascend up into Heaven, He is there; if I make my bed in Hell, behold, He is there; if I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall His hand lead me, His right hand shall hold me."

But the lack of air, that in some minutes had become the main fact of my predicament, by this time was such, that I had come to be nothing but a skull and throat crowded with blood that would bound from me, but could not; yet I think that in the very crux of my death-struggle a curiosity as to the grave, and the nature of death—a curiosity as frivolous as the frolics of a trickster—delayed my failing; for I seemed to desire to see myself die.

Still upon my top, with a quickening drip, drip, dropped the leak, and this in my extremest smart I ceased not to mark.



But there came a moment when all my sentience was swallowed in an amazing consciousness of motion. First I was urgently jerked against the portugal, the which was tugged sideways by some might: some moments more, and the portugal bumped upon something. By a happy instinct, I had stiffened myself, my feet on the drado, my head pressed against the top piece; and immediately I was aware of precipitous rage, haste the most rash, for a quick succession of shocks, upon rocks, as I imagine, quick as you may say one, two, three, knocked me breathless who was already breathless, racking the cask's frame, and battering me back, so to say, out of my death into sense. And or ever I could lend half a thought to this mystery of motion-on-the-horizontal down by the ocean's bottom, I was hounded on to a mystery still more astounding—a sound in the realm of muteness—a roar—that very soon grew to a most great and grave tumult. During which growth of tumult I got the consciousness of being rushed through some tunnel, for the concussions of the cask on every side came fast and more frightfully faster; and I now made out, how I cannot tell, that the direction of my race was half horizontal, and half downward, toward the source of that sounding. How long the trip lasted my spirit, spinning in that thundering dark, could hardly sum up: it might have been a minute or five, a mile or twenty: but there came a moment when I felt the portugal lifted up, and tossed; it was spinning through space; and it dropped upon rock with a crash which ravished me from my consciousness.

So intemperate was this mauling, that upon returning to myself after what may have been many hours, I had no doubt but that I was dead; and within myself I breathed the words, "The soul is an ear; and Eternity is a roar."

For I appeared at present to be a creature created with but one single sense, since, on placing my fingers an inch afore my face, in vain I strained my vision to trace them; my body, in so far as I was any longer cognizant thereof, was, as it were, lost to me, and blotted out; so that I seemed to be naught but an ear, formed to hear unceasingly that tumult that seemed the universe: and anew and anew I mused indolently within me, "Well, the soul is an ear; and Eternity is a roar."

Thus many minutes I lay, listing with interest to the tone of



the roar, the which hath with it a shell's echoing that calleth, making a chaunting vastly far in the void, like an angel's voice far noising. What proved to me that I was disembodied was the apparent fact that I was no longer in the portugal, since I at present breathed free; nevertheless, upon becoming conscious in the course of time of a stench of sea-brine, and presently of the mingling therewith of the portugal's stink of pork, I straightway felt myself to be living flesh; and, on reaching out my fingers, felt the sufficient reason of my breathing, to wit, that the portugal's bottom had been breached in, and a hoop there started by his fall, for the staves' ends at that part at present spread all asprawl. I was prostrate upon my back, and the drado and broken portugal's bottom lay over my legs, so that the portugal must have toppled over on his side after striking on his end.

The next circumstance that I now observed was a trembling of the ground on which I lay, the which trembled greatly, as with a very grave ague.

I set myself then to talk with myself, recalling, not without an effort of my memory, the certain facts of my predicament: to wit, firstly, that I had been cast in a cask from a bark called the *San Matteo*, not less than a century ago, I thought; I had then beyond doubt gone down toward the bottom of the sea; here some sea-river had undoubtedly seized and reeled me through some tunnel beneath the sea's base: and the under-tow of this sea-river's suction it was which must have occasioned that basin-like appearance of the sea's surface with a circular working, observed by me some moments before my going in the portugal. This salt torrent, having caught my cask, must have hurtled me through the tunnel to a hollow hall or vault in the bowels of the earth at the tunnel's mouth, and then hurled the portugal from the tunnel's mouth down upon some rock in the grotto, and so broken the portugal's bottom. The cave must contain the air which it had shut in in the age of the convulsion of nature which had made it a cave, peradventure ere the sea was there, thus permitting me to breathe. And the roar that was roaring should be the thundering of the ocean tumbling down the walls of the hall from out the tunnel's mouth, the preponderousness of which thundering's dropping-down occasioned that ague of the ground which was shaking me.

So much I could well sum up; also, from that echo's humming, whose vast psalmodying haunts the waterfall's thunder, I judged that the hollowness of the hall must be large beyond thought. More than this I understood not; but, this being understood, I covered my face, and gave myself to lamenting: for, ever and again, together with the thunder and his echo, worked certain burstings and crashes of the cataract, brief belchings breaching on a sudden, troubling the echo with yet huger rumours, maddening sad to hearken to; and my hand could I not descry, stared I never so crazily nigh; and the ague of the ground was, as it were, a shivering at the shout of God-Omnipotent's mouth: so that sobs gobbled forth of my bosom, when I understood the pathos of this place.

On throwing my hands over my eyes to cry, I felt on them a slime crass with granules,<sup>1</sup> perhaps splashed upon me through the open end of the portugal on his tumble, the which when I had brushed away, with much anguish I got my head round to where my feet had been. No doubt had I but I should of necessity perish of thirst and dearth of food; but that I might come to my doom at liberty, I crept forth of my prison, as a chick from the rupture of his shell.

A tinder-box was in my pouch, but, in the swoond of my comprehension, I did not then remember it, but moved in darkness over a slime with my arms outstretched, drenched ever with a drizzle, the source of which I did not know. Slow I moved, for I discovered my right thigh to be crushed, and all my body much mauled; and, or ever I had moved ten steps, my shoe stepped into emptiness, and down with a shout I sped, spinning, to the depth.

My falling was stopped by a splash into a water that was warm, into which I sank far; and I rose through it bearing up with me some putrid brute that drew the rheum of his mucus over my face. I then struck out to swim back to the island from whose cliff I had tumbled: for I saw that the cavern's bottom was occupied by a sea, or salt pond, and that upon some island in this sea the cask must have been cast. But my effort to get again to the island availed not, for a current which seized me carried me quick and still quicker, increasing at the last to such a

<sup>1</sup> In MS. "grains": *Globigerina* ooze.

careering that I could no more keep me up over the waves; where-upon an abandonment of myself came upon me, and I began now to drown, yet ever grasping out, as the drowning do; and afore I swooned I was thrown against a shore, where, having clutched something like a gracile trunk, I dragged my frame up on a shore covered over with that same grainy slush, and tumbled to a slumber which dured, I dare say, two days.

I started awake with those waters in mine ear whose immortal harmony, I question it not, I will for ever hear in my heart; and I sat still, listing, afear'd to budge, lest I should afresh blunder into trouble, while mine eyeballs, bereft of light, braved the raylessness with their staring. My feet lay at a sea's edge, for I could feel the upwashing of the waves, the which wash obliquely upon the shore, being driven by a current: but near as they were, I could hear ne'er a splash, nor anything could hear, except the cataract's crashing, joined with the voice of his own echoing, whose music tuneth with the thundering a euphony like that of lute-strings with drum ahumming, and anon the racket of those added crashings, when masses more ponderous of the cataract drop; and I did ever find myself listing with mine ear reached sideward, drawn to the darksome chaunting, forgetting my hunger, and the coming of death: listing I wot not how long, perhaps hours, perhaps night-longs: for here in this hall is no Time, but all is blotted out but the siren's sorrow that haunts it; and a hundred years is as one hour, and one hour as a hundred years.

I remarked, however, immediately, that the waves which washed my feet were not warm like that part of the water where I had fallen into the lake: so that I understood that the lake is a cauldron of different temperatures at different parts, the waters which roll in from the ocean being cold, but the lake warmed by flames beneath the cave: indeed, each region of the cave, so far as my feet ever reached in it, is always warm to the hand, and the atmosphere warm, though thick, and sick with stinks of the sea.

After a long while I found the tinder-box within my pouch, wherein also I found a chisel which I was bringing to my house to sharpen on the night of my capture, and also a small gar or gimlet. So I struck a flash that cut mine eyes like a gash, and I kindled a rag, the which glowed a rich gore-colour upon an



agitated water rushing past the shore; and although only a small region of the dark was lit up, I could see sufficient of the shore's sweep to understand that I was standing on a mainland made of granite, but not altogether without marl on the ground, nigh behind me being a grove of well-formed growths resembling elms, all gnarled and venerable, yet no taller than my belly, although some do come to my neck. Their leaves be milk-white, and even of a quite round shape, and they do for ever shake themselves with the ground that shakes, and produce a globose fruit, the which is blanched, too, and their boles pallid. I saw long afterwards another dwarf of just the same shape, only his fruit oozeth a juice like soap's water, that maketh a lather.<sup>1</sup> On the lake also I have lately seen by the torch's light near the island a weed with leaves over two yards long, the which be caused to float on the water by small bladders attached to it;<sup>2</sup> and also in the marshy spot by the promontory is the forest of bulrushes that show a tuft, or plume, at their summit, and they do shake themselves, their stem being about three feet high, and they shoot out a single root that groweth visible over the ground seven feet or more in his length;<sup>3</sup> besides which, I observed none other shrubs, save a pale purple fungus, well-nigh white, growing on these rocks where I write, and in the corridor which is on this side of the pond of pitch.

But in that minute's glimmering, while my rag's light was dancing on the waves, I knew what superabundance of food lay for me in this place, to be had by only putting forth of my hand: for in that paltry area of the water I saw pale creatures like snakes seven or eight feet long, tangled together in a knot, and some more alone, and four globose white beings, so that I could see that the lake is alive with life; and they lay there quite unaware of the light that pried on their whiteness, so that I decided that they be wights deprived of eyes. A very long time later on, probably many years, I came upon the stream to the lake's left, by the promontory, the which is thronged with oysters, with many sorts of pearl, and conch shells: but at the first I saw it not.

To have the creatures of the lake, I take stand to my knees in

<sup>1</sup> Agave?

<sup>2</sup> Some sort of *Macrocystis*.

<sup>3</sup> Some dwarf papyrus, or papyrus-like sedge.



the water's margin (for farther I may not enter for the strength of the current), lean forward with the torch, and abide the coming of the creature of my liking, the which resembles the creatures called a trunk-fish in the tropics, being of triangular form, with freckles. The species of the creatures of the lake be few, though their number great; and, as all the plants be very pigmy, so all the animals be of great bigness, save one thing resembling a lizard, a finger in his length, that I have seen on the reefs, and his tail is formed in the shape of a leaf, and engorgeth itself grossly, and it gazeth through great globose eyeballs that glare lidless,<sup>1</sup> but they be blind eyeballs; and one only wight of the lake hath eyes, but they do hang by a twine out of his eye-sockets, and dangle about his countenance, and be blind. As to their catching, this I managed at starting without so much as a torch, but by the touch alone; nor do their sluggish natures struggle against my grabbing, but by their motions I understand the wonder that they have what creature he might be who removeth them from their secret home. The flesh of one and all is soft and watery, yet cruel tough, and crude to the tongue. My repasts at starting were ate raw; but afterwards I made fires with the tree-trunks, the which being dry-timbered, I could chop down with the chisel and a rock for my hammer. Later on when I did find out the rock-hall, I laid my fire there: but almost all the rags of my garments, except my jerkin, had been burned up for tinder, before I unearthed the marsh of bulrushes, whose pith served me from thenceforth both for tinder and food, and at present also for parchment: for, boiled in the hot rivulet in the rock-hall, the pith and fish together giveth an excellent good food, when, being voided of moisture, and pounded, they become a powder or flour; so that when I had once come at the bulrushes, where, too, are the oysters, being put upon the plan of boiling, I no more roasted my food as before.

For what appeared a long period, as it were long weeks, I mollified my thirst by soaking my body on the shore's verge, where the waves break; but thirst became a rage in my throat, like that lust of light in mine eyes, so that sometimes, pronouncing a shout, I did desperately drench my bowels, drinking my fill of the bitterness, the which, I am convinced, is more bitterer than

<sup>1</sup> Gecko?

the bitterness of the outer sea. By this time I had roamed exploring far around that part of the shore on which I was cast up, and had found about me a boundless house of caves, chambers, corridors, with dwarf forests, and stretches of sponges of stone, boulders, and tracts of basalt columns, a fantastic mass to me of rock and darkness, all racked, and like the aspen dancing, to the farthest point of my wandering, all inhabited by the noise of the waters' voice, and stinking of the sea with so raw a breath, that in several spots the nostrils scarce can bear it. There be shells of many shapes and dimensions upon the land, many enamelled with gems and pearl, sea-urchins also, star-fish, sea-cucumbers, and other sea-beasts with spines, mussels nigh to the promontory on the lake's left, corals, and many kinds of sponges, many monstrous huge and having a putrid stench, some, as it were, sponges of stone, others soft, and others of lucid glass, painted gallant with hues of the rainbow, and very gracious shaped, as hand-baskets, or ropes of glass, but crude of odour. Till I had set up my hearth in the rock-hall, I rambled about without any torch, for the cause that I knew not yet well the inflammable mood of the wood, nor had yet tumbled upon the sulphur, nor the pitch, with which to lard the torches; and, walking dark, with just a flash anon, I did often count my footsteps, it might be to a thousand, or two, till tired out. But spite of my ramblings, my body had knobs like leprosy, and was lacerated with my scratching, and racked with the rushing through me of the salt draughts which I drank, afore ever I chanced upon fresh water. That day I descended by three great steps that are made as by men's hands, and that lie peradventure half a mile from the lake, into a basalt hall, vastly capacious, so that forty chariots could race abreast therein; and the walls be as straight as the walls of masons, the roof low, only some twenty foot aloft, flat and smooth and black, and at the remote end of it a forest of basalt columns stand. There I marked that the air was even warmer than the warm air near the lake, and it was not long ere I had advanced into a hot steaming, with a sulphur stench, the which I had no sooner perceived than I fell upon my hands over a heap which proved, when I had struck a flash, to be slushy sulphur. I also saw a canal cut through the floor across the rock-hall's breadth, as regular as if graved there, this being two feet deep, as I

discovered, and two feet across, through which canal babbled a black brook, bubbling hot, the floor on each bank of the canal being heaped with sulphur. I had soon scooped up some of the fluid with the tinder-box, and upon his cooling somewhat, I discovered it to be fresh, though sulphurous, and also tarry, in his taste; and thenceforth I had it always cooling in rows of conch shells by the rock-hall's left wall.

And during all the years of my tarrying in this tomb, the rock-hall hath become, in some manner, my home. There, in a corner nigh the three steps, I made up a fire; I put round it stones, and over the stones a slab, and plaiting my beard into my hair behind me, I there broiled my meat, until the time when I took to boiling the mixed trunkfish and bulrush in the canal's boiling brook; and for a long while I kept the fire ever fed with wood from the tiny forests: for that I loved his light.

But, as to light, I have nineteen times beheld it in this dark from other causes than mine own fires, seventeen times the light being lightning: for lightning I must call it, the land lightning like the sky: and this I understand not at all.<sup>1</sup> But I was standing by the water's margin, bent upon catching my white blindlings, when the cavern became far and wide as it were an eye that wildly opened, winked five million to the minute, and as suddenly closed; and after a minute of thick darkness as afore, it opened once more, quick quivered, and closed. And there all ghastr I stayed, in my heart's heart the ghastr thought: "Thou, God, Seest Me." But though mine eyes staggered at the glare, I fancy that in fact it was but faint, and the ghost only of a glare, for of the cave's secrets little was thereby revealed unto me: and sixteen times in like wise his wings have quivered, and the wildness of his eye hath stared at me like the visitations of an archangel: and twice, besides, I have beheld the cave lighted by the volcano.

But it was long before ever the volcano came that I fell in with the mescal: for it was no long time after that surprise of lightning that, in pacing once to the shore to take up some trunkfish which I had thrown in the slush there—I think eight or twelve years may then have gone over me—I happened to bruise in my fingers one of the pigmy globose fruit, and there oozed out of it a milk that I put to my lips. It was bitter, but I did swallow some

<sup>1</sup> Electric earth-storms.



drops unawares, the result whereof was wondrous: for even ere I reached the beach, an apathy enwrapped my being; I let myself drop down by the breakers' brim; my brow and body collapsed in a lassitude; and my lips let out the whisper: "pour on: but as for me, I will know rest." I was thereupon lapped in trances the most halcyon and happy; the roaring rolled for me into such oratories as my mouth may not pronounce, though I appeared, so to speak, to *see*, more than to hear, that music; and in the mean time mine eyes, fast closed, had afore them a universe of hues in slow movement and communion, hues glowing, and hues ghostly and gnomelike, some of them new hues to me, so that I knew not at all how to call them, with cataracts of pomegranate grains pattering, waves of parrot green, wheels of raspberry reeling, dapplings of apple and pansy, pallid eyeballs of bile and daffodil, pellucid tulips, brooks of rubies, auroras, roses, all awork in a world earnestest than Earth, that it were empty to attempt to tell of.

I had heard tell at San Juan of the shrub which they do name "the mescal button," chewed by the Mexicans to produce upon them such revelations of hues; and I have concluded that this shrub of the cave must be of nature akin.<sup>1</sup> But though the gift of it transfigured that stink-pit beneath the sea into a region of the genii for me, I was aware that to munch thereof was presumptuous, for the troubles that his rancour bringeth upon the body of men were quickly obvious upon me. But I made never an attempt to abandon his happiness, for it wheeleth through the brain to so sweet a strain, and talketh such gossip to the organs of the consciousness, as I do not suppose to be true of the very lotus, nor of that pleasant root that is known as nepenthe.

I have spent years on years, nay, as it seems to me, eras on eras, in one dreaming by the sea's rim, while my soul, so to speak, passed into the cataract's inmost roar, and became as one therewith. I lay there naked, for at first I had preserved my jerkin and shirt to serve for tinder, until I tumbled upon the discovery of the bulrush-pith, whereupon I employed the jerkin and shirt to contain the pith and fish for their boiling; so after the last of my trouse's rags had shredded from around my legs,

<sup>1</sup> The mode of occurrence of mescal (above ground) is rather different from Saul's plant, though the effects are identical.



and my shoes, too, from my feet, through great periods of time I have lain there naked, though enveloped to my belly in my hair and beard, idly dreaming, finding it too dreary a trial to seethe my food, and often eating raw, having long ago let the fire in the rock-hall go out. In the end I have shirked even the burden of bending in the sea's surf, or of journeying to the mussel stream, to get at my grub, and will spend considerable periods with never a bit other drink or meat than that bitter-sweet milk of the mescal.

From this life of sloth twice only have I been disturbed by fright, the first time when the volcano came, the second time when I observed the increasing dearth of air to breathe; and on each occasion I was spurred to take torch and search further afield than e'er before what the vault holds—in both searches meeting with what turned out serviceable to my needs: for in the first search I butted on the bulrush bush, which I believe I butted on years ere I observed this increasing dearth of air; and it was the increasing dearth of air which sent me peering further a second time, and then I saw the pond of pitch. This latter is beyond the forest of basalt columns at the far end of the rock-hall; and it was in passing to it through those columns that I saw the beast's bones, that be bigger, I believe, than several elephants together, although the beast resembled an elephant, having straight tusks, exceeding long; and his jaw hath six huge teeth, very strange, every several tooth being made of littler ones, the which cling about it like nipples; and there among those pillars his ribs may have rested for many a century, some of them being now brittle and embrowned; and beyond the pillars is a passage, perfectly curved, having a purplish fungus growing upon his rock; and beyond the passage is a cavern than whose threshold I could no farther advance, for the bed thereof is a bitumen sea, which is half-warm and thick at the brink, but, I think, liquid hot in the middle; and all over his face broods a universe of rainbows, dingy and fat, which be from the fat vapours of the pitch bringing forth rainbows, not rainbows of heaven, but, so to say, fallen angels, grown gross and sluggish. But years ere this, I think, I had seen the bulrushes: for, soon after the volcano came, in roaming over the left shore of the cataract's sea—the which left shore is flat and widespread,

and hath no high walls like the right side—I walked upon a freshet of fresh warm water, and after following it upward, saw all round a marsh's swamp, and the bush of bulrushes. This is where the oysters be so crass, and they be pearl oysters, for all that soil be crass with nacreous matter of every sort, with barrok pearls, mother-of-pearl, and in most of the oysters which I opened pearls, with a lot of conch shells that have within them pink pearls, and there be also the black pearl, such as they have in Mexico and the West Indies, with the yellow and likewise the white, which last be shaped like the pear, and large, and his pallor hath a blank brightness, very priceless, and, so to say, bridal. As to the bulrush, his trunk is triangular (like the trunk-fish), some five inches wide at the bottom, and giveth a white pith good for food. I came, moreover, upon the discovery after a long time that, since this pith lieth in layers, these, being steeped in water, and afterwards dried, do shrink to a parchment, quite white and soft, but tending to be yellow and brittle in time.

But for these two adventures, first to the bulrushes, and then to the pond or sea of pitch, I cannot remember that that long trance I had by the shore was broken by any excursion. But I had a rough enough rousing in that hour when, upon opening mine eyes, I beheld, not the old darkness, but all the hall disclosed in scarlet, and felt the cavern in movement, not with that proper trembling that I knew, due to the preponderousness of the cataract's mass over the earth's fabric, but racked with an earthquake's racking: and when mine eyes, now shyer than the night-bird's, recovered their courage, I observed the sea's whole surface heaved up like sand-heaps, dandled up with the earthquake's dancing. Now also for the first time I saw aloft to my right the tunnel's monstrous mouth, out of which the cataract's mass tumbleth down, the mouth's top rim being rounded, like the top lip of a man's mouth crying aloud. I saw also the cataract rolling hoary across his whole breast's breadth, woolly with flocks and beards of froth, as it were Moses' beard, except at the centre, where it gallops glassy smooth and more massy, for there the sea cometh out from the tunnel's inwards to stretch itself out in that mouth that shouteth aloud. I saw also the roof like a rufous sky of rock, and right before mine eyes lay an

island, long and narrow, upon the which I had been cast at the first, for there yet lay the portugal on the right end of the island, that right end lying quite nigh the cataract, and the island's left end some twenty yards from the lake's left end. And I saw the lake in his entirety by spying over the island's centre, where the land lies low, the lake having an egg's form, perhaps two miles in his length, I being at the egg's small end. I saw also that the cave's right side, where the wall rises sheer, is washed directly by the lake's wheeling career; and since the cataract there crashes down, along that right side I cannot advance; nor along the cave's left side can I advance so much as a mile, for there a headland juts out into the lake, dividing that side of the cave into two great rooms. I saw also nigh the far shore of the lake four more small islands of rock, and I was shewn, from the lake's ocean-like aspect, that his waters be vastly profound, his bottom being doubtless housed far down in the planet's bowels. All was lit up. And some distance beyond the lake's far boundaries, I saw the mouth of some cave, through which came up a haze of radiance sparkling, and vaulting stones, and therewith some tongues of flame, which now shewed, and now withdrew their rouge.

I gathered that some volcanic action was going on under the cavern, and as I there stayed, agape at it, I saw arise out of the lake in the remote distance, and come toward me, a thing, with the which I so long had lived, and known it not. His body lay soft in curves on the billows nigh a furlong behind his uplifted head, and I could not fly, nor turn mine eyes from the pitifulness of his appearing in the light. His head and face be of the dimension of a cottage, having a shameful likeness to a death's-head, being bony, shiny, and very tight-skinned, and of a mucky white colour, with freckles. It hath a forehead and nose-ridge, but, where eyes should be, stands blank skin only; and it drew nigh me with the toothless house of his mouth wide open in a scream of fear, distrusting Him that made it: for the air was waxing still hotter, and it may have had an instinct of calamity, peradventure from some experience of the volcano's fierceness a century since. It travelled nigh under the island's right end through the cataract's foam, and then close under me, nor could see me look at his discovered nudity, nor could my rooted foot flee from it; and



on it journeyed, circling the lake's surface with the dirge of his lamentation. Immediately after I lost my reason through the fierceness of the heat, and reeled; and when I came back to myself the cave was as black as ever. And once again, long afterwards I saw flames flutter in the cave beyond the lake, a grey dust rained over the lake's face, the great creature arose, and a grove of the trees at this end were sere with heat; but since then the event has never been seen.

But it was soon subsequent to this second convulsion that I made an observation: to wit, that unless I was well under the rule of the mescal fruit—when I do scarce seem to breathe—I became aware of an oppression of the chest. And this grew with me; so that I began to commune within me, saying: "Though the cavern be vast, the air that it containeth must be of limited volume, and I have inhaled it long: for whereas when I hither came I was a young thing, I am now old. My lungs have day by day consumed the wholesome air; and the day approacheth when I must surely perish."

At the commencement it was only when I lay me to rest that the trouble oppressed me, but, sat I up, it passed; then after, if I sat, it oppressed me; but, stood I up it passed: so that I understood it to be so that a lake of noxious vapour lay at the bottom of the air of this place, a lake due to my breathing, that each year grew in depth and noxiousness, the longer I breathed: this vapour having a sleepy effect, not happy like the mescal's, but highly unhappy, making me nightmares and aches of my body. In the beginning I got relief by going to live in other regions than in the rock-hall and on the beach: but in every direction my way hath now been blocked, for I have now inhabited in turn every cranny of the cavern whereto I am able to penetrate, and the vapour is in all, troubling also the shrubs of all sorts, the which let fall their heads, and shed their health. There remain some coigns among the rockeries, wherein, when I toil aloft to them, I may yet breathe with some freedom; but that my days are numbered I know. My God! my God! why hast Thou created me?

But soon after understanding the manner of my undoing, I began to argue in myself as regards the cavern and his architecture as never formerly, arguing that whereas so great volumes



of water came in, and the vault was not filled, there must needs be some outlet for an equal volume to flow out. I was led to conjecture that the tunnel which admits the sea into the cavern is at some sea-mountain's summit; that the cavern must be in the mountain's bowels; and that the outflow out of the cavern must be down another much longer tunnel, leading down to the mountain's bottom into the sea.<sup>1</sup> I therefore conceived the notion that, if I could reach the portugal, get it repaired, and, in it, introduce myself into the tunnel of outflow (the which I knew to be beyond the headland on the lake's left, where the lake's two wheeling currents meet), then I should be carried down and out into the bottom of the sea, should thereupon rise to the sea's surface—for the unweighted portugal would certainly float with me—and there I might bore a hole or two in the portugal's upper belly for air, and be picked up by a ship before my stores were done, and before my death from hunger or suffocation, I being well drugged with the mescal, and so but little breathing or eating. As to introducing myself into the tunnel of outflow, nothing more was necessary than to get the portugal to the headland's end, get myself into it, and roll myself in the portugal from the headland's end into the lake: where the currents would not fail to bear me toward the place of outflow, and I should be sucked down into the tunnel.

I meditated that the stupendousness of the attempt in no fashion lessened my chance: for that laws will act exactly on the immense scale as on the small. The portugal I could get to by going into the lake at the egg's-point of the lake, whence the current would carry me away along the left shore toward the island, the left end whereof I might catch by continually swimming strong to the right; and lest I should be dashed to fragments in my grand journey through the tunnel, I determined to pad the portugal's inside with the bulrush pith; and moreover I divided a sliding door in the portugal's side, the which when I should reach the sea's surface would be furnishing me with breathing: in the making whereof I did not doubt but that

<sup>1</sup> This is shrewd: the two tunnels and lake thus acting as a syphon, and the compressed air acting as what in hydrostatics we call a "pocket". This, in fact, is the only hypothesis—except the hypothesis that the tunnel of outflow emerges upon dry land, there forming a salt lake or river, like the Sardinian *salines*.

my former craft in carpentry would help me out. That I might be struck blind by the moon's brightness, and surely by the sun's, upon opening mine eyes up there above I reflected: but I price eyes as of but paltry value to a man, and should estimate it no hardship to dispense with mine, such as they are. On the whole, I had no fear; and the reason of my fearlessness, as I at present perceive, lay in this: that in my heart I never at all intended to attempt the venture. It was a fond thought: for, granting that I got out, how could I live without the cataract? I should surely die. And what good were life to me there in the glare of day, without the mescal's joys, and without the secret presence of the voice, and the thing which it secretly shouteth? In such separation from the power of my life I should pass frailly away as a spectre at day-break: for by the power of the voice is my frail life sustained, and thereon I hang, and therein I have my being. And this in my soul I must have known: but in the futile mood that possessed me, I made three several attempts to gain the portugal, terrified the while at mine own temerity; and twice I failed to make the left end of the island, for the current carried me beyond—toward the tunnel of outflow, I doubted not; yet were my terrors not of that horror mainly, but of the monster in the lake's depth, the which stayeth there pale and pensive, meditating his meditations: for I knew that if my foot or hand just touched his skin, I must assuredly reel and sink, shrieking mad, since I swam dark, but having an unlighted torch in my hand, the tinder-box being tied within my beard; and the first twice I was hurled to land upon the headland, but the third time upon the island's left end, the rock of which I clambered up with my hands lacerated by shells. And after lighting the torch, I wrought my steps toward the island's right end; and there lay the portugal even as I had left it twenty, forty, years ago, the slime on his side yet wet from the water-fall's aura that haunts the island. And in that spot I saw, not the portugal alone, but moreover a sword's hilt, a human skull, and a clock's racket, thither tossed by the cataract. The portugal was still good, for the pitch which is on it: and having cast out the drado by an effort of all my strength, I struck out four of the nails from the three bottom pieces that had been sprung, nailed the three pieces, and the broken hoop of wood, too, to the side of the portugal,

and so consigned the portugal to the waters, the which, I was assured, would bear it to the small end of the lake's egg-shape, as they had borne me upon mine ancient fall from the island.

But I had myself no sooner been spued again upon the mainland, more dead than alive, and there found the portugal stranded, than I knew myself for a futile dreamer, wearying myself without sincere motive: for that I should really abandon the cavern was a thing not within the capability of nature. And there by the shore's edge I left the portugal lying a good while, abiding for the most part upon the crags of these rocks that be like gradients on the right side of the hall, until that day when it was suggested to my spirit how strangely had been given me both ink and paper in this place, the knowledge moreover how to get the portugal forth of the grot with a history of that thing which my God in song hath murmured unto me, having furtively hid me with His hand, though a seraph's pen could never express it; nor could I long resist the pressure of that suggestion to write, and send forth the writing in the portugal.

For the portugal's mending I had the gimlet, the chisel, mescal timber, and some of the nails from the sprung bottom, which could be spared; nor was the job hard, since the one started hoop could be nicely spliced. I rolled and got the portugal up to this level ground in the rocks, surrounding myself, as I wrought, with tarred torches, which I stuck in the rocks' cracks: for down below it is reluctantly if a fire will now burn; and at this height also the torches do burn with shy fires.

Or ever the portugal was repaired, I had got ready the pages for writing, having divided fifteen of the bulrush piths into strips, then wetted, and dried them; but there be spongy spots in them where the lampblack that I have manufactured out of the pitch runneth rather abroad under the splint of fish-bone that serves for my pen, hurting the fairness of my writing. That I could write at all I rather doubted, on the count that I have not for so long handled pen nor spoken, and on the count moreover of the trembling: for not only the pen trembleth by reason of mine age, but the parchment trembleth by reason of the vault's trembling: and between those two tremblements, in a sick sheen which flickers ever, these sheets have, letter by letter, been writ. The fifteen sheets of pith, moreover, have proved too little, and

I am writing now on the second of two sheets that are sections of a fish's skin.

But now it is finished: and I send it out, if so be a fellow in the regions above may read it, and know. My name, if I have not yet writ it down, was James Dowdy Saul; and I was born not far from the borough of Bideford in the county of Devon.

My God! My God! why hast Thou created me?

I ask it: for the question ariseth of itself to my mind because of the crass facts of my predicament; yet my heart knoweth it, Lord God, to be the grumble of an ingrate: for a hidden thing is, that is winner than wife, or child, or the shining of any light, and is like unto treasure hid in a field, the which when a man findeth, he selleth all, and buyeth that field; and I thank, I do thank Thee, for Thy voice, and for my lot, and that it was Thy will to ravish me: for the charm of Thy secret is more than the rose, exceeding utterance.



' MONK WAKES AN ECHO



## MONK WAKES AN ECHO

"It seems incredible, but remember it was Regulus"—PLINY.

I WAS DOWN AT Abbey How, Monk's house in the Cotswolds, when Monk's weakness of the eyes—for which he wore a button in one ear—came upon him, and now he would cower for days over a library-fire, tamed, a "shade" over his nose. In fact, our life was spent in the library, with every one of its procession of windows shuttered up, so that at midday we were as shut away from the sun as at midnight; and our consciousness that, from outside, the mansion had a look of having been deserted for ages may have confirmed our tendency to indolence, Monk mostly giving no sign of life, save an occasional shiver at the gales of autumn wawling all among the hills.

The reaction, however, in his case, was ever certain. A moment came when he stirred and stretched, then a sitting forward, a spring-up, a mutter, "By Jove, I'm hungry!"

For more things than one: for cities, and the storm of things. At the same time he cast the "shade" from his eyes, and said to me: "Do you know what I have been thinking there? That one of the big crimes would rouse and excite us."

"No doubt of that," I said. "Against whom shall we commit it?"

"One needn't commit it oneself," he said. "What I mean is that we should first conceive the crime, construct it, then find out someone who is somewhere committing it in the world, and mix ourselves up generally in the trouble."

"But 'find out' in what possible way?" I asked, "and—with what motive?"

"Isn't crime, being a human thing, our business?" he said.

"But—really, Monk——"

"Crimes—that is what I have been thinking—are of three sorts: little—usually heard of and punished; middle-sized—heard of, but not punished; and big—never heard of."

"What do you call 'big' crimes?" I asked.

"Those which, like Borgia's, Gilles de Rais', are large-minded and dark-minded in mood; and 'little' those which, like burglars' murders, are sordid in mood."

"Suppose, though," I said, "that there are no 'big crimes' going forward at present for us to 'mix ourselves up in'?"

And he: "But isn't everything going forward that ever was or will be—doomsdays, moonfalls, cries of crucified Christs, rackets of Nile-cataracts, births of whirling worlds? As for our own sun, never before, credit me, did he blaze more crazily red, or more dreadfully roar on his road—what a bustle and thrill the whole thing is! Big crimes enough, I should think."

"Well, I am willing," I said, "though I like the light of day, and the pretty things that prink the sky at night, and have no wish to be shot. But how on earth—I can't even begin to conceive——"

"Wait, we shall see; first, let's dine."

After dinner we returned to the library where at once Monk, as he said, "set to work", first assuring me that there was no doubt about the result, since he had several methods in his head, and if one failed every one would not. And now he proceeded to spend three hours in a heat of activity, pitching up ladder-steps, eagerly dashing through leaves, with now a grumble, now a shrug, a mutter, hunting the rainbow, to "give to airy nothing a local habitation and a name".

I saw him pry into A B C's, masses of Ordnance maps, through a shelf of old ledgers belonging to the insurance-branch of his House, piles of newspapers, books on science. At last he lit a cigar, cast himself down upon a couch, his arms behind his head, and laughed. It was then ten o'clock.

"Well?" I said.

"Look you," Monk answered, "since modern men are given by heredity a bent against 'sin', it is under some compelling temptation that they commit it. Well, but in temptation there are two elements—wish, opportunity: so that, if I think of a 'sin' and desire to find out who is committing it, I commence by discovering those who have a roaring opportunity for doing so. Now, suppose I conceive that someone wants, for some reason, to lure a stranger or so into his clutches, what are the ideal



Conditions as to 'opportunity' which I should seek? Those conditions occur in the case of a man living near one of two obscure railway-stations which have nearly the same name: so I found out the sixty such pairs of stations which exist in Europe, and wrote them down—one such pair being Stratton Eastern and Stratton Western in Scotland. Very good. Now, suppose, on discovering this fact, I discover also this constantly repeated advertisement: 'Summerdale Farm. Paying guests received. Every home comfort. Climate highly recommended by the Profession. Terms moderate. Near Stratton Western, Kincardine.—Apply J.P., "Telegraph", Box No. 3715'. And suppose I moreover discover, firstly, that this climate, so highly recommended by the Profession, is the climate of a storm-swept coast, almost uninhabited: and secondly, that there is no record anywhere of any such farm in Kincardine as Summerdale Farm?"

"That might be ugly," I agreed.

"You see, of course," he went on, "what might happen to a 'paying guest' who starts to get to 'Summerdale Farm'. His friends, if he has any, know that he has gone to Stratton Western; his train arrives, let us say one evening, at Stratton Western; his luggage is put upon the local cab, if there is one—upon some species of thing with wheels—and now he gives the order 'Summerdale Farm'. However, his driver knows no Summerdale Farm—no one knows it—it doesn't, in fact, exist. But at last the idea inevitably strikes someone that the stranger has made a mistake—that the farm must be at Stratton Eastern, not at Stratton Western; and, sure at first though our stranger is that it is Western, not Eastern, finally, in his perplexity, and hunger, maybe, he is tempted to try Eastern, whither by the next train he goes. Here someone—maybe disguised—awaits him with a trap. 'Is not he the stranger expected at Summerdale Farm?' Yes. He enters that trap; and a trap it proves. He is driven, a long way perhaps, to a place which is not Summerdale Farm: and no trace from that moment remains of that man in this world."

"Well!" I exclaimed.

"Unless, indeed, the evil-doer has the imprudence to compromise himself by taking out a somewhat unusual number of policies of insurance——"

"No! *Is* there someone at Stratton Eastern who has done that?"

"Not far from Stratton Eastern—a certain Sir Saul Ingram, as I see, residing at Feuding Manor thereabouts. Far be it from me to assert that this Sir Saul, who has taken out the policies, and the man who has advertised the fictitious farm, are the same. Still, I have a greed on me to see this Feuding Manor, and mean to go to it."

"Not—alone?"

"Yes, since I have a sort of guess in my head that Sir Saul Ingram may be a country squire of unquiet type; and you have said that you like the sun."

His eyes twinkled, but his tone was decided. I did not know what to say; and when I woke the next morning my Monk had already taken train northward. At nine the same evening (as it was related to me afterwards) he arrived at Stratton Eastern.

There, after making a good many inquiries, he got to hear something of the whereabouts of Feuding Manor, miles away, and set off on foot over a tract of "links"—sand-dunes mixed with scrub—where the solitude was absolute, great guns of wind blowing a roar of breakers shoreward—wind with something in its tone which seemed to mean that here it was no visitor, but the king of that coast. Warned as he had been in regard to the quicksands near the seaboard of the "links", and hearing the roar of breakers grow in his ears, as he dug his way head-foremost in the teeth of the gale, he was directing his course more westward, when a gust tugged his hat from his hands and head, and carted it into the dark. With the wind now at his right shoulder, he went on hatless for some forty minutes, till he found the ground begin to harden; and soon he was following a foot-path through a wood of alders that presently thickened to a forest where he could scarcely see his hand, and then anew thinned to a wood, through which he passed downwards by a path, and now found himself in a vale, enclosed by fells and scars; and he could make out before him a lake of water.

He thought that this ought to be the place; but, as he could discern nothing with any distinctness, he stood in uncertainty a little, until up burned the brim of the moon luridly above a scar; and now he could perceive the shape of a house, darkness, low, large, on an "ait", or island, lying in a mere.

No blink of light came out from it; but, without hesitation, Monk walked down to the edge of the mere; found a causeway of stone leading to the island; went over it; passed at the end of it between two rocks like druidical "standing-stones", and, sending a flock of black-faced sheep bleating away through bracken, began to prowl round the grounds.

The ground very rough; no visible road; alders and willows huddled all one way by the continual sea-storm; and, as to the house, its structure was most intricate and quaint, the roofs of different breadths, spouts out of the straight, with an outhouse or lean-to here or there. But what struck him was the hoary age of the whole, the walls propped with beams which were themselves watery and soft with rot; and here or there a mass of masonry and beams had tumbled. Every window on both stories was boarded up; and, though Monk again and again applied his eyes to the boardings, he could spy no glimmer of light. All of a sudden a muffled, yet wild, howl wawled out of the house.

Monk had as yet no plan of action; yet upon action of some sort he was resolved; and hearing, as he now stood thinking how he was to act, a horse's neigh, he followed the sound, and came to an outhouse in an alder-spinney. This proved to be a stable, and there, against the door, stood a spade, a rake, and a crow-bar.

Monk took the crowbar and returned to the house, where, after scrambling to the roof of a lean-to, he saw a shutter which was a sheet of iron, over which projected a crane; and he set to work on the shutter, the roar of the winds drowning the sounds of his fumbling. The roof, being slanting, and mossy, was very slippery; but lying along it, he managed presently to prise open the iron slab, which yielded with a pop, though, as it turned out, the wrench did not break the catch: and since the slab lacked a handle, when Monk had drawn it toward him, and had sprung into the apartment beyond, and when the wind again slammed the slab, and the catch clicked, he realised that he was a prisoner. Light though his leap was, it shook the house, which he felt shake throughout to each gust of the gale; and here, it was clear, was the home of old decay. As he stood there in a darkness that was complete, from somewhere far away there came to his ears a cry like the wail of one rived with pain; and when he struck a



match, there, at his feet, kneeling with a face of fear, he saw a man, quite young, yet with long, white hair, clad in the rags of a dressing-gown.

Monk, having struck another match, put his left hand on the lad's head, murmuring to him: "I am not going to hurt you; do I look, now, as if I would? Tell me who you are."

Nothing but a species of jabbering proceeded in answer out of the throat of the lad, who, opening his mouth wide, pointed inward to it.

"Ah!" said Monk, when he saw that the lad had no tongue. And he kept on striking matches, examining that prostrate shape, examining the chamber.

He saw that there were two truckle-beds, from one of which the lad had apparently just risen, the other being "made"; and at the foot of this other—chained to it—was a cash-box, which Monk was going to investigate when the lad held him back with a grip and gaze of warning—a gaze that all at once grew aghast at a sound of footsteps coming without. Quickly now Monk struck another match, hustled the lad into a large cupboard, without shelves, in a corner, locked its door upon him, kept the key; then, flying to the lad's bed, with that lightning knack of his so arranged the bedclothes as to lend them an air of covering a slumberer. An instant later the key turned in a lock; there entered a very bulky man, bearing a candlestick with a tallow candle; and Monk, though he had purposely come to this house without a weapon, faced him.

The man, dressed in a red shirt which bagged over his girdle, was evidently a servant, had an expression of dullness and grimness, a great fan-beard, and eyes nearly invisible beneath their lax lids, that resembled little draperies of skin. At sight of Monk his conduct was extraordinary. He simply dropped candlestick and candle, dashed to the cash-box, and, hugging it with both arms, began to bawl "Help!" But in one half-minute his mood of miserly affright changed to fury, and, bounding toward a stool, he caught and swung it to dash out Monk's brains; but Monk made a dodge as if to seize the cash-box, and the man, seeing this in the still-burning candlelight, bounded to intercept him; upon which Monk escaped out of the chamber.

Leaving the crowbar in a corner, and marking the spot in his



mind, Monk darted onward, little knowing whither, through the most curious old house which he had yet seen, where one chamber was higher or lower than the next by three or four steps, where nothing appeared quite straight, doors hung awry, floors lay aslant. He went butting into triangular rooms, antic nooks, whimsical corners, till, at last, seeing a blink of light ahead, he boldly moved toward it, opened a door, entered a room.

There hastened to meet him—a man; and both stood still looking at each other.

The man—a powerful person of middle height—walked with a busy fling-out of the right leg, his left hand stuck in the pocket of a robe tied with a cord round the waist; he wore spectacles across his broad face, had a broad mouth, and an out-sticking beard, so hairy as to invade the fat of his cheeks.

At last he spoke, saying quite coolly: "What are you doing here?"

His speech was a species of rapid mutter, and even in the act of speaking, his tongue-tip was ever out, seeking for one end of his moustache to eat.

"Here to find a brother of mine," Monk answered.

"What name?"

"Never mind his name. The lad whose tongue you have cut out, Sir Saul Ingram."

Monk was standing with his palms pressed on a table, his back toward the one door, and the baronet, more remote from the door, was moving round toward it—a movement that Monk noticed, but made no attempt to stop. So now, with a sudden run, Ingram gained the door, closed it, locked it. He then stepped to a chest of drawers, got out of a drawer a revolver, turned upon his prisoner. At the same time there was a banging outside the door, and a mouth howling: "There is a mon in the house!"

"Yes, I know, go away," Ingram said to the door; and to Monk: "You are a fool. Woe to the conquered"—with the table between them.

"Going to shoot me?" asked Monk—"an unarmed and helpless man?"

"Fool," muttered Ingram; "what else?"

"I have help near; I defy you to shoot."

Ingram raised the weapon, finger on trigger.

All the house trembled with many a weary creak to the power of the storm, while some seconds passed, in which the baronet appeared to be enjoying a consciousness of power. The shot, however, was never fired: for there ran out a passionate shout—from outside the house, apparently—a cry in the night: "Monk! expect us at two o'clock!" and it was the baronet who seemed shot—stepped backward, rushed aimlessly to the door, aimlessly back again, in frank scare, realizing no doubt that, if Monk's presence in the house was known outside it, then Monk's death, and the manner of it, was a matter for reflection. But he was partially reassured by Monk himself, who said: "No, I have no help near: that shout came from *me*, and seemed to come from outside because I am the sort of man who can do such things. You couldn't shoot me, I think. Try again, and I have other ways of stopping you, some not so agreeable."

Ingram eyed him with a grim underlook, quite undecided now, no doubt, as Monk wished him to be, whether the cry had or had not come from outside; and he probably resolved to wait till "two", the hour mentioned by the voice.

At this point a rap sounded on the locked door, and when Ingram opened it, there slouched-in the man in the red shirt whom Monk had encountered before, bearing dishes on both palms, and followed by a tall woman, white-faced, gaunt, her gown black, who bore on a tray a bottle, a plate, a tablecloth. The man took not the slightest notice of Monk, but the woman eyed him with a look of rancour. No one spoke. The woman spread the table, the man put on the dishes. But as she turned to go, the woman, holding up a finger, said to Ingram: "Saul, give heed! Danger this night!"

The baronet made no answer, locked the door after them, and sat to a repast of potatoes, boiled cod, black bread, whisky; and he set to eating with a certain earnestness, and to drinking.

After some minutes he glanced up at Monk, who stood regarding him with folded arms, and said: "Sit, if you like."

Monk sat by the table, watching the feast, watching the revolver on the table, watching the gulps of whisky. At last,

yielding perhaps to the garrulous influence of the drink, Ingram suddenly said: "Foolish man! What is it all about?"

And Monk: "I found out that you were up to some mischief, and came to stop you."

"Mischief? Know what I am?"

"No, tell me."

"The only exact biologist in the world."

"Oh, come, the only one?"

"See those three books there? In manuscript. Secret of genesis of life in them."

"Truly? And by what methods——?"

"Only one way—human vivisection."

"By Jove!"

Something here new to Monk, and he gazed with something resembling reverence at that plump face, as Ingram drained yet a glass, saying: "The dumb fellow you saw—young parson from Cambridge—am driving mad for brain. Doctors say, you know, they can discover no morbid anatomy in mad brains. No morbid anatomy! Ha, God!"

Ingram grinned to himself at this.

"So how do you drive people mad?" Monk asked.

"Fear, torture, horror, other things; have snakes, a jaguar, a monster grouse with four legs; simply solitary confinement sometimes. Depends on diathesis of subject."

"Well, you are candid enough," from Monk: "how if friends are really coming to rescue me at two? I'll naturally repeat all this."

"No, you won't, friends or no friends. Suppose I wanted to hide you—alive—I could. Why, I have seventeen people here now, undergoing preparations, and you might search, you wouldn't find. Minds like mine are trained in ingenuity, eh?"

"I should call out, of course."

"You wouldn't. I could have you dumb in three minutes. But you won't be here to call out—going into a packing-case with gun-cotton and a time-fuse for first goods train; thirty miles from Stratton Eastern scarcely a trace left of you."

"Even so, you won't escape the law," Monk remarked, "for one of my friends knows of the presence here of the dumb lad, who will be looked for, and undoubtedly found."

Ingram reflected, nodded, said: "You may be right there. I'd better examine his brain now instead of next week; and his body shall go with yours to the railway."

"But tell me one thing," Monk now said: "since science is your motive, how comes it that your name figures in insurance policies?"

Ingram at this glanced up angrily, stung in his honour, crying, "What! You know of that? And do you suppose that the motives of a man like me could be tainted in that way? Why, I live on sixpence a day!—except the whisky. Sometimes I do take out a policy on a patient, but not for myself! I have two misers in the house—Hubert and my sister—they get the money. That man Hubert—miserly—mad! thinks I am for ever on the look-out to steal the money I have given! Sleeps with fellow without tongue and nobody dare approach room: once wanted to kill me—mad."

"I see," said Monk: "whisky is golden, but silence is more so. Doesn't it occur to you, Ingram, that with all this knowledge that you have given me I can snuff you out in five or six different ways?"

The baronet took this coolly. As the rude repast ended, a clock struck midnight; and always outside wawled the storm.

"Hubert!" presently roared the baronet, at the same time clattering a handbell; and when Hubert came slouching in, said to him, "Look in the dissecting-room closet, and carry one of those three packing-cases to your room. Wilson and this man have to go into it, and you have to take them to the station at five in the morning. Understand?"

Hubert grumbled something.

"And don't go holding matches and things over the packing-case, now," Ingram added with a grim smile: "gun-cotton in it."

Hubert grunted, but did not move.

"Well, why don't you go?" Ingram asked.

"Why must the box be e'en stowed in *my* room?"—from Hubert.

"Oh, go away, you, do what I tell you!" said the baronet. "Who wants to steal your daft money? I'm not even going to



enter your room. Isn't that the only room with a crane to lower the packing-case?"

Hubert, reassured, grumbled something, and went out. And now Ingram at once began to make preparations for the operation on the brain, taking two instrument-cases from a bureau, examining sphygmograph, microtome, forceps, scalpels, trephine, one by one, over the lamp, and laying them on a window-seat, the scalpels wrapped in chamois leather. The room was crowded all round with shelves for chemicals, and, like all the house, was pervaded with a breath of the laboratory, a scent of research, a certain taint of death. The baronet had laid down the instruments on the window-seat, when a white face with malign eyes peeped in, saying: "Saul, I would have speech with you."

The baronet stalked to her, and, while they stood talking a little outside the door, Monk stole close and hearkened.

"Saul," the woman said, "it is not well this night, I'm doubting. I have heard your talk with yon callant——"

"Well, what's the matter now, Elspeth?" the baronet was impatient.

"Are you minded to make any more operations on Wilson to-night, Saul?" she asked: "No, don't do it, it is a long work, you will not have the time."

"I am busy—what is it you want with me?" from the baronet.

"End Wilson at once, Saul," she answered, "and yon callant, too, and put them both into the box for the station: for I feel a fright on me. You know not what aid this man may ha' outside; and here is Hubert threeping that one of the snakes has escaped, and I near fainting with fright——"

Monk stopped to listen to no more, flew lightly round the shelves, searching till he found a bottle marked "Phosphorus", which contained some waxy, semi-transparent sticks in water. From this he took out one of the sticks, wetting his fingers well, so that their warmth should not cause the phosphorus to flame; and now, running to the window-seat, he took one of the scalpels there out of its chamois wrapping, made the leather damp to keep it cold a little, and then, putting the stick of phosphorus with the scalpel, wrapped it up anew. He had put back the bottle in its place when the baronet came in again,

stalked to the window, hurriedly put his tools into an outer pocket of his robe, phosphorus and all, and called out: "Hubert!"

"Look you," said Monk, now frowning balefully, "let me save you some trouble, sir. You are calling this Hubert, I think, to tell him to take Wilson to your operating-table. Well, but Wilson is gone—has escaped——"

Ingram turned white.

"I set him at liberty," Monk added.

At those words the baronet flew. To this moment the disappearance of Wilson had not been discovered, probably owing to Monk's life-like placing of the bedclothes when he had locked him away in the cupboard. At any rate, so intense was the baronet's scare at this ugly news, that, in flying out, he even forgot to lock Monk in—only for one instant, though, for back he flew, transferred the key to the outside, turned it, then was off anew, making for Wilson's chamber—which was Hubert's, too; and he was just off when Hubert, in answer to his summons, came, rapped, turned the key, entered, and was looking round for the baronet, when Monk, bursting into laughter, said: "What, looking for the master? Gone out. Well, you can guess—called you to get out of the way while he went to your room—in want of a little cash to-night to buy my silence. Take my advice: lie low—say nothing."

The man's face passed through all the expressions of disbelief, belief, rage, lunacy; and suddenly casting up his arms, he took to his heels. Monk had the hope that in the miser's access of scare he would omit to lock the door, and he did; but, after one moment's forgetfulness, he, too, darted back to the key, turned it, and was away again.

Monk, then, was still a prisoner; but he now no sooner found himself alone than he began to shout, in a perfect imitation of Ingram's voice: "Hi! Elspeth!" and when in a minute the baronet's sister turned the handle, then the key, peeped in, looking for her brother, Monk, bowing, said to her: "The baronet has just left the room, madam. I see that he is in a great hurry to make his experiment on that Wilson, and is now gone to get all ready; but, hurry as he may, I tell you that he will hardly have time. Look you, will you make a bargain with me?"

"Well?" asked Elspeth, with a twitching of her malign eyes.

"Madam," said Monk, "I stand this night in peril; but so do you: and if I show you how to save yourself, will *you* save *me*? A bargain?"

"Ye-es," said the woman.

"Well, in one half-hour others from outside will be here—I know it—and as they have reason to believe that Wilson is here, the only hope for you really is to have Wilson out of the house in the packing-case before they come; and since the baronet is bent upon his experiment, your one chance is to end this Wilson with your own hands—this moment—as he lies a-bed, before the baronet can get him for the experiment: for the baronet has no use for the dead body, it is the living brain that he is after. So now I have told you the facts: will you save my life in return?"

"We must see," she answered, with her twitching eyes of craft—seeing fully the force of Monk's remarks, which jumped with her own views: and at once, making up her mind, she turned to the bureau to unlock a drawer by one of the bundle of keys at her girdle, and to draw forth a horn-handled knife, her purpose, as Monk knew, being to spring first upon and stab him, before hurrying to the dumb lad's bed. But while she was still stooping over the bureau, Monk had caught up Ingram's water-jug, and, hiding it behind his back, had looked down at the floor, which he found to slant, like most of the floors; and, as the woman was raising herself to turn upon him, he hissed: "A snake!"

"Snake!"

When she stared with panic where he pointed, her glance saw in the room's gloom a wiry form gliding over the floor toward her—a snake created by Monk, who, having heard her say that one of the baronet's snakes had escaped, had now, out of the waterbottle, poured an undulating rivulet over the floor. The woman flew and, as she flew, again glanced backward, once more to behold the pursuit of the snake: nor gave she any third glance, but—serpents being her aversion—sent out a shriek, and was gone headlong, leaving the door open, Monk after her, tracking the sound of her footfalls, himself all unmarked, through the intricacies of the house, toward Wilson's room.



The situation at that moment in that room Monk declares that he knew with precision, as though he saw it. He had sent the baronet to find Wilson, and the miser, Hubert, to find the baronet: now, he was convinced that Ingram had a real fear of the miser's growls and furies, and he knew that no sooner would Ingram have discovered the absence of Wilson than he would hear the oncoming of the wrath of Hubert; upon which it was certain that the baronet, to avoid a scene, or something worse, would wish to secrete himself. But there was no hiding-place in that room, save two—the cupboard and the bed-clothes of Wilson's truckle-bed. The cupboard, containing Wilson, Monk had locked: so, Ingram, knowing that Hubert was still ignorant of Wilson's disappearance, would scuttle beneath Wilson's bedclothes, and pretend to be Wilson asleep. And Monk had now prompted Elspeth to kill Wilson in his bed; provided she did which quickly and quietly, she would kill her brother.

Something more or less corresponding to these calculations must really have taken place. Hubert, on entering Wilson's room, must have struck a match, peered round, seen no baronet there, and now, perhaps, was about to go out again, when he must have heard footsteps—Elspeth coming to "end" Wilson; on which the miser's suspicions must at once have leapt up afresh, and he must have crouched somewhere in the dark to watch what would take place. Elspeth then went in, Monk by that time being close behind her, though, before he could reach the door, she had shut and secured it; and he stood listening outside. And now the woman, moving no doubt on hands and knees, steel in hand in the rayless dark, crawled for the bed on which lay her brother, for suddenly—short, but raucous—Monk heard the outburst of a shout.

At this outcry of the baronet, Hubert must have addressed Elspeth: for presently Monk heard her explaining her motive for disposing at once of the dumb lad; then a match was struck within, but, as they had no candle, and the baronet's face must have been covered, he was not apparently recognized: there followed a noise of shuffling feet when the body was being raised and placed in the packing-case waiting there to receive Wilson; and as the garment worn by Wilson was of the same sort as



Ingram's, no suspicion of the truth could have occurred to the criminals, who would strike no matches over the gun-cotton in that box. Monk heard the drop of the lid over the deposited body, and the woman's question: "Has it a lock?"

And now he knew that there was need for haste. In the box was gun-cotton, and in the baronet's pocket phosphorus, for Monk, who could be ruthless, had doomed all the three. That phosphorus must quickly fire at the warmth of a body still warm packed into a closed box, the moistened chamois round it now dry or drying. Now, therefore, Monk darted to the spot where he had deposited the crowbar, then back, to the room outside which, at about the spot where the cupboard which contained Wilson stood, he began to dig at the boarding, Elspeth and Hubert within hearkening in a paralysis of awe apparently to those strokes of the crowbar and those breaths of Monk's breast, while on he toiled in the momentary expectancy of death, till at last the oak was crackling, a plank splintered, another, and an opening was there. Now Monk felt the contact of chilly flesh, dragged the lad out, tossed the meagre form over his shoulders, and, as though the fiend was after him, went flying, with many a blind stumble and fumble, about the house, Wilson's arm clasping his neck, choking him, a whimpering moaning from the dumb throat, while Monk, gasping beneath his load, ran onward in random trepidation, till, spying a gleam like moonshine through a crack, he again and again drove his back against some boarding, tumbled outward, and down fifteen feet, and was rolling downhill in bracken.

Then, catching up Wilson afresh, Monk made paces from the house, but had hardly run thirty yards when behind him a rumpus like the bursting of some tremendous drum had the earth atremble, and glancing backward, he saw a swarm of débris flying, like startled grouse in the midst of a spout of glare. Then followed three more brisk bangs; and the explosion, which was local to Wilson's room, was over. But some instinct of general ruin held Monk rooted where he stood during two minutes of dreadful expectation; at the end of which, at a point not very remote from the place of the explosion, a cake of masonry disengaged itself from the house, to thump in powder to the ground; in that gale the house seemed to totter to its downfall;

when a more ponderous cake of mason-work tumbled outward in a smoke of dust, from the interior there pealed forth, joined in one choir, a shriek of voices; and in some moments the whole hotch-potch of the house nodded, shouted, and rushed to ruin.

Day was breaking when Monk reached Stratton Eastern with his dumb friend, and I saw him again three days later.

## THE BRIDE





## THE BRIDE

"He shall not see the rivers, the floods, the brooks of honey and butter"—JOB.

THEY MET AT Krupp and Mason's, musical-instrument-makers, of Little Britain, E.C., where Walter had been employed two years, and then came Annie to typewrite, and be serviceable. They began to "go out" together after six o'clock; and when Mrs. Evans, Annie's mamma, lost her lodger, Annie mentioned it, and Walter went to live with them at No. 13 Culford Road, N.; by which time Annie and Walter might almost be said to have been engaged. His salary, however, was only thirty shillings a week.

He was the thorough Cockney, Walter; a well-set-up person of thirty, strong-shouldered, with a square brow, a moustache, and black acne-specks in his nose and pale face.

It was on the night of his arrival at No. 13, that he for the first time saw Rachel, Annie's younger sister. Both girls, in fact, were named "Rachel"—after a much-mourned mother of Mrs. Evans'; but Annie Rachel was called "Annie," and Mary Rachel was called "Rachel." Rachel helped Walter at the handle of his box to the top-back room, and here, in the lamp-light he was able to see that she was a tallish girl, with hair almost black, and with a sprinkling of freckles on her very white, thin nose, on the tip of which stood collected, usually, some little sweats. She was thin-faced, and her top teeth projected a little so that her lips only closed with effort, she not so pretty as pink-and-white little Annie, though one could guess, at a glance, that she was a person more to be respected.

"What do you think of him?" said Annie, meeting Rachel as she came down.

"He seems a nice fellow," Rachel said: "rather goodlooking. And strong in the back, you bet."

Walter spent that evening with them in the area front-room, smoking a foul bulldog pipe, which slushed and gurgled to his

suction; and at once Mrs. Evans, a dark old lady without waist, all sighs and lack of breath, decided that he was "a gentlemanly, decent fellow." When bed-time came he made the proposal to lead them in prayer; and to this they submitted, Annie having forewarned them that he was "a Christian." As he climbed to his room, the devoted girl found an excuse to slip out after him, and in the passage of the first floor there was a little kiss.

"Only one," she said, with an uplifted finger.

"And what about his little brother, then?" he chuckled—a chuckle with which all his jokes were accompanied: a kind of guttural chuckle, which seemed to descend or stick straining in the throat, instead of rising to the lips.

"You go on," she said playfully, tapped his cheek, and ran down. So Walter slept for the first night at Mrs. Evans'.

On the whole, as time passed, he had a good deal of the society of the women: for the theatre was a thing abominable to him, and in the evenings he stayed in the underground parlour, sharing the bread-and-cheese supper, and growing familiar with the sighs of Mrs. Evans over her once estate in the world. Rachel, the silent, sewed; Annie, whose relation with Walter was still unannounced, though perhaps guessed, could play hymn-tunes on the old piano, and she played. Last of all, Walter laid down the inveterate wet pipe, led them in prayer, and went to bed. Most mornings he and Annie set out together for Little Britain.

There came a day when he confided to her his intention to ask for a rise of "screw," and when this was actually promised by His Terror, the Boss, there was joy in heaven, and radiance in futurity, and secret talks of rings, a wedding, "a Home." Annie felt herself not far from the kingdom of Hymen, and rejoiced. But nothing, as yet, was said at No. 13: for to Mrs. Evans' past grandeurs thirty shillings a week was felt to be inappropriate.

The next Sunday, however, soon after dinner, this strangeness occurred: Rachel, the silent, disappeared. Mrs. Evans called for her, Annie called, but it was found that she was not in the house, though the putting away of the dinner-things, her usual task, was only half accomplished. Not till tea-time did Rachel return. She was then cold, and somewhat sullen, and somewhat

pale, her lips closing firmly over her projecting teeth. When timidly questioned—for her resentment was greatly feared—she replied that she had just been looking in upon Alice Soulsby, a few squares away, for a little chat: and this was the truth.

It was not, however, the whole truth; she had also looked in at the Church Lane Sunday School on her way: and this fact she guiltily concealed. For half an hour she had sat darkly at the end of the building in a corner, listening to the “address.” This address was delivered by Walter. To this school every Sunday, after dinner, he put down the beloved pipe to go. He was, in fact, its “superintendent.”

After this, the tone and temper of the little household rapidly changed, and a true element of hell was introduced into its platitude. It became, first of all, a question whether or not Rachel could be “experiencing religion,” a thing which her mother and Annie had never dreamt of expecting of her. Praying people, and the Salvationist, had always been the contempt of her strong and callous mind. But on Sunday nights she was now observed to go out alone, and “chapel” was the explanation which she coolly gave. *Which* chapel she did not specify: but in reality it was the Newton Street Hall, at which Walter frequently exhorted and “prayed.” In the Church Lane schoolroom there was prayer-meeting on Thursday evenings; and twice within one month Rachel sallied forth on Thursday evening—soon after Walter. The secret disease which preyed upon the poor girl could hardly now be concealed. At first she suffered bitter, solitary shame; sobbed in a hundred paroxysms; hoped to draw a veil over her infirmity. But her gash was too glaring. In the long Sabbath evenings of summer he preached at street corners, and sometimes secretly, sometimes openly, Rachel would attend these meetings, singing meekly with the rest the undivine hymns of the modern evangelist. In his presence, in the parlour, on other nights, she quietly sewed, hardly speaking. When, at 7 p.m., she heard his key in the front door her heart darted toward its master; when in the morning he flew away to business her universe was cinders.

“It’s a wonder to me what’s coming to our Rachel lately,” said Annie in the train, coming home; “you’re doing her soul good, or something, aren’t you?”



He chuckled, with slushy suction-sounds about the back of the tongue and molars.

"Oh, that be jiggered for a tale!" he said: "*she's* all right."

"I know her better than you, you see. She's quite changed—since you've come. Looks to me as if she's having a touch of the blues, or something."

"Poor thing! She wants looking after, don't she?"

Annie laughed, too: but less brutally, more uneasily.

Walter said: "But she *oughtn't* to have the blues, if she's giving her heart to the Lord! People seem to think a Christian must be this and that. A Christian, if it comes to that, ought to be the jolliest fellow going!"

This was on a Thursday, the night of the Church Lane prayer-meeting, and Walter had only time to rush in at No. 13, wash his face, snatch his Bible, and be off. Rachel, for her part, must verily now have been badly bitten with the rabies of love, or she would have felt that to follow to-night, for the third time lately, could not fail to incur remark. But this consideration never even entered a mind now completely blinded and entranced by the personality of Walter. Through the day her work about the house had been rushed forward with this very object, and at the moment when he banged the door after him she was before her glass, dressing in blanched, intense and trembling flurry, and casting as she bent to give the last touches to her fringe, a look of bitterest hate at the projection of her lip above the teeth.

This night, for the first time, she waited in the chapel till the end of the service, and walked slowly homeward on the way which she knew that Walter would take; and he came striding presently, that morocco Bible in his hand, nearly every passage in which was neatly under-ruled in black and red inks.

"What, is that you?" he said, taking into his a hand cold with sweat.

"It is," she answered, in a hard, formal tone.

"You don't mean to say you've been to the meeting?"

"I do."

"Why, where were my eyes? *I* didn't see you."

"It isn't likely that you would want to, Mr. Teeger."

"Go on—drop that! What do you take me for? I'm only



too glad! And I tell you what it is, Miss Rachel, I say to you as the Lord Jesus said to the young man: 'Thou art not far from the kingdom of heaven.'"

She was *in* it!—near him, alone, in a darkling square, yet suffering, too, in the flames of a passion such as perhaps consumes only the strongest natures.

She caught for support at his unoffered arm; and when he bent his steps straight homeward, she said trembling violently: "I don't wish to go home as yet. I wish to have a little walk. Do you mind, Mr. Teeger?"

"Mind, no. Come along, then," and they went walking among an intricacy of streets and squares, he talking of "the Work," and of common subjects. After half an hour, she was saying: "I often wish I was a man. A man can say and do what he likes; but with a girl it's different. There's you, now, Mr. Teeger, always out and about, having people listening to you, and that. I often wish I was only a man."

"Oh, well, it all depends how you look at it," he said. "And, look here, you may as well call me Walter and be done."

"Oh, I shouldn't think of *that*," she replied. "Not till——"

Her hand trembled on his arm.

"Well, out with it, why don't you?"

"Till—till we know something more definite about you—and Annie."

He chuckled slushily, she now leading him fleetly round and round a square.

"Ah, you girls again!" he cried, "been blabbing again like all the girls! It takes a bright man to hide much from them, don't it?"

"But there isn't much to hide in this case, as far as I can see—*is* there?"

Always Walter laughed, straining deep in the throat. He said: "Oh, come—that would be telling, wouldn't it?"

After a minute's stillness, this treacherous phrase came from Rachel: "Annie doesn't care for anyone, Mr. Teeger."

"Oh, come—that's rather a tall order, *any* one. *She's* all right."

"But she *doesn't*. Of course, most girls are silly, and that, and like to get married——"

"Well, that's only nature, ain't it?"

This was a joke; and downward the laugh strained in his throat, like struggling phlegm.

"Yes, but they don't understand what love is," said Rachel. "They haven't an idea. They like to be married women, and have a husband, and that. But they don't know what love is—believe me! The men don't either."

How she trembled!—her body, her dying voice—she pressing heavily upon him, while the moon triumphed now through cloud glaring a moment white on the lunacy of her ghostly face.

"Well, I don't know—I think *I* understand, lass, what it is," he said.

"You don't, Mr. Teeger!"

"How's that, then?"

"Because, when it takes you, it makes you——"

"Well, let's have it. You seem to know all about it."

Now Rachel commenced to tell him what "it" was—in frenzied definitions, and a power of expression strange for her. *It* was a lunacy, its name was Legion, it was possession by the furies; it was a spasm in the throat, and a sickness of the limbs, and a yearning of the eye-whites, and a fire in the marrow; it was catalepsy, trance, apocalypse; it was high as the galaxy, it was addicted to the gutter; it was Vesuvius, borealis, the sunset; it was the rainbow in a cesspool, St. John plus Heliogabalus, Beatrice plus Messalina; it was a transfiguration, and a leprosy, and a metempsychosis, and a neurosis; it was the dance of the mænads, and the bite of the tarantula, and baptism in a sun: out poured the wild definition in simple words, but with the strife of one fighting for life. And she had not half done when he understood her fully; and he had no sooner understood her, than he was subdued, and succumbed.

"You don't mean to say——" he faltered.

"Ah, Mr. Teeger," she answered, "there's none so blind as those who will not see."

His arm stole round her shuddering body.

Everyone is said to have his failing; and this man, Walter, in no respect a man of strong mind, was certainly on his amatory side, most sudden, promiscuous, and infirm. And this tendency was, if anything, heightened by the quite sincere strain of his mind in the direction of "spiritual things": for, under sudden

temptation, back rushed his being, with the greater rigour, into its natural channel. On the whole, had he not been a Puritan, he would have been a Don Juan.

In an instant Rachel's weight was hanging upon his neck, he kissing her with passion.

After this she said to him: "But you are only doing this out of pity, Walter. Tell the truth, you are in love with Annie?"

He, like Peter, tumbled at once into a fib. "That's what *you* say!"

"You are," she insisted, filled with the bliss of the fib.

"Bah! I'm not. Never was. *You* are the girl for me."

When they went home, they entered the house at different times, she first, he waiting twenty minutes in the street.

The house was small, so the sisters slept together in the second-floor front room; Walter in the second-floor back; Mrs. Evans in the first-floor back, the first-floor front being "the drawing-room." The girls, therefore, generally went to bed together: and that night, as they undressed, there was a row.

First, a long silence. Then Rachel, to say something, pointed to some new gloves of Annie's, asking: "How much did you give for those?"

"Money and kind words," replied Annie.

This was the beginning.

"Well, there's no need to be rude about it," said Rachel. She was happy, in paradise, despised Annie that night.

"Still," said Annie, after a silence of ten minutes before the glass, "*still*, I should never run after a man like that. I'd die first."

"I haven't the least idea what you're talking about," replied Rachel.

"You have. I should be *ashamed* of myself, if I were you."

"Talk away. You're a little fool."

"It's *you*. Throwing yourself at the head of a man who doesn't care for you. What *can* you call yourself?"

Rachel laughed—happily, yet dangerously.

"Don't bother yourself, my girl," she said.

"Think of going out every night to meet a man in that way: look here, it's too disgusting of you, girl!"

"Is it?"

"You can't deny that you were with Mr. Teeger to-night?"

"That I wasn't."

"It's false! Anyone can see it by the joy in your face."

"Well, suppose I was, what about it?"

"But a woman should be decent, I think; a woman should be able to command her feelings, and not expose herself like that. Believe me, it gives me the creeps all over to think of."

"Never mind, don't be jealous, my girl."

The gentle Annie flamed!

"Jealous! of *you*!"

"There isn't any need, you know—not *yet*."

"But I'm *not*! There never *will* be need! Do you take Mr. Teeger for a raving lunatic? I should go and have some false teeth put in first if I were you!"

Thus did Annie drop to the rock-bed of vulgarity; but she knew it to be necessary in order to touch Rachel, as with a white-hot wire, on her very nerve of anguish, and, in fact, at these words Rachel's face resembled white iron, while she cried out, "Never mind my teeth! It isn't the teeth a man looks at! A man knows a finely built woman when he sees her—not like a little dumpy podge!"

"Thank you. You are very polite," replied Annie, brow-beaten by an intensity fiercer than her own. "But still, it's nonsense, Rachel, to talk of my being jealous of *you*. I knew Mr. Teeger six months before you. And you won't know him much longer either, for I don't want to have mother disgraced here, and this is no fit place for him to lodge in. I can easily make him leave it soon——"

At this thing Rachel flew, with minatory palm over Annie's cheek, ready to strike. "You *dare* do anything to make him go away! I'll tear your little——"

Annie winked, flinched, uttered a sob, no more fight left in her.

So for two weeks the situation lasted. Only, after that night, so intense grew the bitterness between the sisters, that Annie moved down to the first-floor back, sleeping now with Mrs. Evans who dimly wondered. As for Walter, meanwhile, his heart was divided within him. He loved Annie; he was fascinated and mesmerised by Rachel. In another age and country he would have married both. Every day he came to a different resolve,



not knowing what to do. One thing was evident—a wedding-ring would be necessary, and he purchased one, uncertain for which of the girls.

“Look here, lass,” he said to Annie in the train, coming home, “let us put a stop to this. The boss doesn’t seem to be in a hurry about that rise of screw, so suppose we get spliced, and be done?”

“Privately?”

“Rather. Your ma and sister mustn’t know,—not just yet a while.”

“And you will still keep on living at the house?”

“Well, of course, for the time being.”

She looked up into his face and smiled. It was settled.

But two nights afterwards he met Rachel on his way home from prayer-meeting; at first was honest and distant; but then committed the incredible weakness of going with her for a walk among the squares, and ended by winning from her an easily granted promise of marriage, on the same terms as those arranged with Annie.

When, the next day at lunch-time, he put his foot on the threshold of the Registrar’s office to give notice, he was still in a state of agonized indecision as to the name which he should couple with his own.

When the official said, “Now the name of the other party?” Walter hesitated, shuffled with his feet, then answered:

“Rachel Evans.”

Not till he was again in the street did he remember that Rachel was the name of both the girls, and that liberty of choice between them still remained to him.

Now, from the day of “notice” to the day of wedlock, an interval of twenty-one clear days must by law, elapse, and Walter, though weak enough to inform both the sisters of the step he had taken, was careful to give them only a vague idea of the date fixed. His once clear conscience, meanwhile, was grievously troubled, his feet in a net; he feared to speak to God; and went drifting like flotsam on the river of chance.

And chance alone it was which at last cast him upon the land. The fifth day before the marriage was a Bank Holiday, and he had arranged with Rachel to go out with her that day to Hyde

Park, she to wait for him at an arranged spot at two o'clock. At two, then, at a street-corner, stood Rachel waiting, twirling her parasol, walking a little, returning. Walter, however, did not appear, and what could have happened was beyond her divination. Had he misunderstood or missed her? Though incredible, it was the only thing to think. To Hyde Park, at any rate, she went alone, feeling desolate and *ennuyée*, in the vague hope of there meeting him.

What had happened was this: Walter had been half-way toward the rendezvous with Rachel, when he was met in the street by Annie, who had gone to spend the day with a married friend at Stroud Green, but had returned, owing to the husband's illness. Seeing Walter, her face lit up with smiles.

"Harry's down with the influenza," she said, "so I couldn't stay and bore poor Ethel. Where are you going?"

For the first time since his "conversion" twelve years before, Walter, with a high flush, now consciously lied.

"Only to the schoolroom," he said, "to hunt for something."

"Well, I am open to be taken out, if any kind friend will be so kind," she said fondly.

Now he had that morning vowed to himself to wed Rachel; and by this vow he now again vowed to be bound. All the more reason why, for the last time, he should "take out" Annie.

"Come along, then, old girl," he gaily said: "where shall we go?"

"Let us go to Hyde Park," said Annie. And to Hyde Park they went, Walter, ever and anon, stabbed by the bitter memory of waiting Rachel.

At five o'clock the two were walking along the north bank of the Serpentine westward toward a two-arched bridge, which is also pierced by a third narrow arch over the bank: to this narrow arch, since it was drizzling, they were making for shelter, when Rachel, a person of the keenest vision, sighted them from the south bank. She was frantic at once. Annie, who was supposed to be at Stroud Green! *What treachery!* This, then, was why . . . She ran panting along the bank, toward the bridge, then over it, northward, and now heard the two under the arch, who stood there talking—of the wedding. Unfortunately, just here is a block of masonry, which prevented Rachel from leaning directly over

the arch to listen. Yet the necessity to hear was absolute: so she ran back clear of the masonry, and bent far over the parapet, outwards and sideways toward the arch, straining neck, body, ears, and anyone looking into those staring eyes *then* would have comprehended the doctrine of the Ferine Soul. But she was at a disadvantage, heard only murmurs, and—was that a kiss? Further and further forth she strained. And now suddenly, with a cry, she is in the water, where it is shallow near the bank. In the fall her head struck upon a stone in the mud.

For three days she screamed continuously the name of Walter, filling the street with it, calling him hers only. On the third night, in the midst of a frightful crisis of cries, she suddenly died.

"Oh, Rachel, don't say you are dead!" cried Annie over her.

The death occurred two days before the marriage-day, and on the next, Walter, well wounded, said to Annie: "This knocks our little affair on the head, of course."

Annie was silent. Then, with a pout, she said: "I don't see why. After all, it was her own fault, entirely. Why should *we* suffer?"

For the feud between the sisters had become cruel as death; and it outlasted death: Annie, on the subject of Rachel and Walter, being no longer a gentle girl, but marble, without respect or pity.

And so, in spite of the trepidations and hesitancy of Walter, the marriage took place, even while Rachel lay stretched on the bed in the second-floor front of No. 13.

The ceremony did not, however transpire without hitch and omen. It was necessary, first of all, for Walter to forewarn Annie that he had given notice of her to the Registrar by her second name of "Rachel"—a mad-looking proceeding that was almost the cause of a rupture which nothing but Walter's most ardent pleadings could steer him clear of. At any rate it was to "Rachel," and not to "Annie" that he was, as a matter of fact, after all married.

After the ceremony, performed in their lunch-time, they returned to business together in Little Britain.

At ten o'clock the same night, as he was going up to bed, she ran after him, and in the passage there was a long, furtive kiss—their last on earth.



"Twelve o'clock?" he whispered intensely.

She held up her forefinger. "One!"

"Oh, say twelve!"

She did not answer, but drew her palm playfully across his cheek, meaning consent, for Mrs. Evans was an inveterately heavy sleeper. He went up. And, careful to leave his door a little ajar, he extinguished his candle, and went to bed. In the apartment nearby lay stark in the dark—with learned, eternal eyelids and drowsy brow—the dead.

Walter could not but think of this presence close at hand. "Well, poor girl!" he sighed. "Poor Rachel! Well, well. His way is in the sea, after all, and His path in the Great Deep, and His footsteps are not known." Then he thought of Annie—the little wife! But instead of Annie, there was Rachel. The two women fought vehemently for his thought—and ever the dead was stronger than the living. . . . Instead of Annie there was Rachel—and again Rachel.

At last he could hear twelve strike from a steeple, and sat up in bed, listening eagerly for the door to open, or a footfall on the floor.

A little American clock ticked in the room; and in the flue of the chimney was a sigh and chaunt just audible.

Suddenly she was intensely with him, filling the chamber—from nowhere. He had heard no footstep, no opening of the door: yet certainly, she was with him *now*, all suddenly, close to him, over him, talking breathlessly to him.

His first sensation was a shuddering which strongly shook him from head to foot, like the shuddering of Russian cold. She held him down by the shoulders; was stretched at length on the bed, over him; and the room seemed full of a rustling and rushing, very strange, like starched muslins rushing out in stormy agitation. She was speaking, too, to him *in breathless haste*, whimpering a secret gibberish which whimpered like a pup for passion—about love and its definition, and about the soul, and the worm, and Eternity, and the passion of death, and the nuptials of the tomb, and the lust and hollowness of the void. And he, too, was speaking, whispering through his pattering teeth, saying: "Sh-h-h, Rachel—Annie, I mean—sh-h-h, my girl—your ma will hear! Rachel, don't—sh-h-h, now!" But even while he



kept up this "sh-h-h, dear—sh-h-h, now," he was conscious of the invasion of a strange rage, of such a strength as if energy was being vehemently pumped into him from some behemoth omnipotence. The form above him he could hardly discern, the room was so dark, but he felt that her garment was flowing forth from her neck in a continuous flutter, with the rustling of the starch of a thousand shrouds, like the outflow of a pennant in wind; and the quivering gauze seemed now to swell and fill the chamber, and now to sink again to the size of woman. And ever the rhapsody of love and death went on, mixed with the chattered "Sh-h-h, Rachel—Annie, I mean," of Walter; till, suddenly, he was involved in an embrace *so* horrible, felt himself encompassed by a might so intolerable, that his soul fainted within him. He sank back; thought span and failed in darkness beneath the spell of that lullaby; he muttered, "Receive my spirit. . . ."

After two days Walter, still unconscious, died. His disfigured body they placed in a grave not far from Rachel's.



THE PRIMATE OF THE ROSE





## THE PRIMATE OF THE ROSE

“‘FRIENDS OF THE ROSE’?” said E. P. Crooks to Smyth one night, at the Savage Club. “Is it an actual fact that there are secret societies in London?”

And Smyth, with his expression of lazy surprise, replied: “Why, yes. Ask me another time. Come and dine with us two, if you like.”

It is a wonder that Crichton Smyth ever did invite Crooks. As editor of the *Westminster Magazine*, he had known Crooks as a little story-writer, and had never had any such impulse: but suddenly Englishmen, with their genius for discovery, had discovered that they had a Crooks; proceeded to pay him ninepence for writing “the”; and then Smyth, with his eyebrows of surprise, muttered: “Come and dine with us.”

Smyth was of that better aristocracy, the upper middle-class, which gives to England its ladies: slim, clean-looking, old-blooded—not much blood, and thin: but rare, like wine of Yquem.

Of another family was Crooks—a fatty little man, fat-cheeked, with an outsticking moustache that hung. Still, there was something or other in him—something brisk in his glance, in the dash of his hair across his forehead; and if at seventeen he had vended soda-water from door to door, at twenty-six he was a graduate, and at thirty-six a star.

But he was a gay Romeo, Crooks—in a rather vulgar mood; and Smyth had a sister.

If one had prophesied to Smyth that his sister, Minna Smyth of the Smyths, could possibly commit follies for E. P. Crooks, or look twice at Crooks, Smyth would hardly have bothered to smile . . .

However, the human female can be pretty queer and wayward; and her heart is like spittle on the palm that the Tartar slaps—no telling which way it will pitch.

From that first night of the dinner Minna Smyth shewed herself amiable to the celebrity—a *chic* dinner of dated wines in a

flat in Westminster: for editors are awfully well-to-do people—do you know? The piano there was a mosaiced thing in mother-of-pearl; and, in turning Miss Smyth's music, Crooks' fingers got positive magnetism, hers negative, and they met.

She was a tall, thin girl of twenty-five, very like Smyth, very English in type, pretty, but washed-out and superfine, with light eyes of the colour of quinine-solution which X-rays make "fluorescent". Was Crooks genuinely smitten with this? It is doubtful. Besides, he was married. But she was a conquest worth making, and he was a man ever on the *qui vive* to add yet a photo to his packet, and a feather to his cap.

Minna Smyth, for her part, took studiously from that night to feeding her mind on the spiced meat of Crooks' books, who, meanwhile, had retaliated upon Smyth by banqueting him at the National Liberal, and might drive home anon with him from the Savage. Crooks felt that he was patronising Smyth; and Smyth felt that he was patronising Crooks: for when one has known a tremendous man in his days of "*£2-a-thousand-words*", one has no respect for his tremendousness—especially Smyth, who was the chilliest thing that the Heavens ever invented. At any rate, they became friendly.

During which time Crooks and Minna Smyth had a way of meeting at private views, lectures, concerts—meetings of which Smyth did not know; letters were written which Smyth did not see; and it happened one evening at the flat, at a moment when Smyth was in the next room, that Minna mentioned to Crooks in the course of conversation that on Friday nights her brother was out "at his secret society", and never came home till 4 A.M.

On this Crooks, picking up her hand, said to her: "I'll come on Friday night."

She looked at him under her eyes, meditating upon him; then moved her face from side to side, while her lips took the shape of "No".

"Something to say," said he: "I hope you aren't inexorable."

Her lids now veiled her eyes, while her bosom rose and rose, unloaded itself of a sigh, and tumbled back.

"Is it yes?" he whispered.

"*Crichton!*" she breathed, with a sudden expression of shrinking and fright in her eyes.

"Oh, I think that that will be all right about Crichton," Crooks said.

"You don't *know* him!" she whispered: "his nose goes white . . ."

Smyth now came in; and presently, when Minna had gone out, Crooks said to him: "By the way, how about that wondrous 'Friends of the Rose', Smyth, that you are always to tell me of?" He threw himself into roomy red velvet opposite Smyth's red velvet on the other side of a fire—it was December—and drank from a large and fragile glass.

"What can one tell of it, if it is a secret society?" Smyth asked, his eyebrows raised over lazy lids that seemed to strain to be open, for there was an ample valley of country between his eyebrows and his nose-tip.

"I mean to say—is the thing *real*? Is it like *London*?"—from Crooks, who had an inquisitive intellect, and, then, was ever on the quest of "copy". He added: "Years ago I wrote a story about a secret society—you must remember it; but I never for a moment believed that there are such things. Anarchism, yes—Freemasonry—the Irish——"

"Those are mushrooms," Smyth remarked, his lips giving out a trickle of thick cigar-smoke, languid as himself; while Crooks smoked a briar pipe.

"What! Freemasonry a mushroom?"—from Crooks—"on the contrary——"

"Comparatively, of course, I meant. And I don't call those secret societies, of whose existence and objects everyone knows. Where's the secrecy? . . . But there are others."

Crooks bent forward. He knew that Smyth was Cockney, as much a thing of London as was Charles Lamb, sometimes burrowing in some Slav night-club at the docks, or among "Ye Merrie Men", when supposed to be at holiday in Homburg: a being deeply initiated into London lore, knowing somewhat more behind those eyebrows of mild surprise than he ever mentioned at table: hence Crooks' interest; and his interest, like his other emotions, was usually shown.

"But in London?" he said. "Really, now? Why have I never dropped across them? In Paris, yes——"

Smyth answered—his taciturnity sometimes melted when the

subject was London—"Paris is to London as a shilling dictionary to the Encyclopædia Britannica. Everything's in London."

"Except Paris"—from Crooks.

"Paris is, too: I could take you to the Bal Bullier within half a mile of here. Only, in Paris it has name and fame, in London it is lost."

"But this 'Rose' business—'secret societies'—you assure me they're a fact?"

"I am a member of two; I know of a third; and have suspicions of a fourth." Smyth laughed a little to himself.

"That's three, say"—Crooks had animated eyes—"now, tell me how I can join them all!"

Smyth chuckled inwardly at this crude enthusiasm; and he said: "You don't seem quite to realise—they are *secret* societies. There are more multi-millionaires—more experts in Becquerel rays—than members. To become a member of those I know is about as rare a thing as the conjunction of four planets; and requires long preparation. You can't go about 'joining them' like that. One of them has consisted of sixteen members since the time of Edward II, another of twenty-three——"

"But what are they *for*?" Crooks fretfully cried. "What's—what's their *motif*, their *idea*?"

"Different *motifs*. Most are benevolent, I think. All mystic."

"Then, why on earth are they secret, if they are benevolent?" Crooks peered piercingly into it with the interest of the perplexed busybody: "The mere fact that they are benevolent——"

"Different reasons for secrecy: some are secret to avoid—hanging sometimes." Smyth showed his teeth in a silent laugh.

"Then, I don't tumble," from Crooks. "Why need they avoid hanging, if they are benevolent?"

"Seems fairly obvious to me," Smyth remarked, his straining lids half-shut behind his *pince-nez*: "There are three types of really secret societies—absurd, obscene, and benevolent: and the benevolent ones can only be created for one reason—because Government, so far, is immature and defective. They assist Government by taking the law into their own hands, executing justice, doing good, in cases where Government can't, or won't, yet do it, and calling upon God to witness in a mystic mood."



"Oho! Is that it? Then, they have my approval. And as to these 'Friends of the Rose' tell me the particular——"

"It was a bad day for me," Smyth interrupted, "when I mentioned to you 'Friends of the Rose', for you have left me no peace since. What business is it of yours? And what can you expect me to tell? Does the great Crooks take it for granted that secrets guarded six centuries will be blabbed to him for the asking? You may be perfectly certain, for instance, that 'Friends of the Rose' is not really their name—though it is not unlike that. What can one tell? Perhaps I may tell you that the membership has always been limited to sixteen; or I may tell you that there is a certain apartment somewhere in London of whose existence only one man at a time—occasionally two—has known for five hundred years."

Crooks winked quick, hearing it; then threw his face about, frowning, fretted, almost offended, for he disliked being "out of" anything. "Apartment," he muttered . . . "And who is that one man who knows?"

"The Primate of the Society."

"Primate . . ." Crooks meditated it over the fire; then animatedly looked up to ask: "Now, where can that apartment be?"

On which Smyth, tickled, let himself go into a sort of laugh, saying: "What, want to take a lady there? I am sorry I can't tell you, if only because I have no notion myself. But when the Primate dies—he is a very old man—lives in Camden Town—I shall know."

"Oh, *you'll* be Primate then?"

Smyth's lids lay closed. He made no answer.

"I should just like half-an-hour's interview with that 'very old man who lives in Camden Town'," Crooks mentioned.

And Smyth answered: "If you saw him hobbling along Gray's Inn Road, it would not occur to you to glance twice at him. London is like that. We brush shoulders with angels at Charing Cross, little divining the depths that some common-looking type has dived, the oddity of his destiny, his store of lore, his giftedness, or the dignity on his head. I know an old pattern-maker in Wapping——"

But at this point Minna came in, and, as Crooks' attention was drawn off, Smyth suddenly stopped.

That was a Wednesday.

Now, on Fridays Smyth invariably left his office an hour earlier, dined at home, locked himself in his book-room for two hours, and then went out dumb, like monks, not to come back till the morning hours.

Years had seen no break in this routine; but this Friday there was a break: for, for some unknown reason, Smyth was back at home before eleven.

In Victoria Street he glanced up at his windows on the second floor; noticed that the drawing-room light seemed low behind the blinds; and muttered something to himself.

He then went up by the lift, opened the flat-door with his key—and did it noiselessly, though he was *far* from admitting to himself that he did it noiselessly. He now glanced into the kitchen, and his eyebrows went higher because of the fact that it was in darkness. He passed, on padded carpet, to two other rooms—no one there: the servants had perhaps gone to the theatre. He then stepped down a passage to the drawing-room door, and, still without sound, turned the handle. But that door was locked: and his eyebrows went higher still.

Standing there, he seemed to come to a sudden decision: and walked sharply, softly, out of the flat.

Down below he stepped into a by-street where there is a Police Ambulance cot; and, standing in the shadow of this, looking toward Victoria Street, he waited.

After half-an-hour he saw Crooks come out of his “Mansion”; saw him walk away with quite an air of jauntiness; and presently saw his drawing-room lights turned on full.

He slept at the Hotel Victoria that night; and the next morning turned up at Covent House the same cold Smyth as ever—made a jest with the lift-man, going up to his office; and his sub-editor did not dream that day what was in him, nor that its name was Legion.

But in the afternoon his sister Minna, who had spent a day of wonderment and trembling, received a note “byhand” from him:

“Dear Minna,

“I regret that reasons have arisen which make it impossible for us to live any longer together. Pray write me by tomorrow

whether you desire to stay on at the flat, or would rather that I took another for you.

“Yours,

“Crichton.”

So they parted . . .

She, knowing that he was attached to the flat, left it for one in Maida Vale, he settling an income upon her. From that night of the lowered lights he did not see her again—not for an instant. To her prayers for an explanation he made no answer.

But his pain proved more than he had bargained for, and he would have done better to have left those rooms which had known her presence. Though not very visible to others, there was a friendship and link between them extremely sacred and sweet; and he pretty soon discovered that, in sending her away, he had plucked out his right eye. Sometimes for days now he would absent himself from the office; his thin, palish face went pinched and paler; some grey began to mingle with his hair; his taciturnity turned to something like dumbness.

But he never relented; until, after six months, it came to his ears, through a doctor, that she was not well, and in a tragic fix. And then he wrote to her:

“Dear Minna,

“I know everything: and whatever there is to forgive I forgive. Please, dear, come back to my arms.

“Yours,

“Crichton.”

She would not at first; but then the wings of love proved stronger than her shrinkings: and she took herself back to the old flat.

But she was not well: for she, too, had rued and gnashed, chewing the ashes of the fire of passion; so that daily he saw her vanishing like a shadow from him; and in a month she sighed at him, and died, leaving him a little girl to nurse.

As for Crooks, he was at Naples, and it was three months before he had definite knowledge that a child was born, a mother dead. Then he asserted himself. Since that Friday night of Smyth's

earlier return he had had no interview with Smyth, for Minna, as it were on her knees, had ever pleaded with him, "Please, please, try not to meet Crichton!" But now Crooks asserted himself.

He sought out Smyth one night at the Savage, and, standing before Smyth's chair, said: "Smyth, I must have the child."

Smyth looked up from the slightly surprising thing in his *Standard* to the slightly surprising object before him, and said: "No."

"Then, I have to see her sometimes—fair's fair."

"If you like," Smyth muttered. "She is at my flat. Try not to see her often"—he read again.

So Crooks went and revolved philosophic thoughts over the insignificant stick of womanhood, that one could push into a jug: and she exclaimed on seeing his fat face, with hair stuck on it.

Then twice a month he went; and once, when, on meeting Smyth in Smyth's hall, he put out his hand, Smyth, with his eyebrows on high, let his long fingers be shaken. (Smyth, in fact, never participated in a hand-shake with any child of Adam, simply permitted and witnessed it, with surprise.)

And when this had happened several times in the course of a year, one night found Crooks seated by the fire, the child on his knee, over against Smyth, as of old. Without greatly caring, he had set himself to be friends again with Smyth, doing it in a patronising mood, and so caring nothing for Smyth's surprise—nor, in truth, could he be sure that Smyth was more surprised than usual, since Smyth was for ever surprised. Moreover, Crooks' fame had lately swelled and mellowed; if he had an opinion on this or that matter, that was put into the newspapers; and he was puffed up, the fact being that the little men of his trade and grain have no essential self, nor impregnable self-estimation, which cannot be raised at all by any applause, nor depressed at all by any dispraise: but when the wind blows they are big, and when the wind lulls they are little. As for Crooks, at this time he felt that his presence honoured inventors and philosophers.

And "Cluck, cluck," he went, cantering his chick on his knee with a gee-up cackling; then: "I say, Smyth, did you ever become Primate of the Rose Society?"

"Yes," Smyth replied with surprise.



"Ah, you did. So *you* have the secret now of that mysterious 'Apartment'?"

"Yes," Smyth replied with surprise.

"Then," says Crooks to himself, "I shall *set foot* in that apartment—sooner or later"; and he sat an hour with Smyth.

In this sort of relation they coexisted, until the midget Minna, fair and frail like its mother, could crawl, could walk, the months for mourning now long over, though Crichton Smyth still dressed in raiment of the raven—crape never more to leave that sleeve of his. Every Sunday sun-down found him in the Brompton Cemetery moping over a tomb; and most who saw him thought him cold; but some thought not. Meantime, Crooks came fairly regularly to the flat; and he said one night by the fire: "I shall leave off coming here, Smyth, if you don't talk to me. I have assumed that there can be no resentment left, since you realise that I loved Minna."

Smyth's lips oozed smoke a minute; then: "How many others did you love that year?"

"Several perhaps. I consider the question irrelevant——"

"How many have you loved since?"

"Several—many, perhaps. That is quite outside——"

"You are married."

"Yes, but I am impatient of argument on the subject, Smyth. It simply means that your views on sex-relations are different from mine; and, as mine are the offspring of thought——"

"I am not 'arguing',"—from Smyth with sleep-loaded lids: "it is not a question of anyone's 'views'. I merely said that you are married, and it is a fact that, if a married man lets himself love a girl of the middle class, he runs a risk of killing her with shame. I do not say that it ought to be so—I am not arguing—I only state, what you know, that it *is* so—at present: and when a death occurs, you get murder. Of course, there is no law against it, but——" He stopped, passing his palm lazily across his raised forehead, his lids closed down, straining to open.

"Men are not exactly angels," Crooks remarked.

"More like devils, some"—a mutter.

"Not referring to poor me?"

"Your existence seems to do a great deal of harm. I don't know that you do any good."

"You don't know that my books do good?"

"No, I don't know. I know that men are already getting past 'novels' without novelty, and that as soon as women cease to be children the last 'novel' will be written. Yours are entertaining, I believe——"

"Not prophetic? Not vital?"

This tickled three of Smyth's ribs on the right side, and he let out on a breath of disdain: "Lot of Simple-Simons we still are."

But at this statement the little maid commenced to lament, and Crooks, handing her to her nurse, kissed her head, murmuring: "I'll go."

But, half-way to the door, he turned to say: "What about that 'Apartment' of yours, Smyth, that I am to be taken to? You said you'd consider it."

Smyth's answer was a little singular. With a push of the lips, pettish, yet mixed with a smile, he said: "Oh, you keep on about that!"

This was the *sixth* time that Crooks had asked—Smyth knew the number. At the first asking a flush of offence had touched Smyth's forehead at the cocky pushfulness that could prick Crooks to make such a request. But since then Smyth had begun to answer with a certain demur, a flirting reluctance, as of a girl who murmurs "no", but blushes "yes".

"Oh, you keep on about that. . . ."

"Where's the harm?" asked Crooks on his next visit. "Provided you can absolutely rely upon my lifelong silence. My curiosity, of course, is intrinsically *literary*. Energize my imagination with an actual sight of the place, and I tell you what—I'll do a series of mystery-stories, and *The Westminster* shall have 'em."

And Smyth, his lids closed but for a slit that rested on Crooks, answered: "Ah, Crooks, don't tempt me."

It was, then, a question of temptation now? Crooks felt exultation. Had not the sister yielded to his tempting? The brother should be his conquest, too . . .

But on the next occasion of Smyth's temptation, Smyth said with a laugh: "You don't apparently care whether you urge me to the breach of a vow of office! And you do it with that same facile callousness with which you break your own marriage-vow."

"Smyth, you will not do as a conscience—you are too pale," said Crooks. "Please leave our evil marriage-customs out of the discussion. As to your 'vow of office', did you not yourself tell me that sometimes *two* men have known the alleged 'Apartment'?"

"Well, yes, I think I did say so. And you conceive, do you, that *you* have a right to be one of the two? Well, perhaps you have—I'll look into the question. But, if ever I do take you, I hope you are not nervous."

"Fancy a nervous E. P. Crooks! What is there to see, then?"

"It is a little—lethal."

"Then, I'm the man. But when?"

"I haven't said yes. Give one time. I have to get the approval of others . . ."

But only three weeks afterwards Smyth yielded. "Very well," he said: "you shall see it; the thing's settled; your imagination shall be 'energized', as you call it. But you are not permitted to know *where* the room is: you have to go to it blindfold. And, by the way, you must go disguised: just hang a beard round your ears—that'll do. And be before the Temple Church on Tuesday night, to hear the Law Courts clock strike eleven."

"*Fiet!*" Crooks cried.

That Tuesday night in October a high wind blew, and by the light of a moon that flew to encounter flying troops of cloud, Crooks stood looking at those eight old tombs, and the circular west-end of the church. The Strand river had thinned now to a trickle of feet: in there in the secrecy of the Inn not a step passed; and Crooks felt upon him the mood of adventure: London was partly Baghdad; this an Arabian night: some time or other he'd make "copy" of the mood of it. To be disguised, too, was quite novel to him: anon he pawed his false beard with a mock pomposity; then he had the thought: "But why, after all, the disguise?"; and just then eleven struck.

At its last stroke a step was on the pavers, and Crichton Smyth with his crape and raven dress was there. He put finger to lip when Crooks began to say something, beckoned, and Crooks followed out through Hare Court, by Middle Temple Lane, past the under-porter's lodge; when Smyth got into a coupé brougham waiting by the Griffin, Crooks followed in.

"I must blindfold you here," Smyth said at his ear.

"There remains the inward eye,"—from Crooks—"blindfold away."

At once Smyth produced two pads of black cotton, and a black ribbon that had two narrower ribbons sewed to its ends; cottons and ribbon he tied over Crooks' eyes and nose: and now it could be seen that the broad ribbon had crimson borders, and three roses embroidered on it.

As soon as it was secured, Smyth, unknown to Crooks, slipped a strip of brass-plate inside the band of Crooks' bowler-hat—a brass-plate on which were etched the words: "Edgar Crichton Smyth, P." Whereupon the driver, as if he had waited for all this, went forward without being ordered.

But Crooks understood that they were going eastward. He heard Bennett's Clock quite near above strike the quarter-past. And presently the following words were uttered within that brougham:

*Crooks* : Talk to me. I am lost in darkness. Silence must be awful to the blind.

*Smyth* : I don't want to talk. This is not a night like every night for you and me.

*Crooks* : You think something of that 'Apartment' of yours!

*Smyth* : It is not an Apartment with 'To Let' in the window. It has no window. I hope you have said your prayers.

*Crooks* : Men of my birth have no need to say prayers, Smyth. Behind and underneath we are essentially religious; and our existence, properly understood, is a prayer.

*Smyth* : Good thing you are religious behind.

*Crooks* : Did you not *know* that I am?

*Smyth* : No, how was I to know? You aren't where one sees you.

*Crooks* : Smyth, you are the most——

*Smyth* : Don't chatter.

Here Crooks could hear a tram droning somewhere through the humdrum plod-clap, plod-clap, of the brougham-horse's hoofs on asphalt; he thought to himself: "We must be somewhere in Whitechapel"; and presently they spoke again:



*Crooks* : Is it far now?

*Smyth* : Ten minutes.

*Crooks* : I don't like the blindfolding, though—and, by the way, what is the disguise for? I understand the blindfold, but why the disguise?

*Smyth* : You will soon guess why.

*Crooks* : Your disguise is a mystery, and your blindfolding a plague. Ah, it must be sad to be blind!

*Smyth* : What about being dead?

*Crooks* : The dead don't know that they are blind, but the blind know that they are dead. Oh, it is a great thing to see the sun! to be alive, and see it. People don't realize, because the universe is not meant for men to see, but for the lords of older orbs than this to cast down their crowns before. To-morrow morning when I have back my sight, I shall build me an altar.

*Smyth* : Don't make any vows at it.

*Crooks* : Certainly, *Smyth*, you are the most surly and cynical——

*Smyth* : We get out here.

On this the brougham, without order, stopped; *Smyth*, having got out, led out *Crooks*; and, without order, the brougham rolled away.

As it had made several turnings, *Crooks* did not know in what district of London he now was—knew that it was East. But no sound of foot-falls passing here: only, he could hear a rush of machinery going on somewhere.

"Those are alternators driven by steam-turbines," he said. "But are we in a street?"

"Sh-h, don't talk," said *Smyth*.

*Crooks* next felt himself led by the hand over what seemed to be cobble-stones, where the feet echoed, and there was a draught, so that he thought he must be under some tunnel, or vault. Then he felt himself in the open again, still going over old cobble-stones; and still the thump and rush of machinery reached the ear from somewhere. As for *Smyth*, he uttered not a word, and would listen to none.

Then there was a stoppage: *Crooks* knew that a door was being unlocked. And, hearing now a click at his ear, he could guess that *Smyth* had switched-on the light of a torch.

He was next led over bare boards in some place that had a smell of soap and candles, tar and benzoline; and twice his steps tripped over what seemed to be empty bags. Then he was led slowly down some board steps; at the bottom of which Smyth stooped to unlock something—apparently a trapdoor in the ground.

Through this Crooks was led down, Smyth now saying to him: "Hold my jacket; these steps are narrow"—and Crooks went down some steep steps of stone, each step a jolt, where he ceased to hear the beat of the machinery.

After this he passed through a passage, apparently of hardened marl, markedly damp and clammy, and uneven to the feet, where even sightless eyes could see and feel the thickness of the darkness; at the far end of which Smyth was again known to open some door—evidently a very heavy one—whose lock gnashed at the key, whose hinges chattered. From which point Crooks was led up steps so narrow, that he could easily feel the wall on either hand, they going now in single file.

To these steps there seemed no end—up and still up; and soon Crooks was afresh conscious of the throb and thresh of steam-machinery, jumbled with the hum of generators making their jew's-harp music: this business and to-do seeming to increase on the ear, and then, as still up they climbed, seeming to die away. Whenever they came to a landing or passage, Crooks, who was fat, and panted, said to himself "at last"; but several times he had to recommence the climb; and he thought to himself: "Can it be the Tower of London? We are in some tower, within the thickness of the wall"; but he did not say anything: a mood of utter dumbness had come upon him.

At last, in moving along a passage over stone floor, he being then in front of Smyth, he stumbled, apparently in dust or rubbish; the next moment he was stopped, butting upon wall; and "Hallo," said he, "what's this?"

There was no reply . . .

Waiting against the wall for guidance, Crooks was conscious of a clang behind him, as of a massive portal slammed, and of the croak of a rusty lock being coaxed by a key. Then he was aware of a scraping, as if a ponderous object was being dragged across the corridor; and simultaneously he was aware of an odour under his nose.

"Smyth!" he called out: "are you there?"

There was no reply . . .

Now he was aware of a match being struck, then of another, and another. By this time his bones were as cold as the stones that enclosed him.

He suddenly cried out: "Smyth! I am going to take the bandage off!"

Still there was no answer: but some moments afterwards there burst upon his startled heart a most bizarre noise, a babbling, or lalling, half-talk, half-song, in some unknown tongue—from Smyth. The next instant Crooks had the bandage snatched from his eyes.

There was light—a pink light—brilliant at first to him; and by it he instantly realized that he was interned. He stood in a room of untooled ashlar some fourteen feet square, with a doorway three feet wide looking down a corridor three feet wide. It was the door of this doorway that had been slammed; but he could still look out, since the door had a hole in its iron—a hole Gothic in shape like the door itself; and outside the door stood an old pricket-candlestick of iron supporting seven candles, all alight, higher than a man's head, occupying all the breadth of the corridor.

Crooks understood that that scraping sound he had heard must have been due to the placing of the candlestick in position, and that the striking of the matches had been for lighting the seven candles, each of which had, before and behind it, a screen of pink porcelain with a pattern of roses—two perpendicular rows of roses—so that, as the candles got lower, they would still glow through a rose.

All this he noticed in some moments; also that there was a hand-bag open on the floor, out of which he assumed that Smyth had got the sort of linen amice, dotted with roses, which he now wore round his shoulders; moreover, in some moments it had entered his consciousness that the dust and rubbish into which he had stumbled was made of the bones and dust and clothes of men who had ended their days there; moreover, he noticed that, hanging before the hole in the portal, was an old Toledo *puñal* of damascened steel, and he understood that this was mercifully meant for his use against himself, if he so chose.

If he had doubted this—if he had cherished a hope—it would have vanished when he saw what was hanging on the shaft of the candlestick—a bit of ebony, or black marble, on which had been scribbled in red pencil:

## MINNA AND FOUR OTHERS

But what most froze the current of Crooks' blood was the horrid comedy of Smyth's psalmodying and dancing in his amice a yard beyond the candles, like one putting forth a spell of "woven paces and of waving hands", his head cast back, his gaze on Heaven—his pince-nez on his nose! But in what occult Chaldæan was that bleating to Moloch and Baal that his tongue baa'd and bleated? Crooks knew some languages: but this recitative had no affinity with any speech of men which he had ever conceived; and then that antic fandango-tangle of writhing palms and twining thighs that went on with the psalming, like some entranced wight steadily treading the treadmill of dance in the land of the tarantula—a piece of witchcraft as antique and aboriginal as torch-lit orgies of Sheba and Egypt . . .

His throat straining out of the hole—his eyes straining out of his head—Crooks sent out to that dread dancer the whisper: "*Smyth, don't do it, Smyth . . .*"

He might as well have whispered to the dust and ashes in which he stood.

After three minutes the ritual ceased; Smyth stood another minute, his brow bowed down, with muttering mouth; then took off and put the amice into a handbag; picked up and put on his hat; and, without speaking, went away, leaving the candles watching there, as for a wake.





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