

Lucretia, Volume 3.

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

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CHAPTER VIII.

THE DISCOVERY.

Dalibard had undertaken to get Lucretia from the house,--in fact, her approaching marriage rendered necessary a communication with Mr. Parchmount, as executor to her uncle's will, relative to the transfer of her portion; and she had asked Dalibard to accompany her thither; for her pride shrank from receiving the lawyer in the shabby parlour of the shabby lodging-house; she therefore, that evening, fixed the next day, before noon, for the visit. A carriage was hired for the occasion, and when it drove off, Mr. Fielden took his children a walk to Primrose Hill, and called, as was agreed, on Mainwaring by the way.

The carriage had scarcely rattled fifty yards through the street when Dalibard fixed his eyes with deep and solemn commiseration on Lucretia. Hitherto, with masterly art, he had kept aloof from direct explanations with his pupil; he knew that she would distrust no one like himself. The plot was now ripened, and it was time for the main agent to conduct the catastrophe. The look was so expressive that Lucretia felt a chill at her heart, and could not, help exclaiming, "What has happened? You have some terrible tidings to communicate!"

"I have indeed to say that which may, perhaps, cause you to hate me forever; as we hate those who report our afflictions. I must endure this; I have struggled long between my indignation and my compassion. Rouse up your strong mind, and hear me. Mainwaring loves your sister!"

Lucretia uttered a cry that seemed scarcely to come from a human voice,--

"No, no!" she gasped out; "do not tell me. I will hear no more; I will not believe you!"

With an inexpressible pity and softness in his tone, this man, whose career had given him such profound experience in the frailties of the human heart, continued: "I do not ask you to believe me, Lucretia; I would not now speak, if you had not the opportunity to convince yourself. Even those with whom you live are false to you; at this moment they have arranged all, for Mainwaring to steal, in your absence, to your sister. In a few moments more he will be with her; if you yourself would learn what passes between them, you have the power."

"I have--I have not--not--the courage; drive on--faster--faster."

Dalibard again was foiled. In this strange cowardice there was something so terrible, yet so touching, that it became sublime,--it was the grasp of a drowning soul at the last plank.

"You are right perhaps," he said, after a pause; and wisely forbearing all taunt and resistance, he left the heart to its own workings.

Suddenly, Lucretia caught at the check-string. "Stop," she exclaimed,--"stop! I will not, I cannot, endure this suspense to last through a life! I will learn the worst. Bid him drive back."

"We must descend and walk; you forget we must enter unsuspected;" and Dalibard, as the carriage stopped, opened the door and let down the steps.

Lucretia recoiled, then pressing one hand to her heart, she descended, without touching the arm held out to her. Dalibard bade the coachman wait, and they walked back to the house.

"Yes, he may see her," exclaimed Lucretia, her face brightening. "Ah, there you have not deceived me; I see your stratagem,--I despise it; I know she loves him; she has sought this interview. He is so mild and gentle, so fearful to give pain; he has consented, from pity,--that is all. Is he not pledged to me? He, so candid, so ingenuous! There must be truth somewhere in the world. If he is false, where find truth? Dark man, must I look for it in you,-- you?"

"It is not my truth I require you to test; I pretend not to truth universal; I can be true to one, as you may yet discover. But I own your belief is not impossible; my interest in you may have made me rash and unjust,--what you may overhear, far from destroying, may confirm forever your happiness. Would that it may be so!"

"It must be so," returned Lucretia, with a fearful gloom on her brow and in her accent; "I will interpret every word to my own salvation."

Dalibard's countenance changed, despite his usual control over it. He had set all his chances upon this cast, and it was more hazardous than he had deemed. He had counted too much upon the jealousy of common natures. After all, how little to the ear of one resolved to deceive herself might pass between these two young persons, meeting not to avow attachment, but to take courage from each other! What restraint might they impose on their feelings! Still, the game must be played out.

As they now neared the house, Dalibard looked carefully round, lest they should encounter Mainwaring on his way to it. He had counted on arriving before the young man could get there.

"But," said Lucretia, breaking silence, with an ironical smile,--"but--for your tender anxiety for me has, no doubt, provided all means and contrivance, all necessary aids to baseness and eavesdropping, that can assure my happiness--how am I to be present at this interview?"

"I have provided, as you say," answered Dalibard, in the tone of a man deeply hurt, "those means which I, who have found the world one foe and one traitor, deemed the best to distinguish falsehood from truth. I have arranged that we shall enter the house unsuspected. Mainwaring and your sister will be in the drawing-room; the room next to it will be vacant, as Mr. Fielden is from home: there is but a glass-door between the two chambers."

"Enough, enough!" and Lucretia turned round and placed her hand lightly on the Provencal's arm. "The next hour will decide whether the means you suggest to learn truth and defend safety will be familiar or loathsome to me for life,--will decide whether trust is a madness; whether you, my youth's teacher, are the wisest of men, or only the most dangerous."

"Believe me, or not, when I say I would rather the decision should condemn me; for I, too, have need of confidence in men."

Nothing further was said; the dull street was quiet and desolate as usual. Dalibard had taken with him the key of the house-door. The door opened noiselessly; they were in the house. Mainwaring's cloak was in the hall; he had arrived a few moments before them. Dalibard pointed silently to that evidence in favour of his tale. Lucretia bowed her head. but with a look that implied defiance; and (still without a word) she ascended the stairs, and entered the room appointed for concealment. But as she entered, at the farther corner of the chamber she saw Mrs. Fielden seated,--seated, remote and out of hearing. The good-natured woman had yielded to Mainwaring's prayer, and Susan's silent look that enforced it, to let their interview be unwitnessed. She did not perceive Lucretia till the last walked glidingly, but firmly, up to her, placed a burning hand on her lips, and whispered: "Hush, betray me not; my happiness for life--Susan's--his--are at stake; I must hear what passes: it is my fate that is deciding. Hush! I command; for I have the right."

Mrs. Fielden was awed and startled; and before she could recover even breath, Lucretia had quitted her side and taken her post at the fatal door. She lifted the corner of the curtain from the glass panel, and looked in.

Mainwaring was seated at a little distance from Susan, whose face was turned from her. Mainwaring's countenance was in full view. But it was Susan's voice that met her ear; and though sweet and low, it was distinct, and even firm. It was evident from the words that the conference had but just begun.

"Indeed, Mr. Mainwaring, you have nothing to explain, nothing of which to accuse yourself. It was not for this, believe me,"--and here Susan turned her face, and its aspect of heavenly innocence met the dry, lurid eye of the unseen witness,--"not for this, believe me, that I consented to see you. If I did so, it was only because I thought, because I feared from your manner, when we met at times, still more from your evident avoidance to meet me at all, that you were unhappy (for I know you kind and honest),--unhappy at the thought that you had wounded me, and my heart could not bear that, nor, perhaps, my pride either. That you should have forgotten me--"

"Forgotten you!"

"That you should have been captivated," continued Susan, in a more hurried tone, "by one so superior to me in all things as Lucretia, is very natural. I thought, then--thought only--that nothing could cloud your happiness but some reproach of a conscience too sensitive. For this I have met you,--met you without a thought which Lucretia would have a right to blame, could she read my heart; met you," and the voice for the first time faltered, "that I might say, 'Be at peace; it is your sister that addresses you. Requite Lucretia's love,--it is deep and strong; give her, as she gives to you, a whole heart; and in your happiness I, your sister--sister to both--I shall be blest.'" With a smile inexpressibly touching and ingenuous, she held out her hand as she ceased. Mainwaring sprang forward, and despite her struggle, pressed it to his lips, his heart.

"Oh," he exclaimed, in broken accents, which gradually became more clear and loud, "what--what have I lost!--lost forever! No, no, I will be worthy of you! I do not, I dare not, say that I love you still! I feel what I owe to Lucretia. How I became first ensnared, infatuated; how, with your image graven so deeply here--"

"Mainwaring--Mr. Mainwaring--I must not hear you. Is this your promise?"

"Yes, you must hear me yet. How I became engaged to your sister,--so different indeed from you,--I start in amaze and bewilderment when I seek to conjecture. But so it was. For me she has forfeited fortune, rank, all which that proud, stern heart so prized and coveted. Heaven is my witness how I have struggled to repay her affection with my own! If I cannot succeed, at least all that faith and gratitude can give are hers. Yes, when I leave you, comforted by your forgiveness, your prayers, I shall have strength to tear you from my heart; it is my duty, my fate. With a firm step I will go to these abhorred nuptials. Oh, shudder not, turn not away. Forgive the word; but I must speak,--my heart will out; yes, abhorred nuptials! Between my grave and the altar, would--would that I had a choice!"

From this burst, which in vain from time to time Susan had sought to check, Mainwaring was startled by an apparition which froze his veins, as a ghost from the grave. The door was thrown open, and Lucretia stood in the aperture,--stood, gazing on him, face to face; and her own was so colourless, so rigid, so locked in its livid and awful solemnity of aspect that it was, indeed, as one risen from the dead.

Dismayed by the abrupt cry and the changed face of her lover, Susan turned and beheld her sister. With the impulse of the pierced and loving heart, which divined all the agony inflicted, she sprang to Lucretia's side, she fell to the ground and clasped her knees.

"Do not heed, do not believe him; it is but the frenzy of a moment. He spoke but to deceive me,--me, who loved him once! Mine alone, mine is the crime. He knows all your worth. Pity--pity--pity on yourself, on him, on me!"

Lucretia's eyes fell with the glare of a fiend upon the imploring face lifted to her own. Her lips moved, but no sound was audible. At length she drew herself from her sister's clasp, and walked steadily up to Mainwaring. She surveyed him with a calm and cruel gaze, as if she enjoyed his shame and terror. Before, however, she spoke, Mrs. Fielden, who had watched, as one spellbound, Lucretia's movements, and, without hearing what had passed, had the full foreboding of what would ensue, but had not stirred till Lucretia herself terminated the suspense and broke the charm of her awe,--before she spoke, Mrs. Fielden rushed in, and giving vent to her agitation in loud sobs, as she threw her arms round Susan, who was still kneeling on the floor, brought something of grotesque to the more tragic and fearful character of the scene.

"My uncle was right; there is neither courage nor honour in the low-born! He, the schemer, too, is right. All hollow,--all false!" Thus said Lucretia, with a strange sort of musing accent, at first scornful, at last only quietly abstracted. "Rise, sir," she then added, with her most imperious tone; "do you not hear your Susan weep? Do you fear in my presence to console her? Coward to her, as forsworn to me! Go, sir, you are free!"

"Hear me," faltered Mainwaring, attempting to seize her hand; "I do not ask you to forgive; but--"

"Forgive, sir!" interrupted Lucretia, rearing her head, and with a look of freezing and unspeakable majesty. "There is only one person here who

needs a pardon; but her fault is inexpiable: it is the woman who stooped beneath her--"

With these words, hurled from her with a scorn which crushed while it galled, she mechanically drew round her form her black mantle; her eye glanced on the deep mourning of the garment, and her memory recalled all that love had cost her; but she added no other reproach. Slowly she turned away. Passing Susan, who lay senseless in Mrs. Fielden's arms, she paused, and kissed her forehead.

"When she recovers, madam," she said to Mrs. Fielden, who was moved and astonished by this softness, "say that Lucretia Clavering uttered a vow when she kissed the brow of William Mainwaring's future wife!"

Olivier Dalibard was still seated in the parlour below when Lucretia entered. Her face yet retained its almost unearthly rigidity and calm; but a sort of darkness had come over its ashen pallor,--that shade so indescribable, which is seen in the human face, after long illness, a day or two before death. Dalibard was appalled; for he had too often seen that hue in the dying not to recognize it now. His emotion was sufficiently genuine to give more than usual earnestness to his voice and gesture, as he poured out every word that spoke sympathy and soothing. For a long time Lucretia did not seem to hear him; at last her face softened,--the ice broke.

"Motherless, friendless, lone, alone forever, undone, undone!" she murmured. Her head sank upon the shoulder of her fearful counsellor, unconscious of its resting-place, and she burst into tears,--tears which perhaps saved her reason or her life.

CHAPTER IX.

A SOUL WITHOUT HOPE.

When Mr. Fielden returned home, Lucretia had quitted the house. She left a line for him in her usual bold, clear handwriting, referring him to his wife for explanation of the reasons that forbade a further residence beneath his roof. She had removed to an hotel until she had leisure to arrange her plans for the future. In a few months she should be of age; and in the meanwhile, who now living claimed authority over her? For the rest, she added, "I repeat what I told Mr. Mainwaring: all engagement between us is at an end; he will not insult me either by letter or by visit. It is natural that I should at present shrink from seeing Susan Mivers. Hereafter, if permitted, I will visit Mrs. Mainwaring."

Though all had chanced as Mr. Fielden had desired (if, as he once half meditated, he had spoken to Lucretia herself); though a marriage that could have brought happiness to none, and would have made the misery of two, was at an end,--he yet felt a bitter pang, almost of remorse, when he learned what had occurred. And Lucretia, before secretly disliked (if any one he could dislike), became dear to him at once, by sorrow and compassion. Forgetting every other person, he hurried to the hotel Lucretia had chosen; but her coldness deceived and her pride repelled him. She listened dryly to all he said, and merely replied: "I feel only gratitude at my escape. Let this subject now close forever."

Mr. Fielden left her presence with less anxious and commiserating feelings,--perhaps all had chanced for the best. And on returning home, his whole mind became absorbed in alarm for Susan. She was delirious, and in great danger; it was many weeks before she recovered. Meanwhile, Lucretia had removed into private apartments, of which she withheld the address. During this time, therefore, they lost sight of her.

If amidst the punishments with which the sombre imagination of poets has diversified the Realm of the tortured Shadows, it had depicted some soul condemned to look evermore down into an abyss, all change to its gaze forbidden, chasm upon chasm yawning deeper and deeper, darker and darker, endless and infinite, so that, eternally gazing, the soul became, as it were, a part of the abyss,--such an image would symbol forth the state of Lucretia's mind.

It was not the mere desolation of one whom love has abandoned and betrayed. In the abyss were mingled inextricably together the gloom of the past and of the future,--there, the broken fortunes, the crushed ambition, the ruin of the worldly expectations long inseparable from her schemes; and amidst them, the angry shade of the more than father, whose heart she had wrung, and whose old age she had speeded to the grave. These sacrifices to love, while love was left to her, might have haunted her at moments; but a smile, a word, a glance, banished the regret and the remorse. Now, love being razed out of life, the ruins of all else loomed dismal amidst the darkness; and a voice rose up, whispering: "Lo, fool, what thou hast lost because thou didst believe and love!" And this thought grasped together the two worlds of being,--the what has been, and the what shall be. All hope seemed stricken from the future, as a man strikes from the calculations of his income the returns from a property irrevocably lost. At her age but few of her sex have parted with religion; but even such mechanical faith as the lessons of her childhood, and the constrained conformities with Christian ceremonies, had instilled, had long since melted away in the hard scholastic scepticism of her fatal tutor,--a scepticism which had won, with little effort, a reason delighting in the maze of doubt, and easily narrowed into the cramped and iron logic of disbelief by an intellect that scorned to submit where it failed to comprehend. Nor had faith given place to those large moral truths from which philosophy has sought to restore the proud statue of Pagan Virtue as a substitute for the meek symbol of the Christian cross. By temperament unsocial, nor readily moved to the genial and benevolent, that absolute egotism in which Olivier Dalibard centred his dreary ethics seemed sanctioned to Lucretia by her studies into the motives of man and the history of the world. She had read the chronicles of States and the memoirs of statesmen, and seen how craft carries on the movements of an age. Those Viscontis, Castruccios, and Medici; those Richelieus and Mazarins and De Retzs; those Loyolas and Mohammeds and Cromwells; those Monks and Godolphins; those Markboroughs and Walpoles; those founders of history and dynasties and sects; those leaders and dupers of men, greater or lesser, corrupters or corrupt, all standing out prominent and renowned from the guiltless and laurelless obscure,--seemed to win, by the homage of posterity, the rewards that attend the deceivers of their time. By a superb arrogance of generalization, she transferred into private life, and the rule of commonplace actions, the policy that, to the abasement of honour, has so often triumphed in the guidance of States. Therefore, betimes, the whole frame of society was changed to her eye, from the calm aspect it wears to those who live united with their kind; she viewed all seemings with suspicion; and before she had entered the world, prepared to live in it as a conspirator in a city convulsed, spying and espied, schemed against

and scheming,--here the crown for the crafty, there the axe for the outwitted.

But her love--for love is trust--had led her half way forth from this maze of the intellect. That fair youth of inexperience and candour which seemed to bloom out in the face of her betrothed; his very shrinking from the schemes so natural to her that to her they seemed even innocent; his apparent reliance on mere masculine ability, with the plain aids of perseverance and honesty,--all had an attraction that plucked her back from herself. If she clung to him firmly, blindly, credulously, it was not as the lover alone. In the lover she beheld the good angel. Had he only died to her, still the angel smile would have survived and warned. But the man had not died; the angel itself had deceived; the wings could uphold her no more,--they had touched the mire, and were sullied with the soil; with the stain, was forfeited the strength. All was deceit and hollowness and treachery. Lone again in the universe rose the eternal I. So down into the abyss she looked, depth upon depth, and the darkness had no relief, and the deep had no end.

Olivier Dalibard alone, of all she knew, was admitted to her seclusion. He played his part as might be expected from the singular patience and penetration which belonged to the genius of his character. He forbore the most distant allusion to his attachment or his hopes. He evinced sympathy rather by imitating her silence, than attempts to console. When he spoke, he sought to interest her mind more than to heal directly the deep wounds of her heart. There is always, to the afflicted, a certain charm in the depth and bitterness of eloquent misanthropy. And Dalibard, who professed not to be a man-hater, but a world-scorner, had powers of language and of reasoning commensurate with his astute intellect and his profound research. His society became not only a relief, it grew almost a want, to that stern sorrower. But whether alarmed or not by the influence she felt him gradually acquiring, or whether, through some haughty desire to rise once more aloft from the state of her rival and her lover, she made one sudden effort to grasp at the rank from which she had been hurled. The only living person whose connection could re-open to her the great world, with its splendours and its scope to ambition, was Charles Vernon. She scarcely admitted to her own mind the idea that she would now accept, if offered, the suit she had before despised; she did not even contemplate the renewal of that suit,--though there was something in the gallant and disinterested character of Vernon which should have made her believe he would regard their altered fortunes rather as a claim on his honour than a release to his engagements. But hitherto no communication had passed between them; and this was strange if he retained the same intentions which he had announced at Laughton. Putting aside, we say, however, all such considerations, Vernon had sought her friendship, called her "cousin," enforced the distant relationship between them. Not as lover, but as kinsman,--the only kinsman of her own rank she possessed,--his position in the world, his connections, his brilliant range of acquaintance, made his counsel for her future plans, his aid in the re-establishment of her consequence (if not--as wealthy, still as well-born), and her admission amongst her equals, of price and value. It was worth sounding the depth of the friendship he had offered, even if his love had passed away with the fortune on which doubtless it had been based.

She took a bold step,--she wrote to Vernon: not even to allude to what had passed between them; her pride forbade such unwomanly vulgarity. The baseness that was in her took at least a more delicate exterior. She wrote to him simply and distantly, to state that there were some books

and trifles of hers left at Laughton, which she prized beyond their trivial value, and to request, as she believed him to be absent from the Hall, permission to call at her old home, in her way to a visit in a neighbouring county, and point out to whomsoever he might appoint to meet her, the effects she deemed herself privileged to claim. The letter was one merely of business, but it was a sufficient test of the friendly feelings of her former suitor.

She sent this letter to Vernon's house in London, and the next day came the answer.

Vernon, we must own, entirely sympathized with Sir Miles in the solemn injunctions the old man had bequeathed. Immediately after the death of one to whom we owe gratitude and love, all his desires take a sanctity irresistible and ineffable; we adopt his affection, his dislikes, his obligations, and his wrongs. And after he had read the copy of Lucretia's letter, inclosed to him by Sir Miles, the conquest the poor baronet had made over resentment and vindictive emotion, the evident effort at passionless justice with which he had provided becomingly for his niece, while he cancelled her claims as his heiress, had filled Vernon with a reverence for his wishes and decisions that silenced all those inclinations to over-generosity which an unexpected inheritance is apt to create towards the less fortunate expectants. Nevertheless, Lucretia's direct application, her formal appeal to his common courtesy as host and kinsman, perplexed greatly a man ever accustomed to a certain chivalry towards the sex; the usual frankness of his disposition suggested, however, plain dealing as the best escape from his dilemma, and therefore he answered thus:--

MADAM,--Under other circumstances it would have given me no common pleasure to place the house that you so long inhabited again at your disposal; and I feel so painfully the position which my refusal of your request inflicts upon me, that rather than resort to excuses and pretexts, which, while conveying an impression of my sincerity, would seem almost like an insult to yourself, I venture frankly to inform you that it was the dying wish of my lamented kinsman, in consequence of a letter which came under his eye, that the welcome you had hitherto received at Laughton should be withdrawn. Pardon me, Madam, if I express myself thus bluntly; it is somewhat necessary to the vindication of my character in your eyes, both as regards the honour of your request and my tacit resignation of hopes fervently but too presumptuously entertained. In this most painful candour, Heaven forbid that I should add wantonly to your self-reproaches for the fault of youth and inexperience, which I should be the last person to judge rigidly, and which, had Sir Miles's life been spared, you would doubtless have amply repaired. The feelings which actuated Sir Miles in his latter days might have changed; but the injunction those feelings prompted I am bound to respect.

For the mere matter of business on which you have done me the honour to address me, I have only to say that any orders you may give to the steward, or transmit through any person you may send to the Hall, with regard to the effects you so naturally desire to claim, shall be implicitly obeyed.

And believe me, Madam (though I do not presume to add those expressions which might rather heighten the offence I fear this letter will give you), that the assurance of your happiness in the choice you have made, and which now no obstacle can oppose, will considerably--lighten the pain with which I shall long recall my ungracious reply to your communication.

I have the honour to be, etc.,

C. VERNON ST. JOHN.

BROOK STREET, Dec. 28, 18--.

The receipt of such a letter could hardly add to the profounder grief which preyed in the innermost core of Lucretia's heart; but in repelling the effort she had made to distract that grief by ambition, it blackened the sullen despondency with which she regarded the future. As the insect in the hollow snare of the ant-lion, she felt that there was no footing up the sides of the cave into which she had fallen; the sand gave way to the step. But despondency in her brought no meekness; the cloud did not descend in rain; resting over the horizon, its darkness was tinged with the fires which it fed. The heart, already so embittered, was stung and mortified into intolerable shame and wrath. From the home that should have been hers, in which, as acknowledged heiress, she had smiled down on the ruined Vernon, she was banished by him who had supplanted her, as one worthless and polluted. Though, from motives of obvious delicacy, Vernon had not said expressly that he had seen the letter to Mainwaring, the unfamiliar and formal tone which he assumed indirectly declared it, and betrayed the impression it had made, in spite of his reserve. A living man then was in possession of a secret which justified his disdain, and that man was master of Laughton! The suppressed rage which embraced the lost lover extended darkly over this witness to that baffled and miserable love. But what availed rage against either? Abandoned and despoiled, she was powerless to avenge. It was at this time, when her prospects seemed most dark, her pride was most crushed, and her despair of the future at its height, that she turned to Dalibard as the only friend left to her under the sun. Even the vices she perceived in him became merits, for they forbade him to despise her. And now, this man rose suddenly into another and higher aspect of character. Of late, though equally deferential to her, there had been something more lofty in his mien, more assured on his brow; gleams of a secret satisfaction, even of a joy, that he appeared anxious to suppress, as ill in harmony with her causes for dejection, broke out in his looks and words. At length, one day, after some preparatory hesitation, he informed her that he was free to return to France; that even without the peace between England and France, which (known under the name of the Peace of Amiens) had been just concluded, he should have crossed the Channel. The advocacy and interest of friends whom he had left at Paris had already brought him under the special notice of the wonderful man who then governed France, and who sought to unite in its service every description and variety of intellect. He should return to France, and then--why, then, the ladder was on the walls of Fortune and the foot planted on the step! As he spoke, confidently and sanguinely, with the verve and assurance of an able man who sees clear the path to his goal, as he sketched with rapid precision the nature of his prospects and his hopes, all that subtle wisdom which had before often seemed but vague and general, took practical shape and interest, thus applied to the actual circumstances of men; the spirit of intrigue, which seemed mean when employed on mean things, swelled into statesmanship and masterly genius to the listener when she saw it linked with the large objects of masculine ambition. Insensibly, therefore, her attention became earnest, her mind aroused. The vision of a field, afar from the scenes of her humiliation and despair,--a field for energy, stratagem, and contest,--invited her restless intelligence. As Dalibard had profoundly calculated, there was no new channel for her affections,--the source was dried up, and the parched sands heaped over it; but while the heart lay dormant, the mind rose sleepless, chafed, and perturbed. Through the mind, he indirectly

addressed and subtly wooed her.

"Such," he said, as he rose to take leave, "such is the career to which I could depart with joy if I did not depart alone!"

"Alone!" that word, more than once that day, Lucretia repeated to herself--"alone!" And what career was left to her?--she, too, alone!

In certain stages of great grief our natures yearn for excitement. This has made some men gamblers; it has made even women drunkards,--it had effect over the serene calm and would-be divinity of the poet-sage. When his son dies, Goethe does not mourn, he plunges into the absorption of a study uncultivated before. But in the great contest of life, in the whirlpool of actual affairs, the stricken heart finds all,--the gambling, the inebriation, and the study.

We pause here. We have pursued long enough that patient analysis, with all the food for reflection that it possibly affords, to which we were insensibly led on by an interest, dark and fascinating, that grew more and more upon us as we proceeded in our research into the early history of a person fated to pervert no ordinary powers into no commonplace guilt.

The charm is concluded, the circle closed round; the self-guided seeker after knowledge has gained the fiend for the familiar.

CHAPTER X.

THE RECONCILIATION BETWEEN FATHER AND SON.

We pass over an interval of some months.

A painter stood at work at the easel, his human model before him. He was employed on a nymph,--the Nymph Galatea. The subject had been taken before by Salvator, whose genius found all its elements in the wild rocks, gnarled, fantastic trees, and gushing waterfalls of the landscape; in the huge ugliness of Polyphemus the lover; in the grace and suavity and unconscious abandonment of the nymph, sleeking her tresses dripping from the bath. The painter, on a larger canvas (for Salvator's picture, at least the one we have seen, is among the small sketches of the great artistic creator of the romantic and grotesque), had transferred the subject of the master; but he had left subordinate the landscape and the giant, to concentrate all his art on the person of the nymph. Middle-aged was the painter, in truth; but he looked old. His hair, though long, was gray and thin; his face was bloated by intemperance; and his hand trembled much, though, from habit, no trace of the tremor was visible in his work.

A boy, near at hand, was also employed on the same subject, with a rough chalk and a bold freedom of touch. He was sketching his design of a Galatea and Polyphemus on the wall; for the wall was only whitewashed, and covered already with the multiform vagaries whether of master or pupils,--caricatures and demigods, hands and feet, torsos and monsters, and Venuses. The rude creations, all mutilated, jarring, and mingled, gave a cynical, mocking, devil-may-care kind of aspect to the sanctum of art. It was like the dissection-room of the anatomist. The boy's sketch

was more in harmony with the walls of the studio than the canvas of the master. His nymph, accurately drawn, from the undressed proportions of the model, down to the waist, terminated in the scales of a fish. The forked branches of the trees stretched weird and imp-like as the hands of skeletons. Polyphemus, peering over the rocks, had the leer of a demon; and in his gross features there was a certain distorted, hideous likeness of the grave and symmetrical lineaments of Olivier Dalibard.

All around was slovenly, squalid, and poverty-stricken,--rickety, worn-out, rush-bottom chairs; unsold, unfinished pictures, pell-mell in the corner, covered with dust; broken casts of plaster; a lay-figure battered in its basket-work arms, with its doll-like face all smudged and besmeared. A pot of porter and a noggin of gin on a stained deal table, accompanied by two or three broken, smoke-blackened pipes, some tattered song-books, and old numbers of the "Covent Garden Magazine," betrayed the tastes of the artist, and accounted for the shaking hand and the bloated form. A jovial, disorderly, vagrant dog of a painter was Tom Varney. A bachelor, of course; humorous and droll; a boon companion, and a terrible borrower. Clever enough in his calling; with pains and some method, he had easily gained subsistence and established a name; but he had one trick that soon ruined him in the business part of his profession. He took a fourth of his price in advance; and having once clutched the money, the poor customer might go hang for his picture. The only things Tom Varney ever fairly completed were those for which no order had been given; for in them, somehow or other, his fancy became interested, and on them he lavished the gusto which he really possessed. But the subjects were rarely salable. Nymphs and deities undraperied have few worshippers in England amongst the buyers of "furniture pictures." And, to say truth, nymph and deity had usually a very equivocal look; and if they came from the gods, you would swear it was the gods of the galleries of Drury. When Tom Varney sold a picture, he lived upon clover till the money was gone. But the poorer and less steady alumni of the rising school, especially those at war with the Academy, from which Varney was excluded, pitied, despised, yet liked and courted him withal. In addition to his good qualities of blithe song-singer, droll story-teller, and stanch Bacchanalian, Tom Varney was liberally good-natured in communicating instruction really valuable to those who knew how to avail themselves of a knowledge he had made almost worthless to himself. He was a shrewd, though good-natured critic, had many little secrets of colouring and composition, which an invitation to supper, or the loan of ten shillings, was sufficient to bribe from him. Ragged, out of elbows, unshaven, and slipshod, he still had his set amongst the gay and the young,--a precious master, a profitable set for his nephew, Master Honore Gabriel! But the poor rascal had a heart larger than many honest, painstaking men. As soon as Gabriel had found him out, and entreated refuge from his fear of his father, the painter clasped him tight in his great slovenly arms, sold a Venus half-price to buy him a bed and a washstand, and swore a tremendous oath that the son of his poor guillotined sister should share the last shilling in his pocket, the last drop in his can.

Gabriel, fresh from the cheer of Laughton, and spoiled by the prodigal gifts of Lucretia, had little gratitude for shillings and porter. Nevertheless, he condescended to take what he could get, while he sighed, from the depths of a heart in which cupidity and vanity had become the predominant rulers, for a destiny more worthy his genius, and more in keeping with the sphere from which he had descended.

The boy finished his sketch, with an impudent wink at the model, flung

himself back on his chair, folded his arms, cast a discontented glance at the whitened seams of the sleeves, and soon seemed lost in his own reflections. The painter worked on in silence. The model, whom Gabriel's wink had aroused, half-flattered, half-indignant for a moment, lapsed into a doze. Outside the window, you heard the song of a canary,--a dingy, smoke-coloured canary that seemed shedding its plumes, for they were as ragged as the garments of its master; still, it contrived to sing, trill-trill-trill-trill-trill, as blithely as if free in its native woods, or pampered by fair hands in a gilded cage. The bird was the only true artist there, it sang as the poet sings,--to obey its nature and vent its heart. Trill-trill-trillela-la-la-trill-trill, went the song,--louder, gayer than usual; for there was a gleam of April sunshine struggling over the rooftops. The song at length roused up Gabriel; he turned his chair round, laid his head on one side, listened, and looked curiously at the bird.

At length an idea seemed to cross him; he rose, opened the window, drew in the cage, placed it on the chair, then took up one of his uncle's pipes, walked to the fireplace, and thrust the shank of the pipe into the bars. When it was red-hot he took it out by the bowl, having first protected his hand from the heat by wrapping round it his handkerchief; this done, he returned to the cage. His movements had wakened up the dozing model. She eyed them at first with dull curiosity, then with lively suspicion; and presently starting up with an exclamation such as no novelist but Fielding dare put into the mouth of a female,--much less a nymph of such renown as Galatea,--she sprang across the room, wellnigh upsetting easel and painter, and fastened firm hold on Gabriel's shoulders.

"The varment!" she cried vehemently; "the good-for-nothing varment! If it had been a jay, or a nasty raven, well and good; but a poor little canary!"

"Hoity-toity! what are you about, nephew? What's the matter?" said Tom Varney, coming up to the strife. And, indeed, it was time; for Gabriel's teeth were set in his catlike jaws, and the glowing point of the pipe-shank was within an inch of the cheek of the model.

"What's the matter?" replied Gabriel, suddenly; "why, I was only going to try a little experiment."

"An experiment? Not on my canary, poor dear little thing! The hours and hours that creature has strained its throat to say 'Sing and be merry,' when I had not a rap in my pocket! It would have made a stone feel to hear it."

"But I think I can make it sing much better than ever,--only just let me try! They say that if you put out the eyes of a canary, it--"

Gabriel was not allowed to conclude his sentence; for here rose that clamour of horror and indignation from both painter and model which usually greets the announcement of every philosophical discovery,--at least, when about to be practically applied; and in the midst of the hubbub, the poor little canary, who had been fluttering about the cage to escape the hand of the benevolent operator, set up no longer the cheerful trill-trillela-la-trill, but a scared and heart-breaking chirp,--a shrill, terrified twit-twit-twitter-twit.

"Damn the bird! Hold your tongues!" cried Gabriel Varney, reluctantly

giving way, but still eying the bird with the scientific regret with which the illustrious Majendie might contemplate a dog which some brute of a master refused to disembowel for the good of the colics of mankind.

The model seized on the cage, shut the door of the wires, and carried it off. Tom Varney drained the rest of his porter, and wiped his forehead with the sleeve of his coat.

"And to use my pipe for such cruelty! Boy, boy, I could not have believed it! But you were not in earnest; oh, no, impossible! Sukey, my love--Galatea the divine--calm thy breast; Cupid did but jest.

'Cupid is the God of Laughter,
Quip and jest and joke, sir.'

"If you don't whip the little wretch within an inch of his life, he'll have a gallows end on't," replied Galatea.

"Go, Cupid, go and kiss Galatea, and make your peace.

'Oh, leave a kiss within the cup,
And I'll not ask for wine.'

And 't is no use asking for wine, or for gin either,--not a drop in the noggin!"

All this while Gabriel, disdaining the recommendations held forth to him, was employed in brushing his jacket with a very mangy-looking brush; and when he had completed that operation he approached his uncle, and coolly thrust his hands into that gentleman's waistcoat-pockets.

"Uncle, what have you done with those seven shillings? I am going out to spend the day."

"If you give them to him, Tom, I'll scratch your eyes out," cried the model; "and then we'll see how you'll sing. Whip him, I say, whip him!"

But, strange to say, this liberty of the boy quite reopened the heart of his uncle,--it was a pleasure to him, who put his hands so habitually into other people's pockets, to be invested with the novel grandeur of the man sponged upon. "That's right, Cupid, son of Cytherea; all's common property amongst friends. Seven shillings, I have 'em not. 'They now are five who once were seven;' but such as they are, we'll share.

'Let old Timotheus yield the prize,
Or both divide the crown.'

"Crowns bear no division, my uncle," said Gabriel, dryly; and he pocketed the five shillings. Then, having first secured his escape by gaining the threshold, he suddenly seized one of the rickety chairs by its leg, and regardless of the gallantries due to the sex, sent it right against the model, who was shaking her fist at him. A scream and a fall and a sharp twit from the cage, which was hurled nearly into the fireplace, told that the missive had taken effect. Gabriel did not wait for the probable reaction; he was in the streets in an instant. "This won't do," he muttered to himself; "there is no getting on here. Foolish drunken vagabond! no good to be got from him. My father is terrible, but he will make his way in the world. Umph! if I were but his match,--and why not? I am brave, and he is not. There's fun, too, in danger."

Thus musing, he took his way to Dalibard's lodgings. His father was at home. Now, though they were but lodgings, and the street not in fashion, Olivier Dalibard's apartments had an air of refinement, and even elegance, that contrasted both the wretched squalor of the abode Gabriel had just left and the meanness of Dalibard's former quarters in London. The change seemed to imply that the Provencal had already made some way in the world. And, truth to say, at all times, even in the lowest ebb of his fortunes, there was that indescribable neatness and formality of precision about all the exterior seemings of the ci-devant friend of the prim Robespierre which belong to those in whom order and method are strongly developed,--qualities which give even to neediness a certain dignity. As the room and its owner met the eye of Gabriel, on whose senses all externals had considerable influence, the ungrateful young ruffian recalled the kind, tattered, slovenly uncle, whose purse he had just emptied, without one feeling milder than disgust. Olivier Dalibard, always careful, if simple, in his dress, with his brow of grave intellectual power, and his mien imposing, not only from its calm, but from that nameless refinement which rarely fails to give to the student the air of a gentleman,--Olivier Dalibard he might dread, he might even detest; but he was not ashamed of him.

"I said I would visit you, sir, if you would permit me," said Gabriel, in a tone of respect, not unmingled with some defiance, as if in doubt of his reception.

The father's slow full eye, so different from the sidelong, furtive glance of Lucretia, turned on the son, as if to penetrate his very heart.

"You look pale and haggard, child; you are fast losing your health and beauty. Good gifts these, not to be wasted before they can be duly employed. But you have taken your choice. Be an artist,--copy Tom Varney, and prosper." Gabriel remained silent, with his eyes on the floor.

"You come in time for my farewell," resumed Dalibard. "It is a comfort, at least, that I leave your youth so honourably protected. I am about to return to my country; my career is once more before me!"

"Your country,--to Paris?"

"There are fine pictures in the Louvre,--a good place to inspire an artist!"

"You go alone, Father!"

"You forget, young gentleman, you disown me as father! Go alone! I thought I told you in the times of our confidence, that I should marry Lucretia Clavering. I rarely fail in my plans. She has lost Laughton, it is true; but 10,000 pounds will make a fair commencement to fortune, even at Paris. Well, what do you want with me, worthy godson of Honore Gabriel Mirabeau?"

"Sir, if you will let me, I will go with you."

Dalibard shaded his brow with his hand, and reflected on the filial proposal. On the one hand, it might be convenient, and would certainly be economical, to rid himself evermore of the mutinous son who had already thrown off his authority; on the other hand, there was much in

Gabriel, mutinous and even menacing as he had lately become, that promised an unscrupulous tool or a sharp-witted accomplice, with interests that every year the ready youth would more and more discover were bound up in his plotting father's. This last consideration, joined, if not to affection, still to habit,--to the link between blood and blood, which even the hardest find it difficult to sever,--prevailed. He extended his pale hand to Gabriel, and said gently,--

"I will take you, if we rightly understand each other. Once again in my power, I might constrain you to my will, it is true. But I rather confer with you as man to man than as man to boy."

"It is the best way," said Gabriel, firmly.

"I will use no harshness, inflict no punishment,--unless, indeed, amply merited by stubborn disobedience or wilful deceit. But if I meet with these, better rot on a dunghill than come with me! I ask implicit confidence in all my suggestions, prompt submission to all my requests. Grant me but these, and I promise to consult your fortune as my own, to gratify your tastes as far as my means will allow, to grudge not your pleasures, and when the age for ambition comes, to aid your rise if I rise myself,--nay, if well contented with you, to remove the blot from your birth, by acknowledging and adopting you formally as my son."

"Agreed! and I thank you," said Gabriel. "And Lucretia is going? Oh, I so long to see her!"

"See her--not yet; but next week."

"Do not fear that I should let out about the letter. I should betray myself if I did," said the boy, bluntly betraying his guess at his father's delay.

The evil scholar smiled.

"You will do well to keep it secret for your own sake; for mine, I should not fear. Gabriel, go back now to your master,--you do right, like the rats, to run from the falling house. Next week I will send for you, Gabriel!"

Not, however, back to the studio went the boy. He sauntered leisurely through the gayest streets, eyed the shops and the equipages, the fair women and the well-dressed men,--eyed with envy and longings and visions of pomps and vanities to come; then, when the day began to close, he sought out a young painter, the wildest and maddest of the crew to whom his uncle had presented their future comrade and rival, and went with this youth, at half-price, to the theatre, not to gaze on the actors or study the play, but to stroll in the saloon. A supper in the Finish completed the void in his pockets, and concluded his day's rank experience of life. By the gray dawn he stole back to his bed, and as he laid himself down, he thought with avid pleasure of Paris, its gay gardens and brilliant shops and crowded streets; he thought, too, of his father's calm confidence of success, of the triumph that already had attended his wiles,--a confidence and a triumph which, exciting his reverence and rousing his emulation, had decided his resolution. He thought, too, of Lucretia with something of affection, recalled her praises and bribes, her frequent mediation with his father, and felt that they should have need of each other. Oh, no, he never would tell her of the snare laid at Guy's Oak,--never, not even if incensed with his

father. An instinct told him that that offence could never be forgiven, and that, henceforth, Lucretia's was a destiny bound up in his own. He thought, too, of Dalibard's warning and threat. But with fear itself came a strange excitement of pleasure,--to grapple, if necessary, he a mere child, with such a man! His heart swelled at the thought. So at last he fell asleep, and dreamed that he saw his mother's trunkless face dripping gore and frowning on him,--dreamed that he heard her say: "Goest thou to the scene of my execution only to fawn upon my murderer?" Then a nightmare of horrors, of scaffolds and executioners and grinning mobs and agonized faces, came on him,--dark, confused, and indistinct. And he woke, with his hair standing on end, and beard below, in the rising sun, the merry song of the poor canary,--trill-lill-lill, trill-trill-lill-lill-la! Did he feel glad that his cruel hand had been stayed?

EPILOGUE TO PART THE FIRST.

It is a year since the November day on which Lucretia Clavering quitted the roof of Mr. Fielden. And first we must recall the eye of the reader to the old-fashioned terrace at Laughton,--the jutting porch, the quaint balustrades, the broad, dark, changeless cedars on the lawn beyond. The day is calm, clear, and mild, for November in the country is often a gentle month. On that terrace walked Charles Vernon, now known by his new name of St. John. Is it the change of name that has so changed the person? Can the wand of the Herald's Office have filled up the hollows of the cheek, and replaced by elastic vigour the listless languor of the tread? No; there is another and a better cause for that healthful change. Mr. Vernon St. John is not alone,--a fair companion leans on his arm. See, she pauses to press closer to his side, gaze on his face, and whisper, "We did well to have hope and faith!"

The husband's faith had not been so unshaken as his Mary's, and a slight blush passed over his cheek as he thought of his concession to Sir Miles's wishes, and his overtures to Lucretia Clavering. Still, that fault had been fairly acknowledged to his wife, and she felt, the moment she had spoken, that she had committed an indiscretion; nevertheless, with an arch touch of womanly malice she added softly,--

"And Miss Clavering, you persist in saying, was not really handsome?"

"My love," replied the husband, gravely, "you would oblige me by not

recalling the very painful recollections connected with that name. Let it never be mentioned in this house."

Lady Mary bowed her graceful head in submission; she understood Charles's feelings. For though he had not shown her Sir Miles's letter and its enclosure, he had communicated enough to account for the unexpected heritage, and to lessen his wife's compassion for the disappointed heiress. Nevertheless, she comprehended that her husband felt an uneasy twinge at the idea that he was compelled to act hardly to the one whose hopes he had supplanted. Lucretia's banishment from Laughton was a just humiliation, but it humbled a generous heart to inflict the sentence. Thus, on all accounts, the remembrance of Lucretia was painful and unwelcome to the successor of Sir Miles. There was a silence; Lady Mary pressed her husband's hand.

"It is strange," said he, giving vent to his thoughts at that tender sign

of sympathy in his feeling,--"strange that, after all, she did not marry Mainwaring, but fixed her choice on that subtle Frenchman. But she has settled abroad now, perhaps for life; a great relief to my mind. Yes, let us never recur to her."

"Fortunately," said Lady Mary, with some hesitation, "she does not seem to have created much interest here. The poor seldom name her to me, and our neighbours only with surprise at her marriage. In another year she will be forgotten!"

Mr. St. John sighed. Perhaps he felt how much more easily he had been forgotten, were he the banished one, Lucretia the possessor! His light nature, however, soon escaped from all thoughts and sources of annoyance, and he listened with complacent attention to Lady Mary's gentle plans for the poor, and the children's school, and the cottages that ought to be repaired, and the labourers that ought to be employed. For though it may seem singular, Vernon St. John, insensibly influenced by his wife's meek superiority, and corrected by her pure companionship, had begun to feel the charm of innocent occupations,--more, perhaps, than if he had been accustomed to the larger and loftier excitements of life, and missed that stir of intellect which is the element of those who have warred in the democracy of letters, or contended for the leadership of States. He had begun already to think that the country was no such exile after all. Naturally benevolent, he had taught himself to share the occupations his Mary had already found in the busy "luxury of doing good," and to conceive that brotherhood of charity which usually unites the lord of the village with its poor.

"I think, what with hunting once a week,--I will not venture more till my pain in the side is quite gone,--and with the help of some old friends at Christmas, we can get through the winter very well, Mary."

"Ah, those old friends, I dread them more than the hunting!"

"But we'll have your grave father and your dear, precise, excellent mother to keep us in order. And if I sit more than half an hour after dinner, the old butler shall pull me out by the ears. Mary, what do you say to thinning the grove yonder? We shall get a better view of the landscape beyond. No, hang it! dear old Sir Miles loved his trees better than the prospect; I won't lop a bough. But that avenue we are planting will be certainly a noble improvement--"

"Fifty years hence, Charles!"

"It is our duty to think of posterity," answered the ci-devant spendthrift, with a gravity that was actually pompous. "But hark! is that two o'clock? Three, by Jove! How time flies! and my new bullocks that I was to see at two! Come down to the farm, that's my own Mary. Ah, your fine ladies are not such bad housewives after all!"

"And your fine gentlemen--"

"Capital farmers! I had no idea till last week that a prize ox was so interesting an animal. One lives to learn. Put me in mind, by the by, to write to Coke about his sheep."

"This way, dear Charles; we can go round by the village,--and see poor Ponto and Dash."

The tears rushed to Mr. St. John's eyes. "If poor Sir Miles could have known you!" he said, with a sigh; and though the gardeners were at work on the lawn, he bowed his head and kissed the blushing cheek of his wife as heartily as if he had been really a farmer.

From the terrace at Laughton, turn to the humbler abode of our old friend the vicar,--the same day, the same hour. Here also the scene is without doors,--we are in the garden of the vicarage; the children are playing at hide-and-seek amongst the espaliers which screen the winding gravel-walks from the esculents more dear to Ceres than to Flora. The vicar is seated in his little parlour, from which a glazed door admits into the garden. The door is now open, and the good man has paused from his work (he had just discovered a new emendation in the first chorus of the "Medea") to look out at the rosy faces that gleam to and fro across the scene. His wife, with a basket in her hand, is standing without the door, but a little aside, not to obstruct the view.

"It does one's heart good to see them," said the vicar, "little dears!"

"Yes, they ought to be dear at this time of the year," observed Mrs. Fielden, who was absorbed in the contents of the basket.

"And so fresh!"

"Fresh, indeed,--how different from London! In London they were not fit to be seen,--as old as---I am sure I can't guess how old they were. But you see here they are new laid every morning!"

"My dear," said Mr. Fielden, opening his eyes,--"new laid every morning!"

"Two dozen and four."

"Two dozen and four! What on earth are you talking about, Mrs. Fielden?"

"Why, the eggs, to be sure, my love!"

"Oh," said the vicar, "two dozen and four! You alarmed me a little; 't is of no consequence,--only my foolish mistake. Always prudent and saving, my dear Sarah,--just as if poor Sir Miles had not left us that munificent fortune, I may call it."

"It will not go very far when we have our young ones to settle. And David is very extravagant already; he has torn such a hole in his jacket!"

At this moment up the gravel-walk two young persons came in sight. The children darted across them, whooping and laughing, and vanished in the further recess of the garden.

"All is for the best, blind mortals that we are; all is for the best," said the vicar, musingly, as his eyes rested upon the approaching pair.

"Certainly, my love; you are always right, and it is wicked to grumble. Still, if you saw what a hole it was,--past patching, I fear!"

"Look round," said Mr. Fielden, benevolently. "How we grieved for them both; how wroth we were with William,--how sad for Susan! And now see them; they will be the better man and wife for their trial."

"Has Susan then consented? I was almost afraid she never would consent. How often have I been almost angry with her, poor lamb, when I have heard her accuse herself of causing her sister's unhappiness, and declare with sobs that she felt it a crime to think of William Mainwaring as a husband."

"I trust I have reasoned her out of a morbid sensibility which, while it could not have rendered Lucretia the happier, must have insured the wretchedness of herself and William. But if Lucretia had not married, and so forever closed the door on William's repentance (that is, supposing he did repent), I believe poor Susan would rather have died of a broken heart than have given her hand to Mainwaring."

"It was an odd marriage of that proud young lady's, after all," said Mrs. Fielden,--"so much older than she; a foreigner, too!"

"But he is a very pleasant man, and they have known each other so long. I did not, however, quite like a sort of cunning he showed, when I came to reflect on it, in bringing Lucretia back to the house; it looks as if he had laid a trap for her from the first."

"Ten thousand pounds,--a great catch for a foreigner!" observed Mrs. Fielden, with the shrewd instinct of her sex; and then she added, in the spirit of a prudent sympathy equally characteristic: "But I think you say Mr. Parchmount persuaded her to allow half to be settled on herself. That will be a hold on him."

"A bad hold, if that be all, Sarah. There is a better,--he is a learned man and a scholar. Scholars are naturally domestic, and make good husbands."

"But you know he must be a papist!" said Mrs. Fielden.

"Umph!" muttered the vicar, irresolutely.

While the worthy couple were thus conversing, Susan and her lover, not having finished their conference, had turned back through the winding walk.

"Indeed," said William, drawing her arm closer to his side, "these scruples, these fears, are cruel to me as well as to yourself. If you were no longer existing, I could be nothing to your sister. Nay, even were she not married, you must know enough of her pride to be assured that I can retain no place in her affections. What has chanced was not our crime. Perhaps Heaven designed to save not only us, but herself, from the certain misery of nuptials so inauspicious!"

"If she would but answer one of my letters!" sighed Susan; "or if I could but know that she were happy and contented!"

"Your letters must have miscarried,--you are not sure even of her address. Rely upon it, she is happy. Do you think that she would a second time have 'stooped beneath her'?"--Mainwaring's lip writhed as he repeated that phrase--"if her feelings had not been involved? I would not wrong your sister,--I shall ever feel gratitude for the past, and remorse for my own shameful weakness; still, I must think that the nature of her attachment to me was more ardent than lasting."

"Ah, William, how can you know her heart?"

"By comparing it with yours. Oh, there indeed I may anchor my faith! Susan, we were formed for each other! Our natures are alike, save that yours, despite its surpassing sweetness, has greater strength in its simple candour. You will be my guide to good. Without you I should have no aim in life, no courage to front the contests of this world. Ah, this hand trembles still!"

"William, William, I cannot repress a foreboding, a superstition! At night I am haunted with that pale face as I saw it last,--pale with suppressed despair. Oh, if ever Lucretia could have need of us,--need of our services, our affections,--if we could but repair the grief we have caused her!"

Susan's head sank on her lover's shoulder. She had said "need of us," "need of our services." In those simple monosyllables the union was pledged, the identity of their lots in the dark urn was implied.

From this scene turn again; the slide shifts in the lantern,--we are at Paris. In the antechamber at the Tuileries a crowd of expectant courtiers and adventurers gaze upon a figure who passes with modest and downcast eyes through the throng; he has just left the closet of the First Consul.

"Par Dieu!" said B----, "power, like misery, makes us acquainted with strange bedfellows. I should like to hear what the First Consul can have to say to Olivier Dalibard."

Fouche, who at that period was scheming for the return to his old dignities of minister of police, smiled slightly, and answered: "In a time when the air is filled with daggers, one who was familiar with Robespierre has his uses. Olivier Dalibard is a remarkable man. He is one of those children of the Revolution whom that great mother is bound to save."

"By betraying his brethren?" said B----, dryly.

"I do not allow the inference. The simple fact is that Dalibard has spent many years in England; he has married an Englishwoman of birth and connections; he knows well the English language and the English people; and just now when the First Consul is so anxious to approfondir the popular feelings of that strange nation, with whose government he is compelled to go to war, he may naturally have much to say to so acute an observer as Olivier Dalibard."

"Um!" said B----; "with such patronage, Robespierre's friend should hold his head somewhat higher!"

Meanwhile, Olivier Dalibard, crossing the gardens of the palace, took his way to the Faubourg St. Germain. There was no change in the aspect of this man: the same meditative tranquillity characterized his downward eyes and bonded brow; the same precise simplicity of dress which had pleased the prim taste of Robespierre gave decorum to his slender, stooping form. No expression more cheerful, no footstep more elastic, bespoke the exile's return to his native land, or the sanguine expectations of Intellect restored to a career. Yet, to all appearance, the prospects of Dalibard were bright and promising. The First Consul was at that stage of his greatness when he sought to employ in his service all such talent as the Revolution had made manifest, provided

only that it was not stained with notorious bloodshed, or too strongly associated with the Jacobin clubs. His quick eye seemed to have discovered already the abilities of Dalibard, and to have appreciated the sagacity and knowledge of men which had enabled this subtle person to obtain the friendship of Robespierre, without sharing in his crimes. He had been frequently closeted with Bonaparte; he was in the declared favour of Fouché, who, though not at that period at the head of the police, was too necessary amidst the dangers of the time, deepened as they were by the rumours of some terrible and profound conspiracy, to be laid aside, as the First Consul had at one moment designed. One man alone, of those high in the State, appeared to distrust Olivier Dalibard,--the celebrated Cambacérès. But with his aid the Provencal could dispense. What was the secret of Dalibard's power? Was it, in truth, owing solely to his native talent, and his acquired experience, especially of England? Was it by honourable means that he had won the ear of the First Consul? We may be sure of the contrary; for it is a striking attribute of men once thoroughly tainted by the indulgence of vicious schemes and stratagems that they become wholly blinded to those plain paths of ambition which common-sense makes manifest to ordinary ability. If we regard narrowly the lives of great criminals, we are often very much startled by the extraordinary acuteness, the profound calculation, the patient, meditative energy which they have employed upon the conception and execution of a crime. We feel inclined to think that such intellectual power would have commanded great distinction, worthily used and guided; but we never find that these great criminals seem to have been sensible of the opportunities to real eminence which they have thrown away. Often we observe that there have been before them vistas into worldly greatness which, by no uncommon prudence and exertion, would have conducted honest men half as clever to fame and power; but, with a strange obliquity of vision, they appear to have looked from these broad clear avenues into some dark, tangled defile, in which, by the subtlest ingenuity, and through the most besetting perils, they might attain at last to the success of a fraud or the enjoyment of a vice. In crime once indulged there is a wonderful fascination, and the fascination is, not rarely, great in proportion to the intellect of the criminal. There is always hope of reform for a dull, uneducated, stolid man, led by accident or temptation into guilt; but where a man of great ability, and highly educated, besots himself in the intoxication of dark and terrible excitements, takes impure delight in tortuous and slimy ways, the good angel abandons him forever.

Olivier Dalibard walked musingly on, gained a house in one of the most desolate quarters of the abandoned faubourg, mounted the spacious stairs, and rang at the door of an attic next the roof. After some moments the door was slowly and cautiously opened, and two small, fierce eyes, peering through a mass of black, tangled curls, gleamed through the aperture. The gaze seemed satisfactory.

"Enter, friend," said the inmate, with a sort of complacent grunt; and as Dalibard obeyed, the man reclosed and barred the door.

The room was bare to beggary; the ceiling, low and sloping, was blackened with smoke. A wretched bed, two chairs, a table, a strong chest, a small cracked looking-glass, completed the inventory. The dress of the occupier was not in keeping with the chamber; true that it was not such as was worn by the wealthier classes, but it betokened no sign of poverty. A blue coat with high collar, and half of military fashion, was buttoned tight over a chest of vast girth; the nether garments were of leather, scrupulously clean, and solid, heavy riding-boots came half-way

up the thigh. A more sturdy, stalwart, strong-built knave never excited the admiration which physical power always has a right to command; and Dalibard gazed on him with envy. The pale scholar absolutely sighed as he thought what an auxiliary to his own scheming mind would have been so tough a frame!

But even less in form than face did the man of thews and sinews contrast the man of wile and craft. Opposite that high forehead, with its massive development of organs, scowled the low front of one to whom thought was unfamiliar,--protuberant, indeed, over the shaggy brows, where phrenologists place the seats of practical perception, strongly marked in some of the brutes, as in the dog, but almost literally void of those higher organs by which we reason and imagine and construct. But in rich atonement for such deficiency, all the animal reigned triumphant in the immense mass and width of the skull behind. And as the hair, long before, curled in close rings to the nape of the bull-like neck, you saw before you one of those useful instruments to ambition and fraud which recoil at no danger, comprehend no crime, are not without certain good qualities, under virtuous guidance,--for they have the fidelity, the obedience, the stubborn courage of the animal,--but which, under evil control, turn those very qualities to unsparing evil: bull-dogs to rend the foe, as bull-dogs to defend the master.

For some moments the two men gazed, silently at each other. At length Dalibard said, with an air of calm superiority,--

"My friend, it is time that I should be presented to the chiefs of your party!"

"Chiefs, par tous les diables!" growled the other; "we Chouans are all chiefs, when it comes to blows. You have seen my credentials; you know that I am a man to be trusted: what more do you need?"

"For myself nothing; but my friends are more scrupulous. I have sounded, as I promised, the heads of the old Jacobin party, and they are favourable. This upstart soldier, who has suddenly seized in his iron grasp all the fruits of the Revolution, is as hateful to them as to you. But que voulez vous, mon cher? men are men! It is one thing to destroy Bonaparte; it is another thing to restore the Bourbons. How can the Jacobin chiefs depend on your assurance, or my own, that the Bourbons will forget the old offences and reward the new service? You apprise me--so do your credentials--that a prince of the blood is engaged in this enterprise, that he will appear at the proper season. Put me in direct communication with this representative of the Bourbons, and I promise in return, if his assurances are satisfactory, that you shall have an *emeute*, to be felt from Paris to Marseilles. If you cannot do this, I am useless; and I withdraw--"

"Withdraw! Garde a vous, Monsieur le Savant! No man withdraws alive from a conspiracy like ours."

We have said before that Olivier Dalibard was not physically brave; and the look of the Chouan, as those words were said, would have frozen the blood of many a bolder man. But the habitual hypocrisy of Dalibard enabled him to disguise his fear, and he replied dryly,--

"Monsieur le Chouan, it is not by threats that you will gain adherents to a desperate cause, which, on the contrary, requires mild words and flattering inducements. If you commit a violence,--a murder,--mon cher,

Paris is not Bretagne; we have a police: you will be discovered."

"Ha, ha! What then? Do you think I fear the guillotine?"

"For yourself, no; but for your leaders, yes! If you are discovered, and arrested for crime, do you fancy that the police will not recognize the right arm of the terrible George Cadoudal; that they will not guess that Cadoudal is at Paris; that Cadoudal will not accompany you to the guillotine?"

The Chouan's face fell. Olivier watched him, and pursued his advantage.

"I asked you to introduce to me this shadow of a prince, under which you would march to a counter-revolution. But I will be more easily contented. Present me to George Cadoudal, the hero of Morbihan; he is a man in whom I can trust, and with whom I can deal. What, you hesitate? How do you suppose enterprises of this nature can be carried on? If, from fear and distrust of each other, the man you would employ cannot meet the chief who directs him, there will be delay, confusion, panic, and you will all perish by the executioner. And for me, Pierre Guillot, consider my position. I am in some favour with the First Consul; I have a station of respectability,--a career lies before me. Can you think that I will hazard these, with my head to boot, like a rash child? Do you suppose that, in entering into this terrible contest, I would consent to treat only with subordinates? Do not deceive yourself. Again, I say, tell your employers that they must confer with me directly, or je m'en lave les mains."

"I will repeat what you say," answered Guillot, sullenly, "Is this all?"

"All for the present," said Dalibard, slowly drawing on his gloves, and retreating towards the door. The Chouan watched him with a suspicious and sinister eye; and as the Provencal's hand was on the latch, he laid his own rough grasp on Dalibard's shoulder,--

"I know not how it is, Monsieur Dalibard, but I mistrust you."

"Distrust is natural and prudent to all who conspire," replied the scholar, quietly. "I do not ask you to confide in me. Your employers bade you seek me: I have mentioned my conditions; let them decide."

"You carry it off well, Monsieur Dalibard, and I am under a solemn oath, which poor George made me take, knowing me to be a hot-headed, honest fellow,--mauvaise tete, if you will,--that I will keep my hand off pistol and knife upon mere suspicion; that nothing less than his word, or than clear and positive proof of treachery, shall put me out of good humour and into warm blood. But bear this with you, Monsieur Dalibard: if I once discover that you use our secrets to betray them; should George see you, and one hair of his head come to injury through your hands,--I will wring your neck as a housewife wrings a pullet's."

"I don't doubt your strength or your ferocity, Pierre Guillot; but my neck will be safe: you have enough to do to take care of your own. Au revoir."

With a tone and look of calm and fearless irony, the scholar thus spoke, and left the room; but when he was on the stairs, he paused, and caught at the balustrade,--the sickness as of terror at some danger past, or to be, came over him; and this contrast between the self-command, or

simulation, which belongs to moral courage, and the feebleness of natural and constitutional cowardice, would have been sublime if shown in a noble cause. In one so corrupt, it but betrayed a nature doubly formidable; for treachery and murder hatch their brood amidst the folds of a hypocrite's cowardice.

While thus the interview is going on between Dalibard and the conspirator, we must bestow a glance upon the Provencal's home.

In an apartment in one of the principal streets between the Boulevards and the Rue St. Honore, a boy and a woman sat side by side, conversing in whispers. The boy was Gabriel Varney, the woman Lucretia Dalibard. The apartment was furnished in the then modern taste, which affected classical forms; and though not without a certain elegance, had something meagre and comfortless in its splendid tripods and thin-legged chairs. There was in the apartment that air which bespeaks the struggle for appearances,--that struggle familiar to those of limited income and vain aspirations, who want the taste which smooths all inequalities and gives a smile to home; that taste which affection seems to prompt, if not to create, which shows itself in a thousand nameless, costless trifles, each a grace. No sign was there of the household cares or industry of women. No flowers, no music, no embroidery-frame, no work-table. Lucretia had none of the sweet feminine habits which betray so lovelily the whereabouts of women. All was formal and precise, like rooms which we enter and leave,--not those in which we settle and dwell.

Lucretia herself is changed; her air is more assured, her complexion more pale, the evil character of her mouth more firm and pronounced.

Gabriel, still a mere boy in years, has a premature look of man. The down shades his lip. His dress, though showy and theatrical, is no longer that of boyhood. His rounded cheek has grown thin, as with the care and thought which beset the anxious step of youth on entering into life.

Both, as before remarked, spoke in whispers; both from time to time glanced fearfully at the door; both felt that they belonged to a hearth round which smile not the jocund graces of trust and love and the heart's open ease.

"But," said Gabriel,--"but if you would be safe, my father must have no secrets hid from you."

"I do not know that he has. He speaks to me frankly of his hopes, of the share he has in the discovery of the plot against the First Consul, of his interviews with Pierre Guillot, the Breton."

"Ah, because there your courage supports him, and your acuteness assists his own. Such secrets belong to his public life, his political schemes; with those he will trust you. It is his private life, his private projects, you must know."

"But what does he conceal from me? Apart from politics, his whole mind seems bent on the very natural object of securing intimacy with his rich cousin, M. Bellanger, from whom he has a right to expect so large an inheritance."

"Bellanger is rich, but he is not much older than my father."

"He has bad health."

"No," said Gabriel, with a downcast eye and a strange smile, "he has not bad health; but he may not be long-lived."

"How do you mean?" asked Lucretia, sinking her voice into a still lower whisper, while a shudder, she scarce knew why, passed over her frame.

"What does my father do," resumed Gabriel, "in that room at the top of the house? Does he tell you that secret?"

"He makes experiments in chemistry. You know that that was always his favourite study. You smile again! Gabriel, do not smile so; it appalls me. Do you think there is some mystery in that chamber?"

"It matters not what we think, belle-mere; it matters much what we know. If I were you, I would know what is in that chamber. I repeat, to be safe, you must have all his secrets, or none. Hush, that is his step!"

The door-handle turned noiselessly, and Olivier entered. His look fell on his son's face, which betrayed only apparent surprise at his unexpected return. He then glanced at Lucretia's, which was, as usual, cold and impenetrable.

"Gabriel," said Dalibard, gently, "I have come in for you. I have promised to take you to spend the day at M. Bellanger's; you are a great favourite with Madame. Come, my boy. I shall be back soon, Lucretia. I shall but drop in to leave Gabriel at my cousin's."

Gabriel rose cheerfully, as if only alive to the expectation of the bon-bons and compliments he received habitually from Madame Bellanger.

"And you can take your drawing implements with you," continued Dalibard. "This good M. Bellanger has given you permission to copy his Poussin."

"His Poussin! Ah, that is placed in his bedroom [It is scarcely necessary to observe that bedchambers in Paris, when forming part of the suite of reception-rooms, are often decorated no less elaborately than the other apartments], is it not?"

"Yes," answered Dalibard, briefly.

Gabriel lifted his sharp, bright eyes to his father's face. Dalibard turned away.

"Come!" he said with some impatience; and the boy took up his hat.

In another minute Lucretia was alone.

"Alone," in an English home, is a word implying no dreary solitude to an accomplished woman; but alone in that foreign land, alone in those half-furnished, desolate apartments,--few books, no musical instruments, no companions during the day to drop in,--that loneliness was wearying. And that mind so morbidly active! In the old Scottish legend, the spirit that serves the wizard must be kept constantly employed; suspend its work for a moment, and it rends the enchanter. It is so with minds that crave for excitement, and live, without relief of heart and affection, on the hard tasks of the intellect.

Lucretia mused over Gabriel's words and warning: "To be safe, you must know all his secrets, or none." What was the secret which Dalibard had not communicated to her?

She rose, stole up the cold, cheerless stairs, and ascended to the attic which Dalibard had lately hired. It was locked; and she observed that the lock was small,--so small that the key might be worn in a ring. She descended, and entered her husband's usual cabinet, which adjoined the sitting-room. All the books which the house contained were there,--a few works on metaphysics, Spinoza in especial, the great Italian histories, some volumes of statistics, many on physical and mechanical philosophy, and one or two works of biography and memoirs. No light literature,--that grace and flower of human culture, that best philosophy of all, humanizing us with gentle art, making us wise through the humours, elevated through the passions, tender in the affections of our kind. She took out one of the volumes that seemed less arid than the rest, for she was weary of her own thoughts, and began to read. To her surprise, the first passage she opened was singularly interesting, though the title was nothing more seductive than the "Life of a Physician of Padua in the Sixteenth Century." It related to that singular epoch of terror in Italy when some mysterious disease, varying in a thousand symptoms, baffled all remedy, and long defied all conjecture,--a disease attacking chiefly the heads of families, father and husband; rarely women. In one city, seven hundred husbands perished, but not one wife! The disease was poison. The hero of the memoir was one of the earlier discoverers of the true cause of this household epidemic. He had been a chief authority in a commission of inquiry. Startling were the details given in the work,--the anecdotes, the histories, the astonishing craft brought daily to bear on the victim, the wondrous perfidy of the subtle means, the variation of the certain murder,--here swift as epilepsy, there slow and wasting as long decline. The lecture was absorbing; and absorbed in the book Lucretia still was, when she heard Dalibard's voice behind: he was looking over her shoulder.

"A strange selection for so fair a student! Enfant, play not with such weapons."

"But is this all true?"

"True, though scarce a fragment of the truth. The physician was a sorry chemist and a worse philosopher. He blundered in his analysis of the means; and if I remember rightly, he whines like a priest at the motives,--for see you not what was really the cause of this spreading pestilence? It was the Saturnalia of the Weak,--a burst of mocking license against the Strong; it was more,--it was the innate force of the individual waging war against the many."

"I do not understand you."

"No? In that age, husbands were indeed lords of the household; they married mere children for their lands; they neglected and betrayed them; they were inexorable if the wife committed the faults set before her for example. Suddenly the wife found herself armed against her tyrant. His life was in her hands. So the weak had no mercy on the strong. But man, too, was then, even more than now, a lonely wrestler in a crowded arena. Brute force alone gave him distinction in courts; wealth alone brought him justice in the halls, or gave him safety in his home. Suddenly the frail puny lean saw that he could reach the mortal part of his giant foe. The noiseless sling was in his hand,--it smote Goliath from afar.

Suddenly the poor man, ground to the dust, spat upon by contempt, saw through the crowd of richer kinsmen, who shunned and bade him rot; saw those whose death made him heir to lordship and gold and palaces and power and esteem. As a worm through a wardrobe, that man ate through velvet and ermine, and gnawed out the hearts that beat in his way. No. A great intellect can comprehend these criminals, and account for the crime. It is a mighty thing to feel in one's self that one is an army,--more than an army! What thousands and millions of men, with trumpet and banner, and under the sanction of glory, strive to do,--destroy a foe,--that, with little more than an effort of the will,--with a drop, a grain, for all his arsenal,--one man can do!"

There was a horrible enthusiasm about this reasoning devil as he spoke thus; his crest rose, his breast expanded. That animation which a noble thought gives to generous hearts kindled in the face of the apologist for the darkest and basest of human crimes. Lucretia shuddered; but her gloomy imagination was spelled; there was an interest mingled with her terror.

"Hush! you appall me," she said at last, timidly. "But, happily, this fearful art exists no more to tempt and destroy?"

"As a more philosophical discovery, it might be amusing to a chemist to learn exactly what were the compounds of those ancient poisons," said Dalibard, not directly answering the implied question. "Portions of the art are indeed lost, unless, as I suspect, there is much credulous exaggeration in the accounts transmitted to us. To kill by a flower, a pair of gloves, a soap-ball,--kill by means which elude all possible suspicion,--is it credible? What say you? An amusing research, indeed, if one had leisure! But enough of this now; it grows late. We dine with M. de----; he wishes to let his hotel. Why, Lucretia, if we knew a little of this old art, par Dieu! we could soon hire the hotel! Well, well; perhaps we may survive my cousin Jean Bellanger!"

Three days afterwards, Lucretia stood by her husband's side in the secret chamber. From the hour when she left it, a change was perceptible in her countenance, which gradually removed from it the character of youth. Paler the cheek could scarce become, nor more cold the discontented, restless eye. But it was as if some great care had settled on her brow, and contracted yet more the stern outline of the lips. Gabriel noted the alteration, but he did not attempt to win her confidence. He was occupied rather in considering, first, if it were well for him to sound deeper into the mystery he suspected; and, secondly, to what extent, and on what terms, it became his interest to aid the designs in which, by Dalibard's hints and kindly treatment, he foresaw that he was meant to participate.

A word now on the rich kinsman of the Dalibards. Jean Bellanger had been one of those prudent Republicans who had put the Revolution to profit. By birth a Marseillais, he had settled in Paris, as an epicier, about the year 1785, and had distinguished himself by the adaptability and finesse which become those who fish in such troubled waters. He had sided with Mirabeau, next with Vergniaud and the Girondins. These he forsook in time for Danton, whose facile corruptibility made him a seductive patron. He was a large purchaser in the sale of the emigrant property; he obtained a contract for the supply of the army in the Netherlands; he abandoned Danton as he had abandoned the Girondins, but without taking any active part in the after-proceedings of the Jacobins. His next connection was with Tallien and Barras, and he enriched himself yet more

under the Directory than he had done in the earlier stages of the Revolution. Under cover of an appearance of bonhomie and good humour, a frank laugh and an open countenance, Jean Bellanger had always retained general popularity and good-will, and was one of those whom the policy of the First Consul led him to conciliate. He had long since retired from the more vulgar departments of trade, but continued to flourish as an army contractor. He had a large hotel and a splendid establishment; he was one of the great capitalists of Paris. The relationship between Dalibard and Bellanger was not very close,--it was that of cousins twice removed; and during Dalibard's previous residence at Paris, each embracing different parties, and each eager in his career, the blood-tie between them had not been much thought of, though they were good friends, and each respected the other for the discretion with which he had kept aloof from the more sanguinary excesses of the time. As Bellanger was not many years older than Dalibard; as the former had but just married in the year 1791, and had naturally before him the prospect of a family; as his fortunes at that time, though rising, were unconfirmed; and as some nearer relations stood between them, in the shape of two promising, sturdy nephews,--Dalibard had not then calculated on any inheritance from his cousin. On his return, circumstances were widely altered: Bellanger had been married some years, and no issue had blessed his nuptials. His nephews, draughted into the conscription, had perished in Egypt. Dalibard apparently became his nearest relative.

To avarice or to worldly ambition there was undoubtedly something very dazzling in the prospect thus opened to the eyes of Olivier Dalibard. The contractor's splendid mode of living, vying with that of the fermier-general of old, the colossal masses of capital by which he backed and supported speculations that varied with an ingenuity rendered practical and profound by experience, inflamed into fever the morbid restlessness of fancy and intellect which characterized the evil scholar; for that restlessness seemed to supply to his nature vices not constitutional to it. Dalibard had not the avarice that belongs either to a miser or a spendthrift. In his youth, his books and the simple desires of an abstract student sufficed to his wants, and a habit of method and order, a mechanical calculation which accompanied all his acts, from the least to the greatest, preserved him, even when most poor, from neediness and want. Nor was he by nature vain and ostentatious,--those infirmities accompany a larger and more luxurious nature. His philosophy rather despised, than inclined to, show. Yet since to plot and to scheme made his sole amusement, his absorbing excitement, so a man wrapped in himself, and with no generous ends in view, has little to plot or to scheme for but objects of worldly aggrandizement. In this Dalibard resembled one whom the intoxication of gambling has mastered, who neither wants nor greatly prizes the stake, but who has grown wedded to the venture for it. It was a madness like that of a certain rich nobleman in our own country who, with more money than he could spend, and with a skill in all games where skill enters that would have secured him success of itself, having learned the art of cheating, could not resist its indulgence. No hazard, no warning, could restrain him,--cheat he must; the propensity became iron-strong as a Greek destiny.

That the possible chance of an inheritance so magnificent should dazzle Lucretia and Gabriel, was yet more natural; for in them it appealed to more direct and eloquent, though not more powerful, propensities. Gabriel had every vice which the greed of gain most irritates and excites. Intense covetousness lay at the core of his heart; he had the sensual temperament, which yearns for every enjoyment, and takes pleasure in every pomp and show of life. Lucretia, with a hardness of mind that

disdained luxury, and a certain grandeur (if such a word may be applied to one so perverted) that was incompatible with the sordid infirmities of the miser, had a determined and insatiable ambition, to which gold was a necessary instrument. Wedded to one she loved, like Mainwaring, the ambition, as we have said in a former chapter, could have lived in another, and become devoted to intellectual efforts, in the nobler desire for power based on fame and genius. But now she had the gloomy cravings of one fallen, and the uneasy desire to restore herself to a lost position; she fed as an aliment upon scorn to bitterness of all beings and all things around her. She was gnawed by that false fever which riots in those who seek by outward seemings and distinctions to console themselves for the want of their own self-esteem, or who, despising the world with which they are brought in contact, sigh for those worldly advantages which alone justify to the world itself their contempt.

To these diseased infirmities of vanity or pride, whether exhibited in Gabriel or Lucretia, Dalibard administered without apparent effort, not only by his conversation, but his habits of life. He mixed with those much wealthier than himself, but not better born; those who, in the hot and fierce ferment of that new society, were rising fast into new aristocracy,—the fortunate soldiers, daring speculators, plunderers of many an argosy that had been wrecked in the Great Storm. Every one about them was actuated by the keen desire "to make a fortune;" the desire was contagious. They were not absolutely poor in the proper sense of the word "poverty," with Dalibard's annuity and the interest of Lucretia's fortune; but they were poor compared to those with whom they associated,—poor enough for discontent. Thus, the image of the mighty wealth from which, perhaps, but a single life divided them, became horribly haunting. To Gabriel's sensual vision the image presented itself in the shape of unlimited pleasure and prodigal riot; to Lucretia it wore the solemn majesty of power; to Dalibard himself it was but the Eureka of a calculation,—the palpable reward of wile and scheme and dexterous combinations. The devil had temptations suited to each.

Meanwhile, the Dalibards were more and more with the Bellangers. Olivier glided in to talk of the chances and changes of the State and the market. Lucretia sat for hours listening mutely to the contractor's boasts of past frauds, or submitting to the martyrdom of his victorious games at tric-trac. Gabriel, a spoiled darling, copied the pictures on the walls, complimented Madame, flattered Monsieur, and fawned on both for trinkets and crowns. Like three birds of night and omen, these three evil natures settled on the rich man's roof.

Was the rich man himself blind to the motives which budded forth into such attentive affection? His penetration was too acute, his ill opinion of mankind too strong, perhaps, for such amiable self-delusions. But he took all in good part; availed himself of Dalibard's hints and suggestions as to the employment of his capital; was polite to Lucretia, and readily condemned her to be beaten at tric-trac; while he accepted with bonhomie Gabriel's spirited copies of his pictures. But at times there was a gleam of satire and malice in his round gray eyes, and an inward chuckle at the caresses and flatteries he received, which perplexed Dalibard and humbled Lucretia. Had his wealth been wholly at his own disposal, these signs would have been inauspicious; but the new law was strict, and the bulk of Bellanger's property could not be alienated from his nearest kin. Was not Dalibard the nearest?

These hopes and speculations did not, as we have seen, absorb the restless and rank energies of Dalibard's crooked, but capacious and

grasping intellect. Patiently and ingeniously he pursued his main political object,--the detection of that audacious and complicated conspiracy against the First Consul, which ended in the tragic deaths of Pichegru, the Duc d'Enghien, and the erring but illustrious hero of La Vendee, George Cadoudal. In the midst of these dark plots for personal aggrandizement and political fortune, we leave, for the moment, the sombre, sullen soul of Olivier Dalibard.

Time has passed on, and spring is over the world. The seeds buried in the earth burst to flower; but man's breast knoweth not the sweet division of the seasons. In winter or summer, autumn or spring alike, his thoughts sow the germs of his actions, and day after day his destiny gathers in her harvests.

The joy-bells ring clear through the groves of Laughton,--an heir is born to the old name and fair lands of St. John. And, as usual, the present race welcomes merrily in that which shall succeed and replace it,--that which shall thrust the enjoyers down into the black graves, and wrest from them the pleasant goods of the world. The joy-bell of birth is a note of warning to the knell for the dead; it wakes the worms beneath the mould: the new-born, every year that it grows and flourishes, speeds the parent to their feast. Yet who can predict that the infant shall become the heir? Who can tell that Death sits not side by side with the nurse at the cradle? Can the mother's hand measure out the woof of the Parcae, or the father's eye detect through the darkness of the morrow the gleam of the fatal shears?

It is market-day at a town in the midland districts of England. There Trade takes its healthiest and most animated form. You see not the stunted form and hollow eye of the mechanic,--poor slave of the capitalist, poor agent and victim of the arch disequalizer, Civilization. There strides the burly form of the farmer; there waits the ruddy hind with his flock; there, patient, sits the miller with his samples of corn; there, in the booths, gleam the humble wares which form the luxuries of cottage and farm. The thronging of men, and the clacking of whips, and the dull sound of wagon or dray, that parts the crowd as it passes, and the lowing of herds and the bleating of sheep,--all are sounds of movement and bustle, yet blend with the pastoral associations of the primitive commerce, when the link between market and farm was visible and direct.

Towards one large house in the centre of the brisk life ebbing on, you might see stream after stream pour its way. The large doors swinging light on their hinges, the gilt letters that shine above the threshold, the windows, with their shutters outside cased in iron and studded with nails, announce that that house is the bank of the town. Come in with that yeoman whose broad face tells its tale, sheepish and down-eyed,--he has come, not to invest, but to borrow. What matters? War is breaking out anew, to bring the time of high prices and paper money and credit. Honest yeoman, you will not be refused. He scratches his rough head, pulls a leg, as he calls it, when the clerk leans over the counter, and asks to see "Muster Mawnering hisself." The clerk points to the little office-room of the new junior partner, who has brought 10,000 pounds and a clear head to the firm. And the yeoman's great boots creak heavily in. I told you so, honest yeoman; you come out with a smile on your brown face, and your hand, that might fell an ox, buttons up your huge breeches pocket. You will ride home with a light heart; go and dine, and be merry.

The yeoman tramps to the ordinary; plates clatter, tongues wag, and the borrower's full heart finds vent in a good word for that kind "Muster Mawnering." For a wonder, all join in the praise. "He's an honour to the town; he's a pride to the country. Thof he's such a friend at a pinch, he's a rale mon of business. He'll make the baunk worth a million! And how well he spoke at the great county meeting about the war, and the laund, and them bloodthirsty Mounseers! If their members were loike him, Muster Fox would look small!"

The day declines; the town empties; whiskeys, horses, and carts are giving life to the roads and the lanes; and the market is deserted, and the bank is shut up, and William Mainwaring walks back to his home at the skirts of the town. Not villa nor cottage, that plain English house, with its cheerful face of red brick, and its solid squareness of shape,-- a symbol of substance in the fortunes of the owner! Yet as he passes, he sees through the distant trees the hall of the member for the town. He pauses a moment, and sighs unquietly. That pause and that sigh betray the germ of ambition and discontent. Why should not he, who can speak so well, be member for the town, instead of that stammering squire? But his reason has soon silenced the querulous murmur. He hastens his step,--he is at home! And there, in the neat-furnished drawing-room, which looks on the garden behind, hisses the welcoming tea-urn; and the piano is open, and there is a packet of new books on the table; and, best of all, there is the glad face of the sweet English wife. The happy scene was characteristic of the time, just when the simpler and more innocent luxuries of the higher class spread, not to spoil, but refine the middle. The dress, air, mien, movements of the young couple; the unassuming, suppressed, sober elegance of the house; the flower-garden, the books, and the music, evidences of cultivated taste, not signals of display,-- all bespoke the gentle fusion of ranks before rude and uneducated wealth, made in looms and lucky hits, rushed in to separate forever the gentleman from the parvenu.

Spring smiles over Paris, over the spires of Notre Dame and the crowded alleys of the Tuileries, over thousands and thousands eager, joyous, aspiring, reckless,--the New Race of France, bound to one man's destiny, children of glory and of carnage, whose blood the wolf and the vulture scent, hungry, from afar!

The conspiracy against the life of the First Consul has been detected and defeated. Pichegru is in prison, George Cadoudal awaits his trial, the Duc d'Enghien sleeps in his bloody grave; the imperial crown is prepared for the great soldier, and the great soldier's creatures bask in the noonday sun. Olivier Dalibard is in high and lucrative employment; his rise is ascribed to his talents, his opinions. No service connected with the detection of the conspiracy is traced or traceable by the public eye. If such exist, it is known but to those who have no desire to reveal it. The old apartments are retained, but they are no longer dreary and comfortless and deserted. They are gay with draperies and ormolu and mirrors; and Madame Dalibard has her nights of reception, and Monsieur Dalibard has already his troops of clients. In that gigantic concentration of egotism which under Napoleon is called the State, Dalibard has found his place. He has served to swell the power of the unit, and the cipher gains importance by its position in the sum.

Jean Bellanger is no more. He died, not suddenly, and yet of some quick disease,--nervous exhaustion; his schemes, they said, had worn him out. But the state of Dalibard, though prosperous, is not that of the heir to the dead millionaire. What mistake is this? The bulk of that wealth

must go to the nearest kin,--so runs the law. But the will is read; and, for the first time, Olivier Dalibard learns that the dead man had a son,--a son by a former marriage,--the marriage undeclared, unknown, amidst the riot of the Revolution; for the wife was the daughter of a proscrit. The son had been reared at a distance, put to school at Lyons, and unavowed to the second wife, who had brought an ample dowry, and whom that discovery might have deterred from the altar. Unacknowledged through life, in death at least the son's rights are proclaimed; and Olivier Dalibard feels that Jean Bellanger has died in vain! For days has the pale Provençal been closeted with lawyers; but there is no hope in litigation. The proofs of the marriage, the birth, the identity, come out clear and clearer; and the beardless schoolboy at Lyons reaps all the profit of those nameless schemes and that mysterious death. Olivier Dalibard desires the friendship, the intimacy of the heir; but the heir is consigned to the guardianship of a merchant at Lyons, near of kin to his mother, and the guardian responds but coldly to Olivier's letters. Suddenly the defeated aspirant seems reconciled to his loss. The widow Bellanger has her own separate fortune, and it is large beyond expectation. In addition to the wealth she brought the deceased, his affection had led him to invest vast sums in her name. The widow then is rich,--rich as the heir himself. She is still fair. Poor woman, she needs consolation! But, meanwhile, the nights of Olivier Dalibard are disturbed and broken. His eye in the daytime is haggard and anxious; he is seldom seen on foot in the streets. Fear is his companion by day, and sits at night on his pillow. The Chouan, Pierre Guillot, who looked to George Cadoudal as a god, knows that George Cadoudal has been betrayed, and suspects Olivier Dalibard; and the Chouan has an arm of iron, and a heart steeled against all mercy. Oh, how the pale scholar thirsted for that Chouan's blood! With what relentless pertinacity, with what ingenious research, he had set all the hounds of the police upon the track of that single man! How notably he had failed! An avenger lived; and Olivier Dalibard started at his own shadow on the wall. But he did not the less continue to plot and to intrigue--nay, such occupation became more necessary, as an escape from himself.

And in the mean while, Olivier Dalibard sought to take courage from the recollection that the Chouan had taken an oath (and he knew that oaths are held sacred with the Bretons) that he would keep his hand from his knife unless he had clear evidence of treachery; such evidence existed, but only in Dalibard's desk or the archives of Fouché. Tush, he was safe! And so, when from dreams of fear he started at the depth of night, so his bolder wife would whisper to him with firm, uncaressing lips: "Olivier Dalibard, thou fearest the living: dost thou never fear the dead? Thy dreams are haunted with a spectre. Why takes it not the accusing shape of thy mouldering kinsman?" and Dalibard would answer, for he was a philosopher in his cowardice: "Il n'y a que les morts qui ne reviennent pas."

It is the notable convenience of us narrators to represent, by what is called "soliloquy," the thoughts, the interior of the personages we describe. And this is almost the master-work of the tale-teller,--that is, if the soliloquy be really in words, what self-commune is in the dim and tangled recesses of the human heart! But to this privilege we are rarely admitted in the case of Olivier Dalibard, for he rarely communed with himself. A sort of mental calculation, it is true, eternally went on within him, like the wheels of a destiny; but it had become a mechanical operation, seldom disturbed by that consciousness of thought, with its struggles of fear and doubt, conscience and crime, which gives its appalling interest to the soliloquy of tragedy. Amidst the

tremendous secrecy of that profound intellect, as at the bottom of a sea, only monstrous images of terror, things of prey, stirred in cold-blooded and devouring life; but into these deeps Olivier himself did not dive. He did not face his own soul; his outer life and his inner life seemed separate individualities, just as, in some complicated State, the social machine goes on through all its numberless cycles of vice and dread, whatever the acts of the government, which is the representative of the State, and stands for the State in the shallow judgment of history.

Before this time Olivier Dalibard's manner to his son had greatly changed from the indifference it betrayed in England,--it was kind and affectionate, almost caressing; while, on the other hand, Gabriel, as if in possession of some secret which gave him power over his father, took a more careless and independent tone, often absented himself from the house for days together, joined the revels of young profligates older than himself, with whom he had formed acquaintance, indulged in spendthrift expenses, and plunged prematurely into the stream of vicious pleasure that oozed through the mud of Paris.

One morning Dalibard, returning from a visit to Madame Bellanger, found Gabriel alone in the salon, contemplating his fair face and gay dress in one of the mirrors, and smoothing down the hair, which he wore long and sleek, as in the portraits of Raphael. Dalibard's lip curled at the boy's coxcombry,--though such tastes he himself had fostered, according to his ruling principles, that to govern, you must find a foible, or instil it; but the sneer changed into a smile.

"Are you satisfied with yourself, joli garçon?" he said, with saturnine playfulness.

"At least, sir, I hope that you will not be ashamed of me when you formally legitimize me as your son. The time has come, you know, to keep your promise."

"And it shall be kept, do not fear. But first I have an employment for you,--a mission; your first embassy, Gabriel."

"I listen, sir."

"I have to send to England a communication of the utmost importance--public importance--to the secret agent of the French government. We are on the eve of a descent on England. We are in correspondence with some in London on whom we count for support. A man might be suspected and searched,--mind, searched. You, a boy, with English name and speech, will be my safest envoy. Bonaparte approves my selection. On your return, he permits me to present you to him. He loves the rising generation. In a few days you will be prepared to start."

Despite the calm tone of the father, so had the son, from the instinct of fear and self-preservation, studied every accent, every glance of Olivier,--so had he constituted himself a spy upon the heart whose perfidy was ever armed, that he detected at once in the proposal some scheme hostile to his interests. He made, however, no opposition to the plan suggested; and seemingly satisfied with his obedience, the father dismissed him.

As soon as he was in the streets, Gabriel went straight to the house of Madame Bellanger. The hotel had been purchased in her name, and she therefore retained it. Since her husband's death he had avoided that

house, before so familiar to him; and now he grew pale and breathed hard as he passed by the porter's lodge up the lofty stairs.

He knew of his father's recent and constant visits at the house; and without conjecturing precisely what were Olivier's designs, he connected them, in the natural and acquired shrewdness he possessed, with the wealthy widow. He resolved to watch, observe, and draw his own conclusions. As he entered Madame Bellanger's room rather abruptly, he observed her push aside amongst her papers something she had been gazing on,--something which sparkled to his eyes. He sat himself down close to her with the caressing manner he usually adopted towards women; and in the midst of the babbling talk with which ladies generally honour boys, he suddenly, as if by accident, displaced the papers, and saw his father's miniature set in brilliants. The start of the widow, her blush, and her exclamation strengthened the light that flashed upon his mind. "Oh, ho! I see now," he said laughing, "why my father is always praising black hair; and--nay, nay--gentlemen may admire ladies in Paris, surely?"

"Pooh, my dear child, your father is an old friend of my poor husband, and a near relation too! But, Gabriel, mon petit ange, you had better not say at home that you have seen this picture; Madame Dalibard might be foolish enough to be angry."

"To be sure not. I have kept a secret before now!" and again the boy's cheek grew pale, and he looked hurriedly round.

"And you are very fond of Madame Dalibard too; so you must not vex her."

"Who says I'm fond of Madame Dalibard? A stepmother!"

"Why, your father, of course,--il est si bon, ce pauvre Dalibard; and all men like cheerful faces. But then, poor lady,--an Englishwoman, so strange here; very natural she should fret, and with bad health, too."

"Bad health! Ah, I remember! She, also, does not seem likely to live long!"

"So your poor father apprehends. Well, well; how uncertain life is! Who would have thought dear Bellanger would have--"

Gabriel rose hastily, and interrupted the widow's pathetic reflections. "I only ran in to say Bon jour. I must leave you now."

"Adieu, my dear boy,--not a word on the miniature! By the by, here's a shirt-pin for you,--tu es joli comme un amour."

All was clear now to Gabriel; it was necessary to get rid of him, and forever. Dalibard might dread his attachment to Lucretia,--he would dread still more his closer intimacy with the widow of Bellanger, should that widow wed again, and Dalibard, freed like her (by what means?), be her choice! Into that abyss of wickedness, fathomless to the innocent, the young villanous eye plunged, and surveyed the ground; a terror seized on him,--a terror of life and death. Would Dalibard spare even his own son, if that son had the power to injure? This mission, was it exile only,--only a fall back to the old squalor of his uncle's studio; only the laying aside of a useless tool? Or was it a snare to the grave? Demon as Dalibard was, doubtless the boy wronged him. But guilt construes guilt for the worst.

Gabriel had formerly enjoyed the thought to match himself, should danger come, with Dalibard; the hour had come, and he felt his impotence. Brave his father, and refuse to leave France! From that, even his reckless hardihood shrank, as from inevitable destruction. But to depart,--be the poor victim and dupe; after having been let loose amongst the riot of pleasure, to return to labour and privation,--from that option his vanity and his senses vindictively revolted. And Lucretia, the only being who seemed to have a human kindness to him! Through all the vicious egotism of his nature, he had some grateful sentiments for her; and even the egotism assisted that unwonted amiability, for he felt that, Lucretia gone, he had no hold on his father's house, that the home of her successor never would be his. While thus brooding, he lifted his eyes, and saw Dalibard pass in his carriage towards the Tuileries. The house, then, was clear; he could see Lucretia alone. He formed his resolution at once, and turned homewards. As he did so, he observed a man at the angle of the street, whose eyes followed Dalibard's carriage with an expression of unmistakable hate and revenge; but scarcely had he marked the countenance, before the man, looking hurriedly round, darted away, and was lost amongst the crowd.

Now, that countenance was not quite unfamiliar to Gabriel. He had seen it before, as he saw it now,--hastily, and, as it were, by fearful snatches. Once he had marked, on returning home at twilight, a figure lurking by the house; and something, in the quickness with which it turned from his gaze, joined to his knowledge of Dalibard's apprehensions, made him mention the circumstance to his father when he entered. Dalibard bade him hasten with a note, written hurriedly, to an agent of the police, whom he kept lodged near at hand. The man was still on the threshold when the boy went out on this errand, and he caught a glimpse of his face; but before the police-agent reached the spot, the ill-omened apparition had vanished. Gabriel now, as his eye rested full upon that threatening brow and those burning eyes, was convinced that he saw before him the terrible Pierre Guillot, whose very name blanched his father's cheek. When the figure retreated, he resolved at once to pursue. He hurried through the crowd amidst which the man had disappeared, and looked eagerly into the faces of those he jostled; sometimes at the distance he caught sight of a figure which appeared to resemble the one which he pursued, but the likeness faded on approach. The chase, however, vague and desultory as it was, led him on till his way was lost amongst labyrinths of narrow and unfamiliar streets. Heated and thirsty, he paused, at last, before a small cafe, entered to ask for a draught of lemonade, and behold, chance had favoured him! The man he sought was seated there before a bottle of wine, and intently reading the newspaper. Gabriel sat himself down at the adjoining table. In a few moments the man was joined by a newcomer; the two conversed, but in whispers so low that Gabriel was unable to hear their conversation, though he caught more than once the name of "George." Both the men were violently excited, and the expression of their countenances was menacing and sinister. The first comer pointed often to the newspaper, and read passages from it to his companion. This suggested to Gabriel the demand for another journal. When the waiter brought it to him, his eye rested upon a long paragraph, in which the name of George Cadoudal frequently occurred. In fact, all the journals of the day were filled with speculations on the conspiracy and trial of that fiery martyr to an erring adaptation of a noble principle. Gabriel knew that his father had had a principal share in the detection of the defeated enterprise; and his previous persuasions were confirmed.

His sense of hearing grew sharper by continued effort, and at length he

heard the first comer say distinctly, "If I were but sure that I had brought this fate upon George by introducing to him that accursed Dalibard; if my oath did but justify me, I would--" The concluding sentence was lost. A few moments after, the two men rose, and from the familiar words that passed between them and the master of the cafe, who approached, himself, to receive the reckoning, the shrewd boy perceived that the place was no unaccustomed haunt. He crept nearer and nearer; and as the landlord shook hands with his customer, he heard distinctly the former address him by the name of "Guillot." When the men withdrew, Gabriel followed them at a distance (taking care first to impress on his memory the name of the cafe, and the street in which it was placed) and, as he thought, unobserved; he was mistaken. Suddenly, in one street more solitary than the rest, the man whom he was mainly bent on tracking turned round, advanced to Gabriel, who was on the other side of the street, and laid his hand upon him so abruptly that the boy was fairly taken by surprise.

"Who bade you follow us?" said he, with so dark and fell an expression of countenance that even Gabriel's courage failed him. "No evasion, no lies; speak out, and at once;" and the grasp tightened on the boy's throat.

Gabriel's readiness of resource and presence of mind did not long forsake him.

"Loose your hold, and I will tell you--you stifle me." The man slightly relaxed his grasp, and Gabriel said quickly "My mother perished on the guillotine in the Reign of Terror; I am for the Bourbons. I thought I overheard words which showed sympathy for poor George, the brave Chouan. I followed you; for I thought I was following friends."

The man smiled as he fixed his steady eye upon the unflinching child. "My poor lad," he said gently, "I believe you,--pardon me; but follow us no more,--we are dangerous!" He waved his hand, and strode away and rejoined his companion, and Gabriel reluctantly abandoned the pursuit and went homeward. It was long before he reached his father's house, for he had strayed into a strange quarter of Paris, and had frequently to inquire the way. At length he reached home, and ascended the stairs to a small room in which Lucretia usually sat, and which was divided by a narrow corridor from the sleeping-chamber of herself and Dalibard. His stepmother, leaning her cheek upon her hand, was seated by the window, so absorbed in some gloomy thoughts, which cast over her rigid face a shade, intense and solemn as despair, that she did not perceive the approach of the boy till he threw his arms round her neck, and then she started as in alarm.

"You! only you," she said, with a constrained smile; "see, my nerves are not so strong as they were."

"You are disturbed, belle-mere,--has he been vexing you?"

"He--Dalibard? No, indeed; we were only this morning discussing matters of business."

"Business,--that means money."

"Truly," said Lucretia, "money does make the staple of life's business. In spite of his new appointment, your father needs some sums in hand,--favours are to be bought, opportunities for speculation occur, and--"

"And my father," interrupted Gabriel, "wishes your consent to raise the rest of your portion?"

Lucretia looked surprised, but answered quietly: "He had my consent long since; but the trustees to the marriage-settlement--mere men of business, my uncle's bankers; for I had lost all claim on my kindred--refuse, or at least interpose such difficulties as amount to refusal."

"But that reply came some days since," said Gabriel, musingly.

"How did you know,--did your father tell you?"

"Poor belle-mere!" said Gabriel, almost with pity; "can you live in this house and not watch all that passes,--every stranger, every message, every letter? But what, then, does he wish with you?"

"He has suggested my returning to England and seeing the trustees myself. His interest can obtain my passport."

"And you have refused?"

"I have not consented."

"Consent!--hush!--your maid; Marie is not waiting without;" and Gabriel rose and looked forth. "No, confound these doors! none close as they ought in this house. Is it not a clause in your settlement that the half of your fortune now invested goes to the survivor?"

"It is," replied Lucretia, struck and thrilled at the question. "How, again, did you know this?"

"I saw my father reading the copy. If you die first, then, he has all. If he merely wanted the money, he would not send you away."

There was a terrible pause. Gabriel resumed: "I trust you, it may be, with my life; but I will speak out. My father goes much to Bellanger's widow; she is rich and weak. Come to England! Yes, come; for he is about to dismiss me. He fears that I shall be in the way, to warn you, perhaps, or to--to-- In short, both of us are in his way. He gives you an escape. Once in England, the war which is breaking out will prevent your return. He will twist the laws of divorce to his favour; he will marry again! What then? He spares you what remains of your fortune; he spares your life. Remain here,--cross his schemes, and-- No, no; come to England,--safer anywhere than here!"

As he spoke, great changes had passed over Lucretia's countenance. At first it was the flash of conviction, then the stunned shock of horror; now she rose, rose to her full height, and there was a livid and deadly light in her eyes,--the light of conscious courage and power and revenge. "Fool," she muttered, "with all his craft! Fool, fool! As if, in the war of household perfidy, the woman did not always conquer! Man's only chance is to be mailed in honour."

"But," said Gabriel, overhearing her, "but you do not remember what it is. There is nothing you can see and guard against. It is not like an enemy face to face; it is death in the food, in the air, in the touch. You stretch out your arms in the dark, you feel nothing, and you die! Oh, do not fancy that I have not thought well (for I am almost a man now)

if there were no means to resist,--there are none! As well make head against the plague,--it is in the atmosphere. Come to England, and return. Live poorly, if you must, but live--but live!"

"Return to England poor and despised, and bound still to him, or a disgraced and divorced wife,--disgraced by the low-born dependant on my kinsman's house,--and fawn perhaps upon my sister and her husband for bread! Never! I am at my post, and I will not fly."

"Brave, brave!" said the boy, clapping his hands, and sincerely moved by a daring superior to his own; "I wish I could help you!"

Lucretia's eye rested on him with the full gaze, so rare in its looks. She drew him to her and kissed his brow. "Boy, through life, whatever our guilt and its doom, we are bound to each other. I may yet live to have wealth; if so, it is yours as a son's. I may be iron to others,--never to you. Enough of this; I must reflect!" She passed her hands over her eyes a moment, and resumed: "You would help me in my self-defence; I think you can. You have been more alert in your watch than I have. You must have means I have not secured. Your father guards well all his papers."

"I have keys to every desk. My foot passed the threshold of that room under the roof before yours. But no; his powers can never be yours! He has never confided to you half his secrets. He has antidotes for every--every--"

"Hist! what noise is that? Only the shower on the casements. No, no, child, that is not my object. Cadoudal's conspiracy! Your father has letters from Fouché which show how he has betrayed others who are stronger to avenge than a woman and a boy."

"Well?"

"I would have those letters. Give me the keys. But hold! Gabriel, Gabriel, you may yet misjudge him. This woman--wife to the dead man--his wife! Horror! Have you no proofs of what you imply?"

"Proofs!" echoed Gabriel, in a tone of wonder; "I can but see and conjecture. You are warned, watch and decide for yourself. But again I say, come to England; I shall go!"

Without reply, Lucretia took the keys from Gabriel's half-reluctant hand, and passed into her husband's writing-room. When she had entered, she locked the door. She passed at once to a huge secretary, of which the key was small as a fairy's work. She opened it with ease by one of the counterfeits. No love-correspondence--the first object of her search, for she was woman--met her eye. What need of letters, when interviews were so facile? But she soon found a document that told all which love-letters could tell,--it was an account of the moneys and possessions of Madame Bellanger; and there were pencil notes on the margin: "Vautran will give four hundred thousand francs for the lands in Auvergne,--to be accepted. Consult on the power of sale granted to a second husband. Query, if there is no chance of the heir-at-law disputing the moneys invested in Madame B.'s name,"--and such memoranda as a man notes down in the schedule of properties about to be his own. In these inscriptions there was a hideous mockery of all love; like the blue lights of corruption, they showed the black vault of the heart. The pale reader saw what her own attractions had been, and, fallen as she was, she smiled

superior in her bitterness of scorn. Arranged methodically with the precision of business, she found the letters she next looked for; one recognizing Dalibard's services in the detection of the conspiracy, and authorizing him to employ the police in the search of Pierre Guillot, sufficed for her purpose. She withdrew, and secreted it. She was about to lock up the secretary, when her eye fell on the title of a small manuscript volume in a corner; and as she read, she pressed one hand convulsively to her heart, while twice with the other she grasped the volume, and twice withdrew the grasp. The title ran harmlessly thus: "Philosophical and Chemical Inquiries into the Nature and Materials of the Poisons in Use between the Fourteenth and Sixteenth Centuries." Hurriedly, and at last as if doubtful of herself, she left the manuscript, closed the secretary, and returned to Gabriel.

"You have got the paper you seek?" he said.

"Yes."

"Then whatever you do, you must be quick; he will soon discover the loss."

"I will be quick."

"It is I whom he will suspect," said Gabriel, in alarm, as that thought struck him. "No, for my sake do not take the letter till I am gone. Do not fear in the mean time; he will do nothing against you while I am here."

"I will replace the letter till then," said Lucretia, meekly. "You have a right to my first thoughts." So she went back, and Gabriel (suspicious perhaps) crept after her.

As she replaced the document, he pointed to the manuscript which had tempted her. "I have seen that before; how I longed for it! If anything ever happens to him, I claim that as my legacy."

Their hands met as he said this, and grasped each other convulsively; Lucretia relocked the secretary, and when she gained the next room, she tottered to a chair. Her strong nerves gave way for the moment; she uttered no cry, but by the whiteness of her face, Gabriel saw that she was senseless,--senseless for a minute or so; scarcely more. But the return to consciousness with a clenched hand, and a brow of defiance, and a stare of mingled desperation and dismay, seemed rather the awaking from some frightful dream of violence and struggle than the slow, languid recovery from the faintness of a swoon. Yes, henceforth, to sleep was to couch by a serpent,--to breathe was to listen for the avalanche! Thou who didst trifle so wantonly with Treason, now gravely front the grim comrade thou hast won; thou scheming desecrator of the Household Gods, now learn, to the last page of dark knowledge, what the hearth is without them!

Gabriel was strangely moved as he beheld that proud and solitary despair. An instinct of nature had hitherto checked him from actively aiding Lucretia in that struggle with his father which could but end in the destruction of one or the other. He had contented himself with forewarnings, with hints, with indirect suggestions; but now all his sympathy was so strongly roused on her behalf that the last faint scruple of filial conscience vanished into the abyss of blood over which stood that lonely Titaness. He drew near, and clasping her hand, said, in a

quick and broken voice,--

"Listen! You know where to find proof of my fa--that is, of Dalibard's treason to the conspirators, you know the name of the man he dreads as an avenger, and you know that he waits but the proof to strike; but you do not know where to find that man, if his revenge is wanting for yourself. The police have not hunted him out: how can you? Accident has made me acquainted with one of his haunts. Give me a single promise, and I will put you at least upon that clew,--weak, perhaps, but as yet the sole one to be followed. Promise me that, only in defence of your own life, not for mere jealousy, you will avail yourself of the knowledge, and you shall know all I do!"

"Do you think," said Lucretia, in a calm, cold voice, "that it is for jealousy, which is love, that I would murder all hope, all peace? For we have here"--and she smote her breast--"here, if not elsewhere, a heaven and a hell! Son, I will not harm your father, except in self-defence. But tell me nothing that may make the son a party in the father's doom."

"The father slew the mother," muttered Gabriel, between his clenched teeth; "and to me, you have wellnigh supplied her place. Strike, if need be, in her name! If you are driven to want the arm of Pierre Guillot, seek news of him at the Cafe Dufour, Rue S----, Boulevard du Temple. Be calm now; I hear your husband's step."

A few days more, and Gabriel is gone! Wife and husband are alone with each other. Lucretia has refused to depart. Then that mute coma of horror, that suspense of two foes in the conflict of death; for the subtle, prying eye of Olivier Dalibard sees that he himself is suspected,--further he shuns from sifting! Glance fastens on glance, and then hurries smilingly away. From the cup grins a skeleton, at the board warns a spectre. But how kind still the words, and how gentle the tone; and they lie down side by side in the marriage-bed,--brain plotting against brain, heart loathing heart. It is a duel of life and death between those sworn through life and beyond death at the altar. But it is carried on with all the forms and courtesies of duel in the age of chivalry. No conjugal wrangling, no slip of the tongue; the oil is on the surface of the wave,--the monsters in the hell of the abyss war invisibly below. At length, a dull torpor creeps over the woman; she feels the taint in her veins,--the slow victory is begun. What mattered all her vigilance and caution? Vainly glide from the fangs of the serpent,--his very breath suffices to destroy! Pure seems the draught and wholesome the viand,--that master of the science of murder needs not the means of the bungler! Then, keen and strong from the creeping lethargy started the fierce instinct of self and the ruthless impulse of revenge. Not too late yet to escape; for those subtle banes, that are to defy all detection, work but slowly to their end.

One evening a woman, closely mantled, stood at watch by the angle of a wall. The light came dim and muffled from the window of a cafe hard at hand; the reflection slept amidst the shadows on the dark pavement, and save a solitary lamp swung at distance in the vista over the centre of the narrow street, no ray broke the gloom. The night was clouded and starless, the wind moaned in gusts, and the rain fell heavily; but the gloom and the loneliness did not appall the eye, and the wind did not chill the heart, and the rain fell unheeded on the head of the woman at her post. At times she paused in her slow, sentry-like pace to and fro, to look through the window of the cafe, and her gaze fell always on one figure seated apart from the rest. At length her pulse beat more quickly,

and the patient lips smiled sternly. The figure had risen to depart. A man came out and walked quickly up the street; the woman approached, and when the man was under the single lamp swung aloft, he felt his arm touched: the woman was at his side, and looking steadily into his face--

"You are Pierre Guillot, the Breton, the friend of George Cadoudal. Will you be his avenger?"

The Chouan's first impulse had been to place his hand in his vest, and something shone bright in the lamp-light, clasped in those iron fingers. The voice and the manner reassured him, and he answered readily,--

"I am he whom you seek, and I only live to avenge."

"Read, then, and act," answered the woman, as she placed a paper in his hands.

At Laughton the babe is on the breast of the fair mother, and the father sits beside the bed; and mother and father dispute almost angrily whether mother or father those soft, rounded features of slumbering infancy resemble most. At the red house, near the market-town, there is a hospitable bustle. William is home earlier than usual. Within the last hour, Susan has been thrice into every room. Husband and wife are now watching at the window. The good Fieldens, with a coach full of children, are expected, every moment, on a week's visit at least.

In the cafe in the Boulevard du Temple sit Pierre Guillot, the Chouan, and another of the old band of brigands whom George Cadoudal had mustered in Paris. There is an expression of content on Guillot's countenance,--it seems more open than usual, and there is a complacent smile on his lips. He is whispering low to his friend in the intervals of eating,--an employment pursued with the hearty gusto of a hungry man. But his friend does not seem to sympathize with the cheerful feelings of his comrade; he is pale, and there is terror on his face; and you may see that the journal in his hand trembles like a leaf.

In the gardens of the Tuileries some score or so of gossips group together.

"And no news of the murderer?" asked one.

"No; but the man who had been friend to Robespierre must have made secret enemies enough."

"Ce pauvre Dalibard! He was not mixed up with the Terrorists, nevertheless."

"Ah, but the more deadly for that, perhaps; a sly man was Olivier Dalibard!"

"What's the matter?" said an employee, lounging up to the group. "Are you talking of Olivier Dalibard? It is but the other day he had Marsan's appointment. He is now to have Pleyel's. I heard it two days ago; a capital thing! Peste! il ira loin. We shall have him a senator soon."

"Speak for yourself," quoth a ci-devant abbe, with a laugh; "I should be sorry to see him again soon, wherever he be."

"Plait-il? I don't understand you!"

"Don't you know that Olivier Dalibard is murdered, found stabbed,--in his own house, too!"

"Ciel! Pray tell me all you know. His place, then, is vacant!"

"Why, it seems that Dalibard, who had been brought up to medicine, was still fond of chemical experiments. He hired a room at the top of the house for such scientific amusements. He was accustomed to spend part of his nights there. They found him at morning bathed in his blood, with three ghastly wounds in his side, and his fingers cut to the bone. He had struggled hard with the knife that butchered him."

"In his own house!" said a lawyer. "Some servant or spendthrift heir."

"He has no heir but young Bellanger, who will be riche a millions, and is now but a schoolboy at Lyons. No; it seems that the window was left open, and that it communicates with the rooftops. There the murderer had entered, and by that way escaped; for they found the leads of the gutter dabbled with blood. The next house was uninhabited,--easy enough to get in there, and lie perdu till night."

"Hum!" said the lawyer. "But the assassin could only have learned Dalibard's habits from some one in the house. Was the deceased married?"

"Oh, yes,--to an Englishwoman."

"She had lovers, perhaps?"

"Pooh, lovers! The happiest couple ever known; you should have seen them together! I dined there last week."

"It is strange," said the lawyer.

"And he was getting on so well," muttered a hungry-looking man.

"And his place is vacant!" repeated the employee, as he quitted the crowd abstractedly.

In the house of Olivier Dalibard sits Lucretia alone, and in her own usual morning-room. The officer appointed to such tasks by the French law has performed his visit, and made his notes, and expressed condolence with the widow, and promised justice and retribution, and placed his seal on the locks till the representatives of the heir-at-law shall arrive; and the heir-at-law is the very boy who had succeeded so unexpectedly to the wealth of Jean Bellanger the contractor! But Lucretia has obtained beforehand all she wishes to save from the rest. An open box is on the floor, into which her hand drops noiselessly a volume in manuscript. On the forefinger of that hand is a ring, larger and more massive than those usually worn by women,--by Lucretia never worn before. Why should that ring have been selected with such care from the dead man's hoards? Why so precious the dull opal in that cumbrous setting? From the hand the volume drops without sound into the box, as those whom the secrets of the volume instruct you to destroy may drop without noise into the grave. The trace of some illness, recent and deep, nor conquered yet, has ploughed lines in that young countenance, and dimmed the light of those searching eyes. Yet courage! the poison is arrested, the poisoner is no more. Minds like thine, stern woman, are cased in coffer of steel, and the rust as yet has gnawed no deeper than the

surface. So over that face, stamped with bodily suffering, plays a calm smile of triumph. The schemer has baffled the schemer! Turn now to the right, pass by that narrow corridor: you are in the marriage-chamber; the windows are closed; tall tapers burn at the foot of the bed. Now go back to that narrow corridor. Disregarded, thrown aside, are a cloth and a besom: the cloth is wet still; but here and there the red stains are dry, and clotted as with bloody glue; and the hairs of the besom start up, torn and ragged, as if the bristles had a sense of some horror, as if things inanimate still partook of men's dread at men's deeds. If you passed through the corridor and saw in the shadow of the wall that homeliest of instruments cast away and forgotten, you would smile at the slatternly housework. But if you knew that a corpse had been borne down those stairs to the left,--borne along those floors to that marriage-bed,--with the blood oozing and gushing and plashing below as the bearers passed with their burden, then straight that dead thing would take the awe of the dead being; it told its own tale of violence and murder; it had dabbled in the gore of the violated clay; it had become an evidence of the crime. No wonder that its hairs bristled up, sharp and ragged, in the shadow of the wall.

The first part of the tragedy ends; let fall the curtain. When next it rises, years will have passed away, graves uncounted will have wrought fresh hollows in our merry sepulchre,--sweet earth! Take a sand from the shore, take a drop from the ocean,--less than sand-grain and drop in man's planet one Death and one Crime! On the map, trace all oceans, and search out every shore,--more than seas, more than lands, in God's balance shall weigh one Death and one Crime!

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