

A Strange Story, Volume 4.

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

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CHAPTER XXXV.

On reaching my own home, I found my servant sitting up for me with the information that my attendance was immediately required. The little boy whom Margrave's carelessness had so injured, and for whose injury he had shown so little feeling, had been weakened by the confinement which the nature of the injury required, and for the last few days had been generally ailing. The father had come to my house a few minutes before I reached it, in great distress of mind, saying that his child had been seized with fever, and had become delirious. Hearing that I was at the mayor's house, he had hurried thither in search of me.

I felt as if it were almost a relief to the troubled and haunting thoughts which tormented me, to be summoned to the exercise of a familiar knowledge. I hastened to the bedside of the little sufferer, and soon forgot all else in the anxious struggle for a human life. The struggle promised to be successful; the worst symptoms began to yield to remedies prompt and energetic, if simple. I remained at the house, rather to comfort and support the parents, than because my continued attendance was absolutely needed, till the night was well-nigh gone; and all cause of immediate danger having subsided, I then found myself once more in the streets. An atmosphere palely clear in the gray of dawn had succeeded to the thunder-clouds of the stormy night; the streetlamps, here and there, burned wan and still. I was walking slowly and wearily, so tired out that I was scarcely conscious of my own thoughts, when, in a narrow lane, my feet stopped almost mechanically before a human form stretched at full length in the centre of the road right in my path. The form was dark in the shadow thrown from the neighbouring houses. "Some poor drunkard," thought I, and the humanity inseparable from my calling not allowing me to leave a fellow-creature thus exposed to the risk of being run over by the first drowsy wagoner who might pass along the thoroughfare, I stooped to rouse and to lift the form. What was my horror when my eyes met the rigid stare of a dead man's. I started, looked again; it was the face of Sir Philip Derval! He was lying on his back, the countenance upturned, a dark stream oozing from the breast,—murdered by two ghastly wounds, murdered not long since, the blood was still warm. Stunned and terror-stricken, I stood bending over the body. Suddenly I was touched on the shoulder.

"Hollo! what is this?" said a gruff voice.

"Murder!" I answered in hollow accents, which sounded strangely to my own ear.

"Murder! so it seems." And the policeman who had thus accosted me lifted the body.

"A gentleman by his dress. How did this happen? How did you come here?" and the policeman glanced suspiciously at me.

At this moment, however, there came up another policeman, in whom I recognized the young man whose sister I had attended and cured.

"Dr. Fenwick," said the last, lifting his hat respectfully, and at the sound of my name his fellow-policeman changed his manner and muttered an apology.

I now collected myself sufficiently to state the name and rank of the murdered man. The policemen bore the body to their station, to which I accompanied them. I then returned to my own house, and had scarcely sunk on my bed when sleep came over me. But what a sleep! Never till then had I known how awfully distinct dreams can be. The phantasmagoria of the naturalist's collection revived. Life again awoke in the serpent and the tiger, the scorpion moved, and the vulture flapped its wings. And there was Margrave, and there Sir Philip; but their position of power was reversed, and Margrave's foot was on the breast of the dead man. Still I slept on till I was roused by the summons to attend on Mr. Vigors, the magistrate to whom the police had reported the murder.

I dressed hastily and went forth. As I passed through the street, I found that the dismal news had already spread. I was accosted on my way to the magistrate by a hundred eager, tremulous, inquiring tongues.

The scanty evidence I could impart was soon given.

My introduction to Sir Philip at the mayor's house, our accidental meeting under the arch, my discovery of the corpse some hours afterwards on my return from my patient, my professional belief that the deed must have been done a very short time, perhaps but a few minutes, before I chanced upon its victim. But, in that case, how account for the long interval that had elapsed between the time in which I had left Sir Philip under the arch and the time in which the murder must have been committed? Sir Philip could not have been wandering through the streets all those hours. This doubt, how ever, was easily and speedily cleared up. A Mr. Jeeves, who was one of the principal solicitors in the town, stated that he had acted as Sir Philip's legal agent and adviser ever since Sir Philip came of age, and was charged with the exclusive management of some valuable house-property which the deceased had possessed in L----; that when Sir Philip had arrived in the town late in the afternoon of the previous day, he had sent for Mr. Jeeves; informed him that he, Sir Philip, was engaged to be married; that he wished to have full and minute information as to the details of his house property (which had greatly increased in value since his absence from England), in connection with the settlements his marriage would render necessary; and that this information was also required by him in respect to a codicil he desired to add to his will.

He had, accordingly, requested Mr. Jeeves to have all the books and statements concerning the property ready for his inspection that night, when he would call, after leaving the ball which he had promised the mayor, whom he had accidentally met on entering the town, to attend. Sir Philip had also asked Mr. Jeeves to detain one of his clerks in his office, in order to serve, conjointly with Mr. Jeeves, as a witness to the codicil he desired to add to his will. Sir Philip had accordingly come to Mr. Jeeves's house a little before midnight; had gone carefully through all the statements prepared for him, and had executed the fresh codicil to his testament, which testament he had in their previous interview given to Mr. Jeeves's care, sealed up. Mr. Jeeves stated that Sir Philip, though a man of remarkable talents and great acquirements, was extremely eccentric, and of a very peremptory temper, and that the importance attached to a promptitude for which there seemed no pressing occasion did not surprise him in Sir Philip as it might have done in an ordinary client. Sir Philip said, indeed, that he should devote the next morning to the draft for his wedding settlements, according to the information of his property which he had acquired; and after a visit of very brief duration to Derval Court, should quit the neighbourhood and return to Paris, where his intended bride then was, and in which city it had been

settled that the marriage ceremony should take place.

Mr. Jeeves had, however, observed to him, that if he were so soon to be married, it was better to postpone any revision of testamentary bequests, since after marriage he would have to make a new will altogether.

And Sir Philip had simply answered,--

"Life is uncertain; who can be sure of the morrow?"

Sir Philip's visit to Mr. Jeeves's house had lasted some hours, for the conversation between them had branched off from actual business to various topics. Mr. Jeeves had not noticed the hour when Sir Philip went; he could only say that as he attended him to the street-door, he observed, rather to his own surprise, that it was close upon daybreak.

Sir Philip's body had been found not many yards distant from the hotel at which he had put up, and to which, therefore, he was evidently returning when he left Mr. Jeeves,--an old-fashioned hotel, which had been the principal one at L---- when Sir Philip left England, though now outrivalled by the new and more central establishment in which Margrave was domiciled.

The primary and natural supposition was that Sir Philip had been murdered for the sake of plunder; and this supposition was borne out by the fact to which his valet deposed, namely,--

That Sir Philip had about his person, on going to the mayor's house, a purse containing notes and sovereigns; and this purse was now missing.

The valet, who, though an Albanian, spoke English fluently, said that the purse had a gold clasp, on which Sir Philip's crest and initials were engraved. Sir Philip's watch was, however, not taken.

And now, it was not without a quick beat of the heart that I heard the valet declare that a steel casket, to which Sir Philip attached extraordinary value, and always carried about with him, was also missing.

The Albanian described this casket as of ancient Byzantine workmanship, opening with a peculiar spring, only known to Sir Philip, in whose possession it had been, so far as the servant knew, about three years: when, after a visit to Aleppo, in which the servant had not accompanied him, he had first observed it in his master's hands. He was asked if this casket contained articles to account for the value Sir Philip set on it,--such as jewels, bank-notes, letters of credit, etc. The man replied that it might possibly do so; he had never been allowed the opportunity of examining its contents; but that he was certain the casket held medicines, for he had seen Sir Philip take from it some small phials, by which he had performed great cures in the East, and especially during a pestilence which had visited Damascus, just after Sir Philip had arrived at that city on quitting Aleppo. Almost every European traveller is supposed to be a physician; and Sir Philip was a man of great benevolence, and the servant firmly believed him also to be of great medical skill. After this statement, it was very naturally and generally conjectured that Sir Philip was an amateur disciple of homoeopathy, and that the casket contained the phials or globules in use among homoeopaths.

Whether or not Mr. Vigors enjoyed a vindictive triumph in making me feel the weight of his authority, or whether his temper was ruffled in the

excitement of so grave a case, I cannot say, but his manner was stern and his tone discourteous in the questions which he addressed to me. Nor did the questions themselves seem very pertinent to the object of investigation.

"Pray, Dr. Fenwick," said he, knitting his brows, and fixing his eyes on me rudely, "did Sir Philip Derval in his conversation with you mention the steel casket which it seems he carried about with him?"

I felt my countenance change slightly as I answered, "Yes."

"Did he tell you what it contained?"

"He said it contained secrets."

"Secrets of what nature,--medicinal or chemical? Secrets which a physician might be curious to learn and covetous to possess?"

This question seemed to me so offensively significant that it roused my indignation, and I answered haughtily, that "a physician of any degree of merited reputation did not much believe in, and still less covet, those secrets in his art which were the boast of quacks and pretenders."

"My question need not offend you, Dr. Fenwick. I put it in another shape: Did Sir Philip Derval so boast of the secrets contained in his casket that a quack or pretender might deem such secrets of use to him?"

"Possibly he might, if he believed in such a boast."

"Humph!--he might if he so believed. I have no more questions to put to you at present, Dr. Fenwick."

Little of any importance in connection with the deceased or his murder transpired in the course of that day's examination and inquiries.

The next day, a gentleman distantly related to the young lady to whom Sir Philip was engaged, and who had been for some time in correspondence with the deceased, arrived at L----. He had been sent for at the suggestion of the Albanian servant, who said that Sir Philip had stayed a day at this gentleman's house in London, on his way to L----, from Dover.

The new comer, whose name was Danvers, gave a more touching pathos to the horror which the murder had excited. It seemed that the motives which had swayed Sir Philip in the choice of his betrothed were singularly pure and noble. The young lady's father--an intimate college friend--had been visited by a sudden reverse of fortune, which had brought on a fever that proved mortal. He had died some years ago, leaving his only child penniless, and had bequeathed her to the care and guardianship of Sir Philip.

The orphan received her education at a convent near Paris; and when Sir Philip, a few weeks since, arrived in that city from the East, he offered her his hand and fortune.

"I know," said Mr. Danvers, "from the conversation I held with him when he came to me in London, that he was induced to this offer by the conscientious desire to discharge the trust consigned to him by his old friend. Sir Philip was still of an age that could not permit him to take under his own roof a female ward of eighteen, without injury to her good

name. He could only get over that difficulty by making the ward his wife. 'She will be safer and happier with the man she will love and honour for her father's sake,' said the chivalrous gentleman, 'than she will be under any other roof I could find for her.'

And now there arrived another stranger to L----, sent for by Mr. Jeeves, the lawyer,--a stranger to L----, but not to me; my old Edinburgh acquaintance, Richard Strahan.

The will in Mr. Jeeves's keeping, with its recent codicil, was opened and read. The will itself bore date about six years anterior to the testator's tragic death: it was very short, and, with the exception of a few legacies, of which the most important was L10,000 to his ward, the whole of his property was left to Richard Strahan, on the condition that he took the name and arms of Derval within a year from the date of Sir Philip's decease. The codicil, added to the will the night before his death, increased the legacy to the young lady from L10,000 to L30,000, and bequeathed an annuity of L100 a year to his Albanian servant. Accompanying the will, and within the same envelope, was a sealed letter, addressed to Richard Strahan, and dated at Paris two weeks before Sir Philip's decease. Strahan brought that letter to me. It ran thus:--

"Richard Strahan, I advise you to pull down the house called Derval Court, and to build another on a better site, the plans of which, to be modified according to your own taste and requirements, will be found among my papers. This is a recommendation, not a command. But I strictly enjoin you entirely to demolish the more ancient part, which was chiefly occupied by myself, and to destroy by fire, without perusal, all the books and manuscripts found in the safes in my study. I have appointed you my sole executor, as well as my heir, because I have no personal friends in whom I can confide as I trust I may do in the man I have never seen, simply because he will bear my name and represent my lineage. There will be found in my writing-desk, which always accompanies me in my travels, an autobiographical work, a record of my own life, comprising discoveries, or hints at discovery, in science, through means little cultivated in our age. You will not be surprised that before selecting you as my heir and executor, from a crowd of relations not more distant, I should have made inquiries in order to justify my selection. The result of those inquiries informs me that you have not yourself the peculiar knowledge nor the habits of mind that could enable you to judge of matters which demand the attainments and the practice of science; but that you are of an honest, affectionate nature, and will regard as sacred the last injunctions of a benefactor. I enjoin you, then, to submit the aforesaid manuscript memoir to some man on whose character for humanity and honour you can place confidential reliance, and who is accustomed to the study of the positive sciences, more especially chemistry, in connection with electricity and magnetism. My desire is that he shall edit and arrange this memoir for publication; and that, wherever he feels a conscientious doubt whether any discovery, or hint of discovery, therein contained would not prove more dangerous than useful to mankind, he shall consult with any other three men of science whose names are a guarantee for probity and knowledge, and according to the best of his judgment, after such consultation, suppress or publish the passage of which he has so doubted. I own the ambition which first directed me towards studies of a very unusual character, and which has encouraged me in their pursuit through many years of voluntary exile, in lands where they could be best facilitated or aided,--the ambition of leaving behind me the renown of

a bold discoverer in those recesses of nature which philosophy has hitherto abandoned to superstition. But I feel, at the moment in which I trace these lines, a fear lest, in the absorbing interest of researches which tend to increase to a marvellous degree the power of man over all matter, animate or inanimate, I may have blunted my own moral perceptions; and that there may be much in the knowledge which I sought and acquired from the pure desire of investigating hidden truths, that could be more abused to purposes of tremendous evil than be likely to conduce to benignant good. And of this a mind disciplined to severe reasoning, and uninfluenced by the enthusiasm which has probably obscured my own judgment, should be the unprejudiced arbiter. Much as I have coveted and still do covet that fame which makes the memory of one man the common inheritance of all, I would infinitely rather that my name should pass away with my breath, than that I should transmit to my fellowmen any portion of a knowledge which the good might forbear to exercise and the bad might unscrupulously pervert. I bear about with me, wherever I wander, a certain steel casket. I received this casket, with its contents, from a man whose memory I hold in profound veneration. Should I live to find a person whom, after minute and intimate trial of his character, I should deem worthy of such confidence, it is my intention to communicate to him the secret how to prepare and how to use such of the powders and essences stored within that casket as I myself have ventured to employ. Others I have never tested, nor do I know how they could be resupplied if lost or wasted. But as the contents of this casket, in the hands of any one not duly instructed as to the mode of applying them, would either be useless, or conduce, through inadvertent and ignorant misapplication, to the most dangerous consequences; so, if I die without having found, and in writing named, such a confidant as I have described above, I command you immediately to empty all the powders and essences found therein into any running stream of water, which will at once harmlessly dissolve them. On no account must they be cast into fire!

"This letter, Richard Strahan, will only come under your eyes in case the plans and the hopes which I have formed for my earthly future should be frustrated by the death on which I do not calculate, but against the chances of which this will and this letter provide. I am about to revisit England, in defiance of a warning that I shall be there subjected to some peril which I refused to have defined, because I am unwilling that any mean apprehension of personal danger should enfeeble my nerves in the discharge of a stern and solemn duty. If I overcome that peril, you will not be my heir; my testament will be remodelled; this letter will be recalled and destroyed. I shall form ties which promise me the happiness I have never hitherto found, though it is common to all men,—the affections of home, the caresses of children, among whom I may find one to whom hereafter I may bequeath, in my knowledge, a far nobler heritage than my lands. In that case, however, my first care would be to assure your own fortunes. And the sum which this codicil assures to my betrothed would be transferred to yourself on my wedding-day. Do you know why, never having seen you, I thus select you for preference to all my other kindred; why my heart, in writing thus, warms to your image? Richard Strahan, your only sister, many years older than yourself—you were then a child—was the object of my first love. We were to have been wedded, for her parents deceived me into the belief that she returned my affection. With a rare and nobler candour, she herself informed me that her heart was given to another, who possessed not my worldly gifts of wealth and station. In resigning my claims to her

hand, I succeeded in propitiating her parents to her own choice. I obtained for her husband the living which he held, and I settled on your sister the dower which, at her death, passed to you as the brother to whom she had shown a mother's love, and the interest of which has secured you a modest independence.

"If these lines ever reach you, recognize my title to reverential obedience to commands which may seem to you wild, perhaps irrational; and repay, as if a debt due froth your own lost sister, the affection I have borne to you for her sake."

While I read this long and strange letter, Strahan sat by my side, covering his face with his hands, and weeping with honest tears for the man whose death had made him powerful and rich.

"You will undertake the trust ordained to me in this letter," said he, struggling to compose himself. "You will read and edit this memoir; you are the very man he himself would have selected. Of your honour and humanity there can be no doubt, and you have studied with success the sciences which he specifies as requisite for the discharge of the task he commands."

At this request, though I could not be wholly unprepared for it, my first impulse was that of a vague terror. It seemed to me as if I were becoming more and more entangled in a mysterious and fatal web. But this impulse soon faded in the eager yearnings of an ardent and irresistible curiosity.

I promised to read the manuscript, and in order that I might fully imbue my mind with the object and wish of the deceased, I asked leave to make a copy of the letter I had just read. To this Strahan readily assented, and that copy I have transcribed in the preceding pages.

I asked Strahan if he had yet found the manuscript. He said, "No, he had not yet had the heart to inspect the papers left by the deceased. He would now do so. He should go in a day or two to Derval Court, and reside there till the murderer was discovered, as doubtless he soon must be through the vigilance of the police. Not till that discovery was made should Sir Philip's remains, though already placed in their coffin, be consigned to the family vault."

Strahan seemed to have some superstitious notion that the murderer might be more secure from justice if his victim were thrust unavenged into the tomb.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

The belief prevalent in the town ascribed the murder of Sir Philip to the violence of some vulgar robber, probably not an inhabitant of L----. Mr. Vigors did not favour that belief. He intimated an opinion, which seemed extravagant and groundless, that Sir Philip had been murdered, for the sake not of the missing purse, but of the missing casket. It was currently believed that the solemn magistrate had consulted one of his pretended clairvoyants, and that this impostor had gulled him with assurances, to which he attached a credit that perverted into egregiously absurd directions his characteristic activity and zeal.

Be that as it may, the coroner's inquest closed without casting any light on so mysterious a tragedy.

What were my own conjectures I scarcely dared to admit,--I certainly could not venture to utter them; but my suspicions centred upon Margrave. That for some reason or other he had cause to dread Sir Philip's presence in L---- was clear, even to my reason. And how could my reason reject all the influences which had been brought to bear on my imagination, whether by the scene in the museum or my conversation with the deceased? But it was impossible to act on such suspicions,--impossible even to confide them. Could I have told to any man the effect produced on me in the museum, he would have considered me a liar or a madman. And in Sir Philip's accusations against Margrave, there was nothing tangible,--nothing that could bear repetition. Those accusations, if analyzed, vanished into air. What did they imply?--that Margrave was a magician, a monstrous prodigy, a creature exceptional to the ordinary conditions of humanity. Would the most reckless of mortals have ventured to bring against the worst of characters such a charge, on the authority of a deceased witness, and to found on evidence so fantastic the awful accusation of murder? But of all men, certainly I--a sober, practical physician--was the last whom the public could excuse for such incredible implications; and certainly, of all men, the last against whom any suspicion of heinous crime would be readily entertained was that joyous youth in whose sunny aspect life and conscience alike seemed to keep careless holiday. But I could not overcome, nor did I attempt to reason against, the horror akin to detestation, that had succeeded to the fascinating attraction by which Margrave had before conciliated a liking founded rather on admiration than esteem.

In order to avoid his visits I kept away from the study in which I had habitually spent my mornings, and to which he had been accustomed to so ready an access; and if he called at the front door, I directed my servant to tell him that I was either from home or engaged. He did attempt for the first few days to visit me as before, but when my intention to shun him became thus manifest, desisted naturally enough, as any other man so pointedly repelled would have done.

I abstained from all those houses in which I was likely to meet him, and went my professional round of visits in a close carriage, so that I might not be accosted by him in his walks.

One morning, a very few days after Strahan had shown me Sir Philip Derval's letter, I received a note from my old college acquaintance, stating that he was going to Derval Court that afternoon; that he should take with him the memoir which he had found, and begging me to visit him at his new home the next day, and commence my inspection of the manuscript. I consented eagerly.

That morning, on going my round, my carriage passed by another drawn up to the pavement, and I recognized the figure of Margrave standing beside the vehicle, and talking to some one seated within it. I looked back, as my own carriage whirled rapidly by, and saw with uneasiness and alarm that it was Richard Strahan to whom Margrave was thus familiarly addressing himself. How had the two made acquaintance?

Was it not an outrage on Sir Philip Derval's memory, that the heir he had selected should be thus apparently intimate with the man whom he had so sternly denounced? I became still more impatient to read the memoir: in all probability it would give such explanations with respect to Margrave's

antecedents, as, if not sufficing to criminate him of legal offences, would at least effectually terminate any acquaintance between Sir Philip's successor and himself.

All my thoughts were, however, diverted to channels of far deeper interest even than those in which my mind had of late been so tumultuously whirled along, when, on returning home, I found a note from Mrs. Ashleigh. She and Lilian had just come back to L----, sooner than she had led me to anticipate. Lilian had not seemed quite well the last day or two, and had been anxious to return.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Let me recall it--softly,--softly! Let me recall that evening spent with her!--that evening, the last before darkness rose between us like a solid wall.

It was evening, at the close of summer. The sun had set, the twilight was lingering still. We were in the old monastic garden,--garden so quiet, so cool, so fragrant. She was seated on a bench under the one great cedar-tree that rose sombre in the midst of the grassy lawn with its little paradise of flowers. I had thrown myself on the sward at her feet; her hand so confidingly lay in the clasp of mine. I see her still,--how young, how fair, how innocent!

Strange, strange! So inexpressibly English; so thoroughly the creature of our sober, homely life! The pretty delicate white robe that I touch so timorously, and the ribbon-knots of blue that so well become the soft colour of the fair cheek, the wavy silk of the brown hair! She is murmuring low her answer to my trembling question.

"As well as when last we parted? Do you love me as well still?"

"There is no 'still' written here," said she, softly pressing her hand to her heart. "Yesterday is as to-morrow in the Forever."

"Ah, Lilian! if I could reply to you in words as akin to poetry as your own!"

"Fie! you who affect not to care for poetry!"

"That was before you went away; before I missed you from my eyes, from my life; before I was quite conscious how precious you were to me, more precious than common words can tell! Yes, there is one period in love when all men are poets, however the penury of their language may belie the luxuriance of their fancies. What would become of me if you ceased to love me?"

"Or of me, if you could cease to love?"

"And somehow it seems to me this evening as if my heart drew nearer to you,--nearer as if for shelter."

"It is sympathy," said she, with tremulous eagerness,--"that sort of mysterious sympathy which I have often heard you deny or deride; for I, too, feel drawn nearer to you, as if there were a storm at hand. I was

oppressed by an indescribable terror in returning home, and the moment I saw you there came a sense of protection."

Her head sank on my shoulder: we were silent some moments; then we both rose by the same involuntary impulse, and round her slight form I twined my strong arm of man. And now we are winding slow under the lilacs and acacias that belt the lawn. Lilian has not yet heard of the murder, which forms the one topic of the town, for all tales of violence and blood affected her as they affect a fearful child. Mrs. Ashleigh, therefore, had judiciously concealed from her the letters and the journals by which the dismal news had been carried to herself. I need scarcely say that the grim subject was not broached by me. In fact, my own mind escaped from the events which had of late so perplexed and tormented it; the tranquillity of the scene, the bliss of Lilian's presence, had begun to chase away even that melancholy foreboding which had overshadowed me in the first moments of our reunion. So we came gradually to converse of the future,—of the day, not far distant, when we two should be as one. We planned our bridal excursion. We would visit the scenes endeared to her by song, to me by childhood,—the banks and waves of my native Windermere,—our one brief holiday before life returned to labour, and hearts now so disquieted by hope and joy settled down to the calm serenity of home.

As we thus talked, the moon, nearly rounded to her full, rose amidst skies without a cloud. We paused to gaze on her solemn haunting beauty, as where are the lovers who have not paused to gaze? We were then on the terrace walk, which commanded a view of the town below. Before us was a parapet wall, low on the garden side, but inaccessible on the outer side, forming part of a straggling irregular street that made one of the boundaries dividing Abbey Hill from Low Town. The lamps of the thoroughfares, in many a line and row beneath us, stretched far away, obscured, here and there, by intervening roofs and tall church towers. The hum of the city came to our ears, low and mellowed into a lulling sound. It was not displeasing to be reminded that there was a world without, as close and closer we drew each to each,—worlds to one another! Suddenly there carolled forth the song of a human voice,—a wild, irregular, half-savage melody, foreign, uncomprehended words,—air and words not new to me. I recognized the voice and chant of Margrave. I started, and uttered an angry exclamation.

"Hush!" whispered Lilian, and I felt her frame shiver within my encircling arm. "Hush! listen! Yes; I have heard that voice before—last night—"

"Last night! you were not here; you were more than a hundred miles away."

"I heard it in a dream! Hush, hush!"

The song rose louder; impossible to describe its effect, in the midst of the tranquil night, chiming over the serried rooftops, and under the solitary moon. It was not like the artful song of man, for it was defective in the methodical harmony of tune; it was not like the song of the wild-bird, for it had no monotony in its sweetness: it was wandering and various as the sounds from an AEolian harp. But it affected the senses to a powerful degree, as in remote lands and in vast solitudes I have since found the note of the mocking-bird, suddenly heard, affects the listener half with delight, half with awe, as if some demon creature of the desert were mimicking man for its own merriment. The chant now had changed into an air of defying glee, of menacing exultation; it might have been the triumphant war-song of some antique barbarian race. The note was

sinister; a shadow passed through me, and Lilian had closed her eyes, and was sighing heavily; then with a rapid change, sweet as the coo with which an Arab mother lulls her babe to sleep, the melody died away. "There, there, look," murmured Lilian, moving from me, "the same I saw last night in sleep; the same I saw in the space above, on the evening I first knew you!"

Her eyes were fixed, her hand raised; my look followed hers, and rested on the face and form of Margrave. The moon shone full upon him, so full as if concentrating all its light upon his image. The place on which he stood (a balcony to the upper story of a house about fifty yards distant) was considerably above the level of the terrace from which we gazed on him. His arms were folded on his breast, and he appeared to be looking straight towards us. Even at that distance, the lustrous youth of his countenance appeared to me terribly distinct, and the light of his wondrous eye seemed to rest upon us in one lengthened, steady ray through the limpid moonshine. Involuntarily I seized Lilian's hand, and drew her away almost by force, for she was unwilling to move, and as I led her back, she turned her head to look round; I, too, turned in jealous rage! I breathed more freely. Margrave had disappeared!

"How came he there? It is not his hotel. Whose house is it?" I said aloud, though speaking to myself.

Lilian remained silent, her eyes fixed upon the ground as if in deep revery. I took her hand; it did not return my pressure. I felt cut to the heart when she drew coldly from me that hand, till then so frankly cordial. I stopped short: "Lilian, what is this? you are chilled towards me. Can the mere sound of that man's voice, the mere glimpse of that man's face, have—" I paused; I did not dare to complete my question.

Lilian lifted her eyes to mine, and I saw at once in those eyes a change. Their look was cold; not haughty, but abstracted. "I do not understand you," she said, in a weary, listless accent. "It is growing late; I must go in."

So we walked on moodily, no longer arm in arm, nor hand in hand. Then it occurred to me that, the next day, Lilian would be in that narrow world of society; that there she could scarcely fail to hear of Margrave, to meet, to know him. Jealousy seized me with all its imaginary terrors, and amidst that jealousy, a nobler, purer apprehension for herself. Had I been Lilian's brother instead of her betrothed, I should not have trembled less to foresee the shadow of Margrave's mysterious influence passing over a mind so predisposed to the charm which Mystery itself has for those whose thoughts fuse their outlines in fancies, whose world melts away into Dreamland. Therefore I spoke.

"Lilian, at the risk of offending you--alas! I have never done so before this night--I must address to you a prayer which I implore you not to regard as the dictate of a suspicion unworthy you and myself. The person whom you have just heard and seen is, at present, much courted in the circles of this town. I entreat you not to permit any one to introduce him to you. I entreat you not to know him. I cannot tell you all my reasons for this petition; enough that I pledge you my honour that those reasons are grave. Trust, then, in my truth, as I trust in yours. Be assured that I stretch not the rights which your heart has bestowed upon mine in the promise I ask, as I shall be freed from all fear by a promise which I know will be sacred when once it is given."

"What promise?" asked Lillian, absently, as if she had not heard my words.

"What promise? Why, to refuse all acquaintance with that man; his name is Margrave. Promise me, dearest, promise me."

"Why is your voice so changed?" said Lillian. "Its tone jars on my ear," she added, with a peevishness so unlike her, that it startled me more than it offended; and without a word further, she quickened her pace, and entered the house.

For the rest of the evening we were both taciturn and distant towards each other. In vain Mrs. Ashleigh kindly sought to break down our mutual reserve. I felt that I had the right to be resentful, and I clung to that right the more because Lillian made no attempt at reconciliation. This, too, was wholly unlike herself, for her temper was ordinarily sweet,—sweet to the extreme of meekness; saddened if the slightest misunderstanding between us had ever vexed me, and yearning to ask forgiveness if a look or a word had pained me. I was in hopes that, before I went away, peace between us would be restored. But long ere her usual hour for retiring to rest, she rose abruptly, and, complaining of fatigue and headache, wished me "good-night," and avoided the hand I sorrowfully held out to her as I opened the door.

"You must have been very unkind to poor Lillian," said Mrs. Ashleigh, between jest and earnest, "for I never saw her so cross to you before. And the first day of her return, too!"

"The fault is not mine," said I, somewhat sullenly; "I did but ask Lillian, and that as a humble prayer, not to make the acquaintance of a stranger in this town against whom I have reasons for distrust and aversion. I know not why that prayer should displease her."

"Nor I. Who is the stranger?"

"A person who calls himself Margrave. Let me at least entreat you to avoid him!"

"Oh, I have no desire to make acquaintance with strangers. But, now Lillian is gone, do tell me all about this dreadful murder. The servants are full of it, and I cannot keep it long concealed from Lillian. I was in hopes that you would have broken it to her."

I rose impatiently; I could not bear to talk thus of an event the tragedy of which was associated in my mind with circumstances so mysterious. I became agitated and even angry when Mrs. Ashleigh persisted in rambling woman-like inquiries,—"*Who was suspected of the deed? Who did I think had committed it? What sort of a man was Sir Philip? What was that strange story about a casket?*" Breaking from such interrogations, to which I could give but abrupt and evasive answers, I seized my hat and took my departure.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Letter from Allen Fenwick to Lillian Ashleigh.

"I have promised to go to Derval Court to-day, and shall not return

till to-morrow. I cannot bear the thought that so many hours should pass away with one feeling less kind than usual resting like a cloud upon you and me. Lilian, if I offended you, forgive me! Send me one line to say so!--one line which I can place next to my heart and cover with grateful kisses till we meet again!"

Reply.

"I scarcely know what you mean, nor do I quite understand my own state of mind at this moment. It cannot be that I love you less--and yet--but I will not write more now. I feel glad that we shall not meet for the next day or so, and then I hope to be quite recovered. I am not well at this moment. Do not ask me to forgive you; but if it is I who am in fault, forgive me, oh, forgive me, Allen!"

And with this unsatisfactory note, not worn next to my heart, not covered with kisses, but thrust crumpled into my desk like a creditor's unwelcome bill, I flung myself on my horse and rode to Derval Court. I am naturally proud; my pride came now to my aid. I felt bitterly indignant against Lilian, so indignant that I resolved on my return to say to her, "If in those words, 'And yet,' you implied a doubt whether you loved me less, I cancel your vows, I give you back your freedom." And I could have passed from her threshold with a firm foot, though with the certainty that I should never smile again.

Does her note seem to you who may read these pages to justify such resentment? Perhaps not. But there is an atmosphere in the letters of the one we love which we alone--we who love--can feel, and in the atmosphere of that letter I felt the chill of the coming winter.

I reached the park lodge of Derval Court late in the day. I had occasion to visit some patients whose houses lay scattered many miles apart, and for that reason, as well as from the desire for some quick bodily exercise which is so natural an effect of irritable perturbation of mind, I had made the journey on horseback instead of using a carriage that I could not have got through the lanes and field-paths by which alone the work set to myself could be accomplished in time.

Just as I entered the park, an uneasy thought seized hold of me with the strength which is ascribed to presentiments. I had passed through my study (which has been so elaborately described) to my stables, as I generally did when I wanted my saddle-horse, and, in so doing, had doubtless left open the gate to the iron palisade, and probably the window of the study itself. I had been in this careless habit for several years, without ever once having cause for self-reproach. As I before said, there was nothing in my study to tempt a thief; the study was shut out from the body of the house, and the servant sure at nightfall both to close the window and lock the gate; yet now, for the first time, I felt an impulse, urgent, keen, and disquieting, to ride back to the town, and see those precautions taken. I could not guess why, but something whispered to me that my neglect had exposed me to some great danger. I even checked my horse and looked at my watch; too late!--already just on the stroke of Strahan's dinner-hour as fixed in his note; my horse, too, was fatigued and spent: besides, what folly! what bearded man can believe in the warnings of a "presentiment"? I pushed on, and soon halted before the old-fashioned flight of stairs that led up to the Hall. Here I was accosted by the old steward; he had just descended the stairs, and as I dismounted he thrust his arm into mine unceremoniously, and drew me a little aside.

"Doctor, I was right; it was his ghost that I saw by the iron door of the mausoleum. I saw it again at the same place last night, but I had no fit then. Justice on his murderer! Blood for blood!"

"Ay!" said I, sternly; for if I suspected Margrave before, I felt convinced now that the inexpiable deed was his. Wherefore convinced? Simply because I now hated him more, and hate is so easily convinced! "Lilian! Lilian!" I murmured to myself that name; the flame of my hate was fed by my jealousy. "Ay!" said I, sternly, "murder will out."

"What are the police about?" said the old man, querulously; "days pass on days, and no nearer the truth. But what does the new owner care? He has the rents and acres; what does he care for the dead? I will never serve another master. I have just told Mr. Strahan so. How do I know whether he did not do the deed? Who else had an interest in it?"

"Hush, hush!" I cried; "you do not know how wildly you are talking."

The old man stared at me, shook his head, released my arm, and strode away.

A labouring man came out of the garden, and having unbuckled the saddle-bags, which contained the few things required for so short a visit, I consigned my horse to his care, and ascended the perron. The old housekeeper met me in the hall, and conducted me up the great staircase, showed me into a bedroom prepared for me, and told me that Mr. Strahan was already waiting dinner for me. I should find him in the study. I hastened to join him. He began apologizing, very unnecessarily, for the state of his establishment. He had as yet engaged no new servants. The housekeeper with the help of a housemaid did all the work.

Richard Strahan at college had been as little distinguishable from other young men as a youth neither rich nor poor, neither clever nor stupid, neither handsome nor ugly, neither audacious sinner nor formal saint, possibly could be.

Yet, to those who understood him well, he was not without some of those moral qualities by which a youth of mediocre intellect often matures into a superior man.

He was, as Sir Philip had been rightly informed, thoroughly honest and upright. But with a strong sense of duty, there was also a certain latent hardness. He was not indulgent. He had outward frankness with acquaintances, but was easily roused to suspicion. He had much of the thriftiness and self-denial of the North countryman, and I have no doubt that he had lived with calm content and systematic economy on an income which made him, as a bachelor, independent of his nominal profession, but would not have sufficed, in itself, for the fitting maintenance of a wife and family. He was, therefore, still single.

It seems to me even during the few minutes in which we conversed before dinner was announced, that his character showed a new phase with his new fortunes. He talked in a grandiose style of the duties of station and the woes of wealth. He seemed to be very much afraid of spending, and still more appalled at the idea of being cheated. His temper, too, was ruffled; the steward had given him notice to quit. Mr. Jeeves, who had spent the morning with him, had said the steward would be a great loss, and a steward at once sharp and honest was not to be easily found.

What trifles can embitter the possession of great goods! Strahan had taken a fancy to the old house; it was conformable to his notions, both of comfort and pomp, and Sir Philip had expressed a desire that the old house should be pulled down. Strahan had inspected the plans for the new mansion to which Sir Philip had referred, and the plans did not please him; on the contrary, they terrified.

"Jeeves says that I could not build such a house under L70,000 or L80,000, and then it will require twice the establishment which will suffice for this. I shall be ruined," cried the man who had just come into possession of at least ten thousand a year.

"Sir Philip did not enjoin you to pull down the old house; he only advised you to do so. Perhaps he thought the site less healthy than that which he proposes for a new building, or was aware of some other drawback to the house, which you may discover later. Wait a little and see before deciding."

"But, at all events, I suppose I must pull down this curious old room,--the nicest part of the old house!"

Strahan, as he spoke, looked wistfully round at the quaint oak chimneypiece; the carved ceiling; the well-built solid walls, with the large mullion casement, opening so pleasantly on the sequestered gardens. He had ensconced himself in Sir Philip's study, the chamber in which the once famous mystic, Forman, had found a refuge.

"So cozy a room for a single man!" sighed Strahan. "Near the stables and dog-kennels, too! But I suppose I must pull it down. I am not bound to do so legally; it is no condition of the will. But in honour and gratitude I ought not to disobey poor Sir Philip's positive injunction."

"Of that," said I, gravely, "there cannot be a doubt." Here our conversation was interrupted by Mrs. Gates, who informed us that dinner was served in the library. Wine of great age was brought from the long neglected cellars; Strahan filled and re-filled his glass, and, warmed into hilarity, began to talk of bringing old college friends around him in the winter season, and making the roof-tree ring with laughter and song once more.

Time wore away, and night had long set in, when Strahan at last rose from the table, his speech thick and his tongue unsteady. We returned to the study, and I reminded my host of the special object of my visit to him,--namely, the inspection of Sir Philip's manuscript.

"It is tough reading," said Strahan; "better put it off till tomorrow. You will stay here two or three days."

"No; I must return to L---- to-morrow. I cannot absent myself from my patients. And it is the more desirable that no time should be lost before examining the contents of the manuscript, because probably they may give some clue to the detection of the murderer."

"Why do you think that?" cried Strahan, startled from the drowsiness that was creeping over him.

"Because the manuscript may show that Sir Philip had some enemy, and who but an enemy could have had a motive for such a crime? Come, bring forth

the book. You of all men are bound to be alert in every research that may guide the retribution of justice to the assassin of your benefactor."

"Yes, yes. I will offer a reward of L5,000 for the discovery. Allen, that wretched old steward had the insolence to tell me that I was the only man in the world who could have an interest in the death of his master; and he looked at me as if he thought that I had committed the crime. You are right; it becomes me, of all men, to be alert. The assassin must be found. He must hang."

While thus speaking, Strahan had risen, unlocked a desk, which stood on one of the safes, and drawn forth a thick volume, the contents of which were protected by a clasp and lock. Strahan proceeded to open this lock by one of a bunch of keys, which he said had been found on Sir Philip's person.

"There, Allen, this is the memoir. I need not tell you what store I place on it,—not, between you and me, that I expect it will warrant poor Sir Philip's high opinion of his own scientific discoveries; that part of his letter seems to me very queer, and very flighty. But he evidently set his heart on the publication of his work, in part if not in whole; and, naturally, I must desire to comply with a wish so distinctly intimated by one to whom I owe so much. I beg, you, therefore, not to be too fastidious. Some valuable hints in medicine, I have reason to believe, the manuscript will contain, and those may help you in your profession, Allen."

"You have reason to believe! Why?"

"Oh, a charming young fellow, who, with most of the other gentry resident at L----, called on me at my hotel, told me that he had travelled in the East, and had there heard much of Sir Philip's knowledge of chemistry, and the cures it had enabled him to perform."

"You speak of Mr. Margrave. He called on you?"

"Yes."

"You did not, I trust, mention to him the existence of Sir Philip's manuscript."

"Indeed I did; and I said you had promised to examine it. He seemed delighted at that, and spoke most highly of your peculiar fitness for the task."

"Give me the manuscript," said I, abruptly, "and after I have looked at it to-night, I may have something to say to you tomorrow in reference to Mr. Margrave."

"There is the book," said Strahan; "I have just glanced at it, and find much of it written in Latin; and I am ashamed to say that I have so neglected the little Latin I learned in our college days that I could not construe what I looked at."

I sat down and placed the book before me; Strahan fell into a doze, from which he was wakened by the housekeeper, who brought in the tea-things.

"Well," said Strahan, languidly, "do you find much in the book that explains the many puzzling riddles in poor Sir Philip's eccentric life and

pursuits?"

"Yes," said I. "Do not interrupt me."

Strahan again began to doze, and the housekeeper asked if we should want anything more that night, and if I thought I could find my way to my bedroom.

I dismissed her impatiently, and continued to read. Strahan woke up again as the clock struck eleven, and finding me still absorbed in the manuscript, and disinclined to converse, lighted his candle, and telling me to replace the manuscript in the desk when I had done with it, and be sure to lock the desk and take charge of the key, which he took off the bunch and gave me, went upstairs, yawning.

I was alone in the wizard Forman's chamber, and bending over a stranger record than had ever excited my infant wonder, or, in later years, provoked my sceptic smile.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

The Manuscript was written in a small and peculiar handwriting, which, though evidently by the same person whose letter to Strahan I had read, was, whether from haste or some imperfection in the ink, much more hard to decipher. Those parts of the Memoir which related to experiments, or alleged secrets in Nature, that the writer intimated a desire to submit exclusively to scholars or men of science, were in Latin,--and Latin which, though grammatically correct, was frequently obscure. But all that detained the eye and attention on the page necessarily served to impress the contents more deeply on remembrance.

The narrative commenced with the writer's sketch of his childhood. Both his parents had died before he attained his seventh year. The orphan had been sent by his guardians to a private school, and his holidays had been passed at Derval Court. Here his earliest reminiscences were those of the quaint old room, in which I now sat, and of his childish wonder at the inscription on the chimneypiece--who and what was the Simon Forman who had there found a refuge from persecution? Of what nature were the studies he had cultivated, and the discoveries he boasted to have made?

When he was about sixteen, Philip Derval had begun to read the many mystic books which the library contained; but without other result on his mind than the sentiment of disappointment and disgust. The impressions produced on the credulous imagination of childhood vanished. He went to the University; was sent abroad to travel: and on his return took that place in the circles of London which is so readily conceded to a young idler of birth and fortune. He passed quickly over that period of his life, as one of extravagance and dissipation, from which he was first drawn by the attachment for his cousin to which his letter to Strahan referred. Disappointed in the hopes which that affection had conceived, and his fortune impaired, partly by some years of reckless profusion, and partly by the pecuniary sacrifices at which he had effected his cousin's marriage with another, he retired to Derval Court, to live there in solitude and seclusion. On searching for some old title-deeds required for a mortgage, he chanced upon a collection of manuscripts much discoloured, and, in part, eaten away by moth or damp. These, on

examination, proved to be the writings of Forman. Some of them were astrological observations and predictions; some were upon the nature of the Cabbala; some upon the invocation of spirits and the magic of the dark ages. All had a certain interest, for they were interspersed with personal remarks, anecdotes of eminent actors in a very stirring time, and were composed as Colloquies, in imitation of Erasmus,--the second person in the dialogue being Sir Miles Derval, the patron and pupil; the first person being Forman, the philosopher and expounder.

But along with these shadowy lucubrations were treatises of a more uncommon and a more startling character,--discussions on various occult laws of nature, and detailed accounts of analytical experiments. These opened a new, and what seemed to Sir Philip a practical, field of inquiry,--a true border-land between natural science and imaginative speculation. Sir Philip had cultivated philosophical science at the University; he resumed the study, and tested himself the truth of various experiments suggested by Forman. Some, to his surprise, proved successful, some wholly failed. These lucubrations first tempted the writer of the memoir towards the studies in which the remainder of his life had been consumed. But he spoke of the lucubrations themselves as valuable only where suggestive of some truths which Forman had accidentally approached, without being aware of their true nature and importance. They were debased by absurd puerilities, and vitiated by the vain and presumptuous ignorance which characterized the astrology of the middle ages. For these reasons the writer intimated his intention (if he lived to return to England) to destroy Forman's manuscripts, together with sundry other books, and a few commentaries of his own upon studies which had for a while misled him,--all now deposited in the safes of the room in which I sat.

After some years passed in the retirement of Derval Court, Sir Philip was seized with the desire to travel, and the taste he had imbibed for occult studies led him towards those Eastern lands in which they took their origin, and still retain their professors.

Several pages of the manuscript were now occupied with minute statements of the writer's earlier disappointment in the objects of his singular research. The so-called magicians, accessible to the curiosity of European travellers, were either but ingenious jugglers, or produced effects that perplexed him by practices they had mechanically learned, but of the rationale of which they were as ignorant as himself. It was not till he had resided some considerable time in the East, and acquired a familiar knowledge of its current languages and the social habits of its various populations, that he became acquainted with men in whom he recognized earnest cultivators of the lore which tradition ascribes to the colleges and priesthoods of the ancient world,--men generally living remote from others, and seldom to be bribed by money to exhibit their marvels or divulge their secrets. In his intercourse with these sages, Sir Philip arrived at the conviction that there does exist an art of magic, distinct from the guile of the conjuror, and applying to certain latent powers and affinities in nature,--a philosophy akin to that which we receive in our acknowledged schools, inasmuch as it is equally based on experiment, and produces from definite causes definite results. In support of this startling proposition, Sir Philip now devoted more than half his volume to the details of various experiments, to the process and result of which he pledged his guarantee as the actual operator. As most of these alleged experiments appeared to me wholly incredible, and as all of them were unfamiliar to my practical experience, and could only be verified or falsified by tests that would require no inconsiderable amount

of time and care, I passed with little heed over the pages in which they were set forth. I was impatient to arrive at that part of the manuscript which might throw light on the mystery in which my interest was the keenest. What were the links which connected the existence of Margrave with the history of Sir Philip Derval? Thus hurrying on, page after page, I suddenly, towards the end of the volume, came upon a name that arrested all my attention,--Haroun of Aleppo. He who has read the words addressed to me in my trance may well conceive the thrill that shot through my heart when I came upon that name, and will readily understand how much more vividly my memory retains that part of the manuscript to which I now proceed, than all which had gone before.

"It was," wrote Sir Philip, "in an obscure suburb of Aleppo that I at length met with the wonderful man from whom I have acquired a knowledge immeasurably more profound and occult than that which may be tested in the experiments to which I have devoted so large a share of this memoir. Haroun of Aleppo had, indeed, mastered every secret in nature which the nobler, or theurgic, magic seeks to fathom.

"He had discovered the great Principle of Animal Life, which had hitherto baffled the subtlest anatomist. Provided only that the great organs were not irreparably destroyed, there was no disease that he could not cure; no decrepitude to which he could not restore vigour: yet his science was based on the same theory as that espoused by the best professional practitioner of medicine, namely, that the true art of healing is to assist nature to throw off the disease; to summon, as it were, the whole system to eject the enemy that has fastened on a part. And thus his processes, though occasionally varying in the means employed, all combined in this,--namely, the re-invigourating and recruiting of the principle of life."

No one knew the birth or origin of Haroun; no one knew his age. In outward appearance he was in the strength and prime of mature manhood; but, according to testimonies in which the writer of the memoir expressed a belief that, I need scarcely say, appeared to me egregiously credulous, Haroun's existence under the same name, and known by the same repute, could be traced back to more than a hundred years. He told Sir Philip that he had thrice renewed his own life, and had resolved to do so no more; he had grown weary of living on. With all his gifts, Haroun owned himself to be consumed by a profound melancholy. He complained that there was nothing new to him under the sun; he said that, while he had at his command unlimited wealth, wealth had ceased to bestow enjoyment, and he preferred living as simply as a peasant; he had tired out all the affections and all the passions of the human heart; he was in the universe as in a solitude. In a word, Haroun would often repeat, with mournful solemnity: "The soul is not meant to inhabit this earth and in fleshy tabernacle for more than the period usually assigned to mortals; and when by art in repairing the walls of the body we so retain it, the soul repines, becomes inert or dejected. He only," said Haroun, "would feel continued joy in continued existence who could preserve in perfection the sensual part of man, with such mind or reason as may be independent of the spiritual essence, but whom soul itself has quitted!--man, in short, as the grandest of the animals, but without the sublime discontent of earth, which is the peculiar attribute of soul."

One evening Sir Philip was surprised to find at Haroun's house another European. He paused in his narrative to describe this man. He said that for three or four years previously he had heard frequent mention, amongst the cultivators of magic, of an orientalized Englishman engaged in

researches similar to his own, and to whom was ascribed a terrible knowledge in those branches of the art which, even in the East, are condemned as instrumental to evil. Sir Philip here distinguished at length, as he had so briefly distinguished in his conversation with me, between the two kinds of magic,--that which he alleged to be as pure from sin as any other species of experimental knowledge, and that by which the agencies of witchcraft are invoked for the purposes of guilt.

The Englishman, to whom the culture of this latter and darker kind of magic was ascribed, Sir Philip Derval had never hitherto come across. He now met him at the house of Haroun; decrepit, emaciated, bowed down with infirmities, and racked with pain. Though little more than sixty, his aspect was that of extreme old age; but still on his face there were seen the ruins of a once singular beauty, and still, in his mind, there was a force that contrasted the decay of the body. Sir Philip had never met with an intellect more powerful and more corrupt. The son of a notorious usurer, heir to immense wealth, and endowed with the talents which justify ambition, he had entered upon life burdened with the odium of his father's name. A duel, to which he had been provoked by an ungenerous taunt on his origin, but in which a temperament fiercely vindictive had led him to violate the usages prescribed by the social laws that regulate such encounters, had subjected him to a trial in which he escaped conviction either by a flaw in the technicalities of legal procedure, or by the compassion of the jury;[1] but the moral presumptions against him were sufficiently strong to set an indelible brand on his honour, and an insurmountable barrier to the hopes which his early ambition had conceived. After this trial he had quitted his country, to return to it no more. Thenceforth, much of his life had been passed out of sight or conjecture of civilized men in remote regions and amongst barbarous tribes. At intervals, however, he had reappeared in European capitals; shunned by and shunning his equals, surrounded by parasites, amongst whom were always to be found men of considerable learning, whom avarice or poverty subjected to the influences of his wealth. For the last nine or ten years he had settled in Persia, purchased extensive lands, maintained the retinue, and exercised more than the power of an Oriental prince. Such was the man who, prematurely worn out, and assured by physicians that he had not six weeks of life, had come to Aleppo with the gaudy escort of an Eastern satrap, had caused himself to be borne in his litter to the mud-hut of Haroun the Sage, and now called on the magician, in whose art was his last hope, to relieve him from the--grave.

He turned round to Sir Philip, when the latter entered the room, and exclaimed in English, "I am here because you are. Your intimacy with this man was known to me. I took your character as the guarantee of his own. Tell me that I am no credulous dupe. Tell him that I, Louis Grayle, am no needy petitioner. Tell me of his wisdom; assure him of my wealth."

Sir Philip looked inquiringly at Haroun, who remained seated on his carpet in profound silence.

"What is it you ask of Haroun?"

"To live on--to live on! For every year of life he can give me, I will load these floors with gold."

"Gold will not tempt Haroun."

"What will?"

"Ask him yourself; you speak his language."

"I have asked him; he vouchsafes me no answer."

Haroun here suddenly roused himself as from a reverie. He drew from under his robe a small phial, from which he let fall a single drop into a cup of water, and said, "Drink this; send to me tomorrow for such medicaments as I may prescribe. Return hither yourself in three days; not before!"

When Grayle was gone, Sir Philip, moved to pity, asked Haroun if, indeed, it were within the compass of his art to preserve life in a frame that appeared so thoroughly exhausted. Haroun answered, "A fever may so waste the lamp of life that one ruder gust of air could extinguish the flame, yet the sick man recovers. This sick man's existence has been one long fever; this sick man can recover."

"You will aid him to do so?"

"Three days hence I will tell you."

On the third day Grayle revisited Haroun, and, at Haroun's request, Sir Philip came also. Grayle declared that he had already derived unspeakable relief from the remedies administered; he was lavish in expressions of gratitude; pressed large gifts on Haroun, and seemed pained when they were refused. This time Haroun conversed freely, drawing forth Grayle's own irregular, perverted, stormy, but powerful intellect.

I can best convey the general nature of Grayle's share in the dialogue between himself, Haroun, and Derval--recorded in the narrative in words which I cannot trust my memory to repeat in detail--by stating the effect it produced on my own mind. It seemed, while I read, as if there passed before me some convulsion of Nature,--a storm, an earthquake,--outcries of rage, of scorn, of despair, a despot's vehemence of will, a rebel's scoff at authority; yet, ever and anon, some swell of lofty thought, some burst of passionate genius,--abrupt variations from the vaunt of superb defiance to the wail of intense remorse.

The whole had in it, I know not what of uncouth but colossal,--like the chant, in the old lyrical tragedy, of one of those mythical giants, who, proud of descent from Night and Chaos, had held sway over the elements, while still crude and conflicting, to be crushed under the rocks, upheaved in their struggle, as Order and Harmony subjected a brightening Creation to the milder influences throned in Olympus. But it was not till the later passages of the dialogue in which my interest was now absorbed, that the language ascribed to this sinister personage lost a gloomy pathos not the less impressive for the awe with which it was mingled. For, till then, it seemed to me as if in that tempestuous nature there were still broken glimpses of starry light; that a character originally lofty, if irregular and fierce, had been embittered by early and continuous war with the social world, and had, in that war, become maimed and distorted; that, under happier circumstances, its fiery strength might have been disciplined to good; that even now, where remorse was so evidently poignant, evil could not be irredeemably confirmed.

At length all the dreary compassion previously inspired vanished in one unqualified abhorrence.

The subjects discussed changed from those which, relating to the common world of men, were within the scope of my reason. Haroun led his wild

quest to boast of his own proficiency in magic, and, despite my incredulity, I could not overcome the shudder with which fictions, however extravagant, that deal with that dark Unknown abandoned to the chimeras of poets, will, at night and in solitude, send through the veins of men the least accessible to imaginary terrors.

Grayle spoke of the power he had exercised through the agency of evil spirits,--a power to fascinate and to destroy. He spoke of the aid revealed to him, now too late, which such direful allies could afford, not only to a private revenge, but to a kingly ambition. Had he acquired the knowledge he declared himself to possess before the feebleness of the decaying body made it valueless, how he could have triumphed over that world which had expelled his youth from its pale! He spoke of means by which his influence could work undetected on the minds of others, control agencies that could never betray, and baffle the justice that could never discover. He spoke vaguely of a power by which a spectral reflection of the material body could be cast, like a shadow, to a distance; glide through the walls of a prison, elude the sentinels of a camp,--a power that he asserted to be when enforced by concentrated will, and acting on the mind, where in each individual temptation found mind the weakest--almost infallible in its effect to seduce or to appall. And he closed these and similar boasts of demoniacal arts, which I remember too obscurely to repeat, with a tumultuous imprecation on their nothingness to avail against the gripe of death. All this lore he would communicate to Haroun, in return for what? A boon shared by the meanest peasant,--life, common life; to breathe yet a while the air, feel yet a while the sun.

Then Haroun replied. He said, with a quiet disdain, that the dark art to which Grayle made such boastful pretence was the meanest of all abuses of knowledge, rightly abandoned, in all ages, to the vilest natures. And then, suddenly changing his tone, he spoke, so far as I can remember the words assigned to him in the manuscript, to this effect,--

"Fallen and unhappy wretch, and you ask me for prolonged life!--a prolonged curse to the world and to yourself. Shall I employ spells to lengthen the term of the Pestilence, or profane the secrets of Nature to restore vigour and youth to the failing energies of Crime?"

Grayle, as if stunned by the rebuke, fell on his knees with despairing entreaties that strangely contrasted his previous arrogance. "And it was," he said, "because his life had been evil that he dreaded death. If life could be renewed he would repent, he would change; he retracted his vaunts, he would forsake the arts he had boasted, he would re-enter the world as its benefactor."

"So ever the wicked man lies to himself when appalled by the shadow of death," answered Haroun. "But know, by the remorse which preys on thy soul, that it is not thy soul that addresses this prayer to me. Couldst thou hear, through the storms of the Mind, the Soul's melancholy whisper, it would dissuade thee from a wish to live on. While I speak, I behold it, that Soul,--sad for the stains on its essence, awed by the account it must render, but dreading, as the direst calamity, a renewal of years below, darker stains and yet heavier accounts! Whatever the sentence it may now undergo, it has a hope for mercy in the remorse which the mind vainly struggles to quell. But darker its doom if longer retained to earth, yoked to the mind that corrupts it, and enslaved to the senses which thou bidst me restore to their tyrannous forces."

And Grayle bowed his head and covered his face with his hands in silence

and in trembling.

Then Sir Philip, seized with compassion, pleaded for him. "At least, could not the soul have longer time on earth for repentance?" And while Sir Philip was so pleading, Grayle fell prostrate in a swoon like that of death. When he recovered, his head was leaning on Haroun's knee, and his opening eyes fixed on the glittering phial which Haroun held, and from which his lips had been moistened.

"Wondrous!" he murmured: "how I feel life flowing back to me. And that, then, is the elixir! it is no fable!"

His hands stretched greedily as to seize the phial, and he cried imploringly, "More, more!" Haroun replaced the vessel in the folds of his robe, and answered,--

"I will not renew thy youth, but I will release thee from bodily suffering: I will leave the mind and the soul free from the pangs of the flesh, to reconcile, if yet possible, their long war. My skill may afford thee months yet for repentance; Seek, in that interval, to atone for the evil of sixty years; apply thy wealth where it may most compensate for injury done, most relieve the indigent, and most aid the virtuous. Listen to thy remorse; humble thyself in prayer."

Grayle departed, sighing heavily and muttering to himself. The next day Haroun summoned Sir Philip Derval, and said to him,--

"Depart to Damascus. In that city the Pestilence has appeared. Go thither thou, to heal and to save. In this casket are stored the surest antidotes to the poison of the plague. Of that essence, undiluted and pure, which tempts to the undue prolongation of soul in the prison of flesh, this casket contains not a drop. I curse not my friend with so mournful a boon. Thou hast learned enough of my art to know by what simples the health of the temperate is easily restored to its balance, and their path to the grave smoothed from pain. Not more should Man covet from Nature for the solace and weal of the body. Nobler gifts far than aught for the body this casket contains. Herein are the essences which quicken the life of those duplicate senses that lie dormant and coiled in their chrysalis web, awaiting the wings of a future development,--the senses by which we can see, though not with the eye, and hear, but not by the ear. Herein are the links between Man's mind and Nature's; herein are secrets more precious even than these,--those extracts of light which enable the Soul to distinguish itself from the Mind, and discriminate the spiritual life, not more from life carnal than life intellectual. Where thou seest some noble intellect, studious of Nature, intent upon Truth, yet ignoring the fact that all animal life has a mind and Man alone on the earth ever asked, and has asked, from the hour his step trod the earth, and his eye sought the Heaven, 'Have I not a soul; can it perish?'--there, such aids to the soul, in the innermost vision vouchsafed to the mind, thou mayst lawfully use. But the treasures contained in this casket are like all which a mortal can win from the mines he explores,--good or ill in their uses as they pass to the hands of the good or the evil. Thou wilt never confide them but to those who will not abuse! and even then, thou art an adept too versed in the mysteries of Nature not to discriminate between the powers that may serve the good to good ends, and the powers that may tempt the good--where less wise than experience has made thee and me--to the ends that are evil; and not even to thy friend the most virtuous--if less proof against passion than thou and I have become--wilt thou confide such contents of the casket as may work on the

fancy, to deafen the conscience and imperil the soul."

Sir Philip took the casket, and with it directions for use, which he did not detail. He then spoke to Haroun about Louis Grayle, who had inspired him with a mingled sentiment of admiration and abhorrence, of pity and terror. And Haroun answered thus, repeating the words ascribed to him, so far as I can trust, in regard to them--as to all else in this marvellous narrative--to a memory habitually tenacious even in ordinary matters, and strained to the utmost extent of its power, by the strangeness of the ideas presented to it, and the intensity of my personal interest in whatever admitted a ray into that cloud which, gathering fast over my reason, now threatened storm to my affections,--

"When the mortal deliberately allies himself to the spirits of evil, he surrenders the citadel of his being to the guard of its enemies; and those who look from without can only dimly guess what passes within the precincts abandoned to Powers whose very nature we shrink to contemplate, lest our mere gaze should invite them. This man, whom thou pitiest, is not yet everlastingly consigned to the fiends, because his soul still struggles against them. His life has been one long war between his intellect, which is mighty, and his spirit, which is feeble. The intellect, armed and winged by the passions, has besieged and oppressed the soul; but the soul has never ceased to repine and to repent. And at moments it has gained its inherent ascendancy, persuaded revenge to drop the prey it had seized, turned the mind astray from hatred and wrath into unwonted paths of charity and love. In the long desert of guilt, there have been green spots and fountains of good. The fiends have occupied the intellect which invoked them, but they have never yet thoroughly mastered the soul which their presence appalls. In the struggle that now passes within that breast, amidst the flickers of waning mortality, only Allah, whose eye never slumbers, can aid."

Haroun then continued, in words yet more strange and yet more deeply graved in my memory,--

"There have been men (thou mayst have known such), who, after an illness in which life itself seemed suspended, have arisen, as out of a sleep, with characters wholly changed. Before, perhaps, gentle and good and truthful, they now become bitter, malignant, and false. To the persons and the things they had before loved, they evince repugnance and loathing. Sometimes this change is so marked and irrational that their kindred ascribe it to madness,--not the madness which affects them in the ordinary business of life, but that which turns into harshness and discord the moral harmony that results from natures whole and complete. But there are dervishes who hold that in that illness, which had for its time the likeness of death, the soul itself has passed away, and an evil genius has fixed itself into the body and the brain, thus left void of their former tenant, and animates them in the unaccountable change from the past to the present existence. Such mysteries have formed no part of my study, and I tell you the conjecture received in the East without hazarding a comment whether of incredulity or belief. But if, in this war between the mind which the fiends have seized, and the soul which implores refuge of Allah; if, while the mind of yon traveller now covets life lengthened on earth for the enjoyments it had perverted its faculties to seek and to find in sin, and covets so eagerly that it would shrink from no crime and revolt from no fiend that could promise the gift, the soul shudderingly implores to be saved from new guilt, and would rather abide by the judgment of Allah on the sins that have darkened it than pass forever irredeemably away to the demons,--if this be so, what if the

soul's petition be heard; what if it rise from the ruins around it; what if the ruins be left to the witchcraft that seeks to rebuild them? There, if demons might enter, that which they sought as their prize has escaped them; that which they find would mock them by its own incompleteness even in evil. In vain might animal life the most perfect be given to the machine of the flesh; in vain might the mind, freed from the check of the soul, be left to roam at will through a brain stored with memories of knowledge and skilled in the command of its faculties; in vain, in addition to all that body and brain bestow on the normal condition of man, might unhallowed reminiscences gather all the arts and the charms of the sorcery by which the fiends tempted the soul, before it fled, through the passions of flesh and the cravings of mind: the Thing, thus devoid of a soul, would be an instrument of evil, doubtless,--but an instrument that of itself could not design, invent, and complete. The demons themselves could have no permanent hold on the perishable materials. They might enter it for some gloomy end which Allah permits in his inscrutable wisdom; but they could leave it no trace when they pass from it, because there is no conscience where soul is wanting. The human animal without soul, but otherwise made felicitously perfect in its mere vital organization, might ravage and destroy, as the tiger and the serpent may destroy and ravage, and, the moment after, would sport in the sunlight harmless and rejoicing, because, like the serpent and the tiger, it is incapable of remorse."

"Why startle my wonder," said Derval, "with so fantastic an image?"

"Because, possibly, the image may come into palpable form! I know, while I speak to thee, that this miserable man is calling to his aid the evil sorcery over which he boasts his control. To gain the end he desires, he must pass through a crime. Sorcery whispers to him how to pass through it, secure from the detection of man. The soul resists, but in resisting, is weak against the tyranny of the mind to which it has submitted so long. Question me no more. But if I vanish from thine eyes, if thou hear that the death which, to my sorrow and in my foolishness I have failed to recognize as the merciful minister of Heaven, has removed me at last from the earth, believe that the pale Visitant was welcome, and that I humbly accept as a blessed release the lot of our common humanity."

Sir Philip went to Damascus. There he found the pestilence raging, there he devoted himself to the cure of the afflicted; in no single instance, so at least he declared, did the antidotes stored in the casket fail in their effect. The pestilence had passed, his medicaments were exhausted, when the news reached him that Haroun was no more. The Sage had been found, one morning, lifeless in his solitary home, and, according to popular rumour, marks on his throat betrayed the murderous hand of the strangler. Simultaneously, Louis Grayle had disappeared from the city, and was supposed to have shared the fate of Haroun, and been secretly buried by the assassins who had deprived him of life. Sir Philip hastened to Aleppo. There he ascertained that on the night in which Haroun died, Grayle did not disappear alone; with him were also missing two of his numerous suite,--the one, an Arab woman, named Ayesha, who had for some years been his constant companion, his pupil and associate in the mystic practices to which his intellect had been debased, and who was said to have acquired a singular influence over him, partly by her beauty and partly by the tenderness with which she had nursed him through his long decline; the other, an Indian, specially assigned to her service, of whom all the wild retainers of Grayle spoke with detestation and terror. He was believed by them to belong to that murderous sect of fanatics whose existence as a community has only recently been made known to Europe, and

who strangle their unsuspecting victim in the firm belief that they thereby propitiate the favour of the goddess they serve. The current opinion at Aleppo was, that if those two persons had conspired to murder Haroun, perhaps for the sake of the treasures he was said to possess, it was still more certain that they had made away with their own English lord, whether for the sake of the jewels he wore about him, or for the sake of treasures less doubtful than those imputed to Haroun, and of which the hiding-place would be to them much better known.

"I did not share that opinion," wrote the narrator, "for I assured myself that Ayesha sincerely loved her awful master; and that love need excite no wonder, for Louis Grayle was one whom if a woman, and especially a woman of the East, had once loved, before old age and infirmity fell on him, she would love and cherish still more devotedly when it became her task to protect the being who, in his day of power and command, had exalted his slave into the rank of his pupil and companion. And the Indian whom Grayle had assigned to her service was allowed to have that brute kind of fidelity which, though it recoils from no crime for a master, refuses all crime against him.

"I came to the conclusion that Haroun had been murdered by order of Louis Grayle,--for the sake of the elixir of life,--murdered by Juma the Strangler; and that Grayle himself had been aided in his flight from Aleppo, and tended, through the effects of the life-giving drug thus murderously obtained, by the womanly love of the Arab woman Ayesha. These convictions (since I could not, without being ridiculed as the wildest of dupes, even hint at the vital elixir) I failed to impress on the Eastern officials, or even on a countryman of my own whom I chanced to find at Aleppo. They only arrived at what seemed the common-sense verdict,--namely, that Haroun might have been strangled, or might have died in a fit (the body, little examined, was buried long before I came to Aleppo); and that Louis Grayle was murdered by his own treacherous dependents. But all trace of the fugitives was lost.

"And now," wrote Sir Philip, "I will state by what means I discovered that Louis Grayle still lived,--changed from age into youth; a new form, a new being; realizing, I verily believe, the image which Haroun's words had raised up, in what then seemed to me the metaphysics of fantasy,--criminal, without consciousness of crime; the dreadest of the mere animal race; an incarnation of the blind powers of Nature,--beautiful and joyous, wanton and terrible and destroying! Such as ancient myths have personified in the idols of Oriental creeds; such as Nature, of herself, might form man in her moments of favour, if man were wholly the animal, and spirit were no longer the essential distinction between himself and the races to which by superior formation and subtler perceptions he would still be the king.

"But this being is yet more dire and portentous than the mere animal man, for in him are not only the fragmentary memories of a pristine intelligence which no mind, unaided by the presence of soul, could have originally compassed, but amidst that intelligence are the secrets of the magic which is learned through the agencies of spirits the most hostile to our race. And who shall say whether the fiends do not enter at their will this void and deserted temple whence the soul has departed, and use as their tools, passive and unconscious, all the faculties which, skilful in sorcery, still place a mind at the control of their malice?

"It, was in the interest excited in me by the strange and terrible fate that befell an Armenian family with which I was slightly acquainted, that I first traced--in the creature I am now about to describe, and whose course I devote myself to watch, and trust to bring to a close--the murderer of Haroun for the sake of the elixir of youth.

"In this Armenian family there were three daughters; one of them--"

I had just read thus far when a dim shadow fell over the page, and a cold air seemed to breathe on me,--cold, so cold, that my blood halted in my veins as if suddenly frozen! Involuntarily I started, and looked up, sure that some ghastly presence was in the room. And then, on the opposite side of the wall, I beheld an unsubstantial likeness of a human form. Shadow I call it, but the word is not strictly correct, for it was luminous, though with a pale shine. In some exhibition in London there is shown a curious instance of optical illusion; at the end of a corridor you see, apparently in strong light, a human skull. You are convinced it is there as you approach; it is, however, only a reflection from a skull at a distance. The image before me was less vivid, less seemingly prominent than is the illusion I speak of. I was not deceived. I felt it was a spectrum, a phantasm; but I felt no less surely that it was a reflection from an animate form,--the form and face of Margrave; it was there, distinct, unmistakable. Conceiving that he himself must be behind me, I sought to rise, to turn round, to examine. I could not move: limb and muscle were overmastered by some incomprehensible spell. Gradually my senses forsook me; I became unconscious as well as motionless. When I recovered, I heard the clock strike three. I must have been nearly two hours insensible! The candles before me were burning low. My eyes rested on the table; the dead man's manuscript was gone!

[1] The reader will here observe a discrepancy between Mrs. Poyntz's account and Sir Philip Derval's narrative. According to the former, Louis Grayle was tried in his absence from England, and sentenced to three years' imprisonment, which his flight enabled him to evade. According to the latter, Louis Grayle stood his trial, and obtained an acquittal. Sir Philip's account must, at least, be nearer the truth than the lady's, because Louis Grayle could not, according to English law, have been tried on a capital charge without being present in court. Mrs. Poyntz tells her story as a woman generally does tell a story,--sure to make a mistake when she touches on a question of law; and--unconsciously perhaps to herself--the woman of the World warps the facts in her narrative so as to save the personal dignity of the hero, who has captivated her interest, not from the moral odium of a great crime, but the debasing position of a prisoner at the bar. Allen Fenwick, no doubt, purposely omits to notice the discrepancy between these two statements, or to animadvert on the mistake which, in the eyes of a lawyer, would discredit Mrs. Poyntz's. It is consistent with some of the objects for which Allen Fenwick makes public his Strange Story, to invite the reader to draw his own inferences from the contradictions by which, even in the most commonplace matters (and how much more in any tale of wonder!), a fact stated by one person is made to differ from the same fact stated by another. The rapidity with which a truth becomes transformed into fable, when it is once sent on its travels from lip to lip, is illustrated by an amusement at this moment in fashion. The amusement is this: In a party of eight or ten persons, let one whisper to another an account of some supposed transaction, or a piece of invented gossip relating to absent persons, dead or alive; let the person, who thus first hears the story, proceed to whisper it, as exactly as he can remember what he has just heard, to the next; the next does the

same to his neighbour, and so on, till the tale has run the round of the party. Each narrator, as soon as he has whispered his version of the tale, writes down what he has whispered. And though, in this game, no one has had any interest to misrepresent, but, on the contrary, each for his own credit's sake strives to repeat what he has heard as faithfully as he can, it will be almost invariably found that the story told by the first person has received the most material alterations before it has reached the eighth or the tenth. Sometimes the most important feature of the whole narrative is altogether omitted; sometimes a feature altogether new and preposterously absurd has been added. At the close of the experiment one is tempted to exclaim, "How, after this, can any of those portions of history which the chronicler took from hearsay be believed?" But, above all, does not every anecdote of scandal which has passed, not through ten lips, but perhaps through ten thousand, before it has reached us, become quite as perplexing to him who would get at the truth, as the marvels he recounts are to the bewildered reason of Fenwick the Sceptic?

CHAPTER XL.

The dead man's manuscript was gone. But how? A phantom might delude my eye, a human will, though exerted at a distance, might, if the tales of mesmerism be true, deprive me of movement and of consciousness; but neither phantom nor mesmeric will could surely remove from the table before me the material substance of the book that had vanished! Was I to seek explanation in the arts of sorcery ascribed to Louis Grayle in the narrative? I would not pursue that conjecture. Against it my reason rose up half alarmed, half disdainful. Some one must have entered the room, some one have removed the manuscript. I looked round. The windows were closed, the curtains partly drawn over the shutters, as they were before my consciousness had left me: all seemed undisturbed. Snatching up one of the candles, fast dying out, I went into the adjoining library, the desolate state-rooms, into the entrance-hall, and examined the outer door. barred and locked! The robber had left no vestige of his stealthy presence.

I resolved to go at once to Strahan's room and tell him of the loss sustained. A deposit had been confided to me, and I felt as if there were a slur on my honour every moment in which I kept its abstraction concealed from him to whom I was responsible for the trust. I hastily ascended the great staircase, grim with faded portraits, and found myself in a long corridor opening on my own bedroom; no doubt also on Strahan's. Which was his? I knew not. I opened rapidly door after door, peered into empty chambers, went blundering on, when to the right, down a narrow passage. I recognized the signs of my host's whereabouts,--signs familiarly commonplace and vulgar; signs by which the inmate of any chamber in lodging-house or inn makes himself known,--a chair before a doorway, clothes negligently thrown on it, beside it a pair of shoes. And so ludicrous did such testimony of common every-day life, of the habits which Strahan would necessarily have contracted in his desultory unluxurious bachelor's existence,--so ludicrous, I say, did these homely details seem to me, so grotesquely at variance with the wonders of which I had been reading, with the wonders yet more incredible of which I myself had been witness and victim, that as I turned down the passage, I heard my own unconscious half-hysterical laugh; and, startled by the sound of that laugh as if it came from some one else, I paused, my hand on the door, and asked myself: "Do I dream? Am I awake? And if awake what am I to say to

the common place mortal I am about to rouse? Speak to him of a phantom! Speak to him of some weird spell over this strong frame! Speak to him of a mystic trance in which has been stolen what he confided to me, without my knowledge! What will he say? What should I have said a few days ago to any man who told such a tale to me?" I did not wait to resolve these questions. I entered the room. There was Strahan sound asleep on his bed. I shook him roughly. He started up, rubbed his eyes. "You, Allen,--you! What the deuce?--what 's the matter?"

"Strahan, I have been robbed!--robbed of the manuscript you lent me. I could not rest till I had told you."

"Robbed, robbed! Are you serious?"

By this time Strahan had thrown off the bed-clothes, and sat upright, staring at me.

And then those questions which my mind had suggested while I was standing at his door repeated themselves with double force. Tell this man, this unimaginative, hard-headed, raw-boned, sandy-haired North countryman,--tell this man a story which the most credulous school-girl would have rejected as a fable! Impossible!

"I fell asleep," said I, colouring and stammering, for the slightest deviation from truth was painful to me, "and--and--when I awoke--the manuscript was gone. Some one must have entered and committed the theft--"

"Some one entered the house at this hour of the night and then only stolen a manuscript which could be of no value to him! Absurd! If thieves have come in it must be for other objects,--for plate, for money. I will dress; we will see!"

Strahan hurried on his clothes, muttering to himself and avoiding my eye. He was embarrassed. He did not like to say to an old friend what was on his mind; but I saw at once that he suspected I had resolved to deprive him of the manuscript, and had invented a wild tale in order to conceal my own dishonesty.

Nevertheless, he proceeded to search the house. I followed him in silence, oppressed with my own thoughts, and longing for solitude in my own chamber. We found no one, no trace of any one, nothing to excite suspicion. There were but two female servants sleeping in the house,--the old housekeeper, and a country girl who assisted her. It was not possible to suspect either of these persons; but in the course of our search we opened the doors of their rooms. We saw that they were both in bed, both seemingly asleep: it seemed idle to wake and question them. When the formality of our futile investigation was concluded, Strahan stopped at the door of my bedroom, and for the first time fixing his eyes on me steadily, said,--

"Allen Fenwick, I would have given half the fortune I have come into rather than this had happened. The manuscript, as you know, was bequeathed to me as a sacred trust by a benefactor whose slightest wish it is my duty to observe religiously. If it contained aught valuable to a man of your knowledge and profession, why, you were free to use its contents. Let me hope, Allen, that the book will reappear to-morrow."

He said no more, drew himself away from the hand I involuntarily extended,

and walked quickly back towards his own room.

Alone once more, I sank on a seat, buried my face in my hands, and strove in vain to collect into some definite shape my own tumultuous and disordered thoughts. Could I attach serious credit to the marvellous narrative I had read? Were there, indeed, such powers given to man, such influences latent in the calm routine of Nature? I could not believe it; I must have some morbid affection of the brain; I must be under an hallucination. Hallucination? The phantom, yes; the trance, yes. But still, how came the book gone? That, at least, was not hallucination.

I left my room the next morning with a vague hope that I should find the manuscript somewhere in the study; that, in my own trance, I might have secreted it, as sleep-walkers are said to secrete things, without remembrance of their acts in their waking state.

I searched minutely in every conceivable place. Strahan found me still employed in that hopeless task. He had breakfasted in his own room, and it was past eleven o'clock when he joined me. His manner was now hard, cold, and distant, and his suspicion so bluntly shown that my distress gave way to resentment.

"Is it possible," I cried indignantly, "that you, who have known me so well, can suspect me of an act so base, and so gratuitously base? Purloin, conceal a book confided to me, with full power to copy from it whatever I might desire, use its contents in any way that might seem to me serviceable to science, or useful to me in my own calling!"

"I have not accused you," answered Strahan, sullenly. "But what are we to say to Mr. Jeeves; to all others who know that this manuscript existed? Will they believe what you tell me?"

"Mr. Jeeves," I said, "cannot suspect a fellow-townsmen, whose character is as high as mine, of untruth and theft. And to whom else have you communicated the facts connected with a memoir and a request of so extraordinary a nature?"

"To young Margrave; I told you so!"

"True, true. We need not go farther to find the thief. Margrave has been in this house more than once. He knows the position of the rooms. You have named the robber!"

"Tut! what on earth could a gay young fellow like Margrave want with a work of such dry and recondite nature as I presume my poor kinsman's memoir must be?"

I was about to answer, when the door was abruptly opened, and the servant-girl entered, followed by two men, in whom I recognized the superintendent of the L---- police and the same subordinate who had found me by Sir Philip's corpse.

The superintendent came up to me with a grave face, and whispered in my ear. I did not at first comprehend him. "Come with you," I said, "and to Mr. Vigors, the magistrate? I thought my deposition was closed."

The superintendent shook his head. "I have the authority here, Dr. Fenwick."

"Well, I will come, of course. Has anything new transpired?"

The superintendent turned to the servant-girl, who was standing with gaping mouth and staring eyes.

"Show us Dr. Fenwick's room. You had better put up, sir, whatever things you have brought here. I will go upstairs with you," he whispered again. "Come, Dr. Fenwick, I am in the discharge of my duty."

Something in the man's manner was so sinister and menacing that I felt at once that some new and strange calamity had befallen me. I turned towards Strahan. He was at the threshold, speaking in a low voice to the subordinate policeman, and there was an expression of amazement and horror in his countenance. As I came towards him he darted away without a word.

I went up the stairs, entered my bedroom, the superintendent close behind me. As I took up mechanically the few things I had brought with me, the police-officer drew them from me with an abruptness that appeared insolent, and deliberately searched the pockets of the coat which I had worn the evening before, then opened the drawers in the room, and even pried into the bed.

"What do you mean?" I asked haughtily.

"Excuse me, sir. Duty. You are--"

"Well, I am what?"

"My prisoner; here is the warrant."

"Warrant! on what charge?"

"The murder of Sir Philip Derval."

"I--! Murder!" I could say no more.

I must hurry over this awful passage in my marvellous record. It is torture to dwell on the details; and indeed I have so sought to chase them from my recollection, that they only come back to me in hideous fragments, like the incoherent remains of a horrible dream.

All that I need state is as follows: Early on the very morning on which I had been arrested, a man, a stranger in the town, had privately sought Mr. Vigors, and deposed that on the night of the murder, he had been taking refuge from a sudden storm under shelter of the eaves and buttresses of a wall adjoining an old archway; that he had heard men talking within the archway; had heard one say to the other, "You still bear me a grudge." The other had replied, "I can forgive you on one condition." That he then lost much of the conversation that ensued, which was in a lower voice; but he gathered enough to know that the condition demanded by the one was the possession of a casket which the other carried about with him; that there seemed an altercation on this matter between the two men, which, to judge by the tones of voice, was angry on the part of the man demanding the casket; that, finally, this man said in a loud key, "Do you still refuse?" and on receiving the answer, which the witness did not overhear, exclaimed threateningly, "It is you who will repent," and then stepped forth from the arch into the street. The rain had then ceased, but by a broad flash of lightning the witness saw distinctly the figure of the person thus quitting the shelter of the arch,--a man of tall stature,

powerful frame, erect carriage. A little time afterwards, witness saw a slighter and older man come forth from the arch, whom he could only examine by the flickering ray of the gas-lamp near the wall, the lightning having ceased, but whom he fully believed to be the person he afterwards discovered to be Sir Philip Derval.

He said that he himself had only arrived at the town a few hours before; a stranger to L----, and indeed to England, having come from the United States of America, where he had passed his life from childhood. He had journeyed on foot to L----, in the hope of finding there some distant relatives. He had put up at a small inn, after which he had strolled through the town, when the storm had driven him to seek shelter. He had then failed to find his way back to the inn, and after wandering about in vain, and seeing no one at that late hour of night of whom he could ask the way, he had crept under a portico and slept for two or three hours. Waking towards the dawn, he had then got up, and again sought to find his way to the inn, when he saw, in a narrow street before him, two men, one of whom he recognized as the taller of the two to whose conversation he had listened under the arch; the other he did not recognize at the moment. The taller man seemed angry and agitated, and he heard him say, "The casket; I will have it." There then seemed to be a struggle between these two persons, when the taller one struck down the shorter, knelt on his breast, and he caught distinctly the gleam of some steel instrument. That he was so frightened that he could not stir from the place, and that though he cried out, he believed his voice was not heard. He then saw the taller man rise, the other resting on the pavement motionless; and a minute or so afterwards beheld policemen coming to the place, on which he, the witness, walked away. He did not know that a murder had been committed; it might be only an assault; it was no business of his, he was a stranger. He thought it best not to interfere, the police having cognizance of the affair. He found out his inn; for the next few days he was absent from L---- in search of his relations, who had left the town, many years ago, to fix their residence in one of the neighbouring villages.

He was, however, disappointed; none of these relations now survived. He had now returned to L----, heard of the murder, was in doubt what to do, might get himself into trouble if, a mere stranger, he gave an unsupported testimony. But, on the day before the evidence was volunteered, as he was lounging in the streets, he had seen a gentleman pass by on horseback, in whom he immediately recognized the man who, in his belief, was the murderer of Sir Philip Derval. He inquired of a bystander the name of the gentleman; the answer was "Dr. Fenwick." That, the rest of the day, he felt much disturbed in his mind, not liking to volunteer such a charge against a man of apparent respectability and station; but that his conscience would not let him sleep that night, and he had resolved at morning to go to the magistrate and make a clean breast of it.

The story was in itself so improbable that any other magistrate but Mr. Vigors would perhaps have dismissed it in contempt. But Mr. Vigors, already so bitterly prejudiced against me, and not sorry, perhaps, to subject me to the humiliation of so horrible a charge, immediately issued his warrant to search my house. I was absent at Derval Court; the house was searched. In the bureau in my favourite study, which was left unlocked, the steel casket was discovered, and a large case-knife, on the blade of which the stains of blood were still perceptible. On this discovery I was apprehended; and on these evidences, and on the deposition of this vagrant stranger, I was not, indeed, committed to take my trial

for murder, but placed in confinement, all bail for my appearance refused, and the examination adjourned to give time for further evidence and inquiries. I had requested the professional aid of Mr. Jeeves. To my surprise and dismay, Mr. Jeeves begged me to excuse him. He said he was pre-engaged by Mr. Strahan to detect and prosecute the murderer of Sir P. Derval, and could not assist one accused of the murder. I gathered from the little he said that Strahan had already been to him that morning and told him of the missing manuscript, that Strahan had ceased to be my friend. I engaged another solicitor, a young man of ability, and who professed personal esteem for me. Mr. Stanton (such was the lawyer's name) believed in my innocence; but he warned me that appearances were grave, he implored me to be perfectly frank with him. Had I held conversation with Sir Philip under the archway as reported by the witness? Had I used such or similar words? Had the deceased said, "I had a grudge against him"? Had I demanded the casket? Had I threatened Sir Philip that he would repent? And of what,--his refusal?

I felt myself grow pale, as I answered, "Yes; I thought such or similar expressions had occurred in my conversation with the deceased."

"What was the reason of the grudge? What was the nature of this casket, that I should so desire its possession?"

There, I became terribly embarrassed. What could I say to a keen, sensible, worldly man of law,--tell him of the powder and the fumes, of the scene in the museum, of Sir Philip's tale, of the implied identity of the youthful Margrave with the aged Grayle, of the elixir of life, and of magic arts? I--I tell such a romance! I,--the noted adversary of all pretended mysticism; I,--I a sceptical practitioner of medicine! Had that manuscript of Sir Philip's been available,--a substantial record of marvellous events by a man of repute for intellect and learning,--I might perhaps have ventured to startle the solicitor of I--with my revelations. But the sole proof that all which the solicitor urged me to confide was not a monstrous fiction or an insane delusion had disappeared; and its disappearance was a part of the terrible mystery that enveloped the whole. I answered therefore, as composedly as I could, that "I could have no serious grudge against Sir Philip, whom I had never seen before that evening; that the words which applied to my supposed grudge were lightly said by Sir Philip, in reference to a physiological dispute on matters connected with mesmeric phenomena; that the deceased had declared his casket, which he had shown me at the mayor's house, contained drugs of great potency in medicine; that I had asked permission to test those drugs myself; and that when I said he would repent of his refusal, I merely meant that he would repent of his reliance on drugs not warranted by the experiments of professional science."

My replies seemed to satisfy the lawyer so far, but "how could I account for the casket and the knife being found in my room?"

"In no way but this; the window of my study is a door-window opening on the lane, from which any one might enter the room. I was in the habit, not only of going out myself that way, but of admitting through that door any more familiar private acquaintance."

"Whom, for instance?"

I hesitated a moment, and then said, with a significance I could not forbear, "Mr. Margrave! He would know the locale perfectly; he would know that the door was rarely bolted from within during the daytime: he

could enter at all hours; he could place, or instruct any one to deposit, the knife and casket in my bureau, which he knew I never kept locked; it contained no secrets, no private correspondence,--chiefly surgical implements, or such things as I might want for professional experiments."

"Mr. Margrave! But you cannot suspect him--a lively, charming young man, against whose character not a whisper was ever heard--of connivance with such a charge against you,--a connivance that would implicate him in the murder itself; for if you are accused wrongfully, he who accuses you is either the criminal or the criminal's accomplice, his instigator or his tool."

"Mr. Stanton," I said firmly, after a moment's pause, "I do suspect Mr. Margrave of a hand in this crime. Sir Philip, on seeing him at the mayor's house, expressed a strong abhorrence of him, more than hinted at crimes he had committed, appointed me to come to Derval Court the day after that on which the murder was committed. Sir Philip had known something of this Margrave in the East; Margrave might dread exposure, revelations--of what I know not; but, strange as it may seem to you, it is my conviction that this young man, apparently so gay and so thoughtless, is the real criminal, and in some way which I cannot conjecture has employed this lying vagabond in the fabrication of a charge against myself. Reflect: of Mr. Margrave's antecedents we know nothing; of them nothing was known even by the young gentleman who first introduced him to the society of this town. If you would serve and save me, it is to that quarter that you will direct your vigilant and unrelaxing researches."

I had scarcely so said when I repented my candour, for I observed in the face of Mr. Stanton a sudden revulsion of feeling, an utter incredulity of the accusation I had thus hazarded, and for the first time a doubt of my own innocence. The fascination exercised by Margrave was universal; nor was it to be wondered at: for besides the charm of his joyous presence, he seemed so singularly free from even the errors common enough with the young,--so gay and boon a companion, yet a shunner of wine; so dazzling in aspect, so more than beautiful, so courted, so idolized by women, yet no tale of seduction, of profligacy, attached to his name! As to his antecedents, he had so frankly owned himself a natural son, a nobody, a traveller, an idler; his expenses, though lavish, were so unostentatious, so regularly defrayed; he was so wholly the reverse of the character assigned to criminals, that it seemed as absurd to bring a charge of homicide against a butterfly or a goldfinch as against this seemingly innocent and delightful favourite of humanity and nature.

However, Mr. Stanton said little or nothing, and shortly afterwards left me, with a dry expression of hope that my innocence would be cleared in spite of evidence that, he was bound to say, was of the most serious character.

I was exhausted. I fell into a profound sleep early that night; it might be a little after twelve when I woke, and woke as fully, as completely, as much restored to life and consciousness, as it was then my habit to be at the break of day. And so waking, I saw, on the wall opposite my bed, the same luminous phantom I had seen in the wizard's study at Derval Court. I have read in Scandinavian legends of an apparition called the Scin-Laeca, or shining corpse. It is supposed in the northern superstition, sometimes to haunt sepulchres, sometimes to foretell doom. It is the spectre of a human body seen in a phosphoric light; and so exactly did this phantom correspond to the description of such an apparition in Scandinavian fable that I knew not how to give it a better name than that of Scin-Laeca,--the

shining corpse.

There it was before me, corpse-like, yet not dead; there, as in the haunted study of the wizard Forman!--the form and the face of Margrave. Constitutionally, my nerves are strong, and my temper hardy, and now I was resolved to battle against any impression which my senses might receive from my own deluding fancies. Things that witnessed for the first time daunt us witnessed for the second time lose their terror. I rose from my bed with a bold aspect, I approached the phantom with a firm step; but when within two paces of it, and my hand outstretched to touch it, my arm became fixed in air, my feet locked to the ground. I did not experience fear; I felt that my heart beat regularly, but an invincible something opposed itself to me. I stood as if turned to stone. And then from the lips of this phantom there came a voice, but a voice which seemed borne from a great distance,--very low, muffled, and yet distinct; I could not even be sure that my ear heard it, or whether the sound was not conveyed to me by an inner sense.

"I, and I alone, can save and deliver you," said the voice. "I will do so; and the conditions I ask, in return, are simple and easy."

"Fiend or spectre, or mere delusion of my own brain," cried I, "there can be no compact between thee and me. I despise thy malice, I reject thy services; I accept no conditions to escape from the one or to obtain the other."

"You may give a different answer when I ask again."

The Scin-Laeca slowly waned, and, fading first into a paler shadow, then vanished. I rejoiced at the reply I had given. Two days elapsed before Mr. Stanton again came to me; in the interval the Scin-Laeca did not reappear. I had mustered all my courage, all my common-sense, noted down all the weak points of the false evidence against me, and felt calm and supported by the strength of my innocence.

The first few words of the solicitor dashed all my courage to the ground; for I was anxious to hear news of Lilian, anxious to have some message from her that might cheer and strengthen me, and my first question was this,--

"Mr. Stanton, you are aware that I am engaged in marriage to Miss Ashleigh. Your family are not unacquainted with her. What says, what thinks she of this monstrous charge against her betrothed?"

"I was for two hours at Mrs. Ashleigh's house last evening," replied the lawyer; "she was naturally anxious to see me as employed in your defence. Who do you think was there? Who, eager to defend you, to express his persuasion of your innocence, to declare his conviction that the real criminal would be soon discovered,--who but that same Mr. Margrave; whom, pardon me my frankness, you so rashly and groundlessly suspected."

"Heavens! Do you say that he is received in that house; that he--he is familiarly admitted to her presence?"

"My good sir, why these unjust prepossessions against a true friend? It was as your friend that, as soon as the charge against you amazed and shocked the town of L---, Mr. Margrave called on Mrs. Ashleigh, presented to her by Miss Brabazon, and was so cheering and hopeful that--"

"Enough!" I exclaimed,--"enough!"

I paced the room in a state of excitement and rage, which the lawyer in vain endeavoured to calm, until at length I halted abruptly: "Well, and you saw Miss Ashleigh? What message does she send to me--her betrothed?"

Mr. Stanton looked confused. "Message! Consider, sir, Miss Ashleigh's situation--the delicacy--and--and--"

"I understand, no message, no word, from a young lady so respectable to a man accused of murder."

Mr. Stanton was silent for some moments, and then said quietly, "Let us change this subject; let us think of what more immediately presses. I see you have been making some notes: may I look at them?"

I composed myself and sat down. "This accuser! Have inquiries really been made as to himself, and his statement of his own proceedings? He comes, he says, from America: in what ship? At what port did he land? Is there any evidence to corroborate his story of the relations he tried to discover; of the inn at which he first put up, and to which he could not find his way?"

"Your suggestions are sensible, Dr. Fenwick. I have forestalled them. It is true that the man lodged at a small inn,--the Rising Sun; true that he made inquiries about some relations of the name of Walls, who formerly resided at L----, and afterwards removed to a village ten miles distant,--two brothers, tradesmen of small means but respectable character. He at first refused to say at what seaport he landed, in what ship he sailed. I suspect that he has now told a falsehood as to these matters. I sent my clerk to Southampton, for it is there he said that he was put on shore; we shall see: the man himself is detained in close custody. I hear that his manner is strange and excitable; but that he preserves silence as much as possible. It is generally believed that he is a bad character, perhaps a returned convict, and that this is the true reason why he so long delayed giving evidence, and has been since so reluctant to account for himself. But even if his testimony should be impugned, should break down, still we should have to account for the fact that the casket and the case-knife were found in your bureau; for, granting that a person could, in your absence, have entered your study and placed the articles in your bureau, it is clear that such a person must have been well acquainted with your house, and this stranger to L---- could not have possessed that knowledge."

"Of course not. Mr. Margrave did possess it!"

"Mr. Margrave again! oh, sir!"

I arose and moved away with an impatient gesture. I could not trust myself to speak. That night I did not sleep; I watched impatiently, gazing on the opposite wall for the gleam of the Scin-Laeca. But the night passed away, and the spectre did not appear.

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