

Cord and Creese

James de Mille

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CORD AND CREESE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE DODGE CLUB."

BY PROF. JAMES DE MILLE.

CORD AND CREESE.

CHAPTER I.

THE LETTER FROM BEYOND THE SEA.

On the morning of July 21, 1840, the _Daily News_ announced the arrival of the ship _Rival_ at Sydney, New South Wales. As ocean steam navigation had not yet extended so far, the advent of this ship with the English mail created the usual excitement. An eager crowd beset the post-office, waiting for the delivery of the mail; and little knots at the street corners were busily discussing the latest hints at news which had been gathered from papers brought ashore by the officers or passengers.

At the lower end of King Street was a large warehouse, with an office at the upper extremity, over which was a new sign, which showed with newly gilded letters the words:

COMPTON & BRANDON.

The general appearance of the warehouse showed that Messrs. Compton and Brandon were probably commission merchants, general agents, or something of that sort.

On the morning mentioned two men were in the inner office of this warehouse. One was an elderly gentleman, with a kind, benevolent aspect, the senior partner of the firm. The other was the junior partner, and in every respect presented a marked contrast to his companion.

He had a face of rather unusual appearance, and an air which in England is usually considered foreign. His features were regular--a straight nose, wide brow, thin lips, and square, massive chin. His complexion was olive, and his eyes were of a dark hazel color, with a peculiarity about them which is not usually seen in the eye of the Teutonic or Celtic race, but is sometimes found among the people of the south of Europe, or in the East. It is difficult to find a name for this peculiarity. It may be seen sometimes in the gipsy; sometimes in the more successful among those who call themselves "spiritual mediums," or among the more powerful mesmerizers. Such an eye belonged to Napoleon Bonaparte, whose glance at times could make the boldest and greatest among his marshals quail. What is it? Magnetism? Or the revelation of the soul? Or what?

In this man there were other things which gave him the look of the great Napoleon. The contour of feature was the same: and on his brow, broad and massive, there might be seen those grand shadows with which French artists love to glorify the Emperor. Yet in addition to this he had that same serene immobility of countenance which characterized the other, which could serve as an impenetrable mask to hide even the intensest person.

There was also about this man a certain aristocratic air and grace of attitude, or of manner, which seemed to show lofty birth and gentle breeding, the mysterious index to good blood or high training. How such a man could have happened to fill the position of junior partner in a commission business was certainly a problem not easily solved. There he was, however, a man in appearance out of place, yet in reality able to fill that place with success; a man, in fact, whose resolute will enabled him to enforce success in any calling of life to which either outside circumstances or his own personal desires might invite him.

"The mail ought to be open by this time," said Brandon, indifferently, looking at his watch. "I am somewhat curious to see how things are looking. I noticed quotations of wool rather higher than by last mail. If the papers are correct which I saw then we ought to do very well by that last cargo."

Mr. Compton smiled.

"Well, Brandon," said he, "if it is so it will show that you are right. You anticipated a rise about this time, you know. You certainly have a remarkable forecast about the chances of business."

"I don't think there is much forecast," said Brandon, with a smile. "It was only the most ordinary calculation made from the well-known fact that the exportation this year had been slight. But there comes Hedley now," he continued, moving his head a little to one side so as to look up the street. "The letters will soon show us all."

Mr. Compton looked out in the direction which Brandon indicated and saw the clerk approaching. He then settled himself back in his chair, put his hands in his pockets, threw one leg over the other, and began whistling a tune with the air of a man who was so entirely prosperous and contented that no news whether good or evil could greatly affect his fortunes.

In a short time the clerk entered the inner office and, laying the letters down upon the table nearest Mr. Compton, he withdrew.

Mr. Compton took up the letters one by one and read the addresses, while Brandon looked carelessly on. There were ten or twelve of them, all of which, except one, were addressed to the firm. This one Mr. Compton selected from among the others, and reaching it out in his hand said:

"This is for you, Mr. Brandon."

"For me?" repeated Brandon, with marked surprise; and taking the letter he looked at the address with eager curiosity.

The address was simply as follows:

Louis Brandon,
Sydney, New South Wales.

The letters were irregular and loosely formed, as though written by a tremulous hand--such letters as old men form when the muscles have become relaxed.

Mr. Compton went on opening the letters of the firm without taking any further notice of his partner. The latter sat for some time looking at the letter without venturing to open it. He held it in both hands, and looked fixedly at that address as though from the address itself he was trying to extort some meaning.

He held it thus in both hands looking fixedly at it, with his head bent forward. Had Mr. Compton thought of taking a look at his usually impassive companion, he would have been surprised at the change which had taken place in him at the mere sight of that tremulous handwriting. For in that he had read grief, misfortune, perhaps death; and as he sat there, pausing before he dared to break the seal, the contents of the letter had already been conjectured.

Gloom therefore unutterable gathered upon his face; his features fixed themselves into such rigidity of grief that they became more expressive than if they had been distorted by passionate emotions; and over his brow collected cloud upon cloud, which deepened and darkened every instant till they overshadowed all; and his face in its statuesque fixedness resembled nothing so much as that which the artist gives to Napoleon at the crisis hour of Waterloo, when the Guard has recoiled from its last charge, and from that Imperial face in its fixed agony the soul itself seems to cry, "Lost!" "Lost!"

Yet it was only for a few minutes. Hastily subduing his feeling Brandon rose, and clutching the letter in his hand as though it were too precious to be trusted to his pocket, he quietly left the office and the warehouse and walked up the street.

He walked on rapidly until he reached a large building which bore the sign "Australian Hotel." Here he entered, and walked up stairs to a room, and locked himself in. Then when alone in his own apartments he ventured to open the letter.

The paper was poor and mean; the handwriting, like that of the address, was tremulous, and in many places quite illegible; the ink was pale; and the whole appearance of the letter seemed to indicate poverty and weakness on the part of the writer. By a very natural impulse Brandon hesitated before beginning to read, and took in all these things with a quick glance.

At last he nerved himself to the task and began to read.

This was the letter.

"Brandon, March 10, 1846.

"My dear Boy,--These are the last words which you will ever hear from your father. I am dying, my dear boy, and dying of a broken heart; but where I am dying I am afraid to tell you. That bitterness I leave for you to find out some day for yourself. In poverty unspeakable, in anguish that I pray you may never know, I turn to you after a silence of

years, and my first word is to implore your forgiveness. I know my noble boy that you grant it, and it is enough for me to ask it. After asking this I can die content on that score.

"Lying as I do now at the point of death, I find myself at last freed from the follies and prejudices which have been my ruin. The clouds roll away from my mind, and I perceive what a mad fool I have been for years. Most of all I see the madness that instigated me to turn against you, and to put against the loyal love of the best of sons my own miserable pride and the accusation of a lying scoundrel. May God have mercy upon me for this!

"I have not much strength, dear boy; I have to write at intervals, and by stealth, so as not to be discovered, for I am closely watched. He must never know that I have sent this to you. Frank and your mother are both sick, and my only help is your sister, my sweet Edith, she watches me, and enables me to write this in safety.

"I must tell you all without reserve before strength leaves me forever.

"That man Potts, whom you so justly hated, was and is the cause of all my suffering and of yours. You used to wonder how such a man as that, a low, vulgar knave, could gain such an influence over me and sway me as he did. I will try to explain.

"Perhaps you remember something about the lamentable death of my old friend Colonel Despard. The first that I ever heard of this man Potts was in his connection with Despard, for whom he acted partly as valet, and partly as business agent. Just before Despard left to go on his fatal voyage he wrote to me about his affairs, and stated, in conclusion, that this man Potts was going to England, that he was sorry to lose him, but recommended him very earnestly to me.

"You recollect that Colonel Despard was murdered on this voyage under very mysterious circumstances on shipboard. His Malay servant Uracao was convicted and executed. Potts distinguished himself by his zeal in avenging his master's death.

"About a year after this Potts himself came to England and visited me. He was, as you know, a rough, vulgar man; but his connection with my murdered friend, and the warm recommendations of that friend, made me receive him with the greatest kindness. Besides, he had many things to tell me about my poor friend, and brought the newspapers both from Manilla and Calcutta which contained accounts of the trial.

"It was this man's desire to settle himself somewhere, and I gave him letters to different people. He then went off, and I did not see him for two years. At the end of that time he returned with glowing accounts of a tin mine which he was working in Cornwall. He had bought it at a low price, and the returns from working it had exceeded his most sanguine expectations. He had just organized a company, and was selling the stock. He came first to me to let me take what I wished. I carelessly took five thousand pounds' worth.

[Illustration: "EDITH SHE WATCHES ME, AND ENABLES ME TO WRITE THIS IN SAFETY."]

"On the following year the dividend was enormous, being nearly sixty per cent. Potts explained to me the cause, declaring that it was the richest

mine in the kingdom, and assuring me that my L5000 was worth ten times that sum. His glowing accounts of the mine interested me greatly. Another year the dividend was higher, and he assured me that he expected to pay cent. per cent.

"It was then that the demon of avarice took full possession of me. Visions of millions came to me, and I determined to become the richest man in the kingdom. After this I turned every thing I had into money to invest in the mine. I raised enormous sums on my landed estate, and put all that I was worth, and more too, into the speculation. I was fascinated, not by this man, but by the wealth that he seemed to represent. I believed in him to the utmost. In vain my friends warned me. I turned from them, and quarreled with most of them. In my madness I refused to listen to the entreaties of my poor wife, and turned even against you. I can not bear to allude to those mournful days when you denounced that villain to his face before me; when I ordered you to beg his pardon or leave my roof forever; when you chose the latter alternative and became an outcast. My noble boy--my true-hearted son, that last look of yours, with all its reproach, is haunting my dying hours. If you were only near me now how peacefully I could die!

"My strength is failing. I can not describe the details of my ruin. Enough that the mine broke down utterly, and I as chief stockholder was responsible for all. I had to sell out every thing. The stock was worthless. The Hall and the estates all went. I had no friend to help me, for by my madness I had alienated them all. All this came upon me during the last year.

"But mark this, my son. This man Potts was not ruined. He seemed to have grown possessed of a colossal fortune. When I reproached him with being the author of my calamity, and insisted that he ought to share it with me, the scoundrel laughed in my face.

"The Hall and the estates were sold, for, unfortunately, though they have been in our family for ages, they were not entailed. A feeling of honor was the cause of this neglect. They were sold, and the purchaser was this man Potts. He must have bought them with the money that he had plundered from me.

"Now, since my eyes have been opened, I have had many thoughts; and among all that occurs to me none is more prominent than the mysterious murder of my friend. This man Potts was with him at the time. He was chief witness against the Malay. The counsel for the defense bore down hard on him, but he managed to escape, and Uracao was executed. Yet this much is evident, that Potts was largely benefited by the death of Despard. He could not have made all his money by his own savings. I believe that the man who wronged me so foully was fully capable of murder. So strong is this conviction now that I sometimes have a superstitious feeling that because I neglected all inquiry into the death of my friend, therefore he has visited me from that other life, and punished me, by making the same man the ruin of us both.

"The mine, I now believe, was a colossal sham; and all the money that I invested in stocks went directly to Potts. Good God! what madness was mine!

"O my boy! Your mother and your brother are lying here sick; your sister attends on us all, though little more than a child. Soon I must leave them; and for those who are destined to live there is a future which I

shudder to contemplate. Come home at once. Come home, whatever you are doing. Leave all business, and all prospects, and come and save them. That much you can do. Come, if it is only to take them back with you to that new land where you live, where they may forget their anguish.

"Come home, my son, and take vengeance. This, perhaps, you can not do, but you at least can try. By the time that you read these words they will be my voice from the grave; and thus I invoke you, and call you to take vengeance.

"But at least come and save your mother, your brother, and your sister. The danger is imminent. Not a friend is left. They all hold aloof, indignant at me. This miscreant has his own plans with regard to them, I doubt not; and he will disperse them or send them off to starve in some foreign land. Come and save them.

"But I warn you to be careful about yourself for their sakes. For this villain is powerful now, and hates you worse than any body. His arm may reach even to the antipodes to strike you there. Be on your guard. Watch every one. For once, from words which fell from him hastily I gathered that he had some dark plan against you. Trust no one. Rely on yourself, and may God help you!

"Poor boy! I have no estate to leave you now, and what I do send to you may seem to you like a mockery. Yet do not despise it. Who knows what may be possible in these days of science? Why may it not be possible to force the sea to give up its prey?

"I send it, at any rate, for I have nothing else to send. You know that it has been in our family for centuries, and have heard how stout old Peter Leggit, with nine sailors, escaped by night through the Spanish fleet, and what suffering they endured before they reached England. He brought this, and it has been preserved ever since. A legend has grown up, as a matter of course, that the treasure will be recovered one day when the family is at its last extremity. It may not be impossible. The writer intended that something should come of it.

"If in that other world to which I am going the disembodied spirit can assist man, then be sure, O my son, I will assist you, and in the crisis of your fate I will be near, if it is only to communicate to your spirit what you ought to do.

"God bless you, dear boy, and farewell.

"Your affectionate father.

"RALPH BRANDON."

This letter was evidently written by fragmentary portions, as though it had been done at intervals. Some parts were written leisurely--others apparently in haste. The first half had been written evidently with the greatest ease. The writing of the last half showed weakness and tremulousness of hand; many words would have been quite illegible to one not familiar with the handwriting of the old man. Sometimes the word was written two or three times, and there were numerous blots and unmeaning lines. It grew more and more illegible toward the close. Evidently it was the work of one who was but ill able to exert even sufficient strength to hold a pen in his trembling hand.

In this letter there was folded a large piece of coarse paper, evidently a blank leaf torn from a book, brown with age, which was worn at the folds, and protected there by pieces of cotton which had been pasted upon it. The paper was covered with writing, in ink that was much faded, though still quite legible.

Opening this Brandon read the following:

[Illustration: Facsimile of handwritten page reading:

"One league due northe of a smalle islet northe of the Islet of Santa Cruz northe of San Salvador----I Ralphe Brandon in my shippe Phoenix am becalmed and surrounded by a Spanish fleete----My shippe is filled with spoyle the Plunder of III galleons----wealth which myghte purchase a kyngdom-tresure equalle to an Empyr's revenue----Gold and jeweles in countless store----and God forbydde that itt shall falle into the hands of the Enemye----I therefore Ralphe Brandon out of mine owne good wyl and intente and that of all my men sink this shippe rather than be taken alyve----I send this by my trusty seaman Peter Leggit who with IX others tolde off by lot will trye to escape in the Boate by nighte----If this cometh haply into the hands of my sonne Philip let him herebye knowe that in this place is all this tresure----which haply may yet be gatherd from the sea----the Islet is knowne by III rockes that be pushed up like III needles from the sande.

"Ralphe Brandon"]

CHAPTER II.

A LIFE TRAGEDY.

Not a word or a gesture escaped Brandon during the perusal, but after he had finished he read the whole through twice, then laying it down, he paced up and down the room. His olive skin had become of a sickly tawny hue, his eyes glowed with intense lustre, and his brow was covered with those gloomy Napoleonic clouds, but not a nerve was shaken by the shock of this dread intelligence.

Evening came and night; and the night passed, and morning came, but it found him still there pacing the room.

Earlier than usual next morning he was at the office, and waited for some time before the senior partner made his appearance. When he came in it was with a smile on his face, and a general air of congratulation to all the world.

"Well, Brandon," said he, cordially, "that last shipment has turned out finely. More than a thousand pounds. And it's all your doing. I objected, but you were right. Let me congratulate you."

Something in Brandon's face seemed to surprise the old gentleman, and he paused for a moment. "Why what's the matter, my boy?" he said, in a paternal voice. "You have not heard any bad news, I hope, in that letter--I hope it's nothing serious?"

Brandon gave a faint smile.

"Serious enough," said he, looking away with an abstracted gaze, "to put a sudden end to my Australian career."

"Oh no--oh no!" said the other, earnestly; "not so bad as that."

"I must go home at once."

"Oh well, that may be, but you will be back again. Take a leave of absence for five years if you wish, but don't quit for good. I'll do the business and won't complain, my boy. I'll keep your place comfortable for you till your return."

Brandon's stern face softened as he looked at the old man, whose features were filled with the kindest expression, and whose tone showed the affectionate interest which he felt.

"Your kindness to me, Mr. Compton," said he, very slowly, and with deep feeling, "has been beyond all words. Ever since I first came to this country you have been the truest and the best of friends. I hope you know me well enough to believe that I can never forget it. But now all this is at an end, and all the bright prospects that I had here must give way to the call of the sternest duty. In that letter which I received last night there came a summons home which I can not neglect, and my whole life hereafter must be directed toward the fulfillment of that summons. From mid-day yesterday until dawn this morning I paced my room incessantly, laying out my plans for the future thus suddenly thrust upon me, and though I have not been able to decide upon any thing definite, yet I see plainly that nothing less than a life will enable me to accomplish my duty. The first thing for me to do is to acquaint you with this and to give up my part in the business."

Mr. Compton placed his elbow on the table near which he had seated himself, leaned his head upon his hand, and looked at the floor. From Brandon's tone he perceived that this resolution was irrevocable. The deep dejection which he felt could not be concealed. He was silent for a long time.

"God knows," said he, at last, "that I would rather have failed in business than that this should have happened."

Brandon looked away and said nothing.

"It comes upon me so suddenly," he continued. "I do not know what to think. And how can I manage these vast affairs without your assistance? For you were the one who did our business. I know that well. I had no head for it."

"You can reduce it to smaller proportions," said Brandon; "that can easily be done."

The old man sighed.

"After all," he continued, "it is not the business. It's losing you that I think of, dear boy. I'm not thinking of the business at all. My grief is altogether about your departure. I grieve, too, at the blow which must have fallen on you to make this necessary."

"The blow is a heavy one," said Brandon; "so heavy that every thing else in life must be forgotten except the one thought--how to recover from it; and perhaps, also," he added, in a lower voice, "how to return it."

Mr. Compton was silent for a long time, and with every minute the deep dejection of his face and manner increased. He folded his arms and shut his eyes in deep thought.

"My boy," said he at last, in that same paternal tone which he had used before, and in a mild, calm voice. "I suppose this thing can not be helped, and all that is left for me to do is to bear it as best I may. I will not indulge in any selfish sorrow in the presence of your greater trouble. I will rather do all in my power to coincide with your wishes. I see now that you must have a good reason for your decision, although I do not seek to look into that reason."

"Believe me," said Brandon, "I would show you the letter at once, but it is so terrible that I would rather that you should not know. It is worse than death, and I do not even yet begin to know the worst."

The old man sighed, and looked at him with deep commiseration.

"If our separation must indeed be final," said he, at last, "I will take care that you shall suffer no loss. You shall have your full share of the capital."

"I leave that entirely to you," said Brandon.

"Fortunately our business is not much scattered. A settlement can easily be made, and I will arrange it so that you shall not have any loss. Our balance-sheet was made out only last month, and it showed our firm to be worth thirty thousand pounds. Half of this is yours, and--"

"Half!" interrupted the other. "My dear friend, you mean a quarter."

The old man waved his hand.

"I said half, and I mean half."

"I will never consent."

"You must."

"Never."

"You shall. Why, think of the petty business that I was doing when you came here. I was worth about four thousand. You have built up the business to its present dimensions. Do you suppose that I don't know?"

"I can not allow you to make such a sacrifice," said Brandon.

"Stop," said Mr. Compton. "I have not said all. I attach a condition to this which I implore you not to refuse. Listen to me, and you will then be able to see."

Mr. Compton rose and looked carefully out into the office. There was no one near. He then returned, locked the door, and drawing his chair close to Brandon, began, in a low voice:

"You have your secrets and I have mine. I don't wish to know yours, but my own I am going to tell to you, not merely for the sake of sympathy, but rather for the sake of your assistance. I am going to tell you who I am, and why I came out here.

"My name is not Compton. It is Henry Lawton. All my early life was passed at York. There I married, had a son, and lived happily for years --in fact, during the childhood of my boy.

"It was that boy of mine, Edgar, that led to all my troubles. I suppose we indulged him too much. It was natural. He was our only child, and so we ruined him. He got beyond our control at last and used to run about the streets of York. I did what I could to save him, but it was too late.

"He went on from bad to worse, until at last he got in with a set of miscreants who were among the worst in the country. My God! to think how my boy, once a sweet child, could have fallen so low. But he was weak, and easily led, and so he went on from bad to worse.

"I can not bear to go into particulars," said the old man, after a long pause. "I will come at once to point. My poor, wretched boy got in with these miscreants, as I was telling you, and I did not see him from one month's end to another. At last a great burglary took place. Three were arrested. Among these two were old offenders, hardened in vice, the one named Briggs, the other Crocker; the third was my unhappy boy."

The old man was silent for some time.

"I do not think, after all, that he was guilty: but Briggs turned King's Evidence, and Crocker and my son were condemned to transportation. There was no help.

"I sold out all I had in the world, and in compliance with the entreaties of my poor wife, who nearly went mad with grief, I came out here. I changed my name to Compton. My boy's term was for three years. I began a business out here, and as my boy behaved well he was able to get permission to hire out as a servant. I took him nominally as my servant, for no one knew that he was my son, and so we had him with us again.

"I hoped that the bitter lesson which he had learned would prove beneficial, but I did not know the strength of evil inclinations. As long as his term of imprisonment lasted he was content and behaved well; but at last, when the three years were up, he began to grow restive. Crocker was freed at about the same time and my boy fell again under his evil influence. This lasted for about a year, when, at last, one morning a letter was brought me from him stating that he had gone to India. My poor wife was again nearly distracted. She thought of nothing but her boy. She made me take her and go in search of him again. So we went to India. After a long search I found him there, as I had feared, in connection with his old, vicious associates. True, they had changed their names, and were trying to pass for honest men. Crocker called himself Clark, and Briggs called himself Potts."

"Potts," cried Brandon.

"Yes," said the other, who was too absorbed in his own thoughts to notice the surprise of Brandon. "He was in the employ of Colonel Despard, at Calcutta, and enjoyed much of his confidence."

"What year was this?" asked Brandon.

"1825," replied Mr. Compton. "Crocker," he continued, "was acting as a sort of shipping agent, and my son was his clerk. Of course, my first efforts were directed toward detaching my son from these scoundrels. I did all that I could. I offered to give him half of my property, and finally all, if he would only leave them forever and come back. The wretched boy refused. He did not appear to be altogether bad, but he had a weak nature, and could not get rid of the influence of these men.

"I staid in India for a year and a half, until I found at last that there was no hope. I could find nothing to do there, and if I remained I would have to starve or go out to service. This I could not think of doing. So I prepared to come back here. But my wife refused to leave her son. She was resolved, she said, to stay by him till the last. I tried to dissuade her, but could not move her. I told her that I could not be a domestic. She said that she could do even that for the sake of her boy. And she went off at once and got a situation as nurse with the same Colonel Despard with whom Briggs, or, as he called himself, Potts, was staying."

"What was the Christian name of this Potts?" asked Brandon, calmly.

"John--John Potts."

Brandon said nothing further, and Compton resumed.

"Thus my wife actually left me. I could not stay and be a slave. So I made her promise to write me, and told her that I would send her as much money as I could. She clung to me half broken-hearted as I left her. Our parting was a bitter one--bitter enough: but I would rather break my heart with grief than be a servant. Besides, she knew that whenever she came back my heart was open to receive her.

"I came back to my lonely life out here and lived for nearly two years. At last, in September 1828, a mail arrived from India bringing a letter from my wife and Indian papers. The news which they brought well-nigh drove me mad."

Compton buried his face in his hands and remained silent for some time.

"You couldn't have been more than a child at that time, but perhaps you may have heard of the mysterious murder of Colonel Despard?"

He looked inquiringly at Brandon, but the latter gave no sign.

[Illustration: "THERE'S SOME MYSTERY ABOUT IT WHICH I CAN'T FATHOM."]

"Perhaps not," he continued--"no: you were too young, of course. Well, it was in the _Vishnu_, a brig in which the Colonel had embarked for Manilla. The brig was laden with hogshead staves and box shooks, and the Colonel went there partly for his health, partly on business, taking with him his valet Potts."

"What became of his family?" interrupted Brandon.

"He had a son in England at school. His wife had died not long before this at one of the hill stations, where she had gone for her health.

Grief may have had something to do with the Colonel's voyage, for he was very much attached to his wife.

"Mails used only to come at long intervals in those days and this one brought the account not only of the Colonel's fate, but of the trial at Manilla and the execution of the man that was condemned.

"It was a very mysterious case. In the month of July a boat arrived at Manilla which carried the crew and one passenger from the brig _Vishnu_. One of the men, a Malay named Uracao, was in irons, and he was immediately given up to the authorities."

"Who were the others?"

"Potts, as he called himself, the Colonel's valet, Clark, three Lascars, and the Captain, an Italian named Cigole. Information was at once laid against the Malay. Potts was the chief witness. He said that he slept in the cabin while the Colonel slept in an inner state-room; that one morning early he was roused by a frightful shriek and saw Uracao rushing from the Colonel's state-room. He sprang up, chased him, and caught him just as he was about to leap overboard. His creese covered with blood was in his hand. The Colonel, when they went to look at him, had his throat cut from ear to ear. Clark swore that he was steering the vessel and saw Potts catch Uracao, and helped to hold him. The Captain, Cigole, swore that he was waked by the noise, and rushed out in time to see this. Clark had gone as mate of the vessel. Of the Lascars, two had been down below, but one was on deck and swore to have seen the same. On this testimony Uracao was condemned and executed."

"How did they happen to leave the brig?"

"They said that a great storm came up about three days' sail from Manilla, the vessel sprang a leak, and they had to take to the boat. Their testimony was very clear indeed, and there were no contradictions; but in spite of all this it was felt to be a very mysterious case, and even the exhibition of the Malay creese, carefully covered with the stains of blood, did not altogether dispel this feeling."

"Have you got the papers yet, or are there any in Sydney that contain an account of this affair?"

"I have kept them all. You may read the whole case if you care about it."

"I should like to, very much," said Brandon, with great calmness.

"When I heard of this before the mail was opened I felt an agony of fear lest my miserable boy might be implicated in some way. To my immense relief his name did not occur at all."

"You got a letter from your wife?" said Brandon, interrogatively.

"Yes," said the old man, with a sigh. "The last that I ever received from her. Here it is." And, saying this, he opened his pocket-book and took out a letter, worn and faded, and blackened by frequent readings.

Brandon took it respectfully, and read the following:

"CALCUTTA, August 15, 1828.

"MY DEAREST HENRY,--By the papers that I send you, you will see what has occurred. Our dear Edgar is well, indeed better than usual, and I would feel much cheered if it were not for the sad fate of the poor Colonel. This is the last letter that you will ever receive from me. I am going to leave this country never to return, and do not yet know where I will go. Wherever I go I will be with my darling Edgar. Do not worry about me or about him. It will be better for you to try and forget all about us, since we are from this time the same as dead to you. Good-by forever, my dearest husband; it shall be my daily prayer that God may bless you.

"Your affectionate wife, MARY."

Brandon read this in silence, and handed it back.

"A strange letter," said Compton mournfully. "At first it gave a bitter pang to think of my Mary thus giving me up forever, so coldly, and for no reason: but afterward I began to understand why she wrote this.

"My belief is, that these villains kept my son in their clutches for some good reason, and that they had some equally good reason for keeping her. There's some mystery about it which I can't fathom. Perhaps she knew too much about the Colonel's affairs to be allowed to go free. They might have detained her by working upon her love for her son, or simply by terrifying her. She was always a timid soul, poor Mary. That letter is not her composition: there is not a word there that sounds like her, and they no doubt told her what to write, or wrote out something, and made her copy it.

"And now," said Compton, after another long pause, "I have got to the end of my story. I know nothing more about them. I have lived here ever since, at first despairing, but of late more resigned to my lot. Yet still if I have one desire in life it is to get some trace of these dear ones whom I still love as tenderly as ever. You, my dear boy, with your ability may conjecture some way. Besides, you will perhaps be traveling more or less, and may be able to hear of their fate. This is the condition that I make. I implore you by your pity for a heart-broken father to do as I say and help me. Half! why, I would give all that I have if I could get them back again."

Brandon shuddered perceptibly at the words "heart-broken father;" but he quickly recovered himself. He took Compton's hand and pressed it warmly.

"Dear friend, I will make no objection to any thing, and I promise you that all my best efforts shall be directed toward finding them out."

"Tell them to come to me, that I am rich, and can make them happy."

"I'll make them go to you if they are alive," said Brandon.

"God bless you!" ejaculated the old man, fervently.

Brandon spent the greater part of that day in making business arrangements, and in reading the papers which Compton had preserved containing an account of the Despard murder.

It was late at night before he returned to his hotel. As he went into the hall he saw a stranger sitting there in a lounging attitude reading the Sydney _News_.

He was a thin, small-sized man, with a foreign air, and quick, restless manner. His features were small, a heavy beard and mustache covered his face, his brow was low, and his eyes black and twinkling. A sharp, furtive glance which he gave at Brandon attracted the attention of the latter, for there was something in the glance that meant more than idle curiosity.

Even in the midst of his cares Brandon's curiosity was excited. He walked with assumed indifference up to the desk as though looking for the key of his room. Glancing at the hotel book his eye ranged down the column of names till it rested on the last one.

"_Pietro Cigole_."

--Cigole! the name brought singular associations. Had this man still any connection with Potts? The words of his father's letter rushed into his mind--"His arm may reach even to the antipodes to strike you. Be on your guard. Watch every one. He has some dark plan against you."

With these thoughts in his mind Brandon went up to his room.

CHAPTER III.

"A MAN OVERBOARD!"

In so small a town as Sydney then was Brandon could hope to learn all that could be learned about Cigole. By casual inquiries he learned that the Italian had come out in the _Rival_, and had given out that he was agent for a London house in the wool business. He had bought up a considerable quantity which he was preparing to ship.

Brandon could not help feeling that there was some ruse about this. Yet he thought, on the other hand, why should he flaunt his name so boldly before the world? If he is in reality following me why should he not drop his name? But then, again, why should he? Perhaps he thinks that I can not possibly know any thing about his name. Why should I? I was a child when Despard was murdered. It may be merely a similarity of names.

Brandon from time to time had opportunities of hearing more about Cigole, yet always the man seemed absorbed in business.

He wondered to himself whether he had better confide his suspicions to Mr. Compton or not. Yet why should he? The old man would become excited, and feel all sorts of wild hopes about discovering his wife and son. Could it be possible that the Italian after so many years could now afford any clue whatever? Certainly it was not very probable.

On the whole Brandon thought that this man, whoever he was or whatever his purpose might be, would be encountered best by himself singly. If Mr. Compton took part he would at once awaken Cigole's fears by his clumsiness.

Brandon felt quite certain that Mr. Compton would not know any thing about Cigole's presence in Sydney unless he himself told him. For the

old man was so filled with trouble at the loss of his partner that he could think of nothing else, and all his thoughts were taken up with closing up the concern so as to send forward remittances of money to London as soon as possible. Mr. Compton had arranged for him to draw L2000 on his arrival at London, and three months afterward L3000-L10,000 would be remitted during the following year.

Brandon had come to the conclusion to tell Mr. Compton about Cigole before he left, so that if the man remained in the country he might be bribed or otherwise induced to tell what he knew; yet thinking it possible that Cigole had designed to return in the same ship with him, he waited to see how things would turn out. As he could not help associating Cigole in his mind with Potts, so he thought that whichever way he turned this man would try to follow him. His anticipations proved correct. He had taken passage in the ship _Java_, and two days before the vessel left he learned that Cigole had taken his passage in her also, having put on board a considerable quantity of wool. On the whole Brandon felt gratified to hear this, for the close association of a long sea voyage would give him opportunities to test this man, and probe him to the bottom. The thought of danger arising to himself did not enter his mind. He believed that Cigole meant mischief, but had too much confidence in his own powers to fear it.

On the 5th of August the ship _Java_ was ready, and Mr. Compton stood on the quarterdeck to bid good-by to Brandon.

"God bless you, dear boy! You will find the money coming promptly, and Smithers & Co.'s house is one of the strongest in London. I have brought you a parting gift," said he, in a low voice. He drew from his pocket a pistol, which in those days was less known than now--indeed, this was the first of its kind which had reached Australia, and Mr. Compton had paid a fabulous price for it. "Here," said he, "take this to remember me by. They call it a revolver. Here is a box of patent cartridges that go with it. It is from me to you. And mind," he continued, while there came over his face a vengeful look which Brandon had never seen there before --"mind, if ever you see John Potts, give him one of those patent cartridges, and tell him it is the last gift of a broken-hearted father."

Brandon's face turned ghastly, and his lips seemed to freeze into a smile of deadly meaning.

"God bless you." cried Compton, "I see by your face that you will do it. Good-by."

He wrung Brandon's hand hard and left the ship.

About six feet away stood Cigole, looking over the stern and smoking a cigar. He was near enough to hear what had been said, but he did not appear to have heard it. Throwing his cigar into the water, he plunged his hands into his pockets, and began whistling a lively air.

"Aha, Capitano," said he, in a foreign accent, "I have brought my wool off at last."

Brandon paced the deck silently yet watchfully.

The good ship _Java_ went out with a fine breeze, which continued for some days, until at last nothing could be seen but the wide ocean.

In those few days Brandon had settled himself comfortably on board, and had learned pretty well the kind of life which he would have to lead for the next six months or so. The captain was a quiet, amiable sort of a person, without much force of character; the mate was more energetic and somewhat passionate; the crew consisted of the average order of men. There was no chance, certainly, for one of those conspiracies such as Mr. Compton had hinted at as having taken place on the *Vishnu*; for in his account of that affair he evidently believed that Uracao had been made a scape-goat for the sins of the others.

Brandon was soon on the best of terms with the officers of the ship. As to Cigole it was different. The fact of their being the only passengers on board might of itself have been a sufficient cause to draw them together; but Brandon found it difficult to pass beyond the extremest limits of formal intercourse. Brandon himself considered that his purposes would be best served by close association with this man; he hoped that in the course of such association he might draw something from Cigole. But Cigole baffled him constantly. He was as polite and courteous as all Italians are; he had an abundance of remarks all ready about the state of the weather, the prospects of the voyage, or the health of the seamen; but beyond these topics it was difficult to induce him to go. Brandon stifled the resentment which he felt toward this man, in his efforts to break down the barriers of formality which he kept up, and sought to draw him out on the subject of the wool trade. Yet here he was baffled. Cigole always took up the air of a man who was speaking to a rival in business, and pretended to be very cautious and guarded in his remarks about wool, as though he feared that Brandon would interfere with his prospects. This sort of thing was kept up with such great delicacy of management on Cigole's part that Brandon himself would have been completely deceived, and would have come to consider him as nothing more than a speculator in wool, had it not been for a certain deep instinct within him, which made him regard this man as one who was actuated by something far deeper than mere regards for a successful speculation.

Cigole managed to baffle the most dextrous efforts and the most delicate contrivances of Brandon. He would acknowledge that he was an Italian, and had been in all parts of Italy, but carefully refrained from telling where he was born. He asserted that this was the first time that he had been in the Eastern seas. He remarked once, casually, that Cigole was a very common name among Italians. He said that he had no acquaintances at all in England, and was only going there now because he heard that there was a good market for wool. At another time he spoke as though much of his life had been passed in Marseilles, and hinted that he was a partner of a commercial house there.

Cigole never made any advances, and never even met half-way those which Brandon made. He was never off his guard for one instant. Polite, smiling, furtive, never looking Brandon fairly in the face, he usually spoke with a profusion of bows, gestures, and commonplaces, adopting, in fact, that part which is always at once both the easiest and the safest to play--the non-committal, pure and perfect.

It was cunning, but low cunning after all, and Brandon perceived that, for one who had some purpose to accomplish, with but a common soul to sustain him, this was the most ordinary way to do it. A villain of profounder cunning or of larger spirit would have pursued a different path. He would have conversed freely and with apparent unreserve; he would have yielded to all friendly advances, and made them himself; he

would have shown the highest art by concealing art, in accordance with the hackneyed proverb, "Ars est celare artem."

Brandon despised him as an ordinary villain, and hardly thought it worth his while to take any particular notice of him, except to watch him in a general way. But Cigole, on the contrary, was very different. His eyes, which never met those of Brandon fairly, were constantly watching him. When moving about the quarter-deck or when sitting in the cabin he usually had the air of a man who was pretending to be intent on something else, but in reality watching Brandon's acts or listening to his words. To any other man the knowledge of this would have been in the highest degree irksome. But to Brandon it was gratifying, since it confirmed his suspicions. He saw this man, whose constant efforts were directed toward not committing himself by word, doing that very thing by his attitude, his gesture, and the furtive glance of his eye. Brandon, too, had his part, but it was infinitely greater than that of Cigole, and the purpose that now animated his life was unintelligible to this man who watched him. But Cigole's whole soul was apparent to Brandon; and by his small arts, his low cunning, his sly observation, and many other peculiarities, he exhibited that which is seen in its perfection in the ordinary spy of despotic countries, such as used to abound most in Rome and Naples in the good old days.

For the common spy of Europe may deceive the English or American traveler; but the Frenchman, the German, the Spaniard, or the Italian, always recognizes him.

So Brandon's superior penetration discovered the true character of Cigole.

He believed that this man was the same Cigole who had figured in the affair of the _Vishnu_; that he had been sent out by Potts to do some injury to himself, and that he was capable of any crime. Yet he could not see how he could do any thing. He certainly could not incite the simple-minded captain and the honest mate to conspiracy. He was too great a coward to attempt any violence. So Brandon concluded that he had simply come to watch him so as to learn his character, and carry back to Potts all the knowledge that he might gain.

This was his conclusion after a close association of one month with Cigole. Yet he made up his mind not to lose sight of this man. To him he appeared only an agent in villainy, and therefore unworthy of vengeance; yet he might be made use of as an aid in that vengeance. He therefore wished to have a clue by which he might afterward find him.

"You and I," said he one day, in conversation, "are both in the same trade. If I ever get to England I may wish some time to see you. Where can I find you?"

Cigole looked in twenty different directions, and hesitated for some time.

"Well," said he at last, "I do not think that you will wish to see me--" and he hesitated; "but," he resumed, with an evil smile, "if you should by any possibility wish to do so, you can find out where I am by inquiring of Giovanni Cavallo, 16 Red Lion Street, London."

"Perhaps I may not wish to," said Brandon, coolly, "and perhaps I may. At any rate, if I do, I will remember to inquire of Giovanni Cavallo, 16

Red Lion Street, London."

He spoke with deep emphasis on the address. Cigole looked uncomfortable, as though he had at last made the mistake which he dreaded, and had committed himself.

So the time passed.

After the first few days the weather had become quite stormy. Strong head-winds, accompanied often by very heavy rains, had to be encountered. In spite of this the ship had a very good passage northward, and met with no particular obstacle until her course was turned toward the Indian Ocean. Then all the winds were dead against her, and for weeks a succession of long tacks far to the north and to the south brought her but a short distance onward. Every day made the wind more violent and the storm worse. And now the season of the equinox was approaching, when the monsoons change, and all the winds that sweep over these seas alter their courses. For weeks before and after this season the winds are all unsettled, and it seems as if the elements were let loose. From the first week in September this became manifest, and every day brought them face to face with sterner difficulties. Twice before the captain had been to Australia; and for years he had been in the China trade; so that he knew these seas well; but he said that he had never known the equinoctial storms begin so early, and rage with such violence.

Opposed by such difficulties as these the ship made but a slow passage--the best routes had not yet been discovered--and it was the middle of September before they entered the Indian Ocean. The weather then became suddenly calm, and they drifted along beyond the latitude of the western extremity of Java, about a hundred miles south of the Straits of Sunda. Here they began to encounter the China fleet which steers through this strait, for every day one or more sails were visible.

Here they were borne on helplessly by the ocean currents, which at this place are numerous and distracted. The streams that flow through the many isles of the Indian Archipelago, uniting with the greater southern streams, here meet and blend, causing great difficulties to navigation, and often baffling even the most experienced seaman. Yet it was not all left to the currents, for frequently and suddenly the storms came up; and the weather, ever changeable, kept the sailors constantly on the alert.

Yet between the storms the calms were frequent, and sometimes long continued, though of such a sort as required watchfulness. For out of the midst of dead calms the storm would suddenly rise in its might, and all the care which experience could suggest was not always able to avert disaster.

"I don't like this weather, Mr. Brandon. It's the worst that we could have, especially just here."

"Why just here?"

"Why, we're opposite the Straits of Sunda, the worst place about these parts."

"What for?"

"Pirates. The Malays, you know. We're not over well prepared to meet them, I'm afraid. If they come we'll have to fight them the best way we can; and these calms are the worst thing for us, because the Malay proas can get along in the lightest wind, or with oars, when we can't move at all."

"Are the Malays any worse than usual now?" asked Brandon.

"Well, no worse than they've been for the last ten years. Zangorri is the worst of them all."

"Zangorri! I've heard of him."

"I should think you had. Why, there never was a pirate in these seas that did so much damage. No mortal knows the ships that devil has captured and burned."

"I hope you have arms for the seamen, at any rate."

"Oh, we have one howitzer, and small-arms for the men, and we will have to get along the best way we can with these; but the owners ought never to send us here without a better equipment."

"I suppose they think it would cost too much."

"Yes; that's it. They think only about the profits, and trust to luck for our safety. Well, I only hope we'll get safely out of this place--that's all."

And the captain walked off much more excited than usual.

They drifted on through days of calm, which were succeeded by fierce but short-lived storms, and then followed by calms. Their course lay sometimes north, sometimes south, sometimes nowhere. Thus the time passed, until at length, about the middle of September, they came in sight of a long, low island of sand.

"I've heard of that sand-bank before," said the captain, who showed some surprise at seeing it; "but I didn't believe it was here. It's not down in the charts. Here we are three hundred and fifty miles southwest of the Straits of Sunda, and the chart makes this place all open water. Well, seein's believin'; and after this I'll swear that there is such a thing as Coffin Island."

"Is that the name?"

"That's the name an old sea-captain gave it, and tried to get the Admiralty to put it on the charts, but they wouldn't. But this is it, and no mistake."

"Why did he call it Coffin Island?"

"Well, he thought that rock looked like a coffin, and it's dangerous enough when a fog comes to deserve that name."

Brandon looked earnestly at the island which the captain mentioned, and which they were slowly approaching.

It lay toward the north, while the ship's course, if it had any in that

calm, was southwest. It was not more than six miles away, and appeared to be about five miles long. At the nearest extremity a black rock arose to a height of about fifty feet, which appeared to be about five hundred feet long, and was of such a shape that the imagination might easily see a resemblance to a coffin. At the farthest extremity of the island was a low mound. The rest of the island was flat, low, and sandy, with no trace of vegetation perceptible from the ship, except a line of dingy green under the rock, which looked like grass.

The ship drifted slowly on.

Meanwhile the captain, in anticipation of a storm, had caused all the sails to be taken in, and stood anxiously watching the sky toward the southwest.

There a dense mass of clouds lay piled along the horizon, gloomy, lowering, menacing; frowning over the calm seas as though they would soon destroy that calm, and fling forth all the fury of the winds. These clouds seemed to have started up from the sea, so sudden had been their appearance; and now, as they gathered themselves together, their forms distended, and heightened, and reached forward vast arms into the sky, striving to climb there, rolling upward voluminous cloud masses which swiftly ascended toward the zenith. So quick was the progress of these clouds that they did not seem to come from the banks below; but it was rather as though all the air suddenly condensed its moisture and made it visible in these dark masses.

As yet there was no wind, and the water was as smooth as glass; but over the wide surface, as far as the eye could reach, the long swell of the ocean had changed into vast rolling undulations, to the motion of which the ship yielded, slowly ascending and descending as the waters rose and fell, while the yards creaked, and the rigging twanged to the strain upon them.

Every moment the sky grew darker, and as gloom gathered above so it increased below, till all the sea spread out a smooth ebon mass. Darkness settled down, and the sun's face was thus obscured, and a preternatural gloom gathered upon the face of nature. Overhead vast black clouds went sweeping past, covering all things, faster and faster, till at last far down in the northern sky the heavens were all obscured.

But amidst all this there was as yet not a breath of wind. Far above the wind careered in a narrow current, which did not touch the surface of the sea but only bore onward the clouds. The agitation of the sky above contrasted with the stillness below made the latter not consoling but rather fearful, for this could be none other than that treacherous stillness which precedes the sudden outburst of the hurricane.

For that sudden outburst all were now looking, expecting it every moment. On the side of the ship where the wind was expected the captain was standing, looking anxiously at the black clouds on the horizon, and all the crew were gazing there in sympathy with him. From that quarter the wind would burst, and it was for this assault that all the preparations had been made.

[Illustration: "HE PUSHED HIM HEADLONG OVER THE RAIL AND HELPLESSLY INTO THE SEA."]

For some time Brandon had watched the collecting clouds, but at length

he turned away, and seemed to find a supreme fascination in the sand-bank. He stood at the stern of the ship, looking fixedly toward the rock, his arms folded, and his thoughts all absorbed in that one thing. A low railing ran round the quarter-deck. The helmsman stood in a sheltered place which rose only two feet above the deck. The captain stood by the companion-way, looking south at the storm; the mate was near the capstan, and all were intent and absorbed in their expectation of a sudden squall.

Close by the rudder-post stood Cigole, looking with all the rest at the gathering storm. His face was only half turned, and as usual he watched this with only a furtive glance, for at times his stealthy eyes turned toward Brandon; and he alone of all on board did not seem to be absorbed by some overmastering thought.

Suddenly a faint, fluttering ripple appeared to the southward; it came quickly: it seemed to flash over the waters; with the speed of the wind it moved on, till a quick, fresh blast struck the ship and sighed through the rigging. Then a faint breathing of wind succeeded; but far away there rose a low moan like that which arises from some vast cataract at a great distance, whose roar, subdued by distance, sounds faintly, yet warningly, to the ear.

At this first touch of the tempest, and the menacing voice of its approach, not a word was spoken, but all stood mute. Brandon alone appeared not to have noticed it. He still stood with folded arms and absorbed air, gazing at the island.

The roar of the waters in the distance grew louder, and in the direction from which it came the dark water was all white with foam, and the boiling flood advanced nearer in myriad-numbered waves, which seemed now like an army rushing to the charge, tossing on high its crested heads and its countless foam-plumes, and threatening to bear down all before it.

At last the tornado struck.

At the fierce blast of the storm the ship rolled far over, the masts creaked and groaned, the waves rushed up and dashed against the side.

At that instant Cigole darted quickly toward Brandon, and the moment that the vessel yielded to the blow of the storm he fell violently against him. Before Brandon had noticed the storm or had time to steady himself he had pushed him headlong over the rail and helplessly into the sea--

"--liquidæ projecit in undas
Praecipitem."

Cigole clung to the rail, and instantly shrieked out:

"Man overboard!"

The startling cry rang through the ship. The captain turned round with a face of agony.

"Man overboard!" shouted Cigole again. "Help! It's Brandon!"

"Brandon!" cried the captain. "He's lost! O God!"

He took up a hen-coop from its fastenings and flung it into the sea, and a couple of pails after it.

He then looked aloft and to the south with eyes of despair. He could do nothing. For now the storm was upon them, and the ship was plunging furiously through the waters with the speed of a race-horse at the touch of the gale. On the lee-side lay the sand-bank, now only three miles away, whose unknown shallows made their present position perilous in the extreme. The ship could not turn to try and save the lost passenger; it was only by keeping straight on that there was any hope of avoiding that lee-shore.

All on board shared the captain's despair, for all saw that nothing could be done. The ship was at the mercy of the hurricane. To turn was impossible. If they could save their own lives now it would be as much as they could do.

Away went the ship--away, farther, and farther, every moment leaving at a greater distance the lost man who struggled in the waters.

At last they had passed the danger, the island was left behind, and the wide sea lay all around.

But by this time the storm was at its height; the ship could not maintain its proper course, but, yielding to the gale, fled to the northwest far out of its right direction.

CHAPTER IV.

SINKING IN DEEP WATERS.

Brandon, overwhelmed by the rush of waters, half suffocated, and struggling in the rush of the waves, shrieked out a few despairing cries for help, and sought to keep his head above water as best he could. But his cries were borne off by the fierce winds, and the ship as it careered madly before the blast was soon out of hearing.

He was a first-rate swimmer, but in a sea like this it needed all his strength and all his skill to save himself from impending death. Encumbered by his clothes it was still more difficult, yet so fierce was the rush of wind and wave that he dared not stop for a moment in his struggles in order to divest himself of his clothing.

At first, by a mere blind instinct, he tried to swim after the ship, as though by any possibility he could ever reach her again, but the hurricane was against him, and he was forced sideways far out of the course which he was trying to take. At last the full possession of his senses was restored, and following the ship no longer, he turned toward the direction where that sand island lay which had been the cause of his disaster. At first it was hidden from view by the swell of waves that rose in front, but soon rising upon the crest of one of these he perceived far away the dark form of the coffin-shaped rock. Here then before him lay the island, and toward this both wind and wave impelled him.

But the rock was far to the right, and it might be that the island did not extend far enough to meet him as he neared it. It was about five miles in length, but in his efforts he might not be able to reach even the western extremity. Still there was nothing else to do but to try. Resolutely, therefore, though half despairingly, he put forth his best strength, and struggled manfully to win the shore.

That lone and barren sand-bank, after all, offered but a feeble chance for life. Even if he did reach it, which was doubtful, what could he do? Starvation instead of drowning would be his fate. More than once it occurred to him that it would be better then and there to give up all efforts and let himself go. But then there came the thought of those dear ones who waited for him in England, the thought of the villain who had thrown him from the ship, and the greater villain who had sent him out on his murderous errand. He could not bear the idea that they should triumph over him so easily and so quickly. His vengeance should not be taken from him; it had been baffled, but it still nerved his arm.

A half hour's struggle, which seemed like many hours, had brought him much nearer to the island, but his strength was almost exhausted. His clothes, caught in the rush of the waves, and clinging to him, confined the free action of his limbs, and lent an additional weight. Another half hour's exertion might possibly bring him to the shore, but that exertion hardly seemed possible. It was but with difficulty now that he could strike out. Often the rush of the waves from behind would overwhelm him, and it was only by convulsive efforts that he was able to surmount the raging billows and regain his breath.

Efforts like these, however, were too exhaustive to be long continued. Nature failed, and already a wild despair came over him. For a quarter of an hour longer he had continued his exertions; and now the island was so near that a quarter of an hour more might bring him to it. But even that exertion of strength was now no longer possible. Faintly and feebly, and with failing limbs and fiercely-throbbing heart, he toiled on, until at last any further effort seemed impossible. Before him was the mound which he had noticed from the ship. He was at the western extremity of the island. He saw that he was being carried in such a direction that even if he did struggle on he might be borne helplessly past the island and out into the open sea. Already he could look past the island, and see the wide expanse of white foaming waves which threatened to engulf him. The sight weakened what little strength was left, and made his efforts even feebler.

Despairingly he looked around, not knowing what he sought, but seeking still for something, he knew not what. In that last look of despair his eyes caught sight of something which at once gave him renewed hope. It was not far away. Borne along by the waves it was but a few yards distant, and a little behind him. It was the hen-coop which the Captain of the _Java_ had thrown overboard so as to give Brandon a chance for life. That last chance was now thrown in his way, for the hen-coop had followed the same course with himself, and had been swept along not very far from him.

Brandon was nerved to new efforts by the sight of this. He turned and exerted the last remnants of his strength in order to reach this means of safety. It was near enough to be accessible. A few vigorous strokes, a few struggles with the waves, and his hands clutched the bars with the grasp of a drowning man.

It was a large hen-coop, capable of keeping several men afloat. Brandon clung to this and at last had rest. Every minute of respite from such struggles as he had carried on restored his strength to a greater degree. He could now keep his head high out of the water and avoid the engulfing fury of the waves behind. Now at last he could take a better survey of the prospect before him, and see more plainly whither he was going.

The sand-bank lay before him; the mount at the western extremity was in front of him, not very far away. The rock which lay at the eastern end was now at a great distance, for he had been swept by the current abreast of the island, and was even now in danger of being carried past it. Still there was hope, for wind and wave were blowing directly toward the island, and there was a chance of his being carried full upon its shore. Yet the chance was a slender one, for the set of the tide carried him beyond the line of the western extremity.

Every minute brought him nearer, and soon his fate would be decided. Nearer and nearer he came, still clinging to the hen-coop, and making no efforts whatever, but reserving and collecting together all his strength, so as to put it forth at the final hour of need.

But as he came nearer the island appeared to move more and more out of the line of his approach. Under these circumstances his only chance was to float as near as possible, and then make a last effort to reach the land.

Nearer and nearer he came. At last he was close by it, but the extreme point of the island lay to the right more than twenty yards. This was the crisis of his fate, for now if he floated on any longer he would be carried farther away.

The shore was here low but steep, the waters appeared to be deep, and a heavy surf dashed upon the island, and threw up its spray far over the mound. He was so near that he could distinguish the pebbles on the beach, and could see beyond the mound a long, flat surface with thin grass growing.

Beyond this point was another a hundred yards away, but farther out of his reach, and affording no hope whatever. Between the two points there was an inlet into the island showing a little cove; but the surf just here became wilder, and long rollers careered one past another over the intervening space. It was a hopeless prospect. Yet it was his last chance.

Brandon made up his mind. He let go the hen-coop, and summoning up all his strength he struck out for the shore. But this time the wind and sea were against him, bearing him past the point, and the waves dashed over him more quickly and furiously than before. He was swept past the point before he had made half a dozen strokes; he was borne on still struggling; and now on his left lay the rollers which he had seen. In spite of all his efforts he was farther away from the island than when he had left the hen-coop. Yet all hope and all life depended on the issue of this last effort. The fifteen or twenty minutes of rest and of breathing-space which he had gained had been of immense advantage, and he struggled with all the force which could be inspired by the nearness of safety. Yet, after all, human efforts can not withstand the fury of the elements, and here against this strong sea the strongest swimmer

could not hope to contend successfully.

"Never I ween was swimmer
In such an evil case."

He swam toward the shore, but the wind striking him from one side, and urging on the sea, drove him sideways. Some progress was made, but the force of the waters was fearful, and for every foot that he moved forward he was carried six feet to leeward. He himself saw this, and calculating his chances he perceived with despair that he was already beyond the first point, and that at the present rate there was no possibility of gaining the farther point.

Already the waves leaped exultingly about him, dashing over him now more wildly, since he was exposed more than before to their full sweep. Already the rollers lay close beside him on his left. Then it seemed as though he would be engulfed. Turning his head backward with a last faint thought of trying to regain the hen-coop, so as to prolong life somewhat, he saw it far away out of his reach. Then all hope left him.

He was now at the outermost line of rollers. At the moment that he turned his head a huge wave raised him up and bore him forward. He struggled still, even in that time of despair, and fought with his enemies. They bore him onward, however, none the less helplessly, and descending carried him with them.

But now at last, as he descended with that wave, hope came back, and all his despair vanished.

For as the wave flung him downward his feet touched bottom, and he stood for a moment erect, on solid, hard sand, in water that scarcely reached above his knees. It was for a moment only that he stood, however, for the sweep of the water bore him down, and he fell forward. Before he could regain himself another wave came and hurled him farther forward.

By a violent effort he staggered to his feet. In an instant he comprehended his position. At this western end the island descended gently into the water, and the shoal which it formed extended for miles away. It was this shoal that caused the long rollers that came over them so vehemently, and in such marked contrast with the more abrupt waves of the sea behind.

In an instant he had comprehended this, and had taken his course of action.

Now he had foothold. Now the ground beneath lent its aid to his endeavor; he was no longer altogether at the mercy of the water. He bounded forward toward the shore in such a direction that he could approach it without opposing himself entirely to the waves. The point that stretched out was now within his reach. The waves rolled past it, but by moving in an oblique direction he could gain it.

[Illustration: "HE STAGGERED UP A FEW PACES UPON THE SANDY DECLIVITY."]

Again and again the high rollers came forward, hurling him up as they caught him in their embrace, and then casting him down again. As he was caught up from the bottom he sustained himself on the moving mass, and supported himself on the crest of the wave, but as soon as his feet touched bottom again he sprang forward toward the point which now became

every minute more accessible. Wave after wave came, each was more furious, each more ravenous than the preceding, as though hounding one another on to make sure of their prey. But now that the hope of life was strong, and safety had grown almost assured, the deathlike weakness which but shortly before had assailed him gave way to new-born strength and unconquerable resolve.

At length he reached a place where the rollers were of less dimensions. His progress became more rapid, until at length the water became exceedingly shallow, being not more than a foot in depth. Here the first point, where the mound was, protected it from the wind and sea. This was the cove which he had noticed. The water was all white with foam, but offered scarcely any resistance to him. He had but to wade onward to the shore.

That shore was at last attained. He staggered up a few paces upon the sandy declivity, and then fell down exhausted upon the ground.

He could not move. It was late; night came on, but he lay where he had fallen, until at last he fell into a sound sleep.

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERY OF COFFIN ISLAND.

When Brandon awaked on the following morning the sun was already high in the sky. He rose at once and walked slowly up, with stiffened limbs, to a higher spot. His clothes already were partly dry, but they were uncomfortable and impeded his motion. He took off nearly every thing, and laid them out on the sand. Then he examined his pistol and the box containing cartridges. This box held some oil also, with the help of which the pistol was soon in good order. As the cartridges were encased in copper they were uninjured. He then examined a silver case which was suspended round his neck. It was cylindrical in shape, and the top unscrewed. On opening this he took out his father's letter and the inclosure, both of which were uninjured. He then rolled them up in a small compass and restored them to their place.

He now began to look about him. The storm had ceased, the waves had subsided, a slight breeze was blowing from the sea which just ruffled the water and tempered the heat. The island on which he had been cast was low, flat, and covered with a coarse grass which grew out of the sand. But the sand itself was in many places thrown up into ridges, and appeared as though it was constantly shifting and changing. The mound was not far away, and at the eastern end of the island he could see the black outline of the rock which he had noticed from the ship. The length he had before heard to be about five miles; the width appeared about one mile, and in its whole aspect it seemed nothing better than the abomination of desolation.

At the end where he was the island terminated in two points, between which there was the cove where he had found refuge. One of these points was distinguished by the mound already mentioned, which from where he stood appeared of an irregular oblong shape. The other point was low, and descended gently into the water. The island itself appeared to be

merely the emergence of some sand-bank which, perhaps, had been formed by currents and eddies; for here the currents of the Strait of Sunda encounter those from the Southern and Indian oceans, and this bank lay probably near their point of union.

A short survey showed him this. It showed him also that there was but little if any hope of sustaining life, and that he had escaped drowning only perhaps to perish by the more lingering agonies of starvation.

Already hunger and thirst had begun to be felt, and how to satisfy these wants he knew not. Still he would not despair. Perhaps the _Java_ might return in search of him, and his confinement would only last for a day or so.

He understood the act of Cigole in a way that was satisfactory to himself. He had thrown him overboard, but had made it appear like an accident. As he felt he had heard the shout "Man overboard!" and was now able to account for it in this way. So a faint hope remained that the captain of the _Java_ would not give him up.

Still subsistence of some kind was necessary, and there was nothing to be done but to explore the sandy tract before him. Setting forth he walked toward the rock along the sea-shore. On one side toward the north the shore was shallow and sloped gently into the water; but on the southern side it descended more abruptly. The tide was out. A steep beach appeared here covered with stones to which myriads of shell-fish were attached. The sight of these suggested the idea to him that on the opposite side there might be clams in the sand. He walked over there in search of them. Here the slope was so gradual that extensive flats were left uncovered by the receding tide.

When a boy he had been sometimes accustomed to wander on sand flats near his home, and dig up these clams in sport. Now his boyish experience became useful. Myriads of little holes dotted the sand, which he knew to be the indications of these molluscs, and he at once began to scoop in the sand with his hands. In a short time he had found enough to satisfy his hunger, and what was better, he saw all around an unlimited supply of such food.

Yet food was not enough. Drink was equally necessary. The salt of these shell-fish aggravated the thirst that he had already begun to feel, and now a fear came over him that there might be no water. The search seemed a hopeless one; but he determined to seek for it nevertheless, and the only place that seemed to promise success was the rock at the eastern end. Toward this he now once more directed his steps.

The island was all of sand except the rocks on the south beach and the cliff at the eastern end. Coarse grass grew very extensively over the surface, but the sand was fine and loose, and in many places thrown up into heaps of many different shapes. The grass grew in tufts or in spires and blades, thinly scattered, and nowhere forming a sod. The soil was difficult to walk over, and Brandon sought the beach, where the damp sand afforded a firmer foothold. In about an hour and a half he reached the rock.

It was between five hundred and six hundred feet in length, and about fifty in height. There was no resemblance to a coffin now as Brandon approached it, for that likeness was only discernible at a distance. Its sides were steep and precipitous. It was one black solid mass, without

any outlying crags, or any fragments near it. Its upper surface appeared to be level, and in various places it was very easy to ascend. Up one of these places Brandon climbed, and soon stood on the top.

Near him the summit was somewhat rounded; at the farther end it was flat and irregular; but between the two ends it sank into a deep hollow, where he saw that which at once excited a tumult of hope and fear. It was a pool of water at least fifty feet in diameter, and deep too, since the sides of the rock went down steeply. But was it fresh or salt? Was it the accumulation from the showers of the rainy season of the tropics, or was it but the result of the past night's storm, which had hurled wave after wave here till the hollow was filled?

With hasty footsteps he rushed toward the margin of the pool, and bent down to taste. For a moment or so, by a very natural feeling, he hesitated, then, throwing off the fever of suspense, he bent down, kneeling on the margin, till his lips touched the water.

It was fresh! Yes, it was from the heavens above, and not from the sea below. It was the fresh rains from the sky that had filled this deep pool, and not the spray from the sea. Again and again he quaffed the refreshing liquid. Not a trace of the salt-water could be detected. It was a natural cistern which thus lay before him, formed as though for the reception of the rain. For the present, at least, he was safe.

He had food and drink. As long as the rainy season lasted, and for some time after, life was secure. Life becomes doubly sweet after being purchased by such efforts as those which Brandon had put forth, and the thought that for the present, at least, he was safe did not fail to fill him with the most buoyant hope. To him, indeed, it seemed just then as if nothing more could be desired. He had food and drink in abundance. In that climate shelter was scarcely needed. What more could he wish?

The first day was passed in exploring the rock to see if there was any place which he might select for his abode. There were several fissures in the rock at the eastern end, and one of these he selected. He then went back for his clothes, and brought them to this place. So the first day went.

All the time his eyes wandered round the horizon to see if a sail might be in sight. After two or three days, in which nothing appeared, he ceased his constant watch, though still from time to time, by a natural impulse, he continued to look. After all he thought that rescue might come. He was somewhat out of the track of the China ships, but still not very much so. An adverse wind might bring a ship close by. The hope of this sustained him.

But day succeeded to day and week to week with no appearance of any thing whatever on the wide ocean.

During these long days he passed the greater part of his time either under the shelter of the rock, where he could best avoid the hot sun, or when the sea-breeze blew on its summit. The frightful solitude offered to him absolutely nothing which could distract his thoughts, or prevent him from brooding upon the hopelessness of his situation.

Brooding thus, it became his chief occupation to read over and over his father's letter and the inclosure, and conjecture what might be his course of action if he ever escaped from this place. His father's voice

seemed now to sound to him more imploringly than ever; and the winds at night, as they moaned round the rock, seemed to modulate themselves, to form their sounds to something like a wild cry, and wail forth, "Come home!" Yet that home was now surely farther removed than ever, and the winds seemed only to mock him. More sad and more despairing than Ulysses on the Ogygian shore, he too wasted away with home-sickness.

[Greek: kateibeto se glukus aion noston oduromeno.]

Fate thus far had been against him, and the melancholy recollections of his past life could yield nothing but despondency. Driven from home when but a boy, he had become an exile, had wandered to the other side of the world, and was just beginning to attain some prospect of a fortune when this letter came. Rising up from the prostration of that blow, he had struggled against fate, but only to encounter a more over-mastering force, and this last stroke had been the worst of all. Could he rally after this? Could he now hope to escape?

Fate had been against him; but yet, perhaps, here, on this lonely island, he might find a turning-point. Here he might find that turning in the long lane which the proverb speaks of. "The day is darkest before the morn," and perhaps he would yet have Fate on his side.

But the sternest and most courageous spirit can hardly maintain its fortitude in an utter and unmitigated solitude. St. Simeon Stylites could do so, but he felt that on the top of that pillar there rested the eyes of the heavenly hosts and of admiring mankind. It is when the consciousness of utter solitude comes that the soul sinks. When the prisoner thinks that he is forgotten by the outside world, then he loses that strength which sustained him while he believed himself remembered.

It was the lot of Brandon to have this sense of utter desolation: to feel that in all the world there was not one human being that knew of his fate; and to fear that the eye of Providence only saw him with indifference. With bitterness he thought of the last words of his father's letter: "If in that other world to which I am going the disembodied spirit can assist man, then be sure, O my son, I will assist you, and in the crisis of your fate I will be near, if it is only to communicate to your spirit what you ought to do."

A melancholy smile passed over his face as he thought of what seemed to him the utter futility of that promise.

Now, as the weeks passed, his whole mode of life affected both mind and body. Yet, if it be the highest state of man for the soul to live by itself, as Socrates used to teach, and sever itself from bodily association, Brandon surely had attained, without knowing it, a most exalted stage of existence. Perhaps it was the period of purification and preparation for future work.

The weather varied incessantly, calms and storms alternating; sometimes all the sea lying dull, listless, and glassy under the burning sky; at other times both sea and sky convulsed with the war of elements.

At last there came one storm so tremendous that it exceeded all that Brandon had ever seen any where.

The wind gathered itself up from the south-east, and for a whole day the forces of the tempest collected themselves, till at last they burst in

fury upon the island. In sustained violence and in the frenzy of its assault it far surpassed that first storm. Before sundown the storm was at its height, and, though yet day, the clouds were so dense and so black that it became like night. Night came on, and the storm, and roar, and darkness increased steadily every hour. So intense was the darkness that the hand, when held close by the face, could not be distinguished. So restless was the force of the wind that Brandon, on looking out to sea, had to cling to the rock to prevent himself from being blown away. A dense rain of spray streamed through the air, and the surf, rolling up, flung its crest all across the island. Brandon could hear beneath him, amidst some of the pauses of the storm, the hissing and bubbling of foaming waters, as though the whole island, submerged by the waves, was slowly settling down into the depths of the ocean.

Brandon's place of shelter was sufficiently elevated to be out of the reach of the waves that might rush upon the land, and on the lee-side of the rock, so that he was sufficiently protected. Sand, which he had carried up, formed his bed. In this place, which was more like the lair of a wild beast than the abode of a human being, he had to live. Many wakeful nights he had passed there, but never had he known such a night as this.

There was a frenzy about this hurricane that would have been inconceivable if he had not witnessed it. His senses, refined and rendered acute by long vigils and slender diet, seemed to detect audible words in the voice of the storm. Looking out through the gloom his sight seemed to discern shapes flitting by like lightning, as though the fabled spirits of the storm had gathered here.

It needed all the robust courage of his strong nature to sustain himself in the presence of the wild fancies that now came rushing and thronging before his mind. The words of his father sounded in his ears; he thought he heard them spoken from the air; he thought he saw an aged spectral face, wan with suffering and grief, in front of his cave. He covered his eyes with his hands, and sought to reason down his superstitious feeling. In vain. Words rang in his ears, muffled words, as though muttered in the storm, and his mind, which had brooded so long over his father's letter, now gave shape to the noise of winds and waves.

"--In the crisis of your fate I will be near."

"I shall go mad!" cried Brandon, aloud, and he started to his feet.

But the storm went on with its fury, and still his eyes saw shapes, and his ears heard fantastic sounds. So the night passed until at last the storm had exhausted itself. Then Brandon sank down and slept far on into the day.

When he awaked again the storm had subsided. The sea was still boisterous, and a fresh breeze blew which he inhaled with pleasure. After obtaining some shell-fish, and satisfying his appetite, he went to the summit of the rock for water, and then stood looking out at sea.

His eye swept the whole circuit of the horizon without seeing any thing, until at length he turned to look in a westwardly direction where the island spread out before him. Here an amazing sight met his eyes.

The mound at the other end had become completely and marvelously changed. On the previous day it had preserved its usual shape, but now

it was no longer smoothly rounded. On the contrary it was irregular, the northern end being still a sort of hillock, but the middle and southern end was flat on the surface and dark in color. From the distance at which he stood it looked like a rock, around which the sand had accumulated, but which had been uncovered by the violent storm of the preceding night.

At that distance it appeared like a rock, but there was something in its shape and in its position which made it look like a ship which had been cast ashore. The idea was a startling one, and he at once dismissed it as absurd. But the more he looked the closer the resemblance grew until at last, unable to endure this suspense, he hurried off in that direction.

During all the time that he had been on the island he had never been close to the mound. He had remained for the most part in the neighborhood of the rock, and had never thought that a barren sand hillock was worthy of a visit. But now it appeared a very different object in his eyes.

He walked on over half the intervening distance, and now the resemblance instead of fading out, as he anticipated, grew more close. It was still too far to be seen very distinctly: but there, even from that distance, he saw the unmistakable outline of a ship's hull.

There was now scarcely any doubt about this. There it lay. Every step only made it more visible. He walked more quickly onward, filled with wonder, and marveling by what strange chance this vessel could have reached its present position.

There it lay. It could not by any possibility have been cast ashore on the preceding night. The mightiest billows that ever rose from ocean could never have lifted a ship so far upon the shore. To him it was certain that it must have been there for a long time, and that the sand had been heaped around it by successive storms.

As he walked nearer he regarded more closely the formation of this western end. He saw the low northern point, and then the cove where he had escaped from the sea. He noticed that the southern point where the mound was appeared to be a sort of peninsula, and the theory suggested itself to him by which he could account for this wonder. This ship, he saw, must have been wrecked at some time long before upon this island. As the shore was shallow it had run aground and stuck fast in the sand. But successive storms had continued to beat upon it until the moving sands which the waters were constantly driving about had gathered all around it higher and higher. At last, in the course of time, a vast accumulation had gathered about this obstacle till a new bank had been formed and joined to the island; and the winds had lent their aid, heaping up the loose sand on high till all the ship was covered. But last night's storm had to some extent undone the work, and now the wreck was once more exposed.

Brandon was happy in his conjecture and right in his theory. All who know any thing about the construction and nature of sand islands such as this are aware that the winds and waters work perpetual changes. The best known example of this is the far-famed Sable Island, which lies off the coast of Nova Scotia, in the direct track of vessels crossing the Atlantic between England and the United States. Here there is repeated on a far larger scale the work which Brandon saw on Coffin Island. Sable

Island is twenty miles long and about one in width--the crest of a vast heap of sand which rises out of the ocean's bed. Here the wildest storms in the world rage uncontrolled, and the keepers of the light-house have but little shelter. Not long ago an enormous flag-staff was torn from out its place and hurled away into the sea. In fierce storms the spray drives all across, and it is impossible to venture out. But most of all, Sable Island is famous for the melancholy wrecks that have taken place there. Often vessels that have the bad fortune to run aground are broken up, but sometimes the sand gathers about them and covers them up. There are numerous mounds here which are known to conceal wrecked ships. Some of these have been opened, and the wreck beneath has been brought to view. Sometimes also after a severe gale these sandy mounds are torn away and the buried vessels are exposed.

[Illustration: "GREAT HEAVENS!" CRIED BRANDON, STARTING BACK--"THE VISHNU!"]

Far away in Australia Brandon had heard of Sable Island from different sea captains who had been in the Atlantic trade. The stories which these men had to tell were all largely tinged with the supernatural. One in particular who had been wrecked there, and had taken refuge for the night in a hut built by the British Government for wrecked sailors, told some wild story about the apparition of a negro who waked him up at dead of night and nearly killed him with horror.

With all these thoughts in his mind Brandon approached the wreck and at last stood close beside it.

It had been long buried. The hull was about two-thirds uncovered. A vast heap of sand still clung to the bow, but the stern stood out full in view. Although it must have been there for a long time the planks were still sound, for they seemed to have been preserved from decay by the sand. All the calking, however, had become loose, and the seams gaped widely. There were no masts, but the lower part of the shrouds still remained, showing that the vessel was a brig. So deeply was it buried in the sand, that Brandon, from where he stood, could look over the whole deck, he himself being almost on a level with the deck. The masts appeared to have been chopped away. The hatchways were gone. The hold appeared to be filled with sand, but there may have been only a layer of sand concealing something beneath. Part of the planking of the deck as well as most of the taffrail on the other side had been carried away. Astern there was a quarter-deck. There was no skylight, but only dead-lights set on the deck. The door of the cabin still remained and was shut tight.

All these things Brandon took in at a glance. A pensive melancholy came over him, and a feeling of pity for the inanimate ship as though she were capable of feeling. By a natural curiosity he walked around to the stern to see if he could read her name.

The stern was buried deep in the sand. He had to kneel to read it. On the side nearest him the letters were obliterated, but he saw some remaining on the opposite side. He went over there and knelt down. There were four letters still legible and part of a fifth. These were the letters:

VISHN

"Great Heavens!" cried Brandon, starting back--"the _Vishnu!_"

CHAPTER VI.

THE DWELLER IN THE SUNKEN SHIP.

After a moment of horror Brandon walked away for a short distance, and then turning he looked fixedly at the wreck for a long time.

Could this be indeed _the_ ship--_the_ Vishnu_? By what marvelous coincidence had he thus fallen upon it? It was in 1828 that the _Vishnu_ sailed from Calcutta for Manilla. Was it possible for this vessel to be preserved so long? And if so, how did it get here?

Yet why not? As to its preservation that was no matter in itself for wonder. East Indian vessels are sometimes built of mahogany, or other woods which last for immense periods. Any wood might endure for eighteen years if covered up by sand. Besides, this vessel he recollected had been laden with staves and box shooks, with other wooden materials which would keep it afloat. It might have drifted about these seas till the currents bore it here. After all it was not so wonderful that this should be the _Vishnu_ of Colonel Despard.

The true marvel was that he himself should have been cast ashore here on the same place where this ship was.

He stood for a long time not caring to enter. His strength had been worn down by the privations of his island life; his nerves, usually like steel, were becoming unstrung; his mind had fallen into a morbid state, and was a prey to a thousand strange fancies. The closed doors of the cabin stood there before him, and he began to imagine that some frightful spectacle was concealed within.

Perhaps he would find some traces of that tragedy of which he had heard. Since the ship had come here, and he had been cast ashore to meet it, there was nothing which he might not anticipate.

A strange horror came over him as he looked at the cabin. But he was not the man to yield to idle fancies. Taking a long breath he walked across the island, and then back again. By that time he had completely recovered, and the only feeling now remaining was one of intense curiosity.

This time he went up without hesitation, and climbed on board the vessel. The sand was heaped up astern, the masts gone, and the hatchways torn off, as has been said. The wind which had blown the sand away had swept the decks as clean as though they had been holy-stoned. Not a rope or a spar or any movable of any kind could be seen.

He walked aft. He tried the cabin door; it was wedged fast as though part of the front. Finding it immovable he stepped back and kicked at it vigorously. A few sturdy kicks started the panel. It gradually yielded and sank in. Then the other panel followed. He could now look in and see that the sand lay inside to the depth of a foot. As yet, however, he could not enter. There was nothing else to do except to kick at it till it was all knocked away, and this after some patient labor was

accomplished.

He entered. The cabin was about twelve feet square, lighted by dead-lights in the deck above. On each side were two state-rooms probably intended for the ship's officers. The doors were all open. The sand had drifted in here and covered the floor and the berths. The floor of the cabin was covered with sand to the depth of a foot. There was no large opening through which it could enter: but it had probably penetrated through the cracks of the doorway in a fine, impalpable dust, and had covered every available surface within.

In the centre of the cabin was a table, secured to the floor, as ships' tables always are; and immediately over it hung the barometer which was now all corroded and covered with mould and rust. A half dozen stools were around, some lying on their sides, some upside down, and one standing upright. The door by which he had entered was at one side, on the other side was another, and between the two stood a sofa, the shape of which was plainly discernible under the sand. Over this was a clock, which had ticked its last tick.

On some racks over the closet there were a few guns and swords, intended, perhaps, for the defensive armament of the brig, but all in the last stage of rust and of decay. Brandon took one or two down, but they broke with their own weight.

The sand seemed to have drifted more deeply into the state-rooms, for while its depth in the cabin was only a foot, in these the depth was nearly two feet. Some of the bedding projected from the berths, but it was a mass of mould and crumbled at the touch.

Brandon went into each of these rooms in succession, and brushed out the heavy, wet sand from the berths. The rotten quilts and blankets fell with the sand in matted masses to the floor. In each room was a seaman's chest. Two of these were covered deeply; the other two but lightly: the latter were unlocked, and he opened the lids. Only some old clothes appeared, however, and these in the same stage of decay as every thing else. In one of them was a book, or rather what had once been a book, but now the leaves were all stuck together, and formed one lump of slime and mould. In spite of his most careful search he had thus far found nothing whatever which could be of the slightest benefit to him in his solitude and necessity.

There were still two rooms which he had not yet examined. These were at the end of the cabin, at the stern of the ship, each taking up one half of the width. The sand had drifted in here to about the same depth as in the side-rooms. He entered first the one nearest him, which was on the right side of the ship. This room was about ten feet long, extending from the middle of the ship to the side, and about six feet wide. A telescope was the first thing which attracted his attention. It lay in a rack near the doorway. He took it down, but it fell apart at once, being completely corroded. In the middle of the room there was a compass, which hung from the ceiling. But the iron pivot had rusted, and the plate had fallen down. Some more guns and swords were here, but all rusted like the others. There was a table at the wall by the stern, covered with sand. An arm-chair stood close by it, and opposite this was a couch. At the end of this room was a berth which had the same appearance as the other berths in the other rooms. The quilts and mattresses as he felt them beneath the damp sand were equally decayed. Too long had the ship been exposed to the ravages of time, and Brandon

saw that to seek for any thing here which could be of the slightest service to himself was in the highest degree useless.

This last room seemed to him as though it might have been the captain's. That captain was Cigole, the very man who had flung him overboard. He had unconsciously by so doing sent him to the scene of his early crime. Was this visit to be all in vain? Thus far it seemed so. But might there not yet be something beneath this sand which might satisfy him in his search?

There still remained another room. Might there not be something there?

Brandon went back into the cabin and stood looking at the open doorway of that other room.

He hesitated. Why? Perhaps it was the thought that here was his last chance, that here his exploration must end, and if nothing came of it then all this adventure would be in vain. Then the fantastic hopes and fears which by turns had agitated him would prove to have been absurd, and he, instead of being sent by Fate as the minister of vengeance, would be only the commonplace victim of an everyday accident.

Perhaps it was some instinct within him that made known to his mind what awaited him there. For now as he stood that old horror came upon him full and strong. Weakness and excitement made his heart beat and his ears ring. Now his fancy became wild, and he recalled with painful vividness his father's words:

"In the crisis of your fate I will be near."

The horrors of the past night recurred. The air of the cabin was close and suffocating. There seemed in that dark room before him some dread Presence, he knew not what; some Being, who had uncovered this his abode and enticed him here.

He found himself rapidly falling into that state in which he would not have been able either to advance or retreat. One overmastering horror seized him. Twice his spirit sought to overcome the faintness and weakness of the flesh. Twice he stepped resolutely forward; but each time he faltered and recoiled.

Here was no place for him to summon up his strength. He could bear it no longer. He turned abruptly and rushed out from the damp, gloomy place into the warm, bright sunshine and the free air of heaven.

The air was bright, the wind blew fresh. He drank in great draughts of that delicious breeze, and the salt sea seemed to be inhaled at each breath.

The sun shone brilliantly. The sea rolled afar and all around, and sparkled before him under the sun's rays with that infinite laughter, that [Greek: anaerithmon gelasma] of which Aeschylus spoke in his deep love of the salt sea. Speaking parenthetically, it may be said that the only ones from among articulate speaking men who have found fitting epithets for the sea are the old Greek, the Scandinavian, and the Englishman.

Brandon drew in new strength and life with every breath, till at last he began to think once more of returning.

But even yet he feared that when he entered that cabin the spell would be on him. The thought of attempting it was intolerable. Yet what was to be done? To remain unsatisfied was equally intolerable. To go back to his rock was not to be thought of.

But an effort must be made to get rid of this womanly fear; why should he yield to this? Surely there were other thoughts which he might call to his mind. There came over him the memory of that villain who had cast him here, who now was exulting in his fancied success and bearing back to his master the news. There came to him the thought of his father, and his wrongs, and his woe. There came to his memory his father's dying words summoning him to vengeance. There came to him the thought of those who yet lived and suffered in England, at the mercy of a pitiless enemy. Should he falter at a superstitious fancy, he--who, if he lived, had so great a purpose?

All superstitious fancy faded away. The thirst for revenge, the sense of intolerable wrong arose. Fear and horror died out utterly, destroyed by Vengeance.

"The Presence, then, is my ally," he murmured. "I will go and face It."

And he walked resolutely, with a firm step, back into the cabin.

Yet even then it needed all the new-born resolution which he had summoned up, and all the thought of his wrong, to sustain him as he entered that inner room. Even then a sharp thrill passed through him, and bodily weakness could only be sustained by the strong, resolute, stubborn soul.

[Illustration: "THERE SEEMED A GHASTLY COMICALITY IN SUCH A THING AS THIS," ETC.]

The room was about the size of the captain's. There was a table against the side, which looked like a leaf which could hang down in case of necessity. A trunk stood opposite the door, with the open lid projecting upward out of a mass of sand. Upon the wall there hung the collar of a coat and part of the shoulders, the rest having apparently fallen away from decay. The color of the coat could still be distinguished; it was red, and the epaulets showed that it had belonged to a British officer.

Brandon on entering took in all these details at a glance, and then his eyes were drawn to the berth at the end of the room, where that Thing lay whose presence he had felt and feared, and which he knew by an internal conviction must be here.

There It awaited him, on the berth. Sand had covered it, like a coverlet, up to the neck, while beyond that protruded the head. It was turned toward him: a bony, skeleton head, whose hollow cavities seemed not altogether vacancy but rather dark eyes which looked gloomily at him--dark eyes fixed, motionless; which had been thus fixed through the long years, watching wistfully for him, expecting his entrance through that doorway. And this was the Being who had assisted him to the shore, and who had thrown off the covering of sand with which he had concealed himself, so as to bring him here before him. Brandon stood motionless, mute. The face was turned toward him--that face which is at once human and yet most frightful since it is the face of Death--the face of a skeleton. The jaws had fallen apart, and that fearful grin which is

fixed on the fleshless face here seemed like an effort at a smile of welcome.

The hair still clung to that head, and hung down over the fleshless forehead, giving it more the appearance of Death in life, and lending a new horror to that which already pervaded this Dweller in the Ship.

"The nightmare Life-in-Death was he,
That thickens men's blood with cold."

Brandon stood while his blood ran chill, and his breath came fast.

If that Form had suddenly thrown off its sandy coverlet and risen to his feet, and advanced with extended hand to meet him, he would not have been surprised, nor would he have been one whit more horror-stricken.

Brandon stood fixed. He could not move. He was like one in a nightmare. His limbs seemed rigid. A spell was upon him. His eyes seemed to fasten themselves on the hollow cavities of the Form before him. But under that tremendous pressure he did not altogether sink. Slowly his spirit rose; a thought of flight came, but it was instantly rejected. The next moment he drew a long breath. "I'm an infernal fool and coward," he muttered. He took three steps forward, and stood beside the Figure. He laid his hand firmly upon the head; the hair fell off at his touch. "Poor devil," said he, "I'll bury your bones at any rate." The spell was broken, and Brandon was himself again.

Once more Brandon walked out into the open air, but this time there was not a vestige of horror left. He had encountered what he dreaded, and it was now in his eyes only a mass of bones. Yet there was much to think of, and the struggle which had raged within him had exhausted him.

The sea-breeze played about him and soon restored his strength. What next to do was the question, and after some deliberation he decided at once to remove the skeleton and bury it.

A flat board which had served as a shelf supplied him with an easy way of turning up the sand. Occupation was pleasant, and in an hour or two he had scooped out a place large enough for the purpose which he had in view. He then went back into the inner cabin.

Taking his board he removed carefully the sand which had covered the skeleton. The clothes came away with it. As he moved his board along it struck something hard. He could not see in that dim light what it was, so he reached down his hand and grasped it.

It was something which the fingers of the skeleton also encircled, for his own hand as he grasped it touched those fingers. Drawing it forth he perceived that it was a common junk bottle tightly corked.

There seemed a ghastly comicality in such a thing as this, that this lately dreaded Being should be nothing more than a common skeleton, and that he should be discovered in this bed of horror doing nothing more dignified than clutching a junk bottle like a sleeping drunkard. Brandon smiled faintly at the idea; and then thinking that, if the liquor were good, it at least would be welcome to him in his present situation. He walked out upon the deck, intending to open it and test its contents. So he sat down, and, taking his knife, he pushed the cork in. Then he smelled the supposed liquor to see what it might be. There was only a

musty odor. He looked in. The bottle appeared to be filled with paper. Then the whole truth flashed upon his mind. He struck the bottle upon the deck. It broke to atoms, and there lay a scroll of paper covered with writing.

He seized it eagerly, and was about opening it to read what was written when he noticed something else that also had fallen from the bottle.

It was a cord about two yards in length, made of the entrail of some animal, and still as strong and as flexible as when it was first made. He took it up carefully, wondering why such a thing as this should have been so carefully sealed up and preserved when so many other things had been neglected.

The cord, on a close examination, presented nothing very remarkable except the fact that, though very thin, it appeared to have been not twisted but plaited in a very peculiar manner out of many fine strands. The intention had evidently been to give to it the utmost possible strength together with the smallest size. Brandon had heard of cords used by Malays and Hindus for assassination, and this seemed like the description which he had read of them.

At one end of the cord was a piece of bronze about the size of a common marble, to which the cord was attached by a most peculiar knot. The bronze itself was intended to represent the head of some Hindu idol, the grotesque ferocity of its features, and the hideous grimace of the mouth being exactly like what one may see in the images of Mother Kali or Bowhani.

At once the cord associated itself in his mind with the horrors which he had heard of as having been perpetrated in the names of these frightful deities, and it seemed now to be more than a common one. He carefully wound it up, placed it in his pocket, and prepared to examine the manuscript.

The sun was high in the heavens, the sea-breeze still blew freshly, while Brandon, opening the manuscript, began to read.

CHAPTER VII.

MANUSCRIPT FOUND IN A BOTTLE.

"BRIG 'VISHNU,' ADRIFT IN THE CHINESE SEA.

"July 10, 1828.

"Whoever finds this let him know that I, Lionel Despard, Colonel of H. M. 37th Regiment, have been the victim of a foul conspiracy performed against me by the captain and crew of the brig _Vishnu_, and especially by my servant, John Potts.

"Expecting at any time to perish, adrift helplessly, at the mercy of winds and waves, I sit down now before I die, to write all the circumstances of this affair. I will inclose the manuscript in a bottle and fling it into the sea, trusting in God that he may cause it to be

borne to those who may be enabled to read my words, so that they may know my fate and bring the guilty to justice. Whoever finds this let him, if possible, have it sent to my friend, Ralph Brandon, of Brandon Hall, Devonshire, England, who will do more than any other man to cause justice to have its due.

"To further the ends of justice and to satisfy the desires of my friends, I will write an account of the whole case.

"In the name of God, I declare that John Potts is guilty of my death. He was my servant. I first found him in India under very remarkable circumstances.

"It was in the year 1826. The Government was engaged in an effort to put down bands of assassins by whom the most terrific atrocities had been committed, and I was appointed to conduct the work in the district of Agra.

"The Thuggee society is still a mystery, though its nature may yet be revealed if they can only capture the chief [Footnote: The chief was captured in 1830, and by his confession all the atrocious system of Thuggee was revealed.] and make him confess. As yet it is not fully known, and though I have heard much which I have reported to the Government, yet I am slow to believe that any human beings can actually practice what I have heard.

"The assassins whom I was pursuing eluded our pursuit with marvelous agility and cunning, but one by one we captured them, and punished them summarily. At last we surrounded a band of Thugs, and to our amazement found among them a European and a small boy. At our attack the Hindus made a desperate resistance, and killed themselves rather than fall into our hands; but the European, leading forward the little boy, fell on his knees and implored us to save him.

"I had heard that an Englishman had joined these wretches, and at first thought that this was the man; so, desirous of capturing him, I ordered my men whenever they found him to spare his life if possible. This man was at once seized and brought before me.

"He had a piteous story to tell. He said that his name was John Potts, that he belonged to Southampton, and had been in India a year. He had come to Agra to look out for employ as a servant, and had been caught by the Thugs. They offered to spare his life if he would join them. According to him they always make this offer. If it had only been himself that was concerned he said that he would have died a hundred times rather than have accepted; but his little boy was with him, and to save his life he consented, hoping that somehow or other he might escape. They then received him with some horrible ceremonies, and marked on his arm and on the arm of his son, on the inner part of the right elbow, the name of Bowhani in Hindu characters. Potts showed me his arm and that of his son in proof of this.

"He had been with them, according to his own account, about three months, and his life had been one continuous horror. He had picked up enough of their language to conjecture to some extent the nature of their belief, which, he asserted, would be most important information for the Government. The Thugs had treated him very kindly, for they looked upon him as one of themselves, and they are all very humane and affectionate to one another. His worst fear had been that they would

compel him to do murder; and he would have died, he declared, rather than consent; but, fortunately, he was spared. The reason of this, he said, was because they always do their murder by strangling, since the shedding of blood is not acceptable to their divinity. He could not do this, for it requires great dexterity. Almost all their strangling is done by a thin, strong cord, curiously twisted, about six feet in length, with a weight at one end, generally carved so as to represent the face of Bowhani. This they throw with a peculiar jerk around the neck of their victim. The weight swings the cord round and round, while the strangler pulls the other end, and death is inevitable. His hands, he said, were coarse and clumsy, unlike the delicate Hindu hands; and so, although they forced him to practice incessantly, he could not learn. He said nothing about the boy, but, from what I saw of that boy afterward, I believe that nature created him especially to be a Thug, and have no doubt that he learned then to wield the cord with as much dexterity as the best strangler of them all.

"His association with them had shown him much of their ordinary habits and some of their beliefs. I gathered from what he said that the basis of the Thuggee society is the worship of Bowhani, a frightful demon, whose highest joy is the sight of death or dead bodies. Those who are her disciples must offer up human victims killed without the shedding of blood, and the more he can kill the more of a saint he becomes. The motive for this is never gain, for they rarely plunder, but purely religious zeal. The reward is an immortality of bliss hereafter, which Bowhani will secure them; a life like that of the Mohammedan Paradise, where there are material joys to be possessed forever without satiety. Destruction, which begins as a kind of duty, becomes also at last, and naturally perhaps, an absorbing passion. As the hunter in pursuing his prey is carried away by excitement and the enthusiasm of the chase, or, in hunting the tiger, feels the delight of braving danger and displaying courage, so here that same passion is felt to an extraordinary degree, for it is men that must be pursued and destroyed. Here, in addition to courage, the hunter of man must call into exercise cunning, foresight, eloquence, intrigue. All this I afterward brought to the attention of the Government with very good results.

"Potts declared that night and day he had been on the watch for a chance to escape, but so infernal was the cunning of these wretches, and so quick their senses, sharpened as they had been by long practice, that success became hopeless. He had fallen into deep dejection, and concluded that his only hope lay in the efforts of the Government to put down these assassins. Our appearance had at last saved him.

"Neither I, nor any of my men, nor any Englishman who heard this story, doubted for an instant the truth of every word. All the newspapers mentioned with delight the fact that an Englishman and his son had been rescued. Pity was felt for that father who, for his son's sake, had consented to dwell amidst scenes of terror, and sympathy for the anguish that he must have endured during that terrific captivity. A thrill of horror passed through all our Anglo-Indian society at the revelation which he made about Thuggee; and so great was the feeling in his favor that a handsome subscription was made up for him by the officers at Agra.

"For my part I believed in him most implicitly, and, as I saw him to be unusually clever, I engaged him at once to be my servant. He staid with me, and every month won more and more of my confidence. He had a good head for business. Matters of considerable delicacy which I intrusted to

him were well performed, and at last I thought it the most fortunate circumstance in my Indian life that I had found such a man.

"After about three years he expressed a wish to go to England for the sake of his son. He thought India a bad place for a boy, and wished to try and start in some business in his native land for his son's sake.

"That boy had always been my detestation--a crafty, stealthy, wily, malicious little demon, who was a perfect Thug in his nature, without any religious basis to his Thuggeeism. I pitied Potts for being the father of such a son. I could not let the little devil live in my house; his cruelty to animals which he delighted to torture, his thieving propensities, and his infernal deceit, were all so intolerable. He was not more than twelve, but he was older in iniquity than many a gray-headed villain. To oblige Potts, whom I still trusted implicitly, I wrote to my old friend Ralph Brandon, of Brandon Hall, Devonshire, requesting him to do what he could for so deserving a man.

"Just about this time an event occurred which has brought me to this.

"My sweet wife had been ill for two years. I had obtained a faithful nurse in the person of a Mrs. Compton, a poor creature, but gentle and affectionate, for whom my dear love's sympathy had been excited. No one could have been more faithful than Mrs. Compton, and I sent my darling to the hill station at Assurabad in hopes that the cooler air might reinvigorate her.

"She died. It is only a month or two since that frightful blow fell and crushed me. To think of it overwhelms me--to write of it is impossible.

"I could think of nothing but to fly from my unendurable grief. I wished to get away from India any where. Before the blow crushed me I hoped that I might carry my darling to the Cape of Good Hope, and therefore I remitted there a large sum; but after she left me I cared not where I went, and finding that a vessel was going to Manilla I decided to go there.

"It was Potts who found out this. I now know that he engaged the vessel, put the crew on board, who were all creatures of his own, and took the route to Manilla for the sake of carrying out his designs on me. To give every thing a fair appearance the vessel was laden with stores and things of that sort, for which there was a demand at Manilla. It was with the most perfect indifference that I embarked. I cared not where I went, and hoped that the novelty of the sea voyage might benefit me.

"The captain was an Italian named Cigole, a low-browed, evil-faced villain. The mate was named Clark. There were three Lascars, who formed the small crew. Potts came with me, and also an old servant of mine, a Malay; whose life I had saved years before. His name was Uracao. It struck me that the crew was a small one, but I thought the captain knew his business better than I, and so I gave myself no concern.

"After we embarked Potts's manner changed very greatly. I remember this now, though I did not notice it at the time, for I was almost in a kind of stupor. He was particularly insolent to Uracao. I remember once thinking indifferently that Potts would have to be reprimanded, or kicked, or something of that sort, but was not capable of any action.

"Uracao had for years slept in front of my door when at home, and, when

traveling, in the same room. He always waked at the slightest noise. He regarded his life as mine, and thought that he was bound to watch over me till I died. Although this was often inconvenient, yet it would have broken the affectionate fellow's heart if I had forbidden it, so it went on. Potts made an effort to induce him to sleep forward among the Lascars, but though Uracao had borne insolence from him without a murmur, this proposal made his eyes kindle with a menacing fire which silenced the other into fear.

"The passage was a quick one, and at last we were only a few days' sail from Manilla. Now our quiet came to an end. One night I was awakened by a tremendous struggle in my cabin. Starting up, I saw in the gloom two figures struggling desperately. It was impossible to see who they were. I sprang from the berth and felt for my pistols. They were gone.

"What the devil is this?' I roared fiercely.

"No answer came; but the next moment there was a tremendous fall, and one of the men clung to the other, whom he held downward. I sprang from my berth. There were low voices out in the cabin.

"You can't,' said one voice, which I recognized as Clark's. 'He has his pistols.'

"He hasn't,' said the voice of Cigole. 'Potts took them away. He's unarmed.'

"Who are you?' I cried, grasping the man who was holding the other down.

"Uracao,' said he. 'Get your pistols or you're lost!'

"What the devil is the matter?' I cried, angrily, for I had not even yet a suspicion.

"Feel around your neck,' said he.

"Hastily I put my hand up. A thrill of terror passed through me. It was the Thuggee cord.

"Who is this?' I cried, grasping the man who had fallen.

"Potts,' cried Uracao. 'Your pistols are under your berth. Quick! Potts tried to strangle you. There's a plot. The Lascars are Thugs. I saw the mark on their arms, the name of Bowhani in Hindu letters.'

"All the truth now seemed to flash across me. I leaped back to the berth to look under it for my pistols. As I stooped there was a rush behind me.

"Help! Clark! Quick!' cried the voice of Potts. 'This devil's strangling me!'

"At this a tumult arose round the two men. Uracao was dragged off. Potts rose to his feet. At that moment I found my pistols. I could not distinguish persons, but I ran the risk and fired. A sharp cry followed. Somebody was wounded.

"Damn him!' cried Potts, 'he's got the pistols.'

"The next moment they had all rushed out, dragging Uracao with them. The door was drawn to violently with a bang and fastened on the outside. They had captured the only man who could help me, and I was a prisoner at the mercy of these miscreants.

"All the remainder of the night and until the following morning I heard noises and trampling to and fro, but had no idea whatever of what was going on. I felt indignation at the treachery of Potts, who, I now perceived, had deceived me all along, but had no fear whatever of any thing that might happen. Death was rather grateful than otherwise. Still I determined to sell my life as dearly as possible, and, loading my pistol once more, I waited for them to come. The only anxiety which I felt was about my poor faithful Malay.

"But time passed, and at last all was still. There was no sound either of voices or of footsteps. I waited for what seemed hours in impatience, until finally I could endure it no longer. I was not going to die like a dog, but determined at all hazards to go out armed, face them, and meet my doom at once.

"A few vigorous kicks at the door broke it open and I walked out. There was no one in the cabin. I went out on deck. There was no one there. I saw it all. I was deserted. More; the brig had settled down so low in the water that the sea was up to her gunwales. I looked out over the ocean to see if I could perceive any trace of them--Potts and the rest. I saw nothing. They must have left long before. A faint smoke in the hatchway attracted my attention. Looking there, I perceived that it had been burned away. The villains had evidently tried to scuttle the brig, and then, to make doubly sure, had kindled a fire on the cargo, thinking that the wooden materials of which it was composed would kindle readily. But the water had rushed in too rapidly for the flames to spread; nevertheless, the water was not able to do its work, for the wood cargo kept the brig afloat. She was water-logged but still floating.

"The masts and shrouds were all cut away. The vessel was now little better than a raft, and was drifting at the mercy of the ocean currents. For my part I did not much care. I had no desire to go to Manilla or any where else; and the love of life which is usually so strong did not exist. I should have preferred to have been killed or drowned at once. Instead of that I lived.

"She died on June 15. It was the 2d of July when this occurred which I have narrated. It is now the 10th. For a week I have been drifting I know not where. I have seen no land. There are enough provisions and water on board to sustain me for months. The weather has been fine thus far.

"I have written this with the wish that whoever may find it will send it to Ralph Brandon, Esq., of Brandon Hall, Devonshire, that he may see that justice is done to Potts, and the rest of the conspirators. Let him also try, if it be not too late, to save Uracao. If this fall into the hands of any one going to England let it be delivered to him as above, but if the finder be going to India let him place it in the hands of the Governor-General; if to China or any other place, let him give it to the authorities, enjoining them, however, after using it, to send it to Ralph Brandon as above.

"It will be seen by this that John Potts was in connection with the

Thugs, probably for the sake of plundering those whom they murdered: that he conspired against me and tried to kill me; and that he has wrought my death (for I expect to die). An examination of my desk shows that he has taken papers and bank bills to the amount of four thousand pounds with him. It was this, no doubt, that induced him to make this attempt against me.

"I desire also hereby to appoint Henry Thornton, Sen., Esq., of Holby Pembroke, Solicitor, my executor and the guardian of my son Courtenay, to whom I bequeath a father's blessing and all that I possess. Let him try to secure my money in Cape Town for my boy, and, if possible, to regain for him the four thousand pounds which Potts has carried off.

"Along with this manuscript I also inclose the strangling cord.

"May God have mercy upon my soul! Amen.

"LIONEL DESPARD."

"July 28.--Since I wrote this there has been a series of tremendous storms. The weather has cleared up again. I have seen no land and no ship.

"July 31.--Land to-day visible at a great distance on the south. I know not what land it may be. I can not tell in what direction I am drifting.

"August 2.--Land visible toward the southwest. It seems like the summit of a range of mountains, and is probably fifty miles distant.

"August 5.--A sail appeared on the horizon. It was too distant to perceive me. It passed out of sight.

"August 10.--A series of severe gales. The sea always rolls over the brig in these storms, and sometimes seems about to carry her down.

"August 20.--Storms and calms alternating. When will this end?

"August 25.--Land again toward the west. It seems as though I may be drifting among the islands of the Indian Archipelago.

"September 2.--I have been sick for a week. Unfortunately I am beginning to recover again. A faint blue streak in the north seems like land.

"September 10.--Open water.

"September 23.--A series of storms. How the brig can stand it I can not see. I remember Potts telling me that she was built of mahogany and copper-fastened. She does not appear to be much injured. I am exceedingly weak from want and exposure. It is with difficulty that I can move about.

"October 2.--Three months adrift. My God have mercy on me, and make haste to deliver me! A storm is rising. Let all Thy waves and billows overwhelm me, O Lord!

"October 5.--A terrific storm. Raged three days. The brig has run aground. It is a low island, with a rock about five miles away. Thank God, my last hour is at hand. The sea is rushing in with tremendous violence, hurling sand upon the brig. I shall drift no more. I can

scarcely hold this pen. These are my last words. This is for Ralph Brandon. My blessing for my loved son. I feel death coming. Whether the storm takes me or not, I must die.

"Whoever finds this will take it from my hand, and, in the name of God, I charge him to do my bidding."

This was the last. The concluding pages of the manuscript were scarcely legible. The entries were meagre and formal, but the hand-writing spoke of the darkest despair. What agonies had this man not endured during those three months!

Brandon folded up the manuscript reverentially, and put it into his pocket. He then went back into the cabin. Taking the bony skeleton hand he exclaimed, in a solemn voice, "In the name of God, if I am saved, I swear to do your bidding!"

He next proceeded to perform the last offices to the remains of Colonel Despard. On removing the sand something bright struck his eye. It was a gold locket. As he tried to open it the rusty hinge broke, and the cover came off.

[Illustration: "THREE MONTHS ADRIFT."]

It was a painting on enamel, which was as bright as when made--the portrait of a beautiful woman, with pensive eyes, and delicate, intellectual expression; and appeared as though it might have been worn around the Colonel's neck. Brandon sighed, then putting this in his pocket with the manuscript he proceeded to his task. In an hour the remains were buried in the grave on Coffin Island.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SIGNAL OF FIRE.

The wreck broke in upon the monotony of Brandon's island life and changed the current of his thoughts. The revelations contained in Despard's manuscript came with perfect novelty to his mind. Potts, his enemy, now stood before him in darker colors, the foulest of miscreants, one who had descended to an association with Thuggee, one who bore on his arm the dread mark of Bowhani. Against such an enemy as this he would have to be wary. If this enemy suspected his existence could he not readily find means to effect his destruction forever? Who could tell what mysterious allies this man might have? Cigole had tracked and followed him with the patience and vindictiveness of a blood-hound. There might be many such as he. He saw plainly that if he ever escaped his first and highest necessity would be to work in secret, to conceal his true name, and to let it be supposed that Louis Brandon had been drowned, while another name would enable him to do what he wished.

The message of Despard was now a sacred legacy to himself. The duty which the murdered man had imposed upon his father must now be inherited by him. Even this could scarcely add to the obligations to vengeance under which he already lay; yet it freshened his passion and quickened his resolve.

The brig was a novelty to him here, and as day succeeded to day he found occupation in searching her. During the hotter part of the day he busied himself in shoveling out the sand from the cavern with a board. In the cool of the morning or evening he worked at the hatchway. Here he soon reached the cargo.

This cargo consisted of staves and short boards. All were blackened, and showed traces of fire. The fire seemed to have burned down to a depth of four feet, and two or three feet under the sides; then the water coming in had quenched it.

He drew out hundreds of these staves and boards, which were packed in bundles, six boards being nailed together as box-shooks, and thirty or forty staves. These he threw out upon the deck and on the sand. What remained he drew about and scattered loosely in the hold of the vessel. He did this with a purpose, for he looked forward to the time when some ship might pass, and it would then be necessary to attract her attention. There was no way of doing so. He had no pole, and if he had it might not be noticed. A fire would be the surest way of drawing attention, and all this wood gave him the means of building one. He scattered it about on the sand, so that it might dry in the hot sun.

Yet it was also necessary to have some sort of a signal to elevate in case of need. He had nothing but a knife to work with; yet patient effort will do much, and after about a week he had cut away the rail that ran along the quarter-deck, which gave him a pole some twenty feet in length. The nails that fastened the boards were all rusted so that they could not be used in attaching any thing to this. He decided when the time came to tie his coat to it, and use that as a flag. It certainly ought to be able to attract attention.

Occupied with such plans and labors and purposes as these, the days passed quickly for two weeks. By that time the fierce rays of the sun had dried every board and stave so that it became like tinder. The ship itself felt the heat; the seams gaped more widely, the boards warped and fell away from their rusty nails, the timbers were exposed all over it, and the hot, dry wind penetrated every cranny. The interior of the hold and the cabin became free from damp, and hot and dry.

Then Brandon flung back many of the boards and staves loosely; and after enough had been thrown there he worked laboriously for days cutting up large numbers of the boards into fine splints, until at last a huge pile of these shavings were accumulated. With these and his pistol he would be able to obtain light and fire in the time of need.

The post which he had cut off was then sharpened at one end, so that he could fix it in the sand when the time came, should it ever come. Here, then, these preparations were completed.

After all his labor in the cabin nothing was found. The bedding, the mattresses, the chests, the nautical instruments had all been ruined. The tables and chairs fell to pieces when the sand was removed; the doors and wood-work sank away; the cabin when cleared remained a wreck.

The weather continued hot and dry. At night Brandon flung himself down wherever he happened to be, either at the brig or at the rock. Every day he had to go to the rock for water, and also to look out toward the sea from that side. At first, while intent upon his work at the ship, the

sight of the barren horizon every day did not materially affect him; he rose superior to despondency and cheered himself with his task. But at length, at the end of about three weeks, all this work was done and nothing more remained. His only idea was to labor to effect his escape, and not to insure his comfort during his stay.

Now as day succeeded to day all his old gloom returned. The excitement of the last few weeks had acted favorably upon his bodily health, but when this was removed he began to feel more than his old weakness. Such diet as his might sustain nature, but it could not preserve health. He grew at length to loathe the food which he had to take, and it was only by a stern resolve that he forced himself to swallow it.

At length a new evil was superadded to those which had already afflicted him. During the first part of his stay the hollow or pool of water on the rock had always been kept filled by the frequent rains. But now for three weeks, in fact ever since the uncovering of the _Vishnu_, not a single drop of rain had fallen. The sun shone with intense heat, and the evaporation was great. The wind at first tempered this heat somewhat, but at last this ceased to blow by day, and often for hours there was a dead calm, in which the water of the sea lay unruffled and all the air was motionless.

If there could only have been something which he could stretch over that precious pool of water he might then have arrested its flight. But he had nothing, and could contrive nothing. Every day saw a perceptible decrease in its volume, and at last it went down so low that he thought he could count the number of days that were left him to live. But his despair could not stay the operation of the laws of nature, and he watched the decrease of that water as one watches the failing breath of a dying child.

Many weeks passed, and the water of the pool still diminished. At last it had sunk so low that Brandon could not hope to live more than another week unless rain came, and that now he could scarcely expect. The look-out became more hopeless, and at length his thoughts, instead of turning toward escape, were occupied with deliberating whether he would probably die of starvation or simple physical exhaustion. He began to enter into that state of mind which he had read in Despard's MSS., in which life ceases to be a matter of desire, and the only wish left is to die as quickly and as painlessly as possible.

At length one day as his eyes swept the waters mechanically out of pure habit, and not expecting any thing, he saw far away to the northeast something which looked like a sail. He watched it for an hour before he fairly decided that it was not some mocking cloud. But at the end of that time it had grown larger, and had assumed a form which no cloud could keep so long.

Now his heart beat fast, and all the old longing for escape, and the old love of life returned with fresh vehemence. This new emotion overpowered him, and he did not try to struggle with it.

Now had come the day and the hour when all life was in suspense. This was his first hope, and he felt that it must be his last. Experience had shown that the island must lie outside the common track of vessels, and, in the ordinary course of things, if this passed by he could not hope to see another.

Now he had to decide how to attract her notice. She was still far away, yet she was evidently drawing nearer. The rock was higher than the mound and more conspicuous. He determined to carry his signal there, and erect it somewhere on that place. So he took up the heavy staff, and bore it laboriously over the sand till he reached the rock.

By the time that he arrived there the vessel had come nearer. Her top-sails were visible above the horizon. Her progress was very slow, for there was only very little wind. Her studding-sails were all set to catch the breeze, and her course was such that she came gradually nearer. Whether she would come near enough to see the island was another question. Yet if they thought of keeping a look-out, if the men in the tops had glasses, this rock and the signal could easily be seen. He feared, however, that this would not be thought of. The existence of Coffin Island was not generally known, and if they supposed that there was only open water here they would not be on the look-out at all.

[Illustration: "STILL HE STOOD THERE, HOLDING ALOFT HIS SIGNAL."]

Nevertheless Brandon erected his signal, and as there was no place on the solid rock where he could insert it he held it up in his own hands. Hours passed. The ship had come very much nearer, but her hull was not yet visible. Still he stood there under the burning sun, holding aloft his signal. Fearing that it might not be sufficiently conspicuous he fastened his coat to the top, and then waved it slowly backward and forward.

The ship moved more slowly than ever; but still it was coming nearer; for after some time, which seemed to that lonely watcher like entire days, her hull became visible, and her course still lay nearer.

Now Brandon felt that he must be noticed. He waved his signal incessantly. He even leaped in the air, so that he might be seen. He thought that the rock would surely be perceived from the ship, and if they looked at that they would see the figure upon it.

Then despondency came over him. The hull of the ship was visible, but it was only the uppermost line of the hull. He was standing on the very top of the rock, on its highest point. From the deck they could not see the rock itself. He stooped down, and perceived that the hull of the ship sank out of sight. Then he knew that the rock would not be visible to them at all. Only the upper half of his body could by any possibility be visible, and he knew enough of the sea to understand that this would have the dark sea for a back-ground to observers in the ship, and therefore could not be seen.

Still he would not yield to the dejection that was rapidly coming over him, and deepening into despair every minute. Never before had he so clung to hope--never before had his soul been more indomitable in its resolution, more vigorous in its strong self-assertion.

He stood there still waving his staff as though his life now depended upon that dumb yet eloquent signal--as though, like Moses, as long as his arms were erect, so long would he be able to triumph over the assault of despair. Hours passed. Still no notice was taken of him. Still the ship held on her course slowly, yet steadily, and no change of direction, no movement of any kind whatever, showed that he had been seen. What troubled him now was the idea that the ship did not come any nearer. This at first he refused to believe, but at last he saw it

beyond doubt, for at length the hull was no longer visible above the horizon.

The ship was now due north from the rock, sailing on a line directly parallel with the island. It came no nearer. It was only passing by it. And now Brandon saw that his last hope of attracting attention by the signal was gone. The ship was moving onward to the west, and every minute would make it less likely that those on board could see the rock.

During the hours in which he had watched the ship he had been busy conjecturing what she might be, and from what port she might have come. The direction indicated China almost undoubtedly. He depicted in his mind a large, commodious, and swift ship, with many passengers on their way back to England. He imagined pleasant society, and general intercourse. His fancy created a thousand scenes of delightful association with "the kindly race of men." All earthly happiness seemed to him at that time to find its centre on board that ship which passed before his eyes.

The seas were bright and sparkling, the skies calm and deeply blue, the winds breathed softly, the white swelling sails puffed out like clouds against the blue sky beyond. That ship seemed to the lonely watcher like Heaven itself. Oh! to pass beyond the limits of this narrow sandy waste! to cross the waters and enter there! Oh! to reach that ship which moved on so majestically, to enter there and be at rest!

It was not given him to enter there. Brandon soon saw this. The ship moved farther away. Already the sun was sinking, and the sudden night of the tropics was coming swiftly on. There was no longer any hope.

He flung the staff down till it broke asunder on the hard rock, and stood for a few moments looking out at sea in mute despair.

Yet could he have known what was shortly to be the fate of that ship--shortly, only in a few days--he would not have despaired, he would have rejoiced, since if death were to be his lot it were better to die where he was than to be rescued and gain the sweet hope of life afresh, and then have that hope extinguished in blood.

But Brandon did not remain long in idleness. There was yet one resource--one which he had already thought of through that long day, but hesitated to try, since he would have to forsake his signal-station; and to remain there with his staff seemed to him then the only purpose of his life. Now since the signal-staff had failed, he had broken it, as some magician might break the wand which had failed to work its appropriate spell, and other things were before him. He took his coat and descended from the rock to make a last effort for life. He walked back through the gathering gloom toward the wreck. He did not run, nor did he in any way exhibit any excitement whatever. He walked with a firm step over the sand, neither hastening on nor lagging back, but advancing calmly.

Before he had gone half-way it was dark. The sun had gone down in a sea of fire, and the western sky, after flaming for a time, had sunk into darkness. There was no moon. The stars shone dimly from behind a kind of haze that overspread the sky. The wind came up more freshly from the east, and Brandon knew that this wind would carry the ship which he wished to attract further and further away. That ship had now died out in the dark of the ebon sea; the chances that he could catch its notice

were all against him, yet he never faltered.

He had come to a fixed resolution, which was at all hazards to kindle his signal-fire, whatever the chances against him might be. He thought that the flames flaring up would of necessity attract attention, and that the vessel might turn, or lie-to, and try to discover what this might be. If this last hope failed, he was ready to die. Death had now become to him rather a thing to be desired than avoided. For he knew that it was only a change of life; and how much better would life be in a spiritual world than life on this lonely isle.

This decision to die took away despair. Despair is only possible to those who value this earthly life exclusively. To the soul that looks forward to endless life despair can never come.

It was with this solemn purpose that Brandon went to the wreck, seeking by a last chance after life, yet now prepared to relinquish it. He had struggled for life all these weeks; he had fought and wrestled for life with unutterable spiritual agony, all day long, on the summit of that rock, and now the bitterness of death was past.

An hour and a half was occupied in the walk over the sand to the wreck. Fresh waves of dark had come over all things, and now, though there were no clouds, yet the gloom was intense, and faint points of light in the sky above showed where the stars might be. Where now was the ship for which Brandon sought? He cared not. He was going to kindle his signal-fire. The wind was blowing freshly by the time that he reached the place. Such a wind had not blown for weeks. It would take the ship away farther. What mattered it? He would seize his last chance, if it were only to put that last chance away forever, and thus make an end of suspense.

All his preparations had long since been made; the dry wood lay loosely thrown about the hold; the pile of shavings and fine thread-like splinters was there awaiting him. He had only to apply the fire.

He took his linen handkerchief and tore it up into fine threads, these he tore apart again and rubbed in his hand till they were almost as loose as lint. He then took these loose fibres, and descending into the hold, put them underneath the pile which he had prepared. Then he took his pistol, and holding it close to the lint fired it.

The explosion rang out with startling force in the narrow hull of the ship, the lint received the fire and glowed with the sparks into spots of red heat. Brandon blew with his breath, and the wind streaming down lent its assistance.

In a few moments the work was done.

It blazed!

But scarcely had the first flame appeared than a puff of wind came down and extinguished it. The sparks, however, were there yet. It was as though the fickle wind were tantalizing him--at one time helping, at another baffling him. Once more Brandon blew. Once more the blaze arose. Brandon flung his coat skirts in front of it till it might gather strength. The blaze ran rapidly through the fine splints, it extended itself toward the shavings, it threw its arms upward to the larger sticks.

The dry wood kindled. A million sparks flew out as it cracked under the assault of the devouring fire. The flame spread itself out to a larger volume; it widened, expanded, and clasped the kindling all around in its fervid embrace. The flame had been baffled at first; but now, as if to assert its own supremacy, it rushed out in all directions with something that seemed almost like exultation. That flame had once been conquered by the waters in this very ship. The wood had saved the ship from the waters. It was as though the WOOD had once invited the FIRE to union, but the WATER had stepped in and prevented the union by force; as though the WOOD, resenting the interference, had baffled the assaults of the WATER, and saved itself intact through the long years for the embrace of its first love. Now the FIRE sought the WOOD once more after so many years, and in ardor unspeakable embraced its bride.

Such fantastic notions passed through Brandon's fancy as he looked at the triumph of the flame. But he could not stay there long, and as he had not made up his mind to give himself to the flames he clambered up quickly out of the hatchway and stood upon the sand without.

The smoke was pouring through the hatchway, the black voluminous folds being rendered visible by the glow of the flames beneath, which now had gained the ascendancy, and set all the winds at defiance. Indeed it was so now that whatever wind came only assisted the flames, and Brandon, as he looked on, amused himself with the thought that the wind was like the world of man, which, when any one is first struggling, has a tendency to crush him, but when he has once gained a foothold exerts all its efforts to help him along. In this mood, half cynical, half imaginative, he watched the progress of the flames.

Soon all the fine kindling had crumbled away at the touch of the fire, and communicating its own heat to the wood around, it sank down, a glowing mass, the foundation of the rising fires.

Here, from this central heart of fire, the flames rushed on upon the wood which lay loosely on all sides, filling the hull. Through that wood the dry hot wind had streamed for many weeks, till every stave and every board had become dry to its utmost possibility. Now at the first breath of the flame the wood yielded; at the first touch it flared up, and prepared to receive the embrace of the fire in every fibre of its being.

The flame rolled on. It threw its long arms through the million interstices of the loose piles of wood, it penetrated every where with its subtle, far-reaching power, till within the ship the glow broadened and widened, the central heart of fire enlarged its borders, and the floods of flame that flowed from it rushed with consuming fury through the whole body of the ship.

Glowing with bright lustre, increasing in that brightness every moment, leaping up as it consumed and flashing vividly as it leaped up. A thousand tongues of flame streamed upward through the crannies of the gaping deck, and between the wide orifices of the planks and timbers the dazzling flames gleamed; a thousand resistless arms seemed extended forward to grasp the fabric now completely at its mercy, and the hot breath of the fire shriveled up all in its path before yet its hands were laid upon it.

And fast and furious, with eager advance, the flames rushed on devouring everything. Through the hatchway, around which the fiercest fires

gathered, the stream of flame rose impetuously on high, in a straight upward torrent, hurling up a vast pyramid of fire to the ebon skies, a [Greek: phlogos migan pogona] which, like that which once illumed the Slavonic strait with the signal-fire first caught from burning Troy, here threw its radiance far over the deep.

While the lighter wood lasted the flame was in the ascendant, and nobly it did its work. Whatever could be done by bright radiance and far-penetrating lustre was done here. If that ship which had passed held any men on board capable of feeling a human interest in the visible signs of calamity at sea, they would be able to read in this flame that there was disaster somewhere upon these waters, and if they had human hearts they would turn to see if there was not some suffering which they might relieve.

But the lighter and the dryer wood was at last consumed, and now there remained that which Brandon had never touched, the dense masses which still lay piled where they had been placed eighteen years before. Upon these the fire now marched. But already the long days and weeks of scorching sun and fierce wind had not been without their effects, and the dampness had been subdued. Besides, the fire that advanced upon them had already gained immense advantage; for one half of the brig was one glowing mass of heat, which sent forth its consuming forces, and withered up, and blighted, and annihilated all around. The close-bound and close-packed masses of staves and boards received the resistless embrace of the fire, and where they did not flame they still gave forth none the less a blazeless glow.

Now from the burning vessel the flame arose no more; but in its place there appeared that which sent forth as vivid a gleam, and as far-flashing a light. The fire had full sway, though it gave forth no blaze, and, while it gleamed but little, still it devoured. From the sides of the ship the planks, blasted by the intense heat and by the outburst of the flames, had sprung away, and now for nearly all the length of the vessel the timbers were exposed without any covering. Between these flashed forth the gleam of the fire inside, which now in one pure mass glowed with dazzling brightness and intense heat.

But the wood inside, damp as it was, and solid in its fibre, did not allow a very swift progress to the fire. It burned, but it burned slowly. It glowed like the charcoal of a furnace from behind its wooden bars.

The massive timbers of mahogany wood yielded slowly and stubbornly to the conflagration. They stood up like iron bars long after all the interior was one glowing mass. But, though they yielded slowly, still they had to yield with the passage of hours to the progress of the fire. And so it came to pass that at length the strong sides, sapped by the steady and resistless assault, surrendered. One by one the stout timbers, now wasted and weakened, gave way and sank down into the fervid mass beneath. At last the whole centre was one accumulation of glowing ashes, and all that remained were the bow, covered with sand, and the stern, with the quarter-deck.

The fire spread in both directions. The stern yielded first. Here the strong deck sustained for a time the onset of the fire that had consumed every thing beneath, but at last it sunk in; the timbers of the sides followed next, and all had gone. With the bow there was a longer and a harder struggle. The fire had penetrated far into that part of the

vessel; the flames smouldered there, but the conflagration went on, and smoke and blue flames issued from every part of that sandy mound, which, fiercely assailed by the heat, gave way in every direction, broke into a million crevices, and in places melted and ran together in a glowing molten heap. Here the fires burned longer, and here they lived and gleamed until morning.

Long before morning Brandon had fallen asleep. He had stood first near the burning wreck. Then the heat forced him to move away, and he had gone to a ridge of sand, where this peninsula joined the island. There he sat down, watching the conflagration for a long time. There the light flashed, and if that ship for whom he was signaling had noticed this sign, and had examined the island, his figure could be seen to any one that chose to examine.

But hours passed on. He strained his eyes through the gloom in the direction in which the ship had vanished to see if there were any sign there. None appeared. The progress of the fire was slow. It went on burning and glowing with wonderful energy all through the night, till at last, not long before dawn, the stern fell in, and nothing now was left but the sand-mound that covered the bows, which, burning beneath, gave forth smoke and fire.

Then, exhausted by fatigue, he sank down on the sand and fell into a sound sleep.

In the midst of thronging dreams, from the depths of that imaginary land where his weary spirit wandered in sleep, he was suddenly roused. A hand was laid on his shoulder, which shook him roughly, and a hoarse voice shouted in his ear, "Mess-mate! Halloo, mess-mate! Wake up!"

Brandon started up and gazed with wild, astonished eyes around. It was day. The sun was two or three hours above the horizon. He was surrounded by half a dozen seamen, who were regarding him with wondering but kindly eyes. The one who spoke appeared to be their leader. He held a spy-glass in his hand. He was a sturdy, thick-set man of about fifty, whose grizzled hair, weather-beaten face, groggy nose, and whiskers, coming all round under his chin, gave him the air of old Benbow as he appears on the stage--"a reg'lar old salt," "sea-dog," or whatever other name the popular taste loves to apply to the British tar.

"Hard luck here, mess-mate," said this man, with a smile. "But you're all right now. Come! Cheer up! Won't you take a drink?" And he held out a brandy-flask.

Brandon rose mechanically in a kind of maze, not yet understanding his good fortune, not yet knowing whether he was alive or dead. He took the flask and raised it to his lips. The inspiriting draught gave him new life. He looked earnestly at the Captain as he handed it back, and then seized both his hands.

"God Almighty bless you for this, noble friend, whoever you are! But how and when did you get here? Who are you? Did you not see my signal on the rock yesterday--?"

"One question at a time, mess-mate," said the other, laughingly. "I'm Captain Corbet, of the ship _Falcon_, bound from Sydney to London, and these are some of my men. We saw this light last night about midnight, right on our weather-bow, and came up to see what it was. We

found shoal water, and kept off till morning. There's the _Falcon_, Sir."

The Captain waved his hand proudly to where a large, handsome ship lay, about seven miles away to the south.

"On your bow? Did you see the fire _ahead_ of you?" asked Brandon, who now began to comprehend the situation.

"Yes."

"Then you didn't pass me toward the north yesterday?"

"No; never was near this place before this morning."

"It must have been some other ship, then," said Brandon, musingly.

"But how did you get here, and how long have you been here?"

Brandon had long since decided on the part he was to play. His story was all ready.

"My name is Edward Wheeler. I came out supercargo in the brig _Argo_, with a cargo of hogshead staves and box shooks from London to Manilla. On the 16th of September last we encountered a tremendous storm and struck on this sand-bank. It is not down on any of the charts. The vessel stuck hard and fast, and the sea made a clean breach over us. The captain and crew put out the boat, and tried to get away, but were swamped and drowned. I staid by the wreck till morning. The vessel stood the storm well, for she had a solid cargo, was strongly built, and the sand formed rapidly all about her. The storm lasted for several days, and by the end of that time a shoal had formed. Several storms have occurred since, and have heaped the sand all over her. I have lived here ever since in great misery. Yesterday a vessel passed, and I put up a signal on the rock over there, which she did not notice. In despair I set fire to the brig, which was loaded with wood and burned easily. I watched till morning, and then fell asleep. You found me so. That's all I have to say."

On hearing this story nothing could exceed the kindness and sympathy of these honest-hearted seamen. The Captain insisted on his taking another drink, apologized for having to carry him back to England, and finally hurried him off to the boat. Before two hours Brandon stood on the deck of the _Falcon_.

CHAPTER IX

THE MALAY PIRATE

Two days had passed since Brandon's rescue. The light wind which had brought up the _Falcon_ soon died out, and before the island had been left far behind a calm succeeded, and there was nothing left but to drift.

A calm in other seas is stillness; here on the Indian Ocean it is

stagnation. The calmness is like Egyptian darkness. It may be felt. The stagnation of the waters seems deep enough to destroy all life there. The air is thick, oppressive, feverish; there is not a breath or a murmur of wind; even the swell of ocean, which is never-ending, here approaches as near as possible to an end. The ocean rolled but slightly, but the light undulations gave a lazy, listless motion to the ship, the span creaked monotonously, and the great sails napped idly in the air.

At such a time the calm itself is sufficiently dreary, but now there was something which made all things still more drear. For the calm was attended by a thick fog; not a moist, drizzling fog like those of the North Atlantic, but a sultry, dense, dry fog; a fog which gave greater emphasis to the heat, and, instead of alleviating it, made it more oppressive.

It was so thick that it was not possible while standing at the wheel to see the fore-castle. Aloft, all the heavens were hidden in a canopy of sickly gray; beneath, the sea showed the same color. Its glassy surface exhibited not a ripple. A small space only surrounded the vessel, and beyond all things were lost to view.

The sailors were scattered about the ship in groups. Some had ascended to the tops with a faint hope of finding more air; some were lying flat on their faces on the fore-castle; others had sought those places which were under the sails where the occasional flap of the broad canvas sent down a slight current of air.

The Captain was standing on the quarter-deck, while Brandon was seated on a stool near the wheel. He had been treated by the Captain with unbounded hospitality, and supplied with every thing that he could wish.

"The fact is," said the Captain, who had been conversing with Brandon, "I don't like calms any where, still less calms with fogs, and least of all, calms off these infernal islands."

"Why?"

"Because to the north'ard is the Strait of Sunda, and the Malay pirates are always cruising about, often as far as this. Did you ever happen to hear of Zangorri?"

"Yes."

"Well, all I can say is, if you hadn't been wrecked, you'd have probably had your throat cut by that devil."

"Can't any body catch him?"

"They don't catch him at any rate. Whether they can or not is another question."

"Have you arms?"

"Yes. I've got enough to give Zangorri a pleasanter reception than he usually gets from a merchant-ship; and my lads are the boys that can use them."

"I wonder what has become of that other ship that passed me on the island," said Brandon, after a pause.

"She can't be very far away from us," replied the Captain, "and we may come up with her before we get to the Cape."

A silence followed. Suddenly the Captain's attention was arrested by something. He raised his hand to his ear and listened very attentively. "Do you hear that?" he asked, quickly.

Brandon arose and walked to where the Captain was. Then both listened. And over the sea there came unmistakable sounds. The regular movement of oars! Oars out on the Indian Ocean! Yet the sound was unmistakable.

"It must be some poor devils that have escaped from shipwreck," said the Captain, half to himself.

"Well, fire a gun."

"No," said the Captain, cautiously, after a pause. "It may be somebody else. Wait a bit."

So they waited a little while. Suddenly there came a cry of human voices--a volley of guns! Shrieks, yells of defiance, shouts of triumph, howls of rage or of pain, all softened by the distance, and all in their unison sounding appallingly as they were borne through the gloom of the fog.

Instantly every man in the ship bounded to his feet. They had not heard the first sounds, but these they heard, and in that superstition which is natural to the sailor, each man's first thought was that the noises came from the sky, and so each looked with a stupefied countenance at his neighbor.

But the Captain did not share the common feeling. "I knew it!" he cried. "I expected it, and blow my old eyes out if I don't catch 'em this time!"

"What?" cried Brandon.

But the Captain did not hear. Instantly his whole demeanor was changed. He sprang to the companion-way. He spoke but one word, not in a loud voice, but in tones so stern, so startling, that every man in the ship heard the word:

"Zangorri!"

All knew what it meant. It meant that the most blood-thirsty pirate of these Eastern seas was attacking some ship behind that veil of fog.

And what ship? This was the thought that came to Brandon. Could it be any possibility be the one which passed by him when he strove so earnestly to gain her attention!

"Out with the long-boat! Load the carronade! Man the boat! Hurry up, lads, for God's sake!" And the Captain dashed down into the cabin. In an instant he was back again, buckling on a belt with a couple of pistols in it, and calling to his men, "Don't shout, don't cheer, but hurry, for God's sake!"

And the men rushed about, some collecting arms, others laboring at the

boat. The _Falcon_ was well supplied with arms, as the Captain had said. Three guns, any quantity of smaller arms, and a long Tom, formed her armament, while the long-boat had a carronade in her bows. Thanks to the snug and orderly arrangement of the ship, every thing was soon ready. The long-boat was out and afloat. All the seamen except four were on board, and the Captain went down last.

"Now, pull away, lads!" he cried; "no talking," and he took the tiller ropes. As he seated himself he looked toward the bows, and his eyes encountered the calm face of Brandon.

"What! you here?" he cried, with unmistakable delight.

Brandon's reply consisted simply in drawing a revolver from his pocket.

"You're a brick!" said the Captain.

Not another word was spoken. The Captain steered the boat toward the direction from which the sounds came. These grew louder every moment--more menacing, and more terrible.

The sailors put all their strength to the oars, and drove the great boat through the water. To their impatience it seemed as though they would never get there. Yet the place which they desired to reach was not far away;--the sounds were now very near; and at length, as they drove onward, the tall sides of a ship burst on their sight through the gloom. By its side was a boat of the kind that is used by the Malays. On board the ship a large number of savage figures were rushing about in mad ferocity.

In a moment the boat was seen. A shout rose from the Malays. A score of them clambered swiftly down the ship's side to their boat, and a panic seemed to seize all the rest, who stood looking around irresolutely for some way of escape.

The boatswain was in the bows of the long-boat and as the Malays crowded into their craft he took aim with the carronade and fired. The explosion thundered through the air. A terrific shriek followed. The next instant the Malay boat, filled with writhing dusky figures, went down beneath the waters.

The long-boat immediately after touched the side of the ship. Brandon grasped a rope with his left hand, and, holding his revolver in his right, leaped upward. A Malay with uplifted knife struck at him. Bang! went the revolver and the Malay fell dead. The next instant Brandon was on board, followed by all the sailors who sprang upward and clambered into the vessel before the Malays could rally from the first shock of surprise.

But the panic was arrested by a man who bounded upon deck through the hatchway. Roused by the noise of the gun, he had hurried up and reached the deck just as the sailors arrived. In fierce, stern words he shouted to his men, and the Malays gathered new courage from his words. There were about fifty of these, and not more than thirty English sailors; but the former had carelessly dropped their arms about, and most of their pieces were unloaded; the latter, therefore, had it all their own way.

The first thing that they did was to pour a volley into the crowd of Malays, as they stood trying to face their new enemy. The next moment

the sailors rushed upon them, some with cutlasses, some with pistols, and some with clubbed muskets.

The Malays resisted desperately. Some fought with their creeses, others snatched up muskets and used them vigorously, others, unarmed, flung themselves upon their assailants, biting and tearing like wild beasts.

In the midst of the scene stood the chief, wielding a clubbed musket. He was a man of short stature, broad chest, and great muscular power. Three or four of the sailors had already been knocked down beneath his blows.

"Down with him," yelled the Captain. "It's Zangorri!"

A venomous smile passed over the dark face of the Malay. Then he shouted to his men and in an instant they rushed to the quarter-deck and took up a position there. A few of them obtained some more muskets that lay about.

The Captain shouted to his men, who were pursuing the Malays, to load once more. They did so, poured in a volley, and then rushed to the quarter-deck. Now a fiercer fight took place. The Captain with his pistol shot one man dead the next instant he was knocked down. The boatswain was grappled by two powerful men. The rest of the sailors were driving all before them.

Meanwhile Brandon had been in the very centre of the fight. With his revolver in his left hand he held a cutlass in his right, and every blow that he gave told. He had sought all through the struggle to reach the spot where Zangorri stood, but had hitherto been unsuccessful. At the retreat which the Malays made he hastily loaded three of the chambers of his revolver which he had emptied into the hearts of three Malays, and sprang upon the quarter-deck first. The man who struck down the Captain fell dead from Brandon's pistol, just as he stooped to plunge his knife into the heart of the prostrate man. Another shot sent over one of the boatswain's assailants, and the other assailant was kicked up into the air and overboard by the boatswain himself.

After this Brandon had no more trouble to get at Zangorri, for the Malay chief with a howl of fury called on his men, and sprang at him. Two quick flashes, two sharp reports, and down went two of them. Zangorri grasped Brandon's hand, and raised his knife; the next instant Brandon had shifted his pistol to his other hand; he fired. Zangorri's arm fell by his side, broken, and the knife rang on the ship's deck.

Brandon bounded at his throat. He wound his arms around him, and with a tremendous jerk hurled Zangorri to the deck, and held him there.

A cry of terror and dismay arose from the Malays as they saw their chief fall. The sailors shouted; there was no further fighting: some of the pirates were killed, others leaped overboard and tried to swim away. The sailors, in their fury, shot at these wretches as they swam. The cruelty of Zangorri had stimulated such a thirst for vengeance that none thought of giving quarter. Out of all the Malays the only one alive was Zangorri himself, who now lay gasping with a mighty hand on his throat.

At last, as his struggles grew feebler, Brandon relaxed his grasp. Some of the sailors came with uplifted knives to put an end to Zangorri.

"Back," cried Brandon, fiercely. "Don't touch him. He's mine!"

"He must die."

"That's for me to say," cried Brandon in a stern voice that forbade reply. In fact, the sailors seemed to feel that he had the best claim here, since he had not only captured Zangorri with his own hands, but had borne the chief share in the fight.

"Englishman," said a voice. "I thank you."

Brandon started.

It was Zangorri who had spoken; and in very fair English too.

"Do you speak English?" was all that he could say in his surprise.

"I ought to. I've seen enough of them," growled the other.

"You scoundrel!" cried Brandon. "you have nothing to thank me for. You must die a worse death."

"Ah," sneered Zangorri. "Well. It's about time. But my death will not pay for the hundreds of English lives that I have taken. I thank you though, for you will give me time yet to tell the Englishmen how I hate them."

And the expression of hate that gleamed from the eyes of the Malay was appalling.

"Why do you hate them?" asked Brandon, whose curiosity was excited.

"My brother's blood was shed by them, and a Malay never forgives. Yet I have never found the man I sought. If I had found him I would not have killed any more."

"The man--what man?"

"The one whom I have sought for fifteen years through all these seas," said the other, hoarsely.

"What is his name?"

"I will not speak it. I had it carved on my creese which hangs around my neck."

Brandon thrust his hand into the bosom of the Malay where he saw a cord which passed around his neck. He drew forth a creese, and holding it up saw this name cut upon the handle: "JOHN POTTS."

The change that came over the severe, impassive face of Brandon was so extraordinary that even Zangorri in his pain and fury saw it. He uttered an exclamation. The brow of Brandon grew as black as night, his nostrils quivered, his eyes seemed to blaze with a terrific lustre, and a slight foam spread itself over his quivering lips. But he commanded himself by a violent effort.

He looked all around. The sailors were busy with the Captain, who still lay senseless. No one observed him. He turned to Zangorri.

"This shall be mine," said he, and he threw the cord around his own neck, and put the creese under his waistcoat. But the sharp eye of the Malay had been watching him, and as he raised his arm carelessly to put the weapon where he desired, he thoughtlessly loosed his hold. That instant Zangorri took advantage of it. By a tremendous effort he disengaged himself and bounded to his feet. The next instant he was at the taffrail. One hasty glance all around showed him all that he wished to see. Another moment and he was beneath the water.

Brandon had been taken unawares, and the Malay was in the water before he could think. But he drew his revolver, in which there yet remained two shots, and, stepping to the taffrail, watched for Zangorri to reappear.

During the fight a change had come over the scene. The fog had begun to be dissipated and a wider horizon appeared. As Brandon looked he saw two vessels upon the smooth surface of the sea. One was the Falcon. The other was a large Malay proa. On the decks of this last was a crowd of men, perhaps about fifty in number, who stood looking toward the ship where the fight had been. The sweeps were out, and they were preparing to move away. But the escape of Zangorri had aroused them, and they were evidently waiting to see the result. That result lay altogether at the disposal of the man with the revolver, who stood at the stern from which Zangorri had leaped.

And now Zangorri's head appeared above the waves, while he took a long breath ere he plunged again. The revolver covered him. In a moment a bullet could have plunged into his brain.

But Brandon did not fire. He could not. It was too cold-blooded. True, Zangorri was stained with countless crimes; but all his crimes at that moment were forgotten: he did not appear as Zangorri the merciless pirate, but simply as a wounded wretch, trying to escape from death. That death Brandon could not deal him.

The sailors were still intent upon the Captain, whose state was critical, and Brandon alone watched the Malay. Soon he saw those on board the proa send down a boat and row quickly toward him. They reached him, dragged him on board, and then rowed back.

Brandon turned away. As yet no one had been in the cabin. He hurried thither to see if perchance any one was there who might be saved.

He entered the cabin. The first look which he gave disclosed a sight which was enough to chill the blood of the stoutest heart that ever beat.

All around the cabin lay human bodies distorted by the agonies of death, twisted and twined in different attitudes, and still lying in the position in which death had found them.

One, whose appearance showed him to be the captain, lay grasping the hair of a Malay, with his sword through his enemy's heart, while a knife still remained buried in his own. Another lay with his head cut open; another with his face torn by the explosion of a gun. There were four whites here and about ten Malays, all dead. But the fourth white was a woman, who lay dead in front of a door that led to an inner cabin, and which was now closed. The woman appeared to be about fifty years of age, her venerable gray hair was stained with blood, and her hand clutched

the arm of a Malay who lay dead by her side.

While Brandon stood looking at this sight he became aware of a movement in a corner of the cabin where there were five or six bodies heaped together. He hurried over to the place, and, pulling away the bodies of several Malays, found at length a Hindu of large stature, in whom life was by no means extinct, for he was pushing with hands and feet and making faint efforts to rise. He had been wounded in many places, and was now quite unconscious.

Brandon dragged away all the bodies, laid him in as easy a posture as possible, and then rushed up to the deck for some water. Returning he dashed it over the Hindu, and bound up one or two wounds which seemed most dangerous.

His care soon brought the Hindu to consciousness.

The man opened his eyes, looked upon Brandon first with astonishment, then with speechless gratitude, and clasping his hand moaned faintly, in broken English.

"Bless de Lor! Sahib!"

Brandon hurried up on deck and calling some of the sailors had the Hindu conveyed there. All crowded around him to ask him questions, and gradually found out about the attack of the pirates. The ship had been becalmed the day before, and the Malay proa was in sight, evidently with evil intentions. They had kept a good watch, and when the fog came had some hope of escape. But the Malay boats had sought them through the fog, and had found them. They had resisted well, but were overpowered by numbers. The Hindu had been cook of the ship, and had fought till the last by the side of his captain.

Without waiting to hear the Hindu's story Brandon went back to the cabin. The door that opened into the inner cabin was shut. He tried it. It was locked. He looked into the keyhole. It was locked from the inside.

[Illustration: "SHE FLUNG HERSELF ON HER KNEES IN A TRANSPORT OF GRATITUDE."] "Is any one there?" he asked.

A cry of surprise was the sole answer.

"You are safe. We are friends. Open!" cried Brandon.

Then came the sound of light footsteps, the key was turned, the door slid back, and there appeared before the astonished eyes of Brandon a young girl, who, the moment that she saw him, flung herself on her knees in a transport of gratitude and raised her face to Heaven, while her lips uttered inaudible words of thanksgiving.

She was quite a young girl, with a delicate, slender frame, and features of extreme loveliness. Her complexion was singularly colorless. Her eyes were large, dark, and luminous. Her hair fell in rich masses over her shoulders. In one hand she held a knife, to which she clung with a death-like tenacity.

"Poor child!" murmured Brandon, in accents of tenderest commiseration. "It is but little that you could do with that knife."

She looked up at him as she knelt, then looked at the keen glittering steel, and, with a solemnity of accent which showed how deeply she was in earnest, murmured, half to herself,

"It could at least have saved me!"

Brandon smiled upon her with such a smile as a father might give at seeing the spirit or prowess of some idolized son.

"There is no need," he said, with a voice of deep feeling, "there is no need of that now. You are saved. You are avenged. Come with me." The girl rose. "But wait," said Brandon, and he looked at her earnestly and most pityingly. "There are things here which you should not see. Will you shut your eyes and let me lead you?"

"I can bear it," said the girl. "I will not shut my eyes."

"You must," said Brandon, firmly, but still pityingly, for he thought of that venerable woman who lay in blood outside the door. The girl looked at him and seemed at first as though about to refuse. There was something in his face so full of compassion, and entreaty, and calm control, that she consented. She closed her eyes and held out her hand. Brandon took it and led her through the place of horror and up to the deck.

Her appearance was greeted with a cry of joy from all the sailors. The girl looked around. She saw the Malays lying dead upon the deck. She saw the ship that had rescued, and the proa that had terrified her. But she saw no familiar face.

She turned to Brandon with a face of horror, and with white lips asked:

"Where are they all?"

"Gone," said Brandon.

"What! All?" gasped the girl.

"All--except yourself and the cook."

She shuddered from head to foot; at last, coming closer to Brandon, she whispered: "And my nurse--?"

Brandon said nothing, but, with a face full of meaning, pointed upward. The girl understood him. She reeled, and would have fallen had not Brandon supported her. Then she covered her face with her hands, and, staggering away to a seat, sank down and wept bitterly.

All were silent. Even the rough sailors respected that grief. Rough! Who does not know that sailors are often the most tender-hearted of men, and always the most impulsive, and most quick to sympathy?

So now they said nothing, but stood in groups sorrowing in her sorrow. The Captain, meanwhile, had revived, and was already on his feet looking around upon the scene. The Hindu also had gained strength with every throb of his heart and every breath of the air.

But suddenly a cry arose from one of the men who stood nearest the

hatchway.

"The ship is sinking!"

Every one started. Yes, the ship was sinking. No one had noticed it; but the water was already within a few feet of the top. No doubt Zangorri had been scuttling her when he rushed out of the hold at the noise of the attack.

There was nothing left but to hasten away. There was time to save nothing. The bodies of the dead had to be left with the ship for their tomb. In a short time they had all hurried into the boat and were pulling away. But not too soon. For scarcely had they pulled away half a dozen boat-lengths from the ship than the water, which had been rising higher and higher, more rapidly every moment, rushed madly with a final onset to secure its prey; and with a groan like that of some living thing the ship went down.

A yell came from over the water. It rose from the Malay proa, which was moving away as fast as the long sweeps could carry her. But the dead were not revenged only. They were remembered. Not long after reaching the _Falcon_ the sailors were summoned to the side which looked toward the spot where the ship had sunk, and the solemn voice of Brandon read the burial-service of the Church.

And as he read that service he understood the fate which he had escaped when the ship passed Coffin Island without noticing his signal.

CHAPTER X.

BEATRICE.

It was natural that a young girl who had gone through so fearful an ordeal should for some time feel its effects. Her situation excited the warmest sympathy of all on board the ship; and her appearance was such as might inspire a chivalrous respect in the hearts of those rough but kindly and sensitive sailors who had taken part in her rescue.

Her whole appearance marked her as one of no common order. There was about her an air of aristocratic grace which inspired involuntary respect; an elegance of manner and complete self-possession which marked perfect breeding. Added to this, her face had something which is greater even than beauty--or at least something without which beauty itself is feeble--namely, character and expression. Her soul spoke out in every lineament of her noble features, and threw around her the charm of spiritual exaltation.

To such a charm as this Brandon did not seem indifferent. His usual self-abstraction seemed to desert him for a time. The part that he had taken in her rescue of itself formed a tie between them; but there was another bond in the fact that he alone of all on board could associate with her on equal terms, as a high-bred gentleman with a high-bred lady.

The Hindu had at once found occupation, for Brandon, who had seen the stuff that was in him, offered to take him for his servant. He said that

his name was Asgeelo, but he was commonly called Cato, and preferred that name to any other. He regarded Brandon as his saviour, with all the superstition which Hindus can feel, and looked up to this saviour as a superior being. The offer of employment was eagerly accepted, and Cato at once entered upon the few duties which his situation could require on ship-board.

Meanwhile the young lady remained unknown. At first she spent the greater part of her time in her room, and only came out at meal-times, when the sadness of her face prevented any thing except the most distant and respectful courtesy. No one knew her name, and no one asked it. Cato was ignorant of it. She and the old nurse had only been known to him as the young missis and the old missis.

Brandon, roused from his indifference, did all in his power to mitigate the gloom of this fair young creature, whom fate had thrown in his way. He found that his attentions were not unacceptable. At length she came out more frequently, and they became companions on the quarter-deck.

Brandon was touched by the exhibition which she had made of her gratitude to himself. She persisted in regarding him alone as the one to whom she owed her life, and apologized to him for her selfishness in giving way so greatly to her grief. After a time she ventured to tell him the story of the voyage which she had been making. She was on her way from China to England. Her father lived in England, but she had passed her life in Hong-Kong, having been brought up there by the old nurse, who had accompanied her on her voyage until that fearful calamity.

She told him at different times that her father was a merchant who had business all over the world, and that he had of late taken up his station in his own home and sent for her.

Of her father she did not say much, and did not seem to know much. She had never seen him. She had been in Hong-Kong ever since she could remember. She believed, however, that she was born in England, but did not know for certain. Her nurse had not known her till she had gone to China.

It was certainly a curious life, but quite natural, when a busy merchant devotes all his thoughts to business, and but little attention to his family. She had no mother, but thought she must have died in India. Yet she was not sure. Of all this, however, she expected to hear when she reached home and met her father.

By the time that she had been a month on board Brandon knew much of the events of her simple life. He saw the strange mixture of fear and longing with which she looked forward to a meeting with her father. He learned that she had a brother, also, whom she had never seen, for her father kept his son with himself. He could not help looking with inexpressible pity on one so lovely, yet so neglected.

Otherwise, as far as mere money was concerned, she had never suffered. Her accomplishments were numerous. She was passionately fond of music, and was familiar with all the classic compositions. Her voice was finely trained, for she had enjoyed the advantage of the instructions of an Italian maestro, who had been banished, and had gone out to Hong-Kong as band-master in the Twentieth Regiment. She could speak French fluently, and had read almost every thing.

Now after finding out all this Brandon had not found out her name. Embarrassments arose sometimes, which she could not help noticing, from this very cause, and yet she said nothing about it. Brandon did not like to ask her abruptly, since he saw that she did not respond to his hints. So he conjectured and wondered. He thought that her name must be of the lordliest kind, and that she for some reason wished to keep it a secret: perhaps she was noble, and did not like to tell that name which had been stained by the occupations of trade. All this Brandon thought.

Yet as he thought this, he was not insensible to the music of her soft, low voice, the liquid tenderness of her eye, and the charm of her manner. She seemed at once to confide herself to him--to own the superiority of his nature and seek shelter in it. Circumstances threw them exclusively into one another's way, and they found each other so congenial that they took advantage of circumstances to the utmost.

There were others as well as Brandon who found it awkward not to have any name by which to address her, and chief of these was the good Captain. After calling her Ma'am and Miss indifferently for about a month he at last determined to ask her directly; so, one day at the dinner-table, he said:

"I most humbly beg your pardon, ma'am; but I do not know your name, and have never had a chance to find it out. If it's no offense, perhaps you would be so good as to tell it?"

The young lady thus addressed flushed crimson, then looked at Brandon, who was gazing fixedly on his plate, and with visible embarrassment said, very softly, "Beatrice."

"B. A. Treachy," said the Captain. "Ah! I hope, Miss Treachy, you will pardon me; but I really found it so everlasting confusing."

A faint smile crossed the lips of Brandon. But Beatrice did not smile. She looked a little frightened, and then said:

"Oh, that is only my Christian name!"

"Christian name!" said the Captain. "How can that be a Christian name?"

"My surname is--" She hesitated, and then, with an effort, pronounced the word "Potts."

"Potts!" said the Captain, quickly, and with evident surprise. "Oh--well, I hope you will excuse me."

But the face of Beatrice turned to an ashen hue as she marked the effect which the mention of that name had produced on Brandon. He had been looking at his plate like one involved in thought. As he heard the name his head fell forward, and he caught at the table to steady himself. He then rose abruptly with a cloud upon his brow, his lips firmly pressed together, and his whole face seemingly transformed, and hurried from the cabin.

She did not see him again for a week. He pleaded illness, shut himself in his state-room, and was seen by no one but Cato.

Beatrice could not help associating this change in Brandon with the

knowledge of her name. That name was hateful to herself. A fastidious taste had prevented her from volunteering to tell it; and as no one asked her directly it had not been known. And now, since she had told it, this was the result.

For Brandon's conduct she could imagine only one cause. He had felt shocked at such a plebeian name.

The fact that she herself hated her name, and saw keenly how ridiculously it sounded after such a name as Beatrice, only made her feel the more indignant with Brandon. "His own name," she thought, bitterly, "is plebeian--not so bad as mine, it is true, yet still it is plebeian. Why should he feel so shocked at mine?" Of course, she knew him only as "_Mr. Wheeler_." "Perhaps he has imagined that I had some grand name, and, learning my true one, has lost his illusion. He formerly esteemed me. He now despises me."

Beatrice was cut to the heart; but she was too proud to show any feeling whatever. She frequented the quarter-deck as before; though now she had no companion except, at turns, the good-natured Captain and the mate. The longer Brandon avoided her the more indignant she felt. Her outraged pride made sadness impossible.

Brandon remained in his state-room for about two weeks altogether. When at length he made his appearance on the quarter-deck he found Beatrice there, who greeted him with a distant bow.

There was a sadness in his face as he approached and took a seat near her which at once disarmed her, drove away all indignation, and aroused pity.

"You have been sick," she said, kindly, and with some emotion.

"Yes," said Brandon, in a low voice, "but now that I am able to go about again my first act is to apologize to you for my rudeness in quitting the table so abruptly as to make it seem like a personal insult to you. Now I hope you will believe me when I say that an insult to you from me is impossible. Something like a spasm passed over my nervous system, and I had to hurry to my room."

"I confess," said Beatrice, frankly, "that I thought your sudden departure had something to do with the conversation about me. I am very sorry indeed that I did you such a wrong; I might have known you better. Will you forgive me?"

Brandon smiled, faintly. "You are the one who must forgive."

"But I hate my name so," burst out Beatrice.

Brandon said nothing.

"Don't you? Now confess."

"How can I--" he began.

"You do, you do!" she cried, vehemently; "but I don't care--for I hate it."

Brandon looked at her with a sad, weary smile, and said nothing. "You

are sick," she said; "I am thoughtless. I see that my name, in some way or other, recalls painful thoughts. How wretched it is for me to give pain to others!"

Brandon looked at her appealingly, and said, "You give pain? Believe me! believe me! there is nothing but happiness where you are."

At this Beatrice looked confused and changed the conversation. There seemed after this to be a mutual understanding between the two to avoid the subject of her name, and although it was a constant mortification to Beatrice, yet she believed that on his part there was no contempt for the name, but something very different, something associated with better memories.

They now resumed their old walks and conversations. Every day bound them more closely to one another, and each took it for granted that the other would be the constant companion of every hour in the day.

Both had lived unusual lives. Beatrice had much to say about her Hong-Kong life, the Chinese, the British officers, and the festivities of garrison life. Brandon had lived for years in Australia, and was familiar with all the round of events which may be met with in that country. He had been born in England, and had lived there, as has already been mentioned, till he was almost a man, so that he had much to say about that mother-land concerning which Beatrice felt such curiosity. Thus they settled down again naturally and inevitably into constant association with each other.

Whatever may have been the thoughts of Brandon during the fortnight of his seclusion, or whatever may have been the conclusion to which he came, he carefully refrained from the most remote hint at the home or the prospects of Beatrice. He found her on the seas, and he was content to take her as she was. Her name was a common one. She might be connected with his enemy, or she might not. For his part, he did not wish to know.

Beatrice also showed equal care in avoiding the subject. The effect which had been produced by the mention of her name was still remembered, and, whatever the cause may have been, both this and her own strong dislike to it prevented her from ever making any allusion either to her father or to any one of her family. She had no scruples, however, about talking of her Hong-Kong life, in which one person seemed to have figured most prominently--a man who had lived there for years, and given her instruction in music. He was an Italian, of whom she knew nothing whatever but his name, with the exception of the fact that he had been unfortunate in Europe, and had come out to Hong-Kong as bandmaster of the Twentieth Regiment. His name was Paolo Langhetti.

"Do you like music?" asked Brandon, abruptly.

"Above all things." said Beatrice, with an intensity of emphasis which spoke of deep feeling.

"Do you play?"

"Somewhat."

"Do you sing?"

"A little. I was considered a good singer in Hong-Kong; but that is nothing. I sang in the Cathedral. Langhetti was kind enough to praise me; but then he was so fond of me that whatever I did was right."

Brandon was silent for a little while. "Langhetti was fond of you?" he repeated, interrogatively, and in a voice of singular sweetness.

"Very," returned Beatrice, musingly. "He always called me 'Bice'--sometimes 'Bicetta,' 'Bicinola,' 'Bicina;' it was his pretty Italian way. But oh, if you could hear him play! He could make the violin speak like a human voice. He used to think in music. He seemed to me to be hardly human sometimes."

"And he loved to hear you sing?" said Brandon, in the same voice.

"He used to praise me," said Beatrice, meekly. "His praise used to gratify, but it did not deceive me. I am not conceited, Mr. Wheeler."

"Would you sing for me?" asked Brandon, in accents almost of entreaty, looking at her with an imploring expression.

Beatrice's head fell. "Not now--not yet--not here," she murmured, with a motion of her hand. "Wait till we pass beyond this ocean. It seems haunted."

Brandon understood her tone and gesture.

But the weeks passed, and the months, and they went over the seas, touching at Mauritius, and afterward at Cape Town, till finally they entered the Atlantic Ocean, and sailed North. During all this time their association was close and continuous. In her presence Brandon softened; the sternness of his features relaxed, and the great purpose of his life grew gradually fainter.

One evening, after they had entered the Atlantic Ocean, they were standing by the stern of the ship looking at the waters, when Brandon repeated his request.

"Would you be willing to sing now?" he asked, gently, and in the same tone of entreaty which he had used before.

Beatrice looked at him for a moment without speaking. Then she raised her face and looked up at the sky, with a deep abstraction in her eyes, as though in thought. Her face, usually colorless, now, in the moonlight, looked like marble; her dark hair hung in peculiar folds over her brow--an arrangement which was antique in its style, and gave her the look of a statue of one of the Muses. Her straight, Grecian features, large eyes, thin lips, and well-rounded chin--all had the same classic air, and Brandon, as he looked at her, wondered if she knew how fair she was. She stood for a moment in silence, and then began. It was a marvelous and a memorable epoch in Brandon's life. The scene around added its inspiration to the voice of the singer. The ocean spread afar away before them till the verge of the horizon seemed to blend sea and sky together. Overhead the dim sky hung, dotted with innumerable stars, prominent among which, not far above the horizon, gleamed that glorious constellation, the Southern Cross. Beatrice, who hesitated for a moment as if to decide upon her song, at last caught her idea from this scene around her, and began one of the most magnificent of Italian compositions:

"I cieli immensi narrano
Del grand' Iddio la gloria."

[Illustration: "SHE GAVE HERSELF ENTIRELY UP TO THE JOY OF SONG."]

Her first notes poured forth with a sweetness and fullness that arrested the attention of all on board the ship. It was the first time she had sung, as she afterward said, since Langhetti had left Hong-Kong, and she gave herself entirely up to the joy of song. Her voice, long silent, instead of having been injured by the sorrow through which she had passed, was pure, full, marvelous, and thrilling. A glow like some divine inspiration passed over the marble beauty of her classic features; her eyes themselves seemed to speak of all that glory of which she sang, as the sacred fire of genius flashed from them.

At those wonderful notes, so generous and so penetrating with their sublime meaning, all on board the ship looked and listened with amazement. The hands of the steersman held the wheel listlessly. Brandon's own soul was filled with the fullest effects. He stood watching her figure, with its inspired lineaments, and thought of the fabled prodigies of music spoken of in ancient story. He thought of Orpheus hushing all animated nature to calm by the magic of his song. At last all thoughts of his own left him, and nothing remained but that which the song of Beatrice swept over his spirit.

But Beatrice saw nothing and heard nothing except the scene before her, with its grand inspiration and her own utterance of its praise. Brandon's own soul was more and more overcome; the divine voice thrilled over his heart; he shuddered and uttered a low sigh of rapture.

"My God!" he exclaimed as she ended; "I never before heard any thing like this. I never dreamed of such a thing. Is there on earth another such a voice as yours? Will I ever again hear any thing like it? Your song is like a voice from those heavens of which you sing. It is a new revelation."

He poured forth these words with passionate impetuosity. Beatrice smiled.

"Langhetti used to praise me," she simply rejoined.

"You terrify me," said he.

"Why?" asked Beatrice, in wonder.

"Because your song works upon me like a spell, and all my soul sinks away, and all my will is weakened to nothingness."

Beatrice looked at him with a mournful smile. "Then you have the true passion for music," she said, "if this be so. For my part it is the joy of my life, and I hope to give up all my life to it."

"Do you expect to see Langhetti when you reach England?" asked Brandon, abruptly.

"I hope so," said she, musingly.

CHAPTER XI.

THE IMPROVISATORE.

The character of Beatrice unfolded more and more every day, and every new development excited the wonder of Brandon.

She said once that music was to her like the breath of life, and indeed it seemed to be; for now, since Brandon had witnessed her powers, he noticed how all her thoughts took a coloring from this. What most surprised him was her profound acquirements in the more difficult branches of the art. It was not merely the case of a great natural gift of voice. Her whole soul seemed imbued with those subtle influences which music can most of all bestow. Her whole life seemed to have been passed in one long intercourse with the greatest works of the greatest masters. All their works were perfectly well known to her. A marvelous memory enabled her to have their choicest productions at command; and Brandon, who in the early part of his life had received a careful musical education, knew enough about it to estimate rightly the full extent of the genius of his companion, and to be astonished thereat.

Her mind was also full of stories about the lives, acts, and words of the great masters. For her they formed the only world with which she cared to be acquainted, and the only heroes whom she had power to admire. All this flowed from one profound central feeling--namely, a deep and all-absorbing love of this most divine art. To her it was more than art. It was a new faculty to him who possessed it. It was the highest power of utterance--such utterance as belongs to the angels; such utterance as, when possessed by man, raises him almost to an equality with them.

Brandon found out every day some new power in her genius. Now her voice was unloosed from the bonds which she had placed upon it. She sang, she said, because it was better than talking. Words were weak--song was all expression. Nor was it enough for her to take the compositions of others. Those were infinitely better, she said, than any thing which she could produce; but each one must have his own native expression; and there were times when she had to sing from herself. To Brandon this seemed the most amazing of her powers. In Italy the power of improvisation is not uncommon, and Englishmen generally imagine that this is on account of some peculiar quality of the Italian language. This is not the case. One can improvise in any language; and Brandon found that Beatrice could do this with the English.

"It is not wonderful," said she, in answer to his expression of astonishment, "it is not even difficult. There is an art in doing this, but, when you once know it, you find no trouble. It is rhythmic prose in a series of lines. Each line must contain a thought. Langhetti found no difficulty in making rhyming lines, but rhymes are not necessary. This rhythmic prose is as poetic as any thing can be. All the hymns of the Greek Church are written on this principle. So are the Te Deum and the Gloria. So were all the ancient Jewish psalms. The Jews improvised. I suppose Deborah's song, and perhaps Miriam's, are of this order."

"And you think the art can be learned by every one?"

"No, not by every one. One must have a quick and vivid imagination, and natural fluency--but these are all. Genius makes all the difference between what is good and what is bad. Sometimes you have a song of Miriam that lives while the world lasts, sometimes a poor little song like one of mine."

"Sing to me about music," said Brandon, suddenly.

Beatrice immediately began an improvisation. But the music to which she sang was lofty and impressive, and the marvelous sweetness of her voice produced an indescribable effect. And again, as always when she sang, the fashion of her face was changed, and she became transfigured before his eyes. It was the same rhythmic prose of which she had been speaking, sung according to the mode in which the Gloria is chanted, and divided into bars of equal time.

Brandon, as always, yielded to the spell of her song. To him it was an incantation. Her own strains varied to express the changing sentiment, and at last, as the song ended, it seemed to die away in melodious melancholy, like the dying strain of the fabled swan.

"Sing on!" he exclaimed, fervently; "I would wish to stand and hear your voice forever."

A smile of ineffable sweetness came over her face. She looked at him, and said nothing. Brandon bowed his head, and stood in silence.

Thus ended many of their interviews. Slowly and steadily this young girl gained over him an ascendancy which he felt hourly, and which was so strong that he did not even struggle against it. Her marvelous genius, so subtle, so delicate, yet so inventive and quick, amazed him. If he spoke of this, she attributed every thing to Langhetti. "Could you but see him," she would say, "I should seem like nothing!"

"Has he such a voice?"

"Oh! he has no voice at all. It is his soul," she would reply. "He speaks through the violin. But he taught me all that I know. He said my voice was God's gift. He had a strange theory that the language of heaven and of the angels was music, and that he who loved it best on earth made his life and his thoughts most heavenly."

"You must have been fond of such a man."

"Very," said Beatrice, with the utmost simplicity. "Oh, I loved him so dearly!"

But in this confession, so artlessly made, Brandon saw only a love that was filial or sisterly. "He was the first one," said Beatrice, "who showed me the true meaning of life. He exalted his art above all other arts, and always maintained that it was the purest and best thing which the world possessed. This consoled him for exile, poverty, and sorrow of many kinds."

"Was he married?"

Beatrice looked at Brandon with a singular smile. "Married! Langhetti married! Pardon me; but the idea of Langhetti in domestic life is so ridiculous."

"Why? The greatest musicians have married."

Beatrice looked up to the sky with a strange, serene smile. "Langhetti has no passion out of art," she said. "As an artist he is all fire, and vehemence, and enthusiasm. He is aware of all human passions, but only as an artist. He has only one love, and that is music. This is his idol. He seems to me himself like a song. But all the raptures which poets and novelists apply to lovers are felt by him in his music. He wants nothing while he has this. He thinks the musician's life the highest life. He says those to whom the revelations of God were committed were musicians. As David and Isaiah received inspiration to the strains of the harp, so, he says, have Bach and Mozart, Handel and Haydn, Beethoven and Mendelssohn. And where, indeed," she continued, in a musing tone, half soliloquizing, "where, indeed, can man rise so near heaven as when he listens to the inspired strains of these lofty souls?"

"Langhetti," said Brandon, in a low voice, "does not understand love, or he would not put music in its place."

"Yes," said Beatrice. "We spoke once about that. He has his own ideas, which he expressed to me."

"What were they?"

"I will have to say them as he said them," said she. "For on this theme he had to express himself in music."

Brandon waited in rapt expectation. Beatrice began to sing:

"Fairest of all most fair,
Young Love, how comest thou
Unto the soul?
Still as the evening breeze
Over the starry wave--
The moonlit wave--

"The heart lies motionless;
So still, so sensitive;
Love fans the breeze.
Lo! at his lightest touch,
The myriad ripples rise,
And murmur on.

"And ripples rise to waves,
And waves to rolling seas,
Till, far and wide,
The endless billows roll,
In undulations long,
For evermore!"

Her voice died away into a scarce audible tone, which sank into Brandon's heart, lingering and dying about the last word, with touching and unutterable melancholy. It was like the lament of one who loved. It was like the cry of some yearning heart.

In a moment Beatrice looked at Brandon with a swift, bright smile. She had sung these words as an artist. For a moment Brandon had thought that she was expressing her own feelings. But the bright smile on her face

contrasted so strongly with the melancholy of her voice that he saw this was not so.

"Thus," she said, "Langhetti sang about it: and I have never forgotten his words."

The thought came to Brandon, is it not truer than she thinks, that "she loves him very dearly?" as she said.

"You were born to be an artist," he said, at last.

Beatrice sighed lightly. "That's what I never can be, I am afraid," said she. "Yet I hope I may be able to gratify my love for it. Art," she continued, musingly, "is open to women as well as to men; and of all arts none are so much so as music. The interpretation of great masters is a blessing to the world. Langhetti used to say that these are the only ones of modern times that have received heavenly inspiration. They correspond to the Jewish prophets. He used to declare that the interpretation of each was of equal importance. To man is given the interpretation of the one, but to woman is given the interpretation of much of the other. Why is not my voice, if it is such as he said, and especially the feeling within me, a Divine call to go forth upon this mission of interpreting the inspired utterances of the great masters of modern days?"

"You," she continued, "are a man, and you have a purpose." Brandon started, but she did not notice it. "You have a purpose in life," she repeated. "Your intercourse with me will hereafter be but an episode in the life that is before you. I am a girl, but I too may wish to have a purpose in life--suited to my powers; and if I am not able to work toward it I shall not be satisfied."

"How do you know that I have a purpose, as you call it?" asked Brandon, after a pause.

"By the expression of your face, and your whole manner when you are alone and subside into yourself," she replied, simply.

"And of what kind?" he continued.

"That I do not seek to know," she replied; "but I know that it must be deep and all-absorbing. It seems to me to be too stern for Love; you are not the man to devote yourself to Avarice: possibly it may be Ambition, yet somehow I do not think so."

"What do you think it is, then?" asked Brandon, in a voice which had died away, almost to a whisper.

She looked at him earnestly; she looked at him pityingly. She looked at him also with that sympathy which might be evinced by one's Guardian Angel, if that Being might by any chance become visible. She leaned toward him, and spoke low in a voice only audible to him:

"Something stronger than Love, and Avarice, and Ambition," said she. "There can be only one thing."

"What?"

"Vengeance!" she said, in a voice of inexpressible mournfulness.

Brandon looked at her wonderingly, not knowing how this young girl could have divined his thoughts. He long remained silent.

Beatrice folded her hands together, and looked pensively at the sea.

"You are a marvelous being," said Brandon, at length. "Can you tell me any more?"

"I might," said she, hesitatingly; "but I am afraid you will think me impertinent."

"No," said Brandon. "Tell me, for perhaps you are mistaken."

"You will not think me impertinent, then? You will only think that I said so because you asked me?"

"I entreat you to believe that it is impossible for me to think otherwise of you than you yourself would wish."

"Shall I say it, then?"

"Yes."

Her voice again sank to a whisper. "Your name is not Wheeler."

Brandon looked at her earnestly. "How did you learn that?"

"By nothing more than observation."

"What is my name?"

"Ah, that is beyond my power to know," said she with a smile. "I have only discovered what you are not. Now you will not think me a spy, will you?" she continued, in a pleading voice.

Brandon smiled on her mournfully as she stood looking at him with her dark eyes upraised.

"A spy!" he repeated. "To me it is the sweetest thought conceivable that you could take the trouble to notice me sufficiently." He checked himself suddenly, for Beatrice looked away, and her hands which had been folded together clutched each other nervously. "It is always flattering for a gentleman to be the object of a lady's notice," he concluded, in a light tone.

Beatrice smiled. "But where," he continued, "could you have gained that power of divination which you possess; you who have always lived a secluded life in so remote a place?"

"You did not think that one like me could come out of Hong-Kong, did you?" said she, laughingly.

"Well, I have seen much of the world; but I have not so much of this power as you have."

"You might have more if--if--" she hesitated. "Well," she continued, "they say, you know, that men act by reason, women by intuition."

"Have you any more intuitions?" asked Brandon, earnestly.

"Yes," said she, mournfully.

"Tell me some."

"They will not do to tell," said Beatrice, in the same mournful tone.

"Why not?"

"They are painful."

"Tell them at any rate."

"No."

"Hint at them."

Beatrice looked at him earnestly. Their eyes met. In hers there was a glance of anxious inquiry, as though her soul were putting forth a question by that look which was stronger than words. In his there was a glance of anxious expectancy, as though his soul were speaking unto hers, saying: "Tell all; let me know if you suspect that of which I am afraid to think."

"We have met with ships at sea," she resumed, in low, deliberate tones.

"Yes."

"Sometimes we have caught up with them, we have exchanged signals, we have sailed in sight of one another for hours or for days, holding intercourse all the while. At last a new morning has come, and we looked out over the sea, and the other ship has gone from sight. We have left it forever. Perhaps we have drifted away, perhaps a storm has parted us, the end is the same--separation for evermore."

She spoke mournfully, looking away, her voice insensibly took up a cadence, and the words seemed to fall of themselves into rhythmic pause.

"I understand you," said Brandon, with a more profound mournfulness in his voice. "You speak like a Sibyl. I pray Heaven that your words may not be a prophecy."

Beatrice still looked at him, and in her eyes he read pity beyond words; and sorrow also as deep as that pity.

"Do you read my thoughts as I read yours?" asked Brandon, abruptly.

"Yes," she answered, mournfully.

He turned his face away.

"Did Langhetti teach you this also?" he asked, at last.

"He taught me many things," was the answer.

Day succeeded to day, and week to week. Still the ship went on holding steadily to her course northward, and every day drawing nearer and

nearer her goal. Storms came--some moderate, some severe; but the ship escaped them all with no casualties, and with but little delay.

At last they passed the equator, and seemed to have entered the last stage of their journey.

CHAPTER XII.

THE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

At length the ship came within the latitude of the Guinea coast.

For some days there had been alternate winds and calms, and the weather was so fitful and so fickle that no one could tell in one hour what would happen in the next. All this was at last terminated by a dead, dense, oppressive calm like those of the Indian Ocean, in which exertion was almost impossible and breathing difficult. The sky, however, instead of being clear and bright, as in former calms, was now overspread with menacing clouds; the sea looked black, and spread out before them on every side like an illimitable surface of polished ebony. There was something appalling in the depth and intensity of this calm with such accompaniments. All felt this influence. Although there was every temptation to inaction and sleep yet no one yielded to it. The men looked suspiciously and expectantly at every quarter of the heavens. The Captain said nothing, but cautiously had all his preparations made for a storm. Every half hour he anxiously consulted the barometer, and then cast uneasy glances at the sea and sky.

But the calm which had set in at midnight, and had become confirmed at dawn, extended itself through the long day. The ship drifted idly, keeping no course, her yards creaking lazily as she slowly rose and fell at the movement of the ocean-undulations. Hour after hour passed, and the day ended, and night came once more.

The Captain did not turn in that night. In anxious expectation he waited and watched on deck, while all around there was the very blackness of darkness. Brandon began to see from the Captain's manner that he expected something far more violent than any thing which the ship had yet encountered, but, thinking that his presence would be of no consequence, he retired at the usual hour.

The deep, dense calm continued until nearly midnight. The watchers on deck still waited in the same anxious expectation, thinking that the night would bring on the change which they expected.

Almost half an hour before midnight a faint light was seen in the thick mass of clouds overhead--it was not lightning, but a whitish streak, as though produced by some movement in the clouds. All looked up in mute expectation.

Suddenly a faint puff of wind came from the west, blowing gently for a few moments, then stopping, and then coming on in a stronger blast. Afar off, at what seemed like an immeasurable distance, a low, dull roar arose, a heavy moaning sound, like the menace of the mighty Atlantic, which was now advancing in wrath upon them.

In the midst of this the whole scene burst forth into dazzling light at the flash of a vast mass of lightning, which seemed to blaze from every part of the heavens on every side simultaneously. It threw forth all things--ship, sea, and sky--into the dazzled eyes of the watchers. They saw the ebon sky, the black and lustrous sea, the motionless ship. They saw also, far off to the west, a long line of white which appeared to extend along the whole horizon.

But the scene darted out of sight instantly, and instantly there fell the volleying discharge of a tremendous peal of thunder, at whose reverberations the air and sea and ship all vibrated.

Now the sky lightened again, and suddenly, as the ship lay there, a vast ball of fire issued from the black clouds immediately overhead, descending like the lightning straight downward, till all at once it struck the main truck. With a roar louder than that of the recent thunder it exploded; fast sheets of fire flashed out into the air, and a stream of light passed down the entire mast, shattering it as a tree is shattered when the lightning strikes it. The whole ship was shaken to its centre. The deck all around the mast was shattered to splinters, and along its extent and around its base a burst of vivid flame started into light.

Wild confusion followed. At once all the sailors were ordered up, and began to extinguish the fires, and to cut away the shattered mast. The blows of the axes resounded through the ship. The rigging was severed; the mast, already shattered, needed but a few blows to loosen its last fibres.

But suddenly, and furiously, and irresistibly it seemed as though the whole tempest which they had so long expected was at last let loose upon them. There was a low moan, and, while they were yet trying to get rid of the mast, a tremendous squall struck the ship. It yielded and turned far over to that awful blow. The men started back from their work. The next instant a flash of lightning came, and toward the west, close over them, rose a long, white wall of foam. It was the van-guard of the storm, seen shortly before from afar, which was now upon them, ready to fall on their devoted heads.

Not a word was spoken. No order came from the Captain. The men awaited some word. There came none. Then the waters, which thus rose up like a heap before them, struck the ship with all the accumulated fury of that resistless onset, and hurled their utmost weight upon her as she lay before them.

The ship, already reeling far over at the stroke of the storm, now, at this new onset, yielded utterly, and rolled far over on her beam-ends. The awful billows dashed over and over her, sweeping her in their fury from end to end. The men clung helplessly to whatever rigging lay nearest, seeking only in that first moment of dread to prevent themselves from being washed away, and waiting for some order from the Captain, and wondering while they waited.

At the first peal of thunder Brandon had started up. He had lain down in his clothes, in order to be prepared for any emergency. He called Cato. The Hindu was at hand. "Cato, keep close to me whatever happens, for you will be needed." "Yes, Sahib." He then hurried to Beatrice's room and knocked. It was opened at once. She came forth with her pale, serene

face, and looked at him.

"I did not lie down," said she. "I knew that there would be something frightful. But I am not afraid. At any rate," she added, "I know I will not be deserted."

Brandon said nothing, but held out to her an India-rubber life-preserver. "What is this for?" "For you. I wish you to put it on. It may not be needed, but it is best to have it on." "And what will you do?" "I--oh! I can swim, you know. But you don't know how to fasten it. Will you allow me to do so?" She raised her arms. He passed the belt around her waist, encircling her almost in his arms while doing so, and his hand, which had boldly grasped the head of the "dweller in the wreck," now trembled as he fastened the belt around that delicate and slender waist.

But scarcely had this been completed when the squall struck the ship, and the waves followed till the vessel was thrown far over on her side; and Brandon seizing Beatrice in one arm, clung with the other to the edge of the skylight, and thus kept himself upright.

He rested now for a moment. "I must go on deck," he said. "I do not wish you to leave me," was her answer. Nothing more was said. Brandon at once lifted her with one arm as though she were a child and clambered along, grasping such fixtures as afforded any thing to which he could cling; and thus, with hands and feet, groped his way to the door of the cabin, which was on the windward side. There were two doors, and between them was a seat.

"This," said he, "is the safest place for you. Can you hold on for a short time? If I take you on deck you will be exposed to the waves."

"I will do whatever you say," she replied; and clinging to the arm of the almost perpendicular seat, she was able to sustain herself there amidst the tossing and swaying of the ship.

Brandon then clambered out on deck. The ship lay far over. The waves came leaping upon her in successive surges. All around the sea was glistening with phosphorescent lustre, and when at times the lightning flashed forth it lighted up the scene, and showed the ocean stirred up to fiercest commotion. It seemed as though cataracts of water were rushing over the doomed ship, which now lay helpless, and at the mercy of the billows. The force of the wind was tremendous, exceeding any thing that Brandon had ever witnessed before.

What most surprised him now was the inaction of the ship's company. Why was not something being done? Where was the Captain?

He called out his name; there was no response. He called after the mate; there was no answer. Instantly he conjectured that in the first fierce onset of the storm both Captain and mate had been swept away. How many more of that gallant company of brave fellows had perished he knew not. The hour was a perilous and a critical one. He himself determined to take the lead.

Through the midst of the storm, with its tumult and its fury, there came a voice as full and clear as a trumpet-peal, which roused all the sailors, and inspired them once more with hope. "Cut away the masts!" The men obeyed, without caring who gave the order. It was the command

which each man had been expecting, and which he knew was the thing that should be done. At once they sprang to their work. The main-mast had already been cut loose. Some went to the fore-mast, others to the mizzen. The vast waves rolled on; the sailors guarded as best they could against the rush of each wave, and then sprang in the intervals to their work. It was perilous in the highest degree, but each man felt that his own life and the lives of all the others depended upon the accomplishment of this work, and this nerved the arm of each to the task.

At last it was done. The last strand of rigging had been cut away. The ship, disencumbered, slowly righted, and at last rode upright.

But her situation was still dangerous. She lay in the trough of the sea, and the gigantic waves, as they rolled up, still beat upon her with all their concentrated energies. Helpless, and now altogether at the mercy of the waves, the only hope left those on board lay in the strength of the ship herself.

None of the officers were left. As the ship righted Brandon thought that some of them might make their appearance, but none came. The Captain, the mate, and the second mate, all had gone. Perhaps all of them, as they stood on the quarter-deck, had been swept away simultaneously. Nothing could now be done but to wait. Morning at last came to the anxious watchers. It brought no hope. Far and wide the sea raged with all its waves. The wind blew with undiminished and irresistible violence. The ship, still in the trough of the sea, heaved and plunged in the overwhelming waves, which howled madly around and leaped over her like wolves eager for their prey. The wind was too fierce to permit even an attempt to rig a jury-mast.

The ship was also deeply laden, and this contributed to her peril. Had her cargo been smaller she would have been more buoyant; but her full cargo, added to her dangerous position as she lay at the mercy of the waves, made all hope of escape dark indeed.

Another night succeeded. It was a night of equal horror. The men stood watching anxiously for some sign of abatement in the storm, but none came. Sea and sky frowned over them darkly, and all the powers which they controlled were let loose unrestrained.

Another day and night came and went. Had not the Falcon been a ship of unusual strength she would have yielded before this to the storm. As it was, she began to show signs of giving way to the tremendous hammering to which she had been exposed, and her heavy Australian cargo bore her down. On the morning of the third day Brandon saw that she was deeper in the water, and suspected a leak. He ordered the pumps to be sounded. It was as he feared. There were four feet of water in the hold.

The men went to work at the pumps and worked by relays. Amidst the rush of the waves over the ship it was difficult to work advantageously, but they toiled on. Still, in spite of their efforts, the leak seemed to have increased, for the water did not lessen. With their utmost exertion they could do little more than hold their own.

It was plain that this sort of thing could not last. Already three nights and three days of incessant toil and anxiety, in which no one had slept, had produced their natural effects. The men had become faint and

weary. But the brave fellows never murmured; they did every thing which Brandon ordered, and worked uncomplainingly.

Thus, through the third day, they labored on, and into the fourth night. That night the storm seemed to have reached its climax, if, indeed, any climax could be found to a storm which at the very outset had burst upon them with such appalling suddenness and fury, and had sustained itself all along with such unremitting energy. But on that night it was worse for those on board, since the ship which had resisted so long began to exhibit signs of yielding, her planks and timbers so severely assailed began to give way, and through the gaping seams the ocean waters permeated, till the ocean, like some beleaguering army, failing in direct assault, began to succeed by opening secret mines to the very heart of the besieged ship.

On the morning of the fourth day all hands were exhausted from night-long work, and there were ten feet of water in the hold.

It now became evident that the ship was doomed. Brandon at once began to take measures for the safety of the men.

On that memorable day of the calm previous to the outbreak of the storm, the Captain had told Brandon that they were about five hundred miles to the westward of the coast of Senegambia. He could not form any idea of the distance which the ship had drifted during the progress of the storm, but justly considered that whatever progress she had made had been toward the land. Their prospects in that direction, if they could only reach it, were not hopeless. Sierra Leone and Liberia were there; and if they struck the coast any where about they might make their way to either of those places.

But the question was how to get there. There was only one way, and that was by taking to the boats. This was a desperate undertaking, but it was the only way of escape now left.

There were three boats on board--viz., the long-boat, the cutter, and the gig. These were the only hope now left them. By venturing in these there would be a chance of escape.

On the morning of the fourth day, when it was found that the water was increasing, Brandon called the men together and stated this to them. He then told them that it would be necessary to divide themselves so that a sufficient number should go in each boat. He offered to give up to them the two larger boats, and take the gig for himself, his servant, and the young lady.

To this the men assented with great readiness. Some of them urged him to go in the larger boat, and even offered to exchange with him; but Brandon declined.

They then prepared for their desperate venture. All the provisions and water that could be needed were put on board of each boat. Firearms were not forgotten. Arrangements were made for a long and arduous voyage. The men still worked at the pumps; and though the water gained on them, yet time was gained for completing these important preparations.

About mid-day all was ready. Fifteen feet of water were in the hold. The ship could not last much longer. There was no time to lose.

But how could the boats be put out? How could they live in such a sea? This was the question to be decided.

The ship lay as before in the trough of the sea. On the windward side the waves came rushing up, beating upon and sweeping over her. On the leeward the water was calmer, but the waves tossed and raged angrily even there.

Only twenty were left out of the ship's company. The rest were all missing. Of these, fourteen were to go in the long-boat, and six in the cutter. Brandon, Beatrice, and Cato were to take the gig.

The sailors put the gig out first. The light boat floated buoyantly on the waters. Cato leaped into her, and she was fastened by a long line to the ship. The nimble Hindu, trained for a lifetime to encounter the giant surges of the Malabar coast, managed the little boat with marvelous dexterity--avoiding the sweep of the waves which dashed around, and keeping sufficiently under the lee to escape the rougher waves, yet not so much so as to be hurled against the vessel.

Then the sailors put out the long-boat. This was a difficult undertaking, but it was successfully accomplished, and the men were all on board at last. Instantly they prepared to row away.

At that moment a wilder wave came pouring over the ship. It was as though the ocean, enraged at the escape of these men, had made a final effort to grasp its prey. Before the boat with its living freight had got rid of the vessel, the sweep of this gigantic wave, which had passed completely over the ship, struck it where it lay. Brandon turned away his eyes involuntarily.

There was a wild shriek--the next moment the black outline of the long-boat, bottom upward, was seen amidst the foaming billows.

The men who waited to launch the cutter were at first paralyzed by this tragedy, but there was no time to lose. Death threatened them behind as well as before; behind, death was certain; before, there was still a chance. They launched the cutter in desperation. The six men succeeded in getting into her, and in rowing out at some distance. As wave after wave rose and fell she disappeared from view, and then reappeared, till at last Brandon thought that she at least was safe.

Then he raised his hand and made a peculiar signal to Cato.

The Hindu understood it. Brandon had given him his directions before; now was the time. The roll of the waves [illegible] up was for the present less dangerous.

Beatrice, who during the whole storm had been calm, and had quietly done whatever Brandon told her, was now waiting at the cabin-door in obedience to his directions.

As soon as Brandon had made the signal he hurried to the cabin-door and assisted Beatrice to the quarter-deck. Cato rowed his boat close up to the ship, and was waiting for a chance to come within reach. The waves were still more moderate. It was the opportunity for which Cato had been watching so long. He held his oars poised, and, as a sudden swell of a wave rose near the ship, he forced his boat so that it came close beside it, rising high on the crest of the swell.

As the wave rose, Brandon also had watched his opportunity as well as the action of Cato. It was the moment too for which he had been watching. In an instant, and without a word, he caught Beatrice in his arms, raised her high in the air, poised himself for a moment on the edge of the quarter-deck, and sprang forward into the boat. His foot rested firmly on the seat where it struck. He set Beatrice down, and with a knife severed the line which connected the boat with the ship.

Then seizing an oar he began to row with all his strength. Cato had the bow oar. The next wave came, and its sweep, communicating itself to the water, rolled on, dashing against the ship and moving under it, rising up high, lifting the boat with it, and bearing it along. But the boat was now under command, and the two rowers held it so that while it was able to avoid the dash of the water, it could yet gain from it all the momentum that could be given.

Brandon handled the oar with a dexterity equal to that of the Hindu, and under such management, which was at once strong and skillful, the boat skimmed lightly over the crests of the rolling waves, and passed out into the sea beyond. There the great surges came sweeping on, rising high behind the boat, each wave seeming about to crush the little bark in its resistless grasp, but notwithstanding the threat the boat seemed always able by some good luck to avoid the impending danger, for as each wave came forward the boat would rise up till it was on a level with the crest, and the flood of waters would sweep on underneath, bearing it onward.

After nearly half an hour's anxious and careful rowing Brandon looked all about to find the cutter. It was nowhere to be seen. Again and again he looked for it, seeking in all directions. But he discovered no sign of it on the raging waters, and at last he could no longer doubt that the cutter also, like long-boat, had perished in the sea.

All day long they rowed before the wind and wave--not strongly, but lightly, so as to husband their strength. Night came, when Brandon and Cato took turns at the oars--not over-exerting themselves, but seeking chiefly to keep the boat's head in proper direction, and to evade the rush of the waves. This last was their constant danger, and it required the utmost skill and the most incessant watchfulness to do so.

[Illustration: "WITHOUT A WORD HE CAUGHT BEATRICE IN HIS ARMS." ETC.]

All this time Beatrice sat in the stern, with a heavy oil-cloth coat around her, which Brandon directed her to put on, saying nothing, but seeing every thing with her watchful, vigilant eyes.

"Are you afraid?" said Brandon once, just after they had evaded an enormous wave.

"No!" was the reply, in a calm, sweet voice; "I trust in you."

"I hope your trust may not be vain," replied Brandon.

"You have saved my life so often," said Beatrice, "that my trust in you has now become a habit."

She smiled faintly as she spoke. There was something in her tone which sank deep into his soul.

The night passed and morning came.

For the last half of the night the wind had been much less boisterous, and toward morning the gale had very greatly subsided. Brandon's foresight had secured a mast and sail on board the gig, and now, as soon as it could be erected with safety, he put it up, and the little boat dashed bravely over the waters. The waves had lessened greatly as the day wore on; they no longer rose in such giant masses, but showed merely the more common proportions. Brandon and Cato now had an opportunity to get some rest from their exhaustive labors. Beatrice at last yielded to Brandon's earnest request, and, finding that the immediate peril had passed, and that his toil for the present was over, she obtained some sleep and rest for herself.

For all that day, and all that night, and all the next day, the little boat sped over the waters, heading due east, so as to reach land wherever they might find it, in the hope that the land might not be very far away from the civilized settlements of the coast. The provisions and water which had been put in the boat formed an ample supply, which would last for a long time. Brandon shared with Cato in the management of the boat, not allowing the big man to have more of the labor than himself.

During these days Brandon and Beatrice were of course thrown into a closer intimacy. At such a time the nature of man or woman becomes most apparent, and here Beatrice showed a noble calm and a simple trust which to Brandon was most touching. He knew that she must feel most keenly the fatigue and the privations of such a life; but her unvarying cheerfulness was the same as it had been on shipboard. He, too, exhibited that same constancy and resolution which he had always evinced, and by his consideration for Cato showed his natural kindness of heart.

"How sorry I am that I can do nothing!" Beatrice would say. "You are killing yourself, and I have to sit idle and gain my safety at your expense."

"The fact that you are yet safe," Brandon would reply, "is enough for me. As long as I see you sitting there I can work."

"But can I do nothing? It is hard for me to sit idle while you wear out your life."

"You can sing," said Brandon.

"What?"

"Langhetti's song," he said, and turned his face away.

She sang at once. Her tones rose in marvelous modulations; the words were not much, but the music with which she clothed them seemed again to utter forth that longing which Brandon had heard before.

Now, as they passed over the seas, Beatrice sang, and Brandon did not wish that this life should end. Through the days, as they sailed on, her voice arose expressive of every changeful feeling, now speaking of grief, now swelling in sweet strains of hope.

Day thus succeeded to day until the fourth night came, when the wind

died out and a calm spread over the waters.

Brandon, who waked at about two in the morning so as to let Cato sleep, saw that the wind had ceased, and that another one of those treacherous calms had come. He at once put out the oars, and, directing Cato to sleep till he waked him, began to pull.

Beatrice remonstrated. "Do not," said she, in an imploring tone. "You have already done too much. Why should you kill yourself?"

"The wind has stopped," answered Brandon. "The calm is treacherous, and no time ought to be lost."

"But wait till you have rested."

"I have been resting for days."

"Why do you not rest during the night and work in the daytime?"

"Because the daytime is so frightfully hot that work will be difficult. Night is the time to work now."

Brandon kept at his oars, and Beatrice saw that remonstrances were useless. He rowed steadily until the break of day: then, as day was dawning, he rested for a while, and looked earnestly toward the east.

A low, dark cloud lay along the eastern horizon, well-defined against the sky, which now was growing brighter and brighter every hour. Was it cloud, or was it something else? This was the question that rose in Brandon's mind.

The sky grew brighter, the scene far and wide opened up before the gathering light until at last the sun began to appear. Then there was no longer any doubt. It was LAND.

This he told to Beatrice; and the Hindu, waking at the same time, looked earnestly toward that shore which they had been striving so long and so earnestly to reach. It was land, but what land? No doubt it was some part of the coast of Senegambia, but what one? Along that extensive coast there were many places where landing might be certain death, or something worse than death. Savage tribes might dwell there--either those which were demoralized by dealings with slave-traders, or those which were flourishing in native barbarism. Yet only one course was now advisable; namely, to go on till they reached the shore.

It appeared to be about fifty miles away. So Brandon judged, and so it proved. The land which they had seen was the summit of lofty hills which were visible from a great distance. They rowed on all that day. The water was calm and glassy. The sun poured down its most fervid beams, the air was sultry and oppressive. Beatrice entreated Brandon now to desist from rowing and wait till the cool of the night, but he was afraid that a storm might come up suddenly.

"No," he said, "our only hope now is to get near the land, so that if a storm does come up we may have some place of shelter within reach."

After a day of exhaustive labor the land was at last reached.

High hills, covered with palm-trees, rose before them. There was no

harbor within sight, no river outlet, but a long, uninterrupted extent of high, wooded shores. Here in the evening they rested on their oars, and looked earnestly at the shore.

Brandon conjectured that they were somewhat to the north of Sierra Leone, and did not think that they could be to the south. At any rate, a southeasterly course was the surest one for them, for they would reach either Sierra Leone or Liberia. The distance which they might have to go was, however, totally uncertain to him.

So they turned the boat's head southeast, and moved in a line parallel with the general line of the shore. That shore varied in its features as they passed along: sometimes depressed into low, wide savannas: at others, rising into a rolling country, with hills of moderate height, behind which appeared the summits of lofty mountains, empurpled by distance.

It was evening when they first saw the land, and then they went on without pausing. It was arranged that they should row alternately, as moderately as possible, so as to husband their strength. Cato rowed for the first part of that night, then Brandon rowed till morning. On the following day Cato took the oars again.

It was now just a week since the wreck, and for the last two days there had not been a breath of wind in the air, nor the faintest ripple on that burning water. To use even the slightest exertion in such torrid heat was almost impossible. Even to sit still under that blighting sun, with the reflected glare from the dead, dark sea around, was painful.

Beatrice redoubled her entreaties to Brandon that he should rest. She wished to have her mantle spread over their heads as a kind of canopy, or fix the sail in some way and float idly through the hottest part of the day. But Brandon insisted that he felt no evil effects as yet; and promised when he did feel such to do as she said.

At last they discovered that their water was almost out, and it was necessary to get a fresh supply. It was the afternoon of the seventh day. Brandon had been rowing ever since midday. Beatrice had wound her mantle about his head in the style of an Eastern turban so as to protect him from the sun's rays. Looking out for some place along the shore where they might obtain water, they saw an opening in the line of coast where two hills arose to a height of several hundred feet. Toward this Brandon rowed.

Stimulated by the prospect of setting foot on shore Brandon rowed somewhat more vigorously than usual; and in about an hour the boat entered a beautiful little cove shut in between two hills, which formed the outlet of a river. Far up its winding course could be traced by the trees along its borders. The hills rose on each side with a steep slope, and were covered with palms. The front of the harbor was shut in from the sea by a beautiful little wooded island. Here Brandon rowed the boat into this cove; and its prow grated against the pebbles of the beach.

Beatrice had uttered many exclamations of delight at the beauty of this scene. At length, surprised at Brandon's silence, she cried,

"Why do you not say something? Surely this is a Paradise after the sea!"

She looked up with an enthusiastic smile.

He had risen to his feet. A strange, vacant expression was in his eyes. He made a step forward as if to land. His unsteady foot trembled. He reeled, and stretched out his arms like some one groping in the dark.

Beatrice shrieked and sprang forward. Too late: for the next moment he fell headlong into the water.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BADINAGE OF OLD FRIENDS.

The town of Holby is on the coast of Pembroke. It has a small harbour, with a light-house, and the town itself contains a few thousand people, most of them belonging to the poorer class. The chief house in the town stands on a rising ground a little outside, looking toward the water. Its size and situation render it the most conspicuous object in the neighborhood.

This house, from its appearance, must have been built more than a century before. It belonged to an old family which had become extinct, and now was occupied by a new owner, who had given it another name. This new owner was William Thornton, Esq., solicitor, who had an office in Holby, and who, though very wealthy, still attended to his business with undiminished application. The house had been originally purchased by the father of the present occupant, Henry Thornton, a well-known lawyer in these parts, who had settled here originally a poor young man, but had finally grown gray and rich in his adopted home. He had bought the place when it was exposed for sale, with the intention of founding a new seat for his own family, and had given it the name of Thornton Grange.

Generations of care and tasteful culture had made Thornton Grange one of the most beautiful places in the county. All around were wide parks dotted with ponds and clumps of trees. An avenue of elms led up to the door. A well-kept lawn was in front, and behind was an extensive grove. Every thing spoke of wealth and elegance.

On an afternoon in February a gentleman in clerical dress walked up the avenue, rang at the door, and entering he gave his name to the servant as the Rev. Courtenay Despard. He was the new Rector of Holby, and had only been there one week.

He entered the drawing-room, sat down upon one of the many lounging chairs with which it was filled, and waited. He did not have to wait long. A rapid step was soon heard descending the stairs, and in a few minutes a lady entered. She came in with a bright smile of welcome on her face, and greeted him with much warmth.

Mrs. Thornton was very striking in her appearance. A clear olive complexion and large, dark hazel eyes marked Southern blood. Her hair was black, wavy, and exceedingly luxuriant. Her mouth was small, her hands and feet delicately shaped, and her figure slender and elegant. Her whole air had that indefinable grace which is the sign of high-breeding; to this there was added exceeding loveliness, with great animation of face and elegance of manner. She was a perfect lady, yet

not of the English stamp; for her looks and manner had not that cold and phlegmatic air which England fosters. She looked rather like some Italian beauty--like those which enchant us as they smile from the walls of the picture-galleries of Italy.

"I am so glad you have come!" said she. "It is so stupid here, and I expected you an hour ago."

"Oh, if I had only known that!" said Despard. "For, do you know, I have been dying of ennui."

"I hope that I may be the means of dispelling it."

"As surely so as the sun disperses the clouds."

"You are never at a loss for a compliment."

"Never when I am with you."

These few words were spoken with a smile by each, and a slightly melodramatic gesture, as though each was conscious of a little extravagance.

"You must be glad to get to your old home," she resumed. "You lived here fifteen, no, sixteen years, you know."

"Eighteen."

"So it was. I was sixteen when you left."

"Never to see you again till I came back," said Despard, with some mournfulness, looking at the floor.

"And since then all has changed."

"But I have not," rejoined Despard, in the same tone.

Mrs. Thornton said nothing for a moment.

"By-the-way, I've been reading such a nice book," she resumed. "It has just come out, and is making a sensation. It would suit you, I know."

"What is it?"

She rose and lifted a book from the table, which she handed to him. He took it, and read the title out loud.

"Christian's Cross."

A strange expression passed over his face. He looked at her, holding the book out at arms'-length with feigned consternation.

"And do you have the heart to recommend this book to me, Mrs. Thornton?"

"Why not?"

"Why, it's religious. Religious books are my terror. How could I possibly open a book like this?"

She laughed.

"You are mistaken," she said. "It is an ordinary novel, and for the sake of your peace of mind I assure you that there is not a particle of religion in it. But why should you look with such repugnance upon it? The expression of your face is simply horror."

"Pietistic books have been the bane of my life. The emotional, the rhapsodical, the meditative style of book, in which one garrulously addresses one's soul from beginning to end, is simply torture to me. You see religion is a different thing. The rhapsody may do for the Tabernacle people, but thoughtful men and women need something different."

"I am so delighted to hear such sentiments from a clergyman! They entirely accord with my own. Still I must own that your horror struck me as novel, to say the least of it."

"Would you like me to try to proselytize you?"

"You may try if you wish. I am open to conviction; but the Church of all the ages, the Apostolic, the Catholic, has a strong hold on me."

"You need not fear that I will ever try to loosen it. I only wish that I may see your face in Trinity Church every Sunday."

"That happiness shall be yours," answered Mrs. Thornton. "As there is no Catholic church here, I will give you the honor of my presence at Trinity."

"If that is the case it will be a place of worship to me."

He smiled away the extravagance of this last remark, and she only shook her head.

"That is a compliment, but it is awfully profane."

"Not profanity; say rather justifiable idolatry."

"Really, I feel overcome; I do not know what to say. At any rate, I hope you will like the book; I know you will find it pleasant."

"Any thing that comes from you could not be otherwise," said Despard. "At the same time it is not my habit to read novels singly."

"Singly! Why how else can one read them?"

"I always read several at a time."

Mrs. Thornton laughed at the whimsical idea.

"You see," said Despard, "one must keep up with the literature of the day. I used to read each book as it came out, but at last found satiety. The best novel palls. For my own comfort I had to invent a new plan to stimulate my interest. I will tell you about it. I take ten at a time, spread them on the table in front of me, and read each chapter in succession."

"Isn't that a little confusing?"

"Not at all," said Despard, gravely. "Practice enables one to keep all distinct."

"But what is the good of it?"

"This," replied Despard; "you see in each novel there are certain situations. Perhaps on an average there may be forty each. Interesting characters also may average ten each. Thrilling scenes twenty each. Overwhelming catastrophes fifteen each. Now by reading novels singly the effect of all this is weakened, for you only have the work of each in its divided, isolated state, but where you read according to my plan you have the aggregate of all these effects in one combined--that is to say, in ten books which I read at once I have two hundred thrilling scenes, one hundred and fifty overwhelming catastrophes, one hundred interesting characters, and four hundred situations of absorbing fascination. Do you not see what an advantage there is in my plan? By following this rule I have been able to stimulate a somewhat faded appetite, and to keep abreast of the literature of the day."

"What an admirable plan! And do you read all books in that way? Why, one could write ten novels at a time on the same principle, and if so he ought to write very much better."

"I think I will try it some day. At present I am busily engaged with a learned treatise on the Symbolical Nature of the Mosaic Economy, and--"

"The--what?" cried Mrs. Thornton, breathlessly. "What was that?"

"The Symbolical Nature of the Mosaic Economy," said Despard, placidly.

"And is the title all your own?"

"All my own."

"Then pray don't write the book. The title is enough. Publish that, and see if it does not of itself by its own extraordinary merits bring you undying fame."

"I've been thinking seriously of doing so," said Despard, "and I don't know but that I may follow your advice. It will save some trouble, and perhaps amount to just as much in the end."

"And do you often have such brilliant fancies?"

"No, frankly, not often. I consider that title the one great idea of my life."

"But do not dwell too much upon that," said Mrs. Thornton, in a warning voice. "It might make you conceited."

"Do you think so?" rejoined the other, with a shudder. "Do you really think so? I hope not. At any rate I hope you do not like conceited people?"

"No."

"Am I conceited?"

"No. I like you," replied Mrs. Thornton, with a slight bow and a wave of the hand, which she accompanied with a smile.

"And I like you," said Despard, in the same tone.

"You could not do less."

"This," said Despard, with an air of thoughtful seriousness, "is a solemn occasion. After such a tender confession from each of us what remains to be done? What is it that the novels lay down?"

"I'm sure," returned Mrs. Thornton, with the same assumed solemnity, "it is not for me to say. You must make the proposition."

"We cannot do any thing less than fly together."

"I should think not"

"But where?"

"And not only where, but how? By rail, by steamboat, or by canal? A canal strikes me as the best mode of flight. It is secluded."

"Free from observation," said Despard.

"Quiet," rejoined Mrs. Thornton.

"Poetic."

"Remote."

"Unfriended."

"Solitary."

"Slow."

"And, best of all, hitherto untried."

"Yes, its novelty is undeniable."

"So much so," said Mrs. Thornton, "that it overwhelms one. It is a bright, original idea, and in these days of commonplace is it not creditable? The idea is mine, Sir, and I will match it with your--what? --your Symbolical Nature of the Mosaic Cosmogony."

"Economy."

"But Cosmogony is better. Allow me to suggest it by way of a change."

"It must be so, since you say it; but I have a weakness for the word Economy. It is derived from the Greek--"

"Greek!" exclaimed Mrs. Thornton, raising her hands. "You surely are not going to be so ungenerous as to quote Greek! Am I not a lady? Will you be so base as to take me at a disadvantage in that way?"

"I am thoroughly ashamed of myself, and you may consider that a tacit apology is going on within my mind whenever I see you."

"You are forgiven," said Mrs. Thornton.

"I can not conceive how I could have so far forgotten myself. I do not usually speak Greek to ladies. I consider it my duty to make myself agreeable. And you have no idea how agreeable I can make myself, if I try."

"I? I have no idea? Is it you who say that, and to me?" exclaimed Mrs. Thornton, in that slight melodramatic tone which she had employed thus far, somewhat exaggerated. "After what I told you--of my feelings?"

"I see I shall have to devote all the rest of my life to making apologies."

"No. Do not make apologies. Avoid your besetting sins. Otherwise, fond as I am of you"--and she spoke with exaggerated solemnity--"I must regard you as a failure."

The conversation went on uninterruptedly in this style for some time. It appeared to suit each of them. Despard's face, naturally grave, assisted him toward maintaining the mock-serious tone which he chose to adopt; and Mrs. Thornton's peculiar style of face gave her the same advantage. It pleased each to express for the other an exaggerated sentiment of regard. They considered it banter and badinage. How far it was safe was another thing. But they had known one another years before, and were only resuming the manner of earlier times.

Yet, after all, was it safe for the grave Rector of Holby to adopt the inflated style of a troubadour in addressing the Lady of Thornton Grange? Neither of them thought of it. They simply improved the shining hour after this fashion, until at length the conversation was interrupted by the opening of folding-doors, and the entrance of a servant who announced--dinner.

On entering the dining-room Despard was greeted with respectful formality by the master of the house. He was a man of about forty, with the professional air of the lawyer about him, and an abstracted expression of face, such as usually belongs to one who is deeply engrossed in the cares of business. His tone, in spite of its friendliness, was naturally stiff, and was in marked contrast to the warmth of Mrs. Thornton's greeting.

"How do you like your new quarters?" he asked, as they sat down.

"Very well," said Despard. "It is more my home, you know, than any other place. I lived there so many years as school-boy with Mr. Carson that it seems natural to take up my station there as home."

Mr. Thornton relapsed into his abstraction while Despard was speaking, who directed the remainder of his conversation to Mrs. Thornton.

It was light, idle chat, in the same tone as that in which they had before indulged. Once or twice, at some unusually extravagant remark, Mr. Thornton looked up in perplexity, which was not lessened on seeing their perfect gravity.

They had a long discussion as to the meaning of the phrase "the day after to-morrow." Despard asserted that it meant the same as eternal

duration, and insisted that it must be so, since when to-morrow came the day after it was still coming, and when that came there was still the day after. He supported his theory with so much earnestness that Thornton, after listening for a while, took the trouble to go heavily and at length into the whole question, and conclude it triumphantly against Despard.

Then the subject of politics came up, and a probable war with France was considered. Despard professed to take no interest in the subject, since, even if an invasion took place, clergymen could do nothing. They were exempt from military duty in common with gaugers. The mention of this brought on a long discussion as to the spelling of the word gauger. Despard asserted that nobody knew how it was spelled, and that, from the necessities of human nature, it was simply impossible to tell whether it was _gauger_ or _guager_. This brought out Thornton again, who mentioned several law papers in which the word had been correctly written by his clerks. Despard challenged him on this, and, because Thornton had to confess that he had not examined the word, dictionary in hand, he claimed a victory over him.

Thornton, at this, looked away, with the smile of a man who is talking unintelligible things to a child.

Then followed a long conversation between Despard and Mrs. Thornton about religion, art, music, and a miscellaneous assemblage of other things, which lasted for a long time. At length he rose to go. Mrs. Thornton went to a side-table and took up a book.

"Here," said she, "is the little book you lent me; I ought to have sent it, but I thought you would come for it."

"And so I will," said he, "some day."

"Come for it to-morrow."

"Will you be at home?"

[Illustration: "MRS. THORNTON, WALKING TO THE WINDOW, LOOKED OUT."]

"Yes."

"Then of course I'll come. And now I must tear myself away. Good-night!"

On the following day, at about two o'clock, Despard called again. Mrs. Thornton had been writing, and the desk was strewn with papers.

"I know I am disturbing you," said he, after the usual greetings. "I see that you are writing, so I will not stay but a moment. I have come, you know, after that little book."

"Indeed, you are not disturbing me at all. I have been trying to continue a letter which I began to my brother a month ago. There is no hurry about it."

"And how is Paolo?"

"I have not heard for some time. I ought to hear soon. He went to America last summer, and I have not had a word from him since. My letter is of no importance, I assure you, and now, since you are here, you

shall not go. Indeed, I only touched it a minute ago. I have been looking at some pictures till I am so begrimed and inundated with dust that I feel as though I had been resolved into my original element."

And she held up her hands with a pretty gesture of horror.

Despard looked at her for a moment as she stood in her bright beauty before him. A sudden expression of pain flashed over his face, succeeded by his usual smile.

"Dust never before took so fair a form," he said, and sat down, looking on the floor.

"For unfailing power of compliment, for an unending supply of neat and pretty speeches, commend me to the Rev. Courtenay Despard."

"Yet, singularly enough, no one else ever dreamed that of me."

"You were always so."

"With you." "In the old days."

"Now lost forever."

Their voices sank low and expressive of a deep melancholy. A silence followed. Despard at last, with a sudden effort, began talking in his usual extravagant strain about badgers till at last Mrs. Thornton began to laugh, and the radiancy of their spirits was restored. "Strange," said he, taking up a prayer-book with a peculiar binding, on which there was a curiously intertwined figure in gilt. "That pattern has been in my thoughts and dreams for a week."

"How so?"

"Why, I saw it in your hands last Sunday, and my eyes were drawn to it till its whole figure seemed to stamp itself on my mind. See! I can trace it from memory." And, taking his cane, he traced the curiously involved figure on the carpet.

"And were your thoughts fixed on nothing better than that?"

"I was engaged in worship," was the reply, with marked emphasis.

"I must take another book next time."

"Do not. You will only force me to study another pattern."

Mrs. Thornton laughed lightly, and Despard looked at her with a smile.

"I'm afraid your thoughts wander," she said, lightly, "as mine do. There is no excuse for you. There is for me. For you know I'm like Naaman; I have to bow my head in the temple of Baal. After all," she continued, in a more serious voice, "I suppose I shall be able some day to worship before my own altar, for, do you know, I expect to end my days in a convent."

"And why?"

"For the purpose of perfect religious seclusion."

Despard looked at her earnestly for a moment. Then his usual smile broke out.

"Wherever you go let me know, and I'll take up my abode outside the walls and come and look at you every day through the grating."

"And would that be a help to a religious life?"

"Perhaps not; but I'll tell you what would be a help. Be a Sister of Charity. I'll be a Paulist. I'll devote myself to the sick. Then you and I can go together; and when you are tired I can assist you. I think that idea is much better than yours."

"Oh, very much, indeed!" said Mrs. Thornton, with a strange, sad look.

"I remember a boy and girl who once used to go hand in hand over yonder shore, and--" He stopped suddenly, and then hastily added, "and now it would be very sad, and therefore very absurd, in one of them to bring up old memories."

Mrs. Thornton suddenly rose, and, walking to the window, looked out. "I wonder if it will rain to-day!" she said, in a sweet voice, full of a tremulous melancholy.

"There are very dark clouds about," returned Despard, mournfully.

"I hope there will not be a storm," she rejoined, with the same sadness. Her hands were held tightly together. "Some things will perish if a storm comes."

"Let us pray that there may be calm and peace," said Despard.

She turned and looked at him for a moment. Strange that these two should pass so quickly from gayety to gloom! Their eyes met, and each read in the face of the other sadness beyond words.

CHAPTER XIV.

TWO LETTERS.

Despard did not go back to the Grange for some days. About a week had passed since the scenes narrated in the preceding chapter when one morning, having finished his breakfast, he went into his library and sat down at the table to write. A litter of papers lay all around. The walls were covered with shelves, filled with books. The table was piled high with ponderous tomes. Manuscripts were strewn around, and books were scattered on the floor. Yet, amidst all this disorder, some order was apparent, for many of these books lay open in certain places, and others were arranged so as to be within reach.

Several sheets of paper, covered with writing, lay before him, headed, "The Byzantine Poets." The books were all in Greek. It was the library of a hard-working student.

Very different was the Despard of the library from the Despard who had visited the Grange. A stern and thoughtful expression was read in his face, and his eyes had an abstraction which would have done credit to Mr. Thornton himself.

Taking his seat at the table, he remained for a while leaning his head on his hand in deep thought. Then he took up a pen and drew a piece of paper before him to try it. He began to draw upon it the same figure which he had marked with his cane on Mrs. Thornton's carpet. He traced this figure over and over, until at last the whole sheet was covered.

Suddenly he flung down the pen, and, taking up the paper, leaned back in his chair with a melancholy face. "What a poor, weak thing I am!" he muttered at last, and let the paper fall to the floor. He leaned his head on his hand, then resumed his pen and began to make some idle marks. At length he began to draw.

Under the fine and delicate strokes of his pen, which were as neat and as exquisite as the most subtle touches of an engraving, a picture gradually rose to view. It was a sea-side scene. The place was Holby Beach. In the distance was the light-house; and on one side a promontory, which protected the harbor. Upon the shore, looking out toward the sea, was a beautiful girl, of about sixteen years of age, whose features, as they grew beneath his tender touches, were those of Mrs. Thornton. Then beside her there gradually rose another figure, a youth of about eighteen, with smooth face and clustering locks, who looked exactly like what the Rev. Courtenay Despard might have been some seven or eight years before. His left arm was around her waist, her arm was thrown up till it touched his shoulder, and his right hand held hers. Her head leaned against him, and both of them, with a subdued expression of perfect happiness, tinged with a certain pensive sadness, were looking out upon the setting sun.

As soon as he finished he looked at the sketch, and then, with a sudden impulse, tore it into a thousand small fragments. He drew the written manuscript before him with a long and deep-drawn sigh, and began writing with great rapidity upon the subject of the Byzantine Poets. He had just written the following words:

"The Anacreontic hymns of John Damascenus form a marked contrast to--" when the sentence was interrupted by a knock at the door. "Come in!" It was the servant with letters from the post-office. Despard put down his pen gravely, and the man laid two letters on the table. He waited till the servant had departed, then seizing one of them, a small one, addressed in a lady's hand, he pressed it vehemently to his lips and tore it open.

It was as follows:

[Illustration: "BOTH WERE LOOKING OUT UPON THE SETTING SUN."]

"DEAR MR. DESPARD,--I suppose I may _never_ expect to see you again. Yet I must see you, for yesterday I received a very long letter from Paolo of so singular a character that you will have to explain it to me. I shall expect you this afternoon, and till then, I remain,

"Yours sincerely,

"TERESA THORNTON.

"THORNTON GRANGE, Friday."

Despard read this letter a score of times, and placed it reverently in an inner drawer of his desk. He then opened the other, and read as follows:

"HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA, January 12, 1847.

"MY DEAR COURTENAY,--I was very glad to hear of your appointment as Rector of Holby, your old home, and hope that by this time you are fully established in the old Rectory, where you spent so many years. I was there often enough in poor old Carson's days to know that it was a fine old place.

"You will see by this that I am in Halifax, Nova Scotia. My regiment was ordered off here last November, and I am just beginning to feel settled. It is not so cold here as it was in Quebec. There is capital moose hunting up the country. I don't admire my accommodations much; but it is not a bad little town, considering all things. The people are pleasant, and there is some stir and gayety occasionally.

"Not long before leaving Quebec, who do you think turned up? No less a person than Paolo Langhetti, who in the course of his wanderings came out there. He had known some extraordinary adventures on his voyage out; and these are the immediate cause of this letter.

"He took passage early in June last in the ship _Tecumseh_, from Liverpool for Quebec. It was an emigrant ship, and crammed with passengers. You have heard all about the horrors of that middle passage, which occurred last year, when those infernal Liverpool merchants, for the sake of patting a few additional pounds in their pockets, sent so many thousands to destruction.

"The _Tecumseh_ was one of these. It was crammed with emigrants. You know Langhetti's extraordinary pluck, and his queer way of devoting himself for others. Well, what did he do but this: as soon as the ship-fever broke out he left the cabin and took up his abode in the steerage with the sick emigrants. He is very quiet about this, and merely says that he helped to nurse the sick. I know what that means.

"The mortality was terrific. Of all the ships that came to Quebec on that fatal summer the _Tecumseh_ showed the largest record of deaths. On reaching the quarantine station Langhetti at once insisted on continuing his attendance on the sick. Hands were scarce, and his offer was eagerly accepted. He staid down there ever so long till the worst of the sickness was over.

"Among the passengers on the _Tecumseh_ were three who belonged to the superior class. Their names were Brandon. He took a deep interest in them. They suffered very much from sickness both during the voyage and at quarantine. The name at once attracted him, being one well known both to him and to us. At last they all died, or were supposed to have died, at the quarantine station. Langhetti, however, found that one of them was only in a 'trance state,' and his efforts for resuscitation were successful. This one was a young girl of not more than sixteen years of age. After her restoration he left the quarantine bringing her with him, and came up to the city. Here he lived for a month or so, until at last he heard of me and came to see me.

"Of course I was delighted to see him, for I always thought him the noblest fellow that ever breathed, though most undoubtedly cranky if not crazy. I told him we were going to Halifax, and as he had no settled plan I made him come here with me.

"The girl remained for a long time in a state of mental torpor, as though her brain had been affected by disease, but the journey here had a beneficial effect on her, and during her stay she has steadily improved. About a week ago Langhetti ventured to ask her all about herself.

"What will you say when I tell you that she is the daughter of poor Ralph Brandon, of Brandon Hall, your father's friend, whose wretched fate has made us all so miserable. You know nothing of this, of course; but where was Thornton? Why did not he do something to prevent this horror, this unutterable calamity? Good God! what suffering there is in this world!

"Now, Courtenay, I come to the point. This poor Edith Brandon, still half-dead from her grief, has been able to tell us that she has still a relative living. Her eldest brother Louis went to Australia many years ago. A few weeks before her father's death he wrote to his son telling him everything, and imploring him to come home. She thinks that her brother must be in England by this time.

"I want you to hunt up Louis Brandon. Spare no trouble. In the name of God, and by the memory of your father, whose most intimate friend was this poor old Brandon, I entreat you to search after Louis Brandon till you find him, and let him know the fate of his friends. I think if she could see him the joy of meeting one relative would restore her to health.

"My boy, I know I have said enough. Your own heart will impel you to do all that can be done for the sake of this poor young girl. You can find out the best ways of learning information. You had better go up at once to London and make arrangements for finding Brandon. Write me soon, and let me know.

"Your affectionate uncle,

"HENRY DESPARD."

Despard read this letter over and over. Then he put it in his pocket, and walked up and down the room in deep thought. Then he took out Mrs. Thornton's note and studied it for a long time. So the hours passed away, until at length two o'clock came and he set out for Thornton Grange.

On entering the drawing-room, Mrs. Thornton was there.

"So you have come at last," said she, as they shook hands.

"As if I would not come ten times a day if I could," was the answer, in an impetuous voice.

"Still there is no reason why you should persistently avoid the Grange."

"What would you say if I followed my own impulse, and came here every

day?"

"I would say, Good-morning, Sir. Still, now that you are here, you must stay."

"I will stay, whether I must or not."

"Have you recovered from the effect of my prayer-book yet?"

"No, nor ever will I. You brought the same one last Sunday."

"That was in order to weaken the effect. Familiarity breeds contempt, you know."

"Then all I can say is, that contempt has very extraordinary manifestations. Among other strange things, it makes me cover my paper with that pattern when I ought to be writing on the Mosaic Economy."

"Cosmogony, you mean."

"Well, then, Cosmogony."

"Cosmogony is such a delicious word! It has been the hope of my life to be able to introduce it in a conversation. There is only one other word that compares with it."

"What is it?"

"I am afraid to pronounce it."

"Try, at any rate."

"Idiosyncrasy," said Mrs. Thornton. "For five or six years I have been on the look-out for an opportunity to use that word, and thus far I have been unsuccessful. I fear that if the opportunity did occur I would call it 'idiocracy.' In fact, I know I would."

"And what would be the difference? Your motive would be right, and it is to motives that we must look, not acts."

After some further badinage, Mrs. Thornton drew a letter from her pocket.

"Here," said she, gravely, "is Paolo's letter. Read it, and tell me what you think of it."

Despard took the letter and began to read, while Mrs. Thornton, sitting opposite to him, watched his face.

The letter was in Italian, and was accompanied by a large and closely-written manuscript of many pages.

"HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA, January 2, 1847.

"MY SWEETEST LITTLE SISTER,--I send you my diary, as I promised you, my Teresella, and you will see all my adventures. Take care of yourself, be happy, and let us hope that we may see one another soon. I am well, through the mercy of the good God, and hope to continue so. There is no such thing as music in this place, but I have found an organ where I can

play. My Cremona is uninjured, though it has passed through hard times-- it sends a note of love to my Teresina. Remember your Paolo to the just and upright Thornton, whom you love. May God bless my little sister's husband, and fill his heart with love for the sweetest of children!

"Read this manuscript carefully, Teresuola mia dolcissima, and pray for the souls of those unhappy ones who perished by the pestilence."

CHAPTER XV.

JOURNAL OF PAOLO LANGHETTI.

Liverpool, June 2, 1840.--I promised you, my Teresina, to keep a diary of all my wanderings, and now I begin, not knowing whether it will be worth reading or not, but knowing this: that my corellina will read it all with equal interest, whether it be trivial or important.

I have taken passage in the ship Tecumseh from Liverpool to Quebec. I have embarked in her for no better reason than this, that she is the first that will sail, and I am impatient. The first New York ship does not leave for a fortnight. A fortnight in Liverpool! Horror!

I have been on board to secure my room. I am told that there is a large number of emigrants. It is a pity, but it can not be helped. All ships have emigrants now. Ireland is being evacuated. There will soon be no peasants to till the soil. What enormous misery must be in that most wretched of countries! Is Italy worse? Yes, far worse; for Italy has a past to contrast with the present, whereas Ireland has no past.

At Sea, June 4.--We are many miles out in the Irish Channel. There are six hundred emigrants on board--men, women, and children. I am told that most of these are from Ireland, unhappy Ireland! Some are from England, and are going to seek their fortune in America. As I look on them I think, My God! what misery there is in this world! And yet what can I do to alleviate it? I am helpless. Let the world suffer. All will be right hereafter.

June 10.--Six hundred passengers! They are all crowded together in a manner that is frightful to me. Comfort is out of the question; the direst distress is every where present; the poor wretches only try to escape suffering. During storms they are shut in; there is little ventilation; and the horror that reigns in that hold will not let me either eat or sleep. I have remonstrated with the captain, but without effect. He told me that he could do nothing. The owners of the ship put them on board, and he was employed to take them to their proper destination. My God! what will become of them?

June 15.--There have been a few days of fine weather. The wretched emigrants have all been on deck. Among them I noticed three who, from their appearance, belonged to a different class. There was a lady with a young man and a young girl, who were evidently her children. The lady has once been beautiful, and still bears the traces of that beauty, though her face indicates the extreme of sadness. The son is a man of magnificent appearance, though as yet not full-grown. The daughter is more lovely than any being whom I have ever seen. She is different from

my Bicetta. Bice is Grecian, with a face like that of a marble statue, and a soul of purely classic mould. Bice is serene. She reminds me of Artemis. Bice is an artist to her inmost heart. Bice I love as I love you, my Teresina, and I never expect to meet with one who can so interpret my ideas with so divine a voice. But this girl is more spiritual. Bice is classic, this one is medieval. Bice is a goddess, this one a saint. Bice is Artemis, or one of the Muses; this one is Holy Agnes or Saint Cecilia. There is in that sweet and holy face the same depth of devotion which our painters portray on the face of the Madonna. This little family group stand amidst all the other passengers, separated by the wide gulf of superior rank, for they are manifestly from among the upper classes, but still more so by the solemn isolation of grief. It is touching to see the love of the mother for her children, and the love of the children for their mother. How can I satisfy the longings which I feel to express to them my sympathy?

June 21.--I have at length gained my desire. I have become acquainted with that little group. I went up to them this morning in obedience to a resistless impulse, and with the most tender sympathy that I could express; and, with many apologies, offered the young man a bottle of wine for his mother. He took it gratefully and frankly. He met me half-way in my advances. The poor lady looked at me with speechless gratitude, as though kindness and sympathy were unknown to her. "God will reward you, Sir," she said, in a tremulous voice, "for your sympathy with the miserable."

"Dear Madame," said I, "I wish no other reward than the consciousness that I may have alleviated your distress."

My heart bled for these poor creatures. Cast down from a life which must have once been one of luxury, they were now in the foulest of places, the hold of an emigrant ship. I went back to the captain to see if I could not do something in their behalf. I wished to give up my room to them. He said I could do so if I wished, but that there was no room left in the cabin. Had there been I would have hired one and insisted on their going there.

I went to see the lady, and made this proposal as delicately as I could. There were two berths in my room. I urged her and her daughter to take them. At first they both refused most positively, with tears of gratitude. But I would not be so put off. To the mother I portrayed the situation of the daughter in that den of horror; to the daughter I pointed out the condition of the mother; to the son I showed the position of his mother and sister, and thus I worked upon the holiest feelings of their hearts. For myself I assured them that I could get a place among the sailors in the fore-castle, and that I preferred doing so. By such means as these I moved them to consent. They did so with an expression of thankfulness that brought tears to my eyes.

"Dear Madame," said I, "you will break my heart if you talk so. Take the room and say nothing. I have been a wanderer for years, and can live anywhere."

It was not till then that I found out their names. I told them mine. They looked at one another in astonishment. "Langhetti?" said the mother.

"Yes."

"Did you ever live in Holby?"

"Yes. My father was organist in Trinity Church, and I and my sister lived there some years. She lives there still."

"My God!" was her ejaculation.

"Why?" I asked, with eager curiosity. "What do you know about Holby, and about Langhetti?"

She looked at me with solemn earnestness. "I," said she, "am the wife, and these are the children of one who was your father's friend. He who was my husband, and the father of these children, was Ralph Brandon, of Brandon Hall."

I stood for a moment stupefied. Then I burst into tears. Then I embraced them all, and said I know not what of pity and sympathy and affection. My God! to think of such a fate as this awaiting the family of Ralph Brandon. Did you know this, oh, Teresina? If so, why did you keep it secret? But no--you could not have known it. If you had this would not have happened.

They took my room in the cabin--the dear ones--Mrs. Brandon and the sweet Edith. The son Frank and I stay together among the emigrants. Here I am now, and I write this as the sun is getting low, and the uproar of all these hundreds is sounding in my ears.

June 30.--There is a panic in the ship. The dread pestilence known as "ship-fever" has appeared. This disease is the terror of emigrant ships. Surely there was never any vessel so well adapted to be the prey of the pestilence as this of ours! I have lived for ten days among the steerage passengers, and have witnessed their misery. Is God just? Can he look down unmoved upon scenes like these? Now that the disease has come, where will it stop?

July 3.--The disease is spreading. Fifteen are prostrate. Three have died.

July 10.--Thirty deaths have occurred, and fifty are sick. I am assisting to nurse them.

July 15.--Thirty-four deaths since my last. One hundred and thirty are sick. I will labor here if I have to die for it.

July 18.--If this is my last entry let this diary be sent to Mrs. Thornton, care of William Thornton, Holby, Pembroke, England--(the above entry was written in English, the remainder was all in Italian, as before). More than two hundred are sick. Frank Brandon is down. I am afraid to let his mother know it. I am working night and day. In three days there have been forty-seven deaths. The crew are demoralized and panic-stricken.

July 23.--Shall I survive these horrors? More than fifty new deaths have occurred. The disease has spread among the sailors. Two are dead, and seven are sick. Horror prevails. Frank Brandon is recovering slowly. Mrs. Brandon does not know that he has been sick. We send word that we are afraid to come for fear of communicating the disease to her and to Edith.

July 27.--More than half of the sailors are sick. Eleven dead. Sixty-seven passengers dead since last report. Frank Brandon almost well, and helping me in my work.

July 30.--Nearly all the sailors more or less sick--five new deaths among them. Ship almost unmanageable. In the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Talk of putting into some port. Seventy passengers dead.

August 2.--Worse yet. Disease has spread into the cabin. Three cabin passengers dead. God have mercy upon poor Mrs. Brandon and sweet Edith! All the steerage passengers, with a few exceptions, prostrate. Frank Brandon is weak but helps me. I work night and day. The ship is like a floating pest-house. Forty new deaths since last report.

August 7.--Drifting along, I know not how, up the St. Lawrence. The weather calm, and two or three sailors able to manage the ship. Captain and mate both dead. Ten cabin passengers dead. Three more sailors dead. Only thirty-two steerage passengers dead since last report, but nearly all are sick. Hardly any one to attend to them.

August 10.--Mrs. Brandon and Edith both sick. Frank prostrate again. God in heaven, have mercy!

August 15.--Mrs. Brandon and Edith very low. Frank better.

August 16.--Quarantine Station, Gosse Island. I feel the fever in my veins. If I die, farewell, sweetest sister.

December 28, Halifax, Nova Scotia.--More than four months have elapsed since my last entry, and during the interval marvelous things have occurred. These I will now try to recall as I best can.

My last entry was made on the day of the arrival of the Tecumseh at the Quarantine Station, Gosse Island, Quebec. We were delayed there for two days. Every thing was in confusion. A large number of ships had arrived, and all were filled with sick. The authorities were taken by surprise; and as no arrangements had ever been made for such a state of things the suffering was extreme. The arrival of the Tecumseh with her frightful record of deaths, and with several hundred sick still on board, completed the confusion. At last the passengers were removed somehow, I know not how or when, for I myself on the evening of our arrival was struck down by the fever. I suppose that Frank Brandon may have nursed me at first; but of that I am not sure. There was fearful disorder. There were few nurses and fewer doctors; and as fast as the sick died they were hurried hastily into shallow graves in the sand. I was sick for two or three weeks, and knew nothing of what was going on. The first thing that I saw on coming to my senses was Edith Brandon.

She was fearfully changed. Unutterable grief dwelt upon her sweet young face, which also was pale and wan from the sickness through which she had passed. An awful feeling shot through me. My first question was, "Is your mother on shore?"

She looked at me for a moment in solemn silence, and, slowly raising her hand, pointed upward.

"Your brother?" I gasped.

She turned her head away. I was silent. They were dead, then. O God! and

this child--what had she not been suffering? My mind at once, in its agony of sympathy with her, burst through the clouds which sickness had thrown around it. "Poor child!" I said. "And why are you here?"

"Where else can I go?" she answered, mournfully.

"At least, you should not wear yourself out by my bedside."

"You are the only one left whom I know. I owe you far more than the small attendance which I have given you."

"But will you not take some rest?"

"Hush! Wait till you are stronger. You are too weak now to think of these things."

She laid her thin hand on my forehead gently. I turned my head away, and burst into a flood of tears. Why was it that this child was called upon to endure such agony? Why, in the midst of that agony, did she come to me to save my life? I did not resist her any longer on that day; but the next day I was stronger, and made her go and repose herself.

For two successive days she came back. On the third day she did not appear. The fourth day also she was absent. Rude nurses attended to me. They knew nothing of her. My anxiety inspired me with such energy that on the fourth day I rose from my bed and staggered about to find her if possible.

All was still confusion. Thousands of sick were on the island. The mistake of the first week had not yet been repaired. No one knew any thing of Edith. I sought her through all the wards. I went to the superintendent, and forced him to make inquiries about her. No one could tell any thing.

My despair was terrible. I forced the superintendent to call up all the nurses and doctors, and question them all, one by one. At last an old Irish woman, with an awful look at me, hinted that she could tell something about her, and whispered a word or two in the superintendent's ear. He started back, with a fearful glance.

"What is it? Tell, in God's name!"

"The dead-house," he murmured.

"Where is it? Take me there!" I cried to the woman. I clutched her arm and staggered after her.

It was a long, low shed, open on all sides. Twelve bodies lay there. In the middle of the row was Edith. She was more beautiful than an angel. A smile wreathed her lips; her eyes looked as though she slumbered. I rushed up to her and caught her in my arms. The next moment I fell senseless.

When I revived I was lying in one of the sick-sheds, with a crowd of sufferers around me. I had only one thought, and that was Edith. I rose at once, weak and trembling, but the resolve of my soul gave strength to my body. An awful fear had taken possession of me, which was accompanied by a certain wild hope. I hurried, with staggering feet, to the dead-house.

All the bodies were gone. New ones had come in.

"Where is she?" I cried to the old woman who had charge there. She knew to whom I referred.

"Buried," said she.

I burst out into a torrent of imprecations. "Where have they buried her? Take me to the place!" I cried, as I flung a piece of gold to the woman. She grasped it eagerly. "Bring a spade, and come quick, for God's sake! _She is not dead!_"

How did I have such a mad fancy? I will tell you. This ship-fever often terminates in a sort of stupor, in which death generally takes place. Sometimes, however, the patient who has fallen into this stupor revives again. It is known to the physicians as the "trance state." I had seen cases of this at sea. Several times people were thrown overboard when I thought that they did not have all the signs of death, and at last, in two cases of which I had charge, I detained the corpses three days, in spite of the remonstrances of the other passengers. _These two revived._ By this I knew that some of those who were thrown overboard were not dead. Did I feel horror at this, my Teresa? No. "Pass away," I said, "unhappy ones. You are not dead. You live in a better life than this. What matters it whether you died by the fever or by the sea?"

But when I saw Edith as she lay there my soul felt assured that she was not dead, and an unutterable convulsion of sorrow overwhelmed me. Therefore I fainted. The horror of that situation was too much for me. To think of that angelic girl about to be covered up alive in the ground; to think of that sweet young life, which had begun so brightly, terminating amidst such black darkness!

"Now God help me!" I cried, as I hurried on after the woman; "and bring me there in time." There! Where? To the place of the dead. It was there that I had to seek her.

"How long had she been in that house before I fainted?" I asked, fearfully.

"Twenty-four hours."

"And when did I faint?"

"Yesterday."

A pang shot through me. "Tell me," I cried, hoarsely, "when she was buried."

"Last night."

"O God!" I groaned, and I could say no more; but with new strength given to me in that hour of agony I rushed on.

It was by the eastern shore of the island. A wide flat was there, washed on one side by the river. Here more than a thousand mounds arose. Alas! could I ever hope to find her!

"Do you know where they have laid her?" I asked, tremblingly.

"Yes," said the woman, confidently.

Hope returned faintly. She led the way.

The moon beamed out brightly from behind a cloud, illumining the waste of mounds. The river murmured solemnly along the shore. All my senses were overwhelmed in the madness of that hour. The moon seemed enlarged to the dimensions of a sky; the murmur of the river sounded like a cataract, and in the vast murmur I heard voices which seemed then like the voices of the dead. But the lustre of that exaggerated glow, and the booming concord of fancied spirit-voices were all contemned as trifles. I cared for nothing either natural or supernatural. Only one thought was present--the place where she was laid.

We reached it at last. At the end of a row of graves we stopped. "Here," said the woman, "are twelve graves. These were made last night. These are those twelve which you saw."

"And where--where, O God, is SHE!"

"There," replied the woman, pointing to one which was the third from the end.

"Do not deceive me!" I cried, imploringly. "Are you sure? For I will tear up all these till I find her."

"I am sure, for I was the one who buried her. I and a man--"

I seized the spade and turned up the soil. I labored incessantly for what seemed an endless period. I had thrown out much earth but had not yet reached her. I felt my fitful strength failing me. My mind, too, seemed entering into a state of delirium. At last my knees gave way, and I sank down just as my spade touched something which gave back a hollow sound.

My knees gave way, and I sank down. But I would not give up. I tore up handfuls of earth and threw them into the air.

"Oh, Edith!" I cried, "I am here! I am coming! I am coming!"

"Come, Sir," said the woman, suddenly, in her strong voice, yet pityingly. "You can do nothing. I will dig her out in a minute."

[Illustration: "I TOOK HER IN MY ARMS AND BROUGHT HER FORTH FROM THE GRAVE," ETC.]

"God forever bless you!" I cried, leaping out and giving place to her. I watched her as she threw out the earth. Hungrily I gazed, devouring that dark aperture with my eyes till at last the rough boards appeared.

Then I leaped down. I put my fingers at the edge and tore at it till it gave way. The lid was only fastened with a few nails. My bleeding fingers clutched it. It yielded to my frantic exertions.

O my God! was there ever a sight on earth like that which now met my eyes as I raised the lid and looked below? The moon, which was high in the sky, streamed down directly into the narrow cell. It showed me the one whom I sought. Its bright beams threw a lustre round that face which

was upturned toward me. Ah me! how white was that face; like the face of some sleeping maiden carved in alabaster. Bathed in the moonbeams it lay before me, all softened and refined and made pure; a face of unearthly beauty. The dark hair caught the moon's rays, and encircled the head like a crown of immortality. Still the eyes were closed as though in slumber; still the lips were fixed into a smile. She lay as one who had fallen into a deep, sweet sleep--as one who in that sleep has dreams, in which are visions of more than earthly beauty, and scenes of more than mortal happiness.

Now it was with me as though at that unequalled vision I had drawn into my inmost being some sudden stimulus--a certain rapture of newborn strength; strength no longer fitful and spasmodic, but firm, well fortified and well sustained.

I took her in my arms and brought her forth from the grave into the life of earth.

Ah me! how light a thing was that frail and slender figure which had been worn down by the unparalleled suffering through which she had passed. This thought transfixed me with a pang of anguish--even awed the rapture that I felt at clasping her in my arms.

But now that I had her, where was I to seek for a place of shelter? I turned to the woman and asked: "Is there any secluded place where she may sleep undisturbed till she wakes--"

"No, there is none but what is crowded with the sick and dying in all this island."

"I must have some place."

"There is only one spot that is quiet."

"What one?"

"The dead-house."

I shuddered. "No, not there. See," said I, and I handed her a piece of gold. "Find me some place and you shall have still more."

"Well," she said, hesitatingly, "I have the room where me and my man live. I suppose we could give up that."

"Take me there, then."

"Shall I help you carry her?"

"No," I answered, drawing back my pure Edith from her outstretched hands. "No, I will carry her."

The woman went on without a word. She led the way back to the low and dismal sheds which lay there like a vast charnel-house, and thence to a low hut some distance away from all, where she opened a door. She spoke a few words to a man, who finally withdrew. A light was burning. A rude cot was there. Here I laid the one whom I carried.

"Come here," said I, "three times a day. I will pay you well for this."

The woman left. All night long I watched. She lay unmoved and unchanged. Where was her spirit wandering? Soared it among the splendors of some far-off world? Lingered it amidst the sunshine of heavenly glory? Did her seraphic soul move amidst her peers in the assemblage of the holy? Was she straying amidst the trackless paths of ether with those whom she had loved in life, and who had gone before?

All night long I watched her as she lay with her marble face and her changeless smile. There seemed to be communicated to me an influence from her which opened the eyes of my spiritual sense; and my spirit sought to force itself upon her far-off perceptions, that so it might catch her notice and bring her back to earth.

The morning dawned. There was no change. Mid-day came, and still there was no change. I know not how it was, but the superintendent had heard about the grave being opened, and found me in the hut. He tried to induce me to give back to the grave the one whom I had rescued. The horror of that request was so tremendous that it forced me into passionless calm. When I refused he threatened. At his menace I rejoined in such language that he turned pale.

"Murderer!" said I, sternly, "is it not enough that you have sent to the grave many wretches who were not dead? Do you seek to send back to death this single one whom I have rescued? Do you want all Canada and all the world to ring with the account of the horrors done here, where people are buried alive? See, she is not dead. She is only sleeping. And yet you put her in the grave."

"She is dead!" he cried, in mingled fear and anger--"and she must be buried."

"She is not dead," said I, sternly, as I glared on him out of my intensity of anguish--"she is not dead: and if you try to send her to death again you must first send me. She shall not pass to the grave except over my corpse, and over the corpse of the first murderer that dares to lay hands on her."

He started back--he and those who were with him. "The man is mad," they said.

They left me in peace. I grow excited as I write. My hand trembles. Let me be calm.

She awoke that night. It was midnight, and all was still. She opened her eyes suddenly, and looked full at me with an earnest and steadfast stare. At last a long, deep-drawn sigh broke the stillness of that lone chamber.

"Back again"--she murmured, in a scarce audible voice--"among men, and to earth. O friends of the Realm of Light, must I be severed from your lofty communion!"

As she spoke thus the anguish which I had felt at the grave was renewed. "You have brought me back," said she, mournfully.

"No," I returned, sadly--"not I. It was not God's will that you should leave this life. He did not send death to you. You were sleeping, and I brought you to this place."

"I know all," she murmured, closing her eyes. "I heard all while my spirit was away. I know where you found me."

"I am weary," she said, after a silence. Her eyes closed again. But this time the trance was broken. She slept with long, deep breathing, interrupted by frequent sighs. I watched her through the long night. At first fever came. Then it passed. Her sleep became calm, and she slumbered like a weary child.

Early in the morning the superintendent came, followed by a dozen armed men. He entered with a frown. I met him with my hand upraised to hush him, and led him gently to the bedside.

"See," I whispered--"but for me she would have been BURIED ALIVE!"

The man seemed frozen into dumbness. He stood ghastly white with horror, thick drops started from his forehead, his teeth chattered, he staggered away. He looked at me with a haunted face, such as belongs to one who thinks he has seen a spirit.

"Spare me," he faltered; "do not ruin me. God knows I have tried to do my best!"

I waved him off. "Leave me. You have nothing to fear." He turned away with his white face, and departed in silence with his men.

After a long sleep Edith waked again. She said nothing. I did not wish her to speak. She lay awake, yet with closed eyes, thinking such thoughts as belong to one, and to one alone, who had known what she had known.

I did not speak to her, for she was to me a holy being, not to be addressed lightly. Yet she did not refuse nourishment, and grew stronger, until at last I was able to have her moved to Quebec. There I obtained proper accommodations for her and good nurses.

I have told you what she was before this. Subsequently there came a change. The nurses and the doctors called it a stupor.

There was something in her face which inspired awe among all who saw her. If it is the soul of man that gives expression to the features, then her soul must have been familiar with things unknown to us. How often have I seen her in walking across the room stop suddenly and stand fixed on the spot, musing and sad! She commonly moved about as though she saw nothing, as though she walked in a dream, with eyes half closed, and sometimes murmuring inaudible words. The nurses half loved and half feared her. Yet there were some little children in the house who felt all love and no fear, for I have seen her smiling on them with a smile so sweet that it seemed to me as if they stood in the presence of their guardian angel. Strange, sad spirit, what thoughts, what memories are these which make her life one long reverie, and have taken from her all power to enjoy the beautiful that dwells on earth! She fills all my thoughts with her loneliness, her tears, and her spiritual face, bearing the marks of scenes that can never be forgotten. She lives and moves amidst her recollections. What is it that so overwhelms all her thoughts? That face of hers appears as though it had bathed itself in the atmosphere of some diviner world than this: and her eyes seem as if they may have gazed upon the Infinite Mystery.

Now from the few words which she has casually dropped I gather this to be her own belief. That when she fell into the state of trance her soul was parted from her body, though still by an inexplicable sympathy she was aware of what was passing around her lifeless form. Yet her soul had gone forth into that spiritual world toward which we look from this earth with such eager wonder. It had mingled there with the souls of others. It had put forth new powers, and learned the use of new faculties. Then that soul was called back to its body.

This maiden--this wonder among mortals--is not a mortal, she is an exiled soul. I have seen her sit with tears streaming down her face, tears such as men shed in exile. For she is like a banished man who has only one feeling, a longing, yearning homesickness. She has been once in that radiant world for a time which we call three days in our human calculations, but which to her seems indefinite; for as she once said--and it is a pregnant thought, full of meaning--there is no time there, all is infinite duration. The soul has illimitable powers; in an instant it can live years, and she in those three days had the life of ages. Her former life on earth has now but a faint hold upon her memory in comparison with that life among the stars. The sorrow that her loved ones endured has become eclipsed by the knowledge of the blessedness in which she found them.

Alas! it is a blessing to die, and it is only a curse to rise from the dead. And now she endures this exile with an aching heart, with memories that are irrepressible, with longings unutterable, and yearnings that cannot be expressed for that starry world and that bright companionship from which she has been recalled. So she sometimes speaks. And little else can she say amidst her tears. Oh, sublime and mysterious exile, could I but know what you know, and have but a small part of that secret which you can not explain!

For she can not tell what she witnessed there. She sometimes wishes to do so, but can not. When asked directly, she sinks into herself and is lost in thought. She finds no words. It is as when we try to explain to a man who has been always blind the scenes before our eyes. We can not explain them to such a man. And so with her. She finds in her memory things which no human language has been made to express. These languages were made for the earth, not for heaven. In order to tell me what she knows, she would need the language of that world, and then she could not explain it, for I could not understand it.

Only once I saw her smile, and that was when one of the nurses casually mentioned, with horror, the death of some acquaintance. "Death!" she murmured, and her eyes lighted up with a kind of ecstasy. "Oh, that I might die!" She knows no blessing on earth except that which we consider a curse, and to her the object of all her wishes is this one thing--Death. I shall not soon forget that smile. It seemed of itself to give a new meaning to death.

Do I believe this, so wild a theory, the very mention of which has carried me beyond myself? I do not know. All my reason rebels. It scouts the monstrous idea. But here she stands before me, with her memories and thoughts, and her wonderful words, few, but full of deepest meaning--words which I shall never forget--and I recognize something before which Reason falters. Whence this deep longing of hers? Why when she thinks of death does her face grow thus radiant, and her eyes kindle with hope? Why does she so pine and grow sick with desire? Why does her heart thus ache as day succeeds to day, and she finds herself still under the

sunlight, with the landscapes and the music of this fair earth still around her?

Once, in some speculations of mine, which I think I mentioned to you, Teresina, I thought that if a man could reach that spiritual world he would look with contempt upon the highest charms that belong to this. Here is one who believes that she has gone through this experience, and all this earth, with all its beauty, is now an object of indifference to her. Perhaps you may ask, Is she sane? Yes, dear, as sane as I am, but with a profounder experience and a diviner knowledge.

After I had been in Quebec about a month I learned that one of the regiments stationed here was commanded by Colonel Henry Despard. I called on him, and he received me with unbounded delight. He made me tell him all about myself, and I imparted to him as much of the events of the voyage and quarantine as was advisable. I did not go into particulars to any extent, of course. I mentioned nothing about _the grave_. That, dearest sister, is a secret between you, and me, and her. For if it should be possible that she should ever be restored to ordinary human sympathy and feeling, it will not be well that all the world should know what has happened to her.

His regiment was ordered to Halifax, and I concluded to comply with his urgent solicitations and accompany him. It is better for _her_ at any rate that there should be more friends than one to protect her. Despard, like the doctors, supposes that she is in a stupor.

The journey here exercised a favorable influence over her. Her strength increased to a marked degree, and she has once or twice spoken about the past. She told me that her father wrote to his son Louis in Australia some weeks before his death, and urged him to come home. She thinks that he is on his way to England. The Colonel and I at once thought that he ought to be sought after without delay, and he promised to write to his nephew, your old playmate, who, he tells me, is to be a neighbor of yours.

If he is still the one whom I remember--intellectual yet spiritual, with sound reason, yet a strong heart, if he is still the Courtenay Despard who, when a boy, seemed to me to look out upon the world before him with such lofty poetic enthusiasm--then, Teresella, you should show him this diary, for it will cause him to understand things which he ought to know. I suppose it would be unintelligible to Mr. Thornton, who is a most estimable man, but who, from the nature of his mind, if he read this, would only conclude that the writer was insane.

At any rate, Mr. Thornton should be informed of the leading facts, so that he may see if something can be done to alleviate the distress, or to avenge the wrongs of one whose father was the earliest benefactor of his family.

CHAPTER XVI.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

"It is now the middle of February," said Despard, after a long pause, in

which he had given himself up to the strange reflections which the diary was calculated to excite. "If Louis Brandon left Australia when he was called he must be in England now."

"You are calm," said Mrs. Thornton. "Have you nothing more to say than that?"

Despard looked at her earnestly. "Do you ask me such a question? It is a story so full of anguish that the heart might break out of pure sympathy, but what words could be found? I have nothing to say. I am speechless. My God! what horror thou dost permit!"

"But something must be done," said Mrs. Thornton, impetuously.

"Yes," said Despard, slowly, "but what? If we could reach our hands over the grave and bring back those who have passed away, then the soul of Edith might find peace; but now--now--we can give her no peace. She only wishes to die. Yet something must be done, and the first thing is to find Louis Brandon. I will start for London to-night. I will go and seek him, not for Edith's sake but for his own, that I may save one at least of this family. For her there is no comfort. Our efforts are useless there. If we could give her the greatest earthly happiness it would be poor and mean, and still she would sigh after that starry companionship from which her soul has been withdrawn."

"Then you believe it."

"Don't you?"

"Of course; but I did not know that you would."

"Why not? and if I did not believe it this at least would be plain, that she herself believes it. And even if it be a hallucination, it is a sublime one, and so vivid that it is the same to her as a reality. Let it be only a dream that has taken place--still that dream has made all other things dim, indistinct, and indifferent to her."

"No one but you would read Paolo's diary without thinking him insane."

Despard smiled. "Even that would be nothing to me. Some people think that a great genius must be insane.

'Great wits are sure to madness near allied,'

you know. For my part, I consider Paolo the sublimest of men. When I saw him last I was only a boy, and he came with his seraphic face and his divine music to give me an inspiration which has biased my life ever since. I have only known one spirit like his among those whom I have met."

An indescribable sadness passed over his face. "But now," he continued, suddenly, "I suppose Thornton must see my uncle's letter. His legal mind may discern some things which the law may do in this case. Edith is beyond all consolation from human beings, and still farther beyond all help from English law. But if Louis Brandon can be found the law may exert itself in his favor. In this respect he may be useful, and I have no doubt he would take up the case earnestly, out of his strong sense of justice."

When Thornton came in to dinner Despard handed him his uncle's letter. The lawyer read it with deep attention, and without a word.

Mrs. Thornton looked agitated--sometimes resting her head on her hand, at others looking fixedly at her husband. As soon as he had finished she said, in a calm, measured tone:

"I did not know before that Brandon of Brandon Hall and all his family had perished so miserably."

Thornton started, and looked at her earnestly. She returned his gaze with unutterable sadness in her eyes.

"He saved my father's life," said she. "He benefited him greatly. Your father also was under slight obligations to him. I thought that things like these constituted a faint claim on one's gratitude, so that if one were exposed to misfortune he might not be altogether destitute of friends."

Thornton looked uneasy as his wife spoke.

"My dear," said he, "you do not understand."

"True," she answered; "for this thing is almost incredible. If my father's friend has died in misery, unpitied and unwept, forsaken by all, do I not share the guilt of ingratitude? How can I absolve myself from blame?"

"Set your mind at rest. You never knew any thing about it. I told you nothing on the subject."

"Then you knew it!"

"Stop! You can not understand this unless I explain it. You are stating bald facts; but these facts, painful as they are, are very much modified by circumstances."

"Well, then, I hope you will tell me all, without reserve, for I wish to know how it is that this horror has happened, and I have stood idly and coldly aloof. My God!" she cried, in Italian; "did he not--did they not in their last moments think of me, and wonder how they could have been betrayed by Langhetti's daughter!"

"My dear, be calm, I pray. You are blaming yourself unjustly, I assure you."

Despard was ghastly pale as this conversation went on. He turned his face away.

"Ralph Brandon," began Thornton, "was a man of many high qualities, but of unbounded pride, and utterly impracticable. He was no judge of character, and therefore was easily deceived. He was utterly inexperienced in business, and he was always liable to be led astray by any sudden impulse. Somehow or other a man named Potts excited his interest about twelve or fifteen years ago. He was a mere vulgar adventurer; but Brandon became infatuated with him, and actually believed that this man was worthy to be intrusted with the management of large business transactions. The thing went on for years. His friends all remonstrated with him. I, in particular, went there to explain to

him that the speculation in which he was engaged could not result in any thing except loss. But he resented all interference, and I had to leave him to himself.

"His son Louis was a boy full of energy and fire. The family were all indignant at the confidence which Ralph Brandon put in this Potts--Louis most of all. One day he met Potts. Words passed between them, and Louis struck the scoundrel. Potts complained. Brandon had his son up on the spot; and after listening to his explanations gave him the alternative either to apologise to Potts or to leave the house forever. Louis indignantly denounced Potts to his father as a swindler. Brandon ordered him to his room, and gave him a week to decide.

"The servants whispered till the matter was noised abroad. The county gentry had a meeting about it, and felt so strongly that they did an unparalleled thing. They actually waited on him to assure him that Potts was unworthy of trust, and to urge him not to treat his son so harshly. All Brandon's pride was roused at this. He said words to the deputation which cut him off forever from their sympathy, and they left in a rage. Mrs. Brandon wrote to me, and I went there. I found Brandon inflexible. I urged him to give his son a longer time, to send him to the army for a while, to do any thing rather than eject him. He refused to change his sentence. Then I pointed out the character of Potts, and told him many things that I had heard. At this he hinted that I wished to have the management of his business, and was actuated by mercenary motive. Of course, after this insult, nothing more was to be said. I went home and tried to forget all about the Brandons. At the end of the week Louis refused to apologize, and left his father forever."

"Did you see Louis?"

"I saw him before that insult to ask if he would apologize."

"Did you try to make him apologize?" asked Mrs. Thornton, coldly.

"Yes. But he looked at me with such an air that I had to apologize myself for hinting at such a thing. He was as inflexible as his father."

"How else could he have been?"

"Well, each might have yielded a little. It does not do to be so inflexible if one would succeed in life."

"No," said Mrs. Thornton. "Success must be gained by flexibility. The martyrs were all inflexible, and they were all unsuccessful."

Thornton looked at his wife hastily. Despard's hand trembled, and his face grew paler still with a more livid pallor.

"Did you try to do any thing for the ruined son?"

"How could I, after that insult?"

"Could you not have got him a government office, or purchased a commission for him in the army?"

"He would not have taken it from me."

"You could have co-operated with his mother, and done it in her name."

"I could not enter the house after being insulted."

"You could have written. From what I have heard of Brandon, he was just the man who would have blessed any one who would interpose to save his son."

"His son did not wish to be saved. He has all his father's inflexibility, but an intellect as clear as that of the most practical man. He has a will of iron, dauntless resolution, and an implacable temper. At the same time he has the open generosity and the tender heart of his father."

"Had his father a tender heart?"

"So tender and affectionate that this sacrifice of his son must have overwhelmed him with the deepest sorrow."

"Did you ever after make any advances to any of them?"

"No, never. I never went near the house."

"Did you ever visit any of the county gentry to see if something could be done?"

"No. It would have been useless. Besides, the very mention of his name would have been resented. I should have had to fling myself headlong against the feelings of the whole public. And no man has any right to do that."

"No," said Mrs. Thornton. "No man has. That was another mistake that the martyrs made. They would fling themselves against public opinion."

"All men can not be martyrs. Besides, the cases are not analogous."

Thornton spoke calmly and dispassionately.

"True. It is absurd in me; but I admire one who has for a moment forgotten his own interests or safety in thinking of others."

"That does very well for poetry, but not in real life."

"In _real life_, such as that on board the _Tecumseh_?" murmured Mrs. Thornton, with drooping eyelids.

"You are getting excited, my dear," said Thornton, patiently, with the air of a wise father who overlooks the petulance of his child. "I will go on. I had business on the Continent when poor Brandon's ruin occurred. You were with me, my dear, at Berlin when I heard about it. I felt shocked, but not surprised. I feared that it would come to that."

"You showed no emotion in particular."

"No; I was careful not to trouble you."

"You were in Berlin three months. Was it at the beginning or end of your stay?"

"At the beginning."

"And you staid?"

"I had business which I could not leave."

"Would you have been ruined if you had left?"

"Well, no--not exactly ruined, but it would have entailed serious consequences."

"Would those consequences have been as serious as the _Tecumseh_ tragedy?"

"My dear, in business there are rules which a man is not permitted to neglect. There are duties and obligations which are imperative. The code of honor there is as delicate, yet as rigid, as elsewhere."

"And yet there are times when all obligations of this sort are weakened. When friends die, this is recognized. Why should it not be so when they are in danger of a fate worse than death?"

Thornton elevated his eyebrows, and made no reply.

"You must have heard about it in March, then?"

"Yes, at the end of January. His ruin took place in December, 1845. It was the middle of May before I got home. I then, toward the end of the month, sent my clerk to Brandon village to make inquiries. He brought word of the death of Brandon, and the departure of his family to parts unknown."

[Illustration: "THEN, COVERING HER FACE WITH HER HANDS, SHE BURST INTO AN AGONY OF TEARS."]

"Did he make no particular inquiries?"

"No."

"And you said not a word to me!"

"I was afraid of agitating you, my dear."

"And therefore you have secured for me unending self-reproach."

"Why so? Surely you are blaming yourself without a shadow of a cause."

"I will tell you why. I dare say I feel unnecessarily on the subject, but I can not help it. It is a fact that Brandon was always impulsive and culpably careless about himself. It is to this quality, strangely enough, that I owe my father's life, and my own comfort for many years. Paolo also owes as much as I. Mr. Brandon, with a friend of his, was sailing through the Mediterranean in his own yacht, making occasional tours into the country at every place where they happened to land, and at last they came to Girgenti, with the intention of examining the ruins of Agrigentum. This was in 1818, four years before I was born. My father was stopping at Girgenti, with his wife and Paolo, who was then six years old. My father had been very active under the reign of Murat, and had held a high post in his government. This made him suspected after Murat's overthrow.

"On the day that these Englishmen visited Girgenti, a woman in deep distress came to see them, along with a little boy. It was my mother and Paolo. She flung herself on the floor at their feet, and prayed them to try and help her husband, who had been arrested on a charge of treason and was now in prison. He was suspected of belonging to the Carbonari, who were just beginning to resume their secret plots, and were showing great activity. My father belonged to the innermost degree, and had been betrayed by a villain named Cigole. My mother did not tell them all this, but merely informed them of his danger.

"At first they did not know what to do, but the prayers of my mother moved their hearts. They went to see the captain of the guard, and tried to bribe him, but without effect. They found out, however, where my father was confined, and resolved upon a desperate plan. They put my mother and Paolo on board of the yacht, and by paying a heavy bribe obtained permission to visit my father in prison. Brandon's friend was about the same height as my father. When they reached his cell they urged my father to exchange clothes with him and escape. At first he positively refused, but when assured that Brandon's friend, being an Englishman, would be set free in a few days, he consented. Brandon then took him away unnoticed, put him on board of the yacht, and sailed to Marseilles, where he gave him money enough to get to England, and told him to stop at Brandon Hall till he himself arrived. He then sailed back to see about his friend.

"He found out nothing about him for some time. At last he induced the British ambassador to take the matter in hand, and he did so with such effect that the prisoner was liberated. He had been treated with some severity at first, but he was young, and the government was persuaded to look upon it as a youthful freak. Brandon's powerful influence with the British ambassador obtained his unconditional release.

"My father afterward obtained a situation here at Holby, where he was organist till he died. Through all his life he never ceased to receive kindness and delicate acts of attention from Brandon. When in his last sickness Brandon came and staid with him till the end. He then wished to do something for Paolo, but Paolo preferred seeking his own fortune in his own way."

Mrs. Thornton ended her little narrative, to which Despard had listened with the deepest attention.

"Who was Brandon's friend?" asked Despard.

"He was a British officer," said Mrs. Thornton. "For fear of dragging in his government, and perhaps incurring dismissal from the army, he gave an assumed name--Mountjoy. This was the reason why Brandon was so long in finding him."

"Did your father not know it?"

"On the passage Brandon kept it secret, and after his friend's deliverance he came to see my father under his assumed name. My father always spoke of him as Mountjoy. After a time he heard that he was dead."

"I can tell you his true name," said Mr. Thornton. "There is no reason why you should not know it."

"What?"

"Lionel Despard--your father, and Ralph Brandon's bosom friend."

Despard looked transfixed. Mrs. Thornton gazed at her husband, and gave an unutterable look at Despard, then, covering her face with her hands, she burst into an agony of tears.

"My God," cried Despard, passing his hand over his forehead, "my father died when I was a child, and nobody was ever able to tell me any thing about him. And Brandon was his friend. He died thus, and his family have perished thus, while I have known nothing and done nothing."

"You at least are not to blame," said Thornton, calmly, "for you had scarcely heard of Brandon's name. You were in the north of England when this happened, and knew nothing whatever about it."

That evening Despard went home with a deeper trouble in his heart. He was not seen at the Grange for a month. At the end of that time he returned. He had been away to London during the whole interval.

As Mrs. Thornton entered to greet him her whole face was overspread with an expression of radiant joy. He took both her hands in his and pressed them without a word. "Welcome back," she murmured--"you have been gone a long time."

"Nothing but an overpowering sense of duty could have kept me away so long," said he, in a deep, low voice.

A few similar commonplaces followed; but with these two the tone of the voice invested the feeblest commonplaces with some hidden meaning.

At last she asked: "Tell me what success you had?" He made no reply; but taking a paper from his pocket opened it, and pointed to a marked paragraph. This was the month of March. The paper was dated January 14, 1847. The paragraph was as follows:

"DISTRESSING CASUALTY.--The ship _Java_, which left Sydney on the 5th of August last, reports a stormy passage. On the 12th of September a distressing casualty occurred. They were in S. lat. 11 deg. 1' 22", E. long. 105 deg. 6' 36", when a squall suddenly struck the ship. A passenger, Louis Brandon, Esq., of the firm of Compton & Brandon, Sydney, was standing by the lee-quarter as the squall struck, and, distressing to narrate, he was hurled violently overboard. It was impossible to do any thing, as a monsoon was beginning, which raged for twenty-four hours. Mr. Brandon was coming to England on business.

"The captain reports a sand-bank in the latitude and longitude indicated above, which he names 'Coffin Island,' from a rock of peculiar shape at the eastern extremity. Ships will do well in future to give this place a wide berth."

Deep despondency came over Mrs. Thornton's face as she read this. "We can do nothing," said she, mournfully. "He is gone. It is better for him. We must now wait till we hear more from Paolo. I will write to him at once."

"And I will write to my uncle."

There was a long silence. "Do you know," said Despard, finally, "that I have been thinking much about my father of late. It seems very strange to me that my uncle never told me about that Sicilian affair before. Perhaps he did not wish me to know it, for fear that through all my life I should brood over thoughts of that noble heart lost to me forever. But I intend to write to him, and obtain afresh the particulars of his death. I wish to know more about my mother. No one was ever in such ignorance of his parents as I have been. They merely told me that my father and mother died suddenly in India, and left me an orphan at the age of seven under the care of Mr. Henry Thornton. They never told me that Brandon was a very dear friend of his. I have thought also of the circumstances of his death, and they all seem confused. Some say he died in Calcutta, others say in China, and Mr. Thornton once said in Manilla. There is some mystery about it."

"When Brandon was visiting my father," said Mrs. Thornton, "you were at school, and he never saw you. I think he thought you were Henry Despard's son."

"There's some mystery about it," said Despard, thoughtfully.

When Mr. Thornton came in that night he read a few extracts from the London paper which he had just received. One was as follows:

"FOUNDERED AT SEA.--The ship _H. B. Smith_, from Calcutta, which arrived yesterday, reports that on the 28th January they picked up a ship's long-boat near the Cape Verd Islands. It was floating bottom upward. On the stern was painted the word _Falcon_. The ship _Falcon_ has now been expected for two months, and it is feared from this that she may have foundered at sea. The _Falcon_ was on her way from Sydney to London, and belonged to Messrs. Kingwood, Flaxman, & Co."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SHADOW OF THE AFRICAN FOREST.

Let us return to the castaways.

It was morning on the coast of Africa--Africa the mysterious, the inhospitable Africa, _leonum arida nutrix_.

There was a little harbor into which flowed a shallow, sluggish river, while on each side rose high hills. In front of the harbor was an island which concealed and protected it.

Here the palm-trees grew. The sides rose steeply, the summit was lofty, and the towering palms afforded a deep, dense shade. The grass was fine and short, and being protected from the withering heat was as fine as that of an English lawn. Up the palm-trees there climbed a thousand parasitic plants, covered with blossoms--gorgeous, golden, rich beyond all description. Birds of starry plumage flitted through the air, as they leaped from tree to tree, uttering a short, wild note; through the spreading branches sighed the murmuring breeze that came from off the

ocean; round the shore the low tones of the gently-washing surf were borne as it came in in faint undulations from the outer sea.

Underneath the deepest shadow of the palms lay Brandon. He had lost consciousness when he fell from the boat; and now for the first time he opened his eyes and looked around upon the scene, seeing these sights and hearing the murmuring sounds.

In front of him stood Beatrice, looking with dropped eyelids at the grass, her arms half folded before her, her head uncovered, her hair bound by a sort of fillet around the crown, and then gathered in great black curling masses behind. Her face was pale as usual, and had the same marble whiteness which always marked it. That face was now pensive and sad; but there was no weakness there. Its whole expression showed manifestly the self-contained soul, the strong spirit evenly-poised, willing and able to endure.

Brandon raised himself on one arm and looked wonderingly around. She started. A vivid flash of joy spread over her face in one bright smile. She hurried up and knelt down by him.

"Do not move--you are weak," she said, as tenderly as a mother to a sick child.

Brandon looked at her fixedly for a long time without speaking. She placed her cool hand on his forehead. His eyes closed as though there were a magnetic power in her touch. After a while, as she removed her hand, he opened his eyes again. He took her hand and held it fervently to his lips. "I know," said he, in a low, dreamy voice, "who you are, and who I am--but nothing more. I know that I have lost all memory; that there has been some past life of great sorrow; but I can not think what that sorrow is--I know that there has been some misfortune, but I can not remember what."

Beatrice smiled sadly. "It will all come to you in time."

"At first when I waked," he murmured, "and looked around on this scene, I thought that I had at last entered the spirit-world, and that you had come with me; and I felt a deep joy that I can never express. But I see, and I know now, that I am yet on the earth. Though what shore of all the earth this is, or how I got here, I know not."

"You must sleep," said she, gently.

"And you--you--you," he murmured, with indescribable intensity--"you, companion, preserver, guardian angel--I feel as though, if I were not a man, I could weep my life out at your feet."

"Do not weep," said she, calmly. "The time for tears may yet come; but it is not now."

He looked at her, long, earnestly, and inquiringly, still holding her hand, which he had pressed to his lips. An unutterable longing to ask something was evident; but it was checked by a painful embarrassment.

"I know nothing but this," said he at last, "that I have felt as though sailing for years over infinite seas. Wave after wave has been impelling us on. A Hindu servant guided the boat. But I lay weak, with my head supported by you, and your arms around me. Yet, of all the days and all

the years that ever I have known, these were supreme, for all the time was one long ecstasy. And now, if there is sorrow before me," he concluded, "I will meet it resignedly, for I have had my heaven already."

"You have sailed over seas," said she, sadly; "but I was the helpless one, and you saved me from death."

"And are you--to me--what I thought?" he asked, with painful vehemence and imploring eyes.

"I am your nurse," said she, with a melancholy smile.

He sighed heavily. "Sleep now," said she, and she again placed her hand upon his forehead. Her touch soothed him. Her voice arose in a low song of surpassing sweetness. His senses yielded to the subtle incantation, and sleep came to him as he lay.

When he awaked it was almost evening. Lethargy was still over him, and Beatrice made him sleep again. He slept into the next day. On waking there was the same absence of memory. She gave him some cordial to drink, and the draught revived him. Now he was far stronger, and he sat up, leaning against a tree, while Beatrice knelt near him. He looked at her long and earnestly.

"I would wish never to leave this place, but to stay here," said he. "I know nothing of my past life. I have drunk of Lethe. Yet I can not help struggling to regain knowledge of that past."

He put his hand in his bosom, as if feeling for some relic.

"I have something suspended about my neck," said he, "which is precious. Perhaps I shall know what it is after a time."

Then, after a pause, "Was there not a wreck?" he asked.

"Yes; and you saved my life."

"Was there not a fight with pirates?"

"Yes; and you saved my life," said Beatrice again.

"I begin to remember," said Brandon. "How long is it since the wreck took place?"

"It was January 15."

"And what is this?"

"February 6. It is about three weeks."

"How did I get away?"

"In a boat with me and the servant."

"Where is the servant?"

"Away providing for us. You had a sun-stroke. He carried you up here."

"How long have I been in this place?"

"A fortnight."

Numerous questions followed. Brandon's memory began to return. Yet, in his efforts to regain knowledge of himself, Beatrice was still the most prominent object in his thoughts. His dream-life persisted in mingling itself with his real life.

"But you," he cried, earnestly--"you, how have you endured all this? You are weary; you have worn yourself out for me. What can I ever do to show my gratitude? You have watched me night and day. Will you not have more care of your own life?"

The eyes of Beatrice kindled with a soft light. "What is my life?" said she. "Do I not owe it over and over again to you? But I deny that I am worn out."

Brandon looked at her with earnest, longing eyes. His recovery was rapid. In a few days he was able to go about. Cato procured fish from the waters and game from the woods, so as to save the provisions of the boat, and they looked forward to the time when they might resume their journey. But to Brandon this thought was repugnant, and an hourly struggle now went on within him. Why should he go to England? What could he do? Why should he ever part from her?

"Oh, to burst all links of habit, and to wander far away,
On from island unto island at the gateways of the day!"

In her presence he might find peace, and perpetual rapture in her smile.

In the midst of such meditations as these her voice once arose from afar. It was one of her own songs, such as she could improvise. It spoke of summer isles amidst the sea; of soft winds and spicy breezes; of eternal rest beneath over-shadowing palms. It was a soft, melting strain--a strain of enchantment, sung by one who felt the intoxication of the scene, and whose genius imparted it to others. He was like Ulysses listening to the song of the sirens. It seemed to him as though all nature there joined in that marvelous strain. It was to him as though the very winds were lulled into calm, and a delicious languor stole upon all his senses.

"Sweet, sweet, sweet, god Pan,
Sweet in the fields by the river,
Blinding sweet, oh great god Pan,
The sun on the hills forgot to die,
And the lily revived, and the dragon-fly
Came back to dream by the river."

It was the [Greek: meligaerun opa], the [Greek: opa kallimon] of the sirens.

For she had that divine voice which of itself can charm the soul; but, in addition, she had that poetic genius which of itself could give words which the music might clothe.

Now, as he saw her at a distance through the trees and marked the statuesque calm of her classic face, as she stood there, seeming in her song rather to soliloquize than to sing, breathing forth her music "in

profuse strains of unpremeditated art," the very beauty of the singer and the very sweetness of the song put an end to all temptation.

"This is folly," he thought. "Could one like that assent to my wild fancy? Would she, with her genius, give up her life to me? No; that divine music must be heard by larger numbers. She is one who thinks she can interpret the inspiration of Mozart and Handel. And who am I?"

Then there came amidst this music a still small voice, like the voice of those helpless ones at home; and this voice seemed one of entreaty and of despair. So the temptation passed. But it passed only to be renewed again. As for Beatrice, she seemed conscious of no such effect as this. Calmly and serenely she bore herself, singing as she thought, as the birds sing, because she could not help it. Here she was like one of the classic nymphs--like the genius of the spot--like Calypso, only passionless.

Now, the more Brandon felt the power of her presence the more he took refuge within himself, avoiding all dangerous topics, speaking only of external things, calling upon her to sing of loftier themes, such as those "cieli immensi" of which she had sung when he first heard her. Thus he fought down the struggles of his own heart, and crushed out those rising impulses which threatened to sweep him helplessly away.

As for Beatrice herself she seemed changeless, moved by no passion and swayed by no impulse. Was she altogether passionless, or was this her matchless self-control? Brandon thought that it was her nature, and that she, like her master Langhetti, found in music that which satisfied all passion and all desire.

In about a fortnight after his recovery from his stupor they were ready to leave. The provisions in the boat were enough for two weeks' sail. Water was put on board, and they bade adieu to the island which had sheltered them.

This time Beatrice would not let Brandon row while the sun was up. They rowed at night, and by day tried to get under the shadow of the shore. At last a wind sprang up; they now sailed along swiftly for two or three days. At the end of that time they saw European houses, beyond which arose some roofs and spires. It was Sierra Leone. Brandon's conjectures had been right. On landing here Brandon simply said that they had been wrecked in the Falcon, and had escaped on the boat, all the rest having perished. He gave his name as Wheeler. The authorities received these unfortunate ones with great kindness, and Brandon heard that a ship would leave for England on the 6th of March.

The close connection which had existed between them for so many weeks was now severed, and Brandon thought that this might perhaps remove that extraordinary power which he felt that she exerted over him. Not so. In her absence he found himself constantly looking forward toward a meeting with her again. When with her he found the joy that flowed from her presence to be more intense, since it was more concentrated. He began to feel alarmed at his own weakness.

The 6th of March came, and they left in the ship Juno for London.

Now their intercourse was like that of the old days on board the Falcon.

"It is like the _Falcon_," said Beatrice, on the first evening.
"Let us forget all about the journey over the sea, and our stay on the island."

"I can never forget that I owe my life to you," said Brandon, vehemently.

"And I," rejoined Beatrice, with kindling eyes, which yet were softened by a certain emotion of indescribable tenderness--"I--how can I forget! Twice you saved me from a fearful death, and then you toiled to save my life till your own sank under it."

"I would gladly give up a thousand lives"--said Brandon, in a low voice, while his eyes were illumined with a passion which had never before been permitted to get beyond control, but now rose visibly, and irresistibly.

"If you have a life to give," said Beatrice, calmly, returning his fevered gaze with a full look of tender sympathy--"if you have a life to give, let it be given to that _purpose_ of yours to which you are devoted."

"You refuse it, then!" cried Brandon, vehemently and reproachfully.

Beatrice returned his reproachful gaze with one equally reproachful, and raising her calm eyes to Heaven, said, in a tremulous voice,

"You have no right to say so--least of all to _me_. I said what you feel and know; and it is this, that others require your life, in

comparison with whom I am nothing. Ah, my friend," she continued, in tones of unutterable sadness, "let us be friends here at least, on the sea, for when we reach England we must be separated for evermore!"

"For evermore!" cried Brandon, in agony.

"For evermore!" repeated Beatrice, in equal anguish.

"Do you feel very eager to get to England?" asked Brandon, after a long silence.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I know that there is sorrow for me there."

"If our boat had been destroyed on the shore of that island," he asked, in almost an imploring voice, "would you have grieved?"

"No."

"The present is better than the future. Oh, that my dream had continued forever, and that I had never awaked to the bitterness of life!"

"That," said Beatrice, with a mournful smile, "is a reproach to me for watching you."

"Yet that moment of awaking was sweet beyond all thought," continued Brandon, in a musing tone, "for I had lost all memory of all things

except you."

They stood in silence, sometimes looking at one another, sometimes at the sea, while the dark shadows of the Future swept gloomily before their eyes.

The voyage passed on until at last the English shores were seen, and they sailed up the Channel amidst the thronging ships that pass to and fro from the metropolis of the world.

"To-morrow we part," said Beatrice, as she stood with Brandon on the quarter-deck.

"No," said Brandon; "there will be no one to meet you here. I must take you to your home."

"To my home! You?" cried Beatrice, starting back. "You dare not."

"I dare."

"Do you know what it is?"

"I do not seek to know. I do not ask; but yet I think I know."

"And yet _you_ offer to go?"

"I must go. I must see you to the very last."

"Be it so," said Beatrice, in a solemn voice, "since it is the very last."

Suddenly she looked at him with the solemn gaze of one whose soul was filled with thoughts that overpowered every common feeling. It was a glance lofty and serene and unimpassioned, like that of some spirit which has passed beyond human cares, but sad as that of some prophet of woe.

"Louis Brandon!"

At this mention of his name a flash of unspeakable surprise passed over Brandon's face. She held out her hand. "Take my hand," said she, calmly, "and hold it so that I may have strength to speak."

"Louis Brandon!" said she, "there was a time on that African island when you lay under the trees and I was sure that you were dead. There was no beating to your heart, and no perceptible breath. The last test failed, the last hope left me, and I knelt by your head, and took you in my arms, and wept in my despair. At your feet Cato knelt and mourned in his Hindu fashion. Then mechanically and hopelessly he made a last trial to see if you were really dead, so that he might prepare your grave. He put his hand under your clothes against your heart. He held it there for a long time. Your heart gave no answer. He withdrew it, and in doing so took something away that was suspended about your neck. This was a metallic case and a package wrapped in oiled silk. He gave them to me."

Beatrice had spoken with a sad, measured tone--such a tone as one sometimes uses in prayer--a passionless monotone, without agitation and without shame.

Brandon answered not a word.

"Take my hand," she said, "or I can not go through. This only can give me strength."

He clasped it tightly in both of his. She drew a long breath, and continued:

"I thought you dead, and knew the full measure of despair. Now, when these were given me, I wished to know the secret of the man who had twice rescued me from death, and finally laid down his life for my sake. I did it not through curiosity. I did it," and her voice rose slightly, with solemn emphasis--"I did it through a holy feeling that, since my life was due to you, therefore, as yours was gone, mine should replace it, and be devoted to the purpose which you had undertaken.

"I opened first the metallic case. It was under the dim shade of the African forest, and while holding on my knees the head of the man who had laid down his life for me. You know what I read there. I read of a father's love and agony. I read there the name of the one who had driven him to death. The shadows of the forest grew darker around me; as the full meaning of that revelation came over my soul they deepened into blackness, and I fell senseless by your side.

[Illustration: "I THOUGHT YOU DEAD, AND KNEW THE FULL MEASURE OF DESPAIR."]

"Better had Cato left us both lying there to die, and gone off in the boat himself. But he revived me. I laid you down gently, and propped up your head, but never again dared to defile you with the touch of one so infamous as I.

"There still remained the other package, which I read--how you reached that island, and how you got that MS., I neither know nor seek to discover; I only know that all my spirit awaked within me as I read those words. A strange, inexplicable feeling arose. I forgot all about you and your griefs. My whole soul was fixed on the figure of that bereaved and solitary man, who thus drifted to his fate. He seemed to speak to me. A fancy, born out of frenzy, no doubt, for all that horror well-nigh drove me mad--a fancy came to me that this voice, which had come from a distance of eighteen years, had spoken to me; a wild fancy, because I was eighteen years old, that therefore I was connected with these eighteen years, filled my whole soul. I thought that this MS. was mine, and the other one yours. I read it over and over, and over yet again, till every word forced itself into my memory--till you and your sorrows sank into oblivion beside the woes of this man.

"I sat near you all that night. The palms sighed in the air. I dared not touch you. My brain whirled. I thought I heard voices out at sea, and figures appeared in the gloom. I thought I saw before me the form of Colonel Despard. He looked at me with sadness unutterable, yet with soft pity and affection, and extended his hand as though to bless me. Madder fancies than ever then rushed through my brain. But when morning came and the excitement had passed I knew that I had been delirious.

"When that morning came I went over to look at you. To my amazement, you were breathing. Your life was renewed of itself. I knelt down and praised God for this, but did not dare to touch you. I folded up the treasures, and told Cato to put them again around your neck. Then I

watched you till you recovered.

"But on that night, and after reading those MSS., I seemed to have passed into another stage of being. I can say things to you now which I would not have dared to say before, and strength is given me to tell you all this before we part for evermore.

"I have awakened to infamy; for what is infamy if it be not this, to bear the name I bear? Something more than pride or vanity has been the foundation of that feeling of shame and hate with which I have always regarded it. And I have now died to my former life, and awakened to a new one.

"Louis Brandon, the agonies which may be suffered by those whom you seek to avenge I can conjecture but I wish never to hear. I pray God that I may never know what it might break my heart to learn. You must save them, you must also avenge them. You are strong, and you are implacable. When you strike your blow will be crushing.

"But I must go and bear my lot among those you strike; I will wait on among them, sharing their infamy and their fate. When your blow falls I will not turn away. I will think of those dear ones of yours who have suffered, and for their sakes will accept the blow of revenge."

Brandon had held her hand in silence, and with a convulsive pressure during these words. As she stopped she made a faint effort to withdraw it. He would not let her. He raised it to his lips and pressed it there.

Three times he made an effort to speak, and each time failed. At last, with a strong exertion, he uttered, in a hoarse voice and broken tones,

"Oh, Beatrice! Beatrice! how I love you!"

"I know it," said she, in the same monotone which she had used before--a tone of infinite mournfulness--"I have known it long, and I would say also, 'Louis Brandon, I love you,' if it were not that this would be the last infamy; that you, Brandon, of Brandon Hall, should be loved by one who bears my name."

The hours of the night passed away. They stood watching the English shores, speaking little. Brandon clung to her hand. They were sailing up the Thames. It was about four in the morning.

"We shall soon be there," said he; "sing to me for the last time. Sing, and forget for a moment that we must part."

Then, in a low voice, of soft but penetrating tones, which thrilled through every fibre of Brandon's being. Beatrice began to sing:

"Love made us one: our unity
Is indissoluble by act of thine,
For were this mortal being ended,
And our freed spirits in the world above,
Love, passing o'er the grave, would join us there,
As once he joined us here:
And the sad memory of the life below
Would but unite us closer evermore.
No act of thine may loose
Thee from the eternal bond,

Nor shall Revenge have power
To disunite us _there_!"

On that same day they landed in London. The Governor's lady at Sierra Leone had insisted on replenishing Beatrice's wardrobe, so that she showed no appearance of having gone through the troubles which had afflicted her on sea and shore.

Brandon took her to a hotel and then went to his agent's. He also examined the papers for the last four months. He read in the morning journals a notice which had already appeared of the arrival of the ship off the Nore, and the statement that three of the passengers of the _Falcon_ had reached Sierra Leone. He communicated to the owners of the _Falcon_ the particulars of the loss of the ship, and earned their thanks, for they were able to get their insurance without waiting a year, as is necessary where nothing is heard of a missing vessel.

He traveled with Beatrice by rail and coach as far as the village of Brandon. At the inn he engaged a carriage to take her up to her father's house. It was Brandon Hall, as he very well knew.

But little was said during all this time. Words were useless. Silence formed the best communion for them. He took her hand at parting. She spoke not a word; his lips moved, but no audible sound escaped. Yet in their eyes as they fastened themselves on one another in an intense gaze there was read all that unutterable passion of love, of longing, and of sorrow that each felt.

The carriage drove off. Brandon watched it. "Now farewell. Love, forever," he murmured, "and welcome Vengeance!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

INQUIRIES.

So many years had elapsed since Brandon had last been in the village which bore the family name that he had no fear of being recognized. He had been a boy then, he was now a man. His features had passed from a transition state into their maturer form, and a thick beard and mustache, the growth of the long voyage, covered the lower part of the face like a mask. His nose which, when he left, had a boyish roundness of outline, had since become refined and chiseled into the straight, thin Grecian type. His eyes alone remained the same, yet the expression had grown different, even as the soul that looked forth through them had been changed by experience and by suffering.

He gave himself out at the inn as an American merchant, and went out to begin his inquiries. Tearing two buttons off his coat, he entered the shop of the village tailor.

"Good-morning," said he, civilly.

"Good-morning, Sir; fine morning, Sir," answered the tailor, volubly. He was a little man, with a cast in his eye, and on looking at Brandon he had to put his head on one side, which he did with a quick, odd gesture.

"There are two buttons off my coat, and I want to know if you can repair it for me?"

"Certainly, Sir; certainly. Take off your coat, Sir, and sit down."

"The buttons," said Brandon, "are a little odd; but if you have not got any exactly like them, any thing similar will do."

"Oh, I think we'll fit you out, Sir. I think we'll fit you out," rejoined the tailor, briskly.

He bustled about among his boxes and drawers, pulled out a large number of articles, and finally began to select the buttons which were nearest like those on the coat.

"This is a fine little village," said Brandon, carelessly.

"Yes, Sir; that's a fact, Sir; that's just what every body says, Sir."

"What old Hall is that which I saw just outside the village?"

"Ah, Sir, that old Hall is the very best in the whole county. It is Brandon Hall, Sir."

"Brandon Hall?"

"Yes, Sir."

"I suppose this village takes the name from the Hall--or is it the Hall that is named after the village?"

"Well, neither, Sir. Both of them were named after the Brandon family."

"Is it an old family? It must be, of course."

"The oldest in the county, Sir."

"I wonder if Mr. Brandon would let a stranger go through his grounds? There is a hill back of the house that I should like to see."

"Mr. Brandon!" exclaimed the tailor, shaking his head; "Mr. Brandon! There ain't no Mr. Brandon now!"

"How is that?"

"Gone, Sir--ruined--died out."

"Then the man that lives there now is not Mr. Brandon?"

"Nothing of the kind, Sir! He, Sir! Why he isn't fit to clean the shoes of any of the old Brandons!"

"Who is he?"

"His name, Sir, is Potts."

"Potts! That doesn't sound like one of your old county names."

"I should think not, Sir. Potts! Why, Sir, he's generally believed in this here community to be a villain, Sir," said the little tailor, mysteriously, and with the look of a man who would like very well to be questioned further.

Brandon humored him. "How is that?"

"It's a long story, Sir."

"Oh, well--tell it. I have a great curiosity to hear any old stories current in your English villages. I'm an American, and English life is new to me."

"I'll bet you never heard any thing like this in all your born days."

"Tell it then, by all means."

The tailor jumped down from his seat, went mysteriously to the door, looked cautiously out, and then returned.

"It's just as well to be a little careful," said he, "for if that man knew that I was talking about him he'd take it out of me quick enough, I tell you."

"You seem to be afraid of him."

"We're all afraid of him in the village, and hate him; but I hope to God he'll catch it yet!"

"How can you be afraid of him? You all say that this is a free country."

"No man, Sir, in any country, is free, except he's rich. Poor people can be oppressed in many ways; and most of us are in one way or other dependent on him. We hate him all the worse, though. But I'll tell you about him."

"Yes, go on."

"Well, Sir, old Mr. Brandon, about twenty years ago, was one of the richest men in the county. About fifteen years ago the man Potts turned up, and however the old man took a fancy to him I never could see, but he did take a fancy to him, put all his money in some tin mines that Potts had started, and the end of it was Potts turned out a scoundrel, as every one said he would, swindled the old man out of every penny, and ruined him completely. Brandon had to sell his estate, and Potts bought it with the very money out of which he had cheated the old man."

"Oh! impossible!" said Brandon. "Isn't that some village gossip?"

"I wish it was, Sir--but it ain't. Go ask any man here, and he'll tell you the same."

"And what became of the family?" asked Brandon, calmly.

"Ah, Sir! that is the worst part of it."

"Why?"

"I'll tell you, Sir. He was ruined. He gave up all. He hadn't a penny

left. He went out of the Hall and lived for a short time in a small house at the other end of the village. At last he spent what little money he had left, and they all got sick. You wouldn't believe what happened after that."

"What was it?"

"They were all taken to the alms-house."

A burst of thunder seemed to sound in Brandon's ears as he heard this, which he had never even remotely imagined. The tailor was occupied with his own thoughts, and did not notice the wildness that for an instant appeared in Brandon's eyes. The latter for a moment felt paralyzed and struck down into nothingness by the shock of that tremendous intelligence.

"The people felt dreadfully about it," continued the tailor, "but they couldn't do any thing. It was Potts who had the family taken to the alms-house. Nobody dared to interfere."

"Did none of the county families do anything?" said Brandon, who at last, by a violent effort, had regained his composure.

"No. They had all been insulted by the old man, so now they let him suffer."

"Had he no old friends, or even acquaintances?"

"Well, that's what we all asked ourselves, Sir; but at any rate, whether he had or not, they didn't turn up--that is, not in time. There was a young man here when it was too late."

"A young man?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Was he a relative?"

"Oh no, Sir, only a lawyer's clerk; wanted to see about business I dare say. Perhaps to collect a bill. Let me see; the lawyer who sent him was named Thornton."

"Thornton!" said Brandon, as the name sank into his soul.

"Yes; he lived at Holby."

Brandon drew a long breath.

"No, Sir; no friends came, whether he had any or not. They were all sick at the alms-house for weeks."

"And I suppose they all died there?" said Brandon, in a strange, sweet voice.

"No, Sir. They were not so happy."

"What suffering could be greater?"

"They do talk dreadfully in this town, Sir; and I dare say it's not

true, but if it is it's enough to make a man's blood ran cold."

"You excite my curiosity. Remember I am an American, and these things seem odd to me. I always thought your British aristocrats could not be ruined."

"Here was one, Sir, that was, anyhow."

"Go on."

"Well, Sir, the old man died in the alms-house. The others got well. As soon as they were well enough they went away."

"How did they get away?"

"Potts helped them," replied the tailor, in a peculiar tone. "They went away from the village."

"Where did they go?"

"People say to Liverpool. I only tell what I know. I heard young Bill Potts, the old fellow's son, boasting one night at the inn where he was half drunk, how they had served the Brandons. He said they wanted to leave the village, so his father helped them away to America."

"To America?"

"Yes, Sir."

Brandon made no rejoinder.

"Bill Potts said they went to Liverpool, and then left for America to make their fortunes."

"What part of America?" asked Brandon, indifferently. "I never saw or heard of them."

"Didn't you, Sir?" asked the tailor, who evidently thought that America was like some English county, where every body may hear of every body else. "That's odd, too. I was going to ask you if you had."

"I wonder what ship they went out in?"

"That I can't say, Sir. Bill Potts kept dark about that. He said one thing, though, that set us thinking."

"What was that?"

"Why, that they went out in an emigrant ship as steerage passengers."

Brandon was silent.

"Poor people!" said he at last.

By this time the tailor had finished his coat and handed it back to him. Having obtained all the information that the man could give Brandon paid him and left.

Passing by the inn he walked on till he came to the alms-house. Here he

stood for a while and looked at it.

Brandon alms-house was small, badly planned, badly managed, and badly built; every thing done there was badly and meanly done. It was white-washed from the topmost point of every chimney down to the lowest edge of the basement. A whited sepulchre. For there was foulness there, in the air, in the surroundings, in every thing. Squalor and dirt reigned. His heart grew sick as those hideous walls rose before his sight.

Between this and Brandon Hall there was a difference, a distance almost immeasurable; to pass from one to the other might be conceived of as incredible; and yet that passage had been made.

To fall so far as to go the whole distance between the two; to begin in one and end in the other; to be born, brought up, and live and move and have one's being in the one, and then to die in the other; what was more incredible than this? Yet this had been the fate of his father.

Leaving the place, he walked directly toward Brandon Hall.

Brandon Hall was begun, nobody knows exactly when; but it is said that the foundations were laid before the time of Egbert. In all parts of the old mansion the progress of English civilization might be studied; in the Norman arches of the old chapel, the slender pointed style of the fifteenth century doorway that opened to the same, the false Grecian of the early Tudor period, and the wing added in Elizabeth's day, the days of that old Ralph Brandon who sank his ship and its treasure to prevent it from falling into the hands of the enemy.

Around this grand old Hall were scenes which could be found nowhere save in England. Wide fields, forever green with grass like velvet, over which rose groves of oak and elm, giving shelter to innumerable birds. There the deer bounded and the hare found a covert. The broad avenue that led to the Hall went up through a world of rich sylvan scenery, winding through groves and meadows and over undulating ground. Before the Hall lay the open sea about three miles away; but the Hall was on an eminence and overlooked all the intervening ground. Standing there one might see the gradual decline of the country as it sloped downward toward the margin of the ocean. On the left a bold promontory jutted far out, on the nearer side of which there was an island with a light-house; on the right was another promontory, not so bold. Between these two the whole country was like a garden. A little cove gave shelter to small vessels, and around this cove was the village of Brandon.

Brandon Hall was one of the oldest and most magnificent of the great halls of England. As Brandon looked upon it it rose before him amidst the groves of six hundred years, its many-gabled roof rising out from amidst a sea of foliage, speaking of wealth, luxury, splendor, power, influence, and all that men hope for, or struggle for, or fight for; from all of which he and his had been cast out; and the one who had done this was even now occupying the old ancestral seat of his family.

Brandon entered the gate, and walked up the long avenue till he reached the Hall. Here he rang the bell, and a servant appeared. "Is Mr. Potts at home?"

"Yes," said the man, brusquely.

"I wish to see him."

"Who shall I say?"

"Mr. Hendricks, from America."

The man showed him into the drawing-room. Brandon seated himself and waited. The room was furnished in the most elegant manner, most of the furniture being old, and all familiar to him. He took a hasty glance around, and closed his eyes as if to shut it all out from sight.

In a short time a man entered.

He appeared to be between fifty and sixty years of age, of medium size, broad-shouldered and stout. He had a thoroughly plebeian air; he was dressed in black, and had a bunch of large seals dangling from beneath his waistcoat. His face was round and fleshy, his eyes were small, and his head was bald. The general expression of his face was that of good-natured simplicity. As he caught sight of Brandon a frank smile of welcome arose on his broad, fat face.

[Illustration: "YOU ARE, SIR. JOHN POTTS OF POTTS HALL."]

Brandon rose and bowed. "Am I addressing Mr. John Potts?"

"You are, Sir. John Potts of Potts Hall."

"Potts of Potts Hall!" repeated Brandon. Then, drawing a card from his pocket he handed it to Potts. He had procured some of these in London. The card read as follows:

BEAMISH & HENDRICKS,
FLOUR MERCHANTS & PROVISION DEALERS,
88 FRONT STREET, CINCINNATI,
OHIO.

"I, Sir," said Brandon, "am Mr. Hendricks, junior partner in Beamish & Hendricks, and I hope you are quite well."

"Very well, thank you," answered Potts, smiling and sitting down. "I am happy to see you."

"Do you keep your health, Sir?"

"Thank you, I do," said Potts. "A touch of rheumatism at odd times, that's all."

Brandon's manner was stiff and formal, and his voice had assumed a slight nasal intonation. Potts had evidently looked on him as a perfect stranger.

"I hope, Sir, that I am not taking up your valuable time. You British noblemen have your valuable time, I know, as well as we business men."

"No, Sir, no, Sir, not at all," said Potts, evidently greatly delighted at being considered a British nobleman.

"Well, Sir John--or is it my lord?" said Brandon, interrogatively, correcting himself, and looking inquiringly at Potts.

"Sir John'll do," said Potts.

"Well, Sir John. Being in England on business, I came to ask you a few questions about a matter of some importance to us."

"Proceed, Sir!" said Potts, with great dignity.

"There's a young man that came into our employ last October whom we took a fancy to, or rather my senior did, and we have an idea of promoting him. My senior thinks the world of him, has the young man at his house, and he is even making up to his daughter. He calls himself Brandon-- Frank Brandon."

At this Potts started from an easy lounging attitude, in which he was trying to "do" the British noble, and with startling intensity of gaze looked Brandon full in the face.

"I think the young man is fairish," continues Brandon, "but nothing extraordinary. He is industrious and sober, but he ain't quick, and he never had any real business experience till he came to us. Now, my senior from the very first was infatuated with him, gave him a large salary, and, in spite of my warnings that he ought to be cautious, he wants to make him head-clerk, with an eye to making him partner next year. And so bent on this is he that I know he would dissolve partnership with me if I refused, take the young man, let him marry his daughter, and leave him all his money when he dies. That's no small sum, for old Mr. Beamish is worth in real estate round Cincinnati over two millions of dollars. So, you see, I have a right to feel anxious, more especially as I don't mind telling you, Sir John, who understand these matters, that I thought I had a very good chance myself with old Beamish's daughter."

Brandon spoke all this very rapidly, and with the air of one who was trying to conceal his feelings of dislike to the clerk of whom he was so jealous. Potts looked at him with an encouraging smile, and asked, as he stopped,

"And how did you happen to hear of me?"

"That's just what I was coming to. Sir John!" Brandon drew his chair nearer, apparently in deep excitement, and in a more nasal tone than ever, with a confidential air, he went on:

"You see, I mistrusted this young man who was carrying every thing before him with a high hand, right in my very teeth, and I watched him. I pumped him to see if I couldn't get him to tell something about himself. But the fellow was always on his guard, and always told the same story. This is what he tells: He says that his father was Ralph Brandon of Brandon Hall, Devonshire, and that he got very poor--he was ruined, in fact, by--I beg your pardon, Sir John, but he says it was you, and that you drove the family away. They then came over to America, and he got to Cincinnati. The old man, he says, died before they left, but he won't tell what became of the others. I confess I believed it was all a lie, and didn't think there was any such place as Brandon Hall, so I determined to find out, naturally enough, Sir John, when two millions were at stake."

Potts winked.

"Well, I suddenly found my health giving way, and had to come to Europe. You see what a delicate creature I am!"

Potts laughed with intense glee.

"And I came here after wandering about, trying to find it. I heard at last that there was a place that used to be Brandon Hall, though most people call it Potts Hall. Now, I thought, my fine young man, I'll catch you; for I'll call on Sir John himself and ask him."

"You did right, Sir," said Potts, who had taken an intense interest in this narrative. "I'm the very man you ought to have come to. I can tell you all you want. This Brandon is a miserable swindler."

"Good! I thought so. You'll give me that, Sir John, over your own name, will you?" cried Brandon, in great apparent excitement.

"Of course I will," said Potts, "and a good deal more. But tell me, first, what that young devil said as to how he got to Cincinnati? How did he find his way there?"

"He would never tell."

"What became of his mother and sister?"

"He wouldn't say."

"All I know," said Potts, "is this. I got official information that they all died at Quebec."

Brandon looked suddenly at the floor and gasped. In a moment he had recovered.

"Curse him! then this fellow is an impostor?"

"No," said Potts, "he must have escaped. It's possible. There was some confusion at Quebec about names."

"Then his name may really be Frank Brandon?"

"It must be," said Potts. "Anyhow, the others are all right."

"Are what?"

"All right; dead you know. That's why he don't like to tell you about them."

"Well, now, Sir John, could you tell me what you know about this young man, since you think he must be the same one?"

"I know he must be, and I'll tell you all about him and the whole cursed lot. In the first place," continued Potts, clearing his throat, "old Brandon was one of the cursedest old fools that ever lived. He was very well off but wanted to get richer, and so he speculated in a tin mine in Cornwall. I was acquainted with him at the time and used to respect him. He persuaded me--I was always off-handed about money, and a careless, easy fellow--he persuaded me to invest in it also. I did so, but at the end of a few years I found out that the tin mine was a rotten concern, and sold out. I sold at a very high price, for people believed it was a

splendid property. After this I found another mine and made money hand over fist. I warned old Brandon, and so did every body, but he didn't care a fig for what we said, and finally, one fine morning, he waked up and found himself ruined.

"He was more utterly ruined than any man I ever knew of, and all his estates were sold. I had made some money, few others in the county had any ready cash, the sale was forced, and I bought the whole establishment at a remarkably low figure. I got old Brandy--Brandy was a nickname I gave the old fellow--I got him a house in the village, and supported him for a while with his wife and daughter and his great lubberly boy. I soon found out what vipers they were. They all turned against their benefactor, and dared to say that I had ruined their father. In fact, my only fault was buying the place, and that was an advantage to old Brandy rather than an injury. It shows, though, what human nature is.

"They all got sick at last, and as they had no one to nurse them, I very considerately sent them all to the alms-house, where they had good beds, good attendance, and plenty to eat and drink. No matter what I did for them they abused me. They reviled me, for sending them to a comfortable home, and old Brandy was the worst of all. I used to go and visit him two or three times a day, and he always cursed me. Old Brandy did get awfully profane, that's a fact. The reason was his infernal pride. Look at me, now! I'm not proud. Put me in the alms-house, and would I curse you? I hope not.

"At last old Brandy died, and of course I had to look out for the family. They seemed thrown on my hands, you know, and I was too good-natured to let them suffer, although they treated me so abominably. The best thing I could think of was to ship them all off to America, where they could all get rich. So I took them to Liverpool."

"Did they want to go?"

"They didn't seem to have an idea in their heads. They looked and acted just like three born fools."

"Strange!"

"I let a friend of mine see about them, as I had considerable to do, and he got them a passage."

"I suppose you paid their way out."

"I did, Sir," said Potts, with an air of munificence; "but, between you and me, it didn't cost much."

"I should think it most have cost a considerable sum."

"Oh no! Clark saw to that. Clark got them places as steerage passengers."

"Young Brandon told me once that he came out as cabin passenger."

"That's his cursed pride. He went out in the steerage, and a devilish hard time he had too."

"Why?"

"Oh, he was a little crowded, I think! There were six hundred emigrants on board the _Tecumseh_--"

"The what?"

"The _Tecumseh_. Clark did that business neatly. Each passenger had to take his own provisions, so he supplied them with a lot. Now what do you think he gave them?"

"I can't imagine."

"He bought them some damaged bread at one quarter the usual price. It was all mouldy, you know," said Potts, trying to make Brandon see the joke. "I declare Clark and I roared over it for a couple of months, thinking how surprised they must have been when they sat down to eat their first dinner."

"That was very neat," rejoined Brandon.

"They were all sick when they left," said Potts; "but before they got to Quebec they were sicker, I'll bet."

"Why so?"

"Did you ever hear of the ship-fever?" said Potts, in a low voice which sent a sharp trill through every fibre of Brandon's being. He could only nod his head.

"Well, the _Tecumseh_, with her six hundred passengers, afforded an uncommon fine field for the ship-fever. That's what I was going to observe. They had a great time at Quebec last summer; but it was unanimously voted that the _Tecumseh_ was the worst ship of the lot. I send out an agent to see what had become of my three friends, and he came back and told me all. He said that about four hundred of the _Tecumseh's_ passengers died during the voyage, and ever so many more after the landing. The obtained a list of the dead from the quarantine records, and among them were those of the these three youthful Brandons. Yes, they joined old Cognac pretty soon--lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in death not divided. But this young devil that you speak of must have escaped. I dare say he did, for the confusion was awful."

"But couldn't there have been another son?"

"Oh no. There was another son, the eldest, the worst of the whole lot, so infernally bad that even old Brandy himself couldn't stand it, but packed him off to Botany Bay. It's well he went of his own accord, for if he hadn't the law would have sent him there at last transported for life."

"Perhaps this man is the same one."

"Oh no. This eldest Brandy is dead."

"Are you sure?"

"Certain--best authority. A business friend of mine was in the same ship with him. Brandy was coming home to see his friends. He fell overboard

and my friend saw him drown. It was in the Indian Ocean."

"When was that?"

"Last September."

"Oh, then this one must be the other of course!"

"No doubt of that, I think," said Potts, cheerily.

Brandon rose. "I feel much obliged. Sir John," said he, stiffly, and with his usual nasal tone, "for your kindness. This is just what I want. I'll put a stop to my young man's game. It's worth coming to England to find out this."

"Well, when you walk him out of your office, give him my respects and tell him I'd be very happy to see him. For I would, you know. I really would."

"I'll tell him so," said Brandon, "and if he is alive perhaps he'll come here."

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared Potts.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Brandon, and pretending not to see Potts's outstretched hand, he bowed and left. He walked rapidly down the avenue. He felt stifled. The horrors that had been revealed to him had been but in part anticipated. Could there be any thing worse?

He left the gates and walked quickly away, he knew not where. Turning into a by-path he went up a hill and finally sat down. Brandon Hall lay not far away. In front was the village and the sea beyond it. All the time there was but one train of thoughts in his mind. His wrongs took shape and framed themselves into a few sharply defined ideas. He muttered to himself over and over the things that were in his mind: "Myself disinherited and exiled! My father ruined and broken-hearted! My father killed! My mother, brother, and sister banished, starved, and murdered!"

He, too, as far as Potts's will was concerned, had been slain. He was alone and had no hope that any of his family could survive. Now, as he sat there alone, he needed to make his plans for the future. One thing stood out prominently before him, which was that he must go immediately to Quebec to find out finally and absolutely the fate of the family.

Then could any thing else be done in England? He thought over the names of those who had been the most intimate friends of his father--Thornton, Langhetti, Despard. Thornton had neglected his father in his hour of need. He had merely sent a clerk to make inquiries after all was over. The elder Langhetti, Brandon knew, was dead. Where were the others? None of them, at any rate, had interfered.

There remained the family of Despard. Brandon was aware that the Colonel had a brother in the army, but where he was he knew not nor did he care. If he chose to look in the army register he might very easily find out; but why should he? He had never known or heard much of him in any way.

There remained Courtenay Despard, the son of Lionel, he to whom the MS. of the dead might be considered after all as chiefly devolving. Of him

Brandon knew absolutely nothing, not even whether he was alive or dead.

For a time he discussed the question in his mind whether it might not be well to seek him out so as to show him his father's fate and gain his co-operation. But after a few moments' consideration he dismissed this thought. Why should he seek his help? Courtenay Despard, if alive, might be very unfit for the purpose. He might be timid, or indifferent, or dull, or indolent. Why make any advances to one whom he did not know? Afterward it might be well to find him, and see what might be done with or through him; but as yet there could be no reason whatever why he should take up his time in searching for him or in winning his confidence.

The end of it all was that he concluded whatever he did to do it by himself, with no human being as his confidant.

Only one or two persons in all the world knew that he was alive, and they were not capable, under any circumstances, of betraying him. And where now was Beatrice? In the power of this man whom Brandon had just left. Had she seen him as he came and went? Had she heard his voice as he spoke in that assumed tone? But Brandon found it necessary to crush down all thoughts of her.

One thing gave him profound satisfaction, and this was that Potts did not suspect him for an instant. And now how could he deal with Potts? The man had become wealthy and powerful. To cope with him needed wealth and power. How could Brandon obtain these? At the utmost he could only count upon the fifteen thousand pounds which Compton would remit. This would be as nothing to help him against his enemy. He had written to Compton that he had fallen overboard and been picked up, and had told the same to the London agent under the strictest secrecy, so as to be able to get the money which he needed. Yet after he got it all, what would be the benefit? First of all, wealth was necessary.

Now more than ever there came to his mind the ancestral letter which his father had inclosed to him--the message from old Ralph Brandon in the treasure-ship. It was a wild, mad hope; but was it unattainable? This he felt was now the one object that lay before him; this must first be sought after, and nothing else could be attempted or even thought of till it had been tried. If he failed, then other things might be considered.

Sitting there on his lonely height, in sight of his ancestral home, he took out his father's last letter and read it again, after which he once more read the old message from the treasure-ship:

"One league due northe of a smalle islet northe of the Islet of Santa Cruz northe of San Salvador----I Ralphe Brandon in my shippe Phoenix am becalmed and surrounded by a Spanish fleete----My shippe is filled with spoyle the Plunder of III galleons----wealth which myghte purchase a kyngdom-tresure equalle to an Empyr's revenue----Gold and jeweles in countless store----and God forbydde that itt shall falle into the hands of the Enemye----I therefore Ralphe Brandon out of mine owne good wyl and intente and that of all my men sink this shippe rather than be taken alyve----I send this by my trusty seaman Peter Leggit who with IX others tolde off by lot will trye to escape in the Boate by nighte----If this cometh haply into the hands of my sonne Philip let him herebye knowe that in this place is all this tresure----which haply may yet be gathered from the sea----the Islet is knowne by III rockes that be pushed up like

Ill needles from the sande.

"Ralphe Brandon"

Five days afterward Brandon, with his Hindu servant, was sailing out of the Mersey River on his way to Quebec.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DEAD ALIVE.

It was early in the month of August when Brandon visited the quarantine station at Gosse Island, Quebec. A low, wooden building stood near the landing, with a sign over the door containing only the word "OFFICE." To this building Brandon directed his steps. On entering he saw only one clerk there.

"Are you the superintendent?" he asked, bowing courteously.

"No," said the clerk. "He is in Quebec just now."

"Perhaps you can give me the information that I want."

"What is it?"

"I have been sent to inquire after some passengers that came out here last year."

"Oh yes, I can tell all that can be told," said the clerk, readily. "We have the registration books here, and you are at liberty to look up any names you wish. Step this way, please." And he led the way to an inner office.

"What year did they come out in?" asked the clerk.

"Last year."

"Last year--an awful year to look up. 1846--yes, here is the book for that year--a year which you are aware was an unparalleled one."

"I have heard so."

"Do you know the name of the ship?"

"The _Tecumseh_."

"The _Tecumseh_!" exclaimed the clerk, with a startled look. "That is an awful name in our records. I am sorry you have not another name to examine, for the _Tecumseh_ was the worst of all."

Brandon bowed.

"The _Tecumseh_," continued the clerk, turning over the leaves of the book as it lay on the desk. "The _Tecumseh_, from Liverpool, sailed June 2, arrived August 16. Here you see the names of those who

died at sea, copied from the ship's books, and those who died on shore. It is a frightful mortality. Would you like to look over the list?"

Brandon bowed and advanced to the desk.

"The deaths on board ship show whether they were seamen or passengers, and the passengers are marked as cabin and steerage. But after landing it was impossible to keep an account of classes."

Brandon carefully ran his eye down the long list, and read each name. Those for which he looked did not appear. At last he came to the list of those who had died on shore. After reading a few names his eye was arrested by one--

"_Brandon, Elizabeth_."

It was his mother. He read on. He soon came to another--

"_Brandon, Edith_." It was his sister.

"Do you find any of the names?" asked the clerk, seeing Brandon turn his head.

"Yes," said Brandon; "this is one," and he pointed to the last name. "But I see a mark opposite that name. What is it? 'B' and 'A.' What is the meaning?" "Is that party a relative of yours?"

"No," said Brandon.

"You don't mind hearing something horrible, then?"

"No."

The clerk drew a long breath.

"Well, Sir, those letters were written by the late superintendent. The poor man is now a lunatic. He was here last year.

"You see this is how it was: The ship-fever broke out. The number of sick was awful, and there were no preparations for them here. The disease in some respects was worse than cholera, and there was nothing but confusion. Very many died from lack of nursing. But the worst feature of the whole thing was the hurried burials.

"I was not here last year, and all who were here then have left. But I've heard enough to make me sick with horror. You perhaps are aware that in this ship-fever there sometimes occurs a total loss of sense, which is apt to be mistaken for death?"

The clerk paused. Brandon regarded him steadily for a moment. Then he turned, and looked earnestly at the book.

"The burials were very hastily made."

"Well?"

"And it is now believed that some were buried in a state of trance."

"Buried alive?"

"Buried alive!"

There was a long silence. Brandon's eyes were fixed on the book. At last he pointed to the name of Edith Brandon.

"Then, I suppose," he said, in a steady voice, which, however, was in a changed key, "these letters 'B' and 'A' are intended to mean something of that description?"

"Something of that sort," replied the clerk.

Brandon drew a long breath.

"But there is no certainty about it in this particular case. I will tell you how these marks happened to be made. The clerk that was here last told me.

"One morning, according to him, the superintendent came in, looking very much excited and altered. He went to this book, where the entries of burials had been made on the preceding evening. This name was third from the last. Twelve had been buried. He penciled these letters there and left. People did not notice him: every body was sick or busy. At last in the evening of the next day, when they were to bury a new lot, they found the superintendent digging at the grave the third from the last. They tried to stop him, but he shouted and moaned alternately 'Buried alive!' 'Buried alive!' In fact they saw that he was crazy, and had to confine him at once."

"Did they examine the grave?"

"Yes. The woman told my predecessor that she and her husband--who did the burying--had examined it, and found the body not only dead, but corrupt. So there's no doubt of it. That party must have been dead at any rate."

"Who was the woman?"

"An old woman that laid them out. She and her husband buried them."

"Where is she now?"

"I don't know."

"Does she stay here yet?"

"No. She left last year."

"What became of the superintendent?"

"He was taken home, but grew no better. At last he had to be sent to an asylum. Some examination was made by the authorities, but nothing ever came of it. The papers made no mention of the affair, and it was hushed up."

Brandon read on. At last he came to another name. It was simply this: "_Brandon_." There was a slight movement on the clerk's part as Brandon came to this name. "There is no Christian name here," said Brandon. "I suppose they did not know it."

"Well," said the clerk, "there's something peculiar about that. The former clerk never mentioned it to any body but me. That man didn't die at all."

"What do you mean?" said Brandon, who could scarcely speak for the tremendous struggle between hope and despair that was going on within him.

"It's a false entry."

"How?"

"The superintendent wrote that. See, the handwriting is different from the others. One is that of the clerk who made all these entries; the other is the superintendent's."

Brandon looked and saw that this was the case.

"What was the cause of that?"

"The clerk told me that after making these next fifteen entries of buried parties--buried the evening after these last twelve--he went away to see about something. When he came back the next morning this name was written in the superintendent's hand. He did not know what to think of it, so he concluded to ask the superintendent; but in the course of the day he heard that he was mad and in confinement, as I have told you."

"Then you mean that this is not an entry of a death at all."

"Yes. The fact is, the superintendent for some reason got it into his head that this Brandon"--and he pointed to Edith's name--"had been buried alive. He brooded over the name, and among other things wrote it down here at the end of the list for the day. That's the way in which my predecessor accounted for it."

"It is a very natural one," said Brandon.

"Quite so." The clerk let it stand. You see, if he had erased it, he might have been overhauled, and there would have been a committee. He was afraid of that; so he thought it better to say nothing about it. He wouldn't have told me, only he said that a party came here once for a list of all the dead of the _Tecumseh_, and he copied all out, including this doubtful one. He thought that he had done wrong, and therefore told me, so that if any particular inquiries were ever made I might know what to say."

"Are there many mistakes in these records?"

[Illustration: "A STRANGE FEELING PASSED OVER BRANDON. HE STEPPED FORWARD."]

"I dare say there are a good many in the list for 1846. There was so much confusion that names got changed, and people died whose names could only be conjectured by knowing who had recovered. As some of those that recovered or had not been sick slipped away secretly, of course there was inaccuracy."

Brandon had nothing more to ask. He thanked the clerk and departed.

There was a faint hope, then, that Frank might yet be alive. On his way to Quebec he decided what to do. As soon as he arrived he inserted an advertisement in the chief papers to the following effect:

NOTICE:

Information of any one of the names of "BRANDON," who came out in the ship _Tecumseh_ in 1846 from Liverpool to Quebec, is earnestly desired by friends of the family. A liberal reward will be given to any one who can give the above information. Apply to:

Henry Peters,
22 Place d'Armes.

Brandon waited in Quebec six weeks without any results. He then went to Montreal and inserted the same notice in the papers there, and in other towns in Canada, giving his Montreal address. After waiting five or six weeks in Montreal he went to Toronto, and advertised again, giving his new address. He waited here for some time, till at length the month of November began to draw to a close. Not yet despondent, he began to form a plan for advertising in every city of the United States.

Meanwhile he had received many communications, all of which, however, were made with the vague hope of getting a reward. None were at all reliable. At length he thought that it was useless to wait any longer in Canada, and concluded to go to New York as a centre of action.

He arrived in New York at the end of December, and immediately began to insert his notices in all parts of the country, giving his address at the Astor House.

One day, as he came in from the street, he was informed that there was some one in his room who wished to see him. He went up calmly, thinking that it was some new person with intelligence.

On entering the room he saw a man standing by the window, in his shirt-sleeves, dressed in coarse clothes. The man was very tall, broad-shouldered, with large, Roman features, and heavy beard and mustache. His face was marked by profound dejection; he looked like one whose whole life had been one long misfortune. Louis Brandon had never seen any face which bore so deep an impress of suffering.

The stranger turned as he came in and looked at him with his sad eyes earnestly.

"Sir," said he, in a voice which thrilled through Brandon, "are you Henry Peters?"

A strange feeling passed over Brandon. He stepped forward.

"Frank!" he cried, in a broken voice.

"Merciful Heavens!" cried the other. "Have you too come up from the dead? Louis!"

In this meeting between the two brothers, after so many eventful years of separation, each had much to tell. Each had a story so marvelous that the other might have doubted it, had not the marvels of his own

experience been equally great. Frank's story, however, is the only one that the reader will care to hear, and that must be reserved for another chapter.

CHAPTER XX.

FRANK'S STORY.

"After you left," said Frank, "all went to confusion. Potts lorded it with a higher hand than ever, and my father was more than ever infatuated, and seemed to feel that it was necessary to justify his harshness toward you by publicly exhibiting a greater confidence in Potts. Like a thoroughly vulgar and base nature, this man could not be content with having the power, but loved to exhibit that power to us. Life to me for years became one long death; a hundred times I would have turned upon the scoundrel and taken vengeance for our wrongs, but the tears of my mother forced me to use self-control. You had been driven off; I alone was left, and she implored me by my love for her to stand by her. I wished her to take her own little property and go with me and Edith where we might all live in seclusion together; but this she would not do for fear of staining the proud Brandon name.

"Potts grew worse and worse every year. There was a loathsome son of his whom he used to bring with him, and my father was infatuated enough to treat the younger devil with the same civility which he showed to the elder one. Poor father! he really believed, as he afterward told me, that these men were putting millions of money into his hands, and that he would be the Beckford of his generation.

"After a while another scoundrel, called Clark, appeared, who was simply the counterpart of Potts. Of this man something very singular was soon made known to me.

"One day I was strolling through the grounds when suddenly, as I passed through a grove which stood by a fish-pond, I heard voices and saw the two men I hated most of all on earth standing near me. They were both naked. They had the audacity to go bathing in the fishpond. Clark had his back turned toward me, and I saw on it, below the neck, three marks, fiery red, as though they had been made by a brand. They were these:" and taking a pencil, Frank made the following marks:

[Illustration: ^ /\ [three lines, forming short arrow]

R [sans-serif R]

+ [plus sign]]

Louis looked at this with intense excitement.

"You have been in New South Wales," said Frank, "and perhaps know whether it is true or not that these are brands on convicts?"

"It is true, and on convicts of the very worst kind."

"Do you know what they mean?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"Only the worst are branded with a single mark, so you may imagine what a triple mark indicates. But I will tell you the meaning of each. The first (/|\) is the king's mark put on those who are totally irreclaimable and insubordinate. The second (R) means runaway, and is put on those who have attempted to escape. The third (+) indicated a murderous attack on the guards. When they are not hung, they are branded with this mark; and those who are branded in this way are condemned to hard work, in chains, for life."

"That's about what I supposed," said Frank, quietly, "only of course you are more particular. After seeing this I told my father. He refused to believe me. I determined to bring matters to a crisis, and charged Potts, in my father's presence, with associating with a branded felon. Potts at once turned upon me and appealed to my father's sense of justice. He accused me of being so far carried away by prejudice as not to hesitate to invent a foul slander against an honest man. He said that Clark would be willing to be put to any test; he could not, however, ask him to expose himself--it was too outrageous but would simply assert that my charge was false."

"My father as usual believed every word and gave me a stern reprimand. Louis, in the presence of my mother and sister I cursed my father on that day. Poor man! the blow soon fell. It was in 1845 that the crash came. I have not the heart to go into details now. I will tell you from time to time hereafter. It is enough to say that every penny was lost. We had to leave the Hall and took a little cottage in the village."

"All our friends and acquaintances stood aloof. My father's oldest friends never came near him. Old Langhetti was dead. His son knew nothing about this. I will tell you more of him presently."

"Colonel Lionel Despard was dead. His son, Courtenay, was ignorant of all this, and was away in the North of England. There was Thornton, and I can't account for his inaction. He married Langhetti's daughter too. That is a mystery."

"They are all false, Frank."

Frank looked up with something like a smile.

"No, not all; wait till you hear me through."

Frank drew a long breath. "We got sick there, and Potts had us taken to the alms-house. There we all prayed for death, but only my father's prayer was heard. He died of a broken heart. The rest of us lived on."

"Scarcely had my father been buried when Potts came to take us away. He insisted that we should leave the country, and offered to pay our way to America. We were all indifferent: we were paralyzed by grief. The alms-house was not a place that we could cling to, so we let ourselves drift, and allowed Potts to send us wherever he wished. We did not even hope for any thing better. We only hoped that somewhere or other we might all

die. What else could we do? What else could I do? There was no friend to whom I could look: and if I ever thought of any thing, it was that America might possibly afford us a chance to get a living till death came.

"So we allowed ourselves to be sent wherever Potts chose, since it could not possibly make things worse than they were. He availed himself of our stolid indifference, put us as passengers in the steerage on board of a crowded emigrant ship, the _Tecumseh_, and gave us for our provisions some mouldy bread.

"We simply lived and suffered, and were all waiting for death, till one day an angel appeared who gave us a short respite, and saved us for a while from misery. This angel, Louis, was Paolo, the son of Langhetti.

"You look amazed. It was certainly an amazing thing that he should be on board the same ship with us. He was in the cabin. He noticed our misery without knowing who we were. He came to give us pity and help us. When at last he found out our names he fell on our necks, kissed us, and wept aloud.

"He gave up his room in the cabin to my mother and sister, and slept and lived with me. Most of all he cheered us by the lofty, spiritual words with which he bade us look with contempt upon the troubles of life and aspire after immortal happiness. Yes, Louis; Langhetti gave us peace.

"There were six hundred passengers. The plague broke out among us. The deaths every day increased, and all were filled with despair. At last the sailors themselves began to die.

"I believe there was only one in all that ship who preserved calm reason and stood without fear during those awful weeks. That one was Langhetti. He found the officers of the ship panic-stricken, so he took charge of the steerage, organized nurses, watched over every thing, encouraged every body, and labored night and day. In the midst of all I fell sick, and he nursed me back to life. Most of all, that man inspired fortitude by the hope that beamed in his eyes, and by the radiancy of his smile. 'Never mind, Brandon,' said he as I lay, I thought doomed. 'Death is nothing. Life goes on. You will leave this pest-ship for a realm of light. Keep up your heart, my brother immortal, and praise God with your latest breath.'

"I recovered, and then stood by his side as best I might. I found that he had never told my mother of my sickness. At last my mother and sister in the cabin fell sick. I heard of it some days after, and was prostrated again. I grew better after a time; but just as we reached quarantine, Langhetti, who had kept himself up thus far, gave out completely, and fell before the plague."

"Did he die?" asked Louis, in a faltering voice.

"Not on ship-board. He was carried ashore senseless. My mother and sister were very low, and were also carried on shore. I, though weak, was able to nurse them all. My mother died first."

There was a long pause. At last Frank resumed:

"My sister gradually recovered: and then, through grief and fatigue, I fell sick for the third time. I felt it coming on. My sister nursed me;

for a time I thought I was going to die. 'Oh, Edith,' I said, 'when I die, devote your life while it lasts to Langhetti, whom God sent to us in our despair. Save his life even if you give up your own.'

"After that I became delirious, and remained so for a long time. Weeks passed; and when at last I revived the plague was stayed, and but few sick were on the island. My case was a lingering one, for this was the third attack of the fever. Why I didn't die I can't understand. There was no attendance. All was confusion, horror, and death.

"When I revived the first question was after Langhetti and Edith. No one knew any thing about them. In the confusion we had been separated, and Edith had died alone."

"Who told you that she died?" asked Louis, with a troubled look.

Frank looked at him with a face of horror.

"Can you bear what I am going to say?"

"Yes."

"When I was able to move about I went to see if any one could tell me about Edith and Langhetti. I heard an awful story; that the superintendent had gone mad and had been found trying to dig open a grave, saying that some one was _buried alive_. Who do you think? oh, my brother!"

"Speak!"

"Edith Brandon was the name he named."

"Be calm, Frank: I made inquiries myself at the island registry-office. The clerk told me this story, but said that the woman who had charge of the dead asserted that the grave was opened, and it was ascertained that absolute death had taken place.

"Alas!" said Frank, in a voice of despair, "I saw that woman--the keeper of the dead-house--the grave-digger's wife. She told me this story, but it was with a troubled eye. I swore vengeance on her unless she told me the truth. She was alarmed, and said she would reveal all she knew if I swore to keep it to myself. I swore it. Can you bear to hear it, Louis?"

"Speak!"

"She said only this: 'When the grave was opened it was found that Edith Brandon had not been dead when she was buried.'"

Louis groaned, and, falling forward, buried his head in both his hands.

It was a long time before either of them spoke. At last Louis, without lifting his head, said:

"Go on."

"When I left the island I went to Quebec, but could not stay there. It was too near the place of horror. I went up the river, working my way as a laborer, to Montreal. I then sought for work, and obtained employment as porter in a warehouse. What mattered it? What was rank or station to

me? I only wanted to keep myself from starvation and get a bed to sleep on at night.

"I had no hope or thought of any thing. The horrors through which I had passed were enough to fill my mind. Yet above them all one horror was predominant, and never through the days and nights that have since elapsed has my soul ceased to quiver at the echo of two terrible words which have never ceased to ring through my brain--'Buried alive!'

"I lived on in Montreal, under an assumed name, as a common porter, and might have been living there yet; but one day as I came in I heard the name of 'Brandon.' Two of the clerks who were discussing the news in the morning paper happened to speak of an advertisement which had long been in the papers in all parts of Canada. It was for information about the Brandon family.

"I read the notice. It seemed to me at first that Potts was still trying to get control of us, but a moment's reflection showed that to be improbable. Then the mention of 'the friends of the family' made me think of Langhetti. I concluded that he had escaped death and was trying to find me out.

"I went to Toronto, and found that you had gone to New York. I had saved much of my wages, and was able to come here. I expected Langhetti, but found you."

"Why did you not think that it might be me?"

"Because I heard a threat of Potts about you, and took it for granted that he would succeed in carrying it out."

"What was the threat?"

"He found out somehow that my father had written a letter to you. I suppose they told him so at the village post-office. One day when he was in the room he said, with a laugh, alluding to the letter, 'I'll uncork that young Brandy-flask before long.'"

"Well--the notice of my death appeared in the English papers."

Frank looked earnestly at him.

"And I accept it, and go under an assumed name."

"So do I. It is better."

"You thought Langhetti alive. Do you think he is?"

"I do not think so now."

"Why not?"

"The efforts which he made were enough to kill any man without the plague. He must have died."

After hearing Frank's story Louis gave a full account of his own adventures, omitting, however, all mention of Beatrice. That was something for his own heart, and not for another's ear.

"Have you the letter and MS.?"

"Yes."

"Let me read them."

Louis took the treasures and handed them to Frank. He read them in silence.

"Is Cato with you yet?"

"Yes."

"It is well."

"And now, Frank," said Louis, "you have something at last to live for."

"What is that?"

"Vengeance!" cried Louis, with burning eyes.

"Vengeance!" repeated Frank, without emotion--"Vengeance! What is that to me? Do you hope to give peace to your own heart by inflicting suffering on our enemies? What can they possibly suffer that can atone for what they have inflicted? All that they can feel is as nothing compared with what we have felt. Vengeance!" he repeated, musingly; "and what sort of vengeance? Would you kill them? What would that effect? Would he be more miserable than he is? Or would you feel any greater happiness? Or do you mean something more far-reaching than death?"

"Death," said Louis, "is nothing for such crimes as his."

"You want to inflict suffering, then, and you ask me. Well, after all, do I want him to suffer? Do I care for this man's sufferings? What are they or what can they be to me? He stands on his own plane, far beneath me; he is a coarse animal, who can, perhaps, suffer from nothing but physical pain. Should I inflict that on him, what good would it be to me? And yet there is none other that I can inflict."

"Langhetti must have transformed you," said Louis, "with his spiritual ideas."

"Langhetti; or perhaps the fact that I three times gazed upon the face of death and stood upon the threshold of that place where dwells the Infinite Mystery. So when you speak of mere vengeance my heart does not respond. But there is still something which may make a purpose as strong as vengeance."

"Name it."

"The sense of intolerable wrong!" cried Frank, in vehement tones; "the presence of that foul pair in the home of our ancestors, our own exile, and all the sufferings of the past! Do you think that I can endure this?"

"No--you must have vengeance."

"No; not vengeance."

"What then?"

"Justice!" cried Frank, starting to his feet. "Justice--strict, stern, merciless; and that justice means to me all that you mean by vengeance. Let us make war against him from this time forth while life lasts; let us cast him out and get back our own; let us put him into the power of the law, and let that take satisfaction on him for his crimes; let us cast him out and fling him from us to that power which can fittingly condemn. I despise him, and despise his sufferings. His agony will give me no gratification. The anguish that a base nature can suffer is only disgusting to me--he suffers only out of his baseness. To me, and with a thing like that, vengeance is impossible, and justice is enough."

"At any rate you will have a purpose, and your purpose points to the same result as mine."

"But how is this possible?" said Frank. "He is strong, and we are weak. What can we do?"

"We can try," said Louis. "You are ready to undertake any thing. You do not value your life. There is one thing which is before us. It is desperate--it is almost hopeless; but we are both ready to try it."

"What is that?"

"The message from the dead," said Louis, spreading before Frank that letter from the treasure-ship which he himself had so often read.

"And are you going to try this?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"I don't know. I must first find out the resources of science."

"Have you Cato yet?"

"Yes."

"Can he dive?"

"He was brought up on the Malabar coast, among the pearl-fishers, and can remain under water for an incredible space of time. But I hope to find means which will enable me myself to go down under the ocean depths. This will be our object now. If it succeeds, then we can gain our purpose; if not, we must think of something else."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE DIVING BUSINESS.

In a little street that runs from Broadway, not far from Wall Street, there was a low doorway with dingy panes of glass, over which was a sign which bore the following letters, somewhat faded:

BROCKET & CO.,
CONTRACTORS

About a month after his arrival at New York Brandon entered this place and walked up to the desk, where a stout, thick-set man was sitting, with his chin on his hands and his elbows on the desk before him.

"Mr. Brocket?" said Brandon, inquiringly.

"Yes, Sir," answered the other, descending from his stool and stepping forward toward Brandon, behind a low table which stood by the desk.

"I am told that you undertake contracts for raising sunken vessels?"

"We are in that line of business."

"You have to make use of diving apparatus?"

"Yes."

"I understand that you have gone into this business to a larger extent than any one in America?"

"Yes, Sir," said Brocket, modestly. "I think we do the leading business in that line."

"I will tell you frankly my object in calling upon you. I have just come from the East Indies for the purpose of organizing a systematic plan for the pearl fisheries. You are aware that out there they still cling to the old fashion of diving, which was begun three thousand years ago. I wish to see if I can not bring science to bear upon it, so as to raise the pearl-oysters in larger quantities."

"That's a good idea of yours," remarked Mr. Brocket, thoughtfully.

"I came to you to see if you could inform me whether it would be practicable or not."

"Perfectly so," said Brocket.

"Do you work with the diving-bell in your business or with armor?"

"With both. We use the diving-bell for stationary purposes; but when it is necessary to move about we employ armor."

"Is the armor adapted to give a man any freedom of movement?"

"The armor is far better than the bell. The armor is so perfect now that a practiced hand can move about under water with a freedom that is surprising. My men go down to examine sunken ships. They go in and out and all through them. Sometimes this is the most profitable part of our business."

"Why so?"

"Why, because there is often money or valuable articles on board, and these always are ours. See," said Brocket, opening a drawer and taking out some silver coin, "here is some money that we found in an old Dutch

vessel that was sunk up the Hudson a hundred years ago. Our men walked about the bed of the river till they found her, and in her cabin they obtained a sum of money that would surprise you--all old coin."

"An old Dutch vessel! Do you often find vessels that have been sunk so long ago?"

"Not often. But we are always on the lookout for them," said Brocket, who had now grown quite communicative. "You see, those old ships always carried ready cash--they didn't use bank-notes and bills of exchange. So if you can only find one you're sure of money."

"Then this would be a good thing to bear in mind in our pearl enterprise?"

"Of course. I should think that out there some reefs must be full of sunken ships. They've been sinking about those coasts ever since the first ship was built."

"How far down can a diver go in armor?"

"Oh, any reasonable depth, when the pressure of the water is not too great. Some pain in the ears is felt at first from the compressed air, but that is temporary. Men can easily go down as far as fifteen or sixteen fathoms."

"How long can they stay down?"

"In the bells, you know, they go down and are pulled up only in the middle of the day and at evening, when their work is done."

"How with the men in armor?"

"Oh, they can stand it almost as well. They come up oftener, though. There is one advantage in the armor: a man can fling off his weight and come up whenever he likes."

"Have you ever been down yourself?"

"Oh yes--oftener than any of my men. I'm the oldest diver in the country, I think. But I don't go down often now. It's hard work, and I'm getting old."

"Is it much harder than other work?"

"Well, you see, it's unnatural sort of work, and is hard on the lungs. Still, I always was healthy. The real reason why I stopped was a circumstance that happened two years ago."

"What was that?"

Brocket drew a long breath, looked for a moment meditatively at the floor, and then went on:

"Well, there happened to be a wreck of a steamer called the Saladin down off the North Carolina coast, and I thought I would try her as a speculation, for I supposed that there might be considerable money on board one way or another. It was a very singular affair. Only two men had escaped; it was so sudden. They said the vessel

struck a rock at night when the water was perfectly still, and went down in a few minutes, before the passengers could even be awakened. It may seem horrid to you, but you must know that a ship-load of passengers is very profitable, for they all carry money. Besides, there are their trunks, and the clerk's desk, and so on. So, this time, I went down myself. The ship lay on one side of the rock which had pierced her, having floated off just before sinking; and I had no difficulty in getting on board. After walking about the deck I went at once into the saloon. Sir," said Brocket, with an awful look at Brandon, "if I should live for a hundred years I should never forget the sight that I saw. A hundred passengers or more had been on board, and most of them had rushed out of their state-rooms as the vessel began to sink. Very many of them lay on the floor, a frightful multitude of dead.

"But there were others," continued Brocket, in a lower tone, "who had clutched at pieces of furniture, at the doors, and at the chairs, and many of these had held on with such a rigid clutch that death itself had not unlocked it. Some were still upright, with distorted features, and staring eyes, clinging, with frantic faces, to the nearest object that they had seen. Several of them stood around the table. The most frightful thing was this: that they were all staring at the door.

"But the worst one of all was a corpse that was on the saloon table. The wretch had leaped there in his first mad impulse, and his hands had clutched a brass bar that ran across. He was facing the door; his hands were still clinging, his eyes glared at me, his jaw had fallen, The hideous face seemed grimacing at and threatening me. As I entered the water was disturbed by my motion. An undulation set in movement by my entrance passed through the length of the saloon. All the corpses swayed for a moment. I stopped in horror. Scarcely had I stopped when the corpses, agitated by the motion of the water and swaying, lost their hold; their fingers slipped, and they fell forward simultaneously. Above all, that hideous figure on the table, as its fingers were loosened, in falling forward, seemed to take steps, with his demon face still staring at me. My blood ran cold. It seemed to me as though these devils were all rushing at me, led on by that fiend on the table. For the first time in my life, Sir, I felt fear under the sea. I started back, and rushed out quaking as though all hell was behind me. When I got up to the surface I could not speak. I instantly left the _Saladin_, came home with my men, and have never been down myself since."

A long conversation followed about the general condition of sunken ships. Brocket had no fear of rivals in business, and as his interlocutor did not pretend to be one he was exceedingly communicative. He described to him the exact depth to which a diver in armor might safely go, the longest time that he could safely remain under water, the rate of travel in walking along a smooth bottom, and the distance which one could walk. He told him how to go on board of a wrecked ship with the least risk or difficulty, and the best mode by which to secure any valuables which he might find. At last he became so exceedingly friendly that Brandon asked him if he would be willing to give personal instructions to himself, hinting that money was no object, and that any price would be paid.

At this Brocket laughed. "My dear Sir, you take my fancy, for I think I see in you a man of the right sort. I should be very glad to show any one like you how to go to work. Don't mention money; I have actually got more now than I know what to do with, and I'm thinking of founding an asylum for the poor. I'll sell you any number of suits of armor, if you

want them, merely in the way of business; but if I give you instructions it will be merely because I like to oblige a man like you."

Brandon of course expressed all the gratitude that so generous an offer could excite.

"But there's no use trying just yet; wait till the month of May, and then you can begin. You have nerve, and I have no doubt that you'll learn fast."

After this interview Brandon had many others. To give credibility to his pretended plan for the pearl fisheries, he bought a dozen suits of diving armor and various articles which Brocket assured him that he would need. He also brought Cato with him one day, and the Hindu described the plan which the pearl-divers pursued on the Malabar coast. According to Cato each diver had a stone which weighed about thirty pounds tied to his foot, and a sponge filled with oil fastened around his neck. On plunging into the water, the weight carried him down. When the diver reached the bottom the oiled sponge was used from time to time to enable him to breathe by inhaling the air through the sponge applied to his mouth. All this was new to Brocket. It excited his ardor.

The month of May at last came. Brocket showed them a place in the Hudson, about twenty miles above the city, where they could practice. Under his direction Brandon put on the armor and went down. Frank worked the pumps which supplied him with air, and Cato managed the boat. The two Brandons learned their parts rapidly, and Louis, who had the hardest task, improved so quickly, and caught the idea of the work so readily, that Brocket enthusiastically assured him that he was a natural-born diver.

All this time Brandon was quietly making arrangements for a voyage. He gradually obtained every thing which might by any possibility be required, and which he found out by long deliberations with Frank and by hints which he gained by well-managed questions to Brocket.

Thus the months of May and June passed until at length they were ready to start.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE ISLET OF SANTA CRUZ.

It was July when Brandon left New York for San Salvador.

He had purchased a beautiful little schooner, which he had fitted up like a gentleman's yacht, and stored with all the articles which might be needed. In cruising about the Bahama Isles he intended to let it be supposed that he was traveling for pleasure. True, the month of July was not the time of the year which pleasure-seekers would choose for sailing in the West Indies, but of this he did not take much thought.

The way to the Bahama Isles was easy. They stopped for a while at Nassau, and then went to San Salvador.

The first part of the New World which Columbus discovered is now but seldom visited, and few inhabitants are found there. Only six hundred people dwell upon it, and these have in general but little intelligence. On reaching this place Brandon sailed to the harbor which Columbus entered, and made many inquiries about that immortal landing. Traditions still survived among the people, and all were glad to show the rich Englishman the lions of the place.

He was thus enabled to make inquiries without exciting suspicion about the islands lying to the north. He was informed that about four leagues north there was an island named Guahi, and as there was no island known in that direction named Santa Cruz, Brandon thought that this might be the one. He asked if there were any small islets or sand-banks near there, but no one could tell him. Having gained all the information that he could he pursued his voyage.

In that hot season there was but little wind. The seas were visited by profound calms which continued long and rendered navigation slow and tedious. Sometimes, to prevent themselves from being swept away by the currents, they had to cast anchor. At other times they were forced to keep in close by the shore. They waited till the night came on, and then, putting out the sweeps, they rowed the yacht slowly along.

It was the middle of July before they reached the island of Guahi, which Brandon thought might be Santa Cruz. If so, then one league due north of this there ought to be the islet of the Three Needles. Upon the discovery of that would depend their fate.

It was evening when they reached the southern shore of Guahi. Now was the time when all the future depended upon the fact of the existence of an islet to the north. That night on the south shore was passed in deep anxiety. They rowed the vessel on with their sweeps, but the island was too large to be passed in one night. Morning came, and still they rowed.

The morning passed, and the hot sun burned down upon them, yet they still toiled on, seeking to pass beyond a point which lay ahead, so as to see the open water to the north. Gradually they neared it, and the sea-view in front opened up more and more widely. There was nothing but water. More and more of the view exposed itself, until at last the whole horizon was visible. Yet there was no land there--no island--no sign of those three rocks which they longed so much to find.

A light wind arose which enabled them to sail over all the space that lay one league to the north. They sounded as they went, but found only deep water. They looked all around, but found not so much as the smallest point of land above the surface of the ocean.

That evening they cast anchor and went ashore at the island of Guahi to see if any one knew of other islands among which might be found one named Santa Cruz. Their disappointment was profound. Brandon for a while thought that perhaps some other San Salvador was meant in the letter. This very idea had occurred to him before, and he had made himself acquainted with all the places of that name that existed. None of them seemed, however, to answer the requirements of the writing. Some must have gained the name since; others were so situated that no island could be mentioned as lying to the north. On the whole, it seemed to him that this San Salvador of Columbus could alone be mentioned. It was alluded to as a well-known place, of which particular description was unnecessary, and no other place at that day had this character except

the one on which he had decided.

One hope yet remained, a faint one, but still a hope, and this might yet be realized. It was that Guahi was not Santa Cruz; but that some other island lay about here, which might be considered as north from San Salvador. This could be ascertained here in Guahi better perhaps than any where else. With this faint hope he landed.

Guahi is only a small island, and there are but few inhabitants upon it, who support themselves partly by fishing. In this delightful climate their wants are not numerous, and the rich soil produces almost any thing which they desire. The fish about here are not plentiful, and what they catch have to be sought for at a long distance off.

"Are there any other islands near this?" asked Brandon of some people whom he met on landing.

"Not very near."

"Which is the nearest?"

"San Salvador."

"Are there any others in about this latitude?"

"Well, there is a small one about twelve leagues east. There are no people on it though."

"What is its name?"

"Santa Cruz."

Brandon's heart beat fast at the sound of that name. It must be so. It must be the island which he sought. It lay to the north of San Salvador, and its name was Santa Cruz.

"It is not down on the charts?"

"No. It is only a small islet."

Another confirmation, for the message said plainly an islet, whereas Guahi was an island.

"How large is it?"

"Oh, perhaps a mile or a mile and a half long."

"Is there any other island near it?"

"I don't know."

"Have you ever been there?"

"No."

Plainly no further information could be gathered here. It was enough to have hope strengthened and an additional chance for success. Brandon obtained as near as possible the exact direction of Santa Cruz, and, going back to the yacht, took advantage of the light breeze which still

was blowing and set sail.

[Illustration: "AN ISLAND COVERED WITH PALM-TREES LAY THERE."]

Night came on very dark, but the breeze still continued to send its light breath, and before this the vessel gently glided on. Not a thing could be seen in that intense darkness. Toward morning Louis Brandon, who had remained up all night in his deep anxiety, tried to pierce through the gloom as he strained his eyes, and seemed as though he would force the darkness to reveal that which he sought. But the darkness gave no token.

Not Columbus himself, when looking out over these waters, gazed with greater eagerness nor did his heart beat with greater anxiety of suspense, than that which Brandon felt as his vessel glided slowly through the dark waters, the same over which Columbus had passed, and moved amidst the impenetrable gloom. But the long night of suspense glided by at last; the darkness faded, and the dawn came.

Frank Brandon, on waking about sunrise, came up and saw his brother looking with fixed intensity of gaze at something directly in front. He turned to see what it might be.

An island covered with palm-trees lay there. Its extent was small, but it was filled with the rich verdure of the tropics. The gentle breeze ruffled the waters, but did not altogether efface the reflection of that beautiful islet.

Louis pointed toward the northeast.

Frank looked.

It seemed to be about two miles away. It was a low sand island about a quarter of a mile long. From its surface projected three rocks thin and sharp. They were at unequal distances from each other, and in the middle of the islet. The tallest one might have been about twelve feet in height, the others eight and ten feet respectively.

Louis and Frank exchanged one long look, but said not a word. That look was an eloquent one.

This then was unmistakably the place of their search.

The islet with the three rocks like needles lying north of Santa Cruz. One league due north of this was the spot where now rested all their hopes.

The island of Santa Cruz was, as had been told them, not more than a mile and a half in length, the sand island with the needles lay about two miles north of it. On the side of Santa Cruz which lay nearest to them was a small cove just large enough for the yacht. Here, after some delay, they were able to enter and land.

The tall trees that covered the island rose over beautiful glades and grassy slopes. Too small and too remote to give support to any number of inhabitants, it had never been touched by the hand of man, but stood before them in all that pristine beauty with which nature had first endowed it. It reminded Brandon in some degree of that African island where he had passed some time with Beatrice. The recollection of this

brought over him an intolerable melancholy, and made the very beauty of this island painful to him. Yet hope was now strong within his heart, and as he traversed its extent his eye wandered about in search of places where he might be able to conceal the treasure that lay under the sea, if he were ever able to recover it from its present place. The island afforded many spots which were well adapted to such a purpose.

In the centre of the island a rock jutted up, which was bald and flat on its summit. On the western side it showed a precipice of some forty or fifty feet in height, and on the eastern side it descended to the water in a steep slope. The tall trees which grew all around shrouded it from the view of those at sea, but allowed the sea to be visible on every side. Climbing to this place, they saw something which showed them that they could not hope to carry on any operations for that day.

On the other side of the island, about ten miles from the shore, there lay a large brig becalmed. It looked like one of those vessels that are in the trade between the United States and the West Indies. As long as that vessel was in the neighborhood it would not do even to make a beginning, nor did Brandon care about letting his yacht be seen. Whatever he did he wished to do secretly.

The brig continued in sight all day, and they remained on the island. Toward evening they took the small boat and rowed out to the sandbank which they called Needle Islet. It was merely a low spit of sand, with these three singularly-shaped rocks projecting upward. There was nothing else whatever to be seen upon it. The moon came up as they stood there, and their eyes wandered involuntarily to the north, to that place, a league away, where the treasure lay beneath the waters.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE OCEAN DEPTHS.

The next morning dawned and Brandon hurried to the rock and looked around. During the night a slight wind had sprung up, and was still gently breathing. Far over the wide sea there was not a sail to be seen. The brig had passed away. They were finally left to themselves.

Now at last the time of trial had come. They were eager to make the attempt, and soon the yacht was unmoored, and moved slowly out to sea in the direction of Needle Island. A light breeze still blew fitfully, but promised at any moment to stop; yet while it lasted they passed onward under its gentle impulse, and so gradually reached Needle Island, and went on into the sea beyond.

Before they had come to the spot which they wished to attain the breeze had died out, and they were compelled to take to the oars. Although early in the morning the sun was burning hot, the work was laborious, and the progress was slow. Yet not a murmur was heard, nor did a single thought of fatigue enter the minds of any of them. One idea only was present--one so overwhelming that all lesser thoughts and all ordinary feelings were completely obliterated. After two hours of steady labor they at last reached a place which seemed to them to be exactly one league due north of Needle Islet. Looking back they saw that the rocks

on the island seemed from this distance closer together, and thinner and sharper, so that they actually bore a greater resemblance to needles from this point than to any thing else.

Here they sounded. The water was fifteen fathoms deep--not so great a depth as they had feared. Then they put down the anchor, for although there was no wind, yet the yacht might be caught in some current, and drift gradually away from the right position.

The small boat had all this time been floating astern with the pumping apparatus in it, so that the adventurous diver might readily be accompanied in his search and his wanderings at the bottom of the sea.

But there was the prospect that this search would be long and arduous, and Brandon was not willing to exhaust himself too soon. He had already resolved that the first exploration should be made by Asgeelo. The Hindu had followed Brandon in all his wanderings with that silent submission and perfect devotion which is more common among Hindus than any other people. He had the air of one who was satisfied with obeying his master, and did not ask the end of any commands which might be given. He was aware that they were about to explore the ocean depths, but showed no curiosity about the object of their search. It was Brandon's purpose to send him down first at different points, so that he might see if there was any thing there which looked like what they sought.

Asgeelo--or Cato, as Brandon commonly called him--had made those simple preparations which are common among his class--the apparatus which the pearl-divers have used ever since pearl-diving first commenced. Twelve or fifteen stones were in the boat, a flask of oil, and a sponge which was fastened around his neck. These were all that he required. Each stone weighed about thirty pounds. One of these he tied around one foot; he saturated the sponge with oil, so as to use it to inhale air beneath the water; and then, standing on the edge of the boat and flinging his arms straight up over his head, he leaped into the water and went down feet foremost.

Over the smooth water the ripples flowed from the spot where Asgeelo had disappeared, extending in successive concentric circles, and radiating in long undulations far and wide. Louis and Frank waited in deep suspense. Asgeelo remained long beneath the water, but to them the time seemed frightful in its duration. Profound anxiety began to mingle with the suspense, for fear lest the faithful servant in his devotion had over-rated his powers--lest the disuse of his early practice had weakened his skill--lest the weight bound to his foot had dragged him down and kept him there forever.

At last, when the suspense had become intolerable and the two had already begun to exchange glances almost of despair, a splash was heard, and Asgeelo emerged far to the right. He struck out strongly toward the boat, which was at once rowed toward him. In a few minutes he was taken in. He did not appear to be much exhausted.

He had seen nothing.

[Illustration: "A dark, sinewy arm emerged from beneath, armed with a long, keen knife."]

They then rowed about a hundred yards further, and Asgeelo prepared to descend once more. He squeezed the oil out of the sponge and renewed it

again. But this time he took a knife in his hand.

"What is that for?" asked Frank and Louis.

"Sharks!" answered Cato, in a terrible tone.

At this Louis and Frank exchanged glances. Could they let this devoted servant thus tempt so terrible a death?

"Did you see any sharks?" asked Louis.

"No, Sahib."

"Why do you fear them, then?"

"I don't fear them, Sahib."

"Why do you take this knife?"

"One may come, Sahib."

After some hesitation Asgeelo was allowed to go. As before he plunged into the water, and remained underneath quite as long; but now they had become familiarized with his powers and the suspense was not so dreadful. At the expiration of the usual time he reappeared, and on being taken into the boat he again announced that he had seen nothing.

They now rowed a hundred yards farther on in the same direction, toward the east, and Asgeelo made another descent. He came back with the same result.

It began to grow discouraging, but Asgeelo was not yet fatigued, and they therefore determined to let him work as long as he was able. He went down seven times more. They still kept the boat on toward the east till the line of "needles" on the sand island had become thrown farther apart and stood at long distances. Asgeelo came up each time unsuccessful.

He at last went down for the eleventh time. They were talking as usual, not expecting that he would reappear for some minutes, when suddenly a shout was heard, and Asgeelo's head emerged from the water not more than twenty yards from the boat. He was swimming with one hand, and in the other he held an uplifted knife, which he occasionally brandished in the air and splashed in the water.

Immediately the cause of this became manifest. Just behind him a sharp black fin appeared cutting the surface of the water.

It was a shark! But the monster, a coward like all his tribe, deterred by the plashing of the water made by Asgeelo, circled round him and hesitated to seize his prey. The moment was frightful. Yet Asgeelo appeared not in the least alarmed. He swam slowly, occasionally turning his head and watching the monster, seeming by his easy dexterity to be almost as much in his native element as his pursuer, keeping his eyes fixed on him and holding his knife in a firm clasp. The knife was a long, keen blade, which Asgeelo had carried with him for years.

Louis and Frank could do nothing. A pistol ball could not reach this monster, who kept himself under the water, where a ball would be spent

before striking him, if indeed any aim could direct a bullet toward that swift darting figure. They had nothing to do but to look on in an agony of horror.

Asgeelo, compelled to watch, to guard, to splash the water, and to turn frequently, made but a slow passage over those twenty yards which separated him from the boat. At last it seemed as if he chose to stay there. It seemed to those who watched him with such awful horror that he might have escaped had he chosen, but that he had some idea of voluntarily encountering the monster. This became evident at last, as the shark passed before him when they saw Asgeelo's face turned toward it; a face full of fierce hate and vengeance; a face such as one turns toward some mortal enemy.

He made a quick, fierce stroke with his long knife. The shark gave a leap upward. The water was tinged with blood. The next moment Asgeelo went down.

"What now?" was the thought of the brothers. Had he been dragged down? Impossible! And yet it seemed equally impossible that he could have gone down of his own accord.

In a moment their suspense was ended. A white flash appeared near the surface. The next instant a dark, sinewy arm emerged from beneath, armed with a long, keen knife, which seemed to tear down with one tremendous stroke that white, shining surface.

It was Asgeelo's head that emerged in a sea of blood and foam. Triumph was in his dark face, as with one hand he waved his knife exultantly.

A few moments afterward the form of a gigantic shark floated upward to the surface, dyeing the sea with the blood which had issued from the stroke dealt by Asgeelo. Not yet, however, was the vindictive fury of the Hindu satiated. He swam up to it. He dashed his knife over and over the white belly till it became a hideous mass of gaping entrails. Then he came into the boat.

He sat down, a hideous figure. Blood covered his tawny face, and the fury of his rage had not left the features.

The strength which this man had shown was tremendous, yet his quickness and agility even in the water had been commensurate with his strength. Brandon had once seen proofs of his courage in the dead bodies of the Malay pirates which lay around him in the cabin of that ill-fated Chinese ship: but all that he had done then was not to be compared to this.

They could not help asking him why he had not at once made his escape to the boat, instead of staying to fight the monster.

Asgeelo's look was as gloomy as death as he replied,

"They tore in pieces my son, Sahib--my only son--when he first went down, and I have to avenge him. I killed a hundred on the Malabar coast before I left it forever. That shark did not attack me; I attacked him."

"If you saw one now would you attack him?"

"Yes, Sahib."

Brandon expressed some apprehension, and wished him not to risk his life.

But Asgeelo explained that a shark could be successfully encountered by a skillful swimmer. The shark is long, and has to move about in a circle which is comparatively large; he is also a coward, and a good swimmer can strike him if he only chooses. He again repeated triumphantly that he had killed more than a hundred to avenge his son.

In his last venture Asgeelo had been no more successful than before. Needle Island was now to the southwest, and Brandon thought that their only chance was to try farther over toward the west, where they had not yet explored.

They rowed at once back to the point from which they had set out, and then went on about a hundred and fifty yards to the west. From this place, as they looked toward the islet, the three rocks seemed so close together that they appeared blended, and the three sharp, needlelike points appeared to issue from one common base. This circumstance had an encouraging effect, for it seemed to the brothers as though their ancestor might have looked upon those rocks from this point of view rather than from any other which had as yet come upon the field of their observation.

This time Brandon himself resolved to go down; partly because he thought that Asgeelo had worked long enough, and ought not to be exhausted on that first day, and partly on account of an intolerable impatience, and an eagerness to see for himself rather than intrust it to others.

There was the horror of the shark, which might have deterred any other man. It was a danger which he had never taken into account. But the resolve of his soul was stronger than any fear, and he determined to face even this danger. If he lost his life, he was indifferent. Let it go! Life was not so precious to him as to some others. Fearless by nature, he was ordinarily ready to run risks; but now the thing that drew him onward was so vast in its importance that he was willing to encounter peril of any kind.

Frank was aware of the full extent of this new danger, but he said nothing, nor did he attempt in any way to dissuade his brother. He himself, had he been able, would have gone down in his place; but as he was not able, he did not suppose that his brother would hesitate.

The apparatus was in the boat. The pumping-machine was in the stern; and this, with the various signal-ropes, was managed by Frank. Asgeelo rowed. These arrangements had long since been made, and they had practiced in this way on the Hudson River.

Silently Brandon put on his diving armor. The ropes and tubes were all carefully arranged. The usual weight was attached to his belt, and he was slowly lowered down to the bottom of the sea.

The bottom of the ocean was composed of a smooth, even surface of fine sand and gravel, along which Brandon moved without difficulty. The cumbrous armor of the diver, which on land is so heavy, beneath the water loses its excessive weight, and by steadying the wearer assists him to walk. The water was marvelously transparent, as is usually the case in the southern seas, and through the glass plate in his helmet

Brandon could look forward to a greater distance than was possible in the Hudson.

Overhead he could see the bottom of the boat, as it floated and moved on in the direction which he wished: signals, which were communicated by a rope which he held in his hand, told them whether to go forward or backward, to the right or to the left, or to stop altogether. Practice had enabled him to command, and them to obey, with ease.

Down in the depths to which he had descended the water was always still, and the storms that affected the surface never penetrated there. Brandon learned this from the delicate shells and the still more delicate forms of marine plants which lay at his feet, so fragile in their structure, and so delicately poised in their position, that they must have formed themselves in deep, dead stillness and absolute motionlessness of waters. The very movement which was caused by his passage displaced them in all directions, and cast them down every where in ruins. Here, in such depths as these, if the sounding lead is cast it brings up these fragile shells, and shows to the observer what profound calm must exist here, far away beneath the ordinary vision of man.

Practice had enabled Brandon to move with much ease. His breathing was without difficulty. The first troubles arising from breathing this confined air had long since been surmounted. One tube ran down from the boat, through which the fresh air was pushed, and another tube ran up a little distance, through which the air passed and left it in myriad bubbles that ascended to the surface.

He walked on, and soon came to a place where things changed their appearance. Hard sand was here, and on every side there arose curiously-shaped coral structures, which resembled more than any thing else a leafless forest. These coral tree-like forms twisted their branches in strange involutions, and in some places formed a perfect barrier of interlaced arms, so that he was forced to make a detour in order to avoid them. The chief fear here was that his tube might get entangled among some of the loftier straggling branches, and impede or retard his progress. To avoid this caused much delay.

Now, among the coral rocks, the vegetation of the lower sea began to appear of more vivid colors and of far greater variety than any which he had ever seen. Here were long plants which clung to the coral like ivy, seeming to be a species of marine parasite, and as it grew it thrived more luxuriantly. Here were some which threw out long arms, terminating in vast, broad, palm-like leaves, the arms intertwined among the coral branches and the leaves hanging downward. Here were long streamers of fine, silk-like strings, that were suspended from many a projecting branch, and hillocks of spongy substance that looked like moss. Here, too, were plants which threw forth long, ribbon-like leaves of variegated color.

It was a forest under the sea, and it grew denser at every step.

At last his progress in this direction was terminated by a rock which came from a southerly direction, like a spur from the islands. It arose to a height of about thirty feet overhead, and descended gradually as it ran north. Brandon turned aside, and walked by its base along its entire extent.

At its termination there arose a long vista, where the ground ascended

and an opening appeared through this marine "forest." On each side the involuted corals flung their twisted arms in more curious and intricate folds. The vegetation was denser, more luxuriant, and more varied. Beneath him was a growth of tender substance, hairy in texture, and of a delicate green color, which looked more like lawn grass of the upper world than any thing else in nature.

Brandon walked on, and even in the intense desire of his soul to find what he sought he felt himself overcome by the sublime influence of this submarine world. He seemed to have intruded into some other sphere, planting his rash footsteps where no foot of man had trodden before, and using the resources of science to violate the hallowed secrecy of awful nature in her most hidden retreats. Here, above all things, his soul was oppressed by the universal silence around. Through that thick helmet, indeed, no sound under a clap of thunder could be heard, and the ringing of his ears would of itself have prevented consciousness of any other noise, yet none the less was he aware of the awful stillness; it was silence that could be felt. In the sublimity of that lonely pathway he felt what Hercules is imagined to have felt when passing to the underworld after Cerberus,

Stupent ubi undae segne torpescit fretum,

and half expected to hear some voice from the dweller in this place:

"Quo pergis audax? Siste proserentem gradum."

There came to him only such dwellers as belonged to the place. He saw them as he moved along. He saw them darting out from the hidden penetralia around, moving swiftly across and sometimes darting in shoals before him. They began to appear in such vast numbers that Brandon thought of the monster which lay a mangled heap upon the surface above, and fancied that perhaps his kindred were waiting to avenge his death. As this fear came full and well defined before him he drew from his belt the knife which Asgeelo had given him, and Frank had urged him to take, feeling himself less helpless if he held this in his hand.

The fishes moved about him, coming on in new and more startled crowds, some dashing past, others darting upward, and others moving swiftly ahead. One large one was there with a train of followers, which moved up and floated for a moment directly in front of him, its large, staring eyes seeming to view him in wonder, and solemnly working its gills. But as Brandon came close it gave a sudden turn and darted off with all its attendants.

At last, amidst all these wonders, he saw far ahead something which drove all other thoughts away, whether of fear, or of danger, or of horror, and filled all his soul with an overmastering passion of desire and hope.

It was a dark object, too remote as yet to be distinctly visible, yet as it rose there his fancy seemed to trace the outline of a ship, or what might once have been a ship. The presentation of his hope before him thus in what seemed like a reality was too much. He stood still, and his heart beat with fierce throbs.

The hope was so precious that for a time he hesitated to advance, for fear lest the hope might be dispelled forever. And then to fail at this place, after so long a search, when he seemed to have reached the end,

would be an intolerable grief.

There, too, was that strange pathway which seemed made on purpose. How came it there? He thought that perhaps the object lying before him might have caused some current which set in there and prevented the growth of plants in that place. These and many other thoughts came to him as he stood, unwilling to move.

But at last he conquered his feelings, and advanced. Hope grew strong within him. He thought of the time on Coffin Island when, in like manner, he had hesitated before a like object.

Might not this, like that, turn out to be a ship? And now, by a strange revulsion, all his feelings urged him on; hope was strong, suspense unendurable. Whatever that object was, he must know.

It might indeed be a rock. He had passed one shortly before, which had gradually declined into the bottom of the sea; this might be a continuation of the same, which after an interval had arisen again from the bottom. It was long and high at one end, and rounded forward at the other. Such a shape was perfectly natural for a rock. He tried to crush down hope, so as to be prepared for disappointment. He tried to convince himself that it must be a rock, and could by no possibility be any thing else. Yet his efforts were totally fruitless. Still the conviction remained that it was a ship, and if so, it could be no other than the one he sought.

As he went on all the marine vegetation ceased. The coral rocks continued no further. Now all around the bottom of the sea was flat, and covered with fine gravel, like that which he had touched when he first came down. The fishes had departed. The sense of solemnity left him; only one thing was perceptible, and that was the object toward which he walked. And now he felt within him such an uncontrollable impulse that even if he had wished he could neither have paused nor gone back. To go forward was only possible. It seemed to him as though some external influence had penetrated his body, and forced him to move. Again, as once before, he recalled the last words of his father, so well remembered:

--"If in that other world to which I am going the disembodied spirit can assist man, then be sure, oh my son, I will assist you, and in the crisis of your fate I will be near, if it is only to communicate to your spirit what you ought to do--"

It was Ralph Brandon who had said this. Here in this object which lay before him, if it were indeed the ship, he imagined the spirit of another Ralph Brandon present, awaiting him.

Suddenly a dark shadow passed over his head, which forced him involuntarily to look up. In spite of his excitement a shudder passed through him. Far overhead, at the surface of the sea the boat was floating. But half-way up were three dark objects moving slowly and lazily along. They were sharks.

To him, in his loneliness and weakness, nothing ever seemed so menacing as these three demons of the deep as he stared up at them. Had they seen him? that was now his thought. He clutched his knife in a firmer hold, feeling all the while how utterly helpless he was, and shrinking away into himself from the terror above. The monsters moved leisurely about,

at one time grazing the tube, and sending down a vibration which thrilled like an electric shock through him. For a moment he thought that they were malignantly tormenting him, and had done this on purpose in order to send down to him a message of his fate.

He waited.

The time seemed endless. Yet at last the end came. The sharks could not have seen him, for they gradually moved away until they were out of sight.

Brandon did not dare to advance for some time. Yet now, since the spell of this presence was removed, his horror left him, and his former hope animated all his soul.

There lay that object before him. Could he advance again after that warning? Dared he? This new realm into which he had ventured had indeed those who were ready and able to inflict a sudden and frightful vengeance upon the rash intruder. He had passed safely among the horrors of the coral forest; but here, on this plateau, could he hope to be so safe? Might not the slightest movement on his part create a disturbance of water sufficient to awaken the attention of those departed enemies and bring them back?

This was his fear. But hope, and a resolute will, and a determination to risk all on this last hazard, alike impelled him on. Danger now lay every where, above as well as below. An advance was not more perilous than an ascent to the boat. Taking comfort from this last thought he moved onward with a steady, determined step.

Hope grew stronger as he drew nearer. The dark mass gradually formed itself into a more distinct outline. The uncertain lines defined into more certain shape, and the resemblance to a ship became greater and greater. He could no longer resist the conviction that this must be a ship.

Still he tried feebly to prepare for disappointment, and made faint fancies as to the reason why a rock should be formed here in this shape. All the time he scouted those fancies and felt assured that it was not a rock.

Nearer and nearer. Doubt no longer remained. He stood close beside it. It was indeed a ship! Its sides rose high over head. Its lofty stern stood up like a tower, after the fashion of a ship of the days of Queen Elizabeth. The masts had fallen and lay, encumbered with the rigging, over the side.

Brandon walked all around it, his heart beating fast, seeing at every step some new proof that this must be no other, by any conceivable possibility, than the one which he sought. On reaching the bows he saw the outline of a bird carved for the figure-head, and knew that this must be the _Phoenix_.

He walked around. The bottom was sandy and the ship had settled down to some depth. Her sides were covered with fine dark shells, like an incrustation, to a depth of an inch, mingled with a short growth of a green, slimy sea-weed.

At last he could delay no longer. One of the masts lay over the side,

and this afforded an easy way by which he could clamber upward upon the deck.

In a few moments Brandon stood upon the deck of the _Phoenix_.

The ship which had thus lain here through centuries, saturated with water that had penetrated to its inmost fibre, still held together sturdily. Beneath the sea the water itself had acted as a preservative, and retarded or prevented decay. Brandon looked around as he stood there, and the light that came from above, where the surface of the sea was now much nearer than before, showed him all the extent of the ship.

The beams which supported the deck had lost their stiffness and sunk downward; the masts, as before stated, had toppled over for the same reason, yielding to their own weight, which, as the vessel was slightly on one side, had gradually borne them down; the bowsprit also had fallen. The hatchways had yielded, and, giving way, had sunk down within the hold. The doors which led into the cabin in the lofty poop were lying prostrate on the deck. The large sky-light which once had stood there had also followed the same fate.

[Illustration: "THE MASTS HAD FALLEN AND LAY, ENCUMBERED WITH THE RIGGING, OVER THE SIDE."]

Before going down Brandon had arranged a signal to send to Frank in case he found the ship. In his excitement he had not yet given it. Before venturing further he thought of this. But he decided not to make the signal. The idea came, and was rejected amidst a world of varying hopes and fears. He thought that if he was successful he himself would be the best messenger of success; and, if not, he would be the best messenger of evil.

He advanced toward the cabin. Turning away from the door he clambered upon the poop, and, looking down, tried to see what depth there might be beneath. He saw something which looked as though it had once been a table. Slowly and cautiously he let himself down through the opening, and his feet touched bottom. He moved downward, and let his feet slide till they touched the floor.

He was within the cabin.

The light here was almost equal to that with-out, for the sky-light was very wide. The floor was sunken in like the deck of the ship. He looked around to see where he might first search for the treasure. Suddenly his eye caught sight of something which drove away every other thought.

At one end was a seat, and there, propped up against the wall, was a skeleton in a sitting posture. Around it was a belt with a sword attached. The figure had partly twisted itself round, but its head and shoulders were so propped up against the wall that it could not fall.

Brandon advanced, filled with a thousand emotions. One hand was lying down in front. He lifted it. There was a gold ring on the bony finger. He took it off. In the dim light he saw, cut in bold relief on this seal-ring, the crest of his family--a Phoenix.

It was his ancestor himself who was before him.

Here he had calmly taken his seat when the ship was settling slowly down

into the embrace of the waters. Here he had taken his seat, calmly and sternly, awaiting his death--perhaps with a feeling of grim triumph that he could thus elude his foes. This was the man, and this the hand, which had written the message that had drawn the descendant here.

Such were the thoughts that passed through Brandon's mind. He put the ring on his own finger and turned away. His ancestor had summoned him hither, and here he was. Where was the treasure that was promised?

Brandon's impatience now rose to a fever. Only one thought filled his mind. All around the cabin were little rooms, into each of which he looked. The doors had all fallen away. Yet he saw nothing in any of them.

He stood for a moment in deep doubt. Where could he look? Could he venture down into the dark hold and explore? How could he hope to find any thing there, amidst the ruins of that interior where guns and chains lay, perhaps all mingled together where they had fallen? It would need a longer time to find it than he had at first supposed. Yet would he falter? No! Rather than give up he would pass years here, till he had dismembered the whole ship and strewn every particle of her piecemeal over the bottom of the sea. Yet he had hoped to solve the whole mystery at the first visit; and now, since he saw no sign of any thing like treasure, he was for a while at a loss what to do.

His ancestor had summoned him, and he had come. Where was the treasure? Where? Why could not that figure arise and show him?

Such were his thoughts. Yet these thoughts, the result of excitement that was now a frenzy, soon gave rise to others that were calmer.

He reflected that perhaps some other feeling than what he had at first imagined might have inspired that grim old Englishman when he took his seat there and chose to drown on that seat rather than move away. Some other feeling, and what feeling? Some feeling which must have been the strongest in his heart. What was that? The one which had inspired the message, the desire to secure still more that treasure for which he had toiled and fought. His last act was to send the message, why should he not have still borne that thought in his mind and carried it till he died?

The skeleton was at one end, supported by the wall. Two posts projected on each side. A heavy oaken chair stood there, which had once perhaps been fastened to the floor. Brandon thought that he would first examine that wall. Perhaps there might be some opening there.

He took the skeleton in his arms reverently, and proceeded to lift it from the chair: He could not. He looked more narrowly, and saw a chain which had been fastened around it and bound it to the chair.

What was the meaning of this? Had the crew mutinied, bound the captain, and run? Had the Spaniards seized the ship after all? Had they recovered the spoil, and punished in this way the plunderer of three galleons, by binding him here to the chair, scuttling the ship, and sending him down to the bottom of the sea?

The idea of the possibility of this made Brandon sick with anxiety. He pulled the chair away, put it on one side, and began to examine the wooden wall by running his hand along it. There was nothing whatever

perceptible. The wall was on the side farthest from the stern, and almost amidships. He pounded it, and, by the feeling, knew that it was hollow behind. He walked to the door which was on one side, and passed in behind this very wall. There was nothing there. It had once perhaps been used as part of the cabin. He came back disconsolately, and stood on the very place where the chair had been.

"Let me be calm," he said to himself. "This enterprise is hopeless. Yes, the Spaniards captured the ship, recovered the treasure, and drowned my ancestor. Let me not be deceived. Let me cast away hope, and search here without any idle expectation."

Suddenly as he thought he felt the floor gradually giving way beneath him. He started, but before he could move or even think in what direction to go the floor sank in, and he at once sank with it downward.

Had it not been that the tube was of ample extent, and had been carefully managed so as to guard against any abrupt descent among rocks at the bottom of the sea, this sudden fall might have ended Brandon's career forever. As it was he only sank quickly, but without accident, until his breast was on a level with the cabin floor.

In a moment the truth flashed upon him. He had been standing on a trap-door which opened from the cabin floor into the hold of the ship. Over this trap-door old Ralph Brandon had seated and bound himself. Was it to guard the treasure? Was it that he might await his descendant, and thus silently indicate to him the place where he must look?

And now the fever of Brandon's conflicting hope and fear grew more intense than it had ever yet been through all this day of days. He stooped down to feel what it was that lay under his feet. His hands grasped something, the very touch of which sent a thrill sharp and sudden through every fibre of his being.

They were metallic bars!

He rose up again overcome. He hardly dared to take one up so as to see what it might be. For the actual sight would realize hope or destroy it forever.

Once more he stooped down. In a sort of fury he grasped a bar in each hand and raised it up to the light.

Down under the sea the action of water had not destroyed the color of those bars which he held up in the dim light that came through the waters. The dull yellow of those rough ingots seemed to gleam with dazzling brightness before his bewildered eyes, and filled his whole soul with a torrent of rapture and of triumph.

His emotions overcame him. The bars of gold fell down from his trembling hands. He sank back and leaned against the wall.

But what was it that lay under his feet? What were all these bars? Were they all gold? Was this indeed all here--the plunder of the Spanish treasure-ships--the wealth which might purchase a kingdom--the treasure equal to an empire's revenue--the gold and jewels in countless store?

A few moments of respite were needed in order to overcome the tremendous

conflict of feeling which raged within his breast. Then once more he stooped down. His outstretched hand felt over all this space which thus was piled up with treasure.

It was about four feet square. The ingots lay in the centre. Around the sides were boxes. One of these he took out. It was made of thick oaken plank, and was about ten inches long and eight wide. The rusty nails gave but little resistance, and the iron bands which once bound them peeled off at a touch. He opened the box.

Inside was a casket.

He tore open the casket.

It was filled with jewels!

His work was ended. No more search, no more fear. He bound the casket tightly to the end of the signal-line, added to it a bar of gold, and clambered to the deck.

He cast off the weight that was at his waist, which he also fastened to the line, and let it go.

Freed from the weight he rose buoyantly to the top of the water.

The boat pulled rapidly toward him and took him in. As he removed his helmet he saw Frank's eyes fixed on his in mute inquiry. His face was ashen, his lips bloodless.

Louis smiled.

"Heavens!" cried Frank, "can it be?"

"Pull up the signal-line and see for yourself," was the answer.

And, as Frank pulled, Louis uttered a cry which made him look up.

Louis pointed to the sun. "Good God! what a time I must have been down!"

"Time!" said Frank. "Don't say time--it was eternity!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

BEATRICE'S JOURNAL

BRANDON HALL

September 1, 1848.--Paolo Langhetti used to say that it was useful to keep a diary; not one from day to day, for each day's events are generally trivial, and therefore not worthy of record; but rather a statement in full of more important events in one's life, which may be turned to in later years. I wish I had begun this sixteen months ago, when I first came here. How full would have been my melancholy record by this time!

Where shall I begin?

Of course, with my arrival here, for that is the time when we separated. There is no need for me to put down in writing the events that took place when _he_ was with me. Not a word that he ever spoke, not a look that he ever gave, has escaped my memory. This much I may set down here.

Alas! the shadow of the African forest fell deeply and darkly upon me. Am I stronger than other women, or weaker? I know not. Yet I can be calm while my heart is breaking. Yes, I am at once stronger and weaker; so weak that my heart breaks, so strong that I can hide it.

I will begin from the time of my arrival here.

I came knowing well who the man was and what he was whom I had for my father. I came with every word of that despairing voyager ringing in my ears--that cry from the drifting _Vishnu_, where Despard laid down to die. How is it that his very name thrills through me? I am nothing to him. I am one of the hateful brood of murderers. A Thug was my father--and my mother who? And who am I, and what?

At least my soul is not his, though I am his daughter. My soul is myself, and life on earth can not last forever. Hereafter I may stand where that man may never approach.

How can I ever forget the first sight which I had of my father, who before I saw him had become to me as abhorrent as a demon! I came up in the coach to the door of the Hall and looked out. On the broad piazza there were two men; one was sitting, the other standing.

The one who was standing was somewhat elderly, with a broad, fat face, which expressed nothing in particular but vulgar good-nature. He was dressed in black; and looked like a serious butler, or perhaps still more like some of the Dissenting ministers whom I have seen. He stood with his hands in his pockets, looking at me with a vacant smile.

The other man was younger, not over thirty. He was thin, and looked pale from dissipation. His face was covered with spots, his eyes were gray, his eyelashes white. He was smoking a very large pipe, and a tumbler of some kind of drink stood on the stone pavement at his feet. He stared at me between the puffs of his pipe, and neither moved nor spoke.

If I had not already tasted the bitterness of despair I should have tasted it as I saw these men. Something told me that they were my father and brother. My very soul sickened at the sight--the memory of Despard's words came back--and if it had been possible to have felt any tender natural affection for them, this recollection would have destroyed it.

"I wish to see Mr. Potts," said I, coldly.

My father stared at me.

"I'm Mr. Potts," he answered.

"I am Beatrice," said I; "I have just arrived from China."

By this time the driver had opened the door, and I got out and walked up on the piazza.

"Johnnie," exclaimed my father, "what the devil is the meaning of this?"

"Gad, I don't know," returned John, with a puff of smoke.

"Didn't you say she was drowned off the African coast?"

"I saw so in the newspapers."

"Didn't you tell me about the _Falcon_ rescuing her from the pirates, and then getting wrecked with all on board?"

"Yes, but then there was a girl that escaped."

"Oh ho!" said my father, with a long whistle. "I didn't know that."

He turned and looked at me hastily, but in deep perplexity.

"So you're the girl, are you?" said he at last.

"I am your daughter," I answered.

I saw him look at John, who winked in return.

He walked up and down for a few minutes, and at last stopped and looked at me again.

"That's all very well," said he at last, "but how do I know that you're the party? Have you any proof of this?"

"No."

"You have nothing but your own statement?"

"No."

"And you may be an impostor. Mind you--I'm a magistrate--and you'd better be careful."

"You can do what you choose," said I, coldly.

"No, I can't. In this country a man can't do what he chooses."

I was silent.

"Johnnie," said my father, "I'll have to leave her to you. You arrange it."

John looked at me lazily, still smoking, and for some time said nothing.

"I suppose," said he at last, "you've got to put it through. You began it, you know. You would send for her. I never saw the use of it."

"But do you think this is the party?"

"Oh, I dare say. It don't make any difference any way. Nobody would take the trouble to come to you with a sham story."

"That's a fact," said my father.

"So I don't see but you've got to take her."

"Well," said my father, "if you think so, why all right."

"I don't think any thing of the kind," returned John, snappishly. "I only think that she's the party you sent for."

"Oh, well, it's all the same," said my father, who then turned to me again.

"If you're the girl," he said, "you can get in. Hunt up Mrs. Compton, and she'll take charge of you."

Compton! At the mention of that name a shudder passed through me. She had been in the family of the murdered man, and had ever since lived with his murderer. I went in without a word, prepared for the worst, and expecting to see some evil-faced woman, fit companion for the pair outside.

A servant was passing along. "Where is Mrs. Compton?" I asked.

"Somewhere or other, I suppose," growled the man, and went on.

I stood quietly. Had I not been prepared for some such thing as this I might perhaps have broken down under grief, but I had read the MS., and nothing could surprise or wound me.

I waited there for nearly half an hour, during which time no notice was taken of me. I heard my father and John walk down the piazza steps and go away. They had evidently forgotten all about me. At last a man came toward the door who did not look like a servant. He was dressed in black. He was a slender, pale, shambling man with thin, light hair, and a furtive eye and a weary face. He did not look like one who would insult me, so I asked him where I could find Mrs. Compton.

He started as I spoke and looked at me in wonder, yet respectfully.

"I have just come from China," said I, "and my father told me to find Mrs. Compton."

He looked at me for some time without speaking a word. I began to think that he was imbecile.

"So you are Mr. Potts's daughter," said he at last, in a thin, weak voice. "I--I didn't know that you had come--I--I knew that he was expecting you--but heard you were lost at sea--Mrs. Compton--yes--oh yes--I'll show you where you can find Mrs. Compton."

He was embarrassed, yet not unkind. There was wonder in his face, as though he was surprised at my appearance. Perhaps it was because he found me so unlike my father. He walked toward the great stairs, from time to time turning his head to look at me, and ascended them. I followed, and after going to the third story we came to a room.

"That's the place," said he.

He then turned, without replying to my thanks, and left me. I knocked at the door. After some delay it was opened, and I went in. A thin, pale

woman was there. Her hair was perfectly white. Her face was marked by the traces of great grief and suffering, yet overspread by an expression of surpassing gentleness and sweetness. She looked like one of these women who live lives of devotion for others, who suffer out of the spirit of self-sacrifice, and count their own comfort and happiness as nothing in comparison with that of those whom they love. My heart warmed toward her at the first glance; I saw that this place could not be altogether corrupt since she was here.

"I am Mr. Potts's daughter," said I; "are you Mrs. Compton?"

She stood mute. An expression of deadly fear overspread her countenance, which seemed to turn her white face to a grayish hue, and the look that she gave me was such a look as one may cast upon some object of mortal fear.

"You look alarmed," said I, in surprise; "and why? Am I then so frightful?"

She seized my hand and covered it with kisses. This new outburst surprised me as much as her former fear. I did not know what to do. "Ah! my sweet child, my dearest!" she murmured. "How did you come here, here of all places on earth?"

I was touched by the tenderness and sympathy of her tone. It was full of the gentlest love. "How did you come here?" I asked.

She started and turned on me her former look of fear.

"Do not look at me so," said I, "dear Mrs. Compton. You are timid. Do not be afraid of me. I am incapable of inspiring fear." I pressed her hand. "Let us say nothing more now about the place. We each seem to know what it is. Since I find one like you living here it will not seem altogether a place of despair."

"Oh, dear child, what words are these? You speak as if you knew all."

"I know much," said I, "and I have suffered much."

"Ah, my dearest! you are too young and too beautiful to suffer." An agony of sorrow came over her face. Then I saw upon it an expression which I have often marked since, a strange straggling desire to say something, which that excessive and ever-present terror of hers made her incapable of uttering. Some secret thought was in her whole face, but her faltering tongue was paralyzed and could not divulge it.

She turned away with a deep sigh. I looked at her with much interest. She was not the woman I expected to find. Her face and voice won my heart. She was certainly one to be trusted. But still there was this mystery about her.

Nothing could exceed her kindness and tenderness. She arranged my room. She did every thing that could be done to give it an air of comfort. It was a very luxuriously furnished chamber. All the house was lordly in its style and arrangements. That first night I slept the sleep of the weary.

The next day I spent in my room, occupied with my own sad thoughts. At about three in the afternoon I saw him come up the avenue. My

heart throbbed violently. My eyes were riveted upon that well-known face, how loved! how dear! In vain I tried to conjecture the reason why he should come. Was it to strike the first blow in his just, his implacable vengeance? I longed that I might receive that blow. Any thing that came from _him_ would be sweet.

He staid a long time and then left. What passed I can not conjecture. But it had evidently been an agreeable visit to my father, for I heard him laughing uproariously on the piazza about something not long after he had gone.

I have not seen him since.

For several weeks I scarcely moved from my room. I ate with Mrs. Compton. Her reserve was impenetrable. It was with painful fear and trembling that she touched upon any thing connected with the affairs of the house or the family. I saw it and spared her. Poor thing, she has always been too timid for such a life as this.

At the end of a month I began to think that I could live here in a state of obscurity without being molested. Strange that a daughter's feelings toward a father and brother should be those of horror, and that her desire with reference to them should be merely to keep out of their sight. I had no occupation, and needed none, for I had my thoughts and my memories. These memories were bitter, yet sweet. I took the sweet, and tried to solace myself with them. The days are gone forever; no longer does the sea spread wide; no longer can I hear his voice; I can hold him in my arms no more; yet I can remember--

"Das suesseste Glueck fuer die trauernde Brust,
Nach der schonen Liebe verschwundener Lust,
Sind der Liebe Schmerzen und Klagen."

I think I had lived this sort of life for three months without seeing either my father or brother.

At the end of that time my father sent for me. He informed me that he intended to give a grand entertainment to the county families, and wanted me to do the honors. He had ordered dress-makers for me; he wished me to wear some jewels which he had in the house, and informed me that it would be the grandest thing of the kind that had ever taken place. Fire-works were going to be let off; the grounds were to be illuminated, and nothing that money could effect would be spared to render it the most splendid festival that could be imagined.

I did as he said. The dress-makers came, and I allowed them to array me as they chose. My father informed me that he would not give me the jewels till the time came, hinting a fear that I might steal them.

At last the evening arrived. Invitations had been sent every where. It was expected that the house would be crowded. My father even ventured to make a personal request that I would adorn myself as well as possible. I did the best I could, and went to the drawing-room to receive the expected crowds.

The hour came and passed, but no one appeared. My father looked a little troubled, but he and John waited in the drawing-room. Servants were sent down to see if any one was approaching. An hour passed. My father looked deeply enraged. Two hours passed. Still no one came. Three hours passed.

I waited calmly, but my father and John, who had all the time been drinking freely, became furious. It was now midnight, and all hope had left them. They had been treated with scorn by the whole county.

The servants were laughing at my father's disgrace. The proud array in the different rooms was all a mockery. The elaborate fire-works could not be used.

My father turned his eyes, inflamed by anger and strong drink, toward me.

"She's a d----d bad investment," I heard him say.

"I told you so," said John, who did not deign to look at me; "but you were determined."

They then sat drinking in silence for some time.

"Sold!" said my father, suddenly, with an oath.

John made no reply.

"I thought the county would take to her. She's one of their own sort," my father muttered.

"If it weren't for you they might," said John; "but they ain't overfond of her dear father."

"But I sent out the _invites_ in her name."

"No go anyhow."

"I thought I'd get in with them all right away, hobnob with lords and baronets, and maybe get knighted on the spot."

John gave a long scream of laughter.

"You old fool!" he cried; "so that's what you're up to, is it? Sir John --ha, ha, ha! You'll never be made Sir John by parties, I'm afraid."

"Oh, don't you be too sure. I'm not put down. I'll try again," he continued, after a pause. "Next year I'll do it. Why, she'll marry a lord, and then won't I be a lord's father-in-law? What do you say to that?"

"When did you get these notions in your blessed head?" asked John.

"Oh, I've had them--It's not so much for myself, Johnnie--but for you. For if I'm a lord you'll be a lord too."

"Lord Potts. Ha, ha, ha!"

"No," said my father, with some appearance of vexation, "not that; we'll take our title the way all the lords do, from the estates. I'll be Lord Brandon, and when I die you'll get the title."

"And that's your little game. Well, you've played such good little games in your life that I've nothing to say, except--'Go it!'"

"She's the one that'll give me a lift."

"Well, she ought to be able to do something."

By this time I concluded that I had done my duty and prepared to retire. I did not wish to overhear any of their conversation. As I walked out of the room I still heard their remarks:

"Blest if she don't look as if she thought herself the Queen," said John.

"It's the diamonds, Johnnie."

"No it ain't, it's the girl herself. I don't like the way she has of looking at me and through me."

"Why, that's the way with that kind. It's what the lords like."

"I don't like it, then, and I tell you _she's got to be took down!_"

This was the last I heard. Yet one thing was evident to me from their conversation. My father had some wild plan of effecting an entrance into society through me. He thought that after he was once recognized he might get sufficient influence to gain a title and found a family. I also might marry a lord. He thus dreamed of being Lord Brandon, and one of the great nobles of the land.

Amidst my sadness I almost smiled at this vain dream; but yet John's words affected me strongly--"You've played such good little games in your life." Well I knew with whom they were played. One was with Despard, the other with Brandon.

This then was the reason why he had sent for me from China. The knowledge of his purpose made my life neither brighter nor darker. I still lived on as before.

During these months Mrs. Compton's tender devotion to me never ceased. I respected her, and forbore to excite that painful fear to which she was subject. Once or twice I forgot myself and began speaking to her about her strange position here. She stopped me with her look of alarm.

"Are you not afraid to be kind to me?" I asked.

She looked at me piteously.

"You are the only one that is kind to me," I continued. "How have you the courage?"

"I can not help it," she murmured, "you are so dear to me."

She sighed and was silent. The mystery about her remained unchanged; her gentle nature, her tender love, and her ever-present fear. What was there in her past that so influenced her life? Had she too been mixed up with the crime on the _Vishnu_? She! impossible. Yet surely something as dark as that must have been required to throw so black a cloud over her life. Yet what--what could that have been? In spite of myself I associate her secret with the tragedy of Despard. She was in his family long. His wife died. She must have been with her at the time.

The possibilities that have suggested themselves to my mind will one day drive me mad. Alas, how my heart yearns over that lonely man in the drifting ship! And yet, merciful God! who am I that I should sympathize with him? My name is infamy, my blood is pollution.

I spoke to her once in a general way about the past. Had she ever been out of England? I asked.

"Yes," she answered, dreamily.

"Where?"

She looked at me and said not a word.

At another time I spoke of China, and hinted that perhaps she too knew something about the East. The moment that I said this I repented. The poor creature was shaken from head to foot with a sudden convulsion of fear. This convulsion was so terrible that it seemed to me as though another would be death. I tried to soothe her, but she looked fearfully at me for a long time after.

At another time I asked her directly whether her husband was alive. She looked at me with deep sadness and shook her head. I do not know what position she holds here. She is not housekeeper; none of the servants pay any attention to her whatever. There is an impudent head servant who manages the rest. I noticed that the man who showed me to her room when I first came treats her differently from the rest. Once or twice I saw them talking in one of the halls. There was deep respect in his manner. What he does I have not yet found out. He has always shown great respect to me, though why I can not imagine. He has the same timidity of manner which marks Mrs. Compton. His name is Philips.

I once asked Mrs. Compton who Philips was, and what he did. She answered quickly that he was a kind of clerk to Mr. Potts, and helped him to keep his accounts.

"Has he been with him long?" I continued.

"Yes, a considerable time," she said--but I saw that the subject distressed her, so I changed it.

For more than three months I remained in my room, but at last, through utter despair, I longed to go out. The noble grounds were there, high hills from which the wide sea was visible--that sea which shall be associated with his memory till I die. A great longing came over me to look upon its wide expanse, and feed my soul with old and dear memories. There it would lie, the same sea from which he so often saved me, over which we sailed till he laid down his noble life at my feet, and I gave back that life to him again.

I used to ascend a hill which was half a mile behind the Hall within the grounds, and pass whole days there unmolested. No one took the trouble to notice what I did, at least I thought so till afterward. There for months I used to go. I would sit and look fixedly upon the blue water, and my imagination would carry me far away to the South, to that island on the African shore, where he once reclined in my arms, before the day when I learned that my touch was pollution to him--to that island where I afterward knelt by him as he lay senseless, slowly coming back to

life, when if I might but touch the hem of his garment it was bliss enough for one day. Ah me, how often I have wet his feet with my tears--poor, emaciated feet--and longed to be able to wipe them with my hair, but dared not. He lay unconscious. He never knew the anguish of my love.

Then I was less despairing. The air around was filled with the echo of his voice; I could shut my eyes, and bring him before me. His face was always visible to my soul.

One day the idea came into my head to extend my ramble into the country outside, in order to get a wider view. I went to the gate.

The porter came out and asked what I wanted. I told him.

"You can't go out," said he, rudely.

"Why not?"

"Oh, them's Potts's orders--that's enough, I think."

"He never said so to me," I replied, mildly.

"That's no odds; he said so to me, and he told me if you made any row to tell you that you were watched, and might just as well give up at once."

"Watched!" said I, wonderingly.

"Yes--for fear you'd get skittish, and try and do something foolish. Old Potts is bound to keep you under his thumb."

I turned away. I did not care much. I felt more surprise than any thing else to think that he would take the trouble to watch me. Whether he did or not was of little consequence. If I could only be where I had the sea before me it was enough.

That day, on going back to the Hall, I saw John sitting on the piazza. A huge bull-dog which he used to take with him every where was lying at his feet. Just before I reached the steps a Malay servant came out of the house.

He was about the same age as John. I knew him to be a Malay when I first saw him, and concluded that my father had picked him up in the East. He was slight but very lithe and muscular, with dark glittering eyes and glistening white teeth. He never looked at me when I met him, but always at the ground, without seeming to be aware of my existence.

The Malay was passing out when John called out to him,

"Hi, there, Vijal!"

Vijal looked carelessly at him.

"Here!" cried John, in the tone with which he would have addressed his dog.

Vijal stopped carelessly.

"Pick up my hat, and hand it to me."

His hat had fallen down behind him. Vijal stood without moving, and regarded him with an evil smile.

"D--n you, do you hear?" cried John. "Pick up my hat."

But Vijal did not move.

"If you don't, I'll set the dog on you," cried John, starting to his feet in a rage.

Still Vijal remained motionless.

"Nero!" cried John, furiously, pointing to Vijal, "seize him, Sir."

The dog sprang up and at once leaped upon Vijal. Vijal warded off the assault with his arm. The dog seized it, and held on, as was his nature. Vijal did not utter a cry, but seizing the dog, he threw him on his back, and flinging himself upon him, fixed his own teeth in the dog's throat.

John burst into a torrent of the most frightful curses. He ordered Vijal to let go of the dog. Vijal did not move; but while the dog's teeth were fixed in his arm, his own were still fixed as tenaciously in the throat of the dog.

John sprang forward and kicked him with frightful violence. He leaped on him and stamped on him. At last, Vijal drew a knife from his girdle and made a dash at John. This frightened John, who fell back cursing. Vijal then raised his head.

The dog lay motionless. He was dead. Vijal sat down, his arm running blood, with the knife in his hand, still glaring at John.

During this frightful scene I stood rooted to the spot in horror. At last the sight of Vijal's suffering roused me. I rushed forward, and tearing the scarf from my neck, knelt down and reached out my hand to stanch the blood.

Vijal drew back. "Poor Vijal," said I, "let me stop this blood. I can dress wounds. How you suffer!"

He looked at me in bewilderment. Surprise at hearing a kind word in this house of horror seemed to deprive him of speech. Passively he let me take his arm, and I bound it up as well as I could.

All this time John stood cursing, first me, and then Vijal. I said not a word, and Vijal did not seem to hear him, but sat regarding me with his fiery black eyes. When at last I had finished, he rose and still stood staring at me. I walked into the house.

John hurled a torrent of imprecations after me. The last words that I heard were the same as he had said once before. "You've got to be took down; and I'll be d--d if you don't get took down precious soon!"

I told Mrs. Compton of what had happened. As usual, she was seized with terror. She looked at me with a glance of fearful apprehension. At last she gasped out:

"They'll kill you."

"Let them," said I, carelessly; "it would be better than living."

"Oh dear!" groaned the poor old thing, and sank sobbing in a chair. I did what I could to soothe her, but to little purpose. She afterward told me that Vijal had escaped further punishment in spite of John's threats, and hinted that they were half afraid of him.

The next day, on attempting to go out, Philips told me that I was not to be permitted to leave the house. I considered it the result of John's threat, and yielded without a word.

After this I had to seek distraction from my thoughts within the house. Now there came over me a great longing for music. Once, when in the drawing-room on that famous evening of the abortive fete, which was the only time I ever was there, I had noticed a magnificent grand piano of most costly workmanship. The thought of this came to my mind, and an unconquerable desire to try it arose. So I went down and began to play.

It was a little out of tune, but the tone was marvelously full and sweet. I threw myself with indescribable delight into the charm of the hour. All the old joy which music once used to bring came back. Imagination, stimulated by the swelling harmonies, transported me far away from this prison-house and its hateful associations to that happier time of youth when not a thought of sorrow came over me. I lost myself therein. Then that passed, that life vanished, and the sea-voyage began. The thoughts of my mind and the emotions of my heart passed down to the quivering chords and trembled into life and sound.

I do not know how long I had been playing when suddenly I heard a sob behind me. I started and turned. It was Philips.

He was standing with tears in his eyes and a rapt expression on his emaciated face, his hands hanging listless, and his whole air that of one who had lost all senses save that of hearing. But as I turned and stopped, the spell that bound him was broken. He sighed and looked at me earnestly.

[Illustration: "I STOOD LOOKING AT HIM WITH A GAZE SO FIXED AND INTENSE THAT IT SEEMED AS IF ALL MY BEING WERE CENTERED IN MY EYES."]

"Can you sing?"

"Would you like me to do so?"

"Yes," he said, in a faint imploring voice.

I began a low song--a strain associated with that same childhood of which I had just been thinking--a low, sad strain, sweet to my ears and to my soul; it spoke of peace and innocence, quiet home joys, and calm delights. My own mind brought before me the image of the house where I had lived, with the shadow of great trees around, and gorgeous flowers every where, where the sultry air breathed soft, and beneath the hot noon all men sank to rest and slumber.

When I stopped I turned again. Philips had not changed his attitude. But as I turned he uttered an exclamation and tore out his watch.

"Oh, Heavens!--two hours!" he exclaimed. "He'll kill me for this."

With these words he rushed out of the room.

I kept up my music for about ten days, when one day it was stopped forever. I was in the middle of a piece when I heard heavy footsteps behind me. I turned and saw my father. I rose and looked at him with an effort to be respectful. It was lost on him, however. He did not glance at me.

"I came up to say to you," said he, after a little hesitation, "that I can't stand this infernal squall and clatter any longer. So in future you just shut up."

He turned and left me. I closed the piano forever, and went to my room.

The year ended, and a new year began. January passed away. My melancholy began to affect my health. I scarcely ever slept at night, and to eat was difficult. I hoped that I was going to die. Alas! death will not come when one calls. One day I was in my room lying on the couch when Mrs. Compton came. On entering she looked terrified about something. She spoke in a very agitated voice: "They want you down stairs."

"Who?"

"Mr. Potts and John."

"Well," said I, and I prepared to get ready.

"When do they want me?"

"Now," said Mrs. Compton, who by this time was crying.

"Why are you so agitated?" I asked.

"I am afraid for you."

"Why so? Can any thing be worse?"

"Ah, my dearest! you don't know--you don't know."

I said nothing more, but went down. On entering the room I saw my father and John seated at a table with brandy before them. A third man was there. He was a thick-set man of about the same height of my father, but more muscular, with a strong, square jaw, thick neck, low brow, and stern face. My father did not show any actual ferocity in his face whatever he felt; but this man's face expressed relentless cruelty.

On entering the room I walked up a little distance and stood looking at them.

"There, Clark; what do you think of that?" said my father.

The name, Clark, at once made known to me who this man was--that old associate of my father--his assistant on board the Vishnu. Yet the name did not add one whit to the abhorrence which I felt--my father was worse even than he.

The man Clark looked at me scrutinizingly for some time.

"So that's the gal," said he, at last.

"That's the gal," said my father.

Clark waved his hand at me. "Turn round sideways," said he.

I looked at him quietly without moving. He repeated the order, but I took no notice of it.

"D--n her!" said he. "Is she deaf?"

"Not a bit of it," said John; "but she's plucky. She'd just as soon you'd kill her as not. There isn't any way of moving her."

"Turn round!" cried my father, angrily.

I turned as he said. "You see," said he, with a laugh, "she's been piously brought up; she honors her father."

At this Clark burst into a loud laugh.

Some conversation followed about me as I stood there. Clark then ordered me to turn round and face him. I took no notice; but on my father's ordering it, I obeyed as before. This appeared to amuse them all very greatly, just as the tricks of an intelligent poodle might have done. Clark gave me many commands on purpose to see my refusal, and have my father's order which followed obeyed.

"Well," said he, at last, leaning back in his chair, "she is a showy piece of furniture. Your idea isn't a bad one either."

He rose from his chair and came toward me. I stood looking at him with a gaze so fixed and intense that it seemed as if all my being were centred in my eyes.

He came up and reached out to take hold of my arm. I stepped back. He looked up angrily. But, for some reason, the moment that he caught sight of my face, an expression of fear passed over his.

"Heavens!" he groaned; "look at that face!" I saw my father look at me. The same horror passed over his countenance. An awful thought came to me. As these men turned their faces away from me in fear I felt my strength going. I turned and rushed from the room. I do not remember any thing more.

It was early in February when this occurred. Until the beginning of August I lay senseless. For the first four months I hovered faintly between life and death.

Why did they not let me die? Why did I not die? Alas! had I died I might now have been beyond this sorrow: I have waked to meet it all again.

Mrs. Compton says she found me on the floor of my own room, and that I was in a kind of stupor. I had no fever or delirium. A doctor came, who said it was a congestion of the brain. Thoughts like mine might well destroy the brain forever.

For a month I have been slowly recovering. I can now walk about the room. I know nothing of what is going on in the house, and wish to know

nothing. Mrs. Compton is as devoted as ever.

I have got thus far, and will stop here. I have been several days writing this. I must stop till I am stronger.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BYZANTINE HYMNISTS.

More than a year had passed since that visit to Thornton Grange which has already been mentioned. Despard had not forgotten or neglected the melancholy case of the Brandon family. He had written in all directions, and had gone on frequent visits.

On his return from one of these he went to the Grange. Mrs. Thornton was sitting in the drawing-room, looking pensively out of the window, when she saw his well-known figure advancing up the avenue. His face was sad, and pervaded by a melancholy expression, which was noticeable now as he walked along.

But when he came into the room that melancholy face suddenly lighted up with the most radiant joy. Mrs. Thornton advanced to meet him, and he took her hand in both of his.

"I ought to say, welcome back again," said she, with forced liveliness, "but you may have been in Holby a week for all I know. When did you come back? Confess now that you have been secluding yourself in your study instead of paying your respects in the proper quarter."

Despard smiled. "I arrived home at eleven this morning. It is now three P.M. by my watch. Shall I say how impatiently I have waited till three o'clock should come?"

"Oh no! don't say any thing of the sort. I can imagine all that you would say. But tell me where you have been on this last visit?"

"Wandering like an evil spirit, seeking rest and finding none."

"Have you been to London again?"

"Where have I not been?"

By this time they had seated themselves.

"My last journey," said Despard, "like my former ones, was, of course, about the Brandon affair. You know that I have had long conversations with Mr. Thornton about it, and he insists that nothing whatever can be done. But you know, also, that I could not sit down idly and calmly under this conviction. I have felt most keenly the presence of intolerable wrong. Every day I have felt as if I had shared in the infamy of those who neglected that dying man. That was the reason why I wrote to Australia to see if the Brandon who was drowned was really the one I supposed. I heard, you know, that he was the same man, and there is no doubt about that. Then you know, as I told you, that I went around among different lawyers to see if any thing could be done. Nearly all

asserted that no redress was possible. That is what Mr. Thornton said. There was one who said that if I were rich enough I might begin a prosecution, but as I am not rich that did me no good. That man would have been glad, no doubt, to have undertaken such a task."

"What is there in law that so hardens the heart?" said Mrs. Thornton, after a pause. "Why should it kill all sentiment, and destroy so utterly all the more spiritual qualities?"

"I don't think that the law does this necessarily. It depends after all on the man himself. If I were a lawyer, I should still love music above all things."

"But did you ever know a lawyer who loved music?"

"I have not known enough of them to answer that. But in England music is not loved so devotedly as in other countries. Is it inconceivable that an Italian lawyer should love music?"

"I don't know. Law is abhorrent to me. It seems to be a profession that kills the finer sentiments."

"Why so, more than medicine? The fact is where ordinary men are concerned any scientific profession renders Art distasteful. At least this is so in England. After all, most depends on the man himself, and, one who is born with a keen sensibility to the charms of art will carry it through life, whatever his profession may be.

"But suppose the man himself has neither taste, nor sensibility, nor any appreciation of the beautiful, nor any sympathy whatever with those who love such things, what then?"

Mrs. Thornton spoke earnestly as she asked this.

"Well," said Despard, "that question answers itself. As a man is born, so he is; and if nature denies him taste or sensibility it makes no difference what is his profession."

Mrs. Thornton made no reply.

"My last journey," said Despard, "was about the Brandon case. I went to London first to see if something could not be done. I had been there before on the same errand, but without success. I was equally unsuccessful this time.

"I tried to find out about Potts, the man who had purchased the estate, but learned that it was necessary to go to the village of Brandon. I went there, and made inquiries. Without exception the people sympathized with the unfortunate family, and looked with detestation upon the man who had supplanted them.

"I heard that a young lady went there last year who was reputed to be his daughter. Every one said that she was extraordinarily beautiful, and looked like a lady. She stopped at the inn under the care of a gentleman who accompanied her, and went to the Hall. She has never come out of it since.

"The landlord told me that the gentleman was a pale, sad-looking man, with dark hair and beard. He seemed very devoted to the young lady, and

parted with her in melancholy silence. His account of this young lady moved me very strangely. He was not at all a sentimental man, but a burly John Bull, which made his story all the more touching. It is strange, I must say, that one like her should go into that place and never be seen again. I do not know what to think of it, nor did any of those with whom I spoke in the village."

"Do you suppose that she really went there and never came back?"

"That is what they say."

"Then they must believe that she is kept there."

"Yes, so they do."

"Why do they not take some steps in the matter?"

"What can they do? She is his daughter. Some of the villagers who have been to the Hall at different times say that they heard her playing and singing."

"That does not sound like imprisonment."

"The caged bird sings."

"Then you think she is a prisoner?"

"I think it odd that she has never come out, not even to go to church."

"It is odd."

"This man Potts excited sufficient interest in my mind to lead me to make many inquiries. I found, throughout the county, that every body utterly despised him. They all thought that poor Ralph Brandon had been almost mad, and, by his madness had ruined his family. Every body believed that Potts had somehow deceived him, but no one could tell how. They could not bring any direct proof against him."

"But I found out in Brandon the sad particulars of the final fate of the poor wife and her unfortunate children. They had been sent away or assisted away by this Potts to America, and had all died either on the way out or shortly after they had arrived, according to the villagers. I did not tell them what I knew, but left them to believe what they chose. It seemed to me that they must have received this information from Potts himself; who alone in that poor community would have been able to trace the fortunes of the unhappy emigrants."

There was a long silence.

"I have done all that I could," said Despard, in a disconsolate tone, "and I suppose nothing now remains to be done. When we hear again from Paolo there may be some new information upon which we can act."

"And you can go back to your Byzantine poets."

"Yes, if you will assist me."

"You know I shall only be too happy."

"And I shall be eternally grateful. You see, as I told you before, there is a field of labor here for the lover of music which is like a new world. I will give you the grandest musical compositions that you have ever seen. I will let you have the old hymns of the saints who lived when Constantinople was the only civilized spot in Europe, and the Christians there were hurling back the Mohammedans. You shall sing the noblest songs that you have ever seen."

"How--in Greek? You must teach me the alphabet then."

"No; I will translate them for you. The Greek hymns are all in rhythmical prose, like the *Te Deum* and the *Gloria*. A literal translation can be sung as well as the originals. You will then enter into the mind and spirit of the ancient Eastern Church before the days of the schism.

"Yes," continued Despard, with an enthusiasm which he did not care to conceal, "we will go together at this sweet task, and we will sing the [Greek: *cath castaen aemeran*], which holds the same place in the Greek Church that the *Te Deum* does in ours. We will chant together the Golden Canon of St. John Damascene--the Queen of Canons, the grandest song of 'Christ is risen' that mortals ever composed. Your heart and mine will beat together with one feeling at the sublime choral strain. We will sing the 'Hymn of Victory.' We will go together over the songs of St. Cosmas, St. Theophanes, and St. Theodore; St. Gregory, St. Anatobus, and St. Andrew of Crete shall inspire us; and the thoughts that have kindled the hearts of martyrs at the stake shall exalt our souls to heaven. But I have more than this. I have some compositions of my own; poor ones, indeed, yet an effort in the right way. They are a collection of those hymns of the Primitive Church which are contained in the New Testament. I have tried to set them to music. They are: 'Worthy is the Lamb,' 'Unto Him that loved us,' 'Great and marvelous are thy works,' and the 'Trisagion.' Yes, we will go together at this lofty and heavenly work, and I shall be able to gain a new interpretation from your sympathy."

Despard spoke with a vehement enthusiasm that kindled his eyes with unusual lustre and spread a glow over his pale face. He looked like some devotee under a sudden inspiration. Mrs. Thornton caught all his enthusiasm; her eyes brightened, and her face also flushed with excitement.

"Whenever you are ready to lead me into that new world of music," said she, "I am ready to follow."

"Are you willing to begin next Monday?"

"Yes. All my time is my own."

"Then I will come for you."

"Then I will be waiting for you. By-the-way, are you engaged for to-night?"

"No; why?"

"There is going to be a fete champetre. It is a ridiculous thing for the Holby people to do; but I have to go to play the patroness. Mr. Thornton does not want to go. Would you sacrifice yourself to my necessities, and

allow me your escort?"

"Would a thirsty man be willing to accept a cooling draught?" said Despard, eagerly. "You open heaven before me, and ask me if I will enter."

His voice trembled, and he paused.

"You never forget yourself," said Mrs. Thornton, with slight agitation, looking away as she spoke.

"I will be back at any hour you say."

"You will do no such thing. Since you are here you must remain and dine, and then go with me. Do you suppose I would trust you? Why, if I let you go, you might keep me waiting a whole hour."

"Well, if your will is not law to me what is? Speak, and your servant obeys. To stay will only add to my happiness."

"Then let me make you happy by forcing you to stay."

Despard's face showed his feelings, and to judge by its expression his language had not been extravagant.

The afternoon passed quietly. Dinner was served up. Thornton came in, and greeted Despard with his usual abstraction, leaving his wife to do the agreeable. After dinner, as usual, he prepared for a nap, and Despard and Mrs. Thornton started for the fete.

It was to be in some gardens at the other end of Holby, along the shore. The townspeople had recently formed a park there, and this was one of the preliminaries to its formal inauguration. The trees were hung with innumerable lamps of varied colors. There were bands of music, and triumphal arches, and gay festoons, and wreaths of flowers, and every thing that is usual at such a time.

On arriving, Despard assisted Mrs. Thornton from the carriage and offered his arm. She took it, but her hand rested so lightly on it that its touch was scarce perceptible. They walked around through the illuminated paths. Great crowds of people were there. All looked with respectful pleasure at Mrs. Thornton and the Rector.

"You ought to be glad that you have come," said she. "See how these poor people feel it: we are not persons of very great consequence, yet our presence is marked and enjoyed."

"All places are alike to me," answered Despard, "when I am with you. Still, there are circumstances about this which will make it forever memorable to me."

"Look at those lights," exclaimed Mrs. Thornton, suddenly; "what varied colors!"

"Let us walk into that grotto," said Despard, turning toward a cool, dark place which lay before them.

Here, at the end of the grotto, was a tree, at the foot of which was a seat. They sat down and staid for hours. In the distance the lights

twinkled and music arose. They said little, but listened to the confused murmur which in the pauses of the music came up from afar.

Then they rose and walked back. Entering the principal path a great crowd streamed on which they had to face.

Despard sighed. "You and I," said he, stooping low and speaking in a sad voice, "are compelled to go against the tide."

"Shall we turn back and go with it?"

"We can not."

"Do you wish to turn aside?"

"We can not. We must walk against the tide, and against the rush of men. If we turn aside there is nothing but darkness."

They walked on in silence till they reached the gate.

"The carriage has not come," said Mrs. Thornton.

"Do you prefer riding?"

"No."

"It is not far. Will you walk?"

"With pleasure."

They walked on slowly. About half-way they met the carriage. Mrs. Thornton ordered it back, saying that she would walk the rest of the way.

They walked on slowly, saying so little that at last Mrs. Thornton began to speak about the music which they had proposed to undertake. Despard's enthusiasm seemed to have left him. His replies were vague and general. On reaching the gate he stood still for a moment under the trees and half turned toward her. "You don't say any thing about the music?" said she.

"That's because I am so stupid. I have lost my head. I am not capable of a single coherent idea."

"You are thinking of something else all the time."

"My brain is in a whirl. Yes, I am thinking of something else."

"Of what?"

"I'm afraid to say."

Mrs. Thornton was silent. They entered the gate and walked up the avenue, slowly and in silence. Despard made one or two efforts to stop, and then continued. At last they reached the door. The lights were streaming brightly from window. Despard stood, silently.

"Will you not come in?"

"No, thank you," said he, dreamily. "It is rather too late, and I must go. Good-night."

He held out his hand. She offered hers, and he took it. He held it long, and half stooped as though he wished to say something. She felt the throbbing of his heart in his hand as it clasped hers. She said nothing. Nor did Despard seem able to say any thing. At last he let go her hand slowly and reluctantly.

"You will not forget the music?" said he.

"No."

"Good-night."

He took her hand again in both of his. As the light shone through the windows she saw his face--a face full of longing beyond words, and sadness unutterable.

"Good-night," she faltered.

He let go her hand, and turning away, was lost amidst the gloom. She waited till the sound of his footsteps had died away, and then went into the house.

On the following morning Despard was walking along when he met her suddenly at a corner of the street. He stopped with a radiant face, and shaking hands with her, for a moment was unable to speak.

"This is too much happiness," he said at last. "It is like a ray of light to a poor captive when you burst upon me so suddenly. Where are you going?"

"Oh, I'm only going to do a little shopping."

"I'm sure I wish that I could accompany you to protect you."

"Well, why not?"

"On the whole, I think that shopping is not my forte, and that my presence would not be essential."

He turned, however, and walked with her some distance, as far as the farthest shop in the town. They talked gayly and pleasantly about the fete. "You will not forget the music," said he, on parting. "Will you come next Monday? If you don't, I won't be responsible for the consequences."

"Do you mean to say, Sir, that you expect me to come alone?"

"I did not hope for any thing else."

"Why, of course, you must call for me. If you do not I won't go."

Despard's eyes brightened.

"Oh, then, since you allow me so sweet a privilege, I will go and accompany you."

"If you fail me I will stay at home," said she, laughingly.

He did not fail her, but at the appointed time went up to the Grange. Some strangers were there, and Mrs. Thornton gave him a look of deep disappointment. The strangers were evidently going to spend the day, so Despard, after a short call, withdrew. Before he left, Mrs. Thornton absented herself on some pretext for a few moments, and as he quitted the room she went to the door with him and gave him a note.

He walked straight home, holding the note in his hands till he reached his study; then he locked himself in, opened the note, and read as follows:

"DEAR MR. DESPARD,--How does it happen that things turn out just as they ought not? I was so anxious to go with you to the church to-day about our music. I know my own powers; they are not contemptible; they are not uncultivated; they are simply, and wholly, and irretrievably _commonplace_. That much I deem it my duty to inform you.

"These wretched people, who have spoiled a day's pleasure, dropped upon me as suddenly as though they had come from the skies. They leave on Thursday morning. Come on Thursday afternoon. If you do not I will never forgive you. On that day give up your manuscripts and books for music and the organ, and allot some portion of your time to, Yours,

"T.T."

On Thursday Despard called, and Mrs. Thornton was able to accompany him. The church was an old one, and had one of the best organs in Wales. Despard was to play and she to sing. He had his music ready, and the sheets were carefully and legibly written out from the precious old Greek scores which he loved so dearly and prized so highly.

They began with the canon for Easter-day of St. John Damascene, who, according to Despard, was the best of the Eastern hymnists. Mrs. Thornton's voice was rich and full. As she came to the [Greek: anastaseos haemera]--Resurrection Day--it took up a tone of indescribable exaltation, blending with the triumph peal of the organ. Despard added his own voice--a deep, strong, full-toned basso--and their blended strains bore aloft the sublimest of utterances, "Christ is arisen!"

[Illustration: AND THEIR BLENDED STRAINS BORE ALOFT THE SUBLIMEST OF UTTERANCES, 'CHRIST IS ARISEN']

Then followed a more mournful chant, full of sadness and profound melancholy, the [Greek: teleutaion aspasmon]--the Last Kiss--the hymn of the dead, by the same poet.

Then followed a sublimer strain, the hymn of St. Theodore on the Judgment--[Greek: taen haemeran taen phriktaen]--where all the horrors of the day of doom are set forth. The chant was commensurate with the dread splendors of the theme. The voices of the two singers blended in perfect concord. The sounds which were thus wrought out bore themselves through the vaulted aisles, returning again to their own ears, imparting to their own hearts something of the awe with which imagination has enshrouded the Day of days, and giving to their voices that saddened cadence which the sad spirit can convey to its material utterance.

Despard then produced some composition of his own, made after the manner of the Eastern chants, which he insisted were the primitive songs of the early Church. The words were those fragments of hymns which are imbedded in the text of the New Testament. He chose first the song of the angels, which was first sung by "a great voice out of heaven"--[Greek: idou, hae skaenae tou Deou]--Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men!

The chant was a marvelous one. It spoke of sorrow past, of grief stayed, of misery at an end forever, of tears dried, and a time when "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying." There was a gentle murmur in the flow of that solemn, soothing strain which was like the sighing of the evening wind among the hoary forest trees; it soothed and comforted; it brought hope, and holy calm, and sweet peace.

As Despard rose from the organ Mrs. Thornton looked at him with moistened eyes.

"I do not know whether your song brings calm or unrest," said she, sadly, "but after singing it I would wish to die."

"It is not the music, it is the words," answered Despard, "which bring before us a time when there shall be no sorrow or sighing."

"May such a time ever be?" murmured she.

"That," he replied, "it is ours to aim after. There is such a world. In that world all wrongs will be righted, friends will be reunited, and those severed here through all this earthly life will be joined for evermore."

Their eyes met. Their spirit lived and glowed in that gaze. It was sad beyond expression, but each one held commune with the other in a mute intercourse, more eloquent than words.

Despard's whole frame trembled. "Will you sing the _Ave Maria_?" he asked, in a low, scarce audible voice. Her head dropped. She gave a convulsive sigh. He continued: "We used to sing it in the old days, the sweet, never-forgotten days now past forever. We sang it here. We stood hand in hand."

His voice faltered.

"Sing," he said, after a time.

"I can not"

Despard sighed. "Perhaps it is better not; for I feel as though, if you were to sing it, my heart would break."

"Do you believe that hearts can break?" she asked gently, but with indescribable pathos.

Despard looked at her mournfully, and said not a word.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CLASPED HANDS.

Their singing went on.

They used to meet once a week and sing in the church at the organ. Despard always went up to the Grange and accompanied her to the church. Yet he scarcely ever went at any other time. A stronger connection and a deeper familiarity arose between them, which yet was accompanied by a profound reverence on Despard's part, that never diminished, but as the familiarity increased only grew more tender and more devoted.

There were many things about their music which he had to say to her. It constituted a common bond between them on which they could talk, and to which they could always revert. It formed a medium for the communion of soul--a lofty, spiritual intercourse, where they seemed to blend, even as their voices blended, in a purer realm, free from the trouble of earth.

Amidst it all Despard had so much to tell her about the nature of the Eastern music that he wrote out a long letter, which he gave her they parted after an unusually lengthy practice. Part of it was on the subject of music, and the rest of a different character.

The next time that they met she gave him a note in response.

"DEAR MR. DESPARD--Why am I not a seraph endowed with musical powers beyond mortal reach? You tell me many things, and never seem to imagine that they are all beyond me. You never seem to think that I am hopelessly commonplace. You are kind in doing what you do, but where is the good where one is so stupid as I am?

"I suppose you have given up visiting the Grange forever. I don't call your coming to take me to the church _visits_. I suppose I may as well give you up. It is as difficult to get you here as if you were the Grand Lama of Thibet.

"Amidst all my stupidities I have two or three ideas which may be useful in our music, if I can only put them in practice. Bear with me, and deal gently with

"Yours, despondingly,

"T. T."

To this Despard replied in a note which he gave her at their next meeting, calling her "Dear Seraph," and signing himself "Grand Lama." After this they always called each other by these names. Grand Lama was an odd name, but it became the sweetest of sounds to Despard since it was uttered by her lips--the sweetest, the most musical, and the tenderest. As to himself he knew not what to call this dear companion of his youth, but the name Seraph came into use, and grew to be associated with her, until at last he never called her any thing else.

Yet after this he used to go to the Grange more frequently. He could not stay away. His steps wandered there irresistibly. An uncontrollable impulse forced him there. She was always alone awaiting him, generally with a sweet confusion of face and a tenderness of greeting which made him feel ready to fall on his knees before her. How else could he feel?

Was she not always in his thoughts? Were not all his sleeping hours one long dream of her? Were not all his waiting thoughts filled with her radiant presence?

"How is it under our control
To love or not to love?"

Did he know what it was that he felt for her? He never thought. Enough that he felt. And that feeling was one long agony of intense longing and yearning after her. Had not all his life been filled by that one bright image?

Youth gave it to him. After-years could not efface it. The impress of her face was upon his heart. Her voice was always in his ears. Every word that she had ever spoken to him was treasured up in his memory and heart with an avarice of love which prevented any one word from even being forgotten.

At church and at home, during service and out of it, in the street or in the study, he saw only one face, and heard only one voice. Amidst the bustle of committee meetings he was conscious of her image--a sweet face smiling on him, a tender voice saying "Lama." Was there ever so musical and so dear a word as "Lama?" For him, never.

The hunger of his longing grew stronger every day. That strong, proud, self-secluded nature of his was most intense in all its feelings, and dwelt with concentrated passion upon this one object of its idolatry. He had never had any other object but this one.

A happy boyhood passed in the society of this sweet playmate, then a young girl of his own age; a happy boyhood here in Holby, where they had always been inseparable, wandering hand in hand along the shore or over the hills; a happy boyhood where she was the one and only companion whom he knew or cared for--this was the sole legacy of his early life. Leaving Holby he had left her, but had never forgotten her. He had carried with him the tender memory of this bright being, and cherished his undying fondness, not knowing what that fondness meant. He had returned to find her married, and severed from him forever, at least in this life. When he found that he had lost her he began to understand how dear she was. All life stood before him aimless, pointless, and meaningless without her. He came back, but the old intercourse could not be renewed; she could not be his, and he could only live, and love, and endure. Perhaps it would have been wiser if he had at once left Holby and sought out some other abode. But the discovery of his love was gradual; it came through suffering and anguish; and when he knew that his love was so intense it was then impossible to leave. To be near her, to breathe the same air, to see her face occasionally, to nurse his old memories, to hoard up new remembrances of her words and looks--these now became the chief occupation of his hours of solitude, and the only happiness left him in his life.

One day he went up with a stronger sense of desolation in his heart than usual, going up to see her in order to get consolation from the sight of her face and the sound of her voice. Their former levity had given place to a seriousness of manner which was very different. A deep, intense joy shone in the eyes of each at meeting, but that quick repartee and light badinage which they had used of old had been dropped.

Music was the one thing of which they could speak without fear. Despard

could talk of his Byzantine poets, and the chants of the Eastern Church, without being in danger of reawakening painful memories. The piano stood close by, and always afforded a convenient mode of distracting attention when it became too absorbed in one another.

For Mrs. Thornton did not repel him; she did not resent his longing; she did not seem forgetful of what he so well remembered. How was it with her who had given her hand to another?

"What she felt the while
Dare he think?"

Yet there were times when he thought it possible that she might feel as he did. The thought brought joy, but it also brought fear. For, if the struggle against this feeling needed all the strength of his nature, what must it cost her? If she had such a struggle as he, how could she endure it? Then, as he considered this, he thought to himself that he would rather she would not love him than love him at such a cost. He was willing to sacrifice his own heart. He wished only to adore her, and was content that she should receive, and permit, and accept his adoration, herself unmoved--a passionless divinity.

In their intercourse it was strange how frequently there were long pauses of perfect silence, during which neither spoke a word. Sometimes each sat looking at the floor; sometimes they looked at one another, as though they could read each other's thoughts, and by the mere gaze of their earnest eyes could hold ample spiritual communion.

On one such occasion they stood by the window looking out upon the lawn, but seeing nothing in that abstracted gaze. Despard stood facing her, close to her. Her hand was hanging by her side. He stooped and took that little slender hand in his. As he did so he trembled from head to foot. As he did so a faint flush passed over her face. Her head fell forward. Despard held her hand and she did not withdraw it. Despard drew her slightly toward him. She looked up into his face with large, eloquent eyes, sad beyond all description, yet speaking things which thrilled his soul. He looked down upon her with eyes that told her all that was in his heart. She turned her head away.

Despard clung to her hand as though that hand were his life, his hope, his joy--as though that alone could save him from some abyss of despair into which he was falling. His lips moved. In vain. No audible sound broke that intense stillness in which the beating and throbbing of those two forlorn hearts could be heard. His lips moved, but all sound died away upon them.

At last a stronger effort broke the silence.

"Teresa!"

It was a strange tone, a tone of longing unutterable, a tone like that which a dying man might use in calling before him one most dear. And all the pent-up feeling of years rushed forth in concentrated energy, and was borne to her ears in the sound of that one word. She looked up with the same glance as before.

"Little playmate," said he, in a tone of infinite sweetness, "have you ever forgotten the old days? Do you remember when you and I last stood hand in hand?"

His voice sounded like the utterance of tears, as though, if he could have wept, he would then have wept as no man wept before, but his eyes were dry through his manhood, and all that tears can express were shown forth in his tone.

As he began to speak her head fell again. As he ended she looked up as before. Her lips moved. She whispered but one word:

"Courtenay!"

She burst into a flood of tears and sank into a chair. And Despard stood, not daring even to soothe her, for fear lest in that vehement convulsion of his soul all his self-command should give way utterly.

At length Mrs. Thornton rose. "Lama," said she, at last, in a low, sad voice, "let us go to the piano."

"Will you sing the _Ave Maria_" he asked, mournfully.

"I dare not," said she, hastily. "No, anything but that. I will sing Rossini's _Cujus Animam_."

Then followed those words which tell in lofty strains of a broken heart:

Cujus animam gementem
Contristatam et flebentem
Pertransivit gladius!

CHAPTER XXVII.

JOURNAL OF PAOLO LANGHETTI.

When Mrs. Thornton saw Despard next she showed him a short note which she had just received from her brother, accompanying his journal. Nearly two years had elapsed since she had last heard from him.

His journal was written as before at long intervals, and was as follows:

Halifax, April 10, 1847.--I exist here, but nothing more. Nothing is offered by this small colonial town that can afford interest. Life goes on monotonously. The officers and their families are what they are every where. They are amiable and pleasant, and try to get the best out of life. The townspeople are hospitable, and there is much refinement among them.

But I live for the most part in a cottage outside of the town, where I can be secluded and free from observation. Near my house is the Northwest Arm. I cross it in a boat, and am at once in a savage wilderness. From the summit of a hill, appropriately named Mount Misery, I can look down upon this city which is bordered by such a wilderness.

The winter has passed since my last entry, and nothing has occurred. I have learned to skate. I went out on a moose-hunt with Colonel Despard.

The gigantic horns of a moose which I killed are now over the door of my studio. I have joined in some festivities, and have done the honors of my house. It is an old-fashioned wooden structure which they call the Priory.

So the winter has passed, and April is now here. In this country there is no spring. Snow is yet on the ground. Winter is transformed gradually till summer. I must keep up my fires till June, they say.

During the winter I have guarded my treasure well. I took a house on purpose to have a home for her. But her melancholy continued, and the state of mind in which I found her still endures. Will it ever change? I gave out here that she was a relative who was in ill health. But the winter has passed, and she remains precisely the same. Can she live on long in this mood?

At length I have decided to try a change for her. The Holy Sisterhood of Mercy have a convent here, where she may find a higher and purer atmosphere than any where else. There I have placed her. I have told nothing of her story. They think she is in grief for the death of friends. They have received her with that warm sympathy and holy love which it is the aim of their life to cherish.

O mater alma Christ! carissima,
Te nunc flagitant devota corda et ora,
Ora pro nobis!

August 5, 1847.--The summer goes on pleasantly. A bracing climate, a cool sea-breeze, fishing and hunting in the forests, sailing in the harbor--these are the amusements which one can find if he has the leisure.

She has been among the Sisterhood of Mercy for some months. The deep calm of that holy retreat has soothed her, but only this much, that her melancholy has not lessened but grown more placid. She is in the midst of those whose thoughts are habitually directed to that work which she longs after. The home from which she has been exiled is the desire of their hearts. They aim after that place for which she longs with so deep a longing. There is sympathy in all those hearts with one another. She hears in their chants and prayers those hopes and desires, and these are but the utterances of what she feels.

Here they sing the matchless Rhythm of Bernard de Morlaix, and in these words she finds the highest expression that human words can give of the thoughts and desires of her soul. They tell me that the first time they sang it, as they came to this passage she burst into tears and sank down almost senseless:

O bona patria! lumina sobria te speculantur,
Ad tua nomina sobria lumina collacrimantur:
Et tua mentio pectoris unctis, cura doloris,
Concipientibus aethers mentibus ignis amoris.

November 17.--The winter must soon be here again.

My treasure is well guarded by the Holy Sisterhood. They revere her and look upon her as a saint. They tell me wonderful things about her which have sunk into my soul. They think that she is another Saint Cecilia, or rather Saint Teresa, the Saint of Love and Longing.

She told them once that she was not a Catholic, but that any form of worship was sweet and precious to her--most of all, the lofty utterances of the prayers and hymns of the Church. She will not listen to dogmas, but says that God wishes only love and praise. Yet she joins in all their rites, and in this House, where Love is chiefly adored, she surpasses all in the deep love of her heart.

January 2, 1848.--I have seen her for the first time in many months. She smiled. I never saw her smile before, except once in the ship, when I told my name and made her mother take my place in the cabin.

She smiled. It was as if an angel from heaven had smiled on me. Do I not believe that she is one?

They all say that she is unchanged. Her sadness has had no abatement. On that meeting she made an effort for my sake to stoop to me. Perhaps she saw how my very soul entreated her to speak. So she spoke of the Sisterhood, and said she loved them all. I asked her if she was happier here than at my house. She said "No." I did not know whether to feel rejoiced or sorrowful. Then she told me something which has filled me with wonder ever since.

She asked me if I had been making inquiries about her family, for I had said that I would. I told her that I had. She asked what I had heard. I hesitated for a moment, and at last, seeing that she was superior to any sorrow of bereavement; I told her all about the sad fate of her brother Louis, which your old friend Courtenay Despard had communicated to his uncle here. She listened without emotion, and at last, looking earnestly at me, said,

"_He is not dead!_"

I stood amazed. I had seen the very newspapers which contained an account of his death, I had read the letters of Courtenay Despard, which showed how painstaking his search had been. Had he not traveled to every place where he could hear any thing of the Brandons? Had he not written at the very outset wherever he could hope to hear any thing? I did not know what to say.

For Louis Brandon is known to have fallen overboard from the ship Java, during a tremendous monsoon, several hundred miles away from any land. How could he possibly have escaped death? The Captain, whom Courtenay Despard found out and questioned, said he threw over a hen-coop and a pail. These could not save him. Despard also inquired for months from every ship that arrived from those parts, but could learn nothing. The next ship that came from New South Wales foundered off the coast of Africa. Three passengers escaped to Sierra Leone, and thence to England. Despard learned their names, but they were not Brandon. The information which one of them, named Wheeler, gave to the ship-owners afforded no hope of his having been found by this ship, even if it had been possible. It was simply impossible, however, for the _Falcon_ did not pass the spot where poor Brandon fell overboard till months had elapsed.

All these things I knew, and they came to my mind. She did not notice my emotion, but after a pause she looked at me again with the same earnestness, and said,

"_My brother Frank is not dead._"

This surprised me as much as the other.

"Are you sure?" said I, reverently.

"I am."

"How did you learn this? All who have inquired say that both of your brothers are dead."

"They told me," said she, "many times. _They_ said that my brothers had not come among them to their own place, as they would have had to come if they had left the earth."

She spoke solemnly and with mysterious emphasis. I said nothing, for I knew not what to say.

On going home and thinking over this, I saw that she believed herself to have the power of communicating with the departed. I did not know whether this intelligence, which she believed she had received, had been gained in her trance, or whether she thought that she had recent interviews with those on high. I went to see her again, and asked this. She told me that once since her recovery she had fallen into that state, and had been, as she called it, "in her home."

I ventured to ask her more about what she considered a communion with the departed. She tried to speak, but looked like one who could not find words. It was still the same as before. She has in her mind thoughts which can not be expressed by any human language. She will not be able to express them till such a language is obtained. Yet she gave me one idea, which has been in my mind ever since.

She said that the language of those among whom she has been has nothing on earth which is like it except music. If our music could be developed to an indefinite extent it might at last begin to resemble it. Yet she said that she sometimes heard strains here in the Holy Mass which reminded her of that language, and might be intelligible to an immortal.

This is the idea which she imparted to me, and I have thought of it ever since.

August 23--Great things have happened.

When I last wrote I had gained the idea of transforming music into a language. The thought came to me that I, who thirst for music, and love it and cherish it above all things--to whom it is an hourly comfort and solace--that I might rise to utter forth to her sounds which she might hear. I had already seen enough of her spiritual tone to know what sympathies and emotions might best be acted upon. I saw her several times, so as to stimulate myself to a higher and purer exercise of whatever genius I may have.

I was encouraged by the thought that from my earliest childhood, as I began to learn to speak so I began to learn to sing. As I learned to read printed type so I read printed music. The thoughts of composers in music thus became as legible to me as those of composers in words. So all my life my knowledge has widened, and with that knowledge my love has increased. This has been my one aim in life--my joy and my delight.

Thus it came to pass that at last, when alone with my Cremona, I could utter all my own thoughts, and pour forth every feeling that was in my heart. This was a language with me. I spoke it, yet there was no one who could understand it fully. Only one had I ever met with to whom I told this besides yourself--she could accompany me--she could understand and follow me wherever I led. I could speak this language to her, and she could hear and comprehend. This one was my Bice.

Now that she had told me this I grasped at the thought. Never before had the idea entered my mind of trying upon her the effect of my music. I had given it up for her sake while she was with me, not liking to cause any sound to disturb her rapt and melancholy mood.

But now I began to understand how it was with her. She had learned the language of the highest places and had heard the New Song. She stood far above me, and if she could not understand my music it would be from the same reason that a grown man can not comprehend the words of a lisping, stammering child. She had that language in its fullness. I had it only in its crudest rudiments.

Now Bice learned my words and followed me. She knew my utterance. I was the master--she the disciple. But here was one who could lead me. I would be the follower and disciple. From her I could learn more than in all my life I could ever discover by my own unassisted efforts.

It was mine, therefore, to struggle to overcome the lisping, stammering utterance of my purely earthly music; to gain from her some knowledge of the mood of that holier, heavenly expression, so that at last I might be able in some degree to speak to this exile the language of the home which she loved; that we, by holding commune in this language, might rise together to a higher spiritual realm, and that she in her solitude might receive at least some associate.

So I proposed to her to come back and stay with me again. She consented at once.

Before that memorable evening I purified my heart by fasting and prayer. I was like one who was seeking to ascend into heaven to take part in that celestial communion, to join in the New Song, the music of the angels.

By fasting and prayer I sought so to ascend, and to find thoughts and fit utterance for those thoughts. I looked upon my office as similar to that of the holy prophets of old. I felt that I had a power of utterance if the Divine One would only inspire.

I fasted and prayed that so I might reduce this grosser material frame, and sharpen and quicken every nerve, and stimulate every fibre of the brain. So alone could I most nearly approach to the commune of spirits. Thus had those saints and prophets of old done when they had entered upon the search after this communion, and they had received their reward, even the visitation of angels and the vision of the blessed.

A prophet--yes--now, in these days, it is left for the prophet to utter forth his inspiration by no other way than that of music.

So I fasted and prayed. I took up the words from the holy priesthood, and I said, as they say:

Munda cor meum, ac labia mea, Omnipotens Deus, qui labia Isaiae prophetae, calculo mundasti ignito!

For so Isaiah had been exalted till he heard the language of heaven, the music of the seraphim.

She, my divinity, my adored, enshrined again in my house, bore herself as before--kind to me and gentle beyond all expression, but with thoughts of her own that placed between us a gulf as wide as that which separates the mortal from the immortal.

On that evening she was with me in the parlor which looks out upon the Northwest Arm. The moon shone down there, the dark, rocky hills on the opposite side rose in heavy masses. The servants were away in the city. We were alone.

Ah, my Cremona! if a material instrument were ever able to utter forth sounds to which immortals might listen, thou, best gift of my father, thou canst utter them!

"You are pale," said she, for she was always kindly and affectionate as a mother with a child, as a guardian angel with his ward. "You are pale. You always forget yourself for others, and now you suffer anxiety for me. Do not suffer. I have my consolations."

I did not make any reply, but took my Cremona, and sought to lift up all my soul to a level with hers, to that lofty realm where her spirit ever wandered, that so I might not be comfortless. She started at the first tone that I struck forth, and looked at me with her large, earnest eyes. I found my own gaze fixed on hers, rapt and entranced. Now there came at last the inspiration so longed for, so sought for. It came from where her very soul looked forth into mine, out of the glory of her lustrous, spiritual eyes. They grew brighter with an almost immortal radiance, and all my heart rose up till it seemed ready to burst in the frenzy of that inspired moment.

Now I felt the spirit of prophecy, I felt the afflatus of the inspired sibyl or seer, and the voice of music which for a lifetime I had sought to utter forth now at last sounded as I longed that it should sound.

I exulted in that sound. I knew that at last I had caught the tone, and from her. I knew its meaning and exulted, as the poet or the musician must always exult when some idea sublimer than any which he has ever known is wafted over his upturned spiritual gaze.

She shared my exaltation. There came over her face swiftly, like the lightning flash, an expression of surprise and joy. So the face of the exile lightens up at the throbbing of his heart, when, in some foreign land, he suddenly and unexpectedly hears the sound of his own language. So his eyes light up, and his heart beats faster, and even amidst the very longing of his soul after home, the desire after that home is appeased by these its most hallowed associations.

And the full meaning of that eloquent gaze of hers as her soul looked into mine became all apparent to me. "Speak on," it said; "sound on, oh strains of the language of my home! Unheard so long, now heard at last."

I knew that I was comprehended. Now all the feelings of the melancholy months came rushing over my heart, and all the holiest ideas which had

animated my life came thronging into my mind, bursting forth into tones, as though of their own accord, involuntarily, as words come forth in a dream.

"Oh thou," I said, in that language which my own lips could not utter--
"oh thou whom I saved from the tomb, the life to which I restored thee is irksome; but there remains a life to which at last thou shalt attain.

"Oh thou," I said, "whose spirit moves among the immortals, I am mortal yet immortal! My soul seeks commune with them. I yearn after that communion. Life here on earth is not more dear to me than to thee. Help me to rise above it. Thou hast been on high, show me too the way.

"Oh thou," I said, "who hast seen things ineffable, impart to me thy confidence. Let me know thy secret. Receive me as the companion of thy soul. Shut not thyself up in solitude. Listen, I can speak thy language.

"Attend," I cried, "for it is not for nothing that the Divine One has sent thee back. Live not these mortal days in loneliness and in uselessness. Regard thy fellow-mortals and seek to bless them. Thou hast learned the mystery of the highest. Let me be thine interpreter. All that thou hast learned I will communicate to man.

"Rise up," I cried, "to happiness and to labor. Behold! I give thee a purpose in life. Blend thy soul with mine, and let me utter thy thoughts so that men shall hear and understand. For I know that the highest truth of highest Heaven means nothing more than love. Gather up all thy love, let it flow forth to thy fellow-men. This shall be at once the labor and the consolation of thy life."

Now all this, and much more--far more--was expressed in the tones that flowed from my Cremona. It was all in my heart. It came forth. It was apprehended by her. I saw it, I knew it, and I exulted. Her eyes dilated more widely--my words were not unworthy of her hearing. I then was able to tell something which could rouse her from her stupor. Oh, Music! Divine Music! What power thou hast over the soul!

There came over her face an expression which I never saw before; one of peace ineffable--the peace that passeth understanding. Ah me! I seemed to draw her to myself. For she rose and walked toward me. And a great calm came over my own soul. My Cremona spoke of peace--soft, sweet, and deep; the profound peace that dwelleth in the soul which has its hope in fruition. The tone widened into sweet modulation--sweet beyond all expression.

She was so close that she almost touched me. Her eyes were still fixed on mine. Tears were there, but not tears of sorrow. Her face was so close to mine that my strength left me. My arms dropped downward. The music was over.

[Illustration: "I DID NOT MAKE ANY REPLY, BUT TOOK MY CREMONA, AND SOUGHT TO LIFT UP ALL MY SOUL TO A LEVEL WITH HERS."]

She held out her hand to me. I caught it in both of mine, and wet it with my tears.

"Paolo," said she, in a voice of musical tone; "Paolo, you are already one of us. You speak our language.

"You have taught me something which flows from love--duty. Yes, we will labor together; and they who live on high will learn even in their radiant home to envy us poor mortals."

I said not a word, but knelt; and holding her hand still, I looked up at her in grateful adoration.

November 28.--For the last three months I have lived in heaven. She is changed. Music has reconciled her to exile. She has found one who speaks, though weakly, the language of that home.

We hold together through this divine medium a lofty spirited intercourse. I learn from her of that starry world in which for a brief time she was permitted to dwell. Her seraphic thoughts have become communicated to me. I have made them my own, and all my spirit has risen to a higher altitude.

So I have at last received that revelation for which I longed, and the divine thoughts with which she has inspired me I will make known to the world. How? Description is inadequate, but it is enough to say that I have decided upon an Opera as the best mode of making known these ideas.

I have reported to one of those classical themes which, though as old as civilization, are yet ever new, because they are truth.

My Opera is on the theme of Prometheus. It refers to Prometheus Delivered. My idea is derived from her. Prometheus represents Divine Love--since he is the god who suffers unendurable agonies through his love for man. Zeus represents the old austere god of the sects and creeds--the gloomy God of Vengeance--the stern--the inexorable--the cruel.

Love endures through the ages, but at last triumphs. The chief agent in his triumph is Athene. She represents Wisdom, which, by its life and increase, at last dethrones the God of Vengeance and enthrones the God of Love.

For so the world goes on; and thus it shall be that Human Understanding, which I have personified under Athene, will at last exalt Divine Love over all, and cast aside its olden adoration of Divine Vengeance.

I am trying to give to my Opera the severe simplicity of the classical form, yet at the same time to pervade it all with the warm atmosphere of love in its widest sense. It opens with a chorus of seraphim. Prometheus laments; but the chief part is that of Athene. On that I have exhausted myself.

But where can I get a voice that can adequately render my thoughts--_our_ thoughts? Where is Bice? She alone has this voice; she alone has the power of catching and absorbing into her own mind the ideas which I form; and with it all, she alone could express them. I would wander over the earth to find her. But perhaps she is in a luxurious home, where her associates would not listen to such a proposal.

Patience! perhaps Bice may at last bring her marvelous voice to my aid.

December 15.--Every day our communion has grown more exalted. She breathes upon me the atmosphere of that radiant world, and fills my soul with rapture. I live in a sublime enthusiasm. We hold intercourse by

means of music. We stand upon a higher plane than that of common men. She has raised me there, and has made me to be a partaker in her thoughts.

Now I begin to understand something of the radiant world to which she was once for a brief time borne. I know her lost joys; I share in her longings. In me, as in her, there is a deep, unquenchable thirst after those glories that are present there. All here seems poor and mean. No material pleasure can for a moment allure.

I live in a frenzy. My soul is on fire. Music is my sole thought and utterance. Colonel Despard thinks that I am mad. My friends here pity me. I smile within myself when I think of pity being given by them to me. Kindly souls! could they but have one faint idea of the unspeakable joys to which I have attained!

My Cremona is my voice. It expresses all things for me. Ah, sweet companion of my soul's flight! my Guide, my Guardian Angel, my Inspirer! had ever before two mortals while on earth a lot like ours? Who else besides us in this life ever learned the joys of pure spiritual communion? We rise on high together. Our souls are borne up in company. When we hold commune we cease to be mortals.

My Opera is finished. The radiancy of that Divine Love which has inundated all the being of Edith has been imparted to me in some measure sufficient to enable me to breathe forth to human ears tones which have been caught from immortal voices. She has given me ideas. I have made them audible and intelligible to men.

I have had one performance of my work, or rather our work, for it is all hers. Hers are the thoughts, mine is only the expression.

I sought out a place of solitude in which I might perform undisturbed and without interruption the theme which I have tried to unfold.

Opposite my house is a wild, rocky shore covered with the primeval woods. Here in one place there rises a barren rock, perfectly bare of verdure, which is called Mount Misery. I chose this place as the spot where I might give my rehearsal.

She was the audience--I was the orchestra--we two were alone.

Mount Misery is one barren rock without a blade of grass on all its dark iron-like surface. Around it is a vast accumulation of granite boulders and vast rocky ledges. The trees are stunted, the very ferns can scarcely find a place to grow.

It was night. There was not a cloud in the sky. The moon shone with marvelous lustre.

Down in front of us lay the long arm of the sea that ran up between us and the city. On the opposite side were woods, and beyond them rose the citadel, on the other side of which the city lay nestling at its base like those Rhenish towns which lie at the foot of feudal castles.

On the left hand all was a wilderness; on the right, close by, was a small lake, which seemed like a sheet of silver in the moon's rays. Farther on lay the ocean, stretching in its boundless extent away to the horizon. There lay islands and sand-banks with light-houses. There,

under the moon, lay a broad path of golden light--molten gold--
unruffled--undisturbed in that dead calm.

My Opera begins with an Alleluia Chorus. I have borrowed words from the Angel Song at the opening of "Faust" for my score. But the music has an expression of its own, and the words are feeble; and the only comfort is, that these words will be lost in the triumph strain of the tones that accompany them.

She was with me, exulting where I was exultant, sad where I was sorrowful; still with her air of Guide and Teacher. She is my Egeria. She is my Inspiring Muse. I invoke her when I sing.

But my song carried her away. Her own thoughts expressed by my utterance were returned to her, and she yielded herself up altogether to their power.

Ah me! there is one language common to all on earth, and to all in heaven, and that is music.

I exulted then on that bare, blasted rock. I triumphed. She joined me in it all. We exulted together. We triumphed. We mourned, we rejoiced, we despaired, we hoped, we sung alleluias in our hearts. The very winds were still. The very moon seemed to stay her course. All nature was hushed.

She stood before me, white, slender, aerial, like a spirit from on high, as pure, as holy, as stainless. Her soul and mine were blended. We moved to one common impulse. We obeyed one common motive.

What is this? Is it love? Yes; but not as men call love. Ours is heavenly love, ardent, but yet spiritual; intense, but without passion; a burning love like that of the cherubim; all-consuming, all-engrossing, and enduring for evermore.

Have I ever told her my admiration? Yes; but not in words. I have told her so in music, in every tone, in every strain. She knows that I am hers. She is my divinity, my muse, my better genius--the nobler half of my soul.

I have laid all my spirit at her feet, as one prostrates himself before a divinity. She has accepted that adoration and has been pleased.

We are blended. We are one, but not after an earthly fashion, for never yet have I even touched her hand in love. It is our spirits, our real selves--not our merely visible selves--that love; yet that love is so intense that I would die for evermore if my death could make her life more sweet.

She has heard all this from my Cremona.

Here, as we stood under the moon, I thought her a spirit with a mortal lover. I recognized the full meaning of the sublime legend of Numa and Egeria. The mortal aspires in purity of heart, and the immortal comes down and assists and responds to his aspirations.

Our souls vibrated in unison to the expression of heavenly thoughts. We threw ourselves into the rapture of the hour. We trembled, we thrilled, till at last frail mortal nature could scarcely endure the intensity of

that perfect joy.

So we came to the end. The end is a chorus of angels. They sing the divinest of songs that is written in Holy Revelation. All the glory of that song reaches its climax in the last strain:

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes!"

We wept together. But we dried our tears and went home, musing on that "tearless eternity" which lies before us.

Morning is dawning as I write, and all the feeling of my soul can be expressed in one word, the sublimest of all words, which is intelligible to many of different languages and different races. I will end with this:

"Alleluia!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

THIS MUST END.

The note which accompanied Langhetti's journal was as follows:

"HALIFAX, December 18, 1848.

"TERESUOLA VIA DOLCISSIMA,--I send you my journal, _sorella carissima_. I have been silent for a long time. Forgive me. I have been sad and in affliction. But affliction has turned to joy, and I have learned things unknown before.

"_Teresina mia_, I am coming back to England immediately. You may expect to see me at any time during the next three months. _She_ will be with me; but so sensitive is she--so strange would she be to you--that I do not know whether it will be well for you to see her or not. I dare not let her be exposed to the gaze of any one unknown to her. Yet, sweetest _sorellina_, perhaps I may be able to tell her that I have a dearest sister, whose heart is love, whose nature is noble, and who could treat her with tenderest care.

"I intend to offer my Opera to the world at London. I will be my own impresario. Yet I want one thing, and that is a Voice. Oh for a Voice like that of Bice! But it is idle to wish for her.

"Never have I heard any voice like hers, my Teresina. God grant that I may find her!

"Expect soon and suddenly to see your most loving brother,

"PAOLO."

Mrs. Thornton showed this note to Despard the next time they met. He had read the journal in the mean time.

"So he is coming back?" said he.

"Yes."

"And with this marvelous girl?"

"Yes."

"She seems to me like a spirit."

"And to me."

"Paolo's own nature is so lofty and so spiritual that one like her is intelligible to him. Happy is it for her that he found her."

"Paolo is more spiritual than human. He has no materialism. He is spiritual. I am of the earth, earthy; but my brother is a spirit imprisoned, who chafes at his bonds and longs to be free. And think what Paolo has done for her in his sublime devotion!"

"I know others who would do as much," said Despard, in a voice that seemed full of tears; "I know others who, like him, would go to the grave to rescue the one they loved, and make all life one long devotion. I know others," he continued, "who would gladly die, if by dying they could gain what he has won--the possession of the one they love. Ah me! Paolo is happy and blessed beyond all men. Between him and her there is no insuperable barrier, no gulf as deep as death."

Despard spoke impetuously, but suddenly checked himself.

"I received," said he, "by the last mail a letter from my uncle in Halifax. He is ordered off to the Cape of Good Hope. I wrote him a very long time ago, as I told you, asking him to tell me without reserve all that he knew about my father's death. I told him plainly that there was a mystery about it which I was determined to solve. I reproached him for keeping it secret from me, and reminded him that I was now a mature man; and that he had no right nor any reason to maintain any farther secrecy. I insisted on knowing all, no matter what it might be.

"I received his letter by the last mail. Here it is;" and he handed it to her. "Read it when you get home. I have written a few words to you, little playmate, also. He has told me all. Did you know this before?"

"Yes, Lama," said Mrs. Thornton, with a look of sorrowful sympathy.

"You knew all my father's fate?"

"Yes, Lama."

"And you kept it secret?"

"Yes, Lama. How could I bear to tell you and give you pain?"

Her voice trembled as she spoke. Despard looked at her with an indescribable expression.

"One thought," said he, slowly, "and one feeling engrosses all my nature, and even this news that I have heard can not drive it away. Even the thought of my father's fate, so dark and so mysterious, can not weaken the thoughts that have all my life been supreme. Do you know,

little playmate, what those thoughts are?"

She was silent. Despard's hand wandered over the keys. They always spoke in low tones, which were almost whispers, tones which were inaudible except to each other. And Mrs. Thornton had to bow her head close to his to hear what he said.

"I must go," said Despard, after a pause, "and visit Brandon again. I do not know what I can do, but my father's death requires further examination. This man Potts is intermingled with it. My uncle gives dark hints. I must make an examination."

"And you are going away again?" said Mrs. Thornton, sadly.

Despard sighed.

"Would it not be better," said he, as he took her hand in his--"would it not be better for you, little playmate, if I went away from you forever?"

She gave him one long look of sad reproach. Then tears filled her eyes.

"This can not go on forever," she murmured. "It must come to that at last!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

BEATRICE'S JOURNAL.

October 30, 1848.--My recovery has been slow, and I am still far from well. I stay in my room almost altogether. Why should I do otherwise? Day succeeds day, and each day is a blank.

My window looks on the sea, and I can sit there and feed my heart on the memories which that sea calls up. It is company for me in my solitude. It is music, though I can not hear its voice. Oh, how I should rejoice if I could get down by its margin and touch its waters! Oh how I should rejoice if those waters would flow over me forever!

November 15.--Why I should write any thing now I do not know. This uneventful life offers nothing to record. Mrs. Compton is as timid, as gentle, and as affectionate as ever. Philips, poor, timorous, kindly soul, sends me flowers by her. Poor wretch, how did he ever get here? How did Mrs. Compton?

December 28.--In spite of my quiet habits and constant seclusion I feel that I am under some surveillance, not from Mrs. Compton, but from others. I have been out twice during the last fortnight and perceived this plainly. Men in the walks who were at work quietly followed me with their eyes. I see that I am watched. I did not know that I was of sufficient importance.

Yesterday a strange incident occurred. Mrs. Compton was with me, and by some means or other my thoughts turned to one about whom I have often tried to form conjectures--my mother. How could she ever have married a

man like my father? What could she have been like? Suddenly I turned to Mrs. Compton, and said:

"Did you ever see my mother?"

What there could have been in my question I can not tell, but she trembled and looked at me with greater fear in her face than I had ever seen there before. This time she seemed to be afraid of me. I myself felt a cold chill run through my frame. That awful thought which I had once before known flashed across my mind.

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Compton, suddenly, "oh, don't look at me so; don't look at me so!"

"I don't understand you," said I, slowly.

She hid her face in her hands and began to weep. I tried to soothe her, and with some success, for after a time she regained her composure. Nothing more was said. But since then one thought, with a long series of attendant thoughts, has weighed down my mind. _Who am I? What am I? What am I doing here? What do these people want with me? Why do they guard me?_

I can write no more.

January 14, 1849.--The days drag on. Nothing new has happened. I am tormented by strange thoughts. I see this plainly that there are times when I inspire fear in this house. Why is this?

Since that day, many, many months ago, when they all looked at me in horror, I have seen none of them. Now Mrs. Compton has exhibited the same fear. There is a restraint over her. Yes, she too fears me. Yet she is kind; and poor Philips never forgets to send me flowers.

I could smile at the idea of any one fearing me, if it were not for the terrible thoughts that arise within my mind.

February 12.--Of late all my thoughts have changed, and I have been inspired with an uncontrollable desire to escape. I live here in luxury, but the meanest house outside would be far preferable. Every hour here is a sorrow, every day a misery. Oh, me! if I could but escape!

Once in that outer world I care not what might happen. I would be willing to do menial labor to earn my bread. Yet it need not come to that. The lessons which Paolo taught me have been useful in more ways than one. I know that I at least need not be dependent.

He used to say to me that if I chose to go on the stage and sing, I could do something better than gain a living or make a fortune. He said I could interpret the ideas of the Great Masters, and make myself a blessing to the world.

Why need I stay here when I have a voice which he used to deign to praise? He did not praise it because he loved me; but I think he loved me because he loved my voice. He loves my voice better than me. And that other one! Ah me--will he ever hear my voice again? Did he know how sweet his voice was to me? Oh me! its tones ring in my ears and in my heart night and day.

March 5.--My resolution is formed. This may be my last entry. I pray to God that it may be. I will trust in him and fly. At night they can not be watching me. There is a door at the north end, the key of which is always in it. I can steal out by that direction and gain my liberty.

Oh Thou who hearest prayer, grant deliverance to the captive!

Farewell now, my journal; I hope never to see you again! Yet I will secrete you in this chamber, for if I am compelled to return I may be glad to seek you again.

March 6.--Not yet! Not yet!

Alas! and since yesterday what things have happened! Last night I was to make my attempt. They dined at eight, and I waited for them to retire. I waited long. They were longer than usual.

[Illustration: "OH!" CRIED MRS. COMPTON SUDDENLY, "OH, DON'T LOOK AT ME SO; DON'T LOOK AT ME SO!"]

At about ten o'clock Mrs. Compton came into my room, with as frightened a face as usual. "They want you," said she.

I knew whom she meant. "Must I go?" said I.

"Alas, dear child, what can you do? Trust in God. He can save you."

"He alone can save me," said I, "if He will. It has come to this that I have none but Him in whom I can trust."

She began to weep. I said no more, but obeyed the command and went down.

Since I was last there months had passed--months of suffering and anguish in body and mind. The remembrance of my last visit there came over me as I entered. Yet I did not tremble or falter. I crossed the threshold and entered the room, and stood before them in silence.

I saw the three men who had been there before. _He_ and his son, and the man Clark, They had all been drinking. Their voices were loud and their laughter boisterous as I approached. When I entered they became quiet, and all three stared at me. At last _he_ said to his son,

"She don't look any fatter, does she, Johnnie?"

"She gets enough to eat, any how," answered John.

"She's one of them kind," said the man Clark, "that don't fatten up. But then, Johnnie, you needn't talk--you haven't much fat yourself, lad."

"Hard work," said John, whereupon the others, thinking it an excellent joke, burst into hoarse laughter. This put them into great good-humor with themselves, and they began to turn their attention to me again. Not a word was said for some time.

"Can you dance?" said he, at last, speaking to me abruptly.

"Yes," I answered.

"Ah! I thought so. I paid enough for your education, any how. It would be hard if you hadn't learned any thing else except squalling and banging on the piano."

I said nothing.

"Why do you stare so, d--n you?" he cried, looking savagely at me.

I looked at the floor.

"Come now," said he. "I sent for you to see if you can dance. Dance!"

I stood still. "Dance!" he repeated with an oath. "Do you hear?"

"I can not," said I.

"Perhaps you want a partner," continued he, with a sneer. "Here, Johnnie, go and help her."

"I'd rather not," said John.

"Clark, you try it--you were always gay," and he gave a hoarse laugh.

"Yes, Clark," cried John. "Now's your chance."

Clark hesitated for a moment, and then came toward me. I stood with my arms folded, and looked at him fixedly. I was not afraid. For I thought in that hour of who these men were, and what they were. My life was in their hands, but I held life cheap. I rose above the fear of the moment, and felt myself their superior.

Clark came up to me and stopped. I did not move.

"Curse her!" said he. "I'd as soon dance with a ghost. She looks like one, any how."

He laughed boisterously.

"He's afraid. He's getting superstitious!" he cried. "What do you think of that, Johnnie?"

"Well," drawled John, "it's the first time I ever heard of Clark being afraid of any thing."

These words seemed to sting Clark to the quick.

"Will you dance?" said he, in a hoarse voice.

I made no answer.

"Curse her! make her dance!" _he_ shouted, starting up from his chair. "Don't let her bully you, you fool!"

Clark stepped toward me and laid one heavy hand on mine, while he attempted to pass the other round my waist. At the horror of his polluting touch all my nature seemed transformed. I started back. There came something like a frenzy over me. I neither knew nor cared what I said.

Yet I spoke slowly, and it was not like passion. All that I had read in that manuscript was in my heart, the very spirit of the murdered Despard seemed to inspire me.

"Touch me not," I said. "Trouble me not. I am near enough to Death already. And you," I cried, stretching out my hand to him, "THUG! never again will I obey one command of yours. Kill me if you choose, and send me after Colonel Despard."

These words seemed to blast and wither them. Clark shrank back. _He_ gave a groan, and clutched the arm of his chair. John looked in fear from one to the other, and stammered with an oath:

"She knows all! Mrs. Compton told her."

"Mrs. Compton never knew it, about the Thug," said he, and then looked up fearfully at me. They all looked once more. Again that fear which I had seen in them before was shown upon their faces.

I looked upon these wretches as though I had surveyed them from some lofty height. That one of them was my father was forgotten. I seemed to utter words which were inspired within me.

"Colonel Despard has spoken to me from the dead, and told me all," said I. "I am appointed to avenge him."

I turned and went out of the room. As I left I heard John's voice:

"If she's the devil himself, as I believe she is," he cried, "_she's got to be took down!_"

I reached my room. I lay awake all night long. A fever seemed raging in all my veins. Now with a throbbing head and trembling hands I write this. Will these be my last words? God grant it, and give me safe deliverance. Amen! amen!

CHAPTER XXX

SMITHERS & CO.

The Brandon Bank, John Potts, President, had one day risen suddenly before the eyes of the astonished county and filled all men with curious speculations.

John Potts had been detestable, but now, as a Bank President, he began to be respectable, to say the least. Wealth has a charm about it which fascinates all men, even those of the oldest families, and now that this parvenu showed that he could easily employ his superfluous cash in a banking company, people began to look upon his name as still undoubtedly vulgar, yet as undoubtedly possessing the ring of gold.

His first effort to take the county by storm, by an ordinary invitation to Brandon Hall, had been sneered at every where. But this bank was a different thing. Many began to think that perhaps Potts had been an ill-used and slandered man. He had been Brandon's agent, but who could prove

any thing against him after all?

There were very many who soon felt the need of the peculiar help which a bank can give if it only chooses. Those who went there found Potts marvelously accommodating. He did not seem so grasping or so suspicious as other bankers. They got what they wanted, laughed at his pleasant jokes, and assured every body that he was a much-belied man.

Surely it was by some special inspiration that Potts hit upon this idea of a bank; if he wished to make people look kindly upon him, to "be to his faults a little blind, and to his virtues very kind," he could not have conceived any better or shorter way toward the accomplishment of so desirable a result.

So lenient were these people that they looked upon all those who took part in the bank with equal indulgence. The younger Potts was considered as a very clever man, with a dry, caustic humor, but thoroughly good-hearted. Clark, one of the directors, was regarded as bluff, and shrewd, and cautious, but full of the milk of human kindness; and Philips, the cashier, was universally liked on account of his gentle, obsequious manner.

So wide-spread and so active were the operations of this bank that people stood astonished and had nothing to say. The amount of their accommodations was enormous. Those who at first considered it a mushroom concern soon discovered their mistake; for the Brandon Bank had connections in London which seemed to give the command of unlimited means, and any sum whatever that might be needed was at once advanced where the security was at all reliable. Nor was the bank particular about security. John Potts professed to trust much to people's faces and to their character, and there were times when he would take the security without looking at it, or even decline it and be satisfied with the name.

In less than a year the bank had succeeded in gaining the fullest confidence even of those who had at first been most skeptical, and John Potts had grown to be considered without doubt one of the most considerable men in the county.

One day in March John Potts was sitting in the parlor of the bank when a gentleman walked in who seemed to be about sixty years of age. He had a slight stoop, and carried a gold-headed cane. He was dressed in black, had gray hair, and a very heavy gray beard and mustache.

"Have I the honor of addressing Mr. Potts?" said the stranger, in a peculiarly high, shrill voice.

"I'm Mr. Potts," said the other.

The stranger thereupon drew a letter from his pocket-book and handed it to Potts. The letter was a short one, and the moment Potts had read it he sprang up and held out his hand eagerly.

"Mr. Smithers, Sir!--you're welcome, Sir, I'm sure, Sir! Proud and happy, Sir, to see you, I'm sure!" said Potts, with great volubility.

Mr. Smithers, however, did not seem to see his hand, but seated himself leisurely on a chair, and looked for a moment at the opposite wall like one in thought.

He was a singular-looking old man. His skin was fresh; there was a grand, stern air upon his brow when it was in repose. The lower part of his face was hidden by his beard, and its expression was therefore lost. His eyes, however, were singularly large and luminous, although he wore spectacles and generally looked at the floor.

"I have but recently returned from a tour," said he, in the same voice; "and my junior partner has managed all the business in my absence, which has lasted more than a year. I had not the honor of being acquainted with your banking-house when I left, and as I had business up this way I thought I would call on you."

"Proud, Sir, and most happy to welcome you to our modest parlor," said Potts, obsequiously. "This is a pleasure--indeed I may say, Sir, a privilege--which I have long wished to have. In fact, I have never seen your junior partner, Sir, any more than yourself. I have only seen your agents, Sir, and have gone on and done my large business with you by writing."

Mr. Smithers bowed.

"Quite so," said he. "We have so many connections in all parts of the world that it is impossible to have the pleasure of a personal acquaintance with them all. There are some with whom we have much larger transactions than yourself whom I have never seen."

"Indeed, Sir!" exclaimed Potts, with great surprise. "Then you must do a larger business than I thought."

"We do a large business," said Mr. Smithers, thoughtfully.

"And all over the world, you said. Then you must be worth millions."

"Oh, of course, one can not do a business like ours, that commands money, without a large capital."

"Are there many who do a larger business than I do?"

"Oh yes. In New York the house of Peyton Brothers do a business of ten times the amount--yes, twenty times. In San Francisco a new house, just started since the gold discoveries, has done a business with us almost as large. In Bombay Messrs. Nickerson, Bolton, & Co. are our correspondents; in Calcutta Messrs. Hostermann, Jennings, & Black; in Hong Kong Messrs. Naylor & Tibbetts; in Sydney Messrs. Sandford & Perley. Besides these, we have correspondents through Europe and in all parts of England who do a much larger business than yours. But I thought you were aware of this," said Mr. Smithers, looking with a swift glance at Potts.

"Of course, of course," said Potts, hastily. "I knew your business was enormous, but I thought our dealings with you were considerable."

"Oh, you are doing a snug business," said Smithers, in a patronizing tone. "It is our custom whenever we have correspondents who are sound men to encourage them to the utmost. This is the reason why you have always found us liberal and prompt."

"You have done great service, Sir," said Potts. "In fact, you have made

the Brandon Bank what it is to-day."

"Well," said Smithers, "we have agents every where; we heard that this bank was talked about, and knowing the concern to be in sure hands we took it up. My Junior has made arrangements with you which he says have been satisfactory."

"Very much so to me," replied Potts. "You have always found the money."

"And you, I suppose, have furnished the securities."

"Yes, and a precious good lot of them you are now holding."

"I dare say," said Smithers: "for my part I have nothing to do with the books. I merely attend to the general affairs, and trust to my Junior for particulars."

"And you don't know the exact state of our business?" said Potts, in a tone of disappointment.

"No. How should I? The only ones with which I am familiar are our American, European, and Eastern agencies. Our English correspondents are managed by my Junior."

"You must be one of the largest houses in London," said Potts, in a tone of deep admiration.

"Oh yes."

"Strange I never heard of you till two years or so."

"Very likely."

"There was a friend of mine who was telling me something about some Sydney merchants who were sending consignments of wool to you. Compton & Brandon. Do you know them?"

"I have heard my Junior speak of them."

"You were in Sydney, were you not?"

"Yes, on my last tour I touched there."

"Do you know Compton & Brandon?"

"I looked in to see them. I think Brandon is dead, isn't he? Drowned at sea--or something of that sort?" said Smithers, indifferently.

"Yes," said Potts.

"Are you familiar with the banking business?" asked Smithers, suddenly.

"Well, no, not very. I haven't had much experience; but I'm growing into it."

"Ah! I suppose your directors are good business men?"

"Somewhat; but the fact is, I trust a good deal to my cashier."

"Who is he?"

"His name is Philips, a very clever man; a first-rate accountant."

"That's right. Very much indeed depends on the cashier."

"He is a most useful and reliable man."

"Your business appears to be growing, from what I have heard."

"Very fast indeed, Sir. Why, Sir, in another year I expect to control this whole county financially. There is no reason why I shouldn't. Every one of my moves is successful."

"That is right. The true mode of success in a business like yours is boldness. That is the secret of my success. Perhaps you are not aware," continued Mr. Smithers, in a confidential tone, "that I began with very little. A few thousands of pounds formed my capital. But my motto was boldness, and now I am worth I will not say how many millions. If you want to make money fast you must be bold."

"Did you make your money by banking?" asked Potts, eagerly.

"No. Much of it was made in that way, but I have embarked in all kinds of enterprises; foreign loans, railway scrip, and ventures in stock of all sorts. I have lost millions, but I have made ten times more than ever I lost. If you want to make money, you must go on the same plan."

"Well, I'm sure," said Potts, "I'm bold enough. I'm enlarging my business every day in all directions."

"That's right."

"I control the county now, and hope in another year to do so in a different way."

"How so?"

"I'm thinking of setting up for Parliament--"

"An excellent idea, if it will not injure the business."

"Oh, it will not hurt it at all. Philips can manage it all under my directions. Besides, I don't mind telling a friend like you that this is the dream of my life."

"A very laudable aim, no doubt, to those who have a genius for statesmanship. But that is a thing which is altogether out of my line. I keep to business. And now, as my time is limited, I must not stay longer. I will only add that my impressions are favorable about your bank, and you may rely upon us to any extent to co-operate with you in any sound enterprise. Go on and enlarge your business, and draw on us for what you want as before. If I were you I would embark all my available means in this bank."

"Well, I'm gradually coming to that, I think," said Potts.

"Then, when you get large deposits, as you must expect, that will give you additional capital to work on. The best way when you have a bank is

to use your cash in speculating in stocks. Have you tried that yet?"

"Yes, but not much."

"If you wish any thing of that kind done we will do it for you."

"But I don't know what are the best investments."

"Oh, that is very easily found out. But if you can't learn, we will let you know. The Mexican Loan just now is the most promising. Some of the California companies are working quietly, and getting enormous dividends."

"California?" said Potts; "that ought to pay."

"Oh, there's nothing like it. I cleared nearly half a million in a few months."

"A few months!" cried Potts, opening his eyes.

"Yes, we have agents who keep us well up; and so, you know, we are able to speculate to the best advantage."

"California!" said Potts, thoughtfully. "I should like to try that above all things. It has a good sound. It is like the chink of cash."

"Yes, you get the pure gold out of that. There's nothing like it."

"Do you know any chances for speculation there?"

"Yes, one or two."

"Would you have any objection to let me know?"

"Not in the least--it will extend your business. I will ask my Junior to send you any particulars you may desire."

"This California business must be the best there is, if all I hear is true."

"You haven't heard the real truth."

"Haven't I?" exclaimed Potts, in wonder. "I thought it was exaggerated."

"I could tell you stories far more wonderful than any thing you have heard."

"Tell me!" cried Potts, breathlessly.

"Well," said Smithers, confidentially, "I don't mind telling you something which is known, I'm sorry to say, in certain circles in London, and is already being acted on. One-half of our fortune has been made in California operations."

"You don't say so!"

"You see I've always been bold," continued Smithers, with an air of still greater confidence. "I read some time since in one of Humboldt's books about gold being there. At the first news of the discovery I

chartered a ship and went out at once. I took every thing that could be needed. On arriving at San Francisco, where there were already very many people, I sold the cargo at an enormous profit, and hired the ship as a warehouse at enormous prices. I then organized a mining company, and put a first-rate man at the head of it. They found a place on the Sacramento River where the gold really seems inexhaustible. I worked it for some months, and forwarded two millions sterling to London. Then I left, and my company is still working."

"Why did you leave?" asked Potts, breathlessly.

"Because I could make more money by being in London. My man there is reliable. I have bound him to us by giving him a share in the business. People soon found out that Smithers & Co. had made enormous sums of money in California, but they don't know exactly how. The immense expansion of our business during the last year has filled them with wonder. For you know every piece of gold that I sent home has been utilized by my Junior."

Potts was silent, and sat looking in breathless admiration at this millionaire. All his thoughts were seen in his face. His whole heart was laid bare, and the one thing visible was an intense desire to share in that golden enterprise.

"I have organized two companies on the same principle as the last. The shares are selling at a large premium in the London market. I take a leading part in each, and my name gives stability to the enterprise. If I find the thing likely to succeed I continue; if not, why, I can easily sell out. I am on the point of organizing a third company."

"Are the shares taken up?" cried Potts, eagerly.

"No, not yet."

"Well, could I obtain some?"

"I really can't say," replied Smithers. "You might make an application to my Junior. I do nothing whatever with the details. I don't know what plans or agreements he may have been making."

"I should like exceedingly to take stock. How do the shares sell?"

"The price is high, as we wish to confine our shareholders to the richer classes. We never put it at less than L1000 a share."

"I would take any quantity."

"I dare say some may be in the market yet," said Smithers, calmly. "They probably sell at a high premium though."

"I'd pay it," said Potts.

"Well, you may write and see; I know nothing about it."

"And if they're all taken up, what then?"

"Oh--then--I really don't know. Why can't you organize a company yourself?"

"Well, you see, I don't know anything about the place."

"True; that is a disadvantage. But you might find some people who do know."

"That would be very difficult. I do not see how we could begin. And if I did find any one, how could I trust him?"

"You'd have to do as I did--give him a share of the business."

"It would be much better if I could get some stock in one of your companies. Your experience and credit would make it a success."

"Yes, there is no doubt that our companies would all be successful since we have a man on the spot."

"And that's another reason why I should prefer buying stock from you. You see I might form a company, but what could I do?"

"Could not your cashier help you?"

"No, not in any thing of that sort."

"Well, I can say nothing about it. My Junior will tell you what chances there are."

"But while I see you personally I should be glad if you would consent to give me a chance. Have you any objection?"

"Oh no. I will mention your case the next time I write, if you wish it. Still I can not control the particular operations of the office. My control is supreme in general matters, and you see it would not be possible for me to interfere with the smaller details."

"Still you might mention me."

"I will do so," said Smithers, and taking out his pocket-book he prepared to write.

"Let me see," said he, "your Christian name is--what?"

"John--John Potts."

"John Potts," repeated the other, as he wrote it down.

Smithers rose. "You may continue to draw on us as before, and any purchases of stock which you wish will be made."

Potts thanked him profusely. "I wish to see your cashier, to learn his mode of managing the accounts. Much depends on that, and a short conversation will satisfy me."

"Certainly, Sir, certainly," said Potts, obsequiously. "Philips!" he called.

Philips came in as timid and as shrinking as usual.

"This is Mr. Smithers, the great Smithers of Smithers & Co., Bankers; he wishes to have a talk with you."

Philips looked at the great man with deep respect and made an awkward bow.

"You may come with me to my hotel," said Smithers; and with a slight bow to Potts he left the bank, followed by Philips.

He went up stairs and into a large parlor on the second story, which looked into the street. He motioned Philips to a chair near the window, and seated himself in an arm-chair opposite.

Smithers looked at the other with a searching glance, and said nothing for some time. His large, full eyes, as they fixed themselves on the face of the other, seemed to read his inmost thoughts and study every part of his weak and irresolute character.

At length he said, abruptly, in a slow, measured voice, "Edgar Lawton!"

At the sound of this name Philips started from his chair, and stood on his feet trembling. His face, always pale, now became ashen, his lips turned white, his jaw fell, his eyes seemed to start from their sockets. He stood for a few seconds, then sank back into a chair.

Smithers eyed him steadfastly. "You see I know you," said he, after a time.

Philips cast on him an imploring look.

"The fact that I know your name," continued Smithers, "shows also that I must know something of your history. Do not forget that!"

"My--my history?" faltered Philips.

"Yes, your history. I know it all, wretched man! I knew your father whom you ruined, and whose heart you broke."

Philips said not a word, but again turned an imploring face to this man.

"I have brought you here to let you know that there is one who holds you in his power, and that one is myself. You think Potts or Clark have you at their mercy. Not so. I alone hold your fate in my hands. They dare not do any thing against you for fear of their own necks."

[Illustration: "AT THE SOUND OF THIS NAME PHILIPS STARTED FROM HIS CHAIR, AND STOOD ON HIS FEET TREMBLING."]

Philips looked up now in wonder, which was greater than his fear.

"Why," he faltered, "you are Potts's friend. You got him to start the bank, and you have advanced him money."

"You are the cashier," said Smithers, calmly. "Can you tell me how much the Brandon Bank owes Smithers & Co?"

Philips looked at the other and hesitated.

"Speak!"

"Two hundred and eighty-nine thousand pounds."

"And if Smithers & Co. chose to demand payment to-morrow, do you think the Brandon Bank would be prompt about it?"

Philips shook his head.

"Then you see that the man whom you fear is not so powerful as some others."

"I thought you were his friend?"

"Do you know who I am?"

"Smithers & Co.," said Philips, wearily.

"Well, let me tell you the plans of Smithers & Co. are beyond your comprehension. Whether they are friends to Potts or not, it seems that they are his creditors to an amount which it would be difficult for him to pay if they chose to demand it."

Philips looked up. He caught sight of the eyes of Smithers, which blazed like two dark, fiery orbs as they were fastened upon him. He shuddered.

"I merely wished to show you the weakness of the man whom you fear. Shall I tell you something else?"

Philips looked up fearfully.

"I have been in York, in Calcutta, and in Manilla: and I know what Potts did in each place. You look frightened. You have every reason to be so. I know what was done at York. I know that you were sent to Botany Bay. I know that you ran away from your father to India. I know your life there. I know how narrowly you escaped going on board the _Vishnu_, and being implicated in the Manilla murder. Madman that you were, why did you not take your poor mother and fly from these wretches forever?"

Philips trembled from head to foot. He said not a word, but bowed his head upon his knees and wept.

"Where is she now?" said Smithers, sternly. Philips mechanically raised his head, and pointed over toward Brandon Hall.

"Is she confined against her will?"

Philips shook his head.

"She stays, then, through love of you?"

Philips nodded.

"Is any one else there?" said Smithers, after a pause, and in a strange, sad voice, in which there was a faltering tone which Philips, in his fright, did not notice.

"Miss Potts," he said.

"She is treated cruelly," said Smithers. "They say she is a prisoner?"

Philips nodded.

"Has she been sick?"

"Yes."

"How long?"

"Eight months, last year."

"Is she well now?"

"Yes."

Smithers bowed his head in silence, and put his hand on his heart. Philips watched him in an agony of fright, as though every instant he was apprehensive of some terrible calamity.

"How is she?" continued Smithers, after a time. "Has she ever been happy since she went there?"

Philips shook his head slowly and mournfully.

"Does her father ever show her any affection?"

"Never."

"Does her brother?"

"Never."

"Is there any one who does?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"Mrs. Compton."

"Your mother?"

"Yes."

"I will not forget that. No, I will never forget that. Do you think that she is exposed to any danger?"

"Miss Potts?"

Smithers bowed.

"I don't know. I sometimes fear so."

"Of what kind?"

"I don't know. Almost any horrible thing may happen in that horrible place."

A pang of agony shot across the sombre brow of Smithers. He was silent for a long time.

"Have you ever slighted her?" he asked at last.

"Never," cried Philips. "I could worship her--"

Smithers smiled upon him with a smile so sweet that it chased all Philips's fears away. He took courage and began to show more calm. "Fear nothing," said Smithers, in a gentle voice. "I see that in spite of your follies and crimes there is something good in you yet. You love your mother, do you not?"

Tears came into Philips's eyes. He sighed. "Yes," he said, humbly.

"And you are kind to _her_--that other one?"

"I love her as my mother," said Philips, earnestly.

Smithers again relapsed into silence for a long time. At last he looked up. Philips saw his eyes this time, no longer stern and wrathful, but benignant and indulgent.

"You have been all your life under the power of merciless men," said he. "You have been led by them into folly and crime and suffering. Often you have been forced to act against your will. Poor wretch! I can save you, and I intend to do so in spite of yourself. You fear these masters of yours. You must know now that I, not they, am to be feared. They know your secret but dare not use it against you. I know it, and can use it if I choose. You have been afraid of them all your life. Fear them no longer, but fear me. These men whom you fear are in my power as well as you are. I know all their secrets--there is not a crime of theirs of which you know that I do not know also, and I know far more.

"You must from this time forth be my agent. Smithers & Co. have agents in all parts of the world. You shall be their agent in Brandon Hall. You shall say nothing of this interview to any one, not even to your mother --you shall not dare to communicate with me unless you are requested, except about such things as I shall specify. If you dare to shrink in any one point from your duty, at that instant I will come down upon you with a heavy hand. You, too, are watched. I have other agents here in Brandon besides yourself. Many of those who go to the bank as customers are my agents. You can not be false without my knowing it; and when you are false, that moment you shall be handed over to the authorities. Do you hear?"

The face of Smithers was mild, but his tone was stern. It was the warning of a just yet merciful master. All the timid nature of Philips bent in deep subjection before the powerful spirit of this man. He bowed his head in silence.

"Whenever an order comes to you from Smithers & Co. you must obey: if you do not obey instantly whatever it is, it will be at the risk of your life. Do you hear?"

Philips bowed.

"There is only one thing now in which I wish you to do anything. You must send every month a notice directed to Mr. Smithers, Senior, about the health of _his daughter_. Should any sudden danger impend you must at once communicate it. You understand?"

Philips bowed.

"Once more I must warn you always to remember that I am your master. Fail in one single thing, and you perish. Obey me, and you shall be rewarded. Now go!"

Philips rose, and, more dead than alive, tottered from the room.

When he left Smithers locked the door. He then went to the window and stood looking at Brandon Hall, with his stern face softened into sadness. He hummed low words as he stood there--words which once had been sung far away.

Among them were these, with which the strain ended:

"And the sad memory of our life below
Shall but unite us closer evermore;
No net of thine shall loose
Thee from the eternal bond,
Nor shall Revenge have power
To disunite us _there_!"

With a sigh he sat down and buried his face in his hands. His gray hair loosened and fell off as he sat there. At last he raised his head, and revealed the face of a young man whose dark hair showed the gray beard to be false.

Yet when he once more put on his wig none but a most intimate friend with the closest scrutiny could recognize there the features of Louis Brandon.

CHAPTER XXXI.

PAOLO LANGHETTI.

Many weeks passed on, and music still formed the chief occupation in life for Despard and Mrs. Thornton. His journey to Brandon village had been without result. He knew not what to do. The inquiries which he made every where turned out useless. Finally Thornton informed him that it was utterly hopeless, at a period so long after the event, to attempt to do any thing whatever. Enough had been done long ago. Now nothing more could possibly be effected.

Baffled, but not daunted, Despard fell back for the present from his purpose, yet still cherished it and wrote to different quarters for information. Meantime he had to return to his life at Holby, and Mrs. Thornton was still ready to assist him.

So the time went on, and the weeks passed, till one day in March Despard went up as usual.

On entering the parlor he heard voices, and saw a stranger. Mrs. Thornton greeted him as usual and sat down smiling. The stranger rose, and he and Despard looked at one another.

He was of medium size and slight in figure. His brow was very broad and high. His hair was black, and clustered in curls over his head. His eyes were large, and seemed to possess an unfathomable depth, which gave them a certain undefinable and mystic meaning--liquid eyes, yet lustrous, where all the soul seemed to live and show itself--benignant in their glance, yet lofty like the eyes of a being from some superior sphere. His face was thin and shaven close, his lips also were thin, with a perpetual smile of marvelous sweetness and gentleness hovering about them. It was such a face as artists love to give to the Apostle John--the sublime, the divine, the loving, the inspired.

"You do not know him," said Mrs. Thornton. "It is Paolo!"

Despard at once advanced and greeted him with the warmest cordiality.

"I was only a little fellow when I saw you last, and you have changed somewhat since then," said Despard. "But when did you arrive? I knew that you were expected in England, but was not sure that you would come here."

"What! *Teresuola mia*," said Langhetti with a fond smile at his sister. "Were you really not sure, *sorellina*, that I would come to see you first of all? Infidel!" and he shook his head at her, playfully.

A long conversation followed, chiefly about Langhetti's plans. He was going to engage a place in London for his opera, but wished first to secure a singer. Oh, if he only could find Bice--his *Bicina*, the divinest voice that mortal ever heard.

Despard and Mrs. Thornton exchanged glances, and at last Despard told him that there was a person of the same name at Brandon Hall. She was living in a seclusion so strict that it seemed confinement, and there was a mystery about her situation which he had tried without success to fathom.

Langhetti listened with a painful surprise that seemed like positive anguish.

"Then I must go myself. Oh, my *Bicina*--to what misery have you come--But do you say that you have been there?"

"Yes."

"Did you go to the Hall?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I know the man to be a villain indescribable--"

Langhetti thought for a moment, and then said,

"True, he is all that, and perhaps more than you imagine."

"I have done the utmost that can be done!" said Despard.

"Perhaps so; still each one wishes to try for himself, and though I can

scarce hope to be more successful than you, yet I must try, if only for my own peace of mind. Oh, _Bicina cara!_ to think of her sweet and gentle nature being subject to such torments as those ruffians can inflict!

"You do not know how it is," said he at last, very solemnly; "but there are reasons of transcendent importance why Bice should be rescued. I can not tell them; but if I dared mention what I hope, if I only dared to speak my thoughts, you--you," he cried, with piercing emphasis, and in a tone that thrilled through Despard, to whom he spoke, "you would make it the aim of all your life to save her."

"I do not understand," said Despard, in astonishment.

"No, no," murmured Langhetti. "You do not; nor dare I explain what I mean. It has been in my thoughts for years. It was brought to my mind first in Hong Kong, when she was there. Only one person besides Potts can explain; only one."

"Who?" cried Despard, eagerly.

"A woman named Compton."

"Compton!"

"Yes. Perhaps she is dead. Alas, and alas, and alas, if she is! Yet could I but see that woman, I would tear the truth from her if I perished in the attempt!"

And Langhetti stretched out his long, slender hand, as though he were plucking out the very heart of some imaginary enemy.

"Think, Teresuola," said he, after a while, "if you were in captivity, what would become of my opera? Could I have the heart to think about operas, even if I believed that they contributed to the welfare of the world, if your welfare was at stake? Now you know that next to you stands Bice. I must try and save her--I must give up all. My opera must stand aside till it be God's will that I give it forth. No, the one object of my life now must be to find Bice, to see her or to see Mrs. Compton, if she is alive."

"Is the secret of so much importance?" asked Despard.

Langhetti looked at him with mournful meaning.

Despard looked at him wonderingly. What could he mean? How could any one affect him? His peace of mind! That had been lost long ago. And if this secret was so terrible it would distract his mind from its grief, its care, and its longing. Peace would be restored rather than destroyed.

"I must find her. I must find her," said Langhetti, speaking half to himself. "I am weak; but much can be done by a resolute will."

"Perhaps Mr. Thornton can assist you," said Despard.

Langhetti shook his head.

"No; he is a man of law, and does not understand the man who acts from feeling. I can be as logical as he, but I obey impulses which are

unintelligible to him. He would simply advise me to give up the matter, adding, perhaps, that I would do myself no good. Whereas he can not understand that it makes no difference to me whether I do myself good or not; and again, that the highest good that I can do myself is to seek after her."

Mrs. Thornton looked at Despard, but he avoided her glance.

"No," said Langhetti, "I will ask assistance from another--from you, Despard. You are one who acts as I act. Come with me."

"When?"

"To-morrow morning."

"I will."

"Of course you will. You would not be a Despard if you did not. You would not be the son of your father--your father!" he repeated, in thrilling tones, as his eyes flashed with enthusiasm. "Despard!" he cried, after a pause, "your father was a man whom you might pray to now. I saw him once. Shall I ever forget the day when he calmly went to lay down his life for my father? Despard, I worship your father's memory. Come with me. Let us emulate those two noble men who once before rescued a captive. We can not risk our lives as they did. Let us at least do what we can."

"I will do exactly what you say. You can think and I will act."

"No, you must think too. Neither of us belong to the class of practical men whom the world now delights to honor; but no practical man would go on our errand. No practical man would have rescued my father. Generous and lofty acts must always be done by those who are not practical men."

"But I must go out. I must think," he continued. "I will go and walk about the grounds."

Saying this he left the room.

"Where is Edith Brandon?" asked Despard, after he had gone.

"She is here," said Mrs. Thornton.

"Have you seen her?"

"Yes."

"Is she what you anticipated?"

"More. She is incredible. She is almost unearthly. I feel awe of her, but not fear. She is too sweet to inspire fear."

CHAPTER XXXII.

FLIGHT.

The last entry in Beatrice's journal was made by her in the hope that it might be the last.

In her life at Brandon Hall her soul had grown stronger and more resolute. Besides, it had now come to this, that henceforth she must either stay and accept the punishment which they might contrive or fly instantly.

For she had dared them to their faces; she had told them of their crimes; she had threatened punishment. She had said that she was the avenger of Despard. If she had desired instant death she could have said no more than that. Would they pass it by? She knew their secret--the secret of secrets; she had proclaimed it to their faces. She had called Potts a Thug and disowned him as her father; what now remained?

But one thing--flight. And this she was fully resolved to try. She prepared nothing. To gain the outside world was all she wished. The need of money was not thought of; nor if it had been would it have made any difference. She could not have obtained it.

The one idea in her mind was therefore flight. She had concealed her journal under a looser piece of the flooring in one of the closets of her room, being unwilling to encumber herself with it, and dreading the result of a search in case she was captured.

She made no other preparations whatever. A light hat and a thin jacket were all that she took to resist the chill air of March. There was a fever in her veins which was heightened by excitement and suspense.

Mrs. Compton was in her room during the evening. Beatrice said but little. Mrs. Compton talked drearily about the few topics on which she generally spoke. She never dared talk about the affairs of the house.

Beatrice was not impatient, for she had no idea of trying to escape before midnight. She sat silently while Mrs. Compton talked or prosed, absorbed in her own thoughts and plans. The hours seemed to her interminable. Slowly and heavily they dragged on. Beatrice's suspense and excitement grew stronger every moment, yet by a violent effort she preserved so perfect an outward calm that a closer observer than Mrs. Compton would have failed to detect any emotion.

At last, about ten o'clock, Mrs. Compton retired, with many kind wishes to Beatrice, and many anxious counsels as to her health. Beatrice listened patiently, and made some general remarks, after which Mrs. Compton withdrew.

She was now left to herself, and two hours still remained before she could dare to venture. She paced the room fretfully and anxiously, wondering why it was that the time seemed so long, and looking from time to time at her watch in the hope of finding that half an hour had passed, but seeing to her disappointment that only two or three minutes had gone.

At last eleven o'clock came. She stole out quietly into the hall and went to the top of the grand stairway. There she stood and listened.

The sound of voices came up from the dining-room, which was near the hall-door. She knew to whom those voices belonged. Evidently it was not

yet the time for her venture.

She went back, controlling her excitement as best she might. At last, after a long, long suspense, midnight sounded.

Again she went to the head of the stairway. The voices were still heard. They kept late hours down there. Could she try now, while they were still up? Not yet.

Not yet. The suspense became agonizing. How could she wait? But she went back again to her room, and smothered her feelings until one o'clock came.

Again she went to the head of the stairway. She heard nothing. She could see a light streaming from the door of the dining-hall below. Lights, also, were burning in the hall itself; but she heard no voices.

Softly and quietly she went down stairs. The lights flashed out through the door of the dining-room into the hall; and as she arrived at the foot of the stairs she heard subdued voices in conversation. Her heart beat faster. They were all there! What if they now discovered her! What mercy would they show her, even if they were capable of mercy?

Fear lent wings to her feet. She was almost afraid to breathe for fear that they might hear her. She stole on quietly and noiselessly up the passage that led to the north end, and at last reached it.

All was dark there. At this end there was a door. On each side was a kind of recess formed by the pillars of the doorway. The door was generally used by the servants, and also by the inmates of the house for convenience.

The key was in it. There was no light in the immediate vicinity. Around it all was gloom. Near by was a stairway, which led to the servants' hall.

She took the key in her hands, which trembled violently with excitement, and turned it in the lock.

Scarcely had she done so when she heard footsteps and voices behind her. She looked hastily back, and, to her horror, saw two servants approaching with a lamp. It was impossible for her now to open the door and go out. Concealment was her only plan.

But how? There was no time for hesitation. Without stopping to think she slipped into one of the niches formed by the projecting pillars, and gathered her skirts close about her so as to be as little conspicuous as possible. There she stood awaiting the result. She half wished that she had turned back. For if she were now discovered in evident concealment what excuse could she give? She could not hope to bribe them, for she had no money. And, what was worst, these servants were the two who had been the most insolent to her from the first.

She could do nothing, therefore, but wait. They came nearer, and at last reached the door.

"Hallo!" said one, as he turned the key. "It's been unlocked!"

"It hain't been locked yet," said the other.

"Yes, it has. I locked it myself an hour ago. Who could have been here?"

"Any one," said the other, quietly. "Our blessed young master has, no doubt, been out this way."

"No, he hasn't. He hasn't stirred from his whisky since eight o'clock."

"Nonsense! You're making a fuss about nothing. Lock the door and come along."

"Any how, I'm responsible, and I'll get a precious overhauling if this thing goes on. I'll take the key with me this time."

And saying this, the man locked the door and took out the key. Both of them then descended to the servants' hall.

The noise of that key as it grated in the lock sent a thrill through the heart of the trembling listener. It seemed to take all hope from her. The servants departed. She had not been discovered. But what was to be done? She had not been prepared for this.

She stood for some time in despair. She thought of other ways of escape. There was the hall-door, which she did not dare to try, for she would have to pass directly in front of the dining-room. Then there was the south door at the other end of the building, which was seldom used. She knew of no others. She determined to try the south door.

Quietly and swiftly she stole away, and glided, like a ghost, along the entire length of the building. It was quite dark at the south end as it had been at the north. She reached the door without accident.

There was no key in it. It was locked. Escape by that way was impossible.

She stood despairing. Only one way was now left, and that lay through the hall-door itself.

Suddenly, as she stood there, she heard footsteps. A figure came down the long hall straight toward her. There was not the slightest chance of concealment here. There were no pillars behind which she might crouch. She must stand, then, and take the consequences. Or, rather, would it not be better to walk forward and meet this new-comer? Yes; that would be best. She determined to do so.

So, with a quiet, slow step she walked back through the long corridor. About half-way she met the other. He stopped and started back.

"Miss Potts!" he exclaimed, in surprise.

It was the voice of Philips.

"Ah, Philips," said she, quietly, "I am walking about for exercise and amusement. I can not sleep. Don't be startled. It's only me."

Philips stood like one paralyzed.

"Don't be cast down," he said at last, in a trembling voice. "You have friends, powerful friends. They will save you."

"What do you mean?" asked Beatrice, in wonder.

"Never mind," said Philips, mysteriously. "It will be all right. I dare not tell. But cheer up."

"What do you mean by friends?"

"You have friends who are more powerful than your enemies, that's all," said Philips, hurriedly. "Cheer up."

Beatrice wondered. A vague thought of Brandon came over her mind, but she dismissed it at once. Yet the thought gave her a delicious joy, and at once dispelled the extreme agitation which had thus far disturbed her. Could Philips be connected with him? Was he in reality considerate about her while shaping the course of his gloomy vengeance? These were the thoughts which flashed across her mind as she stood.

"I don't understand," said she, at last; "but I hope it may be as you say. God knows, I need friends!"

She walked away, and Philips also went onward. She walked slowly, until at last his steps died out in the distance. Then a door banged. Evidently she had nothing to fear from him. At last she reached the main hall, and stopped for a moment. The lights from the dining-room were still flashing out through the door. The grand entrance lay before her. There was the door of the hall, the only way of escape that now remained. Dare she try it?

She deliberated long. Two alternatives lay before her--to go back to her own room, or to try to pass that door. To go back was as repulsive as death, in fact more so. If the choice had been placed full before her then, to die on the spot or to go back to her room, she would have deliberately chosen death. The thought of returning, therefore, was the last upon which she could dwell, and that of going forward was the only one left. To this she gave her attention.

At last she made up her mind, and advanced cautiously, close by the wall, toward the hall-door. After a time she reached the door of the dining-room. Could she venture to pass it, and how? She paused. She listened. There were low voices in the room. Then they were still awake, still able to detect her if she passed the door.

She looked all around. The hall was wide. On the opposite side the wall was but feebly lighted. The hall lights had been put out, and those which shone from the room extended forward but a short distance. It was just possible therefore to escape observation by crossing the doorway along the wall that was most distant from it.

Yet before she tried this she ventured to put forward her head so as to peep into the room. She stooped low and looked cautiously and slowly.

The three were there at the farthest end of the room. Bottles and glasses stood before them, and they were conversing in low tones. Those tones, however, were not so low but that they reached her ears. They were speaking about her.

"How could she have found it out?" said Clark.

"Mrs. Compton only knows _one thing_, " said Potts, "and that is _the secret about her_. She knows nothing more. How could she?"

"Then how could that cursed girl have found out about the Thug business?" exclaimed John.

There was no reply.

"She's a deep one," said John, "d--d deep--deeper than I ever thought. I always said she was plucky--cursed plucky--but now I see she's deep too--and I begin to have my doubts about the way she ought to be took down."

"I never could make her out," said Potts. "And now I don't even begin to understand how she could know that which only we have known. Do you think, Clark, that the devil could have told her of it?"

"Yes," said Clark. "Nobody but the devil could have told her that, and my belief is that she's the devil himself. She's the only person I ever felt afraid of. D--n it, I can't look her in the face."

Beatrice retreated and passed across to the opposite wall. She did not wish to see or hear more. She glided by. She was not noticed. She heard John's voice--sharp and clear--

"We'll have to begin to-morrow and take her down--that's a fact." This was followed by silence.

Beatrice reached the door. She turned the knob. Oh, joy! it was not locked. It opened.

Noiselessly she passed through; noiselessly she shut it behind her. She was outside. She was free.

The moon shone brightly. It illumined the lawn in front and the tops of the clumps of trees whose dark foliage rose before her. She saw all this; yet, in her eagerness to escape, she saw nothing more, but sped away swiftly down the steps, across the lawn, and under the shade of the trees.

Which way should she go? There was the main avenue which led in a winding direction toward the gate and the porter's lodge. There was also another path which the servants generally took. This led to the gate also. Beatrice thought that by going down this path she might come near the gate and then turn off to the wall and try and climb over.

A few moments of thought were sufficient for her decision. She took the path and went hurriedly along, keeping on the side where the shadow was thickest.

She walked swiftly, until at length she came to a place where the path ended. It was close by the porter's lodge. Here she paused to consider.

Late as it was there were lights in the lodge and voices at the door. Some one was talking with the porter. Suddenly the voices ceased and a man came walking toward the place where she stood.

To dart into the thick trees where the shadow lay deepest was the work of a moment. She stood and watched. But the underbrush was dense, and

the crackling which she made attracted the man's attention. He stopped for a moment, and then rushed straight toward the place where she was.

Beatrice gave herself up for lost. She rushed on wildly, not knowing where she went. Behind her was the sound of her pursuer. He followed resolutely and relentlessly. There was no refuge for her but continued flight.

Onward she sped, and still onward, through the dense underbrush, which at every step gave notice of the direction which she had taken. Perhaps if she had been wiser she would have plunged into some thick growth of trees into the midst of absolute darkness and there remained still. As it was she did not think of this. Escape was her only thought, and the only way to this seemed to be by flight.

So she fled; and after her came her remorseless, her un pitying pursuer, fear lent wings to her feet. She fled on through the underbrush that crackled as she passed and gave notice of her track through the dark, dense groves; yet still amidst darkness and gloom her pursuer followed.

[Illustration: "ONWARD SHE SPED, AND STILL ONWARD, THROUGH THE DENSE UNDERBRUSH."]

At last, through utter weakness and weariness, she sank down. Despair came over her. She could do no more.

The pursuer came up. So dense was the gloom in that thick grove that for some time he could not find her. Beatrice heard the crackling of the underbrush all around. He was searching for her.

She crouched down low and scarcely dared to breathe. She took refuge in the deep darkness, and determined to wait till her pursuer might give up his search. At last all was still.

Beatrice thought that he had gone. Yet in her fear she waited for what seemed to her an interminable period. At last she ventured to make a movement. Slowly and cautiously she rose to her feet and advanced. She did not know what direction to take; but she walked on, not caring where she went so long as she could escape pursuit.

Scarcely had she taken twenty steps when she heard a noise. Some one was moving. She stood still, breathless. Then she thought she had been mistaken. After waiting a long time she went on as before. She walked faster. The noise came again. It was close by. She stood still for many minutes.

Suddenly she bounded up, and ran as one runs for life. Her long rest had refreshed her. Despair gave her strength. But the pursuer was on her track. Swiftly, and still more swiftly, his footsteps came up behind her. He was gaining on her. Still she rushed on.

At last a strong hand seized her by the shoulder, and she sank down upon the moss that lay under the forest trees.

"Who are you?" cried a familiar voice.

"Vijal!" cried Beatrice.

The other let go his hold.

"Will you betray me?" cried Beatrice, in a mournful and despairing voice.

Vijal was silent.

"What do you want?" said he, at last. "Whatever you want to do I will help you. I will be your slave."

"I wish to escape."

"Come then--you shall escape," said Vijal.

Without uttering another word he walked on and Beatrice followed. Hope rose once more within her. Hope gave strength. Despair and its weakness had left her. After about half an hour's walk they reached the park wall.

"I thought it was a poacher," said Vijal, sadly; "yet I am glad it was you, for I can help you. I will help you over the wall."

He raised her up. She clambered to the top, where she rested for a moment.

"God bless you, Vijal, and good-by!" said she.

Vijal said nothing.

The next moment she was on the other side. The road lay there. It ran north away from the village. Along this road Beatrice walked swiftly.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"PICKED UP ADRIFT."

On the morning following two travelers left a small inn which lay on the road-side, about ten miles north of Brandon. It was about eight o'clock when they took their departure, driving in their own carriage at a moderate pace along the road.

"Look, Langhetti," said the one who was driving, pointing with his whip to an object in the road directly in front of them.

Langhetti raised his head, which had been bowed down in deep abstraction, to look in the direction indicated. A figure was approaching them. It looked like a woman. She walked very slowly, and appeared rather to stagger than to walk.

"She appears to be drunk, Despard," said Langhetti. "Poor wretch, and on this bleak March morning too! Let us stop and see if we can do any thing for her."

They drove on, and as they met the woman Despard stopped.

She was young and extraordinarily beautiful. Her face was thin and

white. Her clothing was of fine materials but scanty and torn to shreds. As they stopped she turned her large eyes up despairingly and stood still, with a face which seemed to express every conceivable emotion of anguish and of hope. Yet as her eyes rested on Langhetti a change came over her. The deep and unutterable sadness of her face passed away, and was succeeded by a radiant flash of joy. She threw out her arms toward him with a cry of wild entreaty.

The moment that Langhetti saw her he started up and stood for an instant as if paralyzed. Her cry came to his ears. He leaped from the carriage toward her, and caught her in his arms.

"Oh, Bice! Alas, my Bicina!" he cried, and a thousand fond words came to his lips.

Beatrice looked up with eyes filled with grateful tears; her lips murmured some inaudible sentences; and then, in this full assurance of safety, the resolution that had sustained her so long gave way altogether. Her eyes closed, she gave a low moan, and sank senseless upon his breast.

Langhetti supported her for a moment, then gently laid her down to try and restore her. He chafed her hands, and did all that is usually done in such emergencies. But here the case was different--it was more than a common faint, and the animation now suspended was not to be restored by ordinary efforts.

Langhetti bowed over her as he chafed her hands. "Ah, my Bicina," he cried; "is it thus I find you! Ah, poor thin hand! Alas, white wan face! What suffering has been yours, pure angel, among those fiends of hell!"

He paused, and turned a face of agony toward Despard. But as he looked at him he saw a grief in his countenance that was only second to his own. Something in Beatrice's appearance had struck him with a deeper feeling than that merely human interest which the generous heart feels in the sufferings of others.

"Langhetti," said he, "let us not leave this sweet angel exposed to this bleak wind. We must take her back to the inn. We have gained our object. Alas! the gain is worse than a failure."

"What can we do?"

"Let us put her in the carriage between us, and drive back instantly."

Despard stooped as he spoke, raised her reverently in his arms, and lifted her upon the seat. He sprang in and put his arms around her senseless form, so as to support her against himself. Langhetti looked on with eyes that were moist with a sad yet mysterious feeling.

Then he resumed his place in the carriage.

"Oh, Langhetti!" said Despard, "what is it that I saw in the face of this poor child that so wrings my heart? What is this mystery of yours that you will not tell?"

"I can not solve it," said Langhetti, "and therefore I will not tell it."

"Tell it, whatever it is."

"No, it is only conjecture as yet, and I will not utter it."

"And it affects me?"

"Deeply."

"Therefore tell it."

"Therefore I must not tell it; for if it prove baseless I shall only excite your feeling in vain."

"At any rate let me know. For I have the wildest fancies, and I wish to know if it is possible that they are like your own."

"No, Despard," said Langhetti. "Not now. The time may come, but it has not yet."

Beatrice's head leaned against Despard's shoulder as she reclined against him, sustained by his arm. Her face was upturned; a face as white as marble, her pure Grecian features showing now their faultless lines like the sculptured face of some goddess. Her beauty was perfect in its classic outline. But her eyes were closed, and her wan, white lips parted; and there was a sorrow on her face which did not seem appropriate to one so young.

[Illustration: "HE LEAPED FROM THE CARRIAGE TOWARD HER, AND CAUGHT HER IN HIS ARMS."]

"Look," said Langhetti, in a mournful voice. "Saw you ever in all your life any one so perfectly and so faultlessly beautiful? Oh, if you could but have seen her, as I have done, in her moods of inspiration, when she sang! Could I ever have imagined such a fate as this for her?"

"Oh, Despard!" he continued, after, a pause in which the other had turned his stern face to him without a word--"Oh, Despard! you ask me to tell you this secret. I dare not. It is so wide-spread. If my fancy be true, then all your life must at once be unsettled, and all your soul turned to one dark purpose. Never will I turn you to that purpose till I know the truth beyond the possibility of a doubt."

"I saw that in her face," said Despard, "which I hardly dare acknowledge to myself."

"Do not acknowledge it, then, I implore you. Forget it. Do not open up once more that old and now almost forgotten sorrow. Think not of it even to yourself."

Langhetti spoke with a wild and vehement urgency which was wonderful.

"Do you not see," said Despard, "that you rouse my curiosity to an intolerable degree?"

"Be it so; at any rate it is better to suffer from curiosity than to feel what you must feel if I told you what I suspect."

Had it been any other man than Langhetti Despard would have been offended. As it was he said nothing, but began to conjecture as to the

best course for them to follow.

"It is evident," said he to Langhetti, "that she has escaped from Brandon Hall during the past night. She will, no doubt, be pursued. What shall we do? If we go back to this inn they will wonder at our bringing her. There is another inn a mile further on."

"I have been thinking of that," replied Langhetti. "It will be better to go to the other inn. But what shall we say about her? Let us say she is an invalid going home."

"And am I her medical attendant?" asked Despard.

"No; that is not necessary. You are her guardian--the Rector of Holby, of course--your name is sufficient guarantee."

"Oh," said Despard, after a pause, "I'll tell you something better yet. I am her brother and she is my sister--Miss Despard."

As he spoke he looked down upon her marble face. He did not see Langhetti's countenance. Had he done so he would have wondered. For Langhetti's eyes seemed to seek to pierce the very soul of Despard. His face became transformed. Its usual serenity vanished, and there was eager wonder, intense and anxious curiosity--an endeavor to see if there was not some deep meaning underlying Despard's words. But Despard showed no emotion. He was conscious of no deep meaning. He merely murmured to himself as he looked down upon the unconscious face:

"My sick sister--my sister Beatrice."

Langhetti said not a word, but sat in silence, absorbed in one intense and wondering gaze. Despard seemed to dwell upon this idea, fondly and tenderly.

"She is not one of that brood," said he, after a pause. "It is in name only that she belongs to them."

"They are fiends and she is an angel," said Langhetti.

"Heaven has sent her to us; we must preserve her forever."

"If she lives," said Langhetti, "she must never go back."

"Go back!" cried Despard. "Better far for her to die."

"I myself would die rather than give her up."

"And I, too. But we will not. I will adopt her. Yes, she shall cast away the link that binds her to these accursed ones--her vile name. I will adopt her. She shall have my name--she shall be my sister. She shall be Beatrice Despard."

"And surely," continued Despard, looking tenderly down, "surely, of all the Despard race there was never one so beautiful and so pure as she."

Langhetti did not say a word, but looked at Despard and the one whom he thus called his adopted sister with an emotion which he could not control. Tears started to his eyes; yet over his brow there came something which is not generally associated with tears--a lofty,

exultant expression, an air of joy and peace.

"Your sister," said Despard, "shall nurse her back to health. She will do so for your sake, Langhetti--or rather from her own noble and generous instincts. In Thornton Grange she will, perhaps, find some alleviation for the sorrows which she may have endured. Our care shall be around her, and we can all labor together for her future welfare."

They at length reached the inn of which they had spoken, and Beatrice was tenderly lifted out and carried up stairs. She was mentioned as the sister of the Rev. Mr. Despard, of Holby, who was bringing her back from the sea-side, whither she had gone for her health. Unfortunately, she had been too weak for the journey.

The people of the inn showed the kindest attention and warmest sympathy. A doctor was sent for, who lived at a village two miles farther on.

Beatrice recovered from her faint, but remained unconscious. The doctor considered that her brain was affected. He shook his head solemnly over it; as doctors always do when they have nothing in particular to say. Both Langhetti and Despard knew more about her case than he did.

They saw that rest was the one thing needed. But rest could be better attained in Holby than here; and besides, there was the danger of pursuit. It was necessary to remove her; and that, too, without delay. A closed carriage was procured without much difficulty, and the patient was deposited therein.

A slow journey brought them by easy stages to Holby. Beatrice remained unconscious. A nurse was procured, who traveled with her. The condition of Beatrice was the same which she described in her diary. Great grief and extraordinary suffering and excitement had overtaken the brain, and it had given way. So Despard and Langhetti conjectured.

At last they reached Holby. They drove at once to Thornton Grange.

"What is this?" cried Mrs. Thornton, who had heard nothing from them, and ran out upon the piazza to meet them as she saw them coming.

"I have found Bice," said Langhetti, "and have brought her here."

"Where is she?"

"There," said Langhetti. "I give her to your care--it is for you to give her back to me."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ON THE TRACK.

Beatrice's disappearance was known at Brandon Hall on the following day. The servants first made the discovery. They found her absent from her room, and no one had seen her about the house. It was an unusual thing for her to be out of the house early in the day, and of late for many months she had scarcely ever left her room, so that now her absence at

once excited suspicion. The news was communicated from one to another among the servants. Afraid of Potts, they did not dare to tell him, but first sought to find her by themselves. They called Mrs. Compton, and the fear which perpetually possessed the mind of this poor, timid creature now rose to a positive frenzy of anxiety and dread. She told all that she knew, and that was that she had seen her the evening before as usual, and had left her at ten o'clock.

No satisfaction therefore could be gained from her. The servants tried to find traces of her, but were unable. At length toward evening, on Potts's return from the bank, the news was communicated to him.

The rage of Potts need not be described here. That one who had twice defied should now escape him filled him with fury. He organized all his servants into bands, and they scoured the grounds till darkness put an end to these operations.

That evening Potts and his two companions dined in moody silence, only conversing by fits and starts.

"I don't think she's killed herself," said Potts, in reply to an observation of Clark. "She's got stuff enough in her to do it, but I don't believe she has. She's playing a deeper game. I only wish we could fish up her dead body out of some pond; it would quiet matters down very considerable."

"If she's got off she's taken with her some secrets that won't do us any good," remarked John.

"The devil of it is," said Potts, "we don't know how much she does know. She must know a precious lot, or she never would have dared to say what she did."

"But how could she get out of the park?" said Clark. "That wall is too high to climb over, and the gates are all locked."

"It's my opinion," exclaimed John, "that she's in the grounds yet."

Potts shook his head.

"After what she told me it's my belief she can do any thing. Why, didn't she tell us of crimes that were committed before she was born? I begin to feel shaky, and it is the girl that has made me so."

Potts rose to his feet, plunged his hands deep into his pockets, and walked up and down. The others sat in gloomy silence.

"Could that Hong Kong nurse of hers have told her any thing?" asked John.

"She didn't know any thing to tell."

"Mrs. Compton must have blown, then."

"Mrs. Compton didn't know. I tell you that there is not one human being living that knows what she told us besides ourselves and her. How the devil she picked it up I don't know."

"I didn't like the cut of her from the first," said John. "She had a way

of looking that made me feel uneasy, as though there was something in her that would some day be dangerous. I didn't want you to send for her."

"Well, the mischief's done now."

"You're not going to give up the search, are you?" asked Clark.

"Give it up! Not I."

"We must get her back."

"Yes; our only safety now is in catching her again at all hazards."

There was a long silence.

"Twenty years ago," said Potts, moodily, "the Vishnu drifted away, and since the time of the trial no one has mentioned it to me till that girl did."

"And she is only twenty years old," rejoined John.

"I tell you, lads, you've got the devil to do with when you tackle her," remarked Clark; "but if she is the devil we must fight it out and crush her."

"Twenty-three years," continued Potts, in the same gloomy tone--"twenty-three years have passed since I was captured with my followers. No one has mentioned that since. No one in all the world knows that I am the only Englishman that ever joined the Thugs except that girl."

"She must know every thing that we have done," said Clark.

"Of course she must."

"Including our Brandon enterprise," said John.

"And including your penmanship," said Clark; "enough, lad, to stretch a neck."

"Come," said Potts, "don't let us talk of this, any how."

Again they relapsed into silence.

"Well!" exclaimed John, at last, "what are you going to do to-morrow?"

"Chase her till I find her," replied Potts, savagely.

"But where?"

"I've been thinking of a plan which seems to me to be about the thing."

"What?"

"A good old plan," said Potts. "Your pup, Johnnie, can help us."

John pounded his fist on the table with savage exultation.

"My blood-hound! Good, old Dad, what a trump you are to think of that!"

"He'll do it!"

"Yes," said John, "if he gets on her track and comes up with her I'm a little afraid that we'll arrive at the spot just too late to save her. It's the best way that I know of for getting rid of the difficulty handsomely. Of course we are going after her through anxiety, and the dog is an innocent pup who comes with us; and if any disaster happens we will kill him on the spot."

Potts shook his head moodily. He had no very hopeful feeling about this. He was shaken to the soul at the thought of this stern, relentless girl carrying out into the world his terrific secret.

Early on the following morning they resumed their search after the lost girl. This time the servants were not employed, but the three themselves went forth to try what they could do. With them was the "pup" to which allusion had been made on the previous evening. This animal was a huge blood-hound, which John had purchased to take the place of his bull-dog, and of which he was extravagantly proud. True to his instinct, the hound understood from smelling an article of Beatrice's apparel what it was that he was required to seek, and he went off on her trail out through the front door, down the steps, and up to the grove.

The others followed after. The dog led them down the path toward the gate, and thence into the thick grove and through the underbrush. Scraps of her dress still clung in places to the brushwood. The dog led them round and round wherever Beatrice had wandered in her flight from Vijal. They all believed that they would certainly find her here, and that she had lost her way or at least tried to conceal herself. But at last, to their disappointment, the dog turned away out of the wood and into the path again. Then he led them along through the woods until he reached the Park wall. Here the animal squatted on his haunches, and, lifting up his head, gave a long deep howl.

"What's this?" said Potts.

"Why, don't you see? She's got over the wall somehow. All that we've got to do is to put the dog over, and follow on."

[Illustration: "WHY, DON'T YOU SEE? SHE'S GOT OVER THE WALL SOMEHOW."]

The others at once understood that this must be the case. In a short time they were on the other side of the wall, where the dog found the trail again, and led on while they followed as before.

They did not, however, wish to seem like pursuers. That would hardly be the thing in a country of law and order. They chose to walk rather slowly, and John held the dog by a strap which he had brought with him. They soon found the walk much longer than they had anticipated, and began to regret that they had not come in a carriage. They had gone too far, however, to remedy this now, so they resolved to continue on their way as they were.

"Gad!" said John, who felt fatigued first, "what a walker she is!"

"She's the devil!" growled Clark, savagely.

At last, after about three hours' walk, the dog stopped at a place by

the road-side, and snuffed in all directions. The others watched him anxiously for a long time. The dog ran all around sniffing at the ground, but to no purpose.

He had lost the trail. Again and again he tried to recover it. But his blood-thirsty instinct was completely at fault. The trail had gone, and at last the animal came up to his master and crouched down at his feet with a low moan.

"Sold!" cried John, with a curse.

"What can have become of her?" said Potts.

"I don't know," said John. "I dare say she's got took up in some wagon. Yes, that's it. That's the reason why the trail has gone."

"What shall we do now? We can't follow. It may have been the coach, and she may have got a lift to the nearest railway station."

"Well," said John, "I'll tell you what we can do. Let one of us go to the inns that are nearest, and ask if there was a girl in the coach that looked like her, or make any inquiries that may be needed. We could find out that much at any rate."

The others assented. John swore he was too tired. At length, after some conversation, they all determined to go on, and to hire a carriage back. Accordingly on they went, and soon reached an inn.

Here they made inquiries, but could learn nothing whatever about any girl that had stopped there. Potts then hired a carriage and drove off to the next inn, leaving the others behind. He returned in about two hours. His face bore an expression of deep perplexity.

"Well, what luck, dad?" asked John.

"There's the devil to pay," growled Potts.

"Did you find her?"

"There is a girl at the next inn, and it's her. Now what name do you think they call her by?"

"What?"

"Miss Despard."

Clark turned pale and looked at John, who gave a long, low whistle.

"Is she alone?" asked John.

"No--that's the worst of it. A reverend gent is with her, who has charge of her, and says he is her brother."

"Who?"

"His name is Courtenay Despard, son of Colonel Lionel Despard," said Potts.

The others returned his look in utter bewilderment.

"I've been thinking and thinking," said Potts, "but I haven't got to the bottom of it yet. We can't do any thing just now, that's evident. I found out that this reverend gent is on his way to Holby, where he is rector. The only thing left for us to do is to go quietly home and look about us."

"It seems to me that this is like the beginning of one of those monsoon storms," said Clark, gloomily.

The others said nothing. In a short time they were on their way back, moody and silent.

CHAPTER XXXV.

BEATRICE'S RECOVERY.

It was not easy for the overtasked and overworn powers of Beatrice to rally. Weeks passed before she opened her eyes to a recognition of the world around her. It was March when she sank down by the road-side. It was June when she began to recover from the shock of the terrible excitement through which she had passed.

Loving hearts sympathized with her, tender hands cared for her, vigilant eyes watched her, and all that love and care could do were unremittingly exerted for her benefit.

As Beatrice opened her eyes after her long unconsciousness she looked around in wonder, recognizing nothing. Then they rested in equal wonder upon one who stood by her bedside.

She was slender and fragile in form, with delicate features, whose fine lines seemed rather like ideal beauty than real life. The eyes were large, dark, lustrous, and filled with a wonderful but mournful beauty. Yet all the features, so exquisite in their loveliness, were transcended by the expression that dwelt upon them. It was pure, it was spiritual, it was holy. It was the face of a saint, such a face as appears to the rapt devotee when fasting has done its work, and the quickened imagination grasps at ideal forms till the dwellers in heaven seem to become visible.

In her confused mind Beatrice at first had a faint fancy that she was in another state of existence, and that the form before her was one of those pure intelligences who had been appointed to welcome her there. Perhaps there was some such thought visible upon her face, for the stranger came up to her noiselessly, and stooping down, kissed her.

"You are among friends," said she, in a low, sweet voice. "You have been sick long."

"Where am I?"

"Among loving friends," said the other, "far away from the place where you suffered."

Beatrice sighed.

"I hoped that I had passed away forever," she murmured.

"Not yet, not yet," said the stranger, in a voice of tender yet mournful sweetness, which had in it an unfathomable depth of meaning. "We must wait on here, dear friend, till it be His will to call us."

"And who are you?" asked Beatrice, after a long and anxious look at the face of the speaker.

"My name is Edith Brandon," said the other, gently.

"Brandon!--Edith Brandon!" cried Beatrice, with a vehemence which contrasted strangely with the scarce-audible words with which she had just spoken.

The stranger smiled with the same melancholy sweetness which she had shown before.

"Yes," said she; "but do not agitate yourself, dearest."

"And have you nursed me?"

"Partly. But you are in the house of one who is like an angel in her loving care of you."

"But you--you?" persisted Beatrice; "you did not perish, then, as they said?"

"No," replied the stranger; "it was not permitted me."

"Thank God!" murmured Beatrice, fervently. "_He_ has one sorrow less. Did _he_ save you?"

"He," said Edith, "of whom you speak does not know that I am alive, nor do I know where he is. Yet some day we will perhaps meet. And now you must not speak. You will agitate yourself too much. Here you have those who love you. For the one who brought you here is one who would lay down his life for yours, dearest--he is Paolo Langhetti."

"Langhetti!" said Beatrice. "Oh, God be thanked!"

"And she who has taken you to her heart and home is his sister."

"His sister Teresa, of whom he used to speak so lovingly? Ah! God is kinder to me than I feared. Ah, me! it is as though I had died and have awaked in heaven."

"But now I will speak no more, and you must speak no more, for you will only increase your agitation. Rest, and another time you can ask what you please."

Edith turned away and walked to one of the windows, where she looked out pensively upon the sea.

From this time Beatrice began to recover rapidly. Langhetti's sister seemed to her almost like an old friend since she had been associated with some of her most pleasant memories. An atmosphere of love was

around her: the poor sufferer inhaled the pure and life-giving air, and strength came with every breath.

At length she was able to sit up, and then Langhetti saw her. He greeted her with all the ardent and impassioned warmth which was so striking a characteristic of his impulsive and affectionate nature. Then she saw Despard.

There was something about this man which filled her with indefinable emotions. The knowledge which she had of the mysterious fate of his father did not repel her from him. A wonderful and subtle sympathy seemed at once to arise between the two. The stern face of Despard assumed a softer and more genial expression when he saw her. His tone was gentle and affectionate, almost paternal.

[Illustration: "AS BEATRICE OPENED HER EYES AFTER HER LONG UNCONSCIOUSNESS SHE LOOKED AROUND IN WONDER."]

What was the feeling that arose within her heart toward this man? With the one for her Father who had inflicted on his father so terrible a fate, how did she dare to look him in the face or exchange words with him? Should she not rather shrink away as once she shrank from Brandon?

Yet she did not shrink. His presence brought a strange peace and calm over her soul. His influence was more potent over her than that of Langhetti. In this strange company he seemed to her to be the centre and the chief.

To Beatrice Edith was an impenetrable mystery. Her whole manner excited her deepest reverence and at the same time her strongest curiosity. The fact that she was _his_ sister would of itself have won her heart; but there were other things about her which affected her strangely.

Edith moved among the others with a strange, far-off air, an air at once full of gentle affection, yet preoccupied. Her manner indicated love, yet the love of one who was far above them. She was like some grown person associating with young children whom he loved. "Her soul was like a star and dwelt apart."

Paolo seemed more like an equal; but Paolo himself approached equality only because he could understand her best. He alone could enter into communion with her. Beatrice noticed a profound and unalterable reverence in his manner toward Edith, which was like that which a son might pay a mother, yet more delicate and more chivalrous. All this, however, was beyond her comprehension.

She once questioned Mrs. Thornton, but received no satisfaction. Mrs. Thornton looked mysterious, but shook her head.

"Your brother treats her like a divinity."

"I suppose he thinks she is something more than mortal."

"Do you have that awe of her which I feel?"

"Yes; and so does every one. I feel toward her as though she belonged to another world. She takes no interest in this."

"She nursed me."

"Oh yes! Every act of love or kindness which she can perform she seeks out and does, but now as you grow better she falls back upon herself."

Surrounded by such friends as these Beatrice rapidly regained her strength. Weeks went on, and at length she began to move about, to take long rides and drives, and to stroll through the Park.

During these weeks Paolo made known to her his plans. She embraced them eagerly.

"You have a mission," said he. "It was not for nothing that your divine voice was given to you. I have written my opera under the most extraordinary circumstances. You know what it is. Never have I been able to decide how it should be represented. I have prayed for a Voice. At my time of need you were thrown in my way. My Bice, God has sent you. Let us labor together."

Beatrice grasped eagerly at this idea. To be a singer, to interpret the thoughts of Langhetti, seemed delightful to her. She would then be dependent on no friend. She would be her own mistress. She would not be forced to lead a life of idleness, with her heart preying upon itself. Music would come to her aid. It would be at once the purpose, the employment, and the delight of her life. If there was one thing to her which could alleviate sorrow and grief it was the exultant joy which was created within her by the Divine Art--that Art which alone is common to earth and heaven. And for Beatrice there was this joy, that she had one of those natures which was so sensitive to music that under its power heaven itself appeared to open before her.

All these were lovers of music, and therefore had delights to which common mortals are strangers. To the soul which is endowed with the capacity for understanding the delights of tone there are joys peculiar, at once pure and enduring, which nothing else that this world gives can equal.

Langhetti was the high-priest of this charmed circle. Edith was the presiding or inspiring divinity. Beatrice was the medium of utterance--the Voice that brought down heaven to earth.

Mrs. Thornton and Despard stood apart, the recipients of the sublime effects and holy emotions which the others wrought out within them.

Edith was like the soul.

Langhetti like the mind.

Beatrice resembled the material element by which the spiritual is communicated to man. Hers was the Voice which spoke.

Langhetti thought that they as a trio of powers formed a means of communicating new revelations to man. It was natural indeed that he in his high and generous enthusiasm should have some such thoughts as these, and should look forward with delight to the time when his work should first be performed. Edith, who lived and moved in an atmosphere beyond human feeling, was above the level of his enthusiasm; but Beatrice caught it all, and in her own generous and susceptible nature this purpose of Langhetti produced the most powerful effects.

In the church where Mrs. Thornton and Despard had so often met there was now a new performance. Here Langhetti played, Beatrice sang, Edith smiled as she heard the expression of heavenly ideas, and Despard and Mrs. Thornton found themselves borne away from all common thoughts by the power of that sublime rehearsal.

As time passed and Beatrice grew stronger Langhetti became more impatient about his opera. The voice of Beatrice, always marvelous, had not suffered during her sickness. Nay, if any thing, it had grown better; her soul had gained new susceptibilities since Langhetti last saw her, and since she could understand more and feel more, her expression itself had become more subtle and refined. So that Voice which Langhetti had always called divine had put forth new powers, and be, if he believed himself the High-Priest and Beatrice the Pythian, saw that her inspiration had grown more delicate and more profound.

"We will not set up a new Delphi," said he. "Our revelations are not new. We but give fresh and extraordinary emphasis to old and eternal truths."

In preparing for the great work before them it was necessary to get a name for Beatrice. Her own name was doubly abhorrent--first, from her own life-long hate of it, which later circumstances had intensified; and, secondly, from the damning effect which such a name would have on the fortune of any _artiste_. Langhetti wished her to take his name, but Despard showed an extraordinary pertinacity on this point.

"No," said he, "I am personally concerned in this. I adopted her. She is my sister. Her name is Despard. If she takes any other name I shall consider it as an intolerable slight."

He expressed himself so strongly that Beatrice could not refuse. Formerly she would have considered that it was infamous for her to take that noble name; but now this idea had become weak, and it was with a strange exultation that she yielded to the solicitations of Despard.

Langhetti himself yielded at once. His face bore an expression of delight which seemed inexplicable to Beatrice. She asked him why he felt such pleasure. Was not an Italian name better for a singer? Despard was an English name, and, though aristocratic, was not one which a great singer might have.

"I am thinking of other things, my Bicina," said Langhetti, who had never given up his old, fond, fraternal manner toward her. "It has no connection with art. I do not consider the mere effect of the name for one moment."

"What is it, then, that you do consider?"

"Other things."

"What other things?"

"Not connected with Art," continued Langhetti, evasively. "I will tell you some day when the time comes."

"Now you are exciting my curiosity," said Beatrice, in a low and earnest tone. "You do not know what thoughts you excite within me. Either you

ought not to excite such ideas, or if you do, it is your duty to satisfy them."

"It is not time yet."

"What do you mean by that?"

"That is a secret."

"Of course; you make it one; but if it is one connected with me, then surely I ought to know."

"It is not time yet for you to know."

"When will it be time?"

"I can not tell."

"And you will therefore keep it a secret forever?"

"I hope, my Bicina, that the time will come before long."

"Yet why do you wait, if you know or even suspect any thing in which I am concerned?"

"I wish to spare you."

"That is not necessary. Am I so weak that I can not bear to hear any thing which you may have to tell? You forget what a life I have had for two years. Such a life might well prepare me for any thing."

"If it were merely something which might create sorrow I would tell it. I believe that you have a self-reliant nature, which has grown stronger through affliction. But that which I have to tell is different. It is of such a character that it would of necessity destroy any peace of mind which you have, and fill you with hopes and feelings that could never be satisfied."

"Yet even that I could bear. Do you not see that by your very vagueness you are exciting my thoughts and hopes? You do not know what I know."

"What do you know?" asked Langhetti, eagerly.

Beatrice hesitated. No; she could not tell. That would be to tell all the holiest secrets of her heart. For she must then tell about Brandon, and the African island, and the manuscript which he carried and which had been taken from his bosom. Of this she dared not speak.

She was silent.

"You can not know any thing," said Langhetti. "You may suspect much. I only have suspicions. Yet it would not be wise to communicate these to you, since they would prove idle and without result." So the conversation ended, and Langhetti still maintained his secret, though Beatrice hoped to find it out.

At length she was sufficiently recovered to be able to begin the work to which Langhetti wished to lead her. It was August, and Langhetti was impatient to be gone. So when August began he made preparations to

depart, and in a few days they were in London. Edith was left with Mrs. Thornton. Beatrice had an attendant who went with her, half chaperon half lady's maid.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE AFFAIRS OF SMITHERS & CO.

For more than a year the vast operations of Smithers & Co. had astonished business circles in London. Formerly they had been considered as an eminently respectable house, and as doing a safe business; but of late all this had been changed in so sudden and wonderful a manner that no one could account for it. Leaving aside their old, cautious policy, they undertook without hesitation the largest enterprises. Foreign railroads, national loans, vast joint-stock companies, these were the things that now occupied Smithers & Co. The Barings themselves were outrivalled, and Smithers & Co. reached the acme of their sudden glory on one occasion, when they took the new Spanish loan out of the grasp of even the Rothschilds themselves.

How to account for it became the problem. For, allowing the largest possible success in their former business to Smithers & Co., that business had never been of sufficient dimensions to allow of this. Some said that a rich Indian had become a sleeping partner, others declared that the real Smithers was no more to be seen, and that the business was managed by strangers who had bought them out and retained their name. Others again said that Smithers & Co. had made large amounts in California mining speculations. At length the general belief was, that some individuals who had made millions of money in California had bought out Smithers & Co., and were now doing business under their name. As to their soundness there was no question. Their operations were such as demanded, first of all, ready money in unlimited quantities. This they were always able to command. Between them and the Bank of England there seemed to be the most perfect understanding and the most enviable confidence. The Rothschilds spoke of them with infinite respect. People began to look upon them as the leading house in Europe. The sudden apparition of this tremendous power in the commercial world threw that world into a state of consternation which finally ended in wondering awe.

But Smithers & Co. continued calmly, yet successfully, their great enterprises. The Russian loan of fifteen millions was negotiated by them. They took twenty millions of the French loan, five millions of the Austrian, and two and a half of the Turkish. They took nearly all the stock of the Lyons and Marseilles Railroad. They owned a large portion of the stock of the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company. They had ten millions of East India stock. California alone, which was now dazzling the world, could account to the common mind for such enormous wealth. The strangest thing was that Smithers himself was never seen. The business was done by his subordinates. There was a young man who represented the house in public, and who called himself Henderson. He was a person of distinguished aspect, yet of reserved and somewhat melancholy manner. No one pretended to be in his confidence. No one pretended to know whether he was clerk or partner. As he was the only representative of Smithers & Co., he was treated with marked respect

wherever he appeared.

The young man, whether partner or clerk, had evidently the supreme control of affairs. He swayed in his own hands the thunder-bolts of this Olympian power. Nothing daunted him. The grandeur of his enterprises dazzled the public mind. His calm antagonism to the great houses of London filled them with surprise. A new power had seized a high place in the commercial world, and the old gods--the Rothschilds, the Barings, and others--looked aghast. At first they tried to despise this interloper; at length they found him at least as strong as themselves, and began to fancy that he might be stronger. A few experiments soon taught them that there was no weakness there. On one occasion the Rothschilds, true to their ordinary selfish policy, made a desperate attempt to crush the new house which dared to enter into rivalry with them. Widespread plans were arranged in such a way that large demands were made upon them on one day. The amount was nearly two millions. Smithers & Co. showed not the smallest hesitation. Henderson, their representative, did not even take the trouble to confer with the Bank of England. He sent his orders to the Bank. The money was furnished. It was the Directors of the Bank of England who looked aghast at this struggle between Rothschild and Smithers & Co. The gold in the Bank vaults sank low, and the next day the rates of discount were raised. All London felt the result of that struggle.

Smithers & Co. waited for a few months, and then suddenly retorted with terrific force. The obligations of the Rothschilds were obtained from all quarters--some which were due were held over and not presented till the appointed day. Obligations in many forms--in all the forms of indebtedness that may arise in a vast business--all these had been collected from various quarters with untiring industry and extraordinary outlay of care and money. At last in one day they were all poured upon the Rothschilds. Nearly four millions of money were required to meet that demand.

The great house of Rothschild reeled under the blow. Smithers & Co. were the ones who administered it. James Rothschild had a private interview with the Directors of the Bank of England. There was a sudden and enormous sale of securities that day on Change. In selling out such large amounts the loss was enormous. It was difficult to find purchasers, but Smithers & Co. stepped forward and bought nearly all that was offered. The Rothschilds saved themselves, of course, but at a terrible loss, which became the profits of Smithers & Co.

The Rothschilds retreated from the conflict utterly routed, and glad to escape disaster of a worse kind. Smithers & Co. came forth victorious. They had beaten the Rothschilds at their own game, and had made at least half a million. All London rang with the story. It was a bitter humiliation for that proud Jewish house which for years had never met with a rival. Yet there was no help, nor was there the slightest chance of revenge. They were forced to swallow the result as best they could, and to try to regain what they had lost.

After this the pale and melancholy face of Henderson excited a deeper interest. This was the man who had beaten the Rothschilds--the strongest capitalist in the world. In his financial operations he continued as calm, as grave, and as immovable as ever. He would risk millions without moving a muscle of his countenance. Yet so sagacious was he, so widespread were his agencies, so accurate was his secret information, that his plans scarcely ever failed. His capital was so vast that it often

gave him control of the market. Coming into the field untrammelled as the older houses were, he had a larger control of money than any of them, and far greater freedom of action.

After a time the Rothschilds, the Barings, and other great bankers, began to learn that Smithers & Co. had vast funds every where, in all the capitals of Europe, and in America. Even in the West Indies their operations were extensive. Their old Australian agency was enlarged, and a new banking-house founded by them in Calcutta began to act on the same vast scale as the leading house at London. Smithers & Co. also continued to carry on a policy which was hostile to those older bankers. The Rothschilds in particular felt this, and were in perpetual dread of a renewal of that tremendous assault under which they had once nearly gone down. They became timid, and were compelled to arrange their business so as to guard against this possibility. This, of course, checked their operations, and widened and enlarged the field of action for their rivals.

No one knew any thing whatever about Henderson. None of the clerks could tell any thing concerning him. They were all new hands. None of them had ever seen Smithers. They all believed that Henderson was the junior partner, and that the senior spent his time abroad. From this it began to be believed that Smithers staid in California digging gold, which he diligently remitted to the London house.

At length the clerks began to speak mysteriously of a man who came from time to time to the office, and whose whole manner showed him to possess authority there. The treatment which he received from Henderson--at once cordial and affectionate--showed them to be most intimate and friendly; and from words which were dropped they all thought him to be the senior partner. Yet he appeared to be very little older than Henderson, if as old, and no one even knew his name. If any thing could add to the interest with which the house of Smithers & Co. was regarded it was this impenetrable mystery, which baffled not merely outriders but even the clerks themselves.

Shortly after the departure of Langhetti and Beatrice from Holby two men were seated in the inner parlor of the office of Smithers & Co. One was the man known as Henderson, the other the mysterious senior partner.

They had just come in and letters were lying on the table.

"You've got a large number this morning, Frank?" said the senior partner.

"Yes," said Frank, turning them over; "and here, Louis, is one for you." He took out a letter from the pile and handed it to Louis. "It's from your Brandon Hall correspondent," he added.

Louis sat down and opened it. The letter was as follows:

"August 15, 1840.

"DEAR SIR,--I have had nothing in particular to write since the flight of Miss Potts, except to tell you what they were doing. I have already informed you that they kept three spies at Holby to watch her. One of these returned, as I told you in my last letter, with the information that she had gone to London with a party named Langhetti. Ever since then _they_ have been talking it over, and have come to the

conclusion to get a detective and keep him busy watching her with the idea of getting her back, I think. I hope to God they will not get her back. If you take any interest in her, Sir, as you appear to do, I hope you will use your powerful arm to save her. It will be terrible if she has to come back here. She will die, I know. Hoping soon to have something more to communicate,

"I remain, yours respectfully,

"E.L.

"Mr. Smithers, Sen., London."

[Illustration: "LANGHETTI IS ALIVE."]

Louis read this letter over several times and fell into deep thought.

Frank went on reading his letters, looking up from time to time. At last he put down the last one.

"Louis!" said he.

Louis looked up.

"You came so late last night that I haven't had a chance to speak about any thing yet. I want to tell you something very important."

"Well!"

"Langhetti is alive."

"I know it."

"You knew it! When? Why did you not tell me?"

"I didn't want to tell any thing that might distract you from your purpose."

"I am not a child, Louis! After my victory over Rothschild I ought to be worthy of your confidence."

"That's not the point, Frank," said Louis; "but I know your affection for the man, and I thought you would give up all to find him."

"Well!"

"Well. I thought it would be better to let nothing interpose now between us and our purpose. No," he continued, with a stern tone, "no, no one however dear, however loved, and therefore I said nothing about Langhetti. I thought that your generous heart would only be distressed. You would feel like giving up every thing to find him out and see him, and, therefore, I did not wish you even to know it. Yet I have kept an account of his movements, and know where he is now."

"He is here in London," said Frank, with deep emotion.

"Yes, thank God!" said Louis. "You will see him, and we all will be able to meet some day."

"But," asked Frank, "do you not think Langhetti is a man to be trusted?"

"That is not the point," replied Louis. "I believe Langhetti is one of the noblest men that ever lived. It must be so from what I have heard. All my life I will cherish his name and try to assist him in every possible way. I believe also that if we requested it he might perhaps keep our secret. But that is not the point, Frank. This is the way I look at it: We are dead. Our deaths have been recorded. Louis Brandon and Frank Brandon have perished. I am Wheeler, or Smithers, or Forsyth, or any body else; you are Henderson. We keep our secret because we have a purpose before us. Our father calls us from his tomb to its accomplishment. Our mother summons us. Our sweet sister Edith, from her grave of horror unutterable, calls us. All personal feeling must stand aside, Frank--yours and mine--whatever they be, till we have done our duty."

"You are right, Louis," said Frank, sternly.

"Langhetti is in London," continued Louis. "You will not see him, but you can show your gratitude, and so can I. He is going to hire an opera-house to bring out an opera; I saw that in the papers. It is a thing full of risk, but he perhaps does not think of that. Let us enable him to gain the desire of his heart. Let us fill the house for him. You can send your agents to furnish tickets to people who may make the audience; or you can send around those who can praise him sufficiently. I don't know what his opera may be worth. I know, however, from what I have learned, that he has musical genius; and I think if we give him a good start he will succeed. That is the way to show your gratitude, Frank."

"I'll arrange all that!" said Frank. "The house shall be crowded. I'll send an agent to him--I can easily find out where he is, I suppose--and make him an offer of Covent Garden theatre on his own terms. Yes, Langhetti shall have a fair chance. I'll arrange a plan to enforce success."

"Do so, and you will keep him permanently in London till the time comes when we can arise from the dead."

They were silent for a long time. Louis had thoughts of his own, excited by the letter which he had received, and these thoughts he did not care to utter. One thing was a secret even from Frank.

And what could he do? That Beatrice had fallen among friends he well knew. He had found this out when, after receiving a letter from Philips about her flight, he had hurried there and learned the result. Then he had himself gone to Holby, and found that she was at Mrs. Thornton's. He had watched till she had recovered. He had seen her as she took a drive in Thornton's carriage. He had left an agent there to write him about her when he left.

What was he to do now? He read the letter over again. He paused at that sentence: "They have been talking it over, and have come to the conclusion to get a detective, and keep him busy watching her with the idea of getting her back."

What was the nature of this danger? Beatrice was of age. She was with Langhetti. She was her own mistress. Could there be any danger of her being taken back against her will? The villains at Brandon Hall were sufficiently unscrupulous, but would they dare to commit any violence?

and if they did, would not Langhetti's protection save her?

Such were his thoughts. Yet, on the other hand, he considered the fact that she was inexperienced, and might have peculiar ideas about a father's authority. If Potts came himself, demanding her return, perhaps, out of a mistaken sense of filial duty, she might go with him. Or, even if she was unwilling to do so, she might yield to coercion, and not feel justified in resisting. The possibility of this filled him with horror. The idea of her being taken back to live under the power of those miscreants from whom she had escaped was intolerable. Yet he knew not what to do.

Between him and her there was a gulf unfathomable, impassable. She was one of that accursed brood which he was seeking to exterminate. He would spare her if possible; he would gladly lay down his life to save her from one moment's misery; but if she stood in the way of his vengeance, could he--dared he stay that vengeance? For that he would sacrifice life itself! Would he refuse to sacrifice even _her_ if she were more dear than life itself?

Yet here was a case in which she was no longer connected with, but striving to sever herself from them. She was flying from that accursed father of hers. Would he stand idly by, and see her in danger? That were impossible. All along, ever since his return to England, he had watched over her, unseen himself and unsuspected by her, and had followed her footsteps when she fled. To desert her now was impossible. The only question with him was--how to watch her or guard her.

One thing gave him comfort, and that was the guardianship of Langhetti. This he thought was sufficient to insure her safety. For surely Langhetti would know the character of her enemies as well as Beatrice herself, and so guard her as to insure her safety from any attempt of theirs. He therefore placed his chief reliance on Langhetti, and determined merely to secure some one who would watch over her, and let him know from day to day how she fared. Had he thought it necessary he would have sent a band of men to watch and guard her by day and night; but this idea never entered his mind for the simple reason that he did not think the danger was pressing. England was after all a country of law, and even a father could not carry off his daughter against her will when she was of age. So he comforted himself.

"Well," said he, at last, rousing himself from his abstraction, "how is Potts now?"

"Deeper than ever," answered Frank, quietly.

"The Brandon Bank--"

"The Brandon Bank has been going at a rate that would have foundered any other concern long ago. There's not a man that I sent there who has not been welcomed and obtained all that he wanted. Most of the money that they advanced has been to men that I sent. They drew on us for the money and sent us various securities of their own, holding the securities of these applicants. It is simply bewildering to think how easily that scoundrel fell into the snare."

"When a man has made a fortune easily he gets rid of it easily," said Louis, laconically. "Potts thinks that all his applicants are leading men of the county. I take good care that they go there as baronets at

least. Some are lords. He is overpowered in the presence of these lords, and gives them what they ask on their own terms. In his letters he has made some attempts at an expression of gratitude for our great liberality. This I enjoyed somewhat. The villain is not a difficult one to manage, at least in the financial way. I leave the denouement to you, Louis."

"The denouement must not be long delayed now."

"Well, for that matter things are so arranged that we may have 'the beginning of the end' as soon as you choose."

"What are the debts of the Brandon Bank to us now?"

"Five hundred and fifteen thousand one hundred and fifty pounds," said Frank.

"Five hundred thousand--very good," returned Louis, thoughtfully. "And how is the sum secured?"

"Chiefly by acknowledgments from the bank with the indorsement of John Potts, President."

"What are the other liabilities?"

"He has implored me to purchase for him or sell him some California stock. I have reluctantly consented to do so," continued Frank, with a sardonic smile, "entirely through the request of my senior, and he has taken a hundred shares at a thousand pounds each."

"One hundred thousand pounds," said Louis.

"I consented to take his notes," continued Frank, "purely out of regard to the recommendations of my senior."

"Any thing else?" asked Louis.

"He urged me to recommend him to a good broker who might purchase stock for him in reliable companies. I created a broker and recommended him. He asked me also confidentially to tell him which stocks were best, so I kindly advised him to purchase the Mexican and the Guatemala loan. I also recommended the Venezuela bonds. I threw all these into the market, and by dextrous manipulation raised the price to 3 per cent, premium. He paid L103 for every L100. When he wants to sell out, as he may one day wish to do, he will be lucky if he gets 35 per cent"

"How much did he buy?"

"Mexican loan, fifty thousand; Guatemala, fifty thousand; and Venezuela bonds, fifty thousand."

"He is quite lavish."

"Oh, quite. That makes it so pleasant to do business with him."

"Did you advance the money for this?"

"He did not ask it. He raised the money somehow, perhaps from our old advances, and bought them from the broker. The broker was of course

myself. The beauty of all this is, that I send applicants for money, who give their notes; he gets money from me and gives his notes to me, and then advances the money to these applicants, who bring it back to me. It's odd, isn't it?"

Louis smiled.

"Has he no _bona fide_ debtors in his own county?"

"Oh yes, plenty of them; but more than half of his advances have been made to my men.

"Did you hint any thing about issuing notes?"

"Oh yes, and the bait took wonderfully. He made his bank a bank of issue at once, and sent out a hundred and fifty thousand pounds in notes. I think it was in this way that he got the money for all that American stock. At any rate, it helped him. As he has only a small supply of gold in his vaults, you may very readily conjecture his peculiar position."

Louis was silent for a time.

"You have managed admirably, Frank," said he at last.

"Oh," rejoined Frank, "Potts is very small game, financially. There is no skill needed in playing with him. He is such a clumsy bungler that he does whatever one wishes. There is not even excitement. Whatever I tell him to do he does. Now if I were anxious to crush the Rothschilds, it would be very different. There would then be a chance for skill."

"You have had the chance."

"I did not wish to ruin them," said Frank. "Too many innocent people would have suffered. I only wished to alarm them. I rather think, from what I hear, that they were a little disturbed on that day when they had to pay four millions. Yet I could have crushed them if I had chosen, and I managed things so as to let them see this."

"How?"

"I controlled other engagements of theirs, and on the same day I magnanimously wrote them a letter, saying that I would not press for payment, as their notes were as good to me as money. Had I pressed they would have gone down. Nothing could have saved them. But I did not wish that. The fact is they have locked up their means very much, and have been rather careless of late. They have learned a lesson now."

Louis relapsed into his reflections, and Frank began to answer his letters.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE "PROMETHEUS."

It took some time for Langhetti to make his preparations in London.

September came before he had completed them. To his surprise these arrangements were much easier than he had supposed. People came to him of their own accord before he thought it possible that they could have heard of his project. What most surprised him was a call from the manager of Covent Garden Theatre, who offered to put it into his hands for a price so low as to surprise Langhetti more than any thing else that had occurred. Of course he accepted the offer gratefully and eagerly. The manager said that the building was on his hands, and he did not wish to use it for the present, for which reason he would be glad to turn it over to him. He remarked also that there was very much stock in the theatre that could be made use of, for which he would charge nothing whatever. Langhetti went to see it, and found a large number of magnificently painted scenes, which could be used in his piece. On asking the manager how scenes of this sort came to be there, he learned that some one had been representing the "Midsummer Night's Dream," or something of that sort.

Langhetti's means were very limited, and as he had risked every thing on this experiment he was rejoiced to find events so very greatly in his favor.

Another circumstance which was equally in his favor, if not more so, was the kind consideration of the London papers. They announced his forthcoming work over and over again. Some of their writers came to see him so as to get the particulars, and what little he told them they described in the most attractive and effective manner.

A large number of people presented themselves to form his company, and he also received applications by letter from many whose eminence and fortunes placed them above the need of any such thing. It was simply incomprehensible to Langhetti, who thoroughly understood the ways of the musical world; yet since they offered he was only too happy to accept. On having interviews with these persons he was amazed to find that they were one and all totally indifferent about terms; they all assured him that they were ready to take any part whatever, and merely wished to assist in the representation of a piece so new and so original as his was said to be. They all named a price which was excessively low, and assured him that they did so only for form's sake; positively refusing to accept any thing more, and leaving it to Langhetti either to take them on their own terms or to reject them. He, of course, could not reject aid so powerful and so unexpected.

At length, he had his rehearsal. After various trials he invited representatives of the London Press to be present at the last. They all came, and all without exception wrote the most glowing accounts for their respective journals.

"I don't know how it is," said he to Beatrice. "Every thing has come into my hands. I don't understand it. It seems to me exactly as if there was some powerful, unseen hand assisting me; some one who secretly put every thing in my way, who paid these artists first and then sent them to me, and influenced all the journals in my favor. I should be sure of this if it were not a more incredible thing than the actual result itself. As it is I am simply perplexed and bewildered. It is a thing that is without parallel. I have a company such as no one has ever before gathered together on one stage. I have eminent prima donnas who are quite willing to sing second and third parts without caring what I pay them, or whether I pay them or not. I know the musical world. All I can say is that the thing is unexampled, and I can not comprehend it. I

have tried to find out from some of them what it all means, but they give me no satisfaction. At any rate, my Bicina, you will make your _debut_ under the most favorable circumstances. You saw how they admired your voice at the rehearsal. The world shall admire it still more at your first performance."

Langhetti was puzzled, and, as he said, bewildered, but he did not slacken a single effort to make his opera successful. His exertions were as unrelenting as though he were still struggling against difficulties. After all that had been done for him he knew very well that he was sure of a good house, yet he worked as hard as though his audience was very uncertain.

At length the appointed evening came. Langhetti had certainly expected a good house from those happy accidents which had given him the cooperation of the entire musical world and of the press. Yet when he looked out and saw the house that waited for the rising of the curtain he was overwhelmed.

When he thus looked out it was long before the time. A great murmur had attracted his attention. He saw the house crammed in every part. All the boxes were filled. In the pit was a vast congregation of gentlemen and ladies, the very galleries were thronged.

The wonder that had all along filled him was now greater than ever. He well knew under what circumstances even an ordinarily good house is collected together. There must either be undoubted fame in the prima donna, or else the most wide-spread and comprehensive efforts on the part of a skillful impresario. His efforts had been great, but not such as to insure any thing like this. To account for the prodigious crowd which filled every part of the large edifice was simply impossible.

He did not attempt to account for it. He accepted the situation, and prepared for the performance.

What sort of an idea that audience may have had of the "Prometheus" of Langhetti need hardly be conjectured. They had heard of it as a novelty. They had heard that the company was the best ever collected at one time, and that the prima donna was a prodigy of genius. That was enough for them. They waited in a state of expectation which was so high-pitched that it would have proved disastrous in the extreme to any piece, or any singer who should have proved to be in the slightest degree inferior. Consummate excellence alone in every part could now save the piece from ruin. This Langhetti felt; but he was calm, for he had confidence in his work and in his company. Most of all, he had confidence in Beatrice.

At last the curtain rose.

The scene was such a one as had never before been represented. A blaze of dazzling light filled the stage, and before it stood seven forms, representing the seven archangels. They began one of the sublimest strains ever heard. Each of these singers had in some way won eminence. They had thrown themselves into this work. The music which had been given to them had produced an exalted effect upon their own hearts, and now they rendered forth that grand "Chorus of Angels" which those who heard the "Prometheus" have never forgotten. The words resembled, in some measure, the opening song in Goethe's "Faust," but the music was Langhetti's.

The effect of this magnificent opening was wonderful. The audience sat spell-bound--hushed into stillness by those transcendent harmonies which seemed like the very song of the angels themselves; like that "new song" which is spoken of in Revelation. The grandeur of Handel's stupendous chords was renewed, and every one present felt its power.

Then came the second scene. Prometheus lay suffering. The ocean nymphs were around him, sympathizing with his woes. The sufferer lay chained to a bleak rock in the summit of frosty Caucasus. Far and wide extended an expanse of ice. In the distance arose a vast world of snow-coveted peaks. In front was a _mer de glace_, which extended all along the stage.

Prometheus addressed all nature--"the divine ether, the swift-winged winds, Earth the All-mother, and the infinite laughter of the ocean waves." The thoughts were those of Aeschylus, expressed by the music of Langhetti.

The ocean nymphs bewailed him in a song of mournful sweetness, whose indescribable pathos touched every heart. It was the intensity of sympathy--sympathy so profound that it became anguish, for the heart that felt it had identified itself with the heart of the sufferer.

Then followed an extraordinary strain. It was the Voice of Universal Nature, animate and inanimate, mourning over the agony of the God of Love. In that strain was heard the voice of man, the sighing of the winds, the moaning of the sea, the murmur of the trees, the wail of bird and beast, all blending in extraordinary unison, and all speaking of woe.

And now a third scene opened. It was Athene. Athene represented Wisdom or Human Understanding, by which the God of Vengeance is dethroned, and gives place to the eternal rule of the God of Love. To but few of those present could this idea of Langhetti's be intelligible. The most of them merely regarded the fable and its music, without looking for any meaning beneath the surface.

To these, and to all, the appearance of Beatrice was like a new revelation. She came forward and stood in the costume which the Greek has given to Athene, but in her hand she held the olive--her emblem--instead of the spear. From beneath her helmet her dark locks flowed down and were wreathed in thick waves that clustered heavily about her head.

Here, as Athene, the pure classical contour of Beatrice's features appeared in marvelous beauty--faultless in their perfect Grecian mould. Her large, dark eyes looked with a certain solemn meaning out upon the vast audience. Her whole face was refined and sublimed by the thought that was within her. In her artistic nature she had appropriated this character to herself so thoroughly, that, as she stood there, she felt herself to be in reality all that she represented. The spectators caught the same feeling from her. Yet so marvelous was her beauty, so astonishing was the perfection of her form and feature, so accurate was the living representation of the ideal goddess that the whole vast audience after one glance burst forth into pealing thunders of spontaneous and irresistible applause.

Beatrice had opened her mouth to begin, but as that thunder of admiration arose she fell back a pace. Was it the applause that had overawed her?

Her eyes were fixed on one spot at the extreme right of the pit. A face was there which enchained her. A face, pale, sad, mournful, with dark eyes fixed on hers in steadfast despair.

Beatrice faltered and fell back, but it was not at the roar of applause. It was that face--the one face among three thousand before her, the one, the only one that she saw. Ah, how in that moment all the past came rushing before her--the Indian Ocean, the Malay pirate, where that face first appeared, the Atlantic, the shipwreck, the long sail over the seas in the boat, the African isle!

She stood so long in silence that the spectators wondered.

Suddenly the face which had so transfixed her sank down. He was gone, or he had hid himself. Was it because he knew that he was the cause of her silence?

The face disappeared, and the spell was broken. Langhetti stood at the side-scenes, watching with deep agitation the silence of Beatrice. He was on the point of taking the desperate step of going forward when he saw that she had regained her composure.

She regained it, and moved a step forward with such calm serenity that no one could have suspected her of having lost it. She began to sing. In an opera words are nothing--music is all in all. It is sufficient if the words express, even in a feeble and general way, the ideas which breathe and burn in the music. Thus it was with the words in the opening song of Beatrice.

But the music! What language can describe it?

Upon this all the richest stores of Langhetti's genius had been lavished. Into this all the soul of Beatrice was thrown with sublime self-forgetfulness. She ceased to be herself. Before the audience she was Athene.

Her voice, always marvelously rich and full, was now grander and more capacious than ever. It poured forth a full stream of matchless harmony that carried all the audience captive. Strong, soaring, penetrating, it rose easily to the highest notes, and flung them forth with a lavish, and at the same time far-reaching power that penetrated every heart, and thrilled all who heard it. Roused to the highest enthusiasm by the sight of that vast assemblage, Beatrice gave herself up to the intoxication of the hour. She threw herself into the spirit of the piece; she took deep into her heart the thought of Langhetti, and uttered it forth to the listeners with harmonies that were almost divine--such harmonies as they had never before heard.

There was the silence of death as she sang. Her voice stilled all other sounds. Each listener seemed almost afraid to breathe. Some looked at one another in amazement, but most of them sat motionless, with their heads stretched forward, unconscious of any thing except that one voice.

[Illustration: "THE APPEARANCE OF BEATRICE WAS LIKE A NEW REVELATION."]

At last it ceased. For a moment there was a pause. Then there arose a deep, low thunder of applause that deepened and intensified itself every moment till at last it rose on high in one sublime outburst, a frenzy of

acclamation, such as is heard not seldom, but, once heard, is never forgotten.

Beatrice was called out. She came, and retired. Again and again she was called. Flowers were showered down in heaps at her feet. The acclamations went on, and only ceased through the consciousness that more was yet to come. The piece went on. It was one long triumph. At last it ended. Beatrice had been loaded with honors. Langhetti was called out and welcomed with almost equal enthusiasm. His eyes filled with tears of joy as he received this well-merited tribute to his genius. He and Beatrice stood on the stage at the same time. Flowers were flung at him. He took them and laid them at the feet of Beatrice.

At this a louder roar of acclamation arose. It increased and deepened, and the two who stood there felt overwhelmed by the tremendous applause.

So ended the first representation of the "Prometheus!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE SECRET.

The triumph of Beatrice continued. The daily papers were filled with accounts of the new singer. She had come suddenly before them, and had at one bound reached the highest eminence. She had eclipsed all the popular favorites. Her sublime strains, her glorious enthusiasm, her marvelous voice, her perfect beauty, all kindled the popular heart. The people forgave her for not having an Italian name, since she had one which was so aristocratic. Her whole appearance showed that she was something very different from the common order of artistes, as different, in fact, as the "Prometheus" was from the common order of operas. For here in the "Prometheus" there were no endless iterations of the one theme of love, no perpetual repetitions of the same rhyme of _amore_ and _cuore_, or _amor'_ and _cuor'_; but rather the effort of the soul after sublimer mysteries. The "Prometheus" sought to solve the problem of life and of human suffering. Its divine sentiments brought hope and consolation. The great singer rose to the altitude of a sibyl; she uttered inspirations; she herself was inspired.

As she stood with her grand Grecian beauty, her pure classic features, she looked as beautiful as a statue, and as ideal and passionless. In one sense she could never be a popular favorite. She had no archness or coquetry like some, no voluptuousness like others, no arts to win applause like others. Still she stood up and sang as one who believed that this was the highest mission of humanity, to utter divine truth to human ears. She sang loftily, thrillingly, as an angel might sing, and those who saw her revered her while they listened.

And thus it was that the fame of this new singer went quickly through England, and foreign journals spoke of it half-wonderingly, half-cynically, as usual; for Continentals never have any faith in English art, or in the power which any Englishman may have to interpret art. The leading French journals conjectured that the "Prometheus" was of a religious character, and therefore Puritanical; and consequently for that reason was popular. They amused themselves with the idea of a

Puritanical opera, declared that the English wished to Protestantize music, and suggested "Calvin" or "The Sabbath" as good subjects for this new and entirely English class of operas.

But soon the correspondents of some of the Continental papers began to write glowing accounts of the piece, and to put Langhetti in the same class with Handel. He was an Italian, they said, but in this case he united Italian grace and versatility with German solemnity and melancholy. They declared that he was the greatest of living composers, and promised for him a great reputation.

Night after night the representation of the "Prometheus" went on with undiminished success; and with a larger and profounder appreciation of its meaning among the better class of minds. Langhetti began to show a stronger and fuller confidence in the success of his piece than he had yet dared to evince. Yet now its success seemed assured. What more could he wish?

September came on, and every succeeding night only made the success more marked. One day Langhetti was with Beatrice at the theatre, and they were talking of many things. There seemed to be something on his mind, for he spoke in an abstracted manner. Beatrice noticed this at last, and mentioned it.

He was at first very mysterious. "It must be that secret of yours which you will not tell me," said she. "You said once before that it was connected with me, and that you would tell it to me when the time came. Has not the time come yet?" "Not yet," answered Langhetti.

"When will it come?"

"I don't know."

"And will you keep it secret always?"

"Perhaps not."

"You speak undecidedly."

"I am undecided."

"Why not decide now to tell it?" pleaded Beatrice. "Why should I not know it? Surely I have gone through enough suffering to bear this, even if it bring something additional."

Langhetti looked at her long and doubtfully.

"You hesitate," said she.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"It is of too much importance."

"That is all the more reason why I should know it. Would it crush me if I knew it?"

"I don't know. It might."

"Then let me be crushed."

Langhetti sighed.

"Is it something that you know for certain, or is it only conjecture?"

"Neither," said he, "but half-way between the two."

Beatrice looked earnestly at him for some time. Then she put her head nearer to his and spoke in a solemn whisper.

"It is about my mother!"

Langhetti looked at her with a startled expression.

"Is it not?"

He bowed his head.

"It is--it is. And if so, I implore--I conjure you to tell me. Look--I am calm. Think--I am strong. I am not one who can be cast down merely by bad news."

"I may tell you soon."

"Say you will."

"I will," said Langhetti, after a struggle.

"When?"

"Soon."

"Why not to-morrow?"

"That is too soon; you are impatient."

"Of course I am," said Beatrice. "Ought I not to be so? Have you not said that this concerns me? and is not all my imagination aroused in the endeavor to form a conjecture as to what it may be?"

She spoke so earnestly that Langhetti was moved, and looked still more undecided.

"When will you tell me?"

"Soon, perhaps," he replied, with some hesitation.

"Why not now?"

"Oh no, I must assure myself first about some things."

"To-morrow, then."

He hesitated.

"Yes," said she; "it must be to-morrow. If you do not, I shall think that you have little or no confidence in me. I shall expect it to-

morrow."

Langhetti was silent.

"I shall expect it to-morrow," repeated Beatrice.

Langhetti still continued silent.

"Oh, very well; silence gives consent!" said she, in a lively tone.

"I have not consented."

"Yes you have, by your silence."

"I was deliberating."

"I asked you twice, and you did not refuse; surely that means consent."

"I do not say so," said Langhetti, earnestly.

"But you will do so."

"Do not be so certain."

"Yes, I will be certain; and if you do not tell me you will very deeply disappoint me."

"In telling you I could only give you sorrow."

"Sorrow or joy, whatever it is, I can bear it so long as I know this. You will not suppose that I am actuated by simple feminine curiosity. You know me better. This secret is one which subjects me to the tortures of suspense, and I am anxious to have them removed."

"The removal will be worse than the suspense."

"That is impossible."

"You would not say so if you knew what it was."

"Tell me, then."

"That is what I fear to do."

"Do you fear for me, or for some other person?"

"Only for you."

"Do not fear for me, then, I beseech you; for it is not only my desire, but my prayer, that I may know this."

Langhetti seemed to be in deep perplexity. Whatever this secret was with which he was so troubled he seemed afraid to tell it to Beatrice, either from fear that it might not be any thing in itself or result in any thing, or, as seemed more probable, lest it might too greatly affect her. This last was the motive which appeared to influence him most strongly. In either case, the secret of which he spoke must have been one of a highly important character, affecting most deeply the life and fortunes of Beatrice herself. She had formed her own ideas and her own

expectations about it, and this made her all the more urgent, and even peremptory, in her demand. In fact, things had come to such a point that Langhetti found himself no longer able to refuse, and now only sought how to postpone his divulgence of his secret.

Yet even this Beatrice combated, and would listen to no later postponement than the morrow.

At length, after long resistance to her demand, Langhetti assented, and promised on the morrow to tell her what it was that he had meant by his secret.

For, as she gathered from his conversation, it was something that he had first discovered in Hong Kong, and had never since forgotten, but had tried to make it certain. His efforts had thus far been useless, and he did not wish to tell her till he could bring proof. That proof, unfortunately, he was not able to find, and he could only tell his conjectures.

It was for these, then, that Beatrice waited in anxious expectation.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE CAB.

That evening Beatrice's performance had been greeted with louder applause than usual, and, what was more gratifying to one like her, the effective passages had been listened to with a stillness which spoke more loudly than the loudest applause of the deep interest of the audience.

Langhetti had almost always driven home with her, but on this occasion he had excused himself on account of some business in the theatre which required his attention.

On going out Beatrice could not find the cabman whom she had employed. After looking around for him a long time she found that he had gone. She was surprised and vexed. At the same time she could not account for this, but thought that perhaps he had been drinking and had forgotten all about her. On making this discovery she was on the point of going back and telling Langhetti, but a cabman followed her persistently, promising to take her wherever she wished, and she thought that it would be foolish to trouble Langhetti about so small a matter; so that at length she decided to employ the persevering cabman, thinking that he could take her to her lodgings as well as any body else.

The cabman started off at a rapid pace, and went on through street after street, while Beatrice sat thinking of the evening's performance.

At last it seemed to her that she had been a much longer time than usual, and she began to fear that the cabman had lost his way. She looked out. They were going along the upper part of Oxford Street, a great distance from where she lived. She instantly tried to draw down the window so as to attract the cabman's attention, but could not move it. She tried the other, but all were fast and would not stir. She

rapped at the glass to make him hear, but he took no notice. Then she tried to open the door, but could not do so from the inside.

She sat down and thought. What could be the meaning of this? They were now going at a much faster rate than is common in the streets of London, but where she was going she could not conjecture.

She was not afraid. Her chief feeling was one of indignation. Either the cabman was drunk--or what? Could he have been hired to carry her off to her enemies? Was she betrayed?

This thought flashed like lightning through her mind.

She was not one who would sink down into inaction at the sudden onset of terror. Her chief feeling now was one of indignation at the audacity of such an attempt. Obeying the first impulse that seized her, she took the solid roll of music which she carried with her and dashed it against the front window so violently that she broke it in pieces. Then she caught the driver by the sleeve and ordered him to stop.

"All right," said the driver, and, turning a corner, he whipped up his horses, and they galloped on faster than ever.

"If you don't stop I'll call for help!" cried Beatrice.

The driver's only answer was a fresh application of the whip.

The street up which they turned was narrow, and as it had only dwelling-houses it was not so brightly lighted as Oxford Street. There were but few foot-passengers on the sidewalk. As it was now about midnight, most of the lights were out, and the gas-lamps were the chief means of illumination.

Yet there was a chance that the police might save her. With this hope she dashed her music scroll against the windows on each side of the cab and shivered them to atoms, calling at the top of her voice for help. The swift rush of the cab and the sound of a woman's voice shouting for aid aroused the police. They started forward. But the horses were rushing so swiftly that no one dared to touch them. The driver seemed to them to have lost control. They thought that the horses were running away, and that those within the cab were frightened.

Away they went through street after street, and Beatrice never ceased to call. The excitement which was created by the runaway horses did not abate, and at length when the driver stopped a policeman hurried up.

The house before which the cab stopped was a plain two-story one, in a quiet-looking street. A light shone from the front-parlor window. As the cab drew up the door opened and a man came out.

Beatrice saw the policeman.

"Help!" she cried; "I implore help. This wretch is carrying me away."

"What's this?" growled the policeman.

At this the man that had come out of the house hurried forward.

"Have you found her?" exclaimed a well-known voice. "Oh, my child! How

could you leave your father's roof!"

It was John Potts.

Beatrice was silent for a moment in utter amazement. Yet she made a violent effort against her despair.

"You have no control over me," said she, bitterly. "I am of age. And you," said she to the policeman, "I demand your help. I put myself under your protection, and order you either to take that man in charge or to let me go to my home."

"Oh, my daughter!" cried Potts. "Will you still be relentless?"

"Help me!" cried Beatrice, and she opened the cab-door.

"The policeman can do nothing," said Potts. "You are not of age. He will not dare to take you from me."

"I implore you," cried Beatrice, "save me from this man. Take me to the police-station--any where rather than leave me here!"

"You can not," said Potts to the bewildered policeman. "Listen. She is my daughter and under age. She ran away with a strolling Italian vagabond, with whom she is leading an improper life. I have got her back."

"It's false!" cried Beatrice, vehemently. "I fled from this man's house because I feared his violence."

"That is an idle story," said Potts.

"Save me!" cried Beatrice.

"I don't know what to do--I suppose I've got to take you to the station, at any rate," said the policeman, hesitatingly.

"Well," said Potts to Beatrice, "if you do go to the station-house you'll have to be handed back to me. You are under age."

"It's false!" cried Beatrice. "I am twenty."

"No, you are not more than seventeen."

"Langhetti can prove that I am twenty."

"How? I have documents, and a father's word will be believed before a paramour's."

This taunt stung Beatrice to the soul.

"As to your charge about my cruelty I can prove to the world that you lived in splendor in Brandon Hall. Every one of the servants can testify to this. Your morose disposition made you keep by yourself. You always treated your father with indifference, and finally ran away with a man who unfortunately had won your affections in Hong Kong."

"You well know the reason why I left your roof," replied Beatrice, with calm and severe dignity. "Your foul aspersions upon my character are

unworthy of notice."

"And what shall I say about your aspersions on my character?" cried Potts, in a loud, rude voice, hoping by a sort of vulgar self-assertion to brow-beat Beatrice. "Do you remember the names you called me and your threats against me? When all this is brought out in the police court, they will see what kind of a daughter you have been."

"You will be the last one who will dare to let it be brought into a police court."

"And why? Those absurd charges of yours are worthless. Have you any proof?" he continued, with a sneer, "or has your paramour any?"

"Take me away," said Beatrice to the policeman.

"Wait!" exclaimed Potts; "you are going, and I will go to reclaim you. The law will give you back to me; for I will prove that you are under age, and I have never treated you with any thing except kindness. Now the law can do nothing since you are mine. But as you are so young and inexperienced I'll tell you what will happen.

"The newspapers," he continued, after a pause, "will be full of your story. They will print what I shall prove to be true--that you had an intractable disposition--that you had formed a guilty attachment for a drum-major at Hong Kong--that you ran away with him, lived for a while at Holby, and then went with your paramour to London. If you had only married him you would have been out of my power; but you don't pretend to be married. You don't call yourself Langhetti, but have taken another name, which the sharp newspaper reporters will hint was given you by some other one of your numerous favorites. They will declare that you love every man but your own father; and you--you who played the goddess on the stage and sang about Truth and Religion will be known all over England and all over Europe too as the vilest of the vile."

[Illustration: "Oh, my daughter!" cried Potts, "will you still be relentless?"]

At this tremendous menace Beatrice's resolution was shattered to pieces. That this would be so she well knew. To escape from Potts was to have herself made infamous publicly under the sanction of the law, and then, by that same law to be handed back to him. At least whether it was so or not, she thought so. There was no help--no friend.

"Go," said Potts; "leave me now and you become covered with infamy. Who would believe your story?"

Beatrice was silent, her slender frame was rent by emotion.

"O God!" she groaned--but in her deep despair she could not find thoughts even for prayers.

"You may go, policeman," said Potts; "my daughter will come with me."

"Faith and I'm glad! It's the best thing for her;" and the policeman, much relieved, returned to his beat.

"Some of you'll have to pay for them winders," said the cabman.

"All right," answered Potts, quietly.

"There is your home for to-night, at any rate," said Potts, pointing to the house. "I don't think you have any chance left. You had better go in."

His tone was one full of bitter taunt. Scarce conscious, with her brain reeling, and her limbs trembling, Beatrice entered the house.

CHAPTER XL.

DISCOVERIES.

The next morning after Beatrice's last performance Langhetti determined to fulfill his promise and tell her that secret which she had been so anxious to know. On entering into his parlor he saw a letter lying on the table addressed to him. It bore no postage stamp, or post-office mark.

He opened it and read the following:

"London, September 5, 1849.

"SIGNORE,--Cigole, the betrayer and intended assassin of your late father, is now in London. You can find out about him by inquiring of Giovanni Cavallo, 16 Red Lion Street. As a traitor to the Carbonari, you will know that it is your duty to punish him, even if your filial piety is not strong enough to avenge a father's wrongs.

"CARBONARO."

Langhetti read this several times. Then he called for his landlord.

"Who left this letter?" he asked.

"A young man."

"Do you know his name?"

"No."

"What did he look like?"

"He looked like a counting-house clerk more than any thing."

"When was it left?"

"About six o'clock this morning."

Langhetti read it over and over. The news that it contained filled his mind. It was not yet ten o'clock. He would not take any breakfast, but went out at once, jumped into a cab, and drove off to Red Lion Street.

Giovanni Cavallo's office was in a low, dingy building, with a dark, narrow doorway. It was one of those numerous establishments conducted

and supported by foreigners whose particular business it is not easy to conjecture. The building was full of offices, but this was on the ground-floor.

Langhetti entered, and found the interior as dingy as the exterior. There was a table in the middle of the room. Beyond this was a door which opened into a back-room.

Only one person was here--a small, bright-eyed man, with thick Vandyke beard and sinewy though small frame. Langhetti took off his hat and bowed.

"I wish to see Signore Cavallo," said he, in Italian.

"I am Signore Cavallo," answered the other, blandly.

Langhetti made a peculiar motion with his left arm. The keen eye of the other noticed it in an instant. He returned a gesture of a similar character. Langhetti and he then exchanged some more secret signs. At last Langhetti made one which caused the other to start, and to bow with deep respect.

"I did not know," said he, in a low voice, "that any of the Interior Council ever came to London.... But come in here," and he led the way into the inner room, the door of which he locked very mysteriously.

A long conference followed, the details of which would only be tedious. At the close Cavallo said, "There is some life in us yet, and what life we have left shall be spent in trapping that miscreant. Italy shall be avenged on one of her traitors, at any rate."

"You will write as I told you, and let me know?"

"Most faithfully."

Langhetti departed, satisfied with the result of this interview. What surprised him most was the letter. The writer must have been one who had been acquainted with his past life. He was amazed to find any one denouncing Cigole to him, but finally concluded that it must be some old Carbonaro, exiled through the afflictions which had befallen that famous society, and cherishing in his exile the bitter resentment which only exiles can feel.

Cavallo himself had known Cigole for years, but had no idea whatever of his early career. Cigole had no suspicion that Cavallo had any thing to do with the Carbonari. His firm were general agents, who did business of a miscellaneous character, now commission, now banking, and now shipping; and in various ways they had had dealings with this man, and kept up an irregular correspondence with him.

This letter had excited afresh within his ardent and impetuous nature all the remembrances of early wrongs. Gentle though he was, and pure in heart, and elevated in all his aspirations, he yet was in all respects a true child of the South, and his passionate nature was roused to a storm by this prospect of just retaliation. All the lofty doctrines with which he might console others were of no avail here in giving him calm. He had never voluntarily pursued Cigole; but now, since this villain had been presented to him, he could not turn aside from what he considered the holy duty of avenging a father's wrongs.

He saw that for the present every thing would have to give way to this. He determined at once to suspend the representation of the "Prometheus," even though it was at the height of its popularity and in the full tide of its success. He determined to send Beatrice under his sister's care, and to devote himself now altogether to the pursuit of Cigole, even if he had to follow him to the world's end. The search after him might not be long after all, for Cavallo felt sanguine of speedy success, and assured him that the traitor was in his power, and that the Carbonari in London were sufficiently numerous to seize him and send him to whatever punishment might be deemed most fitting.

With such plans and purposes Langhetti went to visit Beatrice, wondering how she would receive the intelligence of his new purpose.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon before he reached her lodgings. On going up he rapped. A servant came, and on seeing him looked frightened.

[Illustration: "WHAT LIFE WE HAVE LEFT SHALL BE SPENT IN TRAPPING THAT MISCREANT."]

"Is Miss Despard in?"

The servant said nothing, but ran off. Langhetti stood waiting in surprise; but in a short time the landlady came. She had a troubled look, and did not even return his salutation.

"Is Miss Despard in?"

"She is not here, Sir."

"Not here!"

"No, Sir. I'm frightened. There was a man here early this morning, too."

"A man here. What for?"

"Why, to ask after her."

"And did he see her?"

"She wasn't here."

"Wasn't here! What do you mean?"

"She didn't come home at all last night. I waited up for her till four."

"Didn't come home!" cried Langhetti, as an awful fear came over him.

"No, Sir."

"Do you mean to tell me that she didn't come home at her usual hour?"

"No, Sir--not at all; and as I was saying, I sat up nearly all night."

"Heavens!" cried Langhetti, in bewilderment. "What is the meaning of this? But take me to her room. Let me see with my own eyes."

The landlady led the way up, and Langhetti followed anxiously. The room

were empty. Every thing remained just as she had left it. Her music was lying loosely around. The landlady said that she had touched nothing.

Langhetti asked about the man who had called in the morning. The landlady could tell nothing about him, except that he was a gentleman with dark hair, and very stern eyes that terrified her. He seemed to be very angry or very terrible in some way about Beatrice.

Who could this be? thought Langhetti. The landlady did not know his name. Some one was certainly interesting herself very singularly about Cigole, and some one else, or else the same person, was very much interested about Beatrice. For a moment he thought it might be Despard. This, however, did not seem probable, as Despard would have written him if he were coming to town.

Deeply perplexed, and almost in despair, Langhetti left the house and drove home, thinking on the way what ought to be done. He thought he would wait till evening, and perhaps she would appear. He did thus wait, and in a fever of excitement and suspense, but on going to the lodging-house again there was nothing more known about her.

Leaving this he drove to the police-office. It seemed to him now that she must have been foully dealt with in some way. He could think of no one but Potts; yet how Potts could manage it was a mystery. That mystery he himself could not hope to unravel. The police might. With that confidence in the police which is common to all Continentals he went and made known his troubles. The officials at once promised to make inquiries, and told him to call on the following evening.

The next evening he went there. The policeman was present who had been at the place when Potts met Beatrice. He told the whole story--the horses running furiously, the screams from the cab, and the appeal of Beatrice for help, together with her final acquiescence in the will of her father.

Langhetti was overwhelmed. The officials evidently believed that Potts was an injured father, and showed some coldness to Langhetti.

"He is her father; what better could she do?" asked one.

"Any thing would be better," said Langhetti, mournfully. "He is a villain so remorseless that she had to fly. Some friends received her. She went to get her own living since she is of age. Can nothing be done to rescue her?"

"Well, she might begin a lawsuit; if she really is of age he can not hold her. But she had much better stay with him."

Such were the opinions of the officials. They courteously granted permission to Langhetti to take the policeman to the house.

On knocking an old woman came to the door. In answer to his inquiries she stated that a gentleman had been living there three weeks, but that on the arrival of his daughter he had gone home.

"When did he leave?"

"Yesterday morning."

CHAPTER XLI

THEY MEET AGAIN.

At four o'clock on the morning of Beatrice's capture Brandon was roused by a rap at his bedroom door. He rose at once, and slipping on his dressing-gown, opened it. A man entered.

"Well?" said Brandon.

"Something has happened."

"What?"

"She didn't get home last night. The landlady is sitting up for her, and is terribly frightened."

"Did you make any inquiries?"

"No, Sir; I came straight here in obedience to your directions."

"Is that all you know?"

"All."

"Very well," said Brandon, calmly, "you may go."

The man retired. Brandon sat down and buried his head in his hands. Such news as this was sufficient to overwhelm any one. The man knew nothing more than this, that she had not returned home and that the landlady was frightened. In his opinion only one of two things could have happened: either Langhetti had taken her somewhere, or she had been abducted.

A thousand fancies followed one another in quick succession. It was too early as yet to go forth to make inquiries; and he therefore was forced to sit still and form conjectures as to what ought to be done in case his conjecture might be true. Sitting there, he took a rapid survey of all the possibilities of the occasion, and laid his plans accordingly.

Brandon had feared some calamity, and with this fear had arranged to have some one in the house who might give him information. The information which he most dreaded had come; it had come, too, in the midst of a time of triumph, when she had become one of the supreme singers of the age, and had gained all that her warmest admirer might desire for her.

If she had not been foully dealt with she must have gone with Langhetti. But if so--where--and why? What possible reason might Langhetti have for taking her away? This conjecture was impossible.

Yet if this was impossible, and if she had not gone with Langhetti, with whom could she have gone? If not a friend, then it must have been with an enemy. But with what enemy? There was only one.

He thought of Potts. He knew that this wretch was capable of any villainy, and would not hesitate at any thing to regain possession of

the one who had fled from him. Why he should wish to take the trouble to regain possession of her, except out of pure villainy, he could not imagine.

With such thoughts as these the time passed heavily. Six o'clock at last came, and he set out for the purpose of making inquiries. He went first to the theatre. Here, after some trouble, he found those who had the place in charge, and, by questioning them, he learned that Beatrice had left by herself in a cab for her home, and that Langhetti had remained some time later. He then went to Beatrice's lodgings to question the landlady. From there he went to Langhetti's lodgings, and found that Langhetti had come home about one o'clock and was not yet up.

Beatrice, therefore, had left by herself; and had not gone any where with Langhetti. She had not returned home. It seemed to him most probable that either voluntarily or involuntarily she had come under the control of Potts. What to do under the circumstances was now the question.

One course seemed to him the most direct and certain; namely, to go up to Brandon at once and make inquiries there. From the letters which Philips had sent he had an idea of the doings of Potts. Other sources of information had also been secured. It was not his business to do any thing more than to see that Beatrice should fall into no harm.

By ten o'clock he had acted upon this idea, and was at the railway station to take the express train. He reached Brandon village about dusk. He went to the inn in his usual disguise as Mr. Smithers, and sent up to the Hall for Mr. Potts.

Potts was not there. He then sent for Philips. After some delay Philips came. His usual timidity was now if possible still more marked, and he was at first too embarrassed to speak.

"Where is Potts?" asked Brandon, abruptly.

"In London, Sir."

"He has been there about three weeks, hasn't he?"

"Yes, Sir."

"So you wrote me. You thought when he went that he was going to hunt up his daughter."

"So I conjectured."

"And he hasn't got back yet?"

"Not yet."

"Has he written any word?"

"None that I know of."

"Did you hear any of them say why he went to get her?"

"Not particularly; but I guessed from what they said that he was afraid of having her at large."

"Afraid? Why?"

"Because she knew some secret of theirs."

"Secret! What secret?" asked Brandon.

"You know, Sir, I suppose," said Philips, meekly.

Brandon had carried Asgeelo with him, as he was often in the habit of doing on his journeys. After his interview with Philips he stood outside on the veranda of the village inn for some time, and then went around through the village, stopping at a number of houses. Whatever it was that he was engaged in, it occupied him for several hours, and he did not get back to the inn till midnight.

On the following morning he sent up to the Hall, but Potts had not yet returned. Philips came to tell him that he had just received a telegraphic dispatch informing him that Potts would be back that day about one o'clock. This intelligence at last seemed to promise something definite.

Brandon found enough to occupy him during the morning among the people of the neighborhood. He seemed to know every body, and had something to say to every one. Yet no one looked at him or spoke to him unless he took the initiative. Last of all, he went to the tailor's, where he spent an hour.

Asgeelo had been left at the inn, and sat there upon a bench outside, apparently idle and aimless. At one o'clock Brandon returned and walked up and down the veranda.

In about half an hour his attention was attracted by the sound of wheels. It was Potts's barouche, which came rapidly up the road. In it was Potts and a young lady.

Brandon stood outside of the veranda, on the steps, in such a position as to be most conspicuous, and waited there till the carriage should reach the place. Did his heart beat faster as he recognized that form, as he marked the settled despair which had gathered over that young face--a face that had the fixed and unalterable wretchedness which marks the ideal face of the Mater Dolorosa?

Brandon stood in such a way that Potts could not help seeing him. He waved his arm, and Potts stopped the carriage at once.

Potts was seated on the front seat, and Beatrice on the back one. Brandon walked up to the carriage and touched his hat.

"Mr. Smithers!" cried Potts, with his usual volubility. "Dear me, Sir. This is really a most unexpected pleasure, Sir."

While Potts spoke Brandon looked steadily at Beatrice, who cast upon him a look of wonder. She then sank back in her seat; but her eyes were still fastened on his as though fascinated. Then, beneath the marble whiteness of her face a faint tinge appeared, a warm flush, that was the sign of hope rising from despair. In her eyes there gleamed the flash of recognition; for in that glance each had made known all its soul to the other. In her mind there was no perplexing question as to how or why he

came here, or wherefore he wore that disguise; the one thought that she had was the consciousness that He was here--here before her.

All this took place in an instant, and Potts, who was talking, did not notice the hurried glance; or if he did, saw in it nothing but a casual look cast by one stranger upon another.

"I arrived here yesterday," said Brandon. "I wished to see you about a matter of very little importance perhaps to you, but it is one which is of interest to me. But I am detaining you. By-the-way, I am somewhat in a hurry, and if this lady will excuse me I will drive up with you to the Hall, so as to lose no time."

"Delighted, Sir, delighted!" cried Potts. "Allow me, Mr. Smithers, to introduce you to my daughter."

Brandon held out his hand. Beatrice held out hers. It was cold as ice, but the fierce thrill that shot through her frame at the touch of his feverish hand brought with it such an ecstasy that Beatrice thought it was worth while to have undergone the horror of the past twenty-four hours for the joy of this one moment.

Brandon stepped into the carriage and seated himself by her side. Potts sat opposite. He touched her. He could hear her breathing. How many months had passed since they sat so near together! What sorrows had they not endured! Now they were side by side, and for a moment they forgot that their bitterest enemy sat before them.

There, before them, was the man who was not only a deadly enemy to each, but who made it impossible for them to be more to one another than they now were. Yet for a time they forgot this in the joy of the ecstatic meeting. At the gate Potts got out and excused himself to Brandon, saying that he would be up directly.

"Entertain this gentleman till I come," said he to Beatrice, "for he is a great friend of mine."

Beatrice said nothing, for the simple reason that she could not speak.

They drove on. Oh, joy! that baleful presence was for a moment removed. The driver saw nothing as he drove under the overarching elms--the elms under which Brandon had sported in his boyhood. He saw not the long, fervid glance that they cast at one another, in which each seemed to absorb all the being of the other; he saw not the close clasped hands with which they clung to one another now as though they would thus cling to each other forever and prevent separation. He saw not the swift, wild movement of Brandon when for one instant he flung his arm around Beatrice and pressed her to his heart. He heard not the beating of that strong heart; he heard not the low sigh of rapture with which for but one instant the head of Beatrice sank upon her lover's breast. It was but for an instant. Then she sat upright again, and their hands sought each other, thus clinging, thus speaking by a voice which was fully intelligible to each, which told how each felt in the presence of the other love unutterable, rapture beyond expression.

The alighted from the carriage. Beatrice led the way into the drawing-room. No one was there. Brandon went into a recess of one of the windows which commanded a view of the Park.

"What a beautiful view!" said he, in a conventional voice.

She came up and stood beside him.

"Oh, my darling! Oh, my darling!" he cried, over and over again; and flinging his arms around her he covered her face with burning kisses. Her whole being seemed in that supreme moment to be absorbed in his. All consciousness of any other thing than this unspeakable joy was lost to her. Before all others she was lofty, high-souled, serene, self-possessed--with him she was nothing, she lost herself in him.

"Do not fear, my soul's darling," said he; "no harm shall come. My power is every where--even in this house. All in the village are mine. When my blow falls you shall be saved."

She shuddered.

"You will leave me here?"

"Heavens! I must," he groaned; "we are the sport of circumstances. Oh, my darling!" he continued, "you know my story, and my vengeance."

"I know it all," she whispered. "I would wish to die if I could die by your hand."

"I will save you. Oh, love--oh, soul of mine--my arms are around you! You are watched--but watched by me."

"You do not know," she sighed. "Alas! your father's voice must be obeyed, and your vengeance must be taken."

"Fear not," said he; "I will guard you."

She answered nothing. Could she confide in his assurance? She could not. She thought with horror of the life before her. What could Brandon do? She could not imagine.

They stood thus in silence for a long time. Each felt that this was their last meeting, and each threw all life and all thought into the rapture of this long and ecstatic embrace. After this the impassable gulf must reopen. She was of the blood of the accursed. They must separate forever.

He kissed her. He pressed her a thousand times to his heart. His burning kisses forced a new and feverish life into her, which roused all her nature. Never before had he dared so to fling open all his soul to her; never before had he so clasped her to his heart; but now this moment was a break in the agony of a long separation--a short interval which must soon end and give way to the misery which had preceded it--and so he yielded to the rapture of the hour, and defied the future.

The moments extended themselves. They were left thus for a longer time than they hoped. Potts did not come. They were still clinging to one another. She had flung her arms around him in the anguish of her unspeakable love, he had clasped her to his wildly-throbbing heart, and he was straining her there recklessly and despairingly, when suddenly a harsh voice burst upon their ears.

"The devil!"

Beatrice did not hear it. Brandon did, and turned his face. Potts stood before them.

"Mr. Potts!" said he, as he still held Beatrice close to his heart, "this poor young lady is in wretched health. She nearly fainted. I had to almost carry her to the window. Will you be good enough to open it, so as to give her some air? Is she subject to these faints? Poor child!" he said; "the air of this place ought surely to do you good. I sympathize with you most deeply, Mr. Potts."

"She's sickly--that's a fact," said Potts. "I'm very sorry that you have had so much trouble--I hope you'll excuse me. I only thought that she'd entertain you, for she's very clever. Has all the accomplishments--"

"Perhaps you'd better call some one to take care of her," interrupted Brandon.

"Oh, I'll fetch some one. I'm sorry it happened so. I hope you won't blame me, Sir," said Potts, humbly, and he hurried out of the room.

Beatrice had not moved. She heard Brandon speak to some one, and at first gave herself up for lost, but in an instant she understood the full meaning of his words. To his admirable presence of mind she added her own. She did not move, but allowed her head to rest where it was, feeling a delicious joy in the thought that Potts was looking on and was utterly deceived. When he left to call a servant she raised her head and gave Brandon a last look expressive of her deathless, her unutterable love. Again and again he pressed her to his heart. Then the noise of servants coming in roused him. He gently placed her on a sofa, and supported her with a grave and solemn face.

"Here, Mrs. Compton. Take charge of her," said Potts. "She's been trying to faint."

Mrs. Compton came up, and kneeling down kissed Beatrice's hands. She said nothing.

"Oughtn't she to have a doctor?" said Brandon.

"Oh no--she'll get over it. Take her to her room, Mrs. Compton."

"Can the poor child walk?" asked Brandon.

Beatrice rose. Mrs. Compton asked her to take her arm. She did so, and leaning heavily upon it, walked away.

[Illustration: "THE DEVIL!" ... POTTS STOOD BEFORE THEM.]

"She seems very delicate," said Brandon. "I did not know that you had a daughter."

Potts sighed.

"I have," said he, "to my sorrow."

"To your sorrow!" said Brandon, with exquisitely simulated sympathy.

"Yes," replied the other. "I wouldn't tell it to every one--but you, Mr.

Smithers, are different from most people. You see I have led a roving life. I had to leave her out in China for many years with a female guardian. I suppose she was not very well taken care of. At any rate, she got acquainted out there with a strolling Italian vagabond, a drum-major in one of the regiments, named Langhetti, and this villain gained her affections by his hellish arts. He knew that I was rich, and, like an unprincipled adventurer, tried to get her, hoping to get a fortune. I did not know any thing about this till after her arrival home. I sent for her some time ago and she came. From the first she was very sulky. She did not treat me like a daughter at all. On one occasion she actually abused me and called me names to my face. She called me a Thug! What do you think of that, Mr. Smithers?"

The other said nothing, but there was in his face a horror which Potts considered as directed toward his unnatural offspring.

"She was discontented here, though I let her have every thing. I found out in the end all about it. At last she actually ran away. She joined this infamous Langhetti, whom she had discovered in some way or other. They lived together for some time, and then went to London, where she got a situation as an actress. You can imagine by that," said Potts, with sanctimonious horror, "how low she had fallen.

"Well, I didn't know what to do. I was afraid to make a public demand for her through the law, for then it would all get into the papers; it would be an awful disgrace, and the whole county would know it. So I waited, and a few weeks ago I went to London. A chance occurred at last which threw her in my way. I pointed out to her the awful nature of the life she was leading, and offered to forgive her all if she would only come back. The poor girl consented, and here she is. But I'm very much afraid," said Potts in conclusion, with a deep sigh, "that her constitution is broken up. She's very feeble."

Brandon said nothing.

"Excuse me for troubling you with my domestic affairs; but I thought I ought to explain, for you have had such trouble with her yourself."

"Oh, don't mention it. I quite pitied the poor child, I assure you; and I sincerely hope that the seclusion of this place, combined with the pure sea-air, may restore her spirits and invigorate her in mind as well as in body. And now, Mr. Potts, I will mention the little matter that brought me here. I have had business in Cornwall, and was on my way home when I received a letter summoning me to America. I may have to go to California. I have a very honest servant, whom I have quite a strong regard for, and I am anxious to put him in some good country house till I get back. I'm afraid to trust him in London, and I can't take him with me. He is a Hindu, but speaks English and can do almost any thing. I at once remembered you, especially as you were close by me, and thought that In your large establishment you might find a place for him. How is it?"

"My dear Sir, I shall be proud and happy. I should like, above all things, to have a man here who is recommended by one like you. The fact is, my servants are all miserable, and a good one can not often be had. I shall consider it a favor if I can get him."

"Well, that is all arranged--I have a regard for him, as I said before, and want to have him in a pleasant situation. His name is Asgeelo, but

we are in the habit of calling him Cato--"

"Cato! a very good name. Where is he now?"

"At the hotel. I will send him to you at once," said Brandon, rising.

"The sooner the better," returned Potts.

"By-the-way, my junior speaks very encouragingly about the prospects of the Brandon Bank--"

"Does he?" cried Potts, gleefully. "Well, I do believe we're going ahead of every thing."

"That's right. Boldness is the true way to success."

"Oh, never fear. We are bold enough."

"Good. But I am hurried, and I must go. I will send Asgeelo up, and give him a letter."

With these words Brandon bowed an adieu and departed. Before evening Asgeelo was installed as one of the servants.

CHAPTER XLII

LANGHETTI'S ATTEMPT.

Two days after Brandon's visit to Potts, Langhetti reached the village.

A searching examination in London had led him to believe that Beatrice might now be sought for at Brandon Hall. The police could do nothing for him. He had no right to her. If she was of age, she was her own mistress, and must make application herself for her safety and deliverance; if she was under age, then she must show that she was treated with cruelty. None of these things could be done, and Langhetti despaired of accomplishing any thing.

The idea of her being once more in the power of a man like Potts was frightful to him. This idea filled his mind continually, to the exclusion of all other thoughts. His opera was forgotten. One great horror stood before him, and all else became of no account. The only thing for him to do was to try to save her. He could find no way, and therefore determined to go and see Potts himself.

It was a desperate undertaking. From Beatrice's descriptions he had an idea of the life from which she had fled, and other things had given him a true idea of the character of Potts. He knew that there was scarcely any hope before him. Yet he went, to satisfy himself by making a last effort.

He was hardly the man to deal with one like Potts. Sensitive, high-toned, passionate, impetuous in his feelings, he could not command that calmness which was the first essential in such an interview. Besides, he was broken down by anxiety and want of sleep. His sorrow for Beatrice

had disturbed all his thoughts. Food and sleep were alike abominable to him. His fine-strung nerves and delicate organization, in which every feeling had been rendered more acute by his mode of life, were of that kind which could feel intensely wherever the affections were concerned. His material frame was too weak for the presence of such an ardent soul. Whenever any emotion of unusual power appeared he sank rapidly.

So now, feverish, emaciated, excited to an intense degree, he appeared in Brandon to confront a cool, unemotional villain, who scarcely ever lost his presence of mind. Such a contest could scarcely be an equal one. What could he bring forward which could in any way affect such a man? He had some ideas in his own mind which he imagined might be of service, and trusted more to impulse than any thing else. He went up early in the morning to Brandon Hall.

Potts was at home, and did not keep Langhetti long waiting. There was a vast contrast between these two men--the one coarse, fat, vulgar, and strong; the other refined, slender, spiritual, and delicate, with his large eyes burning in their deep sockets, and a strange mystery in his face.

"I am Paolo Langhetti," said he, abruptly--"the manager of the Covent Garden Theatre."

"You are, are you?" answered Potts, rudely; "then the sooner you get out of this the better. The devil himself couldn't be more impudent. I have just saved my daughter from your clutches, and I'm going to pay you off, too, my fine fellow, before long."

"Your daughter!" said Langhetti. "What she is, and who she is, you very well know. If the dead could speak they would tell a different story."

"What the devil do you mean," cried Potts, "by the dead? At any rate you are a fool; for very naturally the dead can't speak; but what concern that has with my daughter I don't know. Mind, you are playing a dangerous game in trying to bully me."

Potts spoke fiercely and menacingly. Langhetti's impetuous goal kindled to a new fervor at this insulting language. He stretched out his long, thin hand toward Potts, and said:

"I hold your life and fortune in my hand. Give up that girl whom you call your daughter."

Potts stood for a moment staring.

"The devil you do!" he cried, at last. "Come, I call that good, rich, racy! Will your sublime Excellency have the kindness to explain yourself? If my life is in your hand it's in a devilish lean and weak one. It strikes me you've got some kink in your brain--some notion or other. Out with it, and let us see what you're driving at!"

"Do you know a man named Cigole?" said Langhetti.

"Cigole!" replied Potts, after a pause, in which he had stared hard at Langhetti; "well, what if I do? Perhaps I do, and perhaps I don't."

"He is in my power," said Langhetti, vehemently.

"Much good may he do you then, for I'm sure when he was in my power he never did any good to me."

"He will do good in this case, at any rate," said Langhetti, with an effort at calmness. "He was connected with you in a deed which you must remember, and can tell to the world what he knows."

"Well, what if he does?" said Potts.

"He will tell," cried Langhetti, excitedly, "the true story of the Despard murder."

"Ah!" said Potts, "now the murder's out. That's what I thought. Don't you suppose I saw through you when you first began to speak so mysteriously? I knew that you had learned some wonderful story, and that you were going to trot it out at the right time. But if you think you're going to bully me you'll find it hard work."

"Cigole is in my power," said Langhetti, fiercely.

"And so you think I am, too?" sneered Potts.

"Partly so."

"Why?"

"Because he was an accomplice of yours in the Despard murder."

"So he says, no doubt; but who'll believe him?"

"He is going to turn Queen's evidence!" said Langhetti, solemnly.

"Queen's evidence!" returned Potts, contemptuously, "and what's his evidence worth--the evidence of a man like that against a gentleman of unblemished character?"

"He will be able to show what the character of that gentleman is," rejoined Langhetti.

"Who will believe him?"

"No one can help it."

"You believe him, no doubt. You and he are both Italians--both dear friends--and both enemies of mine; but suppose I prove to the world conclusively that Cigole is such a scoundrel that his testimony is worthless?"

"You can't," cried Langhetti, furiously.

Potts cast a look of contempt at him--

"Can't I!" He resumed: "How very simple, how confiding you must be, my dear Langhetti! Let me explain my meaning. You got up a wild charge against a gentleman of character and position about a murder. In the first place, you seem to forget that the real murderer has long since been punished. That miserable devil of a Malay was very properly convicted at Manilla, and hanged there. It was twenty years ago. What English court would consider the case again after a calm and impartial

Spanish court has settled it finally, and punished the criminal? They did so at the time when the case was fresh, and I came forth honored and triumphant. You now bring forward a man who, you hint, will make statements against me. Suppose he does? What then? Why, I will show what this man is. And you, my dear Langhetti, will be the first one whom I will bring up against him. I will bring you up under oath, and make you tell how this Cigole--this man who testifies against me--once made a certain testimony in Sicily against a certain Langhetti senior, by which that certain Langhetti senior was betrayed to the Government, and was saved only by the folly of two Englishmen, one of whom was this same Despard. I will show that this Langhetti senior was your father, and that the son, instead of avenging, or at any rate resenting, his father's wrong, is now a bosom friend of his father's intended murderer --that he has urged him on against me. I will show, my dear Langhetti, how you have led a roving life, and, when a drum-major at Hong Kong, won the affections of my daughter; how you followed her here, and seduced her away from a kind father; how at infinite risk I regained her; how you came to me with audacious threats; and how only the dread of further scandal, and my own anxious love for my daughter, prevented me from handing you over to the authorities. I will prove you to be a scoundrel of the vilest description, and, after such proof as this, what do you think would be the verdict of an English jury, or of any judge in any land; and what do you think would be your own fate? Answer me that."

Potts spoke with savage vehemence. The frightful truth flashed at once across Langhetti's mind that Potts had it in his power here to show all this to the world. He was overwhelmed. He had never conceived the possibility of this. Potts watched him silently, with a sneer on his face.

"Don't you think that you had better go and comfort yourself with your dear friend Cigole, your father's intended murderer?" said he at length. "Cigole told me all about this long ago. He told me many things about his life which would be slightly damaging to his character as a witness, but I don't mind telling you that the worst thing against him in English eyes is his betrayal of your father. But this seems to have been a very slight matter to you. It's odd too; I've always supposed that Italians understood what vengeance means."

Langhetti's face bore an expression of agony which he could not conceal. Every word of Potts stung him to the soul. He stood for some time in silence. At last, without a word, he walked out of the room.

His brain reeled. He staggered rather than walked. Potts looked after him with a smile of triumph. He left the Hall and returned to the village.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE STRANGER.

A few weeks after Langhetti's visit Potts had a new visitor at the bank. The stranger entered the bank parlor noiselessly, and stood quietly waiting for Potts to be disengaged. That worthy was making some entries in a small memorandum-book. Turning his head, he saw the newcomer. Potts

looked surprised, and the stranger said, in a peculiar voice, somewhat gruff and hesitating,

"Mr. Potts?"

"Yes," said Potts, looking hard at his visitor.

He was a man of singular aspect. His hair was long, parted in the middle, and straight. He wore dark colored spectacles. A thick, black beard ran under his chin. His linen was not over-clean, and he wore a long surtout coat.

"I belong to the firm of Bigelow, Higginson, & Co., Solicitors, London. --I am the Co."

"Well!"

"The business about which I have come is one of some importance. Are we secure from interruption?"

"Yes," said Potts, "as much as I care about being. I don't know any thing in particular that I care about locking the doors for."

"Well, you know best," said the stranger. "The business upon which I have come concerns you somewhat, but your son principally."

Potts started, and looked with eager inquiry at the stranger.

"It is such a serious case," said the latter, "that my seniors thought, before taking any steps in the matter, it would be best to consult you privately."

"Well," returned Potts, with a frown, "what is this wonderful case?"

"Forgery," said the stranger.

Potts started to his feet with a ghastly face, and stood speechless for some time.

"Do you know who you're talking to?" said he, at last.

"John Potts, of Brandon Hall, I presume," said the stranger, coolly. "My business concerns him somewhat, but his son still more."

"What the devil do you mean?" growled Potts, in a savage tone.

"Forgery," said the stranger. "It is an English word, I believe. Forgery, in which your son was chief agent. Have I made myself understood?"

Potts looked at him again, and then slowly went to the door, locked it, and put the key in his pocket.

"That's right," said the stranger, quietly.

"You appear to take things easy," rejoined Potts, angrily; "but let me tell you, if you come to bully me you've got into the wrong shop."

"You appear somewhat heated. You must be calm, or else we can not get to

business; and in that case I shall have to leave."

"I don't see how that would be any affliction," said Potts, with a sneer.

"That's because you don't understand my position, or the state of the present business. For if I leave it will be the signal for a number of interested parties to make a combined attack on you."

"An attack?"

"Yes."

"Who is there?" said Potts, defiantly.

"Giovanni Cavallo, for one; my seniors, Messrs. Bigelow & Higginson, and several others.

"Never heard of any of them before."

"Perhaps not. But if you write to Smithers & Co. they will tell you that Bigelow, Higginson, & Co. are their solicitors, and do their confidential business."

"Smithers & Co.?" said Potts, aghast.

"Yes. It would not be for your interest for Bigelow, Higginson, & Co. to show Smithers & Co. the proofs which they have against you, would it?"

Potts was silent. An expression of consternation came over his face. He plunged his hands deep in his pockets and bowed his head frowningly.

"It is all bosh," said he, at last, raising his head. "Let them show and be d---d. What have they got to show?"

"I will answer your question regularly," said the stranger, "in accordance with my instructions"--and, drawing a pocket-book from his pocket, he began to read from some memoranda written there.

"1st. The notes to which the name of Ralph Brandon is attached, 150 in number, amounting to L93,500."

"Pooh!" said Potts.

"These forgeries were known to several besides your son and yourself, and one of these men will testify against you. Others who know Brandon's signature swear that this lacks an important point of distinction common to all the Brandon signatures handed down from father to son. You were foolish to leave these notes afloat. They have all been bought up on a speculation by those who wished to make the Brandon property a little dearer."

"I don't think they'll make a fortune out of the speculation," said Potts, who was stifling with rage. "D--n them! who are they?"

"Well, there are several witnesses who are men of such character that if my seniors sent them to Smithers & Co. Smithers & Co. would believe that you were guilty. In a court of law you would have no better chance. One of these witnesses says he can prove that your true name is Briggs."

At this Potts bounded from his chair and stepped forward with a terrific oath.

"You see, your son's neck is in very considerable danger."

"Yours is in greater," said Potts, with menacing eyes.

"Not at all. Even supposing that you were absurd enough to offer violence to an humble subordinate like me, it would not interfere with the policy of Messrs. Bigelow, Higginson, & Co., who are determined to make money out of this transaction. So you see it's absurd to talk of violence."

The stranger took no further notice of Potts, but looked again at his memoranda; while the latter, whose face was now terrific from the furious passions which it exhibited, stood like a wild beast in a cage, "willing to wound, but yet afraid to strike."

"The next case," said the stranger, "is the Thornton forgery."

"Thornton!" exclaimed Potts, with greater agitation.

"Yes," said the stranger. "In connection with the Despard murder there were two sets of forgeries; one being the Thornton correspondence, and the other your correspondence with the Bank of Good Hope."

"Heavens! what's all this?" cried Potts. "Where have you been unearthing this rubbish?"

"First," said the stranger, without noticing Potts's exclamation, "there are the letters to Thornton, Senior, twenty years ago, in which an attempt was made to obtain Colonel Despard's money for yourself. One Clark, an accomplice of yours, presented the letter. The forgery was at once detected. Clark might have escaped, but he made an effort at burglary, was caught, and condemned to transportation. He had been already out once before, and this time received a new brand in addition to the old ones."

Potts did not say a word, but sat stupefied.

"Thornton, Junior, is connected with us, and his testimony is valuable, as he was the one who detected the forgery. He also was the one who went to the Cape of Good Hope, where he had the pleasure of meeting with you. This brings me to the third case," continued the stranger.

"Letters were sent to the Cape of Good Hope, ordering money to be paid to John Potts. Thornton, Senior, fearing from the first attempt that a similar one would be made at the Cape, where the deceased had funds, sent his son there. Young Thornton reached the place just before you did, and would have arrested you, but the proof was not sufficient."

"Aha!" cried Potts, grasping at this--"not sufficient proof! I should think not." His voice was husky and his manner nervous.

"I said 'was not'--but Messrs. Bigelow, Higginson, & Co. have informed me that there are parties now in communication with them who can prove how, when, where, and by whom the forgeries were executed."

"It's a d----d infernal lie!" roared Potts, in a fresh burst of anger.

"I only repeat what they state. The man has already written out a statement in full, and is only waiting for my return to sign it before a magistrate. This will be a death-warrant for your son; for Messrs. Bigelow, Higginson, & Co. will have him arrested at once. You are aware that he has no chance of escape. The amount is too enormous, and the proof is too strong."

"Proof!" cried Potts, desperately; "who would believe any thing against a man like me, John Potts--a man of the county?"

"English law is no respecter of persons," said the stranger. "Rank goes for nothing. But if it did make class distinctions, the witnesses about these documents are of great influence. There is Thornton of Holby, and Colonel Henry Despard at the Cape of Good Hope, with whom Messrs. Bigelow, Higginson, & Co. have had correspondence. There are also others."

"It's all a lie!" exclaimed Potts, in a voice which was a little tremulous. "Who is this fool who has been making out papers?"

"His name is Philips; true name Lawton. He tells a very extraordinary story; very extraordinary indeed."

The stranger's peculiar voice was now intensified in its odd, harsh intonations. The effect on Potts was overwhelming. For a moment he was unable to speak.

"Philips!" he gasped, at length.

"Yes. You sent him on business to Smithers & Co. He has not yet returned. He does not intend to, for he was found out by Messrs. Bigelow, Higginson, & Co., and you know how timid he is. They have succeeded in extracting the truth from him. As I am in a hurry, and you, too, must be busy," continued the stranger, with unchanged accents, "I will now come to the point. These forged papers involve an amount to the extent of--Brandon forgeries, L93,500; Thornton papers, L5000; Bank of Good Hope, L4000; being in all L102,500. Messrs. Bigelow, Higginson, & Co. have instructed me to say that they will sell these papers to you at their face without charging interest. They will hand them over to you and you can destroy them, in which case, of course, the charge must be dropped."

"Philips!" cried Potts. "I'll have that devil's blood!"

"That would be murder," said the stranger, with a peculiar emphasis.

His tone stung Potts to the quick.

"You appear to take me for a born fool," he cried, striding up and down.

"Not at all. I am only an agent carrying out the instructions of others."

Potts suddenly stopped in his walk.

"Have you all those papers about you?" he hissed.

"All."

Potts looked all around. The door was locked. They were alone. The stranger easily read his thought.

"No use," said he, calmly. "Messrs. Bigelow, Higginson, & Co. would miss me if any thing happened. Besides, I may as well tell you that I am armed."

The stranger rose up and faced Potts, while, from behind his dark spectacles, his eyes seemed to glow like fire. Potts retreated with a curse.

"Messrs. Bigelow, Higginson, & Co. instructed me to say that if I am not back with the money by to-morrow night, they will at once begin action, and have your son arrested. They will also inform Smithers & Co., to whom they say you are indebted for over L600,000. So that Smithers & Co. will at once come down upon you for payment."

"Do Smithers & Co. know any thing about this?" asked Potts, in a voice of intense anxiety.

"They do business with you the same as ever, do they not?"

"Yes."

"How do you suppose they can know it?"

"They would never believe it"

"They would believe any statement made by Messrs. Bigelow, Higginson, & Co. My seniors have been on your track for a long time, and have come into connection with various parties. One man who is an Italian they consider important. They authorize me to state to you that this man can also prove the forgeries."

"Who?" grasped Potts.

"His name is Cigole."

"Cigole!"

"Yes."

"D--- him!"

"You may damn him, but that won't silence him," remarked the other, mildly.

"Well, what are you going to do?" growled Potts.

"Present you the offer of Messrs. Bigelow, Higginson, & Co.," said the other, with calm pertinacity. "Upon it depend your fortune and your son's life."

"How long are you going to wait?"

"Till evening. I leave to-night. Perhaps you would like to think this over. I'll give you till three o'clock. If you decide to accept, all

well; if not, I go back."

The stranger rose, and Potts unlocked the door for him.

After he left Potts sat down, buried in his own reflections. In about an hour Clark came in.

"Well, Johnnie!" said he, "what's up? You look down--any trouble?"

At this Potts told Clark the story of the recent interview. Clark looked grave, and shook his head several times.

"Bad! bad! bad!" said he, slowly, when Potts had ended. "You're in a tight place, lad, and I don't see what you've got to do but to knock under."

A long silence followed.

"When did that chap say he would leave?"

"To-night."

Another silence.

"I suppose," said Clark, "we can find out how he goes?"

"I suppose so," returned Potts, gloomily.

"Somebody might go with him or follow him," said Clark, darkly.

Potts looked at him. The two exchanged glances of intelligence.

"You see, you pay your money, and get your papers back. It would be foolish to let this man get away with so much money. One hundred and two thousand five hundred isn't to be picked up every day. Let us pick it up this time, or try to. I can drop down to the inn this evening, and see the cut of the man. I don't like what he said about me. I call it backbiting."

"You take a proper view of the matter," said Potts. "He's dangerous. He'll be down on you next. What I don't like about him is his cold-bloodedness."

"It does come hard."

"Well, we'll arrange it that way, shall we?"

"Yes, you pay over, and get your documents, and I'll try my hand at getting the money back. I've done harder things than that in my time and so have you--hey, lad!"

"I remember a few."

"I wonder if this man knows any of them."

"No," said Potts, confidently. "He would have said something."

"Don't be too sure. The fact is, I've been troubled ever since that girl came out so strong on us. What are you going to do with her?"

"Don't know," growled Potts. "Keep her still somehow."

"Give her to me."

"What'll you do with her?" asked Potts, in surprise.

"Take her as my wife," said Clark, with a grin. "I think I'll follow your example and set up housekeeping. The girl's plucky; and I'd like to take her down."

"We'll do it; and the sooner the better. You don't want a minister, do you?"

"Well, I think I'll have it done up ship-shape, marriage in high life; papers all full of it; lovely appearance of the bride--ha, ha, ha! I'll save you all further trouble about her--a husband is better than a father in such a case. If that Italian comes round it'll be his last round."

Some further conversation followed, in which Clark kept making perpetual references to his bride. The idea had taken hold of his mind completely.

At one o'clock Potts went to the inn, where he found the agent. He handed over the money in silence. The agent gave him the documents. Potts looked at them all carefully.

Then he departed.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE STRANGER'S STORY.

That evening a number of people were in the principal parlor of the Brandon Inn. It was a cool evening in October; and there was a fire near which the partner of Bigelow, Higginson, & Co. had seated himself.

Clark had come in at the first of the evening and had been there ever since, talking volubly and laughing boisterously. The others were more or less talkative, but none of them rivaled Clark. They were nearly all Brandon people; and in their treatment of Clark there was a certain restraint which the latter either did not wish or care to notice. As for the stranger he sat apart in silence without regarding any one in particular, and giving no indication whether he was listening to what was going on or was indifferent to it all. From time to time Clark threw glances in his direction, and once or twice he tried to draw some of the company out to make remarks about him; but the company seemed reluctant to touch upon the subject, and merely listened with patience.

Clark had evidently a desire in his mind to be very entertaining and lively. With this intent he told a number of stories, most of which were intermingled with allusions to the company present, together with the stranger. At last he gazed at the latter in silence for some little time, and then turned to the company.

"There's one among us that hasn't opened his mouth this evening. I call it unsociable. I move that the party proceed to open it forthwith. Who seconds the motion? Don't all speak at once."

The company looked at one another, but no one made any reply.

"What! no one speaks! All right; silence gives consent;" and with these words Clark advanced toward the stranger. The latter said nothing, but sat in a careless attitude.

"Friend!" said Clark, standing before the stranger, "we're all friends here--we wish to be sociable--we think you are too silent--will you be kind enough to open your mouth? If you won't tell a story, perhaps you will be good enough to sing us a song?"

The stranger sat upright.

"Well," said he; in the same peculiar harsh voice and slow tone with which he had spoken to Potts, "the request is a fair one, and I shall be happy to open my mouth. I regret to state that having no voice I shall be unable to give you a song, but I'll be glad to tell a story, if the company will listen."

"The company will feel honored," said Clark, in a mocking tone, as he resumed his seat.

The stranger arose, and, going to the fire-place, picked up a piece of charcoal.

Clark sat in the midst of the circle, looking at him with a sneering smile. "It's rather an odd story," said the stranger, "and I only heard it the other day; perhaps you won't believe it, but it's true."

"Oh, never mind the truth of it!" exclaimed Clark--"push along."

The stranger stepped up to the wall over the fire-place.

"Before I begin I wish to make a few marks, which I will explain in process of time. My story is connected with these."

He took his charcoal and made upon the wall the following marks:

[Illustration: ^ /\ [three lines, forming short arrow]

R [sans-serif R]

+ [plus sign]]

He then turned, and stood for a moment in silence.

The effect upon Clark was appalling. His face turned livid, his arms clutched violently at the seat of his chair, his jaw fell, and his eyes were fixed on the marks as though fascinated by them.

The stranger appeared to take no notice of him.

"These marks," said he, "were, or rather are, upon the back of a friend

of mine, about whom I am going to tell a little story.

"The first (/\\) is the Queen's mark, put on certain prisoners out in Botany Bay, who are totally insubordinate.

"The second (R) signifies 'run away,' and is put on those who have attempted to escape.

"The third (+) indicates a murderous assault on the guards. When they don't hang the culprit they put this on, and those who are branded in this way have nothing but hard work, in chains for life.

"These marks are on the back of a friend of mine, whose name I need not mention, but for convenience sake I will call him Clark."

Clark didn't even resent this, but sat mute, with a face of awful expectation.

"My friend Clark had led a life of strange vicissitudes," said the stranger, "having slipped through the meshes of the law very successfully a great number of times, but finally he was caught, and sent to Botany Bay. He served his time out, and left; but, finally, after a series of very extraordinary adventures in India, and some odd events in the Indian Ocean, he came to England. Bad luck followed him, however. He made an attempt at burglary, and was caught, convicted, and sent back again to his old station at Botany Bay.

"Of course he felt a strong reluctance to stay in such a place, and therefore began to plan an escape; he made one attempt, which was unsuccessful. He then laid a plot with two other notorious offenders. Each of these three had been branded with those letters which I have marked. One of these was named Stubbs, and another Wilson, the third was this Clark. No one knew how they met to make their arrangements, for the prison regulations are very strict; but, they did meet, and managed to confer together. They contrived to get rid of the chains that were fastened around their ankles, and one stormy night they started off and made a run for it.

"The next day the guards were out in pursuit with dogs. They went all day long on their track over a very rough country, and finally came to a river. Here they prepared to pass the night.

"On rising early on the following morning they saw something moving on the top of a hill on the opposite side of the river. On watching it narrowly they saw three men. They hurried on at once in pursuit. The fugitives kept well ahead, however, as was natural; and since they were running for life and freedom they made a better pace.

"But they were pretty well worn out. They had taken no provisions with them, and had not calculated on so close a pursuit. They kept ahead as best they could, and at last reached a narrow river that ran down between cliffs through a gully to the sea. The cliffs on each side were high and bold. But they had to cross it; so down on one side they went, and up the other.

"Clark and Stubbs got up first. Wilson was just reaching the top when the report of a gun was heard, and a bullet struck him in the arm. Groaning in his agony he rushed on trying to keep up with his companions.

"Fortunately for them night came on. They hurried on all night, scarcely knowing where they were going, Wilson in an agony trying to keep up with them. Toward morning they snatched a little rest under a rock near a brook and then hurried forward.

"For two days more they hastened on, keeping out of reach of their pursuers, yet still knowing that they were followed, or at least fearing it. They had gone over a wild country along the coast, and keeping a northward direction. At length, after four days of wandering, they came to a little creek by the sea-shore. There were three houses here belonging to fishermen. They rushed into the first hut and implored food and drink. The men were off to Sydney, but the kind-hearted women gave them what they had. They were terrified at the aspect of these wretched men, whose natural ferocity had been heightened by hardship, famine, and suffering. Gaunt and grim as they were, they seemed more terrible than three wild beasts. The women knew that they were escaped convicts.

[Illustration: HE TOOK HIS CHARCOAL AND MADE UPON THE WALL THE FOLLOWING MARKS.]

"There was a boat lying on the beach. To this the first thoughts of the fugitives were directed. They filled a cask of water and put it on board. They demanded some provisions from the fisherman's wife. The frightened woman gave them some fish and a few ship-biscuits. They were about to forage for themselves when Wilson, who had been watching, gave the alarm.

"Their pursuers were upon them. They had to run for it at once. They had barely time to rush to the boat and get out a little distance when the guard reached the beach. The latter fired a few shots after them, but the shots took no effect.

"The fugitives put out to sea in the open boat. They headed north, for they hoped to catch some Australian ship and be taken up. Their provisions were soon exhausted. Fortunately it was the rainy season, so that they had a plentiful supply of water, with which they managed to keep their cask filled; but that did not prevent them from suffering the agonies of famine. Clark and Stubbs soon began to look at Wilson with looks that made him quiver with terror. Naturally enough, gentlemen; you see they were starving. Wilson was the weakest of the three, and therefore was at their mercy. They tried, however, to catch fish. It was of no use. There seemed to be no fish in those seas, or else the bits of bread crumb which they put down were not an attractive bait.

"The two men began to look at Wilson with the eyes of fiends--eyes that flamed with foul desire, beaming from deep, hollow orbits which famine had made. The days passed. One morning Wilson lay dead."

The stranger paused for a moment, amidst an awful silence.

"The lives of these two were preserved a little longer," he added, in slow, measured tones.

"They sailed on. In a few days Clark and Stubbs began to look at one another. You will understand, gentlemen, that it was an awful thing for these men to cast at each other the same glances which they once cast on Wilson. Each one feared the other; each watched his chance, and each guarded against his companion.

"They could no longer row. The one sat in the bow, the other in the stern, glaring at one another. My friend Clark was a man of singular endurance. But why go into particulars? Enough; the boat drifted on, and at last only one was left.

"A ship was sailing from Australia, and the crew saw a boat drifting. A man was there. They stopped and picked him up. The boat was stained with blood. Tokens of what that blood was lay around. There were other things in the boat which chilled the blood of the sailors. They took Clark on board. He was mad at first, and raved in his delirium. They heard him tell of what he had done. During that voyage no one spoke to him. They touched at Cape Town, and put him ashore.

"My friend is yet alive and well. How do you like my story?"

The stranger sat down. A deep stillness followed, which was suddenly broken by something, half groan and half curse. It was Clark.

He lifted himself heavily from his chair, his face livid and his eyes bloodshot, and staggered out of the room.

CHAPTER XLV.

BEATRICE'S JOURNAL CONCLUDED.

September 7, 1849.--[This part begins with a long account of her escape, her fortunes at Holby and London, and her recapture, which is here omitted, as it would be to a large extent a repetition of what has already been stated.]--After Brandon left me my heart still throbbed with the fierce impulse which he had imparted to it. For the remainder of the day I was upheld by a sort of consciousness of his presence. I felt as though he had only left me in person and had surrounded me in some way with his mysterious protection.

Night came, and with the night came gloom. What availed his promise? Could he prevent what I feared? What power could he possibly have in this house? I felt deserted, and my old despair returned.

In the morning I happened to cross the hall to go to Mrs. Compton's room, when, to my amazement, I saw standing outside the Hindu Asgeelo. Had I seen Brandon himself I could scarcely have been more amazed or overjoyed. He looked at me with a warning gesture.

"How did you get here?" I whispered.

"My master sent me."

A thrill passed through my veins.

"Do not fear," he said, and walked mysteriously away.

I asked Mrs. Compton who he was, and she said he was a new servant whom _He_ had just hired. She knew nothing more of him.

September 12.--A week has passed. Thus far I have been left alone. Perhaps they do not know what to do with me. Perhaps they are busy arranging some dark plan.

Can I trust? Oh, Help of the helpless, save me!

Asgeelo is here--but what can one man do? At best he can only report to his master my agony or my death. May that Death soon come. Kindly will I welcome him.

September 15.--Things are certainly different here from what they used to be. The servants take pains to put themselves in my way, so as to show me profound respect. What is the meaning of this? Once or twice I have met them in the hall and have marked their humble bearing. Is it mockery? Or is it intended to entrap me? I will not trust any of them. Is it possible that this can be Brandon's mysterious power?

Impossible. It is rather a trick to win my confidence: But if so, why? They do not need to trick me. I am at their mercy.

I am at their mercy, and am without defense. What will become of me? What is to be my fate?

Philips has been as devoted as ever. He leaves me flowers every day. He tries to show sympathy. At least I have two friends here--Philips and Asgeelo. But Philips is timid, and Asgeelo is only one against a crowd. There is Vijal--but I have not seen him.

September 25--To-day in my closet I found a number of bottles of different kinds of medicine, used while I was sick. Two of these attracted my attention. One was labeled "_Laudanum_" another was labeled "_Hydrocyanic Acid--Poison._" I suppose they used these drugs for my benefit at that time. The sight of them gave me more joy than any thing else that I could have found.

When the time comes which I dread I shall not be without resource.
These shall save me.

October 3.--They leave me unmolested. They are waiting for some crushing blow, no doubt. Asgeelo sometimes meets me, and makes signs of encouragement.

To-day Philips met me and said: "Don't fear--the crisis is coming." I asked what he meant. As usual he looked frightened and hurried away.

What does he mean? What crisis? The only crisis that I can think of is one which fills me with dread. When that comes I will meet it firmly.

October 10.--Mrs. Compton told me to-day that Philips had gone to London on business. The poor old thing looked very much troubled. I urged her to tell me what was the matter, but she only looked the more terrified. Why she should feel alarm about the departure of Philips for London I can not imagine. Has it any thing to do with me? No. How can it? My fate, whatever it is, must be wrought out here in this place.

October 14.--The dreaded crisis has come at last. Will not this be my last entry? How can I longer avoid the fate that impends?

This afternoon He sent for me to come down.

I went to the dining-room expecting some horror, and I was not disappointed. The three were sitting there as they had sat before, and I thought that there was trouble upon their faces. It was only two o'clock, and they had just finished lunch.

John was the first to speak. He addressed me in a mocking tone.

"I have the honor to inform you," said he, "that the time has arrived when you are to be took down."

I paid no attention whatever to these words. I felt calm. The old sense of superiority came over me, and I looked at Him without a tremor.

My tyrant glanced at me with a dark scowl. "After your behavior, girl, you ought to bless your lucky stars that you got off as you did. If I had done right, I'd have made you pay up well for the trouble you've given. But I've spared you. At the same time I wouldn't have done so long. I was just arranging a nice little plan for your benefit when this gentleman"--nodding his head to Clark--"this gentleman saved me the trouble."

I said nothing.

"Come, Clark, speak up--it's your affair--"

"Oh, you manage it," said Clark. "You've got the 'gift of gab.' I never had it."

"I never in all my born days saw so bold a man as timid with a girl as you are."

"He's doin' what I shouldn't like to try on," said John.

"See here," said my tyrant, sternly, "this gentleman has very kindly consented to take charge of you. He has even gone so far as to consent to marry you. He will actually make you his wife. In my opinion he's crazy, but he's got his own ideas. He has promised to give you a tip-top wedding. If it had been left to me," he went on, sternly, "I'd have let you have something very different, but he's a soft-hearted fellow, and is going to do a foolish thing. It's lucky for you though. You'd have had a precious hard time of it with me, I tell you. You've got to be grateful to him; so come up here, and give him a kiss, and thank him."

So prepared was I for any horror that this did not surprise me.

"Do you hear?" he cried, as I stood motionless. I said nothing.

"Do as I say, d--n you, or I'll make you."

"Come," said Clark, "don't make a fuss about the wench now--it'll be all right. She'll like kissing well enough, and be only too glad to give me one before a week."

"Yes, but she ought to be made to do it now."

"Not necessary, Johnnie; all in good time."

My master was silent for some moments. At last he spoke again:

"Girl," said he. "You are to be married tomorrow. There won't be any invited guests, but you needn't mind that. You'll have your husband, and that's more than you deserve. You don't want any new dresses. Your ball dress will do."

"Come, I won't stand that," said Clark. "She's got to be dressed up in tip-top style. I'll stand the damage."

"Oh, d--n the damage. If you want that sort of thing, it shall be done. But there won't be time."

"Oh well, let her fix up the best way she can."

At this I turned and left the room. None of them tried to prevent me. I went up to my chamber, and sat down thinking. The hour had come.

This is my last entry. My only refuge from horror unspeakable is the Poison.

Perhaps one day some one will find my journal where it is concealed. Let them learn from it what anguish may be endured by the innocent.

May God have mercy upon my soul! Amen.

October 14, 11 o'clock.--Hope!

Mrs. Compton came to me a few minutes since. She had received a letter from Philips by Asgeelo. She said the Hindu wished to see me. He was at my door. I went there. He told me that I was to fly from Brandon Hall at two o'clock in the morning. He would take care of me. Mrs. Compton said she was to go with me. A place had been found where we could get shelter.

Oh my God, I thank thee! Already when I heard this I was mixing the draught. Two o'clock was the hour on which I had decided for a different kind of flight.

Oh God! deliver the captive. Save me, as I put my trust in thee! Amen.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE LAST ESCAPE.

The hour which Beatrice had mentioned in her diary was awaited by herewith feverish impatience. She had confidence in Asgeelo, and this confidence was heightened by the fact that Mrs. Compton was going to accompany her. The very timidity of this poor old creature would have prevented her from thinking of escape on any ordinary occasion; but now the latter showed no fear. She evinced a strange exultation. She showed Philips's letter to Beatrice, and made her read it over and over again. It contained only a few words.

"The time has come at last. I will keep my word to you, dear old woman. Be ready tonight to leave Brandon Hall and those devils forever. The

Hindu will help you.

"EDGAR."

Mrs. Compton seemed to think far more of the letter than of escaping. The fact that she had a letter seemed to absorb all her faculties, and no other idea entered her mind. Beatrice had but few preparations to make; a small parcel contained all with which she dared to encumber herself. Hastily making it up she waited in extreme impatience for the time.

At last two o'clock came. Mrs. Compton was in her room. There was a faint tap at the door. Beatrice opened it. It was Asgeelo. The Hindu stood with his finger on his lips, and then moved away slowly and stealthily. They followed.

The Hindu led the way, carrying a small lantern. He did not show any very great caution, but moved with a quiet step, thinking it sufficient if he made no noise. Beatrice followed, and Mrs. Compton came last, carrying nothing but the note from Philips, which she clutched in her hand as though she esteemed it the only thing of value which she possessed.

[ILLUSTRATION: "THE GIGANTIC FIGURE OF ASGEELO STOOD ERECT, ONE ARM CLUTCHING THE THROAT OF HIS ASSAILANT, AND THE OTHER HOLDING THE KNIFE ALOFT."]

In spite of Beatrice's confidence in Asgeelo she felt her heart sink with dread as she passed through the hall and down the great stairway. But no sound disturbed them. The lights were all out and the house was still. The door of the dining-room was open, but no light shone through.

Asgeelo led the way to the north door. They went on quietly without any interruption, and at last reached it. Asgeelo turned the key and held the door half open for a moment. Then he turned and whispered to them to go out.

Beatrice took two or three steps forward, when suddenly a dark figure emerged from the stairway that led to the servants' hall and with a sudden spring, advanced to Asgeelo.

The latter dropped the lamp, which fell with a rattle on the floor but still continued burning. He drew a long, keen knife from his breast, and seized the other by the throat.

Beatrice started back. By the light that flickered on the floor she saw it all. The gigantic figure of Asgeelo stood erect, one arm clutching the throat of his assailant, and the other holding the knife aloft.

Beatrice rushed forward and caught the uplifted arm.

"Spare him!" she said, in a low whisper. "He is my friend. He helped me to escape once before."

She had recognized Vijal.

The Hindu dropped his arm and released his hold. The Malay staggered back and looked earnestly at Beatrice. Recognizing her, he fell on his knees and kissed her hand.

"I will keep your secret," he murmured.

Beatrice hurried out, and the others followed. They heard the key turn in the door after them. Vijal had locked it from the inside.

Asgeelo led the way with a swift step. They went down the main avenue, and at length reached the gate without any interruption. The gates were shut.

Beatrice looked around in some dread for fear of being discovered. Asgeelo said nothing, but tapped at the door of the porter's lodge. The door soon opened, and the porter came out. He said nothing, but opened the gates in silence.

They went out. The huge gates shut behind them. They heard the key turn in the lock. In her excitement Beatrice wondered at this, and saw that the porter must also be in the secret. Was this the work of Brandon?

They passed down the road a little distance, and at length reached a place where there were two coaches and some men.

One of these came up and took Mrs. Compton. "Come, old woman," said he; "you and I are to go in this coach." It was too dark to see who it was; but the voice sounded like that of Philips. He led her into the coach and jumped in after her.

There was another figure there. He advanced in silence, and motioned to the coach without a word. Beatrice followed; the coach door was opened, and she entered. Asgeelo mounted the box. The stranger entered the coach and shut the door.

Beatrice had not seen the face of this man; but at the sight of the outline of his figure a strange, wild thought came to her mind. As he seated himself by her side a thrill passed through every nerve. Not a word was spoken.

He reached out one hand, and caught hers in a close and fervid clasp. He threw his arm about her waist, and drew her toward him. Her head sank in a delicious languor upon his breast; and she felt the fast throbbing of his heart as she lay there. He held her pressed closely for a long while, drawing quick and heavy breaths, and not speaking a word. Then he smoothed her brow, stroked her hair, and caressed her cheek. Every touch of his made her blood tingle.

"Do you know who I am?" said at last a well-known voice.

She made no answer, but pressed his hand and nestled more closely to his heart.

The carriages rushed on swiftly. They went through the village, passed the inn, and soon entered the open country. Beatrice, in that moment of ecstasy, knew not and cared not whither they were going. Enough that she was with him.

"You have saved me from a fate of horror," said she, tremulously; "or rather, you have prevented me from saving myself."

"How could you have saved yourself?"

"I found poison."

She felt the shudder that passed through his frame. He pressed her again to his heart, and sat for a long time in silence.

"How had you the heart to let me go back when you could get me away so easily?" said she, after a time, in a reproachful tone.

"I could not save you then," answered he, "without open violence. I wished to defer that for the accomplishment of a purpose which you know. But I secured your safety, for all the servants at Brandon Hall are in my pay."

"What! Vijal too?"

"No, not Vijal; he was incorruptible; but all the others. They would have obeyed your slightest wish in any respect. They would have shed their blood for you, for the simple reason that I had promised to pay each man an enormous sum if he saved you from any trouble. They were all on the look out. You never were so watched in your life. If you had chosen to run off every man of them would have helped you, and would have rejoiced at the chance of making themselves rich at the expense of Potts. Under these circumstances I thought you were safe."

"And why did you not tell me?"

"Ah! love, there are many things which I must not tell you."

He sighed. His sombre tone brought back her senses which had been wandering. She struggled to get away. He would not release her.

"Let me go!" said she. "I am of the accursed brood--the impure ones! You are polluted by my touch!"

"I will not let you go," returned he, in a tone of infinite sweetness. "Not now. This may be our last interview. How can I let you go?"

"I am pollution."

"You are angelic. Oh, let us not think of other things. Let us banish from our minds the thought of that barrier which rises between us. While we are here let us forget every thing except that we love one another. To-morrow will come, and our joy will be at an end forever. But you, darling, will be saved! I will guard you to my life's end, even though I can not come near you."

Tears fell from Beatrice's eyes. He felt them hot upon his hand. He sighed deeply.

"I am of the accursed brood!--the accursed!--the accursed! You dishonor your name by touching me."

Brandon clung to her. He would not let her go. She wept there upon his breast, and still murmured the words, "Accursed! accursed!"

Their carriage rolled on, behind them came the other; on for mile after mile, round the bays and creeks of the sea, until at last they reached a village.

"This is our destination," said Brandon.

"Where are we?" sighed Beatrice.

"It is Denton," he replied.

The coach stopped before a little cottage. Asgeelo opened the door. Brandon pressed Beatrice to his heart.

"For the last time, darling," he murmured.

She said nothing. He helped her out, catching her in his arms as she descended, and lifting her to the ground. Mrs. Compton was already waiting, having descended first. Lights were burning in the cottage window.

"This is your home for the present," said Brandon. "Here you are safe. You will find every thing that you want, and the servants are faithful. You may trust them."

He shook hands, with Mrs. Compton, pressed the hand of Beatrice, and leaped into the coach.

"Good-by," he called, as Asgeelo whipped the horses.

"Good-by forever," murmured Beatrice through her tears.

CHAPTER XLVII.

ROUSED AT LAST.

About this time Despard received a call from Langhetti. "I am going away," said the latter, after the preliminary greetings. "I am well enough now to resume my search after Beatrice."

"Beatrice?"

"Yes."

"What can you do?"

"I haven't an idea; but I mean to try to do something."

Langhetti certainly did not look like a man who was capable of doing very much, especially against one like Potts. Thin, pale, fragile, and emaciated, his slender form seemed ready to yield to the pressure of the first fatigue which he might encounter. Yet his resolution was strong, and he spoke confidently of being able in some mysterious way to effect the escape of Beatrice. He had no idea how he could do it. He had exerted his strongest influence, and had come away discomfited. Still he had confidence in himself and trust in God, and with these he determined to set out once more, and to succeed or perish in the attempt.

After he had left Despard sat moodily in his study for some hours. At

last a visitor was announced. He was a man whom Despard had never seen before, and who gave his name as Wheeler.

The stranger on entering regarded Despard for some time with an earnest glance in silence. At last he spoke: "You are the son of Lionel Despard, are you not?"

"Yes," said Despard, in some surprise.

"Excuse me for alluding to so sad an event; but you are, of course, aware of the common story of his death."

"Yes," replied Despard, in still greater surprise.

"That story is known to the world," said the stranger. "His case was publicly tried at Manilla, and a Malay was executed for the crime."

"I know that," returned Despard, "and I know, also, that there were some, and that there still are some, who suspect that the Malay was innocent."

"Who suspected this?"

"My uncle Henry Despard and myself."

"Will you allow me to ask you if your suspicions pointed at any one?"

"My uncle hinted at one person, but he had nothing more than suspicions."

"Who was the man?"

"A man who was my father's valet, or agent, who accompanied him on that voyage, and took an active part in the conviction of the Malay."

"What was his name?"

"John Potts."

"Where does he live now?"

"In Brandon."

"Very well. Excuse my questions, but I was anxious to learn how much you knew. You will see shortly that they were not idle. Has any thing ever been done by any of the relatives to discover whether these suspicions were correct?"

"At first nothing was done. They accepted as an established fact the decision of the Manilla court. They did not even suspect then that any thing else was possible. It was only subsequent circumstances that led my uncle to have some vague suspicions."

"What were those, may I ask?"

"I would rather not tell," said Despard, who shrank from relating to a stranger the mysterious story of Edith Brandon.

"It is as well, perhaps. At any rate, you say there were no suspicions

expressed till your uncle was led to form them?"

"No."

"About how long ago was this?"

"About two years ago--a little more, perhaps. I at once devoted myself to the task of discovering whether they could be maintained. I found it impossible, however, to learn any thing. The event had happened so long ago that it had faded out of men's minds. The person whom I suspected had become very rich, influential, and respected. In fact, he was unassailable, and I have been compelled to give up the effort."

"Would you like to learn something of the truth?" asked the stranger, in a thrilling voice.

Despard's whole soul was roused by this question.

"More than any thing else," replied he.

"There is a sand-bank," began the stranger, "three hundred miles south of the island of Java, which goes by the name of Coffin Island. It is so called on account of a rock of peculiar shape at the eastern extremity. I was coming from the East, on my way to England, when a violent storm arose, and I was cast ashore alone upon that island. This may seem extraordinary to you, but what I have to tell is still more extraordinary. I found food and water there, and lived for some time. At last another hurricane came and blew away all the sand from a mound at the western end. This mound had been piled about a wrecked vessel--a vessel wrecked twenty years ago, twenty years ago," he repeated, with startling emphasis, "and the name of that vessel was the _Vishnu_."

"The _Vishnu_!" cried Despard, starting to his feet, while his whole frame was shaken by emotion at this strange narrative. "_Vishnu_!"

"Yes, the _Vishnu_!" continued the stranger.

"You know what that means. For many years that vessel had lain there, entombed amidst the sands, until at last I--on that lonely isle--saw the sands swept away and the buried ship revealed. I went on board. I entered the cabin. I passed through it. At last I entered a room at one corner. A skeleton lay there. Do you know whose it was?"

"Whose?" cried Despard, in a frenzy of excitement.

"_Your father's_!" said the stranger, in an awful voice.

"God in heaven!" exclaimed Despard, and he sank back into his seat.

"In his hand he held a manuscript, which was his last message to his friends. It was inclosed in a bottle. The storm had prevented him from throwing it overboard. He held it there as though waiting for some one to take it. I was the one appointed to that task. I took it. I read it, and now that I have arrived in England I have brought it to you."

"Where is it?" cried Despard, in wild excitement.

"Here," said the stranger, and he laid a package upon the table.

Despard seized it, and tore open the coverings. At the first sight he recognized the handwriting of his father, familiar to him from old letters written to him when he was a child--letters which he had always preserved, and every turn of which was impressed upon his memory. The first glance was sufficient to impress upon his mind the conviction that the stranger's tale was true.

Without another word he began to read it. And as he read all his soul became associated with that lonely man, drifting in his drifting ship. There he read the villainy of the miscreant who had compassed his death, and the despair of the castaway.

That suffering man was his own father. It was this that gave intensity to his thoughts as he read. The dying man bequeathed his vengeance to Ralph Brandon, and his blessing to his son.

Despard read over the manuscript many times. It was his father's words to himself.

"I am in haste," said the stranger. "The manuscript is yours. I have made inquiries for Ralph Brandon, and find that he is dead. It is for you to do as seems good. You are a clergyman, but you are also a man; and a father's wrongs cry to Heaven for vengeance."

"And they shall be avenged!" exclaimed Despard, striking his clenched hand upon the table.

"I have something more before I go," continued the stranger, mournfully --"something which you will prize more than life. It was worn next your father's heart till he died. I found it there."

Saying this he handed to Despard a miniature, painted on enamel, representing a beautiful woman, whose features were like his own.

"My mother!" cried Despard, passionately, and he covered the miniature with kisses.

"I buried your father," said the stranger, after a long pause. "His remains now lie on Coffin Island, in their last resting-place."

"And who are you? What are you? How did you find me out? What is your object?" cried Despard, eagerly.

"I am Mr. Wheeler," said the stranger, calmly; "and I come to give you these things in order to fulfill my duty to the dead. It remains for you to fulfill yours."

"That duty shall be fulfilled!" exclaimed Despard. "The law does not help me: I will help myself. I know some of these men at least. I will do the duty of a son."

The stranger bowed and withdrew.

Despard paced the room for hours. A fierce thirst for vengeance had taken possession of him. Again and again he read the manuscript, and after each reading his vengeful feeling became stronger.

At last he had a purpose. He was no longer the imbecile--the crushed--

the hopeless. In the full knowledge of his father's misery his own became endurable.

In the morning he saw Langhetti and told him all.

"But who is the stranger?" Despard asked in wonder.

"It can only be one person," said Langhetti, solemnly.

"Who?"

"Louis Brandon. He and no other. Who else could thus have been chosen to find the dead? He has his wrongs also to avenge."

Despard was silent. Overwhelming thoughts crowded upon him. Was this man Louis Brandon?

"We must find him," said he. "We must gain his help in our work. We must also tell him about Edith."

"Yes," replied Langhetti. "But no doubt he has his own work before him; and this is but part of his plan, to rouse you from inaction to vengeance."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

WHO IS HE?

On the morning after the last escape of Beatrice, Clark went up to Brandon Hall. It was about nine o'clock. A sullen frown was on his face, which was pervaded by an expression of savage malignity. A deeply preoccupied look, as though he were altogether absorbed in his own thoughts, prevented him from noticing the half-smiles which the servants cast at one another.

Asgeelo opened the door. That valuable servant was at his post as usual. Clark brushed past him with a growl and entered the dining-room.

Potts was standing in front of the fire with a flushed face and savage eyes. John was stroking his dog, and appeared quite indifferent. Clark, however, was too much taken up with his own thoughts to notice Potts. He came in and sat down in silence.

"Well," said Potts, "did you do that business?"

"No," growled Clark.

"No!" cried Potts. "Do you mean to say you didn't follow up the fellow?"

"I mean to say it's no go," returned Clark. "I did what I could. But when you are after a man, and he turns out to be the DEVIL HIMSELF, what can you do?"

At these words, which were spoken with unusual excitement, John gave a low laugh, but said nothing.

"You've been getting rather soft lately, it seems to me," said Potts.
"At any rate, what did you do?"

"Well," said Clark, slowly--"I went to that inn--to watch the fellow. He was sitting by the fire, taking it very easy. I tried to make out whether I had ever seen him before, but could not. He sat by the fire, and wouldn't say a word. I tried to trot him out, and at last I did so. He trotted out in good earnest, and if any man was ever kicked at and ridden rough-shod over, I'm that individual. He isn't a man--he's Beelzebub. He knows every thing. He began in a playful way by taking a piece of charcoal and writing on the wall some marks which belong to me, and which I'm a little delicate about letting people see; in fact, the Botany Bay marks."

"Did he know that?" cried Potts, aghast.

"Not only knew it, but, as I was saying, marked it on the wall. That's a sign of knowledge. And for fear they wouldn't be understood, he kindly explained to about a dozen people present the particular meaning of each."

"The devil!" said John.

"That's what I said he was," rejoined Clark, dryly. "But that's nothing. I remember when I was a little boy," he continued, pensively, "hearing the parson read about some handwriting on the wall, that frightened Beelzebub himself; but I tell you this handwriting on the wall used me up a good deal more than that other. Still what followed was worse."

Clark paused for a little while, and then, taking a long breath, went on.

"He proceeded to give to the assembled company an account of my life, particularly that very interesting part of it which I passed on my last visit to Botany Bay. You know my escape."

He stopped for a while.

"Did he know about that, too?" asked Potts, with some agitation.

"Johnnie," said Clark, "he knew a precious sight more than you do, and told some things which I had forgotten myself. Why, that devil stood up there and slowly told the company not only what I did but what I felt. He brought it all back. He told how I looked at Stubbs, and how Stubbs looked at me in the boat. He told how we sat looking at each other, each in our own end of the boat."

Clark stopped again, and no one spoke for a long time.

"I lost my breath and ran out," he resumed, "and was afraid to go back. I did so at last. It was then almost midnight. I found him still sitting there. He smiled at me in a way that fairly made my blood run cold. 'Crocker,' said he, 'sit down.'"

At this Potts and John looked at each other in horror.

"He knows that too?" said John.

"Every thing," returned Clark, dejectedly.

"Well, when he said that I looked a little surprised, as you may be sure.

"I thought you'd be back,' said he, 'for you want to see me, you know. You're going to follow me,' says he. 'You've got your pistols all ready, so, as I always like to oblige a friend, I'll give you a chance. Come.'

"At this I fairly staggered.

"Come,' says he, 'I've got all that money, and Potts wants it back. And you're going to get it from me. Come.'

"I swear to you I could not move. He smiled at me as before, and quietly got up and left the house. I stood for some time fixed to the spot. At last I grew reckless. 'If he's the devil himself,' says I, 'I'll have it out with him.' I rushed out and followed in his pursuit. After some time I overtook him. He was on horseback, but his horse was walking. He heard me coming. 'Ah, Crocker,' said he, quite merrily, 'so you've come, have you?'

"I tore my pistol from my pocket and fired. The only reply was a loud laugh. He went on without turning his head. I was now sure that it was the devil, but I fired my other pistol. He gave a tremendous laugh, turned his horse, and rode full at me. His horse seemed as large as the village church. Every thing swam around, and I fell headforemost on the ground. I believe I lay there all night. When I came to it was morning, and I hurried straight here."

As he ended Clark arose, and, going to the sideboard, poured out a large glass of brandy, which he drank raw.

"The fact is," said John, after long thought, "you've been tricked. This fellow has doctored your pistols and frightened you."

"But I loaded them myself," replied Clark.

"When?"

"Oh, I always keep them loaded in my room. I tried them, and found the charge was in them."

"Oh, somebody's fixed them."

"I don't think half as much about the pistols as about what he told me. What devil could have put all that into his head? Answer me that," said Clark.

"Somebody's at work around us," said John. "I feel it in my bones."

"We're getting used up," said Potts. "The girl's gone again."

"The girl! Gone!"

"Yes, and Mrs. Compton too."

"The devil!"

"I'd rather lose the girl than Mrs. Compton; but when they both vanish the same night what are you to think?"

"I think the devil is loose."

"I'm afraid he's turned against us," said Potts, in a regretful tone.
"He's got tired of helping us."

"Do none of the servants know any thing about it?"

"No--none of them."

"Have you asked them all?"

"Yes."

"Doesn't that new servant, the Injin?"

"No; they all went to bed at twelve. Vijal was up as late as two. They all swear that every thing was quiet."

"Did they go out through the doors?"

"The doors were all locked as usual."

"There's treachery somewhere!" cried John, with more excitement than usual.

The others were silent.

"I believe that the girl's at the bottom of it all," said John. "We've been trying to take her down ever since she came, but it's my belief that we'll end by getting took down ourselves. I scented bad luck in her at the other side of the world. We've been acting like fools. We ought to have silenced her at first."

"No," rejoined Potts, gloomily. "There's somebody at work deeper than she is. Somebody--but who?--who?"

"Nobody but the devil," said Clark, firmly.

"I've been thinking about that Italian," continued Potts. "He's the only man living that would bother his head about the girl. They know a good deal between them. I think he's managed some of this last business. He humbugged us. It isn't the devil; it's this Italian. We must look out; he'll be around here again perhaps."

Clark's eyes brightened.

"The next time," said he, "I'll load my pistols fresh, and then see if he'll escape me!"

At this a noise was heard in the hall. Potts went out. The servants had been scouring the grounds as before, but with no result.

"No use," said John. "I tried it with my dog. He went straight down through the gate, and a little distance outside the scent was lost. I tried him with Mrs. Compton too. They both went together, and of course had horses or carriages there."

"What does the porter say?" asked Clark.

"He swears that he was up till two, and then went to bed, and that nobody was near the gate."

"Well, we can't do any thing," said Potts; "but I'll send some of the servants off to see what they can hear. The scent was lost so soon that we can't tell what direction they took."

"You'll never get her again," said John; "she's gone for good this time."

Potts swore a deep oath and relapsed into silence. After a time they all went down to the bank.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE RUN ON THE BANK.

Not long after the bank opened a number of people came in who asked for gold in return for some bank-notes which they offered. This was an unusual circumstance. The people also were strangers. Potts wondered what it could mean. There was no help for it, however. The gold was paid out, and Potts and his friends began to feel somewhat alarmed at the thought which now presented itself for the first time that their very large circulation of notes might be returned upon them. He communicated this fear to Clark.

"How much gold have you?"

"Very little."

"How much?"

"Thirty thousand."

"Phew!" said Clark, "and nearly two hundred thousand out in notes!"

Potts was silent.

"What'll you do if there is a run on the bank?"

"Oh, there won't be."

"Why not?"

"My credit is too good."

"Your credit won't be worth a rush if people know this."

While they talked persons kept dropping in. Most of the villagers and people of the neighborhood brought back the notes, demanding gold. By about twelve o'clock the influx was constant.

Potts began to feel alarmed. He went out, and tried to bully some of the villagers. They did not seem to pay any attention to him, however. Potts went back to his parlor discomfited, vowing vengeance against those who had thus slighted him. The worst of these was the tailor, who brought in notes to the extent of a thousand pounds, and when Potts ordered him out and told him to wait, only laughed in his face.

"Haven't you got gold enough?" said the tailor, with a sneer. "Are you afraid of the bank? Well, old Potts, so am I."

At this there was a general laugh among the people.

The bank clerks did not at all sympathize with the bank. They were too eager to pay out. Potts had to check them. He called them in his parlor, and ordered them to pay out more slowly. They all declared that they couldn't.

The day dragged on till at last three o'clock came. Fifteen thousand pounds had been paid out. Potts fell into deep despondency. Clark had remained throughout the whole morning.

"There's going to be a run on the bank!" said he. "It's only begun."

Potts's sole answer was a curse.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"You'll have to help me," replied Potts. "You've got something."

"I've got fifty thousand pounds in the Plymouth Bank."

"You'll have to let me have it."

Clark hesitated.

"I don't know," said he.

"D-n it, man, I'll give you any security you wish. I've got more security than I know what to do with."

"Well," said Clark, "I don't know. There's a risk."

"I only want it for a few days. I'll send down stock to my London broker and have it sold. It will give me hundreds of thousands--twice as much as all the bank issue. Then I'll pay up these devils well, and that damned tailor worst of all. I swear I'll send it all down to-day, and have every bit of it sold. If there's going to be a run, I'll be ready for them."

"How much have you?"

"I'll send it all down--though I'm devilish sorry," continued Potts.

"How much? why, see here;" and he penciled down the following figures on a piece of paper, which he showed to Clark:

California Company.....	L100,000
Mexican bonds	50,000
Guatemala do.	50,000
Venezuela do.	50,000

L250,000

"What do you think of that, my boy?" said Potts.

"Well," returned Clark, cautiously, "I don't like them American names."

"Why," said Potts, "the stock is at a premium. I've been getting from twenty to twenty-five per cent. dividends. They'll sell for three hundred thousand nearly. I'll sell them all. I'll sell them all," he cried. "I'll have gold enough to put a stop to this sort of thing forever."

"I thought you had some French and Russian bonds," said Clark.

"I gave those to that devil who had the--the papers, you know. He consented to take them, and I was very glad, for they paid less than the others."

Clark was silent.

"Why, man, what are you thinking about? Don't you know that I'm good for two millions, what with my estate and my stock?"

"But you owe an infernal lot."

"And haven't I notes and other securities from every body?"

"Yes, from every body; but how can you get hold of them?"

"The first people of the county!"

"And as poor as rats."

"London merchants!"

"Who are they? How can you get back your money?"

"Smithers & Co. will let me have what I want."

"If Smithers & Co. knew the present state of affairs I rather think that they'd back down."

"Pooh! What! Back down from a man with my means! Nonsense! They know how rich I am, or they never would have begun. Come, don't be a fool. It'll take three days to get gold for my stock, and if you don't help me the bank may stop before I get it. If you'll help me for three days I'll pay you well."

[Illustration: THE RUN ON THE BANK]

"How much will you give?"

"I'll give ten thousand pounds--there! I don't mind."

"Done. Give me your note for sixty thousand pounds, and I'll let you have the fifty thousand for three days."

"All right. You've got me where my hair is short; but I don't mind. When

can I have the money?"

"The day after to-morrow. I'll go to Plymouth now, get the money to-morrow, and you can use it the next day."

"All right; I'll send down John to London with the stock, and he'll bring up the gold at once."

Clark started off immediately for Plymouth, and not long after John went away to London. Potts remained to await the storm which he dreaded.

The next day came. The bank opened late on purpose. Potts put up a notice that it was to be closed that day at twelve, on account of the absence of some of the directors.

At about eleven the crowd of people began to make their appearance as before. Their demands were somewhat larger than on the previous day. Before twelve ten thousand pounds had been paid. At twelve the bank was shut in the faces of the clamorous people, in accordance with the notice.

Strangers were there from all parts of the county. The village inn was crowded, and a large number of carriages was outside. Potts began to look forward to the next day with deep anxiety. Only five thousand pounds remained in the bank. One man had come with notes to the extent of five thousand, and had only been got rid of by the shutting of the bank. He left, vowing vengeance.

To Potts's immense relief Clark made his appearance early on the following day. He had brought the money. Potts gave him his note for sixty thousand pounds, and the third day began.

By ten o'clock the doors were besieged by the largest crowd that had ever assembled in this quiet village. Another host of lookers-on had collected. When the doors were opened they poured in with a rush.

The demands on this third day were very large. The man with the five thousand had fought his way to the counter first, and clamored to be paid. The noise and confusion were overpowering. Every body was cursing the bank or laughing at it. Each one felt doubtful about getting his pay. Potts tried to be dignified for a time. He ordered them to be quiet, and assured them that they would all be paid. His voice was drowned in the wild uproar. The clerks counted out the gold as rapidly as possible, in spite of the remonstrances of Potts, who on three occasions called them all into the parlor, and threatened to dismiss them unless they counted more slowly. His threats were disregarded. They went back, and paid out as rapidly as before. The amounts required ranged from five or ten pounds to thousands of pounds. At last, after paying out thousands, one man came up who had notes to the amount of ten thousand pounds. This was the largest demand that had yet been made. It was doubtful whether there was so large an amount left. Potts came out to see him. There was no help for it; he had to parley with the enemy.

He told him that it was within a few minutes of three, and that it would take an hour at least to count out so much--would he not wait till the next day? There would be ample time then.

The man had no objection. It was all the same to him. He went out with his bundle of notes through the crowd, telling them that the bank could

not pay him. This intelligence made the excitement still greater. There was a fierce rush to the counter. The clerks worked hard, and paid out what they could in spite of the hints and even the threats of Potts, till at length the bank clock struck the hour of three. It had been put forward twenty minutes, and there was a great riot among the people on that account, but they could not do any thing. The bank was closed for the day, and they had to depart.

Both Potts and Clark now waited eagerly for the return of John. He was expected before the next day. He ought to be in by midnight. After waiting impatiently for hours they at length drove out to see if they could find him.

About twelve miles from Brandon they met him at midnight with a team of horses and a number of men, all of whom were armed.

"Have you got it?"

"Yes," said John, "what there is of it."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I'm too tired to explain. Wait till we get home."

It was four o'clock in the morning before they reached the bank. The gold was taken out and deposited in the vaults, and the three went up to the Hall. They brought out brandy and refreshed themselves, after which John remarked, in his usual laconic style,

"You've been and gone and done it."

"What?" asked Potts, somewhat puzzled.

"With your speculations in stocks."

"What about them?"

"Nothing," said John, "only they happen to be at a small discount."

"A discount?"

"Slightly."

Potts was silent.

"How much?" asked Clark.

"I have a statement here," said John. "When I got to London, I saw the broker. He said that American stocks, particularly those which I held, had undergone a great depreciation. He assured me that it was only temporary, that the dividends which these stocks paid were enough to raise them in a short time, perhaps in a few weeks, and that it was madness to sell out now. He declared that it would ruin the credit of the Brandon Bank if it were known that we sold out at such a fearful sacrifice, and advised me to raise the money at a less cost."

"Well, I could only think of Smithers & Co. I went to their office. They were all away. I saw one of the clerks who said they had gone to see about some Russian loan or other, so there was nothing to do but to go

back to the broker. He assured me again that it was an unheard of sacrifice; that these very stocks which I held had fallen terribly, he knew not how, and advised me to do any thing rather than make such a sacrifice. But I could do nothing. Gold was what I wanted, and since Smithers & Co. were away this was the only way to get it."

"Well!" cried Potts, eagerly. "Did you get it?"

"You saw that I got it. I sold out at a cost that is next to ruin."

"What is it?"

"Well," said John, "I will give you the statement of the broker," and he drew from his pocket a paper which he handed to the others. They looked at it eagerly.

It was as follows:

100 shares California @ L1000 each.	65 per
cent, discount.....	L35,000
50 shares Mexican.	75 per cent, discount
50 shares Guatemala.	80 per cent, dis-
count	10,000
50 shares Venezuela.	80 per cent discount
	10,000

	L67,000

The faces of Potts and Clark grew black as night as they read this. A deep execration burst from Potts. Clark leaned back in his chair.

"The bank's blown up!" said he.

"No, it ain't," rejoined Potts.

"Why not?"

"There's gold enough to pay all that's likely to be offered."

"How much more do you think will be offered?"

"Not much; it stands to reason."

"It stands to reason that every note which you've issued will be sent back to you. So I'll trouble you to give me my sixty thousand; and I advise you as a friend to hold on to the rest."

"Clark!" said Potts, "you're getting timider and timider. You ain't got any more pluck these times than a kitten."

"It's a time when a man's got to be careful of his earnings," said Clark. "How much have you out in notes? You told me once you had out about L180,000, perhaps more. Well, you've already had to redeem about L75,000. That leaves L105,000 yet, and you've only got L67,000 to pay it with. What have you got to say to that?"

"Well!" said Potts. "The Brandon Bank may go--but what then? You forget that I have the Brandon estate. That's worth two millions."

"You got it for two hundred thousand."

"Because it was thrown away, and dropped into my hands."

"It'll be thrown away again at this rate. You owe Smithers & Co."

"Pooh! that's all offset by securities which I hold."

"Queer securities!"

"All good," said Potts. "All first-rate. It'll be all right. We'll have to put it through."

"But what if it isn't all right?" asked Clark, savagely.

"You forget that I have Smithers & Co. to fall back on."

"If your bank breaks, there is an end of Smithers & Co."

"Oh no. I've got this estate to fall back on, and they know it. I can easily explain to them. If they had only been in town I shouldn't have had to make this sacrifice. You needn't feel troubled about your money. I'll give you security on the estate to any amount. I'll give you security for seventy thousand," said Potts.

Clark thought for a while.

"Well!" said he, "it's a risk, but I'll run it"

"There isn't time to get a lawyer now to make out the papers; but whenever you fetch one I'll do it"

"I'll get one to-day, and you'll sign the papers this evening. In my opinion by that time the bank'll be shut up for good, and you're a fool for your pains. You're simply throwing away what gold you have."

Potts went down not long after. It was the fourth day of the run. Miscellaneous callers thronged the place, but the amounts were not large. In two hours not more than five thousand were paid out.

At length a man came in with a carpet-bag. He pulled out a vast quantity of notes.

"How much?" asked the clerk, blandly.

"Thirty thousand pounds," said the man.

Potts heard this and came out.

"How much?" he asked.

"Thirty thousand pounds."

"Do you want it in gold?"

"Of course."

"Will you take a draft on Messrs. Smithers & Co.?"

"No, I want gold."

While Potts was talking to this man another was waiting patiently beside him. Of course this imperative claimant had to be paid or else the bank would have to stop, and this was a casualty which Potts could not yet face with calmness. Before it came to that he was determined to pay out his last sovereign.

On paying the thirty thousand pounds it was found that there were only two bags left of two thousand pounds each.

The other man who had waited stood calmly, while the one who had been paid was making arrangements about conveying his money away.

It was now two o'clock. The stranger said quietly to the clerk opposite that he wanted gold.

"How much?" said the clerk, with the same blandness.

"Forty thousand pounds," answered the stranger.

"Sorry we can't accommodate you, Sir," returned the clerk.

Potts had heard this and came forward.

"Won't you take a draft on London?" said he.

"Can't," replied the man; "I was ordered to get gold."

"A draft on Smithers & Co.?"

"Couldn't take even Bank of England notes," said the stranger; "I'm only an agent. If you can't accommodate me I'm sorry, I'm sure."

Potts was silent. His face was ghastly. As much agony as such a man could endure was felt by him at that moment.

Half an hour afterward the shutters were up; and outside the door stood a wild and riotous crowd, the most noisy of whom was the tailor.

The Brandon Bank had failed.

CHAPTER L.

THE BANK DIRECTORS.

The bank doors were closed, and the bank directors were left to their own reflections. Clark had been in through the day, and at the critical moment his feelings had overpowered him so much that he felt compelled to go over to the inn to get something to drink, wherewith he might refresh himself and keep up his spirits.

Potts and John remained in the bank parlor. The clerks had gone. Potts was in that state of dejection in which even liquor was not desirable. John showed his usual nonchalance.

"Well, Johnnie," said Potts, after a long silence, "we're used up!"

"The bank's bursted, that's a fact. You were a fool for fighting it out so long."

"I might as well. I was responsible, at any rate."

"You might have kept your gold."

"Then my estate would have been good. Besides, I hoped to fight through this difficulty. In fact, I hadn't any thing else to do."

"Why not?"

"Smithers & Co,"

"Ah! yes."

"They'll be down on me now. That's what I was afraid of all along."

"How much do you owe them?"

"Seven hundred and two thousand pounds."

"The devil! I thought it was only five hundred thousand."

"It's been growing every day. Its a dreadful dangerous thing to have unlimited credit."

"Well, you've got something as an offset. The debts due the bank."

"Johnnie," said Potts, taking a long breath, "since Clark isn't here I don't mind telling you that my candid opinion is them debts isn't worth a rush. A great crowd of people came here for money. I didn't hardly ask a question. I shelled out royally. I wanted to be known, so as to get into Parliament some day. I did what is called 'going it blind.'"

"How much is owing you?"

"The books say five hundred and thirteen thousand pounds--but it's doubtful if I can get any of it. And now Smithers & Co. will be down on me at once."

"What do you intend to do?"

"I don't know."

"Haven't you thought?"

"No, I couldn't."

"Well, I have."

"What?"

"You'll have to try to compromise."

"What if they won't?"

John shrugged his shoulders, and said nothing.

"After all," resumed Potts, hopefully, "it can't be so bad. The estate is worth two millions."

"Pooh!"

"Isn't it?"

"Of course not. You know what you bought it for."

"That's because it was thrown away."

"Well, it'll have to be thrown away again."

"Oh, Smithers & Co.'ll be easy. They don't care for money."

"Perhaps so. The fact is, I don't understand Smithers & Co. at all. I've tried to see through their little game, but can't begin to do it."

"Oh, that's easy enough! They knew I was rich, and let me have what money I wanted."

John looked doubtful.

At this moment a rap was heard at the back door.

"There comes Clark!" said he.

Potts opened the door. Clark entered. His face was flushed, and his eyes bloodshot.

"See here," said he, mysteriously, as he entered the room.

"What?" asked the others, anxiously.

"There's two chaps at the inn. One is the Italian--"

"Langhetti!"

"Ay," said Clark, gloomily; "and the other is his mate--that fellow that helped him to carry off the gal. They've done it again this time, and my opinion is that these fellows are at the bottom of all our troubles. You know _whose son he is_."

Potts and John exchanged glances.

"I went after that devil once, and I'm going to try it again. This time I'll take some one who isn't afraid of the devil. Johnnie, is the dog at the Hall?"

"Yes."

"All right!" said Clark. "I'll be even with this fellow yet, if he is in league with the devil."

With these words Clark went out, and left the two together. A glance of savage exultation passed over the face of Potts.

"If he comes back successful," said he, "all right, and if he doesn't, why then"--He paused.

"If he doesn't come back," said John, finishing the sentence for him, "why then--all right."

CHAPTER LI.

A STRUGGLE.

All the irresolution which for a time had characterized Despard had vanished before the shock of that great discovery which his father's manuscript had revealed to him. One purpose now lay clearly and vividly before him, one which to so loyal and devoted a nature as his was the holiest duty, and that was vengeance on his father's murderers.

In this purpose he took refuge from his own grief; he cast aside his own longings, his anguish, his despair. Langhetti wished to search after his "Bice;" Despard wished to find those whom his dead father had denounced to him. In the intensity of his purpose he was careless as to the means by which that vengeance should be accomplished. He thought not whether it would be better to trust to the slow action of the law, or to take the task into his own hands. His only wish was to be confronted with either of these men, or both of them.

It was with this feeling in his heart that he set out with Langhetti, and the two went once more in company to the village of Brandon, where they arrived on the first day of the "run on the bank."

He did not know exactly what it would be best to do first. His one idea was to go to the Hall, and confront the murderers in their own place. Langhetti, however, urged the need of help from the civil magistrate. It was while they were deliberating about this that a letter was brought in addressed to the _Rev. Courtenay Despard_.

Despard did not recognize the handwriting. In some surprise how any one should know that was here he opened the letter, and his surprise was still greater as he read the following:

"SIR,--There are two men here whom you seek--one Potts, the other Clark. You can see them both at any time.

"The young lady whom you and Signor Langhetti formerly rescued has escaped, and is now in safety at Denton, a village not more than twenty miles away. She lives in the last cottage on the left-hand side of the road, close by the sea. There is an American elm in front."

There was no signature.

Despard handed it in silence to Langhetti, who read it eagerly. Joy spread over his face. He started to his feet.

"I must go at once," said he, excitedly. "Will you?"

"No," replied Despard. "You had better go. I must stay; my purpose is a

different one."

"But do not you also wish to secure the safety of Bice?"

"Of course; but I shall not be needed. You will be enough."

Langhetti tried to persuade him, but Despard was immovable. For himself he was too impatient to wait. He determined to set out at once. He could not get a carriage, but he managed to obtain a horse, and with this he set out. It was about the time when the bank had closed.

Just before his departure Despard saw a man come from the bank and enter the inn. He knew the face, for he had seen it when here before. It was Clark. At the sight of this face all his fiercest instinct awoke within him--a deep thirst for vengeance arose. He could not lose sight of this man. He determined to track him, and thus by active pursuit to do something toward the accomplishment of his purpose.

He watched him, therefore, as he entered the inn, and caught a hasty glance which Clark directed at himself and Langhetti. He did not understand the meaning of the scowl that passed over the ruffian's face, nor did Clark understand the full meaning of that gloomy frown which lowered over Despard's brow as his eyes blazed wrathfully and menacingly upon him.

[Illustration: "THE NEXT INSTANT DESPARD HAD SEIZED HIS THROAT AND HELD HIM SO THAT HE COULD NOT MOVE."]

Clark came out and went to the bank. On quitting the bank Despard saw him looking back at Langhetti, who was just leaving. He then watched him till he went up to the Hall.

In about half an hour Clark came back on horseback followed by a dog. He talked for a while with the landlord, and then went off at a slow trot.

On questioning the landlord Despard found that Clark had asked him about the direction which Langhetti had taken. The idea at once flashed upon him that possibly Clark wished to pursue Langhetti, in order to find out about Beatrice. He determined on pursuit, both for Langhetti's sake and his own.

He followed, therefore, not far behind Clark, riding at first rapidly till he caught sight of him at the summit of a hill in front, and then keeping at about the same distance behind him. He had not determined in his mind what it was best to do, but held himself prepared for any course of action.

After riding about an hour he put spurs to his horse, and went on at a more rapid pace. Yet he did not overtake Clark, and therefore conjectured that Clark himself must have gone on more rapidly. He now put his own horse at its fullest speed, with the intention of coming up with his enemy as soon as possible.

He rode on at a tremendous pace for another half hour. At last the road took a sudden turn; and, whirling around here at the utmost speed, he burst upon a scene which was as startling as it was unexpected, and which roused to madness all the fervid passion of his nature.

The road here descended, and in its descent wound round a hill and led

into a gentle hollow, on each side of which hills arose which were covered with trees.

Within this glen was disclosed a frightful spectacle. A man lay on the ground, torn from his horse by a huge blood-hound, which even then was rending him with its huge fangs! The dismounted rider's foot was entangled in the stirrups, and the horse was plunging and dragging him along, while the dog was pulling him back. The man himself uttered not a cry, but tried to fight off the dog with his hands as best he could.

In the horror of the moment Despard saw that it was Langhetti. For an instant his brain reeled. The next moment he had reached the spot. Another horseman was standing close by, without pretending even to interfere. Despard did not see him; he saw nothing but Langhetti. He flung himself from his horse, and drew a revolver from his pocket. A loud report rang through the air, and in an instant the huge blood-hound gave a leap upward, with a piercing yell, and fell dead in the road.

Despard flung himself on his knees beside Langhetti. He saw his hands torn and bleeding, and blood covering his face and breast. A low groan was all that escaped from the sufferer.

"Leave me," he gasped. "Save Bice."

In his grief for Langhetti, thus lying before him in such agony, Despard forgot all else. He seized his handkerchief and tried to stanch the blood.

"Leave me!" gasped Langhetti again. "Bice will be lost." His head, which Despard had supported for a moment, sank back, and life seemed to leave him.

Despard started up. Now for the first time he recollected the stranger; and in an instant understood who he was, and why this had been done. Suddenly, as he started up, he felt his pistol snatched from his hand by a strong grasp. He turned.

It was the horseman--it was Clark--who had stealthily dismounted, and, in his desperate purpose, had tried to make sure of Despard.

But Despard, quick as thought, leaped upon him, and caught his hand. In the struggle the pistol fell to the ground. Despard caught Clark in his arms, and then the contest began.

Clark was of medium size, thick-set, muscular, robust, and desperate. Despard was tall, but his frame was well knit, his muscles and sinews were like iron, and he was inspired by a higher Spirit and a deeper passion.

In the first shock of that fierce embrace not a word was spoken. For some time the struggle was maintained without result. Clark had caught Despard at a disadvantage, and this for a time prevented the latter from putting forth his strength effectually.

At last he wound one arm around Clark's neck in a strangling grasp, and forced his other arm under that of Clark. Then with one tremendous, one resistless impulse, he put forth all his strength. His antagonist gave way before it. He reeled.

Despard disengaged one arm and dealt him a tremendous blow on the temple. At the same instant he twined his legs about those of the other. At the stroke Clark, who had already staggered, gave way utterly and fell heavily backward, with Despard upon him.

The next instant Despard had seized his throat and held him down so that he could not move.

The wretch gasped and groaned. He struggled to escape from that iron hold in vain. The hand which had seized him was not to be shaken off. Despard had fixed his grasp there, and there in the throat of the fainting, suffocating wretch he held it.

The struggles grew fainter, the arms relaxed, the face blackened, the limbs stiffened. At last all efforts ceased.

Despard then arose, and, turning Clark over on his face, took the bridle from one of the horses, bound his hands behind him, and fastened his feet securely. In the fierce struggle Clark's coat and waistcoat had been torn away, and slipped down to some extent. His shirt-collar had burst and slipped with them. As Despard turned him over and proceeded to tie him, something struck his eye. It was a bright, red scar.

He pulled down the shirt. A mark appeared, the full meaning of which he knew not, but could well conjecture. There were three brands--fiery red--and these were the marks:

[Illustration: ^ /\ [three lines, forming short arrow]

R [sans-serif R]

+ [plus sign]]

CHAPTER LII.

FACE TO FACE.

On the same evening Potts left the bank at about five o'clock, and went up to the Hall with John. He was morose, gloomy, and abstracted. The great question now before him was how to deal with Smithers & Co. Should he write to them, or go and see them, or what? How could he satisfy their claims, which he knew would now be presented? Involved in thoughts like these, he entered the Hall, and, followed by John, went to the dining-room, where father and son sat down to refresh themselves over a bottle of brandy.

They had not been seated half an hour before the noise of carriage-wheels was heard; and on looking out they saw a dog-cart drawn by two magnificent horses, which drove swiftly up to the portico. A gentleman dismounted, and, throwing the reins to his servant, came up the steps.

The stranger was of medium size, with an aristocratic air, remarkably regular features, of pure Grecian outline, and deep, black, lustrous

eyes. His brow was dark and stern, and clouded over by a gloomy frown.

"Who the devil is he?" cried Potts. "D--n that porter! I told him to let no one in to-day."

"I believe the porter's playing fast and loose with us. But, by Jove! do you see that fellow's eyes? Do you know who else has such eyes?"

"No."

"Old Smithers."

"Smithers!"

"Yes."

"Then this is young Smithers?"

"Yes; or else the devil," said John, harshly. "I begin to have an idea," he continued. "I've been thinking about this for some time."

"What is it?"

"Old Smithers had these eyes. That last chap that drew the forty thousand out of you kept his eyes covered. Here comes this fellow with the same eyes. I begin to trace a connection between them."

"Pooh! Old Smithers is old enough to be this man's grandfather."

"Did you ever happen to notice that old Smithers hadn't a wrinkle in his face?"

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing--only his hair mightn't have been natural; that's all."

Potts and John exchanged glances, and nothing was said for some time.

"Perhaps this Smithers & Son have been at the bottom of all this," continued John. "They are the only ones who could have been strong enough."

"But why should they?"

John shook his head.

"Despard or Langhetti may have got them to do it. Perhaps that d----d girl did it. Smithers & Co. will make money enough out of the speculation to pay them. As for me and you, I begin to have a general but very accurate idea of ruin. You are getting squeezed pretty close up to the wall, dad, and they won't give you time to breathe."

Before this conversation had ended the stranger had entered, and had gone up to the drawing-room. The servant came down to announce him.

"What name?" asked Potts.

"He didn't give any."

Potts looked perplexed.

"Come now," said John. "This fellow has overreached himself at last. He's come here; perhaps it won't be so easy for him to get out. I'll have all the servants ready. Do you keep up your spirits. Don't get frightened, but be plucky. Bluff him, and when the time comes ring the bell, and I'll march in with all the servants." Potts looked for a moment at his son with a glance of deep admiration.

"Johnnie,--you've got more sense in your little finger than I have in my whole body. Yes: we've got this fellow, whoever he is; and if he turns out to be what I suspect, then we'll spring the trap on him, and he'll learn what it is to play with edge tools."

With these words Potts departed, and, ascending the stairs, entered the drawing-room.

The stranger was standing looking out of one of the windows. His attitude brought back to Potts's recollection the scene which had once occurred there, when old Smithers was holding Beatrice in his arms. The recollection of this threw a flood of light on Potts's mind. He recalled it with a savage exaltation. Perhaps they were the same, as John said--perhaps; no, most assuredly they must be the same.

"I've got him now, any way," murmured Potts to himself, "whoever he is."

The stranger turned and looked at Potts for a few moments. He neither bowed nor uttered any salutation whatever. In his look there was a certain terrific menace, an indefinable glance of conscious power, combined with implacable hate. The frown which usually rested on his brow darkened and deepened till the gloomy shadows that covered them seemed like thunder-clouds.

Before that awful look Potts felt himself cowering involuntarily; and he began to feel less confidence in his own power, and less sure that the stranger had flung himself into a trap. However, the silence was embarrassing; so at last, with an effort, he said:

"Well; is there any thing you want of me? I'm in a hurry."

"Yes," said the stranger, "I reached the village to-day to call at the bank, but found it closed."

"Oh! I suppose you've got a draft on me, too."

"Yes," said the stranger, mysteriously. "I suppose I may call it a draft."

"There's no use in troubling your head about it, then," returned Potts; "I won't pay."

"You won't?"

"Not a penny."

A sharp, sudden smile of contempt flashed over the stranger's face.

"Perhaps if you knew what the draft is, you would feel differently."

"I don't care what it is."

"That depends upon the drawer."

"I don't care who the drawer is. I won't pay it. I don't care even if it's Smithers & Co. I'll settle all when I'm ready. I'm not going to be bullied any longer. I've borne enough. You needn't look so very grand," he continued, pettishly; "I see through you, and you can't keep up this sort of thing much longer."

"You appear to hint that you know who I am?"

"Something of that sort," said Potts, rudely; "and let me tell you I don't care who you are."

"That depends," rejoined the other, calmly, "very much upon circumstances."

"So you see," continued Potts, "you won't get any thing out of me--not this time," he added.

"My draft," said the stranger, "is different from those which were presented at the bank counter."

He spoke in a tone of deep solemnity, with a tone which seemed like the tread of some inevitable Fate advancing upon its victim. Potts felt an indefinable fear stealing over him in spite of himself. He said not a word.

"My draft," continued the stranger, in a tone which was still more aggressive in its dominant and self-assertive power--"my draft was drawn twenty years ago."

Potts looked wonderingly and half fearfully at him.

"My draft," said the other, "was drawn by Colonel Lionel Despard."

A chill went to the heart of Potts. With a violent effort he shook off his fear.

"Pooh!" said he, "you're at that old story, are you? That nonsense won't do here."

"It was dated at sea," continued the stranger, in tones which still deepened in awful emphasis--"at sea, when the writer was all alone."

"It's a lie!" cried Potts, while his face grew white.

"At sea," continued the other, ringing the changes on this one word, "at sea--on board that ship to which you had brought him--the _Vishnu_!"

Potts was like a man fascinated by some horrid spectacle. He looked fixedly at his interlocutor. His jaw fell.

"There he died," said the stranger. "Who caused his death? Will you answer?"

With a tremendous effort Potts again recovered command of himself.

"You--you've been reading up old papers," replied he, in a stammering voice. "You've got a lot of stuff in your head which you think will frighten me. You've come to the wrong shop."

But in spite of these words the pale face and nervous manner of Potts showed how deep was his agitation.

"I myself was on board the _Vishnu_," said the other.

"You!"

"Yes, I."

"You! Then you must have been precious small. The _Vishnu_ went down twenty years ago."

"I was on board of the _Vishnu_, and I saw Colonel Despard."

The memory of some awful scene seemed to inspire the tones of the speaker--they thrilled through the coarse, brutal nature of the listener.

"I saw Colonel Despard," continued the stranger.

"You lie!" cried Potts, roused by terror and horror to a fierce pitch of excitement.

"I saw Colonel Despard," repeated the stranger, for the third time, "on board the _Vishnu_ in the Indian Sea. I learned from him his story --"

He paused.

"Then," cried Potts quickly, to whom there suddenly came an idea which brought courage with it; "then, if you saw him, what concern is it of mine? He was alive, then, and the Despard murder never took place."

"It did take place," said the other.

"You're talking nonsense. How could it if you saw him? He must have been alive."

"He was dead!" replied the stranger, whose eyes had never withdrawn themselves from those of Potts, and now seemed like two fiery orbs blazing wrathfully upon him. The tones penetrated to the very soul of the listener. He shuddered in spite of himself. Like most vulgar natures, his was accessible to superstitious horror. He heard and trembled.

"He was dead," repeated the stranger, "and yet all that I told you is true. I learned from him his story."

"Dead men tell no tales," muttered Potts, in a scarce articulate voice.

"So you thought when you locked him in, and set fire to the ship, and scuttled her; but you see you were mistaken, for here at least was a dead man who did tell tales, and I was the listener."

And the mystic solemnity of the man's face seemed to mark him as one who might indeed have held commune with the dead.

"He told me," continued the stranger, "where he found you, and how."

Awful expectation was manifest on the face of Potts.

"He told me of the mark on your arm. Draw up your sleeve, Briggs, Potts, or whatever other name you choose, and show the indelible characters which represent the name of _Bowhani_."

Potts started back. His lips grew ashen. His teeth chattered.

"He gave me this," cried the stranger, in a louder voice; "and this is the draft which you will not reject."

He strode forward three or four paces, and flung something toward Potts.

It was a cord, at the end of which was a metallic ball. The ball struck the table as it fell, and rolled to the floor, but the stranger held the other end in his hand.

"THUG!" cried he; "do you know what that is?"

Had the stranger been Olympian Jove, and had he flung forth from his right hand a thunder-bolt, it could not have produced a more appalling effect than that which was wrought upon Potts by the sight of this cord. He started back in horror, uttering a cry half-way between a scream and a groan. Big drops of perspiration started from his brow. He trembled and shuddered from head to foot. His jaw fell. He stood speechless.

"That is my draft," said the stranger.

"What do you want?" gasped Potts.

"The title deeds of the Brandon estates!"

"The Brandon estates!" said Potts, in a faltering voice.

"Yes, the Brandon estates; nothing less."

"And will you then keep silent?"

"I will give you the cord."

"Will you keep silent?"

"I am your master," said the other, haughtily, as his burning eyes fixed themselves with a consuming gaze upon the abject wretch before him; "I am your master. I make no promises. I spare you or destroy you as I choose."

These words reduced Potts to despair. In the depths of that despair he found hope. He started up, defiant. With an oath he sprang to the bell-rope and pulled again and again, till the peals reverberated through the house.

The stranger stood with a scornful smile on his face. Potts turned to him savagely:

"I'll teach you," he cried, "that you've come to the wrong shop. I'm not a child. Who you are I don't know and I don't care. You are the cause of my ruin, and you'll repent of it."

[Illustration: "THUG! DO YOU KNOW WHAT THAT IS?"]

The stranger said nothing, but stood with the same fixed and scornful smile. A noise was heard outside, the tramp of a crowd of men. They ascended the stairs. At last John appeared at the door of the room, followed by thirty servants. Prominent among these was Asgeelo. Near him was Vijal. Potts gave a triumphant smile. The servants ranged themselves around the room.

"Now," cried Potts, "you're in for it. You're in a trap, I think. You'll find that I'm not a born idiot. Give up that cord!"

The stranger said nothing, but wound up the cord coolly, placed it in his pocket, and still regarded Potts with his scornful smile.

"Here!" cried Potts, addressing the servants. "Catch that man, and tie his hands and feet."

The servants had taken their station around the room at John's order. As Potts spoke they stood there looking at the stranger, but not one of them moved. Vijal only started forward. The stranger turned toward him and looked in his face.

Vijal glanced around in surprise, waiting for the other servants.

"You devils!" cried Potts, "do you hear what I say? Seize that man!"

None of the servants moved.

"It's my belief," said John, "that they're all ratting."

"Vijal!" cried Potts, savagely, "tackle him."

Vijal rushed forward. At that instant Asgeelo bounded forward also with one tremendous leap, and seizing Vijal by the throat hurled him to the floor.

The stranger waved his hand.

"Let him go!" said he.

Asgeelo obeyed.

"What the devil's the meaning of this?" cried John, looking around in dismay. Potts also looked around. There stood the servants--motionless, impassive.

"For the last time," roared Potts, with a perfect volley of oaths, "seize that man, or you'll be sorry for it."

The servants stood motionless. The stranger remained in the same attitude with the same sneering smile.

"You see," said he, at last, "that you don't know me, after all. You are

in my power, Briggs--you can't get away, nor can your son."

Potts rushed, with an oath, to the door. Half a dozen servants were standing there. As he came furiously toward them they held out their clenched fists. He rushed upon them. They beat him back. He fell, foaming at the lips.

John stood, cool and unmoved, looking around the room, and learning from the face of each servant that they were all beyond his authority. He folded his arms, and said nothing.

"You appear to have been mistaken in your man," said the stranger, coolly. "These are not your servants; they're mine. Shall I tell them to seize you?"

Potts glared at him with bloodshot eyes, but said nothing.

"Shall I tell them to pull up your sleeve and display the mark of Bowhani, Sir? Shall I tell who and what you are? Shall I begin from your birth and give them a full and complete history of your life?"

Potts looked around like a wild beast in the arena, seeking for some opening for escape, but finding nothing except hostile faces.

"Do what you like!" he cried, desperately, with an oath, and sank down into stolid despair.

"No; you don't mean that," said the other. "For I have some London policemen at the inn, and I might like best to hand you over to them on charges which you can easily imagine. You don't wish me to do so, I think. You'd prefer being at large to being chained up in a cell, or sent to Botany Bay, I suppose? Still, if you prefer it, I will at once arrange an interview between yourself and these gentlemen."

"What do you want?" anxiously asked Potts, who now thought that he might come to terms, and perhaps gain his escape from the clutches of his enemy.

"The title deeds of the Brandon estate," said the stranger.

"Never!"

"Then off you go. They must be mine, at any rate. Nothing can prevent that. Either give them now and begone, or delay, and you go at once to jail."

"I won't give them," said Potts, desperately.

"Cato!" said the stranger, "go and fetch the policemen."

"Stop!" cried John.

At a sign Asgeelo, who had already taken two steps toward the door, paused.

"Here, dad," said John, "you've got to do it. You might as well hand over the papers. You don't want to get into quod, I think."

Potts turned his pale face to his son.

"Do it!" exclaimed John.

"Well," he said, with a sigh, "since I've got to, I've got to, I suppose. You know best, Johnnie. I always said you had a long head."

"I must go and get them," he continued.

"I'll go with you; or no--Cato shall go with you, and I'll wait here."

The Hindu went with Potts, holding his collar in his powerful grasp, and taking care to let Potts see the hilt of a knife which he carried up his sleeve, in the other hand.

After about a quarter of an hour they returned, and Potts handed over to the stranger some papers. He looked at them carefully, and put them in his pocket. He then gave Potts the cord. Potts took it in an abstracted way, and said nothing.

"You must leave this Hall to-night," said the stranger, sternly--"you and your son. I remain here."

"Leave the Hall?" gasped Potts.

"Yes."

For a moment he stood overwhelmed. He looked at John. John nodded his head slowly.

"You've got to do it, dad," said he.

Potts turned savagely at the stranger. He shook his clenched fist at him.

"D--n you!" he cried. "Are you satisfied yet? I know you. I'll pay you up. What complaint have you against me, I'd like to know? I never harmed you."

"You don't know me, or you wouldn't say that."

"I do. You're Smithers & Co."

"True; and I'm several other people. I've had the pleasure of an extended intercourse with you. For I'm not only Smithers & Co., but I'm also Beamish & Hendricks, American merchants. I'm also Bigelow, Higginson, & Co., solicitors to Smithers & Co. Besides, I'm your London broker, who attended to your speculations in stocks. Perhaps you think that you don't know me after all."

As he said this Potts and John exchanged glances of wonder.

"Tricked!" cried Potts--"deceived! humbugged! and ruined! Who are you? What have you against me? Who are you? Who?"

And he gazed with intense curiosity upon the calm face of the stranger, who, in his turn, looked upon him with the air of one who was surveying from a superior height some feeble creature far beneath him.

"Who am I?" he repeated. "Who? I am the one to whom all this belongs. I

am one whom you have injured so deeply, that what I have done to you is nothing in comparison."

"Who are you?" cried Potts, with feverish impatience. "It's a lie. I never injured you. I never saw you before till you came yourself to trouble me. Those whom I have injured are all dead, except that parson, the son of--of the officer."

"There are others."

Potts said nothing, but looked with some fearful discovery dawning upon him.

"You know me now!" cried the stranger. "I see it in your face."

"You're not _him_!" exclaimed Potts, in a piercing voice.

"I am LOUIS BRANDON!"

"I knew it! I knew it!" cried John, in a voice which was almost a shriek.

"Cigole played false. I'll make him pay for this," gasped Potts.

"Cigole did not play false. He killed me as well as he could--But away, both of you. I can not breathe while you are here. I will allow you an hour to be gone."

At the end of the hour Brandon of Brandon Hall was at last master in the home of his ancestors.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE COTTAGE.

When Despard had bound Clark he returned to look after Langhetti. He lay feebly and motionless upon the ground. Despard carefully examined his wounds. His injuries were very severe. His arms were lacerated, and his shoulder torn; blood also was issuing from a wound on the side of his neck. Despard bound these as best he could, and then sat wondering what could be done next.

He judged that he might be four or five miles from Denton, and saw that this was the place to which he must go. Besides, Beatrice was there, and she could nurse Langhetti. But how could he get there?--that was the question. It was impossible for Langhetti to go on horseback. He tried to form some plan by which this might be done. He began to make a sort of litter to be hung between two horses, and had already cut down with his knife two small trees or rather bushes for this purpose, when the noise of wheels on the road before him attracted his attention.

It was a farmer's wagon, and it was coming from the direction of Denton. Despard stopped it, explained his situation, and offered to pay any thing if the farmer would turn back and convey his friend and his prisoner to Denton. It did not take long to strike a bargain; the farmer

turned his horses, some soft shrubs and ferns were strewn on the bottom of the wagon, and on these Langhetti was deposited carefully. Clark, who by this time had come to himself, was put at one end, where he sat grimly and sulkily; the three horses were led behind, and Despard, riding on the wagon, supported the head of Langhetti on his knees.

Slowly and carefully they went to the village. Despard had no difficulty in finding the cottage. It was where the letter had described it. The village inn stood near on the opposite side of the road.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening when they reached the cottage. Lights were burning in the windows. Despard jumped out hastily and knocked. A servant came. Despard asked for the mistress, and Beatrice appeared. As she recognized him her face lighted up with joy. But Despard's face was sad and gloomy. He pressed her hand in silence and said:

"My dear adopted sister, I bring you our beloved Langhetti."

"Langhetti!" she exclaimed, fearfully.

"He has met with an accident. Is there a doctor in the place? Send your servant at once."

Beatrice hurried in and returned with a servant.

"We will first lift him out," said Despard. "Is there a bed ready?"

"Oh yes! Bring him in!" cried Beatrice, who was now in an agony of suspense.

She hurried after them to the wagon. They lifted Langhetti out and took him into a room which Beatrice showed them. They tenderly laid him on the bed. Meanwhile the servant had hurried off for a doctor, who soon appeared.

Beatrice sat by his bedside; she kissed the brow of the almost unconscious sufferer, and tried in every possible way to alleviate his pain. The doctor soon arrived, dressed his wounds, and left directions for his care, which consisted chiefly in constant watchfulness.

Leaving Langhetti under the charge of Beatrice, Despard went in search of a magistrate. He found one without any difficulty, and before an hour Clark was safe in jail. The information which Despard lodged against him was corroborated by the brands on his back, which showed him to be a man of desperate character, who had formerly been transported for crime.

Despard next wrote a letter to Mrs. Thornton. He told her about Langhetti, and urged her to come on immediately and bring Edith with her. Then he returned to the cottage and wished to sit up with Langhetti. Beatrice, however, would not let him. She said that no one should deprive her of the place by his bedside. Despard remained, however, and the two devoted equal attention to the sufferer. Langhetti spoke only once. He was so faint that his voice was scarce audible. Beatrice put her ear close to his mouth.

"What is it?" asked Despard.

"He wants Edith," said Beatrice.

"I have written for her," said Despard.

Beatrice whispered this to Langhetti. An ecstatic smile passed over his face.

"It is well," he murmured.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE WORM TURNS.

Potts departed from the Hall in deep dejection. The tremendous power of his enemy had been shown all along; and now that this enemy turned out to be Louis Brandon, he felt as though some supernatural being had taken up arms against him. Against that being a struggle seemed as hopeless as it would be against Fate. It was with some such feeling as this that he left Brandon Hall forever.

All of his grand projects had broken down, suddenly and utterly. He had not a ray of hope left of ever regaining the position which he had but recently occupied. He was thrust back to the obscurity from which he had emerged.

One thing troubled him. Would the power of his remorseless enemy be now stayed--would his vengeance end here? He could scarce hope for this. He judged that enemy by himself, and he knew that he would not stop in the search after vengeance, that nothing short of the fullest and direst ruin--nothing, in fact, short of death itself would satisfy him.

John was with him, and Vijal, who alone out of all the servants had followed his fortunes. These three walked down and passed through the gates together, and emerged into the outer world in silence. But when they had left the gates the silence ended.

"Well, dad!" said John, "what are you going to do now?"

"I don't know."

"Have you any money?"

"Four thousand pounds in the bank."

"Not much, dad," said John, slowly, "for a man who last month was worth millions. You're coming out at the little end of the horn."

Potts made no reply.

"At any rate there's one comfort," said John, "even about that."

"What comfort?"

"Why, you went in at the little end."

They walked on in silence.

"You must do something," said John at last.

"What can I do?"

"You won't let that fellow ride the high horse in this style, will you?"

"How can I help it?"

"You can't help it; but you can strike a blow yourself."

"How?"

"How? You've struck blows before to some purpose, I think."

"But I never yet knew any one with such tremendous power as this man has. And where did he get all his money? You said before that he was the devil, and I believe it. Where's Clark? Do you think he has succeeded?"

"No," said John.

"No more do I. This man has every body in his pay. Look at the servants! See how easily he did what he wished!"

"You've got one servant left."

"Ah, yes--that's a fact."

"That servant will do something for you."

"What do you mean?"

"Brandon is a man, after all--and can _die_, " said John, with deep emphasis. "Vijal," he continued, in a whisper, "hates me, but he would lay down his life for you."

"I understand," said Potts, after a pause.

A long silence followed.

"You go on to the inn," said Potts, at last. "I'll talk with Vijal."

"Shall I risk the policemen?"

"Yes, you run no risk. I'll sleep in the bank."

"All right," said John, and he walked away.

"Vijal," said Potts, dropping back so as to wait for the Malay. "You are faithful to me."

"Yes," answered Vijal.

"All the others betrayed me, but you did not?"

"Never."

"Do you know when you first saw me?"

"Yes."

"I saved your life."

"Yes."

"Your father was seized at Manilla and killed for murder, but I protected you, and promised to take care of you. Haven't I done so?"

"Yes," said Vijal humbly, and in a reverent tone.

"Haven't I been another father?"

"You have."

"Didn't I promise to tell you some day who the man was that killed your father?"

"Yes," exclaimed Vijal, fiercely.

"Well, I'm going to tell you."

"Who?" cried Vijal, in excitement so strong that he could scarce speak.

"Did you see that man who drove me out of the Hall?"

"Yes."

"Well, that was the man. He killed your father. He has ruined me--your other father. What do you say to that?"

"He shall die," returned Vijal, solemnly. "He shall die."

"I am an old man," resumed Potts. "If I were as strong as I used to be I would not talk about this to you. I would do it all myself."

"I'll do it!" cried Vijal. "I'll do it!"

His eyes flashed, his nostrils dilated--all the savage within him was aroused. Potts saw this, and rejoiced.

"Do you know how to use this?" he asked, showing Vijal the cord which Brandon had given him.

Vijal's eyes dilated, and a wilder fire shone in them. He seized the cord, turned it round his hand for a moment, and then hurled it at Potts. It passed round and round his waist.

"Ah!" said Potts, with deep gratification. "You have not forgotten, then. You can throw it skillfully."

Vijal nodded, and said nothing.

"Keep the cord. Follow up that man. Avenge your father's death and my ruin."

"I will," said Vijal, sternly.

"It may take long. Follow him up. Do not come back to me till you come

to tell me that he is dead."

Vijal nodded.

"Now I am going. I must fly and hide myself from this man. As long as he lives I am in danger. But you will always find John at the inn when you wish to see me."

"I will lay down my life for you," said Vijal.

"I don't want your life," returned Potts. "I want _his_."

"You shall have it," exclaimed Vijal.

Potts said no more. He handed Vijal his purse in silence. The latter took it without a word. Potts then went toward the bank, and Vijal stood alone in the road.

CHAPTER LV.

ON THE ROAD.

On the following morning Brandon started from the Hall at an early hour. He was on horseback. He rode down through the gates. Passing through the village he went by the inn and took the road to Denton.

He had not gone far before another horseman followed him. The latter rode at a rapid pace. Brandon did not pay any especial attention to him, and at length the latter overtook him. It was when they were nearly abreast that Brandon recognized the other. It was Vijal.

"Good-morning," said Vijal.

"Good-morning," replied Brandon.

"Are you going to Denton?" "Yes."

"So am I," said Vijal.

Brandon was purposely courteous, although it was not exactly the thing for a gentleman to be thus addressed by a servant. He saw that this servant had overreached himself, and knew that he must have some motive for joining him and addressing him in so familiar a manner.

He suspected what might be Vijal's aim, and therefore kept a close watch on him. He saw that Vijal, while holding the reins in his left hand, kept his right hand concealed in his breast. A suspicion darted across his mind. He stroked his mustache with his own right hand, which he kept constantly upraised, and talked cheerfully and patronizingly with his companion. After a while he fell back a little and drew forth a knife, which he concealed in his hand, and then he rode forward as before abreast of the other, assuming the appearance of perfect calm and indifference.

"Have you left Potts?" said Brandon, after a short time.

"No," replied Vijal.

"Ah! Then you are on some business of his now?"

"Yes."

Brandon was silent.

"Would you like to know what it is?" asked Vijal.

"Not particularly," said Brandon, coldly.

"Shall I tell you?"

"If you choose."

Vijal raised his hand suddenly and gave a quick, short jerk. A cord flew forth--there was a weight at the end. The cord was flung straight at Brandon's neck.

But Brandon had been on his guard. At the movement of Vijal's arm he had raised his own; the cord passed around him, but his arm was within its embrace. In his hand he held a knife concealed. In an instant he slashed his knife through the windings of the cord, severing them all; then dropping the knife he plunged his hand into the pocket of his coat, and before Vijal could recover from his surprise he drew forth a revolver and pointed it at him.

[Illustration: VIJAL LOOKED EARNESTLY AT IT. HE SAW THESE WORDS: "JOHN POTTS."]

Vijal saw at once that he was lost. He nevertheless plunged his spurs into his horse and made a desperate effort to escape. As his horse bounded off Brandon fired. The animal gave a wild neigh, which sounded almost like a shriek, and fell upon the road, throwing Vijal over his head.

In an instant Brandon was up with him. He leaped from his horse before Vijal had disencumbered himself from his, and seizing the Malay by the collar held the pistol at his head.

"If you move," he cried, sternly, "I'll blow your brains out!"

Vijal lay motionless.

"Scoundrel!" exclaimed Brandon, as he held him with the revolver pressed against his head, "who sent you to do this?"

Vijal in sullen silence answered nothing.

"Tell me or I'll kill you. Was it Potts?"

Vijal made no reply.

"Speak out," cried Brandon. "Fool that you are, I don't want your life."

"You are the murderer of my father," said Vijal, fiercely, "and therefore

I sought to kill you."

Brandon gave a low laugh.

"The murderer of your father?" he repeated.

"Yes," cried Vijal, wildly; "and I sought your death."

Brandon laughed again.

"Do you know how old I am?"

Vijal looked up in amazement. He saw by that one look what he had not thought of before in his excitement, that Brandon was a younger man than himself by several years. He was silent.

"How many years is it since your father died?"

Vijal said nothing.

"Fool!" exclaimed Brandon. "It is twenty years. You are false to your father. You pretend to avenge his death, and you seek out a young man who had no connection with it. I was in England when he was killed. I was a child only seven years of age. Do you believe now that I am his murderer?"

Brandon, while speaking in this way, had relaxed his hold, though he still held his pistol pointed at the head of his prostrate enemy. Vijal gave a long, low sigh.

"You were too young," said he, at last. "You are younger than I am. I was only twelve."

"I could not have been his murderer, then?"

"No."

"Yet I know who his murderer was, for I have found out."

"Who?"

"The same man who killed my own father."

Vijal looked at Brandon with awful eyes.

"Your father had a brother?" said Brandon.

"Yes."

"Do you know his name?"

"Yes. Zangorri."

"Right. Well, do you know what Zangorri did to avenge his brother's death?"

"No; what?"

"For many years he vowed death to all Englishmen, since it was an

Englishman who had caused the death of his brother. He had a ship; he got a crew and sailed through the Eastern seas, capturing English ships and killing the crews. This was his vengeance." Vijal gave a groan.

"You see he has done more than you. He knew better than you who it was that had killed your father."

"Who was it?" cried Vijal, fiercely.

"I saw him twice," continued Brandon, without noticing the question, of the other. "I saw him twice, and twice he told me the name of the man whose death he sought. For year after year he had sought after that man, but had not found him. Hundreds of Englishmen had fallen. He told me the name of the man whom he sought, and charged me to carry out his work of vengeance. I promised to do so, for I had a work of vengeance of my own to perform, and on the same man, too."

"Who was he?" repeated Vijal, with increased excitement.

"When I saw him last he gave me something which he said he had worn around his neck for years. I took it, and promised to wear it till the vengeance which he sought should be accomplished. I did so for I too had a debt of vengeance stronger than his, and on the same man."

"Who was he?" cried Vijal again, with restless impetuosity.

Brandon unbuttoned his vest and drew forth a Malay creese, which was hung around his neck and worn under his coat.

"Do you know what this is?" he asked, solemnly.

Vijal took it and looked at it earnestly. His eyes dilated, his nostrils quivered.

"My father's!" he cried, in a tremulous voice.

Can you read English letters?"

"Yes."

"Can you read the name that is cut upon it?"

And Brandon pointed to a place where some letters were carved.

Vijal looked earnestly at it. He saw these words:

JOHN POTTS.

"That," said Brandon, "is what your father's brother gave to me."

"It's a lie!" growled Vijal, fiercely.

"It's true," said Brandon, calmly, "and it was carved there by your father's own hand."

Vijal said nothing for a long time. Brandon arose, and put his pistol in his pocket. Vijal, disencumbering himself from his horse, arose also. The two stood together on the road.

For hours they remained there talking. At last Brandon remounted and rode on to Denton. But Vijal went back to the village of Brandon. He carried with him the creese which Brandon had given him.

CHAPTER LVI.

FATHER AND SON.

Vijal, on going back to Brandon village, went first to the inn where he saw John. To the inquiries which were eagerly addressed to him he answered nothing, but simply said that he wished to see Potts. John, finding him impracticable, cursed him and led the way to the bank.

As Vijal entered Potts locked the door carefully, and then anxiously questioned him. Vijal gave a plain account of every thing exactly as it had happened, but with some important alterations and omissions. In the first place, he said nothing whatever of the long interview which had taken place and the startling information which he had received. In the second place, he assured Potts that he must have attacked the wrong man. For when this man had spared his life he looked at him closely and found out that he was not the one that he ought to have attacked.

"You blasted fool," cried Potts. "Haven't you got eyes? D--n you; I wish the fellow, whoever he is, had seized you, or blown your brains out."

Vijal cast down his eyes humbly.

"I can try again," said he. "I have made a mistake this time; the next time I will make sure."

There was something in the tone of his voice so remorseless and so vengeful that Potts felt reassured.

"You are a good lad," said he, "a good lad. And you'll try again?"

"Yes," said Vijal, with flashing eyes.

"You'll make sure this time?"

"I'll make sure this time. But I must have some one with me," he continued. "You need not trouble yourself. Send John with me. He won't mistake. If he is with me I'll make sure."

As the Malay said this a brighter and more vivid flash shone from his eyes. He gave a malevolent smile, and his white teeth glistened balefully. Instantly he checked the smile, and cast down his eyes.

"Ah!" said Potts. "That is very good. John shall go. Johnnie, you don't mind going, do you?"

"I'll go," said John, languidly.

"You'll know the fellow, won't you?"

"I rather think I should."

"But what will you do first?"

"Go to Denton," said John.

"To Denton?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because Brandon is there."

"How can he be?"

"Simply," said John, "because I know the man that Vijal attacked must have been Brandon. No other person answers to the description. No other person would be so quick to dodge the cord, and so quick with the revolver. He has humbugged Vijal somehow, and this fool of a nigger has believed him. He was Brandon, and no one else, and I'm going on his track."

"Well--you're right, perhaps," said Potts; "but take care of yourself, Johnnie."

John gave a dry smile.

"I'll try to do so and I hope to take care of others also," said he.

"God bless you, Johnnie!" said Potts, affectionately, not knowing the blasphemy of invoking the blessing of God on one who was setting out to commit murder.

"You're spooney, dad," returned John, and he left the bank with Vijal.

John went back to the inn first, and after a few preparations started for Denton. On the way he amused himself with coarse jests at Vijal's stupidity in allowing himself to be deceived by Brandon, taunted him with cowardice in yielding so easily, and assured him that one who was so great a coward could not possibly succeed in any undertaking.

Toward evening they reached the inn at Denton. John was anxious not to show himself, so he went at once to the inn, directing Vijal to keep a look-out for Brandon and let him know if he saw any one who looked like him. These directions were accompanied and intermingled with numerous threats as to what he would do if Vijal dared to fail in any particular. The Malay listened calmly, showing none of that impatience and haughty resentment which he formerly used to manifest toward John, and quietly promised to do what was ordered.

About ten o'clock John happened to look on of the window. He saw a figure standing where the light from the windows flashed out, which at once attracted his attention. It was the man whom he sought--it was Brandon. Was he stopping at the same inn? If so, why had not Vijal told him? He at once summoned Vijal, who came as calm as ever. To John's impatient questions as to why he had not told him about Brandon, he answered that Brandon had only come there half an hour previously, and that he had been watching him ever since to see what he was going to do.

"You must keep on watching him, then; do you hear?"

"Yes."

"And if you let him slip this time, you infernal nigger, you'll pay dear for it."

"I'll not make a mistake this time," was Vijal's answer. And as he spoke his eyes gleamed, and again that baleful smile passed over his face.

"That's the man," said John. "You understand that? That's the man you've got to fix, do you hear? Don't be a fool this time. You must manage it to-night, for I don't want to wait here forever. I leave it to you. I only came to make sure of the man. I'm tired, and I'm going to bed soon. When I wake to-morrow I expect to hear from you that you have finished this business. If you don't, d--n you, I'll wring your infernal nigger's neck."

"It will all be done by to-morrow," said Vijal, calmly.

"Then clear out and leave me. I'm going to bed. What you've got to do is to watch that man."

Vijal retired.

The night passed. When the following morning came John was not up at the ordinary breakfast hour. Nine o'clock came. Ten o'clock. Still he did not appear.

"He's a lazy fellow," said the landlord, "though he don't look like it. And where's his servant?"

"The servant went back to Brandon at day-break," was the answer.

Eleven o'clock came. Still there were no signs of John. There was a balcony in the inn which ran in front of the windows of the room occupied by John. After knocking at the door once or twice the landlord tapped at the window and tried to peep in to see if the occupant was awake or not. One part, of the blind was drawn a little aside, and showed the bed and the form of a man still lying there.

"He's an awful sleeper," said the landlord. "It's twelve o'clock, and he isn't up yet. Well, it's his business, not mine."

About half an hour after the noise of wheels was heard, and a wagon drove swiftly into the yard of the inn. An old man jumped out, gave his horse to the hostler, and entered the inn.

He was somewhat flushed and flurried. His eyes twinkled brightly, and there was a somewhat exuberant familiarity in his address to the landlord.

"There was a party who stopped here last night," said he, "that I wish to see."

"There was only one person here last night," answered the landlord; "a young man--"

"A young man, yes--that's right; I want to see him."

"Well, as to that," said the landlord, "I don't know but you'll have to wait. He ain't up yet."

"Isn't he up yet?"

"No; he's an awful sleeper. He went to bed last night early, for his lights were out before eleven, and now it's nearly one, and he isn't up."

"At any rate, I must see him."

"Shall I wake him?"

[Illustration: HE TORE DOWN THE COVERLET, WHICH CONCEALED THE GREATER PART OF HIS FACE.]

"Yes, and be quick, for I'm in a hurry."

The landlord went up to the door and knocked loudly. There was no answer. He knocked still more loudly. Still no answer. He then kept up an incessant rapping for about ten minutes. Still there was no answer. He had tried the door before, but it was locked on the inside. He went around to the windows that opened on the balcony; these were open.

He then went down and told the old man that the door was fastened, but that the windows were unfastened. If he chose to go in there he might do so.

"I will do so," said the other, "for I must see him. I have business of importance." He went up.

The landlord and some of the servants, whose curiosity was by this time excited, followed after.

The old man opened the window, which swung back on hinges, and entered. There was a man in the bed.

He lay motionless. The old man approached. He recognized the face.

A cold chill went to his heart. He tore down the coverlet, which concealed the greater part of his face. The next moment he fell forward upon the bed.

"Johnnie!" he screamed--"Johnnie!"

There was no answer. The face was rigid and fixed. Around the neck was a faint, bluish line, a mark like what might have been made by a cord.

"Johnnie, Johnnie!" cried the old man again, in piercing tones. He caught at the hands of the figure before him; he tried to pull it forward.

There was no response. The old man turned away and rushed to the window, gasping, with white lips, and bloodshot eyes, and a face of horror.

"He is dead!" he shrieked. "My boy--my son--my Johnnie! Murderer! You have killed him."

The landlord and the servants started back in horror from the presence of this father in his misery.

It was for but a moment that he stood there. He went back and flung himself upon the bed. Then he came forth again and stood upon the balcony, motionless, white-faced, speechless--his lips muttering inaudible words.

A crowd gathered round. The story soon spread. This was the father of a young man who had stopped at the inn and died suddenly. The crowd that gathered around the inn saw the father as he stood on the balcony.

The dwellers in the cottage that was almost opposite saw him, and Asgeelo brought them the news.

CHAPTER LVII.

MRS. COMPTON'S SECRET.

On the night after the arrival of John, Brandon had left Denton. He did not return till the following day. On arriving at the inn he saw an unusual spectacle--the old man on the balcony, the crowd of villagers around, the universal excitement.

On entering the inn he found some one who for some time had been waiting to see him. It was Philips. Philips had come early in the morning, and had been over to the cottage. He had learned all about the affair at the inn, and narrated it to Brandon, who listened with his usual calmness. He then gave him a letter from Frank, which Brandon read, and put in his pocket.

Then Philips told him the news which he had learned at the cottage about Langhetti. Langhetti and Despard were both there yet, the former very dangerously ill, the latter waiting for some friends. He also told about the affair on the road, the seizure of Clark, and his delivery into the hands of the authorities.

Brandon heard all this with the deepest interest. While the excitement at the inn was still at its height, he hurried off to the magistrate into whose hands Clark had been committed. After an interview with him he returned. He found the excitement unabated. He then went to the cottage close by the inn, where Beatrice had found a home, and Langhetti a refuge. Philips was with him.

On knocking at the door Asgeelo opened it. They entered the parlor, and in a short time Mrs. Compton appeared. Brandon's first inquiry was after Langhetti.

"He is about the same," said Mrs. Compton.

"Does the doctor hold out any hopes of his recovery?" asked Brandon, anxiously.

"Very little," said Mrs. Compton.

"Who nurses him?"

"Miss Potts and Mr. Despard."

"Are they both here?"

"Yes."

Brandon was silent.

"I will go and tell them that you are here," said Mrs. Compton.

Brandon made no reply, and Mrs. Compton, taking silence for assent, went to announce his arrival.

In a short time they appeared. Beatrice entered first. She was grave, and cold, and solemn; Despard was gloomy and stern. They both shook hands with Brandon in silence. Beatrice gave her hand without a word, lifelessly and coldly; Despard took his hand abstractedly.

Brandon looked earnestly at Beatrice as she stood there before him, calm, sad, passionless, almost repellent in her demeanor, and wondered what the cause might be of such a change.

Mrs. Compton stood apart at a little distance, near Philips, and looked on with a strange expression, half wistful, half timid.

There was a silence which at length became embarrassing. From the room where they were sitting the inn could plainly be seen, with the crowd outside. Beatrice's eyes were directed toward this. Despard said not a word. At another time he might have been strongly interested in this man, who on so many accounts was so closely connected with him; but now the power of some dominant and all-engrossing idea possessed him, and he seemed to take no notice of any things whatever either without the house or within.

After looking in silence at the inn for a long time Beatrice withdrew her gaze. Brandon regarded her with a fixed and earnest glance, as though he would read her inmost soul. She looked at him, and cast down her eyes.

"You abhor me!" said he, in a loud, thrilling voice.

She said nothing, but pointed toward the inn.

"You know all about that?"

Beatrice bowed her head silently.

"And you look upon me as guilty?"

She gazed at him, but said nothing. It was a cold, austere gaze, without one touch of softness.

"After all," said she, "he was my father. You had your vengeance to take, and you have taken it. You may now exult, but my heart bleeds."

Brandon started to his feet.

"As God lives," he cried, "I did not do that thing!"

Beatrice looked up mournfully and inquiringly.

"If it had been his base life which I sought," said Brandon, vehemently, "I might long ago have taken it. He was surrounded on all sides by my power. He could not escape. Officers of the law stood ready to do my bidding. Yet I allowed him to leave the Hall in safety. I might have taken his heart's-blood. I might have handed him over to the law. I did not."

"No," said Beatrice, in icy tones, "you did not; you sought a deeper vengeance. You cared not to take his life. It was sweeter to you to take his son's life and give him agony. Death would have been insufficient--anguish was what you wished;

"It is not for me to blame you," she continued, while Brandon looked at her without a word. "Who am I--a polluted one, of the accursed brood--who am I, to stand between you and him, or to blame you if you seek for vengeance? I am nothing. You have done kindnesses to me which I now wish were undone. Oh that I had died under the hand of the pirates! Oh that the ocean had swept me down to death with all its waves! Then I should not have lived to see this day!"

Roused by her vehemence Despard started from his abstraction and looked around.

"It seems to me," said he, "as if you were blaming some one for inflicting suffering on a man for whom no suffering can be too great. What! can you think of your friend as he lies there in the next room in his agony, dying, torn to pieces by this man's agency, and have pity for him?"

"Oh!" cried Beatrice, "is he not my father?"

Mrs. Compton looked around with staring eyes, and trembled from head to foot. Her lips moved--she began to speak, but the words died away on her lips.

"Your father!" said Despard; "his acts have cut him off from a daughter's sympathy."

"Yet he has a father's feelings, at least for his dead son. Never shall I forget his look of anguish as he stood on the balcony. His face was turned this way. He seemed to reproach me."

"Let me tell you," cried Despard, harshly. "He has not yet made atonement for his crimes. This is but the beginning. I have a debt of vengeance to extort from him. One scoundrel has been handed over to the law, another lies dead, another is in London in the hands of Langhetti's friends, the Carbonari. The worst one yet remains, and my father's voice cries to me day and night from that dreadful ship."

"Your father's voice!" cried Beatrice. She looked at Despard. Their eyes met. Something passed between them in that glance which brought back the old, mysterious feeling which she had known before. Despard rose hastily and left the room.

"In God's name," cried Brandon, "I say that this man's life was not

sought by me, nor the life of any of his. I will tell you all. When he compassed the death of Uracao, of whom you know, he obtained possession of his son, then a mere boy, and carried him away. He kept this lad with him and brought him up with the idea that he was his best friend, and that he would one day show him his father's murderer. After I made myself known to him, he told Vijal that I was this murderer. Vijal tried to assassinate me. I foiled him, and could have killed him. But I spared his life. I then told him the truth. That is all that I have done. Of course, I knew that Vijal would seek for vengeance. That was not my concern. Since Potts had sent him to seek my life under a lie, I sent him away with knowledge of the truth. I do not repent that told him; nor is there any guilt chargeable to me. The man that lies dead there is not my victim. Yet if he were--oh, Beatrice! if he were--what then? Could that atone for what I have suffered? My father ruined and broken-hearted and dying in a poor-house calls to me always for vengeance. My mother suffering in the emigrant ship, and dying of the plague amidst horrors without a name calls to me. Above all my sweet sister, my pure Edith--"

"Edith!" interrupted Beatrice--"Edith!"

"Yes; do you not know that? She was buried alive."

"What!" cried Beatrice; "is it possible that you do not know that she is alive?"

"Alive!"

"Yes, alive; for when I was at Holly I saw her."

Brandon stood speechless with surprise.

"Langhetti saved her," said Beatrice. "His sister has charge of her now."

"Where, where is she?" asked Brandon, wildly.

"In a convent at London."

At this moment Despard entered.

"Is this true?" asked Brandon, with a deeper agitation than had ever yet been seen in him--"my sister, is it true that she is not dead?"

"It is true. I should have told you," said Despard, "but other thoughts drove it from my mind, and I forgot that you might be ignorant."

"How is it possible? I was at Quebec myself. I have sought over the world after my relatives--"

"I will tell you," said Despard.

He sat down and began to tell the story of Edith's voyage and all that Langhetti had done, down to the time of his rescue of her from death. The recital filled Brandon with such deep amazement that he had not a word to say. He listened like one stupefied.

"Thank God!" he cried at last when it was ended; "thank God, I am spared this last anguish; I am freed from the thought which for years has been most intolerable. The memories that remain are bitter enough, but they

are not so terrible as this. But I must see her. I must find her. Where is she?"

"Make yourself easy on that score," said Despard, calmly. "She will be here to-morrow or the day after. I have written to Langhetti's sister; she will come, and will bring your sister with her."

"I should have told you so before," said Beatrice, "but my own troubles drove every thing else from my mind."

"Forgive me," said Brandon, "for intruding now. I came in to learn about Langhetti. You look upon me with horror. I will withdraw."

Beatrice bowed her head, and tears streamed from her eyes. Brandon took her hand.

"Farewell," he murmured; "farewell, Beatrice. You will not condemn me when I say that I am innocent?"

"I am accursed," she murmured.

Despard looked at these two with deep anxiety.

"Stay," said he to Brandon. "There is something which must be explained. There is a secret which Langhetti has had for years, and which he has several times been on the point of telling. I have just spoken to him and told him that you are here. He says he will tell his secret now, whatever it is. He wishes us all to come in--and you too, especially," said Despard, looking at Mrs. Compton.

The poor old creature began to tremble.

"Don't be afraid, old woman," said Philips. "Take my arm and I'll protect you."

She rose, and, leaning on his arm, followed the others into Langhetti's room. He was fearfully emaciated. His material frame, worn down by pain and confinement, seemed about to dissolve and let free that soaring soul of his, whose fiery impulses had for years chafed against the prison bars of its mortal inclosure. His eyes shone darkly and luminously from their deep, hollow sockets, and upon his thin, wan, white lips there was a faint smile of welcome--faint like the smile of the sick, yet sweet as the smile of an angel.

It was with such a smile that he greeted Brandon, and with both of his thin white hands pressed the strong and muscular hand of the other.

"And you are Edith's brother," he said. "Edith's brother," he repeated, resting lovingly upon that name, Edith. "She always said you were alive, and once she told me she should live to see you. Welcome, brother of my Edith! I am a dying man. Edith said her other brother was alive--Frank. Where is Frank? Will he not come to stand by the bedside of his dying friend? He did so once."

"He will come," said Brandon, in a voice choked with emotion, as he pressed the hand of the dying man. "He will come, and at once."

"And you will be all here, then--sweet friends! It is well."

He paused.

"Bice!" said he at last.

Beatrice, who was sitting by his head, bent down toward him.

"Bice," said Langhetti. "My pocket-book is in my coat, and if you open the inside pocket you will find something wrapped in paper. Bring it to me."

Beatrice found the pocket-book and opened it as directed. In the inside pocket there was a thin, small parcel. She opened it and drew forth a very small baby's stocking.

"Look at the mark," said Langhetti.

Beatrice did so, and saw two letters marked on it--B. D.

"This was given me by your nurse at Hong Kong. She said your things were all marked with those letters when you were first brought to her. She did not know what it meant. 'B' meant Beatrice; but what did 'D' mean?"

All around that bedside exchanged glances of wonder. Mrs. Compton was most agitated.

"Take me away," she murmured to Philips.

But Philips would not.

"Cheer up, old woman!" said he. "There's nothing to fear now. That devil won't hurt you."

"Now, in my deep interest in you, and in my affection, I tried to find out what this meant. The nurse and I often talked about it. She told me that your father never cared particularly about you, and that it was strange for your clothing to be marked 'D' if your name was Potts. It was a thing which greatly troubled her. I made many inquiries. I found out about the Manilla murder case. From that moment I suspected that 'D' meant Despard.

"Oh, Heavens!" sighed Beatrice, in an agony of suspense. Brandon and Despard stood motionless, waiting for something further.

"This is what I tried to solve. I made inquiries every where. At last I gave it up. So when circumstances threw Beatrice again in my way I tried again. I have always been baffled There is only, one who can tell--only one. She is here, in this room; and, in the name of God, I call upon her to speak out and tell the truth."

"Who?" cried Despard, while he and Brandon both looked earnestly at Mrs. Compton.

"Mrs. Compton!" said Langhetti; and his voice seemed to die away from exhaustion.

Mrs. Compton was seized with a panic more overpowering than usual. She gasped for breath. "Oh, Lord!" she cried. "Oh, Lord! Spare me! spare me! He'll kill me!"

Brandon walked up to her and took her hand. "Mrs. Compton," said he, in a calm, resolute voice, "your timidity has been your curse. There is no need for fear now. I will protect you. The man whom you have feared so many years is now ruined, helpless, and miserable. I could destroy him at this moment if I chose. You are foolish if you fear him. Your son is with you. His arm supports you, and I stand here ready to protect both you and your son. Speak out, and tell what you know. Your husband is still living. He longs for your return. You and your son are free from your enemies. Trust in me, and you shall both go back to him and live in peace."

Tears fell from Mrs. Compton's eyes. She seized Brandon's hand and pressed it to her thin lips.

"You will protect me?" said she.

"Yes."

"You will save me from him?" she persisted, in a voice of agony.

"Yes, and from all others like him. Do not fear. Speak out."

Mrs. Compton clung to the arm of her son. She drew a long breath. She looked up into his face as though to gain courage, and then began.

It was a long story. She had been attendant and nurse to the wife of Colonel Despard, who had died in giving birth to a child. Potts had brought news of her death, but had said nothing whatever about the child. Colonel Despard knew nothing of it. Being at a distance at the time, on duty, he had heard but the one fact of his wife's death, and all other things were forgotten. He had not even made inquiries as to whether the child which he had expected was alive or dead, but had at once given way to the grief of the bereavement, and had hurried off.

In his designs on Colonel Despard, Potts feared that the knowledge of the existence of a child might keep him in India, and distract his mind from its sorrow. Therefore he was the more anxious not only to keep this secret, but also to prevent it from ever being known to Colonel Despard. With this idea he hurried the preparation of the Vishnu to such an extent that it was ready for sea almost immediately, and left with Colonel Despard on that ill-fated voyage.

Mrs. Compton had been left in India with the child. Her son joined her, in company with John, who, though only a boy, had the vices of a grown man. Months passed before Potts came back. He then took her along with the child to China, and left the latter with a respectable woman at Hong Kong, who was the widow of a British naval officer. The child was Beatrice Despard.

Potts always feared that Mrs. Compton might divulge his secret, and therefore always kept her with him. Timid by nature to an unusual degree, the wretched woman was in constant fear for her life, and as years passed on this fear was not lessened. The sufferings which she felt from this terror were atoned for, however, by the constant presence of her son, who remained in connection with Potts, influenced chiefly by the ascendancy which this villain had over a man of his weak and timid nature. Potts had brought them to England, and they had lived in different places, until at last Brandon Hall had fallen into his hands. Of the former occupants of Brandon Hall, Mrs. Compton knew almost

nothing. Very little had ever been said about them to her. She knew scarcely any thing about them, except that their names were Brandon, and that they had suffered misfortunes.

Finally, this Beatrice was Beatrice Despard, the daughter of Colonel Despard and the sister of the clergyman then present. She herself, instead of being the daughter of Potts, had been one of his victims, and had suffered not the least at his hands.

This astounding revelation was checked by frequent interruptions. The actual story of her true parentage overwhelmed Beatrice. This was the awful thought which had occurred to herself frequently before. This was what had moved her so deeply in reading the manuscript of her father on that African Isle. This also was the thing which had always made her hate with such intensity the miscreant who pretended to be her father.

Now she was overwhelmed. She threw herself into the arms of her brother and wept upon his breast. Courtenay Despard for a moment rose above the gloom that oppressed him, and pressed to his heart this sister so strangely discovered. Brandon stood apart, looking on, shaken to the soul and unnerved by the deep joy of that unparalleled discovery. Amidst all the speculations in which he had indulged the very possibility of this had never suggested itself. He had believed most implicitly all along that Beatrice was in reality the daughter of his mortal enemy. Now the discovery of the truth came upon him with overwhelming force.

She raised herself from her brother's embrace, and turned and looked upon the man whom she adored--the one who, as she said, had over and over again saved her life; the one whose life she, too, in her turn had saved, with whom she had passed so many adventurous and momentous days--days of alternating peace and storm, of varying hope and despair. To him she owed every thing; to him she owed even the rapture of this moment.

As their eyes met they revealed all their inmost thoughts. There was now no barrier between them. Vanished was the insuperable obstacle, vanished the impassable gulf. They stood side by side. The enemy of this man--his foe, his victim--was also hers. Whatever he might suffer, whatever anguish might have been on the face of that old man who had looked at her from the balcony, she had clearly no part nor lot now in that suffering or that anguish. He was the murderer of her father. She was not the daughter of this man. She was of no vulgar or sordid race. Her blood was no longer polluted or accursed. She was of pure and noble lineage. She was a Despard.

"Beatrice," said Brandon, with a deep, fervid emotion in his voice; "Beatrice, I am yours, and you are mine. Beatrice, it was a lie that kept us apart. My life is yours, and yours is mine."

He thought of nothing but her. He spoke with burning impetuosity. His words sank into her soul. His eyes devoured hers in the passion of their glance.

"Beatrice--my Beatrice!" he said, "Beatrice Despard--"

He spoke low, bending his head to hers. Her head sank toward his breast.

"Beatrice, do you now reproach me?" he murmured.

She held out her hand, while tears stood in her eyes. Brandon seized it

and covered it with kisses. Despard saw this. In the midst of the anguish of his face a smile shone forth, like sunshine out of a clouded sky. He looked at these two for a moment.

Langhetti's eyes were closed. Mrs. Compton and her son were talking apart. Despard looked upon the lovers.

"Let them love," he murmured to himself; "let them love and be happy. Heaven has its favorites. I do not envy them; I bless them, though I love without hope. Heaven has its favorites, but I am an outcast from that favor."

A shudder passed through him. He drew himself up.

"Since love is denied me," he thought, "I can at least have vengeance."

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE MALAY'S VENGEANCE.

Some hours afterward Despard called Brandon outside the cottage, and walked along the bank which overhung the beach. Arriving at a point several hundred yards distant from the cottage he stopped. Brandon noticed a deeper gloom upon his face and a sterner purpose on his resolute mouth.

"I have called you aside," said Despard, "to say that I am going on a journey. I may be back immediately. If I do not return, will you say to any one who may ask"--and here he paused for a moment--"say to any one who may ask, that I have gone away on important business, and that the time of my coming is uncertain."

"I suppose you can be heard of at Holby, in case of need."

"I am never going back again to Holby."

Brandon looked surprised.

"To one like you," said Despard, "I do not object to tell my purpose. You know what it is to seek for vengeance. The only feeling that I have is that. Love, tenderness, affection, all are idle words with me.

"There are three who pre-eminently were concerned in my father's death," continued Despard. "One was Cigole. The Carbonari have him. Langhetti tells me that he must die, unless he himself interposes to save him. And I think Langhetti will never so interpose. Langhetti is dying--another stimulus to vengeance.

"The one who has been the cause of this is Clark, another one of my father's murderers. He is in the hands of the law. His punishment is certain.

"There yet remains the third, and the worst. Your vengeance is satisfied on him. Mine is not. Not even the sight of that miscreant in the attitude of a bereaved father could for one moment move me to pity. I

took note of the agony of his face. I watched his grief with joy. I am going to complete that joy. He must die, and no mortal can save him from my hands."

The deep, stern tones of Despard were like the knell of doom, and there was in them such determinate vindictiveness that Brandon saw all remonstrance to be useless.

He marked the pale sad face of this man. He saw in it the traces of sorrow of longer standing than any which he might have felt about the manuscript that he had read. It was the face of a man who had suffered so much that life had become a burden.

"You are a clergyman," said Brandon at length, with a faint hope that an appeal to his profession might have some effect.

Despard smiled cynically.

"I am a man," said he.

"Can not the discovery of a sister," asked Brandon, "atone in some degree for your grief about your father?"

Despard shook his head wearily.

"No," said he, "I must do something, and only one purpose is before me now. I see your motive. You wish to stop short of taking that devil's life. It is useless to remonstrate. My mind is made up. Perhaps I may come back unsuccessful. If so--I must be resigned, I suppose. At any rate you know my purpose, and can let those who ask after me know, in a general way, what I have said."

With a slight bow Despard walked away, leaving Brandon standing there filled with thoughts which were half mournful, half remorseful.

On leaving Brandon Despard went at once to the inn. The crowd without had dwindled away to half a dozen people, who were still talking about the one event of the day. Making his way through these he entered the inn.

The landlord stood there with a puzzled face, discussing with several friends the case of the day. More particularly he was troubled by the sudden departure of the old man, who about an hour previously had started off in a great hurry, leaving no directions whatever as to what was to be done with the body up stairs. It was this which now perplexed the landlord.

Despard listened attentively to the conversation. The landlord mentioned that Potts had taken the road to Brandon. The servant who had been with the young man had not been seen. If the old man should not return what was to be done?

This was enough for Despard, who had his horse saddled without delay and started also on the Brandon road. He rode on swiftly for some time, hoping to overtake the man whom he pursued. He rode, however, several miles without coming in sight of him or of any one like him. At last he reached that hollow which had been the scene of his encounter with Clark. As he descended into it he saw a group of men by the road-side surrounding some object. In the middle of the road was a farmer's wagon,

and a horse was standing in the distance.

[Illustration: "IT WAS POTTS."]

Despard rode up and saw the prostrate figure of a man. He dismounted. The farmers stood aside and disclosed the face.

It was Potts.

Despard stooped down. It was already dusk but even in that dim light he saw the coils of a thin cord wound tightly about the neck of this victim, from one end of which a leaden bullet hung down.

By that light also he saw the hilt of a weapon which had been plunged into his heart, from which the blood had flowed in torrents.

It was a Malay creese. Upon the handle was carved a name:

JOHN POTTS.

CHAPTER LIX.

[Greek: Deute teleutaion aspasmon domen.]

The excitement which had prevailed through the village of Denton was intensified by the arrival there of the body of the old man. For his mysterious death no one could account except one person.

That one was Brandon, whom Despard surprised by his speedy return, and to whom he narrated the circumstances of the discovery. Brandon knew who it was that could wield that cord, what arm it was that had held that weapon, and what heart it was that was animated by sufficient vengeance to strike these blows.

Despard, finding his purpose thus unexpectedly taken away, remained in the village and waited. There was one whom he wished to see again. On the following day Frank Brandon arrived from London. He met Langhetti with deep emotion, and learned from his brother the astonishing story of Edith.

On the following day that long-lost sister herself appeared in company with Mrs. Thornton. Her form, always fragile, now appeared frailer than ever, her face had a deeper pallor, her eyes an intenser lustre, her expression was more unearthly. The joy which the brothers felt at finding their sister was subdued by an involuntary awe which was inspired by her presence. She seemed to them as she had seemed to others like one who had arisen from the dead.

At the sight of her Langhetti's face grew radiant--all pain seemed to leave him. She bent over him, and their wan lips met in the only kiss which they had ever exchanged, with all that deep love which they had felt for one another. She sat by his bedside. She seemed to appropriate him to herself. The others acknowledged this quiet claim and gave way to it.

As she kissed Langhetti's lips he murmured faintly:

"I knew you would come."

"Yes," said Edith. "We will go together."

"Yes, sweetest and dearest," said Langhetti. "And therefore we meet now never to part again."

She looked at him fondly.

"The time of our deliverance is near, oh my friend."

"Near," repeated Langhetti, with a smile of ecstasy--"near. Yes, you have already by your presence brought me nearer to my immortality."

Mrs. Thornton was pale and wan; and the shock which she felt at the sight of her brother at first overcame her.

Despard said nothing to her through the day, but as evening came on he went up to her and in a low voice said, "Let us take a walk."

Mrs. Thornton looked at him earnestly, and then put on her bonnet. It was quite dark as they left the house. They walked along the road. The sea was on their left.

"This is the last that we shall see of one another, Little Playmate," said Despard, after a long silence. "I have left Holby forever."

"Left Holby! Where are you going?" asked Mrs. Thornton, anxiously.

"To join the army."

"The army!"

"Little Playmate," said Despard, "even my discovery of my father's death has not changed me. Even my thirst for vengeance could not take the place of my love. Listen--I flung myself with all the ardor that I could command into the pursuit of my father's murderers. I forced myself to an unnatural pitch of pitilessness and vindictiveness. I set out to pursue one of the worst of these men with the full determination to kill him. God saved me from blood-guiltiness. I found the man dead in the road. After this all my passion for vengeance died out, and I was brought face to face with the old love and the old despair. But each of us would die rather than do wrong, or go on in a wrong course. The only thing left for us is to separate forever."

"Yes, forever," murmured Mrs. Thornton.

"Ah, Little Playmate," he continued, taking her hand, "you are the one who was not only my sweet companion but the bright ideal of my youth. You always stood transfigured in my eyes. You, Teresa, were in my mind something perfect--a bright, brilliant being unlike any other. Whether you were really what I believed you mattered not so far as the effect upon me was concerned. You were at once a real and an ideal being. I believed in you, and believe in you yet."

"I was not a lover; I was a devotee. My feelings toward you are such as Dante describes his feelings toward his Beatrice. My love is tender and

reverential. I exalt you to a plane above my own. What I say may sound extravagant to you, but it is actual fact with me. Why it should be so I can not tell. I can only say--I am so made.

"We part, and I leave you; but I shall be like Dante, I suppose, and as the years pass, instead of weakening my love they will only refine it and purify it. You will be to me a guardian angel, a patron saint--your name shall always mingle with my prayers. Is it impious to name your name in prayer? I turn away from you because I would rather suffer than do wrong. May I not pray for my darling?"

"I don't know what to do," said Mrs. Thornton, wearily. "Your power over me is fearful. Lama, I would do any thing for your sake. You talk about your memories; it is not for me to speak about mine. Whether you idealize me or not, after all, you must know what I really am."

[Illustration: "SHE WAS WEeping. DESPARD FOLDED HER IN HIS ARMS."]

"Would you be glad never to see me again?"

The hand which Despard held trembled.

"If you would be happier," said she.

"Would you be glad if I could conquer this love of mine, and meet you again as coolly as a common friend?"

"I want you to be happy, Lama," she replied. "I would suffer myself to make you happy."

She was weeping. Despard folded her in his arms.

"This once," said he, "the only time, Little Playmate, in this life."

She wept upon his breast.

"[Greek: Teleutaion aspasmion domeni]" said Despard, murmuring in a low voice the opening of the song of the dead, so well known, so often song, so fondly remembered--the song which bids fare-well to the dead when the friends bestow the "last kiss."

He bent down his head. Her head fell. His lips touched her forehead.

She felt the beating of his heart; she felt his frame tremble from head to foot; she heard his deep-drawn breathing, every breath a sigh.

"It is our last farewell," said he, in a voice of agony.

Then he tore himself away, and, a few minutes later, was riding from the village.

CHAPTER LX.

CONCLUSION.

A month passed. Despard gave no sign. A short note which he wrote to Brandon announced his arrival at London, and informed him that important affairs required his departure abroad.

The cottage was but a small place, and Brandon determined to have Langhetti conveyed to the Hall. An ambulance was obtained from Exeter, and on this Langhetti and Edith were taken away.

On arriving at Brandon Hall Beatrice found her diary in its place of concealment, the memory of old sorrows which could never be forgotten. But those old sorrows were passing away now, in the presence of her new joy.

And yet that joy was darkened by the cloud of a new sorrow. Langhetti was dying. His frail form became more and more attenuated every day, his eyes more lustrous, his face more spiritual. Down every step of that way which led to the grave Edith went with him, seeming in her own face and form to promise a speedier advent in that spirit-world where she longed to arrive. Beside these Beatrice watched, and Mrs. Thornton added her tender care.

Day by day Langhetti grew worse. At last one day he called for his violin. He had caused it to be sent for on a previous occasion, but had never used it. His love for music was satisfied by the songs of Beatrice. Now he wished to exert his own skill with the last remnants of his strength.

Langhetti was propped up by pillows, so that he might hold the instrument. Near him Edith reclined on a sofa. Her large, lustrous eyes were fixed on him. Her breathing, which came and went rapidly, showed her utter weakness and prostration.

Langhetti drew his bow across the strings.

It was a strange, sweet sound, weak, but sweet beyond all words--a long, faint, lingering tone, which rose and died and rose again, bearing away the souls of those who heard it into a realm of enchantment and delight.

That tone gave strength to Langhetti. It was as though some unseen power had been invoked and had come to his aid. The tones came forth more strongly, on firmer pinions, flying from the strings and towering through the air.

The strength of these tones seemed to emanate from some unseen power; so also did their meaning. It was a meaning beyond what might be intelligible to those who listened--a meaning beyond mortal thought.

Yet Langhetti understood it, and so did Edith. Her eyes grew brighter, a flush started to her wan cheeks, her breathing grew more rapid.

The music went on. More subtle, more penetrating, more thrilling in its mysterious meaning, it rose and swelled through the air, like the song of some unseen ones, who were waiting for newcomers to the Invisible land.

Suddenly Beatrice gave a piercing cry. She rushed to Edith's sofa. Edith lay back, her marble face motionless, her white lips apart, her eyes looking upward. But the lips breathed no more, and in the eyes there no longer beamed the light of life.

At the cry of Beatrice the violin fell from Langhetti's hand, and he sank back. His face was turned toward Edith. He saw her and knew it all.

[Illustration: LANGHETTI DREW HIS BOW ACROSS THE STRINGS.]

He said not a word, but lay with his face turned toward her. They wished to carry her away, but he gently reproved them.

"Wait!" he murmured. "In a short time you will carry away another also. Wait."

They waited.

An hour before midnight all was over. They had passed--those pure spirits, from a world which was uncongenial to a fairer world and a purer clime.

They were buried side by side in the Brandon vaults. Frank then returned to London. Mrs. Thornton went back to Holby. The new rector was surprised at the request of the lady of Thornton Grange to be allowed to become organist in Trinity Church. She offered to pension off the old man who now presided there. Her request was gladly acceded to. Her zeal was remarkable. Every day she visited the church to practice at the organ. This became the purpose of her life. Yet of all the pieces two were performed most frequently in her daily practice, the one being the Agnus Dei; the other, the [Greek: teleutaion aspasmou] of St. John Damascene. Peace! Peace! Peace!

Was that cry of hers unavailing? Of Despard nothing was known for some time. Mr. Thornton once mentioned to his wife that the Rev. Courtenay Despard had joined the Eleventh Regiment, and had gone to South Africa. He mentioned this because he had seen a paragraph stating that a Captain Despard had been killed in the Kaffir war, and wondered whether it could by any possibility be their old friend or not.

At Brandon Hall, the one who had been so long a prisoner and a slave soon became mistress.

The gloom which had rested over the house was dispelled, and Brandon and his wife were soon able to look back, even to the darkest period of their lives, without fear of marring their perfect happiness.

THE END.

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