Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

PLAYING WITH FIRE
& Other Stories

English man of letters Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930) is known as the creator of the immortal Sherlock Holmes and as one of the founders of the detective genre. He is far less remembered as the author of historical, science fiction and adventure stories.

Sir A.Conan Doyle says: "This volume is made up of a series of pictures of the past which may be regarded as trial flights towards a larger ideal which I have long had in my mind. It has seemed to me that there is a region between actual story and actual history which has never been adequately exploited. These short sketches, portraying variuos crises in the story of the human race, are to be judged as experiments in that direction."

This collection throws a light on the hitherto not very well-known aspects of his *oeuvre*, and the reader will certainly enjoy these superb stories and appreciate their skilfully woven intrigue.

THE UNKNOWN AND LITTLE KNOWN
CONAN DOYLE

PLAYING WITH FIRE

and Other Stories

by

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

MOSCOW – 1999

Аннотация:

А.Конан-Дойль. Игра с огнём. Повести и рассказы. Сборник. На англ. яз. – Подготовка текста и комментарии П.А. Гелева.

Английский писатель Артур Конан-Дойль известен как создатель Шерлока Холмса и один из основателей и творцов детективного жанра. Несколько менее известен он как автор исторических, фантастических и приключенческих романов, повестей и рассказов. И почти совсем не известен как ссчинитель увлекательных историй, в которых сильны элементы загадки, мистики и необъяснимо таинственного.

Читатель сможет познакомиться с этими малоизвестными сторонами творчества писателя в рассказах и повестях, представленных в настоящем сборнике, и вновь насладиться талантом мастера детективного жанра, искусно вычерченной интригой.

INTRODUCTION

There is hardly anyone who has not read at least one story by Conan Doyle, but no one can claim to have read all his works, not even in Britain, for no really *complete* works of his have ever been published.

English man of letters Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930) is known as the creator of the immortal Sherlock Holmes and as one of the founders of the detective genre. He is far less remembered as the author of historical, science fiction and adventure stories, and still less, if ever, as the author of fascinating stories infused with mystery and mysticism.

Conan Doyle could have spoken about himself the following words of his hero: "My versatile mind is open to the eerie and the fantastic." He always took a keen interest in unknown, mysterious and supernatural phenomena and the powers of the human mind. No wonder, therefore, he spent nearly fifty years studying and successfully practising Spiritualism – the most amazing phenomenon of our reality. The mystery of Life and Death, the puzzles of the human mind unfathomable for run-of-the-mill rationalists always appealed to Conan Doyle, just as nowadays they still appeal to us. This collection throws a light on the hitherto not very well-known aspects of his *oeuvre*, and the reader will certainly enjoy these superb stories and appreciate their skilfully woven intrigue.

Now, it seems appropriate to touch upon what is sometimes called "apocryphal stories by Conan Doyle".

In his letter of September 30th, 1895, to "The Critic", a New York newspaper, Conan Doyle says: "Sir, – Will you allow me through your columns to warn your readers against a book called *Strange Secrets*, which is being sold with my name upon the cover? Out of a large number of stories, only one is mine – a very short one in the middle of the book."

What he referred to above is the book published in 1895 by R.F.Fenno&C^{o} in New York. The indication on the title page says that the stories were "told by Conan Doyle and Others" ("and Others" is set in a very small print). This quotation calls for some clarification.

While reading these stories carefully, we tried to find out which of them could belong to Conan Doyle. (We were unaware of his categorical statement at the time.) However, having perused the book, we had to admit that, with the best will, we could not trace any other authorship. This needs further explanation.

The collection contains *The Secret of Swalecliffe Castle, The Secret of the Mine, The Secret of Calverly Court, The Secret of Cousin Geoffrey's Chamber, The Secret of Goresthorpe Grange, The Box with the Iron Clamps, The Veiled Portrait, The Ghost of Lawford Hall, The Spectre Hand, A Coachful of Ghosts, George Venn and The Ghost, The Mystery in Daffodil Terrace, Why New Houses Are Haunted, A Very Queer Inn*.

Thus, the only story which Conan Doyle claimed to be his is obviously *The Secret of Goresthorpe Grange*, placed in the middle of the book. It is common knowledge that he wrote it in his youth and later revised it several times. One cannot help admitting that the following story *George Venn and The Ghost* has too much in common with the above-mentioned one to question its authorship.

We can find still another couple – *The Spectre Hand* and *The Veiled Portrait*. Who could have created these stories? It is noteworthy that their theme always interested ACD, besides, both have characteristic references to Baron Reichenbach, Christian Oersted and Doctor Johnson. Being an advocate of Spiritualism in his last years, Conan Doyle often referred to the first two authors, saying he had read their works when he was young. There are some other details that make us conclude that the stories are by one and the same author who created the previous couple.

Another match that follows is *The Secret of Cousin Geoffrey's Chamber* and *The Ghost of Lawford Hall*. Again, there is no reason to believe that they were written by somebody else, although one must admit that the latter is rather poorly done. Nevertheless, it contains indirect evidence of the early Conan Doyle's authorship. Thus, we come across the statement that Jehu was Nimshi's son, which is wrong because Jehu was a son of Jehoshaphat (and a grandson of Nimshi). Isn't it curious that the same mistake occurs in *Mikah Clarke*, a well-known novel by Conan Doyle?

If we compare these apocrypha with what is certain to be the early Conan Doyle, we cannot help noticing that they have a great in common, as far as the plot, the characters and the settings are concerned. One can also try to authenticate Conan Doyle's work by taking into account the rare names of his characters which usually pass from one story to another. So do they in what is thought to be Conan Doyle's apocrypha. It would be too far-fetched to put it down to sheer coincidence.

A Coachful of Ghosts doesn't quite fit in with this scheme, but no matter how exotic it may seem, there are no grounds for arguing its authenticity because the French theme was often developed by Conan Doyle, especially in such novels as *The Refugees*, *The Exploits of Brigadier Gerard*, *The Adventures of Etienne Gerard*, *The Great Shadow*, *Uncle Bernac*, let alone shorter ones.

Only one story – *The Mystery in Daffodil Terrace* – seemed doubtful to us because of its baffling, crude style, and yet we had to admit that the theme – both poverty and gold corrupt – is to be found in other works by Conan Doyle, for example, in *The Doings of Raffles Haw*. If we compare the two stories, the former will seem to be just a pen test. Besides, it would have been very unwise of the editors to include such a poorly written story in the collected works of the famous man-of-letters if it had been by an anonymous writer. In view of these considerations we have to admit ACD's authenticity.

Now, one may well wonder why Conan Doyle wanted to repudiate the

authorship of these stories. The clue may be his letter of protest sent to American editors after they had published his collected works entitled *My Friend the Murderer* without his prior consent. The book contained *My Friend the Murderer, The Silver Hatchet, The Gully of Bluemansdyke, The Parson of Jackman's Gulch, A Night Among the Nihilists*.

Conan Doyle says that "the tales were written many years ago, and were meant to have the ephemerial life that they deserve" and that "it is slightly annoying to an author when work which he has deliberately suppressed is resuscitated against his wish". So this is probably the answer. An anonymous agent somehow gets hold of Conan Doyle's early stories and gets them published one by one without the author's consent. Greatly annoyed, Conan Doyle repudiates the authorship of his early stories on the grounds that "they are hardly of any interest to the reader".

By the way, we were lucky to read another collection by ACD: *Beyond the City*, Chicago, 1892, Donohue, Henneberry&C^{O}. The book includes a novel of the same name and a collection of short stories strangely entitled *Pearl-Fishing*, which in fact contains two – *Loaded Dice* and *The Serf of Pobereze*. There may have been a few more, but the copy we read has only two. As it is, there is nothing that can justify the strange title.

It is known that in those days American editors used to complete a short manuscript with some other stories of the same author by using larger print. Therefore, we can feel quite confident of the authenticity. The first one leaves much room for improvement and tells of a gambling and its harmful effect – something that interested Conan Doyle throughout his life. However weak the story may seem, it is again suggestive of Conan Doyle's authorship. *The Serf of Pobereze* would seem rather unusual for ACD, but we cannot attribute it to anybody else. It can have been written when Conan Doyle was a young man. If it had been by an anonymous author, the editors would not have ventured to place it in the book of the illustrious writer, as we have said above.

Thus we strongly insist that all the stories of this collection were written by Conan Doyle and believe that some of them are of great literary merit. This is why we have placed them among other stories which are certain to be Conan Doyle's. Anyway, the reader will find them all interesting.

Paul Guéléva

CONTENTS

PLAYING WITH FIRE

I cannot pretend to say what occurred on the 14th of April last at №.17, Badderly Gardens. Put down in black and white, my surmise might seem too crude, too grotesque, for serious consideration. And yet that something did occur, and that it was of a nature which will leave its mark upon every one of us for the rest of our lives, is as certain as the unanimous testimony of five witnesses can make it. I will not enter into any argument or speculation. I will only give a plain statement, which will be submitted to John Moir, Harvey Deacon, and Mrs.Delamere, and withheld from publication unless they are prepared to corroborate every detail. I cannot obtain the sanction of Paul Le Duc, for he appears to have left the country.

It was John Moir (the well-known senior partner of Moir, Moir, and Sanderson) who had originally turned our attention to occult subjects. He had, like many very hard and practical men of business, a mystic side to his nature, which had led him to the examination, and eventually to the acceptance, of those elusive phenomena which are grouped together with much that is foolish, and much that is fraudulent, under the common heading of spiritualism. His researches, which had begun with an open mind, ended unhappily in dogma, and he became as positive and fanatical as any other bigot. He represented in our little group the body of men who have turned these singular phenomena into a new religion.

Mrs.Delamere, our medium, was his sister, the wife of Delamere, the rising sculptor. Our experience had shown us that to work on these subjects without a medium was as futile as for an astronomer to make observations without a telescope. On the other hand, the introduction of a paid medium was hateful to all of us. Was it not obvious that he or she would feel bound to return some result for money received, and that the temptation to fraud would be an overpowering one? No phenomena could be relied upon which were produced at a guinea an hour. But, fortunately, Moir had discovered that his sister was mediumistic – in other words, that she was a battery of that animal magnetic force which is the only form of energy which is subtle enough to be acted upon from the spiritual plane as well as from our own material one. Of course, when I say this, I do not mean to beg the question; but I am simply indicating the theories upon which we were ourselves, rightly or wrongly, explaining what we saw. The lady came, not altogether with the approval of her husband, and though she never gave indications of any very great psychic force, we were able, at least, to obtain those usual phenomena of message-tilting which are at the same time so puerile and so inexplicable. Every Sunday

evening we met in Harvey Deacon's studio at Badderly Gardens, the next house to the corner of Merton Park Road.

Harvey Deacon's imaginative work in art would prepare anyone to find that he was an ardent lover of everything which was *outré* and sensational. A certain picturesqueness in the study of the occult had been the quality which had originally attracted him to it, but his attention was speedily arrested by some of those phenomena to which I have referred, and he was coming rapidly to the conclusion that what he had looked upon as an amusing romance and an after-dinner entertainment was really a very formidable reality. He is a man with a remarkably clear and logical brain – a true descendant of his ancestor, the well-known Scotch professor – and he represented in our small circle the critical element, the man who has no prejudices, is prepared to follow facts as far as he can see them, and refuses to theorize in advance of his data. His caution annoyed Moir as much as the latter's robust faith amused Deacon, but each in his own way was equally keen upon the matter.

And I? What am I to say that I represented? I was not the devotee. I was not the scientific critic. Perhaps the best that I can claim for myself is that I was the dilettante man about town, anxious to be in the swim of every fresh movement, thankful for any new sensation which would take me out of myself and open up fresh possibilities of existence. I am not an enthusiast myself, but I like the company of those who are. Moir's talk, which made me feel as if we had a private pass-key through the door of death, filled me with a vague contentment. The soothing atmosphere of the séance with the darkened lights was delightful to me. In a word, the thing amused me, and so I was there.

It was, as I have said, upon the 14th of April last that the very singular event which I am about to put upon record took place. I was the first of the men to arrive at the studio, but Mrs.Delamere was already there, having had afternoon tea with Mrs.Harvey Deacon. The two ladies and Deacon himself were standing in front of an unfinished picture of his upon the easel. I am not an expert in art, and I have never professed to understand what Harvey Deacon meant by his pictures; but I could see in this instance that it was all very clever and imaginative, fairies and animals and allegorical figures of all sorts. The ladies were loud in their praises, and indeed the colour effect was a remarkable one.

"What do you think of it, Markham?" he asked.

"Well, it's above me," said I. "These beasts – what are they?"

"Mythical monsters, imaginary creatures, heraldic emblems – a sort of weird, bizarre procession of them."

"With a white horse in front!"

"It's not a horse," said he, rather testily – which was surprising, for he was a very good-humoured fellow as a rule, and hardly ever took himself seriously.

"What is it, then?"

"Can't you see the horn in front? It's a unicorn. I told you they were heraldic beasts. Can't you recognize one?"

"Very sorry, Deacon," said I, for he really seemed to be annoyed.

He laughed at his own irritation,

"Excuse me, Markham!" said he; "the fact is that I have had an awful job over the beast. All day I have been painting him in and painting him out, and trying to imagine what a real live, ramping unicorn would look like. At last I got him, as I hoped; so when you failed to recognize it, it took me on the raw."

"Why, of course it's a unicorn," said I, for he was evidently depressed at my obtuseness. "I can see the horn quite plainly, but I never saw a unicorn except beside the Royal Arms, and so I never thought of the creature. And these others are griffons and cockatrices, and dragons of sorts?"

"Yes, I had no difficulty with them. It was the unicorn which bothered me. However, there's an end of it until tomorrow." He turned the picture round upon the easel, and we all chatted about other subjects.

Moir was late that evening, and when he did arrive he brought with him, rather to our surprise, a small, stout Frenchman, whom he introduced as Monsieur Paul Le Duc. I say to our surprise, for we held a theory that any intrusion into our spiritual circle deranged the conditions, and introduced an element of suspicion. We knew that we could trust each other, but all our results were vitiated by the presence of an outsider. However, Moir soon reconciled us to the innovation. Monsieur Paul Le Duc was a famous student of occultism, a seer, a medium, and a mystic. He was travelling in England with a letter of introduction to Moir from the President of the Parisian brothers of the Rosy Cross. What more natural than that he should bring him to our little séance, or that we should feel honoured by his presence?

He was, as I have said, a small, stout man, undistinguished in appearance, with a broad, smooth, clean-shaven face, remarkable only for a pair of large, brown, velvety eyes, staring vaguely out in front of him. He was well dressed, with the manners of a gentleman, and his curious little turns of English speech set the ladies smiling. Mrs.Deacon had a prejudice against our researches and left the room, upon which we lowered the lights, as was our custom, and drew up our chairs to the square mahogany table which stood in the centre of the studio. The light was subdued, but sufficient to allow us to see each other quite plainly. I

remember that I could even observe the curious, podgy little square-topped hands which the Frenchman laid upon the table.

"What a fun!" said he. "It is many years since I have sat in this fashion, and it is to me amusing. Madame is medium. Does madame make the trance?"

"Well, hardly that," said Mrs.Delamere. "But I am always conscious of extreme sleepiness."

"It is the first stage. Then you encourage it, and there comes the trance. When the trance comes, then out jumps your little spirit and in jumps another little spirit, and so you have direct talking or writing. You leave your machine to be worked by another. *Hein?* But what have unicorns to do with it?"

Harvey Deacon started in his chair. The Frenchman was moving his head slowly round and staring into the shadows which draped the walls.

"What a fun!" said he. "Always unicorns. Who has been thinking so hard upon a subject so bizarre?"

"This is wonderful!" cried Deacon. "I have been trying to paint one all day. But how could you know it?"

"You have been thinking of them in this room."

"Certainly."

"But thoughts are things, my friend. When you imagine a thing you make a thing. You don't know it, *hein?* But I can see your unicorns because it is not only with my eye that I can see."

"Do you mean to say that I create a thing which has never existed by merely thinking of it?"

"But certainly. It is the fact which lies under all other facts. That is why an evil thought is also a danger."

"They are, I suppose, upon the astral plane?" said Moir.

"Ah, well, these are but words, my friends. They are there – somewhere – everywhere – I cannot tell myself. I see them. I could touch them."

"You could not make *us* see them."

"It is to materialize them. Hold! It is an experiment. But the power is wanting. Let us see what power we have, and then arrange what we shall do. May I place you as I wish?"

"You evidently know a great deal more about it than we do," said Harvey Deacon; "I wish that you would take complete control."

"It may be that the conditions are not good. But we will try what we can do. Madame will sit where she is, I next, and this gentleman beside me. Meester Moir will sit next to madame, because it is well to have blacks and blondes in turn. So! And now with your permission I will turn the lights all out."

"What is the advantage of the dark?" I asked.

"Because the force with which we deal is a vibration of ether and so also is light. We have the wires all for ourselves now – *hein?* You will not be frightened in the darkness, madame? What a fun is such a séance!"

At first the darkness appeared to be absolutely pitchy, but in a few minutes our eyes became so far accustomed to it that we could just make out each other's presence – very dimly and vaguely, it is true. I could see nothing else in the room – only the black loom of the motionless figures. We were all taking the matter much more seriously than we had ever done before.

"You will place your hands in front. It is hopeless that we touch, since we are so few round so large a table. You will compose yourself, madame, and if sleep should come to you you will not fight against it. And now we sit in silence and we expect – *hein?*"

So we sat in silence and expected, staring out into the blackness in front of us. A clock ticked in the passage. A dog barked intermittently far away. Once or twice a cab rattled past in the street, and the gleam of its lamps through the chink in the curtains was a cheerful break in that gloomy vigil. I felt those physical symptoms with which previous séances had made me familiar – the coldness of the feet, the tingling in the hands, the glow of the palms, the feeling of a cold wind upon the back. Strange little shooting pains came in my forearms, especially as it seemed to me in my left one, which was nearest to our visitor – due no doubt to disturbance of the vascular system, but worthy of some attention all the same. At the same time I was conscious of a strained feeling of expectancy which was almost painful. From the rigid, absolute silence of my companions I gathered that their nerves were as tense as my own.

And then suddenly a sound came out of the darkness – a low, sibilant sound, the quick, thin breathing of a woman. Quicker and thinner yet it came, as between clenched teeth, to end in a loud gasp with a dull rustle of cloth.

"What's that? Is all right?" someone asked in the darkness.

"Yes, all is right," said the Frenchman. "It is madame. She is in her trance. Now, gentlemen, if you will wait quiet you will see something, I think, which will interest you much."

Still the ticking in the hall. Still the breathing, deeper and fuller now, from the medium. Still the occasional flash, more welcome than ever, of the passing lights of the hansoms. What a gap we were bridging, the half-raised veil of the eternal on the one side and the cabs of London on the other. The table was throbbing with a mighty pulse. It swayed steadily, rhythmically, with an easy swooping, scooping motion under our

fingers. Sharp little raps and cracks came from its substance, file-firing, volley-firing, the sounds of a fagot burning briskly on a frosty night.

"There is much power," said the Frenchman. "See it on the table!"

I had thought it was some delusion of my own, but all could see it now. There was a greenish-yellow phosphorescent light – or I should say a luminous vapour rather than a light – which lay over the surface of the table. It rolled and wreathed and undulated in dim glimmering folds, turning and swirling like clouds of smoke. I could see the white, square-ended hands of the French medium in this baleful light.

"What a fun!" he cried. "It is splendid!"

"Shall we call the alphabet?" asked Moir.

"But no – for we can do much better," said our visitor. "It is but a clumsy thing to tilt the table for every letter of the alphabet, and with such a medium as madame we should do better than that."

"Yes, you will do better," said a voice.

"Who was that? Who spoke? Was that you, Markham?"

"No, I did not speak."

"It was madame who spoke."

"But it was not her voice."

"Is that you, Mrs.Delamere?"

"It is not the medium, but it is the power which uses the organs of the medium," said the strange, deep voice.

"Where is Mrs.Delamere? It will not hurt her, I trust."

"The medium is happy in another plane of existence. She has taken my place, as I have taken hers."

"Who are you?"

"It cannot matter to you who I am. I am one who has lived as you are living, and who has died as you will die."

We heard the creak and grate of a cab pulling up next door. There was an argument about the fare, and the cabman grumbled hoarsely down the street. The green-yellow cloud still swirled faintly over the table, dull elsewhere, but glowing into a dim luminosity in the direction of the medium. It seemed to be piling itself up in front of her. A sense of fear and cold struck into my heart. It seemed to me that lightly and flippantly we had approached the most real and august of sacraments, that communion with the dead of which the fathers of the Church had spoken.

"Don't you think we are going too far? Should we not break up this séance?" I cried.

But the others were all earnest to see the end of it. They laughed at my scruples.

"All the powers are made for use," said Harvey Deacon. "If we *can* do this, we *should* do this. Every new departure of knowledge has been

called unlawful in its inception. It is right and proper that we should inquire into the nature of death."

"It is right and proper," said the voice.

"There, what more could you ask?" cried Moir, who was much excited. "Let us have a test. Will you give us a test that you are really there?"

"What test do you demand?"

"Well, now – I have some coins in my pocket. Will you tell me how many?"

"We come back in the hope of teaching and of elevating, and not to guess childish riddles."

"Ha, ha, Meester Moir, you catch it that time," cried the Frenchman. "But surely this is very good sense what the Control is saying."

"It is a religion, not a game," said the cold, hard voice.

"Exactly – the very view I take of it," cried Moir. "I am sure I am very sorry if I have asked a foolish question. You will not tell me who you are?"

"What does it matter?"

"Have you been a spirit long?"

"Yes."

"How long?"

"We cannot reckon time as you do. Our conditions are different."

"Are you happy?"

"Yes."

"You would not wish to come back to life?"

"No – certainly not."

"Are you busy?"

"We could not be happy if we were not busy."

"What do you do?"

"I have said that the conditions are entirely different."

"Can you give us no idea of your work?"

"We labour for our own improvement and for the advancement of others."

"Do you like coming here tonight?"

"I am glad to come if I can do any good by coming."

"Then to do good is your object?"

"It is the object of all life on every plane."

"You see, Markham, that should answer your scruples."

It did, for my doubts had passed and only interest remained.

"Have you pain in your life?" I asked.

"No; pain is a thing of the body."

"Have you mental pain?"
"Yes; one may always be sad or anxious."
"Do you meet the friends whom you have known on earth?"
"Some of them."
"Why only some of them?"
"Only those who are sympathetic."
"Do husbands meet wives?"
"Those who have truly loved."
"And the others?"
"They are nothing to each other."
"There must be a spiritual connection?"
"Of course."
"Is what we are doing right?"
"If done in the right spirit."
"What is the wrong spirit?"
"Curiosity and levity."
"May harm come of that?"
"Very serious harm."
"What sort of harm?"
"You may call up forces over which you have no control."
"Evil forces?"
"Undeveloped forces."
"You say they are dangerous. Dangerous to body or mind?"
"Sometimes to both."

There was a pause, and the blackness seemed to grow blacker still, while the yellow-green fog swirled and smoked upon the table.

"Any questions you would like to ask, Moir?" said Harvey Deacon.
"Only this – do you pray in your world?"
"One should pray in every world."
"Why?"
"Because it is the acknowledgment of forces outside ourselves."
"What religion do you hold over there?"
"We differ exactly as you do."
"You have no certain knowledge?"
"We have only faith."

"These questions of religion," said the Frenchman, "they are of interest to you serious English people, but they are not so much fun. It seems to me that with this power here we might be able to have some great experience – *hein?* Something of which we could talk."

"But nothing could be more interesting than this," said Moir.

"Well, if you think so, that is very well," the Frenchman answered, peevishly. "For my part, it seems to me that I have heard all this before,

and that tonight I should weesh to try some experiment with all this force which is given to us. But if you have other questions, then ask them, and when you are finish we can try something more."

But the spell was broken. We asked and asked, but the medium sat silent in her chair. Only her deep, regular breathing showed that she was there. The mist still swirled upon the table.

"You have disturbed the harmony. She will not answer."

"But we have learned already all that she can tell – *hein?* For my part I wish to see something that I have never seen before."

"What then?"

"You will let me try?"

"What would you do?"

"I have said to you that thoughts are things. Now I wish to prove it to you, and to show you that which is only a thought. Yes, yes, I can do it and you will see. Now I ask you only to sit still and say nothing, and keep ever your hands quiet upon the table."

The room was blacker and more silent than ever. The same feeling of apprehension which had lain heavily upon me at the beginning of the séance was back at my heart once more. The roots of my hair were tingling.

"It is working! It is working!" cried the Frenchman, and there was a crack in his voice as he spoke which told me that he also was strung to his tightest.

The luminous fog drifted slowly off the table, and wavered and flickered across the room. There in the farther and darkest corner it gathered and glowed, hardening down into a shining core – a strange, shifty, luminous, and yet non-illuminating patch of radiance, bright itself, but throwing no rays into the darkness. It had changed from a greenish-yellow to a dusky sullen red. Then round this centre there coiled a dark, smoky substance, thickening, hardening, growing denser and blacker. And then the light went out, smothered in that which had grown round it.

"It has gone."

"Hush – there's something in the room."

We heard it in the corner where the light had been, something which breathed deeply and fidgeted in the darkness.

"What is it? Le Duc, what have you done?"

"It is all right. No harm will come." The Frenchman's voice was treble with agitation.

"Good heavens, Moir, there's a large animal in the room. Here it is, close by my chair! Go away! Go away!"

It was Harvey Deacon's voice, and then came the sound of a blow upon some hard object. And then... And then... how can I tell you what happened then?

Some huge thing hurtled against us in the darkness, rearing, stamping, smashing, springing, snorting. The table was splintered. We were scattered in every direction. It clattered and scrambled amongst us, rushing with horrible energy from one corner of the room to another. We were all screaming with fear, grovelling upon our hands and knees to get away from it. Something trod upon my left hand, and I felt the bones splinter under the weight.

"A light! A light!" someone yelled.

"Moir, you have matches, matches!"

"No, I have none, Deacon, where are the matches? For God's sake, the matches!"

"I can't find them. Here, you Frenchman, stop it!"

"It is beyond me. Oh, *mon Dieu*, I cannot stop it. The door! Where is the door?"

My hand, by good luck, lit upon the handle as I groped about in the darkness. The hard-breathing, snorting, rushing creature tore past me and butted with a fearful crash against the oaken partition. The instant that it had passed I turned the handle, and next moment we were all outside, and the door shut behind us. From within came a horrible crashing and rending and stamping.

"What is it? In Heaven's name, what is it?"

"A horse. I saw it when the door opened. But Mrs.Delamere —?"

"We must fetch her out. Come on, Markham; the longer we wait the less we shall like it."

He flung open the door and we rushed in. She was there on the ground amidst the splinters of her chair. We seized her and dragged her swiftly out, and as we gained the door I looked over my shoulder into the darkness. There were two strange eyes glowing at us, a rattle of hoofs, and I had just time to slam the door when there came a crash upon it which split it from top to bottom.

"It's coming through! It's coming!"

"Run, run for your lives!" cried the Frenchman.

Another crash, and something shot through the riven door. It was a long white spike, gleaming in the lamp-light. For a moment it shone before us, and then with a snap it disappeared again.

"Quick! Quick! This way!" Harvey Deacon shouted. "Carry her in! Here! Quick!"

We had taken refuge in the dining-room, and shut the heavy oak door. We laid the senseless woman upon the sofa, and as we did so, Moir,

the hard man of business, drooped and fainted across the hearthrug. Harvey Deacon was as white as a corpse, jerking and twitching like an epileptic. With a crash we heard the studio door fly to pieces, and the snorting and stamping were in the passage, up and down, up and down, shaking the house with their fury. The Frenchman had sunk his face on his hands, and sobbed like a frightened child.

"What shall we do?" I shook him roughly by the shoulder. "Is a gun any use?"

"No, no. The power will pass. Then it will end."

"You might have killed us all – you unspeakable fool – with your infernal experiments."

"I did not know. How could I tell that it would be frightened? It is mad with terror. It was his fault. He struck it."

Harvey Deacon sprang up. "Good heavens!" he cried.

A terrible scream sounded through the house.

"It's my wife! Here, I'm going out. If it's the Evil One himself I am going out!"

He had thrown open the door and rushed out into the passage. At the end of it, at the foot of the stairs, Mrs.Deacon was lying senseless, struck down by the sight which she had seen. But there was nothing else.

With eyes of horror we looked about us, but all was perfectly quiet and still. I approached the black square of the studio door, expecting with every slow step that some atrocious shape would hurl itself out of it. But nothing came, and all was silent inside the room. Peeping and peering, our hearts in our mouths, we came to the very threshold, and stared into the darkness. There was still no sound, but in one direction there was also no darkness. A luminous, glowing cloud, with an incandescent centre, hovered in the corner of the room. Slowly it dimmed and faded, growing thinner and fainter, until at last the same dense, velvety blackness filled the whole studio. And with the last flickering gleam of that baleful light the Frenchman broke into a shout of joy.

"What a fun!" he cried. "No one is hurt, and only the door broken, and the ladies frightened. But, my friends, we have done what has never been done before."

"And as far as I can help," said Harvey Deacon, "it will certainly never be done again."

And that was what befell on the 14th of April last at №.17 Badderly Gardens. I began by saying that it would seem too grotesque to dogmatize as to what it was which actually did occur; but I give my impressions, *our* impressions (since they are corroborated by Harvey Deacon and John Moir), for what they are worth. You may, if it pleases you, imagine that we were the victims of an elaborate and extraordinary hoax. Or you may

think with us that we underwent a very real and a very terrible experience. Or perhaps you may know more than we do of such occult matters, and can inform us of some similar occurrence. In this latter case a letter to William Markham, 146M, The Albany, would help to throw a light upon that which is very dark to us.

1900

WHY NEW HOUSES ARE HAUNTED

I made an interesting acquaintance the other day. He sat on my right hand at dinner, and, judging by appearance, he might as well have been of note as not. He spoke in German, rapidly, with a precision very much to the point – being one of those large-browed, bright-eyed individuals who can distinguish between masks and faces at a glance, and give a pretty accurate guess as to the kind of soul behind either. His under lip was deeply indented, so that, when smiling, his mouth assumed the same triangular form that characterized Heine, though his humour, while leaning towards sarcasm, was never bitter.

"I saw an old friend today," he said, suddenly, turning from his wife to me and throwing one arm comfortably over the back of his chair; "I met him first this summer in the Engadine."

"You were glad to meet him again, then?" said I.

"Most uncommonly glad," he answered, shaking his head emphatically. "Though I never spoke three words to him in my life, yet I can say, with all my heart, that it gives me exceeding joy to see him again. It is impossible to be bored where he is!"

"Are *you* ever bored?" I asked.

"I?" he returned heartily. "Not I, thank God! I am proud to say, I have never been bored a single hour in my life. I see other people wearying themselves; but, while their folly and my own remain to laugh at *ennui* stays far from me. If it came near, the recollection of my Engadine friend would banish it at once. I will describe him. You will know him, then, forever, for there cannot be his like on earth. Two such prodigies would be greater bounty on the part of nature than we poor sinners dare expect. He is about the middle height, has gray hair and a voice like far-off thunder. I should say, rather, a voice lost in a cellar that rolls and rolls through wine-filled vaults, seeking an outlet in vain. His nose is a colour-study for painters; yes, on my word, a real colour-study. It is of good size, and has every variety of shade ranging through purple, red, and blue. It is a marvel! In the summer this gentleman walked about, attended by two young servant-maids, both strong and healthy, and both crowned with red silk handkerchiefs. These carried his walking-stick and painting apparatus – for he is an artist, of course, and paints wonderful pictures, all green and blue, as unlike nature as anything is possible to be. They also provide him amusement when he is fatigued."

Here, the three-cornered smile appeared and deepened on my neighbour's face:

"The amusements are as original as the man," he continued, chuckling. "They always consist of athletic exhibitions. He makes his girls fetch and carry like dogs, or jump over stones, or across a stick which he holds out; sometimes he joins in the sport himself, vaulting over tables and chairs at wayside inns until fatigue stops him, then the maids carry on the fun by themselves."

"He must be mad!" I cried indignantly.

"He is English," replied my informant demurely but with twinkling eyes. "He was born in Italy, I believe, and owns a restaurant near some great town. This he lets, however, and spends the rent most joyously, as I can testify."

"Does he walk about here with two maids?" I asked.

"No," replied the German. "He left them in the Engadine. Most likely he will hire others for the winter; but you will not need them as a mark of recognition. The colour-study will be sufficient. It is a real masterpiece, an astonishing combination of inharmonious shades."

As a natural result, I looked out eagerly for this old gentleman, but for some days in vain. My German friend departed, and his story was well-nigh forgotten, when it was brought to mind one night towards the end of a *table d'hôte* by a Voice – I spell it advisedly with a capital – such as I had never conceived possible from man.

It reverberated solemnly through the *salle-à-manger* like the deepest organ-note; nor did it seem to come from any person present, but from a vast cavern underground, some huge, mysterious void inhabited by ghosts and ghouls. And the Voice said:

"No, I would not insure *all* effervescing drinks. Not soda-water, for instance!"

As the contrast between the sepulchral tone and the words themselves was supremely ludicrous, a burst of general laughter followed, which rose louder and louder as one after another at table caught the infection and first tittered because their neighbour roared, then roared because they could not help themselves. Peal succeeded peal till the rafters rang, and as the last died away, the Voice spoke again from Hades, reflectively and slowly:

"Or ginger-beer!"

And instantly the senseless merriment broke out afresh. I speculated on the force of influences, laughing the while myself as heartily as any; and, as I speculated, the German's description of his Engadine acquaintance came back to me, and I leaned forward to see the originator of the excess. He was thoughtfully pouring out a tumbler of Chianti from a flask, and a shadow of the ruby liquid was cast upon the bluer portion of

that famous colour-study for painters, which ranged through purple and red.

The Master of Maidens looked up from his occupation.

"Sir," said he, and the marvellous Voice rumbled and echoed above the tumult of many tongues, "that won't do! You make a great mistake. If you were to pull down a haunted house twenty times over, and rebuild it in a different locality each time – if you were to divide it into twenty cottages – it would remain haunted to the end. I know, Mr.Barrister, from bitter experience."

"Tell us all about it, Mr.Brace," suggested the gentleman addressed, who acted as president at his end of the table.

"Oh, yes; I daresay! Tell you all about it! Sir, I am a man with a conscience!"

"We don't doubt it in the least," said the barrister.

"With a heavy conscience, a restless conscience, a conscience that never will allow itself sleep, or me a moment's peace!" moaned the Voice.

"Confession is good for the soul, sir," remarked an American.

"Eh?" – the monosyllable was very doleful. "With you as Father Confessor? I doubt it, sir; I doubt it. You're too young and too d–d good-looking!"

And again the chorus of senseless merriment rose to a shriek and gradually died away. Then the Voice was heard, gallant in a ghostly fashion that made my flesh creep.

"Why not, madam?" it rolled. "Why not? Ladies must be obeyed under all circumstances whatsoever. Certainly, I will tell my misfortune, if *you* care to listen:

"When I came of age I inherited two houses from my father, the rents of which were to be my income, as they had been his. One, luckily, is profitable, rising in value; the other is a never-ceasing source of trouble. I say 'is,' for, though long since passed out of my hands, thank God, it plagues and bothers its present owners as it plagued and bothered me; which is saying a good deal.

"I am not going to tell you where this house was originally built; that has nothing to do with the question. It might have been in Russia, quite as well as in Japan or Mexico. What happens in one country at one time may happen in another country at another time, and the explanation of either will account for both, provided the causes of both are identical. That's logic, Mr.Barrister, ain't it?"

"Just so," said the barrister superciliously. "Was your father a solicitor, Mr. Brace?"

"He was," growled the Voice. "And can you tell me, sir, the difference between a solicitor and a barrister?"

"No, I can't," drawled the president.

"The same difference as between a crocodile and an alligator," roared the Voice angrily; and as the laugh turned against his victim, Mr.Brace poured out another tumblerful of Chianti and drank it off at a draught.

"Well, madam," he continued more gently, "this second house had come into my father's hands in the way of business. When clients could not pay their fees in cash he was sometimes willing to accept their dwellings instead. 'Buildings pay ten per cent, and are safe investments,' he used to say. I wish to goodness he had not been quite so sure; I'd have been so much the richer then. But, as he did not consult me, I knew nothing about the transaction until after his death, when the will was read. I first set eyes on the abominable swindle when I went to inspect the premises.

"I found a square, solemn edifice, overgrown with ivy, standing in the middle of a few acres of pleasure-ground which had been utterly neglected for years. High brick walls divided the property from the rest of the world; within them you might fancy yourself the first or last man, according to taste, so complete was the sense of isolation. Foreign trees, rare shrubs, stumps of weather-stained statues, moss-grown fountains, and grass-grown walks, were sorrowfully suggestive of by-gone grandeur. Indoors it was much the same; echoing corridors, crooked staircases, unexpected rooms with painted ceilings in unexpected places, approached by unexpected ways. Upon my word, I felt odd as I tramped through them!

" 'Ugh!' I exclaimed at last to the Caretaker, 'the house might be haunted!'

" 'It is haunted, sir,' she returned quietly. 'But I'm used to it. Nothing will hurt me if I keep away from the Red Room after dark.'

" 'Ah! the Red Room!' said I, looking at her (she was an old scarecrow); 'and which may that be?'

"She brought me into a large, bare apartment on the ground-floor, where spiders had made themselves a paradise of dust and web. There was a long mirror opposite the fire-place, and the room was lighted by French windows opening on a terrace that ended on one side at the gravel sweep before the entrance, on the other at a wall and an iron door admitting into the fruit-garden. A dismal row of terra-cotta vases ornamented the farther edge of this walk, and a broken set of steps led down to a lawn where the grass had grown rank round a deep basin of stagnant water. The lawn itself was bounded by a thick row of laurels that hid the ivied outer walls. No one could cross the grass without leaving tracks as in a meadow; no one could enter or leave by the iron door because it was locked and the key in my possession; and I suddenly determined no one should escape by the

great gate under the archway, through which I had driven in, for I would lock it and keep that key too, while I slept or watched in the Red Room that very night.

"The old woman turned pale when I told her my intention, which confirmed my resolve. How could I let a haunted house, unless I proved the tales were groundless? And how could I prove them except by experience? And the best way of assuring myself a good night's rest was by giving rogues no time for preparation. I would not allow the hag to say a word. 'For,' said I, 'I know nothing about the house or its antecedents, therefore imagination can scarcely run away with me; at all events, if it does, it will be in a new line.' Accordingly I bid her rig up a bed near the fire-place, to avoid the reflection of the mirror, and clear the spiders out, collect chairs and tables from the other rooms, and light a roaring fire to make the place more comfortable, whilst I drove back to town for provisions, candles, etc., and to fetch my pistols and my dog.

"Zamba was of Danish breed, slate-coloured, and fierce to every one but me. She loved me, poor unfortunate brute, as well as a woman might have done, and she disposed at her rivals more effectually. We were both in high spirits when l returned with her about sunset. I sent the trap away, and, having locked the gates, instituted, with Zamba's aid, a thorough search of the premises outside and in. I knew nothing could escape her prying nose. She was amazingly curious; she examined every hole and corner of the grounds, tracking the rank grass near the pool in every direction. But she found nothing. Indoors it was the same; there were lots of dust, but, besides, not even a rat (except the housekeeper) in that accursed house from garret to cellar.

"I forgot to say, the weather was fine and clear for the time of year. The moon, too, was luckily at the full, and would shine on the terrace a good part of the night. Nature seemed inclined to aid me.

"When Zamba and I had finished our rounds, I took her into the Red Room. Here she was not quite so satisfied. She sniffed the air doubtfully once or twice, and looked inquiringly into my face; then she walked slowly to the window, looked out, came back to me, wagging her tail uncertainly, as if to ask, 'Is it all right?' Her doubts were quelled for the moment when I reassured her by voice and caresses, and she stretched herself at full length on the hearth before the now blazing fire.

"The twilight was deepening, and the old woman, whom I had called to help in unpacking the stores, asked permission to go away. I told her to light two duplex lamps first, and place them in the two darkest corners of the room. She grinned approval of the precaution, but as, having obeyed me, she was about to vanish into cannier regions, she paused with the door-handle in her hand and said in a rapid whisper:

" 'All the lamps and candles,' here she eyed the four I had ranged on the supper-table, 'in the world won't help you, if you haven't plenty of matches. There's another box, sir, *and don't let it lie on the table!*'

"The door slammed behind her; next moment it opened and she said:

" 'But that won't help you either, for no one ever came out of this room alive after a night spent in it – *and no one ever will!*'

"She was gone. I picked up the matches from the floor, where she had flung them, and blessed her for the forethought, for I had forgotten to bring any with me, and as I put them in my pocket Zamba whined.

" 'What's the matter, old girl?' I asked. 'You and I are going to have grand fun tonight, ain't we?'

"But she heaved a deep sigh and put her nose between her paws.

"Between eating, feeding Zamba, reading and smoking, time passed pretty quickly until ten o'clock. Then looking up I saw the full moon shining in at the long French windows. I thought I should like to stroll on the terrace, and calling Zamba I lit a fresh cigar and went out into the open air.

"Not a leaf was stirring; the moonlight fell on the dewdrops hanging on the long, limp blades of grass, so that each bead resembled a pearl, so pure, so soft was their radiance. Not a grasshopper, not a frog broke the stillness with chirp or croak. I never felt a silence so intensely in my life; yet it was not oppressive; it was like falling asleep – a sweet luxurious sense of repose. Even Zamba fell under the influence and walked quietly beside me, sometimes thrusting her nozzle into my hand courting caresses, or touching my fingers lightly with her tongue.

"I don't know how long we had been pacing the walk in this fashion, when Zamba cocked her ears.

" 'What is it?' I asked her gently. She glanced quickly into my face and wagged her tail, then put back her ears and whined. I listened anxiously.

"And presently a full, sweet woman's voice began to sing – to vocalize. It seemed to come from the sweep before the door. There was nothing odd about it, nothing unusual. I thought a vagrant artist was singing on the chance of gaining pence, but that her voice was superior to most of the class – in fact, I never heard a better on any stage. Sometimes the sound came nearer, sometimes it drifted farther off, as if the songstress were moving up and down before the house, to see if at any window there were signs of life. No words were distinguishable in the song; runs, trills, and sorrowful single notes of exceeding beauty followed one another, melodiously indeed, but with no regard to order – at least, I have not known a composition approaching that in structure. It carried me away. I

listened and listened till my cigar went out, and listened still to the enchanting strains, now rising, now falling, as I imagined the woman approched or retired from the terrace. Suddenly it ceased.

" 'Poor thing!' I said aloud, awaking as from a dream. 'We must give her some food and see what can be done for her. Come along, Zamba!'

"Zamba crawled after me. I remembered her reluctance next day. As I came into the Red Room I looked about for a half loaf and some fowl I had left from supper, and as I stooped to pile the food together, the song burst out again; but this time, as if the singer stood on the terrace, almost in the room.

"I did not turn at once, for the chicken would not balance on the loaf; when I did turn, the song had ceased, and to my utter amazement there was no one near the open window.

" 'Hullo!' I said, 'that's odd!'

"Going to the threshold, I saw the terrace was deserted; then, for the first time, I recollected the great gates were locked, the keys in my possession, and that no living being could enter the precincts without my knowledge! Calling to Zamba, I ran out, intending to search the garden and shrubbery with her. She obeyed reluctantly; when I urged her forward she gazed piteously into my face and whined; and, on my persisting, she rose on her hind legs and placed her fore-paws on my breast. Poor brute! After that we went back together to the Red Room no wiser than we had left it. I looked at my watch as we came in. It was twenty minutes past twelve.

"Sitting down in the arm-chair I piled fresh logs on the fire. Zamba took up her old position on the rug, with her nose between her paws, and watched the window suspiciously. About ten minutes later, one of the duplex lamps went out, and Zamba rose slowly, growling angrily. The next instant the other lamp went out, and the dog, barking furiously, flew at Something which was coming in from the terrace. I saw the animal spring into the air about the height a man's throat would be from the ground. I saw nothing between me and the outer air except Zamba; the moonlight streamed full across the rank grass, the stagnant pool and the terrace, and no shadow intercepted its path to me. But Zamba, certainly attacked Something, and as certainly, her body was immediately flung violently backwards, so that she fell at my feet dead, her neck hideously twisted and broken.

"I seized my pistols and fired at Nothing. One of the four candles on the table was put out. Remembering the old woman's warning, I laid one revolver down and tried to light the candle from another. Then, in the mirror opposite, for the first time I perceived Something. It was a Hand,

pale and sinewy; it seized the revolver and carried it away. Another candle went out.

" 'This is getting serious!' I said to myself, and I stuck the second pistol into my coat-pocket that I might relight the two candles at once. The others went out. I lighted them again. Once more two were extinguished; the second revolver was snatched from my pocket. The third candle went out. I snatched out the matches and lighted it, the other was extinguished. I relighted it, and so the game went on; as fast as one candle went out I struck a match and lit it again, to be put out again, and so on *da capo*. I observed, too, that other Hands had joined that pale one, hovering and encircling in the air, now vanishing, now appearing, and, repeated in the mirror, their number seemed countless. I was too excited to care much about them, as they had not, as yet, come very near; but the thought did occur to me: 'How shall I keep them at bay when the matches are exhausted? Will they strangle me in the dark?' My foot touched poor Zamba's body, and a cold chill ran over me; for, at the same time, I perceived the Hands closer to me than ever before; and their shadowy fingers had a cruel, gripping expression that didn't please me. I did not relish their proximity at all. The match-box was, now, nearly empty.

" 'Come!' said I, aloud and firmly; 'I am going to stay here all night, and walk out of this room alive in the morning. Matches or no matches; candles or no candles; Hands or no Hands!'

"I sat down and lighted another candle. Presently the logs on the hearth fell apart. I kicked them together with some difficulty, for striking matches takes up a good deal of attention, and, notwithstanding any danger, the humour of the situation tickled me. Surely a more ridiculous night's work could hardly be imagined than that of lighting candles for ghosts to snuff out! If poor Zamba's body, with its twisted neck, had not proved a terrible reality underlying the apparent comedy, I could have laughed outright, but – *only three matches remained to strike!*

" 'I will stay here all night,' I repeated doggedly. 'Light or no light; Hands or no Hands!'

"My assailants increased in number; the room was full of them, from floor to ceiling, all pale and cruel, all shadowy and indistinct, yet they did not touch me. I wondered at that, wondered what hindered them from strangling me at once as they had my dog, when I struck the last match and saw the last candle extinguished. I kicked the logs on the hearth; a shower of sparks flew into the air; and I was left in complete darkness, hemmed in by those horrid, pallid Hands. That was a terrible moment, but my blood was up.

" 'I stay *here*!' I cried furiously. 'Hands or no Hands, matches or no matches; candles or no candles; and I will walk out of this room alive in the morning!'

"The Things paused in their advance. Only for a second, however; the next they were circling and hovering, appearing and disappearing in their old fashion, making horrid dives at me, like a flock of hellish birds hungering to pick my bones. Still I was not daunted. Having observed that my enemies advanced as my courage failed, and fled when I was bold, I concluded that my will preserved me, and that, should it fail or falter, Zamba's fate would certainly be mine. Accordingly I resisted every impulse of fear. Leaning back in my chair, I waited for the morning, and thought the dawn would never break. Sometimes drops of exhaustion and nervous apprehension stood on my forehead, as imagination pictured those cruel, fleshless Hands behind me, their long, pale fingers, perhaps, in the act of clasping round my throat; and, at such moments, the Things thronged thicker, faster towards me, till checked by my strong determination. Half a lifetime seemed crowded into those few hours.

"At last, as my strength was giving way and hope failing, a gray look came into the sky; a slow, soft breeze stole through the trees in the shrubbery, and a cock crew. The pale Hands swept towards me in angry crowds – I gave myself up for lost – they disappeared."

The Voice paused. We waited in breathless silence.

"The shock of relief was too great for me, madam. I must have fainted; for, when I became conscious, the dawn had fully broken. I was lying on the floor across poor Zamba, and my old hag of a housekeeper was peeping in at the open window.

"She screamed when she saw me get up – the old goose – but, to do her justice, she was glad enough to find me alive. She brought me tea – I preferred brandy – to make me more comfortable; but she could do nothing for Zamba! Poor Zamba!"

Mr.Brace stretched out his hand for the Chianti, and as he poured out the last glass he continued:

"Now, madam, this is how my conscience became burdened. On inquiry I found that *every* room in the house was haunted by different kinds of apparitions; and so were the walks in the grounds. The voice I had heard singing was the pleasantest and most harmless of the whole lot. I could not stand that, you know. One spirit might be put up with, but fifty or sixty – no thank you! I sold my inheritance to a contractor on condition he pulled it down. He in his turn sold the stones and bricks to a builder, who ran up a row of neat two-storied villas near a manufacturing town, using them as material. They let splendidly at first, not so well the second year, worse the third, and *not at all the fourth*. For the whole lot, madam,

are haunted. The pale Hands and all the ghosts in my big ghost-shop are now carrying on their nightly games in the respective villas where the stones and bricks of their respective homes were used up. Except the songstress; she sings up and down the road instead of up and down my terrace."

"But how is your conscience troubled?" asked the lady.

"It is naturally tender," moaned the Voice. "It cannot bear the thought of having, unintentionally, been the originator of so much misery in the world as must be caused by letting loose so many apparitions. Hence it gives me no rest."

"Then you believe, Mr.Brace, the ghosts went with the bricks?" said the barrister.

"Sure of it," replied the Voice sorrowfully. "And more: every place built with old material is likely to be haunted, for what do contractors care where their bricks come from, so long as they are cheap? That's how we hear of unaccountable ghosts in brand new villas, and why so many of them are dangerous. They don't like having been disturbed, you see."

"Very curious!" said the barrister musingly.

"I *think* I've heard about the Hands before," remarked the American. "Were you ever in Russia, Mr.Brace?"

"Sir," growled the Voice, "you are an uncommonly sharp young man – a credit to your nation, sir. But tell me first why you are not a donkey's tail."

"Why I am not a donkey's tail," repeated the American. "Can't say, I'm sure. Because he ain't my brother?"

"Because you are no end of an ass, sir!" thundered the Voice; and the old gentleman pushed back his chair from the table and left the *salle-à-manger*.

1895

THE BULLY OF BROCAS COURT

That year – it was in 1878 – the South Midland Yeomanry were out near Luton, and the real question which appealed to every man in the great camp was not how to prepare for a possible European war, but the far more vital one how to get a man who could stand up for ten rounds to Farrier-Sergeant Burton. Slogger Burton was a fine upstanding fourteen stone of bone and brawn, with a smack in either hand which would leave any ordinary mortal senseless. A match must be found for him somewhere or his head would outgrow his dragoon helmet. Therefore Sir Frederick Milburn, better known as Mumbles, was dispatched to London to find if among the fancy there was no one who would make a journey in order to take down the number of the bold dragoon.

They were bad days, those, in the prize-ring. The old knuckle-fighting had died out in scandal and disgrace, smothered by the pestilent crowd of betting men and ruffians of all sorts who hung upon the edge of the movement and brought disgrace and ruin upon the decent fighting men, who were often humble heroes whose gallantry has never been surpassed. An honest sportsman who desired to see a fight was usually set upon by villains, against whom he had no redress, since he was himself engaged on what was technically an illegal action. He was stripped in the open street, his purse taken, and his head split open if he ventured to resist. The ringside could only be reached by men who were prepared to fight their way there with cudgels and hunting-crops. No wonder that the classic sport was attended now by those only who had nothing to lose.

On the other hand, the era of the reserved building and the legal glove-fight had not yet arisen, and the cult was in a strange intermediate condition. It was impossible to regulate it, and equally impossible to abolish it, since nothing appeals more directly and powerfully to the average Briton. Therefore there were scrambling contests in stableyards and barns, hurried visits to France, secret meetings at dawn in wild parts of the country, and all manner of evasions and experiments. The men themselves became as unsatisfactory as their surroundings. There could be no honest open contest, and the loudest bragger talked his way to the top of the list. Only across the Atlantic had the huge figure of John Lawrence Sullivan appeared, who was destined to be the last of the earlier system and the first of the later one.

Things being in this condition, the sporting Yeomanry Captain found it no easy matter among the boxing saloons and sporting pubs of London to find a man who could be relied upon to give a good account of the huge Farrier-Sergeant. Heavy-weights were at a premium. Finally his

choice fell upon Alf Stevens of Kentish Town, an excellent rising middle-weight who had never yet known defeat and had indeed some claims to the championship. His professional experience and craft would surely make up for the three stone of weight which separated him from the formidable dragoon. It was in this hope that Sir Frederick Milburn engaged him, and proceeded to convey him in his dog-cart behind a pair of spanking greys to the camp of the Yeomen. They were to start one evening, drive up the Great North Road, sleep at St.Albans, and finish their journey next day.

The prize-fighter met the sporting Baronet at the Golden Cross, where Bates, the little groom, was standing at the head of the spirited horses. Stevens, a pale-faced, clean-cut young fellow, mounted beside his employer and waved his hand to a little knot of fighting men, rough, collarless, reefer-coated fellows who had gathered to bid their comrade good-bye. "Good luck, Alf!" came in a hoarse chorus as the boy released the horses' heads and sprang in behind, while the high dog-cart swung swiftly round the curve into Trafalgar Square.

Sir Frederick was so busy steering among the traffic in Oxford Street and the Edgware Road that he had little thought for anything else, but when he got into the edges of the country near Hendon, and the hedges had at last taken the place of that endless panorama of brick dwellings, he let his horses go easy with a loose rein while he turned his attention to the young man at his side. He had found him by correspondence and recommendation, so that he had some curiosity now in looking him over. Twilight was already falling and the light dim, but what the Baronet saw pleased him well. The man was a fighter every inch, clean-cut, deep-chested, with the long straight cheek and deep-set eye which goes with an obstinate courage. Above all, he was a man who had never yet met his master and was still upheld by the deep sustaining confidence which is never quite the same after a single defeat. The Baronet chuckled as he realized what a surprise packet was being carried north for the Farrier-Sergeant.

"I suppose you are in some sort of training, Stevens?" he remarked, turning to his companion.

"Yes, sir; I am fit to fight for my life."

"So I should judge by the look of you."

"I live regular all the time, sir, but I was matched against Mike Connor for this last week-end and scaled down to eleven four. Then he paid forfeit, and here I am at the top of my form."

"That's lucky. You'll need it all against a man who has a pull of three stone and four inches."

The young man smiled.

"I have given greater odds than that, sir."

"I dare say. But he's a game man as well."

"Well, sir, one can but do one's best."

The Baronet liked the modest but assured tone of the young pugilist. Suddenly an amusing thought struck him and he burst out laughing.

"By Jove!" he cried. "What a lark if the Bully is out tonight!"

Alf Stevens pricked up his ears.

"Who might he be, sir?"

"Well, that's what the folk are asking. Some say they've seen him, and some say he's a fairy-tale, but there's good evidence that he is a real man with a pair of rare good fists that leave their marks behind him."

"And where might he live?"

"On this very road. It's between Finchley and Elstree, as I've heard. There are two chaps, and they come out on nights when the moon is at full and challenge the passers-by to fight in the old style. One fights and the other picks up. By George! the fellow *can* fight, too, by all accounts. Chaps have been found in the morning with their faces all cut to ribbons to show that the Bully had been at work upon them."

Alf Stevens was full of interest.

"I've always wanted to try an old-style battle, sir, but it never chanced to come my way. I believe it would suit me better than the gloves."

"Then you won't refuse the Bully?"

"Refuse him! I'd go ten mile to meet him."

"By George! it would be great!" cried the Baronet. "Well, the moon is at the full, and the place should be about here."

"If he's as good as you say," Stevens remarked, "he should be known in the ring, unless he is just an amateur who amuses himself like that."

"Some think he's an ostler, or maybe a racing man from the training stables over yonder. Where there are horses there is boxing. If you can believe the accounts, there is something a bit queer and outlandish about the fellow. Hi! Look out, damn you, look out!"

The Baronet's voice had risen to a sudden screech of surprise and of anger. At this point the road dips down into a hollow, heavily shaded by trees, so that at night it arches across like the mouth of a tunnel. At the foot of the slope there stand two great stone pillars, which, as viewed by daylight, are lichen-stained and weathered, with heraldic devices on each which are so mutilated by time that they are mere protuberances of stone. An iron gate of elegant design, hanging loosely upon rusted hinges, proclaims both the past glories and the present decay of Brocas Old Hall, which lies at the end of the weed-encumbered avenue. It was from the

shadow of this ancient gateway that an active figure had sprung suddenly into the centre of the road and had, with great dexterity, held up the horses, who ramped and pawed as they were forced back upon their haunches.

"Here, Rowe, you 'old the tits, will ye?" cried a high strident voice. "I've a little word to say to this 'ere slap-up Corinthian before 'e goes any farther."

A second man had emerged from the shadows and without a word took hold of the horses' heads. He was a short, thick fellow, dressed in a curious brown many-caped overcoat, which came to his knees, with gaiters and boots beneath it. He wore no hat, and those in the dog-cart had a view, as he came in front of the side-lamps, of a surly red face with an ill-fitting lower lip clean shaven, and a high black cravat swathed tightly under the chin. As he gripped the leathers his more active comrade sprang forward and rested a bony hand upon the side of the splashboard while he looked keenly up with a pair of fierce blue eyes at the faces of the two travellers, the light beating full upon his own features. He wore a hat low upon his brow, but in spite of its shadow both the Baronet and the pugilist could see enough to shrink from him, for it was an evil face, evil but very formidable, stern, craggy, high-nosed, and fierce, with an inexorable mouth which bespoke a nature which would neither ask for mercy nor grant it. As to his age, one could only say for certain that a man with such a face was young enough to have all his virility and old enough to have experienced all the wickedness of life. The cold, savage eyes took a deliberate survey, first of the Baronet and then of the young man beside him.

"Aye, Rowe, it's a slap-up Corinthian, same as I said," he remarked over his shoulder to his companion. "But this other is a likely chap. If 'e isn't a millin' cove 'e ought to be. Any'ow, we'll try 'im out."

"Look here," said the Baronet, "I don't know who you are, except that you are a damned impertinent fellow. I'd put the lash of my whip across your face for two pins!"

"Stow that gammon, gov'nor! It ain't safe to speak to me like that."

"I've heard of you and your ways!" cried the angry soldier. "I'll teach you to stop my horses on the Queen's high road! You've got the wrong men this time, my fine fellow, as you will soon learn."

"That's as it may be," said the stranger. "May'ap, master, we may all learn something before we part. One or other of you 'as got to get down and put up your 'ands before you get any farther."

Stevens had instantly sprung down into the road.

"If you want a fight you've come to the right shop," said he; "it's my trade, so don't say I took you unawares."

The stranger gave a cry of satisfaction.

"Blow my dickey!" he shouted. "It *is* a millin' cove, Joe, same as I said. No more chaw-bacons for us, but the real thing. Well, young man, you've met your master tonight. Happen you never 'eard what Lord Longmore said o' me? 'A man must be made special to beat you,' says 'e. That's wot Lord Longmore said."

"That was before the Bull came along," growled the man in front, speaking for the first time.

"Stow your chaffing, Joe! A little more about the Bull and you and me will quarrel. 'E bested me once, but it's all betters and no takers that I glut 'im if ever we meet again, Well, young man, what d'ye think of me?"

"I think you've got your share of cheek."

"Cheek. Wot's that?"

"Impudence, bluff – gas, if you like."

The last word had a surprising effect upon the stranger. He smote his leg with his hand and broke out into a high neighing laugh, in which he was joined by his gruff companion.

"You've said the right word, my beauty," cried the latter, " 'Gas' is the word and no error. Well, there's a good moon, but the clouds are comin' up. We had best use the light while we can."

Whilst this conversation had been going on the Baronet had been looking with an ever-growing amazement at the attire of the stranger. A good deal of it confirmed his belief that he was connected with some stables, though making every allowance for this his appearance was very eccentric and old-fashioned. Upon his head he wore a yellowish-white top-hat of long-haired beaver, such as is still affected by some drivers of four-in-hands, with a bell crown and a curling brim. His dress consisted of a short-waisted swallow-tail coat, snuff-coloured, with steel buttons. It opened in front to show a vest of striped silk, while his legs were encased in buff knee-breeches with blue stockings and low shoes. The figure was angular and hard, with a great suggestion of wiry activity. This Bully of Brocas was clearly a very great character, and the young dragoon officer chuckled as he thought what a glorious story he would carry back to the mess of this queer old-world figure and the thrashing which he was about to receive from the famous London boxer.

Billy, the little groom, had taken charge of the horses, who were shivering and sweating.

"This way!" said the stout man, turning towards the gate. It was a sinister place, black and weird, with the crumbling pillars and the heavy arching trees. Neither the Baronet nor the pugilist liked the look of it.

"Where are you going, then?"

"This is no place for a fight," said the stout man. "We've got as pretty a place as ever you saw inside the gate here. You couldn't beat it on Molesey Hurst."

"The road is good enough for me," said Stevens.

"The road is good enough for two Johnny Raws," said the man with the beaver hat. "It ain't good enough for two slap-up millin' coves like you an' me. You ain't afeard, are you?"

"Not of you or ten like you," said Stevens, stoutly.

"Well, then, come with me and do it as it ought to be done."

Sir Frederic and Stevens exchanged glances.

"I'm game," said the pugilist.

"Come on, then."

The little party of four passed through the gateway. Behind them in the darkness the horses stamped and reared, while the voice of the boy could be heard as he vainly tried to soothe them. After walking fifty yards up the grass-grown drive the guide turned to the right through a thick belt of trees, and they came out upon a circular plot of grass, white and clear in the moonlight. It had a raised bank, and on the farther side was one of those little pillared stone summer-houses beloved by the early Georgians.

"What did I tell you?" cried the stout man, triumphantly. "Could you do better than this within twenty mile of town? It was made for it. Now, Tom, get to work upon him, and show us what you can do."

It had all become like an extraordinary dream. The strange men, their odd dress, their queer speech, the moonlit circle of grass, and the pillared summer-house all wove themselves into one fantastic whole. It was only the sight of Alf Stevens's ill-fitting tweed suit, and his homely English face surmounting it, which brought the Baronet back to the workaday world. The thin stranger had taken off his beaver hat, his swallow-tailed coat, his silk waistcoat, and finally his shirt had been drawn over his head by his second. Stevens in a cool and leisurely fashion kept pace with the preparations of his antagonist. Then the two fighting men turned upon each other.

But as they did so Stevens gave an exclamation of surprise and horror. The removal of the beaver hat had disclosed a horrible mutilation of the head of his antagonist. The whole upper forehead had fallen in, and there seemed to be a broad red weal between his close-cropped hair and his heavy brows.

"Good Lord," cried the young pugilist. "What's amiss with the man?"

The question seemed to rouse a cold fury in his antagonist.

"You look out for your own head, master," said he. "You'll find enough to do, I'm thinkin', without talkin' about mine."

This retort drew a shout of hoarse laughter from his second.

"Well said, my Tommy!" he cried. "It's Lombard Street to a China orange on the one and only."

The man whom he called Tom was standing with his hands up in the centre of the natural ring. He looked a big man in his clothes, but he seemed bigger in the buff, and his barrel chest, sloping shoulders, and loosely-slung muscular arms were all ideal for the game. His grim eyes gleamed fiercely beneath his misshapen brows, and his lips were set in a fixed hard smile, more menacing than a scowl. The pugilist confessed, as he approached him, that he had never seen a more formidable figure. But his bold heart rose to the fact that he had never yet found the man who could master him, and that it was hardly credible that he would appear as an old-fashioned stranger on a country road. Therefore, with an answering smile, he took up his position and raised his hands.

But what followed was entirely beyond his experience. The stranger feinted quickly with his left, and sent in a swinging hit with his right, so quick and hard that Stevens had barely time to avoid it and to counter with a short jab as his opponent rushed in upon him. Next instant the man's bony arms were round him, and the pugilist was hurled into the air in a whirling cross-buttock, coming down with a heavy thud upon the grass. The stranger stood back and folded his arms while Stevens scrambled to his feet with a red flush of anger upon his cheeks.

"Look here," he cried. "What sort of game is this? "

"We claim foul!" the Baronet shouted.

"Foul be damned! As clean a throw as ever I saw!" said the stout man. "What rules do you fight under?"

"Queensberry, of course."

"I never heard of it. It's London prize-ring with us."

"Come on, then!" cried Stevens, furiously. "I can wrestle as well as another. You won't get me napping again."

Nor did he. The next time that the stranger rushed in Stevens caught him in as strong a grip, and after swinging and swaying they came down together in a dog-fall. Three times this occurred, and each time the stranger walked across to his friend and seated himself upon the grassy bank before he recommenced.

"What d'ye make of him?" the Baronet asked, in one of these pauses.

Stevens was bleeding from the ear, but otherwise showed no sign of damage.

"He knows a lot," said the pugilist. "I don't know where he learned it, but he's had a deal of practice somewhere. He's as strong as a lion and as hard as a board, for all his queer face."

"Keep him at out-fighting. I think you are his master there."

"I'm not so sure that I'm his master anywhere, but I'll try my best."

It was a desperate fight, and as round followed round it became clear, even to the amazed Baronet, that the middle-weight champion had met his match. The stranger had a clever draw and a rush which, with his springing hits, made him a most dangerous foe. His head and body seemed insensible to blows, and the horribly malignant smile never for one instant flickered from his lips. He hit very hard with fists like flints, and his blows whizzed up from every angle. He had one particularly deadly lead, an uppercut at the jaw, which again and again nearly came home, until at last it did actually fly past the guard and brought Stevens to the ground. The stout man gave a whoop of triumph.

"The whisker hit, by George! It's a horse to a hen on my Tommy! Another like that, lad, and you have him beat."

"I say, Stevens, this is going too far," said the Baronet, as he supported his weary man. "What will the regiment say if I bring you up all knocked to pieces in a bye-battle! Shake hands with this fellow and give him best, or you'll not be fit for your job."

"Give him best? Not I!" cried Stevens, angrily. "I'll knock that damned smile off his ugly mug before I've done."

"What about the Sergeant?"

"I'd rather go back to London and never see the Sergeant than have my number taken down by this chap."

"Well, 'ad enough?" his opponent asked, in a sneering voice, as he moved from his seat on the bank.

For answer young Stevens sprang forward and rushed at his man with all the strength that was left to him. By the fury of his onset he drove him back, and for a long minute had all the better of the exchanges. But this iron fighter seemed never to tire. His step was as quick and his blow as hard as ever when this long rally had ended. Stevens had eased up from pure exhaustion. But his opponent did not ease up. He came back on him with shower of furious blows which beat down the weary guard of the pugilist. Alf Stevens was at the end of his strength and would in another instant have sunk to the ground but for a singular intervention.

It has been said that in their approach to the ring the party had passed through a grove of trees. Out of these there came a peculiar shrill cry, a cry of agony, which might be from a child or from some small woodland creature in distress. It was inarticulate, high-pitched, and inexpressibly melancholy. At the sound the stranger, who had knocked Stevens on to his knees, staggered back and looked round him with an expression of helpless horror upon his face. The smile had left his lips and

there only remained the loose-lipped weakness of a man in the last extremity of terror.

"It's after me again, mate!" he cried.

"Stick it out, Tom! You have him nearly beat! It can't hurt you."

"It can 'urt me! It will 'urt me!" screamed the fighting man. "My God! I can't face it! Ah, I see it! I see it! "

With a scream of fear he turned and bounded off into the brushwood. His companion, swearing loudly, picked up the pile of clothes and darted after him, the dark shadows swallowing up their flying figures.

Stevens, half-senselessly, had staggered back and lay upon the grassy bank, his head pillowed upon the chest of the young Baronet, who was holding his flask of brandy to his lips. As they sat there they were both aware that the cries had become louder and shriller. Then from among the bushes there ran a small white terrier, nosing about as if following a trail and yelping most piteously. It squattered across the grassy sward, taking no notice of the two young men. Then it also vanished into the shadows. As it did so the two spectators sprang to their feet and ran as hard as they could tear for the gateway and the trap. Terror had seized them – a panic terror far above reason or control. Shivering and shaking, they threw themselves into the dog-cart, and it was not until the willing horses had put two good miles between that ill-omened hollow and themselves that they at last ventured to speak.

"Did you ever see such a dog?" asked the Baronet.

"No," cried Stevens. "And, please God, I never may again."

Late that night the two travellers broke their journey at the Swan Inn, near Harpenden Common. The landlord was an old acquaintance of the Baronet's, and gladly joined him in a glass of port after supper. A famous old sport was Mr.Joe Horner, of the Swan, and he would talk by the hour of the legends of the ring, whether new or old. The name of Alf Stevens was well known to him, and he looked at him with the deepest interest.

"Why, sir, you have surely been fighting," said he. "I hadn't read of any engagement in the papers."

"Enough said of that," Stevens answered, in a surly voice.

"Well, no offence! I suppose" – his smiling face became suddenly very serious – "I suppose you didn't, by chance, see anything of him they call the Bully of Brocas as you came north?"

"Well, what if we did?"

The landlord was tense with excitement.

"It was him that nearly killed Bob Meadows. It was at the very gate of Brocas Old Hall that he stopped him. Another man was with him. Bob

was game to the marrow, but he was found hit to pieces on the lawn inside the gate where the summer-house stands."

The Baronet nodded.

"Ah, you've been there!" cried the landlord.

"Well, we may as well make a clean breast of it," said the Baronet, looking at Stevens. "We have been there, and we met the man you speak of – an ugly customer he is, too!"

"Tell me!" said the landlord, in a voice that sank to a whisper. "Is it true what Bob Meadows says, that the men are dressed like our grandfathers, and that the fighting man has his head all caved in?"

"Well, he was old-fashioned, certainly, and his head was the queerest ever I saw."

"God in Heaven!" cried the landlord. "Do you know, sir, that Tom Hickman, the famous prize-fighter, together with his pal, Joe Rowe, a silversmith of the City, met his death at that very point in the year 1822, when he was drunk, and tried to drive on the wrong side of a wagon? Both were killed and the wheel of the wagon crushed in Hickman's forehead."

"Hickman! Hickman!" said the Baronet. "Not the gasman?"

"Yes, sir, they called him Gas. He won his fights with what they called the 'whisker hit,' and no one could stand against him until Neate – him that they called the Bristol Bull – brought him down."

Stevens had risen from the table as white as cheese.

"Let's get out of this, sir. I want fresh air. Let us get on our way."

The landlord clapped him on the back.

"Cheer up, lad! You've held him off, anyhow, and that's more than anyone else has ever done. Sit down and have another glass of wine, for if a man in England has earned it this night it is you. There's many a debt you would pay if you gave the Gasman a welting, whether dead or alive. Do you know what he did in this very room?"

The two travellers looked round with startled eyes at the lofty room, stone-flagged and oak-panelled, with great open grate at the farther end.

"Yes, in this very room. I had it from old Squire Scotter, who was here that very night. It was the day when Shelton beat Josh Hudson out St.Albans way, and Gas had won a pocketful of money on the fight. He and his pal Rowe came in here upon their way, and he was mad-raging drunk. The folk fairly shrunk into the corners and under the tables, for he was stalkin' round with the great kitchen poker in his hand, and there was murder behind the smile upon his face. He was like that when the drink was in him – cruel, reckless, and a terror to the world. Well, what think you that he did at last with the poker? There was a little dog, a terrier as I've heard, coiled up before the fire, for it was a bitter December night.

The Gasman broke its back with one blow of the poker. Then he burst out laughin', flung a curse or two at the folk that shrunk away from him, and so out to his high gig that was waiting outside. The next we heard was that he was carried down to Finchley with his head ground to a jelly by the wagon wheel. Yes, they do say the little dog with its bleeding skin and its broken back has been seen since then, crawlin' and yelpin' about Brocas Corner, as if it were lookin' for the swine that killed it. So you see, Mr.Stevens, you were fightin' for more than yourself when you put it across the Gasman."

"Maybe so," said the young prize-fighter, "but I want no more fights like that. The Farrier-Sergeant is good enough for me, sir, and if it is the same to you, we'll take a railway train back to town."

1921

THE GHOST OF LAWFORD HALL

A True Story

It is now about thirty years ago that I and my husband, not long after our marriage, went on a visit to Lawford Hall, an old house near Rugby, which I had long desired to see. I remember I posted alone from Coventry, near which town we had been staying, as my husband had gone on two days before to attend some county races, where the Lawfords were running a favorite horse, and to go hunting the next day with the old baronet. At the last Warwickshire house in which we had been staying, I had picked up one wet day, in the library, an old book of trials which contained allusions to Lawford Hall.

For three hours in a cozy nook of that old Elizabethan room – where Vandyke's cavaliers seemed longing to come out of their frames to talk to you – I sat absorbed over a strange and terrible poisoning case which had made all Warwickshire shudder sixty years before. There are days when the brain seems unusually sensitive to impressions; and all the details of this crime, from some reason or another, became printed, or, I may rather say, photographed on my retina, with a sharpness and vividness that was almost painful.

I saw the great plumed bed where the rich man lay: again the thin Hogarthian figure of the younger step-brother, in the old costume, stole with silent foot through the shadow of the broad oak staircase, and past the curtained bed to the mantelpiece where the long row of bottles stood. I saw the thin trembling white hand, with the lace ruffle all but covering it, remove half the contents of one phial and substitute the laurel water, that he had distilled, with cruel care, in his own locked-up room. I heard the dreadful cry of the dying man as his step-brother bent over him. I could hear the ringing hoofs of the doctor's horse as it came racing up the Rugby Road. I could see the grave face of the man in black as he stood by the bedside, and, raising the cold waxen head let it fall again, uttering only those few solemn words, "It is too late; he is dead."

Then I followed the surgeon down to the wainscoted parlor, where the murderer with hypocritical grief told his planned story of the cause of his brother's fit, and with subtle craft evaded any examination of the body. I tracked the poisoner to the quiet autumn garden, where he eyed with a bitter smile, as he passed, the laurel from whence he had picked the fatal leaves. I heard him stop and tell with exultation the old gardener, who was resting on his spade, "that it would be easy days with the old servants now,

not as in Sir Edward's time, and that he had long worked to be master of Lawford Hall, and was so at last."

I watched him tremble when the letter came from his brother's friend, sternly and coldly desiring that the body should be examined; step by step, indeed, I followed that soft-spoken, decorous, cat-like, cruel villain, till I left him with irons round his small wrists, while the mourning coach was preparing that was to take him to the Warwick gibbet, still lying, still unrepentant, still denying, in spite of the countless proofs of guilt that from earth, water, and air, had been drawn to cover him with shame. I saw him also in the dead of the night previous, when the grim keepers were asleep, steal from his pillow, throw himself on his knees, so seldom bent to God, and unite his thin fettered hands in passionate prayer to the Judge of all, and I hoped that even at that last moment he had found mercy.

These scenes again rose in my mind as, after hours of heavy rain, the sun shone out just as the post-chaise swept round a turn of the road, past Newbold, into Little Lawford. The light glittered on the yellowing leaves of the lime trees and flickered upon the wet gables of the old house. It was a stately, melancholy building, half Tudor, half classic, and the huge Elizabethan porch contrasted unpleasantly with the ugly square windows of the Georgian era, that were rendered more hideous by the picturesque oriels that here and there were left. There was a solid comfort about the heavy stone mullions that the flimsy modern window-sashes of Dutch invention could not touch, and I regretted that the old house had been so awkwardly patched. Just to the right of the porch there was an old Tudor window that especially struck my eye. It was overhung with a Virginian creeper, whose leaves were already turning scarlet.

The moment I glanced at that window, a scene of the old trial came again into my thoughts. It was below that room that the poisoner stood that April morning and called, in his gay, careless way, to his sister, to ask her if she was ready for the ride before breakfast. She had just been to her brother's room to give him the fatal medicine, and had left him as she thought asleep. The window opened on a passage between her room and that of the murdered man, and she heard her brother call to her as she passed back from the one room to the other. "I shall be ready in a quarter of an hour," she called from the window, upon which he went to the stable, mounted his bay mare, which was already saddled, and rode off to the Wells. Five minutes after the sister returned to her brother's room, and found him in the agonies of death.

As the postchaise swept round the drive to the front entrance, I observed on the right the dial court, of which I had read, with the great iron gates, leading into the garden. It was there the poisoner had stood, the

night he distilled the laurel water, talking to two tenants who had come to see his sick brother. Stately as the house was, guarded by its avenue of limes and girt with its broad gardens, I could not help fancying that a curse still rested upon it. There was a malign, unhappy look about it that weighed on my too active imagination, so that a curious presentiment of some impending evil came over me, as the great bell, dragged from its socket, gave forth a clamorous jangling clang, that seemed to echo through endless passages with a querulous clamor that I thought would never cease.

* * *

The dinner was dull. Lady Lawford, whom I had found so delightful, so charming, so vivacious at Paris, seemed oppressed with the social difficulties of her county position, and to be unequal to the task of entertaining alone a gathering of such local pomposities. Some secret trouble, some sorrow, seemed to have fallen upon her. She had an absent manner, and often relapsed into embarrassing silences. The local doctor, the local solicitor, the rector, two or three old maids, and some shy country squires' daughters, were all that she had to amuse; but still she failed to amuse them.

The Meet had been a long way off, and my husband and hers were not expected till late. Once or twice during dinner she rather alarmed me, by mentioning the dangerous country they would that day ride over. She hoped all was safe. We ladies were just rising to go, to the evident delight of the doctor, the rector, and the solicitor, when we heard a sound of voices in the hall, a scuffling, and then a groan. At that moment Sir Edward Lawford, in a soiled scarlet coat, entered hurriedly, looking rather pale and anxious, and with one arm in a sling.

"Mr.Dobson," said he to the doctor, who instantly pricked up his ears, "we want your help at once. A poor fellow has been thrown, and a good deal hurt."

Then seeing me, his face grew graver; he advanced to me and offered his hand. "My dear Mrs.H–," he said, "you mustn't he alarmed, but your husband has been thrown in trying a gate; his shoulder is put out, and one of his ribs I'm afraid of – but it will be all right directly."

I remember no more; they told me afterwards that I fainted. By nature I was strong-nerved, but from Sir Edward's manner I formed an immediate notion that my husband was dangerously injured, and so indeed it proved.

* * *

It was a week before my husband was out of danger. He had dislocated his shoulder and broken two ribs, besides receiving a painful injury on his knee-cap. I watched him day and night, and gave him myself the narcotics that were required to give him the necessary sleep, for a neuralgic affection attended some of the contusions, and a low fever followed, to allay which rest was indispensable.

It was the ninth day, if I remember right, that, pale, anxious, and exhausted by want of sleep, I came for the first time since my husband's accident to take my doleful seat at the dinner table. Sir Edward was very frank and cordial; untiring in his attentions to me, and in his sympathy for me.

"Most unfortunate!" he said, "and just at the beginning of the hunting season too – at the end one would not care – and I was so anxious to show him how straight our set here rode. Tell him, poor fellow, when he gets better, that we've had to shoot Parepa – she'd broken her leg just above the fetlock – but I'd rather have shot all my stud than have had him bowled over like that."

"There is no danger now, I assure you," said the everlasting country doctor, who seemed perennial at Lawford Hall banquets. "I assure you on my honour, as a professional man, if he is only careful, and we can keep up this artificial sleep without injury to his sanguineous circulation and his digestive organs."

"Ah! this riding, like the driving of Jehu, the son of Nimshi, Sir Edward," said the equally perennial rector, "is very much on the increase with our country aristocracy, and is likely, I fear, to be attended with most terrible casualties. Where do you get your Moselle, Sir Edward?"

The inevitable old-maid sisters uttered their usual exclamations whenever the accident was alluded to, of "Shocking – shocking! Oh, dear, it is dreadful to think of!"

I bore it as long as I could, but that vast evening – a century in itself – was no bad preparation to a year at the hulks. Oh, that never-ceasing sonata of Beethoven, beaten out with remorseless exactitude by the rector's conscientious daughter, oh! the wearisomeness of that strictly scientific rubber at which I assisted as in a dream. At last the playing grew sleepier and sleepier; Sir Edward, tired with foxhunting, fell asleep as the cards were being shuffled, and I gave an internal three times three when the servant announced the first carriage, and Lady Lawford said:

"Well, I think we're all getting sleepy together; so perhaps we'd better go to bed."

Could this be the Lady Lawford I had known in Paris, I thought, as I mounted the old oak staircase, and, with a half-alarmed look at my own shadow, entered the long corridor, in which our room was the only one inhabited. A miserable visit it had been. If past trouble weighed upon the house, was the shadow of that crime to cast a gloom upon the race forever? I could not account for the change in people I had known so gay and pleasant, and I puzzled myself in vain to invent a reason. Extravagant I might have expected to find them, their life a ceaseless whirl of excitement; but careworn, humdrum – it seemed impossible. One would really have thought that Sir Edward's father had been the murderer, instead of some grandfather's cousin, who had left no children. Oh, that George was well! I thought, that we could get away from this dreadful place.

I uttered these words aloud as I opened the bedroom door, so loud that I almost thought they might have waked George; but there he lay, in a deep sleep, breathing heavily, and with one bandaged arm resting upon the counterpane. There was no lamp lit in the room, but a cheerful wood fire blazed in the grate, and merry shadows danced upon the ceiling. The medicine-bottles were drawn up in a ghastly rank and file on the mantelpiece, and the careful servant had left jelly and meat essence, and some fruit, ready for my use on a side-table.

I threw myself into a great carved chair that stood by the fire, and listened to my husband's breathing. There was no sound but that and the measured ticking of an old clock in the corridor. A bolt shot, a door slammed far away in some distant wing of the house, then the house seemed to fall into the profoundest sleep. It was still as the family vault. Once a bough of clematis at the window tapped against the glass, as if a fairy was begging admittance; once a cold breath of air – spread from I knew not where, and going no one knew whither – crept from under the door, and flowed in a cold, invisible current through the room in a ghostly kind of way. Half an hour later, as I sat and watched, the wind seemed to spring into a sudden sort of rumbling and bluster in the great chimney, then sank again to silence, gagged by some secret power which it could not resist.

I was looking at the fire, thinking of I know not what, waiting for half-past one, when I was to try and rouse George to give him the strengthening medicine, when my eyes all at once fell on a picture in a row of portraits I had not before especially noticed; it was one of four that hang in a dark corner of the room, very dark by day, and within the shadow of the heavy crimson curtains; but now the firelight gleamed full on it, and I could see its features as clearly as if a sunbeam had fallen full upon the spot. It represented a man of about thirty; the features were firm, but rather

sharp and Voltairean; the powdered hair, gathered into a club, was tied with ribbon; the thinlipped mouth wore a cold, set smile. A sudden thought, from which I could not divest myself, arose in my mind – it was the portrait of the murderer. Just such a refined serpentish face I had imagined his to be.

The scene of that tragedy came again into my mind; that was the face that had bent over the dead body with affected compassion; that had smiled in triumph upon the gardener; that had angrily rebuked the sister for complaining of his wish to rinse the fatal bottle, that the face that, with practised courtesy, had pretended to invite every inquiry.

I knew the portrait would not be there if the Lawfords knew of its existence; but still I could not help thinking that the portrait it was, and that the name of the wretch it represented had in the lapse of time been forgotten. Consigned to exile in a garret, the picture had, somehow or other, with a sort of diabolic persistency, found its way back to its old haunts. Perhaps this had been his own bedroom, and that close by was the locked-up chamber where he had distilled the poison. Perhaps (and this terrible thought made me shudder in spite of myself) this was the very room where the sick man had died in agony. Oh, this terrible house! I should never feel happy in it again. My mind relapsed into its old train of associations.

One special scene occurred to me: it was that where the two doctors, sent for by the murderer, came to make an examination of the body. He received them in the hall with a candle in his hand, and invited them in. He was courteous and obliging. Sir William Wheeler, he said, had wished for the examination. For what purpose? they asked. Merely to satisfy the family, he said, and showed them a letter from Sir William, expressing such a wish, "merely that those who had been intimate with the dead might be beyond suspicion." Had Sir William written no other letter? asked the more suspicious of the doctors. Yes, there had been another, equally friendly. This second letter had been by no means friendly; it had indeed words which expressed a suspicion of poison. The guilty man pretended to feel for this letter in his waistcoat-pocket, and in doing so pulled out an envelope. The doctor had only time for one glance, but that glance was sufficient to show it was directed in Sir William's handwriting; still he said nothing. The examination did not take place, and the detection of the crime was for a time deferred, till a keener and less trustful medical man threw himself with untiring energy into the pursuit of the subtle criminal.

I looked up: it was half-past one. I went at once to the bedside and tried to rouse my husband to give him his medicine, but he only stirred once, reluctantly, gave a deep sigh, and relapsed into sleep. It was better to

let him sleep; so undressing and putting on my dressing-gown, I pressed together the wood, now burnt to a white ash, and threw myself on the bed beside my husband. I was just sinking into a doze, when a slight sound disturbed me. I was highly sensitive just then from want of sleep, and in a moment I recovered my senses. It was a faint sound, like some one trying the handle of the bedroom door. I listened again – all was still. It might have been a rat scratching behind the wainscot: at night the faintest sound becomes magnified by the imagination. I sat up and listened: it was nothing. The burning wood just then gave way, and so broke into a slight blaze.

I lay down again, and I think fell asleep. I was awoke, not by any sound, but by a creeping, indescribable sense of something supernatural and terrible. I looked up without moving, and saw – to my infinite horror that paralyzed every limb – the door softly, noiselessly open, and from the outer darkness the figure of an old man, dressed in an old yellow silk dressing-gown, glide in. He turned as he silently closed the door, and I saw that his thin, emaciated face was pale as the dead; that his head was bandaged and his jaw bound up as that of a corpse is bound. The vacant eyes, that seemed entirely colourless, were bent on the fireplace, and the figure seemed not to notice the bed, or those who were on it. Slowly gliding over the door, the spirit of the murdered man – for such it seemed to me to be – moved towards the fire, and there stood for a moment, as if wrapped in thought. It then took a bottle from the row on the mantelpiece, examined it carefully, and went through the action of filling a glass with it. The figure then sat down in the old chair by the fire, and sat there moving its thin white hands, that seemed almost transparent, before and over the flame.

My courage recovering itself slowly, I began now to question myself seriously as to whether I was delirious or dreaming. To be sure I was awake – softly I stretched out my hand and pressed my husband's arm. He slightly moved, and utters a faint groan. I looked up and counted the green and red flowers in the cornice of the bed. I recalled the position of the bell, which was out of my reach. I pulled off my rings, and put them on again. I even took out my watch, and saw the time. It was a quarter past two.

As I lay there reasoning with myself that the half-open door and the pale figure in the faded yellow silk dressing-gown were only illusions of the senses, arising from an imagination rendered sensitive by excitement, I again pressed my husband's hand tightly, so tightly that he moved and feebly groaned. At that sound the figure rose from the chair, stirred together the embers, and advanced slowly towards the bed. To my indescribable terror in the firelight, I then saw that in one hand it held a

long glancing sharp knife, the blade of which it held turned upwards against its arm.

The wood ashes in the grate had now burned so low that they only cast a faint red glimmer on the floor, but there was still quite enough light on the end of the bed for me to see that the figure, raising the knife, was stealing towards me. I was frozen with terror, and had perhaps less power of voluntary movement left through my fear than I imagined, for I lay there uttering no cry, moving no limb. At that moment the figure struck against a chair that stood by the table where I had been reading, and overset it. In a moment my brain seemed to recover its power, my heart to beat with renewed power. That one slight fact convinced me that the figure was not a supernatural one – it might be a murderer or a sleep-walker – but it was common flesh and blood. Its dreadful object I knew not; but there it stood, with the knife in its hand, eyeing us in a blank, deadly way, and with a sort of serpent-like malice. I had just resolved to spring upon it, struggle for the weapon, and scream for help, when it turned towards the door and glided out as silently and in as death-like a way as it had entered. I watched it an instant, then with a sudden flood of fresh life darted from the bed, closed the door, swiftly turned the key, drew the bolt with the rapidity of lightning, and fell back on the floor in a swoon.

* * *

The next morning I went down and joined the party at breakfast as usual. I said nothing, but complained of sleeplessness and not feeling well. Great was the sympathy and universal was the cry that I must not sit up watching an other night. “My dear Mrs.H–, you will take these things quieter a year hence,” said Sir Edward, cynically.

I saw Lady Lawford fixing her eyes on me with a peculiar earnestness.

When we had done breakfast Lady Lawford took me quietly apart in her boudoir.

“Mrs.H–,” she said, taking my hand, “you look very ill. I am a woman of the world, and older than you. You cannot deceive me; something terrible must have happened to you last night. I think I can guess what it was. It was not the watching alone made your hand shake as it now does. Come, dear, tell me.”

I told her all, and concealed nothing, from the thought about the poisoner’s portrait to the moment that I fainted. I saw her face grow very sad and serious as I went on. When I had done she heaved a great sigh.

"My dear," she said, "I can and must explain this mystery, though I would have concealed it from almost every one but you. We have, in a distant wing of the house, an insane person – an old man, a relation of Sir Edward's. He was fond of Sir Edward when a boy, and my husband in gratitude for his kindness took care of him when his wife and friends deserted him. He is a great care to us, as at times he is subject to paroxysms of homicidal mania. He is very cunning and dangerous, and has to be strictly watched, especially at such periods. Last night the person in charge of him, who had been drinking with the upper servant, fell asleep, as he now confesses; and the old man, watching his opportunity, stole from the room, and passed down a back staircase leading to the kitchen. There he secreted a large carving-knife left in the butler's pantry by one of the servants, and crossed to your side of the house. The man awaking pursued him, and found him crouching in the hall; but gathered from his few incoherent words that he had entered some bedroom, either yours or one near it. This is the whole mystery, my dear Mrs.H–, and I can only deeply regret you should have been placed for a moment in such great danger."

We remained – were, indeed, obliged to remain for days more – in the house; but I was, I must confess, very glad, in spite of Lady Lawford's hospitality, to see the coach that was to take us away drive up to the front door. Often in my dreams that old Tudor window, the great iron gate, the portrait, and the ghostly figure in the old yellow dressing gown, figure in wild nightmare complications.

1895

GEORGE VENN AND THE GHOST

We had been sitting round the fire, rather late at night, some half dozen of us, talking about ghosts, as people will talk sometimes on winter nights over the fire. We had none of us apparently anything very new to say upon the subject. We were only dealing with tales told at second hand; matters we had heard from others or read of in books; no one pretended to have undergone any personal experiences in connection with ghosts. One man had narrated a curious story touching an apparition said to have been seen by his grandfather; another had to tell about a house, alleged to be haunted, which had at one time been occupied by his uncles. We did not seem to get any nearer to the spirit world than this. We had only "hearsay" testimony to offer: no evidence bearing upon the question that would have been listened to for a moment in a court of law.

Of course some of our number had been talking a great deal more than the rest. In conversation, as in racing, there are always a few who make all the running, while the rest are content to come in anyhow. But, to continue the figure, it isn't always those who start off with the lead that manage to keep it; their pace slackens, and they drop back, and occasionally some from quite the rear show very respectably in front at the finish.

There was a lull. The talkers had rather exhausted their subject; they had perhaps no great stock of it on hand to draw from. One of our number, who had been sitting a little apart, and somewhat silent, then rose from his chair and approached the fire. With the tongs he lifted a red-hot coal from the grate, and began deliberately to light his pipe. Somehow it happened that as he did this simple thing we all watched him without speaking, as though deeply interested in his movements. Our conversation, I suppose, had inclined us to lay an absurd stress upon trifles. We had started with rather a light treatment of our theme, and had at no time professed to attach much faith to the various recitals that had been ventured upon concerning supernatural visitations; but gradually, and perhaps unconsciously, we had become more and more held and possessed by our topic. We did not derive strength and support from our numbers, for each man seemed to communicate his weakness to his neighbour: we rather awed and influenced each other, and had at last wrought our nervous systems up to such a pitch of 'receptivity', that I believe any sudden loud knocking at the door, or the fall of any article of furniture, or the winking or quenching of the gaslights, would have occasioned us very acute alarm. In this state of morbid impressibility we looked on raptly

intent while George Venn went through the business of lighting his pipe with a hot coal.

"I don't think – you fellows – know much what – you're talking about," he said, breaking up his observation into little pieces, as it were, by the interjection of puffs from his pipe. He had at all times a habit of speaking calmly and slowly, almost solemnly. Upon the present occasion he was more than ever deliberate, and seemed somehow to force upon us an air of waiting breathlessly for his oracular utterances. "For all – you've been saying – it doesn't seem to me – that any of you – have really seen – a ghost. Now I *have!*"

He spoke these last words loudly, and rather imperiously, I thought. He had a deep bass voice, somewhat hollow in tone. Upon the present occasion it seemed to me to possess almost a sepulchral quality. For a moment the hot coal lit up his face with a peculiar red glow; then he enveloped himself in quite a cloud of smoke, through which he stalked back to his chair, all eyes following him with earnest curiosity, and perhaps some apprehension.

I think it must have occurred at the same moment to the other men in the room as well as to me that, all things considered, perhaps George Venn was the most likely of any of us to have been favoured with personal experiences in relation to the world of ghosts. This idea might have been due to the fact that less was really known about him than about the others, most of whom had been intimately connected with each other from quite schoolboy times, whereas Venn was comparatively a recent acquaintance. He was older than the rest, with a more decided manner; was somewhat taciturn, while we were inclined to be talkative; with no affectation of being *blasé*, he was apt to maintain a deliberate serenity while our spirits were at their highest and wildest – was, indeed, especially quiet and calm when we were most boisterous. But at the same time it must be said of him, that if he never yielded to our exhilaration, so also he never was deeply affected by our depression; and we had the usual juvenile propensity of oscillating with exceeding rapidity between ecstatic joy and abject despondency.

No one knew much about Venn. He was an artist, he had passed the greater part of his life abroad, and was now perhaps thirty years old or so. Within the last few years he had settled in London, and had gradually been introduced into the small group of men – art-students for the most part, and intimate friends – who were now assembled round the fire talking about ghosts. Though we were bound by no rules, and our meetings were the result of little pre-arrangement, and were irregular and accidental enough, we formed, in truth, a sort of club of young men, bound together by similar pursuits and inclinations. We met in each other's studios from

time to time, talked art, smoked pipes, discussed each other's achievements and aspirations, had a turn now and then with the gloves or a bout with single-stick, and emptied tumblers of punch. We were decidedly young men, as you will perhaps have already concluded from this report of our proceeding; and we gladly opened our ranks to admit George Venn. He was older, more experienced, was clever, good-tempered, and could give us valuable information about the methods and manners of continental art and artists. Moreover, the fact that he presented a type of character dissimilar to the general was in itself an urgent reason for his acceptance amongst us with promptness and goodwill.

Yes, decidedly I thought he was the very man to have seen a ghost. The more I considered him, the more I grew fixed in that opinion. Who should have seen a ghost if George Venn had not? That calm manner of his, which nothing seemed to affect – that settled repose, from which nothing could rouse him – those deep, yet hollow tones – those steady, earnest, dark eyes of his – all pertained appropriately to a man who had, it may be, looked into the other world, and was not, therefore, to be startled by the incidents of this – who was, as it were, *en rapport* with the supernatural, and therefore little likely to be affected by the normal occurrences of life. If a stranger of ordinary capacity had been introduced into the room at that moment, and asked to select from among us the man who had seen a ghost, I felt positive that he would have singled out George Venn. The pretensions of the others in such respect were contemptible, compared to Venn's.

Not that his appearance was remarkable, otherwise than by a simplicity of toilet that was perhaps a little studied. We, after the manner of young art-students, were a little prone to eccentricities of dress, to certain fanciful exuberances in our modes of arranging our hair, training our moustaches, and shaping our beards. (We did not all possess those last-named appendages; all, however, affected a growth, more or less downy in quality and slight in quantity, upon the upper lip.) But Venn, if he had ever been subjected to such weaknesses, had now, at any rate, outgrown and got rid of them. He never appeared in the picturesque, brightly-lined, many-buttoned velvet painting jackets which were favourites with us. He wore generally a simple suit of tweed, and looked rather as though he were going shooting or on a pedestrian expedition than merely to work at his easel. In fact he never seemed to *pose* himself as a painter, whereas I think we were fond of attitudinizing a good deal in that character. He had possibly passed through that first stage of excited pride in his profession to which the student is prone. He wore no beard whatever, shaving close; though, to judge by the blue-black shades about his chin and lips, he might, had he so listed, have indulged in hirsute decoration on a most

liberal scale. His hair was clipped close, the forelock drooping a little over his broad forehead, something after the fashion made memorable by the First Napoleon. Indeed, now I come to think of it, Venn had a good deal of the straight-ruled brow, the olive complexion, the sunken but steady eyes, and the regularity of feature of the great Emperor. Perhaps, upon the whole, his face was a little more aquiline in mould; while his figure, without being less broad, was taller, and more lithe and sinewy; and he was without the tendency to corpulence which spoilt the contour of *le petit caporal*, especially as he advanced in life.

"You've seen a ghost, Venn?" some one asked. "Really?"

"I have," he answered, simply.

"Where?"

"In this studio."

We received this announcement with quite a gasp of astonishment.

I should have said, perhaps, that we were sitting in Venn's painting-room. We had a habit of meeting now at Frank Ripley's, now at Tom Thoroton's, now at Venn's, now at my studio. There was no settled plan about the thing, no precise invitation issued; but at times a sort of understanding seemed to pervade our small society that on a particular night Frank, or Tom, or George, or Harry, as the case might be, would be in his rooms "at home," when men were expected "to look him up" accordingly. Somehow the information circulated rapidly amongst us. We were too intimate to stand upon much ceremony with each other. No one waited for any further or more official intimation on the subject, but, when the night arrived, forthwith proceeded to his friend's abode, with unquestioning acceptance of the idea that he would find a host prepared to give him welcome. So it happened that it was in Venn's studio, on Venn's chairs, round Venn's fire, that we met on the evening under mention, smoking Venn's tobacco, drinking Venn's grog, and talking about ghosts in the manner already alluded to.

Now there was this to be said about Venn, that he never did anything quite as anybody else would do it. His arrangements in connection with the practice of his profession were differently ordered to those of other students. We were for the most part content with furnished apartments, improvising as convenient studios as we could; Venn had taken a whole house to himself.

"After all, it costs very little more," he one day explained in his quiet way, "while the advantages are enormous. Sometimes I like to be quiet, very quiet; with other people living in a house, you know, that's not possible. Occasionally it happens that I prefer to be noisy, particularly noisy: it occurs to me that I want to ascertain whether I've lost my aim, whether my nerve is steady, and my eye correct; and then I blaze away

with my revolver at a mark on the wall for hours, sometimes for days together; or, feeling a passion for exercise, I pile up my furniture, and amuse myself with taking a flying leap over it, or jumping down a whole flight of stairs, coming down sometimes rather loudly and heavily, I can tell you. Other lodgers in the house might reasonably object to that kind of thing. They could no more stand me than I could tolerate them, in fact. We should never agree. We could never come to terms as to being noisy or quiet at quite the same times. In fact, I've tried life in lodgings, and found it a dead failure. The landlady always came up to give me notice to quit just as I was thinking of going down to let her know that I couldn't endure to stop under her roof any longer. So now I'm on a different plan. I've a house of my own. A man's house is his castle. This is my castle – Venn Castle, if you like; and I can do what I like in it; play the drum or the organ, or leap-frog; fire off anything, from a popgun to an Armstrong; be as quiet as a mouse or noisy as Verdi's orchestra; and there's no one to interfere with me or say me nay. It's a capital good house; wants a great deal doing to it, I admit; in fact, it's terribly out of repair; but then that makes it cheap. I've got it for the fag end of a lease: the landlord won't do anything until the lease falls in; and of course no reasonable – I was going to say no respectable – tenant would take a place upon which he had to spend no end of money to make it decently habitable, especially as he couldn't be certain of having his term renewed. But I'm not particular; it suits me very well. I don't mind cracked ceilings, or broken cornices, or uneven floors; and so long as there are stairs, I don't think banisters matter much; for cobwebs, I'm rather partial to them, and we all know that dirt is picturesque. So here I've pitched my tent, and I shaII get on well enough if I can only persuade the public to buy my pictures. After all, that's the main desideratum of an artist's life."

Certainly it was a queer old place, was Venn's Castle, built at a time when London houses were allowed a little more elbow room than at present. The rooms were large and numerous, the entrance wide; it belonged to the days when there were "halls," real halls, and not "passages" merely; the staircase solid and spacious, ascending gently, with large landings, and wooden globes at the corners of the banisters. The house was situated in a street near Soho Square, and had been once the abode of wealth and fashion, no doubt, but these had long since departed, leaving few traces behind them. "Venn's Castle" was shouldered by public-houses and hucksters' shops; the neighbourhood had sadly lost caste, and consideration, and money too, I should think. Decidedly it had a very down-at-heel, out-at-elbow, impecunious, insolvent look. The scavengers didn't do their duty by the street, nor the paving commissioners, if there are such functionaries, nor the gas companies. It

was always muddy, the roadway most uneven, and the lamps few and far between, emitting the feeblest of rays. Poverty had taken possession of the precinct, and was left to have its own way, to do its best or its worst there, undisturbed and unassisted. Proceeding to Venn's you felt sure that you were entering a district certain to be described in parliamentary and registrar-general reports as "thickly populated and very poor." The evidence was clear on the subject: to be quite satisfied, you had only to look aloft at the number of bird-cages, at the pigeons perched on the coping-stones of the chimney stacks, at the vermilioned flower-pots, the bright-green mignonette boxes upon the window-sills, or below at the mangles, to be arrived at down the area steps, and the clothes banging up to dry in the areas; or all round at the coal-sheds, the beer-shops, the numberless bells on the doorposts, and zinc plates on the doors. And then the tide of children that flooded the streets and broke into waves on the kerb-stones; the children forever singing shrill choruses, or performing wild dances, or playing strange games, very noisy, and dirty, and ill clad, and bareheaded, wanting, perhaps, fresh air and more food, and yet apparently very happy and high-spirited notwithstanding! Arriving at Venn's door, it was always necessary to break the ranks of a brigade of children drawn up in very close order, and holding possession of the steps against all comers. Having reached the knocker, and obtained entrance into the house, the brigade instantly re-formed in your rear, as though effectually to prevent your retreat by the same road. A thorough conviction must have occupied the minds of the juvenile population that to them belonged, by the right of long custom, Venn's doorsteps a great deal more than to Venn, and that if there was any permission required in the matter, he had to seek such permission of them rather than they of him.

"You've seen a ghost in this studio, Venn?"

"Certainly I have."

Now if Venn was a likely man to have seen a ghost, it was not less clear that Venn's studio was the very place of all others in which a ghost – from all one had ever read or heard by tale or history of ghosts – would be likely to make its appearance. It was a large room, so large that it seemed hardly possible by any process of lighting to disperse the gloom that would somehow gather in its corners. Indeed, not the painting-room simply, but every other room in the house, seemed to present itself as a likely and promising haunt for a ghost. Almost everywhere a mysterious murkiness pervaded; projecting masses of wall flung dark shadows, sunken windows starved the light, while dust-crusted panes sullied it. And then the stairs creaked, the boards started, the wainscot cracked in a way that was certainly rather alarming; especially when you had once got thoroughly into your mind the notion that the house was haunted. Hitherto,

I confess, such an idea had not occurred to me, and I had constantly visited Venn, passing up and down his great staircase, and in and out of his great grim rooms without ever suspecting that ghosts were possibly dogging my steps, or lurking in corners watching my movements, or creeping into nooks and corners to get out of my way. Now, however, I saw the thing from a very different point of view. It was palpable the place was haunted. As I glanced over my shoulder, and round the room – not without, I admit, a vague dread of detecting some horrid object, unperceived before, crouching among the distant shadows – I felt more and more convinced of the fact. We had often laughed at Venn about his cheap house, had made facetious reference to its being in chancery, the property of a lunatic landlord, and so on, but I don't think we had ever hit upon the real truth, now so self-evident, it was beyond all question – Venn had got his house cheaply because it was haunted, and no one else could be found to live in it.

And yet, after all, there was little enough in the studio; it was simply a large room, barely habitable from the comfortless way in which it was fitted up. Venn carried his views as to the picturesqueness of dirt and litter to quite an excess: he never permitted the dust to be disturbed, or a cobweb to be removed. Some of us were, on the other hand, very dainty about our studios, decking them with carved oak and choice specimens of china and Venetian glass, hangings of mediaeval tapestry, cut velvet, or stamped leather, making them as spruce and pretty as a lady's boudoir. Venn denounced all such doings as fopperies and finicking rubbish.

"I hate to be surrounded by things I can smash or spoil. I only want room to turn round and splash my oils or spurt my turps about in. This is a studio, not a hair-cutting saloon. Some of you fellows can't paint unless you have diamond rings on your fingers, and bear's-grease on your hair, and scent on your pocket-handkerchiefs. You'll mix your colours with eau-de-Cologne next. This studio not comfortable! What more do you want? Aren't there chairs to sit down upon, and a square of carpet in front of the fire? It is a little ragged, I own; but that's from the hot coals jumping out of the fire now and then, and fellows dropping their fusees about. I'm not going to load the place with gimcracks and furniture, as you do. What good do you get out of them? They only cost money, and absorb the light. There's not too much of either of those articles in this studio, I can tell you." So he held to his desolate, destitute painting-room, with its few ricketty Windsor chairs, its cloudy ceiling and uneven floor, its bare, dingy wainscoting, only ornamented here and there by a "life study," or a vague outline in chalk or charcoal; stray canvasses resting here and there with their faces turned to the wall, the failures to be found in all studios: inchoate undertakings which the artist can never persuade himself to

complete or destroy thoroughly, but offers rather to wear out and perish of their own accord, aided by time and dust and damp.

"Well, tell us about this ghost, Venn," said Tom Thoroton. He had waited for some few minutes, in hopes that Venn would volunteer a narration on the subject. But he did not seem inclined to speak; sat quietly smoking his pipe, apparently absorbed in the contemplation of its well-coloured bowl. It was evident that he required to be stimulated into talking by coaxing and questioning.

"Tell us about this ghost, Venn."

"What do you want to know about it?" he asked.

"When did you first see it?"

"Not long after I took this house."

"Weren't you frightened?"

"Well, not exactly frightened. I was vexed and annoyed at first, but I got used to it afterwards; there was nothing so very alarming about it."

"Did it stay long?"

"Some few days."

"What! then you saw it by daylight? I thought ghosts never appeared except at night?"

"Ah, it's clear you get your notion of ghosts from the theatre; you're thinking of 'his majesty of buried Denmark,' and Banquo, and the tent scene in Richard the Third. But the ghosts have changed all that; they take their walks by day now as well as by night."

"You're joking, Venn."

"Very well, then, let's change the subject; I didn't start it; and I'm sure I don't want to go on with it."

But of course we were not going to let the thing drop in that unsatisfactory way. Venn's coyness only piqued out curiosity the more.

"No, no," I said, "let's hear all about it, old fellow. Does it come often?"

"Well, no. I couldn't stand it constantly; it would be rather too much of a good thing, you know. A little of it I don't so much mind; but of course it would be terrible in the way of my work if it were here always. I should have to give up the place, in fact."

"But how often does it come?"

"Well; two or three times a year say – not more."

"And stop a few days each time?"

"Exactly."

"Hanged if I should like it, though," said Tom Thoroton; and he passed his hand across his forehead. "It's all very well for you, Venn, to talk in that cool way about it; but I know I should be terribly upset if a ghost were to come and take up his abode in my place for days together. I

shouldn't be able to do a stroke of work while it stayed, or to get a wink of sleep, or to eat or drink ever so little." And Tom Thoroton emptied his tumbler. He looked very white, I thought. He was at all times a young fellow of rather an active imagination.

"One gets used to things," said Venn, with a philosophical air; "and I always find that if one's appetite goes away, it comes back again, sure enough. I wish one's money would do the same."

"Does it come upon you suddenly, or do you know when to expect it?"

"Well, some time before, I have a notion that it will make its appearance."

"Ah! I see? a presentiment?"

"A presentiment, if you like."

"A presage of coming misfortune?"

"That, too, if you will have it so. I don't go in for fine language much myself."

"You find yourself disturbed in mind; oppressed in an unaccountable way?"

"I find that, after certain bad attacks of extravagance and idleness, comes a depression of spirits, and then the ghost."

"But you're never low-spirited, Venn?"

"I am, sometimes. But when such misfortune happens to me I know what course to pursue, I keep myself to myself, as people say. I don't victimize my friends. I don't try to pull them down to my low level. I don't want to inoculate every one I meet with my malady. Low spirits are very catching sort of things. A determined man may spread his disorder far and wide among his acquaintances, if he gives his mind to it. For my part I feel penitent, and a little ashamed; and I lock myself up till I am better. I don't care to go whining about, making everybody miserable under the pretence of obtaining their sympathy."

I don't know whether Venn meant it so or not; but this was certainly rather hard upon some of us, who, I own, were a little apt to impart not only our joys but also our griefs, in fact, especially our griefs, to our friends, without much regard to their feelings so long as we obtain some small sense of relief by the proceeding.

"But you're not speaking of a real ghost, Venn, but a sort of apparition of the mind, born of gloom, and idleness, and some irregularity of life, and consequent contrition. Your ghost is only the result of a disordered fancy, weakened nerves, disturbed health."

"Nothing of the kind," said Venn, quietly. "I'm speaking of a real ghost, tangible, unmistakable, who comes into this studio, and sits in that chair for long, long hours together."

He pointed to the "sitter's" chair, raised on a dais, the usual studio property. Of course we all turned to look at the chair, following his hand as he pointed to it, almost expecting to see the ghost then and there occupying that seat of vantage. No ghost was there, however.

"By George! it must be very awful," said Tom Thoroton, in a moved voice. "Fancy a ghost coming into a fellow's studio, and sitting down there for hours together! By George! enough to drive a fellow mad."

"As I said before, Tom, it's annoying until one get's accustomed to it."

"Is the ghost – a woman?" asked Frank Ripley.

"No, Frank – you needn't grin – not a woman; not at all like a woman."

Frank Ripley's organ of veneration was by no means well developed. It was no laughing matter that we were discussing. Perhaps in truth he was only laughing – as the scoffer will sometimes laugh – to conceal his fears.

"Not a woman, Frank, nor anything so very awful, Tom. I'm not setting up to be tremendous in the way of nerve and pluck. But the ghost doesn't come to me in an alarming form; it is, on the contrary, a simple, unpretending ghost enough, is quiet and pacific in its nature and demeanour, seems indeed anxious to give me as little trouble as possible under the circumstances."

"What form does it take then?"

"That of a little wizen old man in a shabby long brown great-coat, with a red comforter round his neck."

"Why then–," I began.

"What have you got to say on the subject?" Venn inquired rather sharply, I fancied.

"Why, don't you remember? I called on you one day – there was some difficulty about my seeing you, but I was let in at last – and there was some one sitting here, answering that description: a little old man in a long brown coat, with a comforter round his neck; he was sitting quietly in that chair; he didn't speak a word – in fact, I don't remember that he moved."

"When was it?"

"Not long after Christmas."

"Ah! yes, I remember now. Well, that was the ghost that haunts this house."

"By Jove! then I've seen him."

I took a new interest in myself. I was master of an extraordinary experience. I also had seen a ghost. That seeing it, I didn't at the time

know it to be a ghost, was a little disappointing, I admit; yet in truth it did not materially affect the question.

"Then I've seen him!" I became an object of attention to the whole room.

"Let us have no more scepticism about this matter," said Venn, almost hilarious in his "triumph." "No more talk about nerves, and fancy, and bad health – that sort of thing. The story doesn't rest upon my credit solely; unlooked-for evidence has turned up quite at the right moment. The ghost has been seen by other eyes than mine."

"But I say, weren't you frightened, old fellow?" Tom Thoroton inquired of me.

"Well, not so much as you might fancy, Tom; because, don't you see, I never thought about the man being a ghost. In fact, he didn't look the least like a ghost – that is to say, according to one's preconceived ideas as to what a ghost should look like. No more like a ghost than I look, or you, for that matter – not so much as you, perhaps, Tom, for you're looking uncommonly white tonight, old man."

"What! the ghost was sitting there, and you didn't know that it was a ghost?"

"No; I thought the old man was a model. In fact, I think Venn said he was a model. Certainly he made a sketch of him."

"You make a sketch of the ghost, Venn?" they all exclaimed in amazement.

"Yes, a very slight thing," he said.

"By George! you *have* a nerve!" cried Tom Thoroton admiringly.

"Here's the sketch," said Venn, as he took a millboard from a corner of the room. "It's flimsy enough, and a little too low in tone; but it was done on a very dark day. It will give you some idea of the man. I described him as a model, because – well – because," he explained, half laughing, "I thought it would be pleasanter for all parties that his real character should not be revealed; it saved a great deal of awkwardness and troublesome explanation; nothing could be more embarrassing, I should think, than a formal introduction to a ghost, *as* a ghost; it was better to regard him for the nonce in the light of an ordinary human being. I'm sure he was grateful to me for so considering him. You're not afraid to look at the drawing, Tom? That can't hurt you, at all events."

We all looked at the drawing. Certainly there was nothing very remarkable about it. It was very slight, in oils; thinly painted, and sketchily treated: not well defined – hardly made out at all in places. Yet undoubtedly it bore a decided resemblance to the old man I had seen in the studio.

"Still, I wonder at your nerve," persisted Tom Thoroton.

"Well, you see, Tom, I'm a practical sort of fellow. Given a ghost in your studio, the question arises how to utilize him? Well, why not make a study of him? It always is good practice to make sketches and studies of any and everything. The thing's very simple."

"Did the ghost make any objection?"

"Not the least in the world. He was rather pleased at the idea – was flattered – glad to be of use. Ghosts, it seems to me, have a good many of the weaknesses of the flesh, and they are not nearly so black, or for that matter so white, as they are often painted. For instance, the ghost in question was very happy to make himself at home. I begged him to do so, and he complied. He was even so accommodating as to smoke a pipe with me."

"He smoked a pipe!" we all exclaimed.

"Fancy smoking a pipe with a ghost!" cried Tom Thoroton in a scared voice.

"Yes; here's the identical pipe! I put it on one side for him in case he should want it again." And Venn took from the high mantelpiece a long clay "churchwarden." We all examined it with deep interest, though of course it was a fac-simile of thousands of other "churchwardens." But then a pipe which had been smoked by a ghost was naturally a curiosity, of its kind almost unique.

"He smoked! Did he talk?"

"Yes. But he was not a ghost of any great conversational powers. He did his best, however, to make himself agreeable. I think he appreciated my method of treating him, which was decidedly polite. I flatter myself I'm polite to everyone. Why should I alter my usual line of conduct in the presence of a ghost? I was polite to him and considerate. I endeavoured to make his abode here, while it lasted, as agreeable as I could to both of us. I fancy in other haunts he meets with a less pleasant reception. When you come to think of it, you know, people generally are really very rude to ghosts. Instead of treating them with any sort of respect, they stare at them, scream at them, call them names, such as "horrible shadow," "unreal mockery," "goblin damned;" apply to them other equally offensive epithets, and sometimes go into convulsive fits, or faint right off at the sight of them. Well, you know that's really not pleasant to the ghost, and a ghost has his feelings like anybody else – places him, indeed, in a very awkward and painful position. He doesn't want to disturb the peace of families, or to do any harm really. He only asks to be let alone. Perfect quiet is much more congenial to him than indecent uproar and alarm. If his appearance is not attractive, that's hardly to be considered as his fault. If his presence is objectionable, he can't very well help that. I'll undertake to say he doesn't really want to be wandering

about to and fro upon the earth, making himself unpleasant. He'd much prefer sitting quietly at home – wherever that may be – if he could have altogether his own way in the matter."

"This is all very well, you know, Venn; but if the ghost were to come in now, you wouldn't like it."

"I quite admit it, Frank. I should dislike it very much. Still, I trust I should know how to behave with a proper regard for the decencies of life. A ghost understands seemly behaviour; while for good manners I'm convinced that ghosts have quite as good manners as – well, let us say picture-dealers."

"But are you sure this is a ghost, Venn? Are there no other lodgers in the house?"

"None, only the old woman – my housekeeper – who let you fellows in and who'll let you out, presently; there's no hurry."

"But how do you account for this ghost?"

"Ah, that's a very grave question (I don't mean a pun) I may have a notion myself on the subject."

"Well, what is it?"

"No. I won't state it just at present. I should like to hear first what is the usual theory about ghosts. Can any one tell me? – in a few words, of course. No one wants to have a long lecture on the subject."

"Well, a man dies with something on his mind, consequently his spirit can get no rest, but continues to haunt the earth," explained Tom Thoroton.

"And that something on his mind?"

"Well, let us say that in his lifetime he has hidden a treasure, which remains undiscovered; he has died suddenly without time to make a revelation on the subject. Perhaps for want of the money his family are in great distress, so he can't rest quiet, but haunts the place where his treasure lies secreted. Plenty of ghost stories run like that. There may be some treasure hidden beneath the floor of this room."

"If I thought it I'd soon have the boards up and secure it. But I don't believe a word of it. The only treasure in this room amounts to about fifteen and fourpence, which I have here" – Venn slapped his pocket as he spoke. "Only fifteen and fourpence – and I owe – well, never mind how much I owe. Of course I don't include in my calculation such small coin as you fellows may have in your pockets. Your money can't be said in any way to pertain to the room. No, Tom; I can't admit your explanation about the buried treasure. It's too improbable. A buried treasure in a studio! Impossible!"

"But it needn't be a buried treasure," cried Thoroton; "ghosts haunt places for other reasons than that. Instance, a sin committed, unatoned for, unavenged."

"Ah!" Venn seemed to think this explanation more reasonable. "But what sort of a sin? Something rather strong in that way, of course?"

"Well, say a bigamy?" Thoroton exclaimed rather at random. I fancy he had been reading a good many sensational novels of late.

"Or a forgery!" suggested some one.

"Or embezzlement!"

"Or arson!"

"Or murder!" Then there was silence for a few minutes.

"What do you say, Venn?" Thoroton asked breathlessly.

"No. Not murder, I should think, Tom. Not murder exactly, but rather an execution!"

"An execution!" we all shouted.

"Ah! Like that in 'Les Trois Mousquetaires,' perhaps!" cried Tom Thoroton, breathlessly.

Before Venn could answer, there came a loud single knock at the door. We were instantly silent.

"Come in," said Venn.

There was a shuffling sound, the door opened slowly – very slowly – and then a figure appeared, advanced into the room, and stood amongst us.

It was the ghost!

I think we were all frightened. I know *I* was; and we had real cause for alarm. There was no mistake about it. The new-comer was the little old man I had once before seen in Venn's studio, not knowing him to be a ghost: it was the little wizen old man in the long brown coat and the red comforter, a sketch of whose portrait Venn had just showed us. We looked at the ghost, then at each other, then at the ghost again, then at Venn. What white faces we all had! from the glare of the gas, of course.

Even Venn was disturbed, I could see, though he made an effort to conceal or to overcome his emotion. He made a step forward to where the figure of the little old man was standing.

"You'll think me very late, I'm afraid," said the ghost, in an odd, quavering voice. He made a bow as he spoke – a bow that was almost grotesque in its exceeding obsequiousness, I remember thinking at the time.

"Well, it *is* late," said Venn, with a forced air of not caring about the thing.

"Better late than never, you know, Mr.Venn," observed the ghost.

"I don't quite see that," said Venn, with tolerable coolness. He must have had a very critical turn of mind. Fancy taking an objection to the ghost's simple citation of a popular proverb! How Thoroton marvelled at him!

"I'm afraid I'm disturbing you, and these good gents," and the ghost glanced around at us with a queer smile. What a sparkle – quite a supernatural sparkle – there was in his little round black eyes! And then – I'm sure it grated upon all of us to be called *gents* by a ghost!

"Stow me anywheres if I'm at all in the way. There ain't no need, you know, Mr.Venn, to be pertikler to a shade," said the ghost.

("By George, though," murmured Tom Thoroton. "I thought ghosts talked better English than that!")

"Only you know, Mr.Venn, the other parts of the 'ouse ain't over and above 'abitable. Still, I'm accommodatin', I am; and if it's ill-conwenient for me to come in here at the present moment, why I don't mind sittin' down on the stairs outside for a hour or two – only mind, fair's fair; no larks, *fain smuggings*; no disturbing the property, such as there is," and he looked round the room, not reverently, I thought, in regard to its few contents. "You've always behaved the thorough gen'elman to me, Mr.Venn, *that* I will say: tipping me liberal and treating me 'andsome, it would be 'ard if I couldn't be accommodatin' for a hour or two; wouldn't it now, gents?" and he looked round at us again.

"We'll go, Venn." There was a general movement towards our hats and coats. We seemed all stirred by a common desire to get away from Venn's studio as quickly as we might.

"Stop," cried Venn, in some excitement, the tones of his voice very hollow and solemn, and yet with a sort of desire to laugh twitching about his lips as he spoke.

"You mustn't go like this. The unforeseen circumstance that has occurred forces upon me an explanation, though I had not contemplated giving any. Some one just now suggested that there had been a *murder* committed in this house. I proposed by way of amendment to substitute the word *execution*. That is the truth, the real truth, gentlemen. There *has* been an execution in this house. In point of fact there have been many executions in this house; and there is an execution in this house at the present moment. Moreover, my old acquaintance here, the ghost, is no other than – *a man in possession*."

"A man in possession!" we echoed.

"Yes; and he haunts me, and this house, soon after quarter-day, especially. My landlord has a great regard for me as his tenant, but he is ridiculously punctilious on the subject of the receipt of his rent. I have a great respect for him, as a landlord; but I concede that, owing to

circumstances over which I have no control, and to which I will not further allude, I am oftentimes not quite so well prepared to pay my rent as doubtless I ought to be. The result generally is – an execution, and the presence of my friend here in the character of a man in possession. It's one of the inconveniences of having a house all to oneself – an inconvenience that is amply compensated for by the many advantages of the arrangement. I have already referred to them. I said just now that, after bad attacks of extravagance and idleness, came depression of spirits; and then – the ghost. In plainer words, I don't work, and I get into debt. I don't pay my rent, and the landlord puts in an execution, and I am haunted by my friend here – a very worthy old person in his way – who's presently going to smoke a pipe, and have a glass of grog with me, as he's done before now. But he'll go out on Monday, when I shall receive money enough to satisfy all outstanding claims, my landlord's among the rest. Why hurry away? This is a 'most honest ghost'; that let me tell you. Come, another tumbler all round. Why not? That's right. Don't talk about spirits anymore; but put them in your glasses and drink them – properly diluted, of course, and with a little sugar and lemon."

It was evident that, in considering George Venn, we had entirely failed to appreciate one element in his character. He possessed an inclination for humour and practical jesting beyond anything we had ever given him credit for. But then – the fact has been already stated – we were all very young men; and perhaps our conduct occasionally rendered us particularly open to jocose comment and criticism.

1895

THE GREAT KEINPLATZ EXPERIMENT

Of all the sciences which have puzzled the sons of men, none had such an attraction for the learned Professor von Baumgarten as those which relate to psychology and the ill-defined relations between mind and matter. A celebrated anatomist, a profound chemist, and one of the first physiologists in Europe, it was a relief for him to turn from these subjects and to bring his varied knowledge to bear upon the study of the soul and the mysterious relationship of spirits. At first, when as a young man he began to dip into the secrets of mesmerism, his mind seemed to be wandering in a strange land where all was chaos and darkness, save that here and there some great unexplainable and disconnected fact loomed out in front of him. As the years passed, however, and as the worthy Professor's stock of knowledge increased, for knowledge begets knowledge as money bears interest, much which had seemed strange and unaccountable began to take another shape in his eyes. New trains of reasoning became familiar to him, and he perceived connecting links where all had been incomprehensible and startling. By experiments which extended over twenty years, he obtained a basis of facts upon which it was his ambition to build up a new, exact science which should embrace mesmerism, spiritualism, and all cognate subjects. In this he was much helped by his intimate knowledge of the more intricate parts of animal physiology which treat of nerve currents and the working of the brain; for Alexis von Baumgarten was Regius Professor of Physiology at the University of Keinplatz, and had all the resources of the laboratory to aid him in his profound researches.

Professor von Baumgarten was tall and thin, with a hatchet face and steel-grey eyes, which were singularly bright and penetrating. Much thought had furrowed his forehead and contracted his heavy eyebrows, so that he appeared to wear a perpetual frown, which often misled people as to his character, for though austere he was tender-hearted. He was popular among the students, who would gather round him after his lectures and listen eagerly to his strange theories. Often he would call for volunteers from amongst them in order to conduct some experiment, so that eventually there was hardly a lad in the class who had not, at one time or another, been thrown into a mesmeric trance by his Professor.

Of all these young devotees of science there was none who equalled in enthusiasm Fritz von Hartmann. It had often seemed strange to his fellow-students that wild, reckless Fritz, as dashing a young fellow as ever hailed from the Rhinelands, should devote the time and trouble which he did in reading up abstruse works and in assisting the Professor in his

strange experiments. The fact was, however, that Fritz was a knowing and long-headed fellow. Months before he had lost his heart to young Elise, the blue-eyed, yellow-haired daughter of the lecturer. Although he had succeeded in learning from her lips that she was not indifferent to his suit, he had never dared to announce himself to her family as a formal suitor. Hence he would have found it a difficult matter to see his young lady had he not adopted the expedient of making himself useful to the Professor. By this means he frequently was asked to the old man's house, where he willingly submitted to be experimented upon in any way as long as there was a chance of his receiving one bright glance from the eyes of Elise or one touch of her little hand.

Young Fritz von Hartmann was a handsome lad enough. There were broad acres, too, which would descend to him when his father died. To many he would have seemed an eligible suitor; but Madame frowned upon his presence in the house, and lectured the Professor at times on his allowing such a wolf to prowl around their lamb. To tell the truth, Fritz had an evil name in Keinplatz. Never was there a riot or a duel, or any other mischief afoot, but the young Rhinelander figured as a ringleader in it. No one used more free and violent language, no one drank more, no one played cards more habitually, no one was more idle, save in the one solitary subject. No wonder, then, that the good Frau Professorin gathered her Fraulein under her wing, and resented the attentions of such a *mauvais sujet*. As to the worthy lecturer, he was too much engrossed by his strange studies to form an opinion upon the subject one way or the other.

For many years there was one question which had continually obtruded itself upon his thoughts. All his experiments and his theories turned upon a single point. A hundred times a day the Professor asked himself whether it was possible for the human spirit to exist apart from the body for a time and then to return to it once again. When the possibility first suggested itself to him his scientific mind had revolted from it. It clashed too violently with preconceived ideas and the prejudices of his early training. Gradually, however, as he proceeded farther and farther along the pathway of original research, his mind shook off its old fetters and became ready to face any conclusion which could reconcile the facts. There were many things which made him believe that it was possible for mind to exist apart from matter. At last it occurred to him that by a daring and original experiment the question might be definitely decided.

"It is evident," he remarked in his celebrated article upon invisible entities, which appeared in the *Keinplatz wochentliche Medikalschrift* about this time, and which surprised the whole scientific world – "it is evident that under certain conditions the soul or mind does separate itself from the body. In the case of a mesmerized person, the body lies in a

cataleptic condition, but the spirit has left it. Perhaps you reply that the soul is here, but in a dormant condition. I answer that this is not so, otherwise how can one account for the condition of clairvoyance, which has fallen into disrepute through the knavery of certain scoundrels, but which can easily be shown to be an undoubted fact. I have been able myself, with a sensitive subject, to obtain an accurate prescription of what was going on in another room or another house. How can such knowledge be accounted for on any hypothesis save that the soul of the subject has left the body and is wandering through space? For a moment it is recalled by the voice of the operator and says what it has seen, and then wings its way once more through the air. Since the spirit is by its very nature invisible, we cannot see these comings and goings, but we see their effect in the body of the subject, now rigid and inert, now struggling to narrate impressions which could never have come to it by natural means. There is only one way which I can see by which the fact can be demonstrated. Although we in the flesh are unable to see these spirits, yet our own spirits, could we separate them from the body, would be conscious of the presence of others. It is my intention, therefore, shortly to mesmerize one of my pupils. I shall then mesmerize myself in a manner which has become easy to me. After that, if my theory holds good, my spirit will have no difficulty in meeting and communing with the spirit of my pupil, both being separated from the body. I hope to be able to communicate the result of this interesting experiment in an early number of the *Keinplatz wochentliche Medikalschrift*."

When the good Professor finally fulfilled his promise, and published an account of what occurred, the narrative was so extraordinary that it was received with general incredulity. The tone of some of the papers was so offensive in their comments upon the matter that the angry savant declared that he would never open his mouth again or refer to the subject in any way – a promise which he has faithfully kept. This narrative has been compiled, however, from the most authentic sources, and the events cited in it may be relied upon as substantially correct.

It happened, then, that shortly after the time when Professor von Baumgarten conceived the idea of the above-mentioned experiment, he was walking thoughtfully homewards after a long day in the laboratory, when he met a crowd of roistering students who had just streamed out from a beer-house. At the head of them, half-intoxicated and very noisy, was young Fritz von Hartmann. The Professor would have passed them, but his pupil ran across and intercepted him.

"Heh! my worthy master," he said, taking the old man by the sleeve, and leading him down the road with him. "There is something that

I have to say to you, and it is easier for me to say it now, when the good beer is humming in my head, than at another time."

"What is it, then, Fritz?" the physiologist asked, looking at him in mild surprise.

"I hear, mein Herr, that you are about to do some wondrous experiment in which you hope to take a man's soul out of his body, and then to put it back again. Is it not so?"

"It is true, Fritz."

"And have you considered, my dear sir, that you may have some difficulty in finding someone on whom to try this? Potztausend! Suppose that the soul went out and would not come back. That would be a bad business. Who is to take the risk?"

"But Fritz," the Professor cried, very much startled by this view of the matter, "I had relied upon your assistance in the attempt. Surely you will not desert me. Consider the honour and glory."

"Consider the fiddlesticks!" the student cried angrily. "Am I to be paid always thus? Did I not stand two hours upon a glass insulator while you poured electricity into my body? Have you not stimulated my phrenic nerves, besides ruining my digestion with a galvanic current round my stomach? Four-and-thirty times you have mesmerized me, and what have I got from all this? Nothing. And now you wish to take my soul out, as you would take the works from a watch. It is more than flesh and blood can stand."

"Dear, dear!" the Professor cried in great distress. "That is very true, Fritz. I never thought of it before. If you can but suggest how I can compensate you, you will find me ready and willing."

"Then listen," said Fritz solemnly. "If you will pledge your word that after this experiment I may have the hand of your daughter, then I am willing to assist you; but if not, I shall have nothing to do with it. These are my only terms."

"And what would my daughter say to this?" the Professor exclaimed, after a pause of astonishment.

"Elise would welcome it," the young man replied. "We have loved each other long."

"Then she shall be yours," the physiologist said with decision, "for you are a good-hearted young man, and one of the best neurotic subjects that I have ever known – that is when you are not under the influence of alcohol. My experiment is to be performed upon the fourth of next month. You will attend at the physiological laboratory at twelve o'clock. It will be a great occasion, Fritz. Von Gruben is coming from Jena, and Hinterstein from Basle. The chief men of science of all South Germany will be there."

"I shall be punctual," the student said briefly; and so the two parted. The Professor plodded homeward, thinking of the great coming event, while the young man staggered along after his noisy companions, with his mind full of the blue-eyed Elise, and of the bargain which he had concluded with her father.

The Professor did not exaggerate when he spoke of the widespread interest excited by his novel psychological experiment. Long before the hour had arrived the room was filled by a galaxy of talent. Besides the celebrities whom he had mentioned, there had come from London the great Professor Lurcher, who had just established reputation by a remarkable treatise upon cerebral centres. Several great lights of the Spiritualistic body had also come a long distance to be present, as had a Swedenborgian minister, who considered that the proceedings might throw some light upon the doctrines of the Rosy Cross.

There was considerable applause from this eminent assembly upon the appearance of Professor von Baumgarten and his subject upon the platform. The lecturer, in a few well-chosen words, explained what his views were, and how he proposed to test them.

"I hold," he said, "that when a person is under the influence of mesmerism, his spirit is for the time released from his body, and I challenge anyone to put forward any other hypothesis which will account for the fact of clairvoyance. I therefore hope that upon mesmerizing my young friend here, and then putting myself into a trance, our spirit may be able to commune together, though our bodies lie still and inert. After a time nature will resume her sway, our spirits will return into our respective bodies and all will be as before. With your kind permission, we shall now proceed to attempt the experiment."

The applause was renewed at this speech, and the audience settled down in expectant silence. With a few rapid passes the Professor mesmerized the young man, who sank back in his chair, pale and rigid. He then took a bright globe of glass from his pocket, and by concentrating his gaze upon it and making a strong mental effort, he succeeded in throwing himself into the same condition. It was a strange and impressive sight to see the old man and the young sitting together in the same cataleptic condition. Whither, then, had their souls fled? That was the question which presented itself to each and every one of the spectators.

Five minutes passed, and then ten, and then fifteen, and then fifteen more, while the Professor and his pupil sat stiff and stark upon the platform. During that time not a sound was heard from the assembled savants, but every eye was bent upon the two pale faces, in search of the first signs of returning consciousness. Nearly an hour had elapsed before the patient watchers were rewarded. A faint flush came back to the cheeks

of Professor von Baumgarten. The soul was coming back once more to its earthly tenement. Suddenly he stretched out his long, thin arms, as one awaking from sleep, and rubbing his eyes, stood up from his chair and gazed about him as though he hardly realized where he was.

"Tausend Teufel!" he exclaimed, rapping out a tremendous South German oath, to the great astonishment of his audience and to the disgust of the Swedenborgian. "Where the Henker am I then, and what in thunder has occurred? Oh yes, I remember now. One of these nonsensical mesmeric experiments. There is no result this time, for I remember nothing at all since I became unconscious; so you have had all your long journeys for nothing, my learned friends, and a very good joke, too"; at which the Regius Professor of Physiology burst into a roar of laughter and slapped his thigh in a highly indecorous fashion. The audience were so enraged at this unseemly behaviour on the part of their host, that there might have been a considerable disturbance, had it not been for the judicious interference of young Fritz von Hartmann, who had now recovered from his lethargy. Stepping to the front of the platform, the young man apologized for the conduct of his companion.

"I am sorry to say," he said, "that he is a harum-scarum sort of fellow, although he appeared so grave at the commencement of this experiment. He is still suffering from mesmeric reaction, and is hardly accountable for his words. As to the experiment itself, I do not consider it to be a failure. It is very possible that our spirits may have been communing in space during this hour; but, unfortunately, our gross bodily memory is distinct from our spirit, and we cannot recall what has occurred. My energies shall now be devoted to devising some means by which spirits may be able to recollect what occurs to them in their free state, and I trust that when I have worked this out, I may have the pleasure of meeting you all once again in this hall, and demonstrating to you the result."

This address, coming from so young a student, caused considerable astonishment among the audience, and some were inclined to be offended, thinking that he assumed rather too much importance. The majority, however, looked upon him as a young man of great promise, and many comparisons were made as they left the hall between his dignified conduct and the levity of his professor, who during the above remarks was laughing heartily in a corner, by no means abashed at the failure of the experiment.

Now although all these learned men were filing out of the lecture-room under the impression that they had seen nothing of note, as a matter of fact one of the most wonderful things in the whole history of the world had just occurred before their very eyes. Professor von Baumgarten had

been so far correct in his theory that both his spirit and that of his pupil had been, for a time, absent from the body. But here a strange and unforeseen complication had occurred. In their return the spirit of Fritz von Hartmann had entered into the body of Alexis von Baumgarten, and that of Alexis von Baumgarten had taken up its abode in the frame of Fritz von Hartmann. Hence the slang and scurrility which issued from the lips of the serious Professor, and hence also the weighty words and grave statements which fell from the careless student. It was an unprecedented event, yet no one knew of it, least of all those whom it concerned.

The body of the Professor, feeling conscious suddenly of a great dryness about the back of the throat, sallied out into the street, still chuckling to himself over the result of the experiment, for the soul of Fritz within was reckless at the thought of the bride whom he had won so easily. His first impulse was to go up to the house and see her, but on second thoughts he came to the conclusion that it would be best to stay away until Madame Baumgarten should be informed by her husband of the agreement which had been made. He therefore made his way down to the Gruner Mann, which was one of the favourite trysting-places of the wilder students, and ran, boisterously waving his cane in the air, into the little parlour, where sat Spiegel and Muller and half a dozen other boon companions.

"Ha, ha! my boys," he shouted. "I knew I should find you here. Drink up, every one of you, and call for what you like, for I'm going to stand treat today."

Had the green man who is depicted upon the signpost of that well-known inn suddenly marched into the room and called for a bottle of wine, the students could not have been more amazed than they were by this unexpected entry of their revered professor. They were so astonished that for a minute or two they glared at him in utter bewilderment without being able to make any reply to his hearty invitation.

"Donner und Blitzen!" shouted the Professor angrily. "What the deuce is the matter with you, then? You sit there like a set of stuck pigs staring at me. What is it then?"

"It is the unexpected honour," stammered Spiegel, who was in the chair.

"Honour – rubbish!" said the Professor testily. "Do you think that just because I happen to have been exhibiting mesmerism to a parcel of old fossils, I am therefore too proud to associate with dear old friends like you? Come out of that chair, Spiegel, my boy, for I shall preside now. Beer, or wine, or schnapps, my lads – call for what you like, and put it all down to me."

Never was there such an afternoon in the Gruner Mann. The foaming flagons of lager and the green-necked bottles of Rhenish circulated merrily. By degrees the students lost their shyness in the presence of their Professor. As for him, he shouted, he sang, he roared, he balanced a long tobacco-pipe upon his nose, and offered to run a hundred yards against any member of the company. The Kellner and the barmaid whispered to each other outside the door their astonishment at such proceedings on the part of a Regius Professor of the ancient university of Keinplatz. They had still more to whisper about afterwards, for the learned man cracked the Kellner's crown, and kissed the barmaid behind the kitchen door.

"Gentlemen," said the Professor, standing up, albeit somewhat totteringly, at the end of the table, and balancing his high, old-fashioned wine glass in his bony hand, "I must now explain to you what is the cause of this festivity."

"Hear! hear!" roared the students, hammering their beer glasses against the table; "a speech, a speech! – silence for a speech."

"The fact is, my friends," said the Professor, beaming through his spectacles, "I hope very soon to be married."

"Married!" cried a student, bolder than the others. "Is Madame dead, then?"

"Madame who?"

"Why, Madame van Baumgarten, of course."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the Professor; "I can see, then, that you know all about my former difficulties. No, she is not dead, but I have reason to believe that she will not oppose my marriage."

"That is very accommodating of her," remarked one of the company.

"In fact," said the Professor, "I hope that she will now be induced to aid me in getting a wife. She and I never took to each other very much; but now I hope all that may be ended, and when I marry she will come and stay with me."

"What a happy family!" exclaimed some wag.

"Yes, indeed; and I hope you will come to my wedding, all of you. I won't mention names, but here is to my little bride!" and the Professor waved his glass in the air.

"Here's to his little bride!" roared the roisterers, with shouts of laughter. "Here's her health. Sie soll leben – Hoch!" And so the fun waxed still more fast and furious, while each young fellow followed the Professor's example, and drank a toast to the girl of his heart.

While all this festivity had been going on at the Gruner Mann, a very different scene had been enacted elsewhere. Young Fritz von

Hartmann, with a solemn face and a reserved manner, had, after the experiment, consulted and adjusted some mathematical instruments; after which, with a few peremptory words to the janitor, he had walked out into the street and wended his way slowly in the direction of the house of the Professor. As he walked he saw von Althaus, the professor of anatomy, in front of him, and, quickening his pace, he overtook him.

"I say, von Althaus," he exclaimed, tapping him on the sleeve, "you were asking me for some information the other day concerning the middle coat of the cerebral arteries. Now I find —"

"Donnerwetter!" shouted von Althaus, who was a peppery old fellow. "What the deuce do you mean by your impertinence! I'll have you up before the Academical Senate for this, sir"; with which threat he turned on his heel and hurried away. Von Hartmann was much surprised at this reception.

"It's on account of this failure of my experiment," he said to himself, and continued moodily on his way.

Fresh surprises were in store for him, however. He was hurrying along when he was overtaken by two students. These youths, instead of raising their caps or showing any other sign of respect, gave a wild whoop of delight the instant that they saw him, and rushing at him seized him by each arm and commenced dragging him along with them.

"*Gott im Himmel*!" roared von Hartmann. "What is the meaning of this unparalleled insult? Where are you taking me?"

"To crack a bottle of wine with us," said the two students. "Come along! That is an invitation which you have never refused."

"I never heard of such insolence in my life!" cried von Hartmann. "Let go my arms! I shall certainly have you rusticated for this. Let me go, I say!" and he kicked furiously at his captors.

"Oh, if you choose to turn ill-tempered, you may go where you like," the students said, releasing him. "We can do very well without you."

"I know you. I'll pay you out" said von Hartmann furiously, and continued in the direction which he imagined to be his own home, much incensed at the two episodes which had occurred to him on the way.

Now, Madame von Baumgarten, who was looking out of the window and wondering why her husband was late for dinner, was considerably astonished to see the young student come stalking down the road. As already remarked, she had a great antipathy to him, and if ever he ventured into the house it was on sufferance, and under the protection of the Professor. Still more astonished was she, therefore, when she beheld him undo the wicket-gate and stride up the garden path with the air of one who is master of the situation. She could hardly believe her eyes, and hastened to the door with all her maternal instincts up in arms. From the

upper windows the fair Elise had also observed this daring move upon the part of her lover, and her heart beat quick with mingled pride and consternation.

"Good day, sir," Madame Baumgarten remarked to the intruder, as she stood in gloomy majesty in the open doorway.

"A very fine day indeed, Martha," returned the other. "Now, don't stand there like a statue of Juno, but bustle about and get the dinner ready, for I am wellnigh starved."

"Martha! Dinner!" ejaculated the lady, falling back in astonishment.

"Yes, dinner, Martha, dinner!" howled von Hartmann, who was becoming irritable. "Is there anything wonderful in that request when a man has been out all day? I'll wait in the dining-room. Anything will do. Schinken, and sausage, and prunes – any little thing that happens to be about. There you are, standing staring again. Woman, will you or will you not stir your legs?"

This last address, delivered with a perfect shriek of rage, had the effect of sending good Madame Baumgarten flying along the passage and through the kitchen, where she locked herself up in the scullery and went into violent hysterics. In the meantime von Hartmann strode into the room and threw himself down upon the sofa in the worst of tempers.

"Elise!" he shouted. "Confound the girl! Elise!"

Thus roughly summoned, the young lady came timidly downstairs and into the presence of her lover.

"Dearest!" she cried, throwing her arms round him, "I know this is all done for my sake! It is a *ruse* in order to see me."

Von Hartmann's indignation at this fresh attack upon him was so great that he became speechless for a minute from rage, and could only glare and shake his fists, while he struggled in her embrace. When he at last regained his utterance, he indulged in such a bellow of passion that the young lady dropped back, petrified with fear, into an arm-chair.

"Never have I passed such a day in my life," von Hartmann cried, stamping upon the floor. "My experiment has failed. Von Althaus has insulted me. Two students have dragged me along the public road. My wife nearly faints when I ask her for dinner, and my daughter flies at me and hugs me like a grizzly bear."

"You are ill, dear," the young lady cried. "Your mind is wandering. You have not even kissed me once."

"No, and I don't intend to either," von Hartmann said with decision. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Why don't you go and fetch my slippers, and help your mother to dish the dinner?"

"And is it for this," Elise cried, burying her face in her handkerchief – "is it for this that I have loved you passionately for upwards of ten months? Is it for this that I have braved my mother's wrath? Oh, you have broken my heart; I am sure you have!" and she sobbed hysterically.

"I can't stand much more of this," roared von Hartmann furiously. "What the deuce does the girl mean? What did I do ten months ago which inspired you with such a particular affection for me? If you are really so very fond, you would do better to run away down and find the Schinken and some bread, instead of talking all this nonsense."

"Oh, my darling!" cried the unhappy maiden, throwing herself into the arms of what she imagined to be her lover, "you do but joke in order to frighten your little Elise."

Now it chanced that at the moment of this unexpected embrace von Hartmann was still leaning back against the end of the sofa, which, like much German furniture, was in a somewhat rickety condition. It also chanced that beneath this end of the sofa there stood a tank full of water in which the physiologist was conducting certain experiments upon the ova of fish, and which he kept in his drawing-room in order to ensure an equable temperature. The additional weight of the maiden combined with the impetus with which she hurled herself upon him, caused the precarious piece of furniture to give way, and the body of the unfortunate student was hurled backwards into the tank, in which his head and shoulders were firmly wedged, while his lower extremities flapped helplessly about in the air. This was the last straw. Extricating himself with some difficulty from his unpleasant position, von Hartmann gave an inarticulate yell of fury, and dashing out of the room, in spite of the entreaties of Elise, he seized his hat and rushed off into the town, all dripping and dishevelled, with the intention of seeking in some inn the food and comfort which he could not find at home.

As the spirit of von Baumgarten encased in the body of von Hartmann strode down the winding pathway which led down to the little town, brooding angrily over his many wrongs, he became aware that an elderly man was approaching him who appeared to be in an advanced state of intoxication. Von Hartmann waited by the side of the road and watched this individual, who came stumbling along, reeling from one side of the road to the other, and singing a student song in a very husky and drunken voice. At first his interest was merely excited by the fact of seeing a man of so venerable an appearance in such a disgraceful condition, but as he approached nearer, he became convinced that he knew the other well, though he could not recall when or where he had met him. This impression

became so strong with him, that when the stranger came abreast of him he stepped in front of him and took a good look at his features.

"Well, sonny," said the drunken man, surveying von Hartmann and swaying about in front of him, "where the Henker have I seen you before? I know you as well as I know myself. Who the deuce are you?"

"I am Professor von Baumgarten," said the student. "May I ask who you are? I am strangely familiar with your features."

"You should never tell lies, young man," said the other. "You're certainly not the Professor, for he is an ugly, snuffy old chap, and you are a big, broad-shouldered young fellow. As to myself, I am Fritz von Hartmann at your service."

"That you certainly are not," exclaimed the body of von Hartmann. "You might very well be his father. But hullo, sir, are you aware that you are wearing my studs and my watch-chain?"

"Donnerwetter!" hiccoughed the other. "If those are not the trousers for which my tailor is about to sue me, may I never taste beer again."

Now as von Hartmann, overwhelmed by the many strange things which had occurred to him that day, passed his hand over his forehead and cast his eyes downwards, he chanced to catch the reflection of his own face in a pool which the rain had left upon the road. To his utter astonishment he perceived that his face was that of a youth, that his dress was that of a fashionable young student, and that in every way he was the antithesis of the grave and scholarly figure in which his mind was wont to dwell. In an instant his active brain ran over the series of events which had occurred and sprang to the conclusion. He fairly reeled under the blow.

"Himmel!" he cried, "I see it all. Our souls are in the wrong bodies. I am you and you are I. My theory is proved – but at what an expense! Is the most scholarly mind in Europe to go about with this frivolous exterior? Oh, the labours of a lifetime are ruined! " and he smote his breast in his despair.

"I say," remarked the real von Hartmann from the body of the Professor, "I quite see the force of your remarks, but don't go knocking my body about like that. You received it in excellent condition, but I perceive that you have wet it and bruised it, and spilled snuff over my ruffled shirt-front."

"It matters little," the other said moodily. "Such as we are so must we stay. My theory is triumphantly proved, but the cost is terrible."

"If I thought so," said the spirit of the student, "it would be hard indeed. What could I do with these stiff old limbs, and how could I woo Elise and persuade her that I was not her father? No, thank Heaven, in spite of the beer which has upset me more than ever it could upset my real self, I can see a way out of it."

"How?" gasped the Professor.

"Why, by repeating the experiment. Liberate our souls once more, and the chances are that they will find their way back into their respective bodies."

No drowning man could clutch more eagerly at a straw than did von Baumgarten's spirit at this suggestion. In feverish haste he dragged his own frame to the side of the road and threw it into a mesmeric trance; he then extracted the crystal ball from the pocket, and managed to bring himself into the same condition.

Some students and peasants who chanced to pass during the next hour were much astonished to see the worthy Professor of Physiology and his favourite student both sitting upon a very muddy bank and both completely insensible. Before the hour was up quite a crowd had assembled, and they were discussing the advisability of sending for an ambulance to convey the pair to hospital, when the learned savant opened his eyes and gazed vacantly around him. For an instant he seemed to forget how he had come there, but next moment he astonished his audience by waving his skinny arms above his head and crying out in a voice of rapture:

"Gott sei gedanket! I am myself again. I feel I am!"

Nor was the amazement lessened when the student, springing to his feet, burst into the same cry, and the two performed a sort of *pas de joie* in the middle of the road.

For some time after that people had some suspicion of the sanity of both the actors in this strange episode. When the Professor published his experiences in the *Medikalschrift* as he had promised, he was met by an intimation, even from his colleagues, that he would do well to have his mind cared for, and that another such publication would certainly consign him to a madhouse. The student also found by experience that it was wisest to be silent about the matter.

When the worthy lecturer returned home that night he did not receive the cordial welcome which he might have looked for after his strange adventures. On the contrary, he was roundly upbraided by both his female relatives for smelling of drink and tobacco, and also for being absent while a young scapegrace invaded the house and insulted its occupants. It was long before the domestic atmosphere of the lecturer's house resumed its normal quiet, and longer still before the genial face of von Hartmann was seen beneath its roof. Perseverance, however, conquers every obstacle, and the student eventually succeeded in pacifying the enraged ladies and in establishing himself upon the old footing. He has now no longer any cause to fear the enmity of Madame, for he is Hauptmann von Hartmann of the Emperor's own Uhlans, and his loving

wife Elise had already presented him with two little Uhlans as a visible sign and token of her affection.

1886

THE SILVER HATCHET

On the 3rd of December, 1861, Dr.Otto von Hopstein, Regius Professor of Comparative Anatomy of the University of Buda-Pesth, and Curator of the Academical Museum, was foully and brutally murdered within a stone-throw of the entrance to the college quadrangle.

Besides the eminent position of the victim and his popularity amongst both students and towns-folk, there were other circumstances which excited public interest very strongly, and drew general attention throughout Austria and Hungary to this murder. The *Pesther Abendblatt* of the following day had an article upon it, which may still be consulted by the curious, and from which I translate a few passages giving a succinct account of the circumstances under which the crime was committed, and the peculiar features in the case which puzzled the Hungarian police.

"It appears," said that very excellent paper, "that Professor von Hopstein left the University about half-past four in the afternoon, in order to meet the train which is due from Vienna at three minutes after five. He was accompanied by his old and dear friend, Herr Wilhelm Schlessinger, sub-Curator of the Museum and Privat-docent of Chemistry. The object of these two gentlemen in meeting this particular train was to receive the legacy bequeathed by Graf von Schulling to the University of Buda-Pesth. It is well known that this unfortunate nobleman, whose tragic fate is still fresh in the recollection of the public, left his unique collection of mediaeval weapons, as well as several priceless black-letter editions, to enrich the already celebrated museum of his Alma Mater. The worthy Professor was too much of an enthusiast in such matters to intrust the reception or care of this valuable legacy to any subordinate, and, with the assistance of Herr Schlessinger, he succeeded in removing the whole collection from the train, and stowing it away in a light cart which had been sent by the University authorities. Most of the books and more fragile articles were packed in cases of pine-wood, but many of the weapons were simply done round with straw, so that considerable labor was involved in moving them all. The Professor was so nervous, however, lest any of them should be injured, that he refused to allow any of the railway employés (*Eisenbahndiener*) to assist. Every article was carried across the platform by Herr Schlessinger, and handed to Professor von Hopstein in the cart, who packed it away. When everything was in, the two gentlemen, still faithful to their charge, drove back to the University, the Professor being in excellent spirits, and not a little proud of the physical exertion which he had shown himself capable of. He made some joking allusion to it to Reinmaul, the janitor, who, with his friend Schiffer, a Bohemian Jew, met

the cart on its return and unloaded the contents. Leaving his curiosities safe in the store-room, and locking the door, the Professor handed the key to his sub-curator, and, bidding every one good evening, departed in the direction of his lodgings. Schlessinger took a last look to reassure himself that all was right, and also went off, leaving Reinmaul and his friend Schiffer smoking in the janitor's lodge.

"At eleven o'clock, about an hour and a half after von Hopstein's departure, a soldier of the 14th regiment of Jaeger, passing the front of the University on his way to barracks, came upon the lifeless body of the Professor lying a little way from the side of the road. He had fallen upon his face, with both hands stretched out. His head was literally split in two halves by a tremendous blow, which, it is conjectured, must have been struck from behind, there remaining a peaceful smile upon the old man's face, as if he had been still dwelling upon his net archaeological acquisition when death had overtaken him. There is no other mark of violence upon the body, except a bruise over the left patella, caused probably by the fall. The most mysterious part of the affair is that the Professor's purse, containing forty-three gulden, and his valuable watch, have been untouched. Robbery cannot, therefore, have been the incentive to the deed, unless the assassins were disturbed before they could complete their work.

"This idea is negatived by the fact that the body must have lain at least an hour before anyone discovered it! The whole affair is wrapped in mystery. Dr.Langemann, the eminent medico-jurist, has pronounced that the wound is such as might have been inflicted by a heavy sword-bayonet wielded by a powerful arm. The police are extremely reticent upon the subject, and it is suspected that they are in possession of a clue which may lead to important results."

Thus far the *Pesther Abendblatt*. The researches of the police failed, however, to throw the least glimmer of light upon the matter. There was absolutely no trace of the murderer, nor could any amount of ingenuity invent any reason which could have induced any one to commit the dreadful deed. The deceased Professor was a man so wrapped in his own studies and pursuits that he lived apart from the world, and had certainly never raised the slightest animosity in any human breast. It must have been some fiend, some savage, who loved blood for its own sake, who struck that merciless blow.

Though the officials were unable to come to any conclusions upon the matter, popular suspicion was not long in pitching upon a scapegoat. In the first published accounts of the murder the name of one Schiffer had been mentioned as having remained with the janitor after the Professor's departure. This man was a Jew, and Jews have never been popular in

Hungary. A cry was at once raised for Schiffer's arrest; but as there was not the slightest grain of evidence against him, the authorities very properly refused to consent to so arbitrary a proceeding. Reinmaul, who was an old and most respected citizen, declared solemnly that Schiffer was with him until the startled cry of the soldier had caused them both to run out to the scene of the tragedy. No one ever dreamed of implicating Reinmaul in such a matter; but still it was rumored that his ancient and well-known friendship for Schiffer might have induced him to tell a falsehood in order to screen him. Popular feeling ran very high upon the subject, and there seemed a danger of Schiffer's being mobbed in the street, when an incident occurred which threw a very different light upon the matter.

On the morning of the 12th of December, just nine days after the mysterious murder of the Professor, Schiffer, the Bohemian Jew, was found lying in the north-western corner of the Grand Platz stone dead, and so mutilated that he was hardly recognizable. His head was cloven open in very much the same way as that of von Hopstein, and his body exhibited numerous deep gashes, as if the murderer had been so carried away and transported with fury that he had continued to hack the lifeless body. Snow had fallen heavily the day before, and was lying at least a foot deep all over the square; some had fallen during the night, too, as was evidenced by a thin layer lying like a winding-sheet over the murdered man. It was hoped at first that this circumstance might assist in giving a clue by enabling the footsteps of the assassin to be traced; but the crime had been committed, unfortunately, in a place much frequented during the day, and there were innumerable tracks in every direction. Besides, the newly-fallen snow had blurred the footsteps to such an extent that it would have been impossible to draw trustworthy evidence from them.

In this case there was exactly the same impenetrable mystery and absence of motive which had characterized the murder of Professor von Hopstein. In the dead man's pocket there was found a note-book containing a considerable sum in gold and several very valuable bills, but no attempt had been made to rifle him. Supposing that any one to whom he had lent money (and this was the first idea which occurred to the police) had taken this means of evading his debt, it was hardly conceivable that he would have left such a valuable spoil untouched. Schiffer lodged with a widow named Gruga, at 49 Marie Theresa Strasse, and the evidence of his landlady and her children showed that he had remained shut up in his room the whole of the preceding day in a state of deep dejection, caused by the suspicion which the populace had fastened upon him. She had heard him go out about eleven o'clock at night for his last and fatal walk, and as he had a latch-key she had gone to bed without waiting for

him. His object in choosing such a late hour for a ramble obviously was that he did not consider himself safe if recognized in the streets.

The occurrence of this second murder so shortly after the first threw not only the town of Buda-Pesth, but the whole of Hungary, into a terrible state of excitement, and even of terror. Vague dangers seemed to hang over the head of every man. The only parallel to this intense feeling was to be found in our own country at the time of the Williams murders described by de Quincey. There were so many resemblances between the cases of von Hopstein and of Schiffer that no one could doubt that there existed a connection between the two. The absence of object and of robbery, the utter want of any clue to the assassin, and, lastly, the ghastly nature of the wounds, evidently inflicted by the same or a similar weapon, all pointed in one direction. Things were in this state when the incidents which I am now about to relate occurred, and in order to make them intelligible I must lead up to them from a fresh point of departure.

Otto von Schlegel was a younger son of the old Silesian family of that name. His father had originally destined him for the army, but at the advice of his teachers, who saw the surprising talent of the youth, had sent him to the University of Buda-Pesth to be educated in medicine. Here young Schlegel carried everything before him, and promised to be one of the most brilliant graduates turned out for many a year. Though a hard reader, he was no bookworm, but an active, powerful young fellow, full of animal spirits and vivacity, and extremely popular among his fellow-students.

The New Year examinations were at hand, and Schlegel was working hard – so hard that even the strange murders in the town, and the general excitement in men's minds, failed to turn his thoughts from his studies. Upon Christmas Eve, when every house was illuminated, and the roar of drinking songs came from the Bierkeller in the Studentquartier, he refused the many invitations to roystering suppers which were showered upon him and went off with his books under his arm to the rooms of Leopold Strauss, to work with him into the small hours of the morning.

Strauss and Schlegel were bosom friends. They were both Silesians, and had known each other from boyhood. Their affection had become proverbial in the University. Strauss was almost as distinguished a student as Schlegel, and there had been many a tough struggle for academic honours between the two fellow-countrymen, which had only served to strengthen their friendship by a bond of mutual respect. Schlegel admired the dogged pluck and never-failing good temper of his old playmate; while the latter considered Schlegel, with his many talents and brilliant versatility, the most accomplished of mortals.

The friends were still working together, the one reading from a volume on anatomy, the other holding a skull and marking off the various parts mentioned in the text, when the deep-toned bell of St.Gregory's church struck the hour of midnight.

"Hark to that!" said Schlegel, snapping up the book and stretching out his long legs towards the cheery fire. "Why, it's Christmas morning, old friend! May it not be the last that we spend together!"

"May we have passed all these confounded examinations before another one comes!" answered Strauss. "But see here, Otto, one bottle of wine will not be amiss. I have laid one up on purpose"; and with a smile on his honest, South German face, he pulled out a long-necked bottle of Rhenish from amongst a pile of books and bones in the corner.

"It is a night to be comfortable indoors," said Otto von Schlegel, looking out at the snowy landscape, "for 'tis bleak and bitter enough outside. Good health, Leopold!"

"*Lebe hoch!*" replied his companion. "It is a comfort indeed to forget sphenoid bones and ethmoid bones, if it be but for a moment. And what is the news of the corps, Otto? Has Graube fought the Swabian?"

"They fight tomorrow," said von Schlegel. "I fear that our man will lose his beauty, for he is short in the arm. Yet activity and skill may do much for him. They say his hanging guard is perfection."

"And what else is the news amongst the students?" asked Strauss.

"They talk, I believe, of nothing but the murders. But I have worked hard of late, as you know, and hear little of the gossip."

"Have you had time," inquired Strauss, "to look over the books and the weapons which our dear old Professor was so concerned about the very day he met his death? They say they are well worth a visit."

"I saw them today," said Schlegel, lighting his pipe. "Reinmaul, the janitor, showed me over the store-room, and I helped to label many of them from the original catalogue of Graf Schulling's museum. As far as we can see, there is but one article missing of all the collection."

"One missing!" exclaimed Strauss. "That would grieve old von Hopstein's ghost. Is it anything of value?"

"It is described as an antique hatchet, with a head of steel and a handle of chased silver. We have applied to the railway company, and no doubt it will be found."

"I trust so," echoed Strauss; and the conversation drifted off into other channels. The fire was burning low and the bottle of Rhenish was empty before the two friends rose from their chairs, and von Schlegel prepared to depart.

"Ugh! It's a bitter night!" he said, standing on the doorstep and folding his cloak round him. "Why, Leopold, you have your cap on. You are not going out, are you?"

"Yes, I am coming with you," said Strauss, shutting the door behind him. "I feel heavy," he continued, taking his friend's arm, and walking down the street with him. "I think a walk as far as your lodgings, in the crisp, frosty air, is just the thing to set me right."

The two students went down Stephen Strasse together and across Julien Platz, talking on a variety of topics. As they passed the corner of the Grand Platz, however, where Schiffer had been found dead, the conversation turned naturally upon the murder.

"That's where they found him," remarked von Schlegel, pointing to the fatal spot.

"Perhaps the murderer is near us now," said Strauss. "Let us hasten on."

They both turned to go, when von Schlegel gave a sudden cry of pain and stooped down.

"Something has cut through my boot!" he cried; and feeling about with his hand in the snow, he pulled out a small, glistening battle-axe, made apparently entirely of metal. It had been lying with the blade turned slightly upwards, so as to cut the foot of the student when he trod upon it.

"The weapon of the murderer!" he ejaculated.

"The silver hatchet from the museum!" cried Strauss in the same breath.

There could be no doubt that it was both the one and the other. There could not be two such curious weapons, and the character of the wounds was just such as would be inflicted by a similar instrument. The murderer had evidently thrown it aside after committing the dreadful deed, and it had lain concealed in the snow some twenty metres from the spot ever since. It was extraordinary that of all the people who had passed and repassed none had discovered it; but the snow was deep, and it was a little off the beaten track.

"What are we to do with it?" said von Schlegel, holding it in his hand. He shuddered as he noticed by the light of the moon that the head of it was all dabbled with dark-brown stains.

"Take it to the Commissary of Police," suggested Strauss.

"He'll be in bed now. Still, I think you are right. But it is nearly four o'clock. I will wait until morning, and take it round before breakfast. Meanwhile, I must carry it with me to my lodgings."

"That is the best plan," said his friend; and the two walked on together talking of the remarkable find which they had made. When they came to Schlegel's door, Strauss said good-bye, refusing an invitation to

go in, and walked briskly down the street in the direction of his own lodgings.

Schlegel was stooping down putting the key into the lock, when a strange change came over him. He trembled violently, and dropped the key from his quivering fingers. His right hand closed convulsively round the handle of the silver hatchet, and his eye followed the retreating figure of his friend with a vindictive glare. In spite of the coldness of the night the perspiration streamed down his face. For a moment he seemed to struggle with himself, holding his hand up to his throat as if he were suffocating. Then, with crouching body and rapid, noiseless steps, he crept after his late companion.

Strauss was plodding sturdily along through the snow, humming snatches of a student song, and little dreaming of the dark figure which pursued him. At the Grand Platz it was forty yards behind him; at the Julien Platz it was but twenty; in Stephen Strasse it was ten, and gaining on him with panther-like rapidity. Already it was almost within arm's length of the unsuspecting man, and the hatchet glittered coldly in the moonlight, when some slight noise must have reached Strauss's ears, for he faced suddenly round upon his pursuer. He started and uttered an exclamation as his eye met the white, set face, with flashing eyes and clenched teeth, which seemed to be suspended in the air behind him.

"What, Otto!" he exclaimed, recognizing his friend. "Art thou ill? You look pale. Come with me to my-– Ah! hold, you madman, hold! Drop that axe! Drop it, I say, or by Heaven I'll choke you!"

Von Schlegel had thrown himself upon him with a wild cry and uplifted weapon; but the student was stout-hearted and resolute. He rushed inside the sweep of the hatchet and caught his assailant round the waist, narrowly escaping a blow which would have cloven his head. The two staggered for a moment in a deadly wrestle, Schlegel endeavouring to shorten his weapon; but Strauss with a desperate wrench managed to bring him to the ground, and they rolled together in the snow, Strauss clinging to the other's right arm and shouting frantically for assistance. It was as well that he did so, for Schlegel would certainly have succeeded in freeing his arm had it not been for the arrival of two stalwart gendarmes, attracted by the uproar. Even then the three of them found it difficult to overcome the maniacal strength of Schlegel, and they were utterly unable to wrench the silver hatchet from his grasp. One of the gendarmes, however, had a coil of rope round his waist, with which he rapidly secured the student's arms to his sides. In this way, half pushed, half dragged, he was conveyed, in spite of furious cries and frenzied struggles, to the central police station.

Strauss assisted in coercing his former friend, and accompanied the police to the station; protesting loudly at the same time against any

unnecessary violence, and giving it as his opinion that a lunatic asylum would be a more fitting place for the prisoner. The events of the last half-hour had been so sudden and inexplicable that he felt quite dazed himself. What did it all mean? It was certain that his old friend from boyhood had attempted to murder him, and had nearly succeeded. Was von Schlegel then the murderer of Professor von Hopstein and of the Bohemian Jew? Strauss felt that it was impossible, for the Jew was not even known to him, and the Professor had been his especial favorite. He followed mechanically to the police station, lost in grief and amazement.

Inspector Baumgarten, one of the most energetic and best known of the police officials, was on duty in the absence of the Commissary. He was a wiry, little, active man, quiet and retiring in his habits, but possessed of great sagacity and a vigilance which never relaxed. Now, though he had had a six hours' vigil, he sat as erect as ever, with his pen behind his ear, at his official desk, while his friend, Sub-inspector Winkel, snored in a chair at the side of the stove. Even the inspector's usually immovable features betrayed surprise, however, when the door was flung open and von Schlegel was dragged in with pale face and disordered clothes, the silver hatchet still grasped firmly in his hand. Still more surprised was he when Strauss and the gendarmes gave their account, which was duly entered in the official register.

"Young man, young man," said Inspector Baumgarten, laying down his pen and fixing his eyes sternly upon the prisoner, "this is pretty work for Christmas morning; why have you done this thing?"

"God knows!" cried von Schlegel, covering his face with his hands and dropping the hatchet. A change had come over him, his fury and excitement were gone, and he seemed utterly prostrated with grief.

"You have rendered yourself liable to a strong suspicion of having committed the other murders which have disgraced our city."

"No, no, indeed!" said von Schlegel, earnestly. "God forbid!"

"At least you are guilty of attempting the life of Herr Leopold Strauss."

"The dearest friend I have in the world," groaned the student. "Oh, how could I! How could I!"

"His being your friend makes your crime ten times more heinous," said the inspector, severely. "Remove him for the remainder of the night to the— But steady! Who comes here?"

The door was pushed open, and a man came into the room, so haggard and care-worn that he looked more like a ghost than a human being. He tottered as he walked, and had to clutch at the backs of the chairs as he approached the inspector's desk. It was hard to recognize in this miserable-looking object the once cheerful and rubicund sub-Curator

of the Museum and Privat-docent of Chemistry, Herr Wilhelm Schlessinger. The practised eye of Baumgarten, however, was not to be baffled by any change.

"Good morning, mein Herr," he said; "you are up early. No doubt the reason is that you have heard that one of your students, von Schlegel, is arrested for attempting the life of Leopold Strauss?"

"No; I have come for myself," said Schlessinger, speaking huskily, and putting his hand up to his throat. "I have come to ease my soul of the weight of a great sin, though, God knows, an unmeditated one. It was I who-– But merciful heavens! – there it is – the horrid thing! Oh, that I had never seen it!"

He shrank back in a paroxysm of terror, glaring at the silver hatchet where it lay upon the floor, and pointing at it with his emaciated hand.

"There it lies!" he yelled. "Look at it! It has come to condemn me. See that brown rust on it! Do you know what that is? That is the blood of my dearest, best friend, Professor von Hopstein. I saw it gush over the very handle as I drove the blade through his brain. Mein Gott, I see it now!"

"Sub-inspector Winkel," said Baumgarten, endeavouring to preserve his official austerity, "you will arrest this man, charged on his own confession with the murder of the late Professor. I also deliver into your hands von Schlegel here, charged with a murderous assault upon Herr Strauss. You will also keep this hatchet" – here he picked it from the floor – "which has apparently been used for both crimes."

Wilhelm Schlessinger had been leaning against the table, with a face of ashy paleness. As the inspector ceased speaking, he looked up excitedly.

"What did you say?" he cried. "Von Schlegel attack Strauss! The two dearest friends in the college! I slay my old master! It is magic, I say; it is a charm! There is a spell upon us! It is – ah, I have it! It is that hatchet – that thrice accursed hatchet!" and he pointed convulsively at the weapon which Inspector Baumgarten still held in his hand.

The inspector smiled contemptuously.

"Restrain yourself, mein Herr," he said. "You do but make your case worse by such wild excuses for the wicked deed you confess to. Magic and charms are not known in the legal vocabulary, as my friend Winkel will assure you."

"I know not," remarked his sub-inspector, shrugging his broad shoulders. "There are many strange things in the world, who knows but that–"

"What!" roared Inspector Baumgarten, furiously. "You would undertake to contradict me! You would set up your opinion! You would be

the champion of these accused murderers! Fool, miserable fool, your hour has come!" and rushing at the astonished Winkel, he dealt a blow at him with the silver hatchet which would certainly have justified his last assertion had it not been that, in his fury, he overlooked the lowness of the rafters above his head. The blade of the hatchet struck one of these, and remained there quivering, while the handle was splintered into a thousand pieces.

"What have I done?" gasped Baumgarten falling back into his chair. "What have I done?"

"You have proved Herr Schlessinger's words to be correct," said von Schlegel, stepping forward, for the astonished policemen had let go their grasp of him. "That is what you have done. Against reason, science, and everything else though it be, their is a charm at work. There must be! Strauss, old boy, you know I would not, in my right senses, hurt one hair of your head. And you, Schlessinger, we both know you loved the old man who is dead. And you, Inspector Baumgarten, you would not willingly have struck your friend, the sub-inspector?"

"Not for the whole world," groaned the inspector, covering his face with his hands.

"Then is it not clear? But now, thank Heaven, the accursed thing is broken, and can never do harm again. But see, what is that?"

Right in the centre of the room was lying a thin brown cylinder of parchment. One glance at the fragments of the handle of the weapon showed that it had been hollow. This roll of paper had apparently been hidden away inside the metal case thus formed, having been introduced through a small hole, which had been afterwards soldered up. Von Schlegel opened the document. The writing upon it was almost illegible from age; but as far as they could make out it stood thus, in mediaeval German:

"*Diese Waffe benutzte Max von Erlichingen um Johanna Bodeck zu ermordern, deshalb beschuldige Ich, Johann Bodeck, mittelst der macht welche mir als mitglied des Concils des Rothen Kreuzes verliehen wurde, dieselbe mit dieser unthat. Mag sie anderen denselben schmerz verursachen, den sie mir verursacht hat. Mag Jede hand die sie ergreift mit dem blut eines freundes gerothet sein.*

Immer uebel – niemals gut,
Geroethet mit des freundes blut."

Which may be roughly translated:

"*This weapon was used by Max von Erlichingen for the murder of Joanna Bodeck. Therefore do I, Johann Bodeck, accurse it by the power which has been bequeathed to me as one of the Council of the Rosy Cross. May it deal to others the grief which it has dealt to me! May every hand that grasps it be reddened in the blood of a friend!*

"Ever evil, never good,
Reddened with a loved one's blood."

There was a dead silence in the room when von Schlegel had finished spelling out this strange document. As he put it down Strauss laid his hand affectionately upon his arm.

"No such proof is needed by me, old friend," he said. "At the very moment that you struck at me I forgave you in my heart. I well know that if the poor Professor were in the room he would say as much to Herr Wilhelm Schlessinger."

"Gentlemen," remarked the inspector, standing up and resuming his official tones, "this affair, strange as it is, must be treated according to rule and precedent. Sub-inspector Winkel, as your superior officer, I command you to arrest me upon a charge of murderously assaulting you. You will commit me to prison for the night, together with Herr von Schlegel and Herr Wilhelm Schlessinger. We shall take our trial at the coming sitting of the judges. In the meantime take care of that piece of evidence" – pointing to the piece of parchment – "and, while I am away, devote your time and energy to utilizing the clue you have obtained in discovering who it was who slew Herr Schiffer, the Bohemian Jew."

The one missing link in the chain of evidence was soon supplied. On the 28th of December the wife of Reinmaul the janitor, coming into the bed-room after a short absence, found her husband hanging lifeless from a hook in the wall. He had tied a long bolster-case round his neck and stood upon a chair in order to commit the fatal deed. On the table was a note in which he confessed to the murder of Schiffer the Jew, adding that the deceased had been his oldest friend, and that he had slain him without premeditation, in obedience to some uncontrollable impulse. Remorse and grief, he said, had driven him to self-destruction; and he wound up his confession by commending his soul to the mercy of Heaven.

The trial which ensued was one of the strangest which ever occurred in the whole history of jurisprudence. It was in vain that the prosecuting counsel urged the improbability of the explanation offered by the prisoners, and deprecated the introduction of such an element as magic into a nineteenth-century law-court. The chain of facts was too strong, and the prisoners were unanimously acquitted. "This silver hatchet," remarked

the judge in his summing up, "has hung untouched upon the wall in the mansion of the Graf von Sculling for nearly two hundred years. The shocking manner in which he met his death at the hands of his favorite house steward is still fresh in your recollection. It has come out in evidence that, a few days before the murder, the steward had overhauled the old weapons and cleaned them. In doing this he must have touched the handle of this hatchet. Immediately afterward he slew his master, whom he had served faithfully for twenty years. The weapon then came, in conformity with the Count's will, to Buda-Pesth, where, at the station, Herr Wilhelm Schlessinger grasped it, and, within two hours, used it against the person of the deceased Professor. The next man whom we find touching it is the janitor Reinmaul, who helped to remove the weapons from the cart to the store-room. At the first opportunity he buried it in the body of his friend Schiffer. We then have the attempted murder of Strauss by Schlegel, and of Winkel by Inspector Baumgarten, all immediately following the taking of the hatchet into the hand. Lastly, comes the providential discovery of the extraordinary document which has been read to you by the clerk of the court. I invite your most careful consideration, gentlemen of the jury, to this chain of facts, knowing that you will find a verdict according to your consciences without fear and without favor."

Perhaps the most interesting piece of evidence to the English reader, though it found few supporters among the Hungarian audience, was that of Dr.Langemann, the eminent medico-jurist, who has written textbooks upon metallurgy and toxicology. He said:

"I am not so sure, gentlemen, that there is need to fall back upon necromancy or the black art for an explanation of what has occurred. What I say is merely a hypothesis, without proof of any sort, but in a case so extraordinary every suggestion may be of value. The Rosicrucians, to whom allusion is made in this paper, were the most profound chemists of the early Middle Ages, and included the principal alchemists whose names have descended to us. Much as chemistry has advanced, there are some points in which the ancients were ahead of us, and in none more so than in the manufacture of poisons of subtle and deadly action. This man Bodeck, as one of the elders of the Rosicrucians, possessed, no doubt, the recipe of many such mixtures, some of which, like the *aqua tofana* of the Medicis, would poison by penetrating through the pores of the skin. It is conceivable that the handle of this silver hatchet has been anointed by some preparation which is a diffusible poison, having the effect upon the human body of bringing on sudden and acute attacks of homicidal mania. In such attacks it is well known that the madman's rage is turned against those whom he loved best when sane. I have, as I remarked before, no

proof to support me in my theory, and simply put it forward for what it is worth."

With this extract from the speech of the learned and ingenious professor, we may close the account of this famous trial.

The broken pieces of the silver hatchet were thrown into a deep pond, a clever poodle being employed to carry them in his mouth, as no one would touch them for fear some of the infection might still hang about them. The piece of parchment was preserved in the museum of the University. As to Strauss and Schlegel, Winkel and Baumgarten, they continued the best of friends and are so still for all I know to the contrary. Schlessinger became surgeon of a cavalry regiment, and was shot at the battle of Sadowa five years later, while rescuing the wounded under a heavy fire. By his last injunctions his little patrimony was to be sold to erect a marble obelisk over the grave of Professor von Hopstein.

1883

LOT N^{o} 249,

or Strange Doings in Oxford

Of the dealings of Edward Bellingham with William Monkhouse Lee, and of the cause of the great terror of Abercrombie Smith, it may be that no absolute and final judgment will ever be delivered. It is true that we have the full and clear narrative of Smith himself, and such corroboration as he could look for from Thomas Styles the servant, from the Reverend Plumptree Peterson, Fellow of Old's, and from such other people as chanced to gain some passing glance at this or that incident in a singular chain of events. Yet, in the main, the story must rest upon Smith alone, and the most will think that it is more likely that one brain, however outwardly sane, has some subtle warp in its texture, some strange flaw in its workings, than that the path of Nature has been overstepped in open day in so famed a centre of learning and light as the University of Oxford. Yet when we think how narrow and how devious this path of Nature is, how dimly we can trace it, for all our lamps of science, and how from the darkness which girds it round great and terrible possibilities loom ever shadowly upwards, it is a bold and confident man who will put a limit to the strange by-paths into which the human spirit may wander.

In a certain wing of what we will call Old College in Oxford there is a corner turret of an exceeding great age. The heavy arch which spans the open door has bent downwards in the centre under the weight of its years, and the grey, lichen-blotched blocks of stone are bound and knitted together with withes and strands of ivy, as though the old mother had set herself to brace them up against wind and weather. From the door a stone stair curves upward spirally, passing two landings and terminating in a third one, its steps all shapeless and hollowed by the tread of so many generations of the seekers after knowledge. Life has flowed like water down this winding stair, and, waterlike, has left these smooth-worn grooves behind it. From the long-gowned, pedantic scholars of Plantagenet days down to the young bloods of a later age, how full and strong had been that tide of young, English life. And what was left now of all those hopes, those strivings, those fiery energies, save here and there in some old-world churchyard a few scratches upon a stone, and perchance a handful of dust in a mouldering coffin? Yet here were the silent stair and the grey, old wall, with bend and saltire and many another heraldic device still to be read upon its surface, like grotesque shadows thrown back from the days that had passed.

In the month of May, in the year 1884, three young men occupied the sets of rooms which opened on to the separate landings of the old stair. Each set consisted simply of a sitting-room and of a bedroom, while the two corresponding rooms upon the ground-floor were used, the one as a coal-cellar, and the other as the living-room of the servant, or scout, Thomas Styles, whose duty it was to wait upon the three men above him. To right and to left was a line of lecture-rooms and of offices, so that the dwellers in the old turret enjoyed a certain seclusion, which made the chambers popular among the more studious undergraduates. Such were the three who occupied them now – Abercrombie Smith above, Edward Bellingham beneath him, and William Monkhouse Lee upon the lowest storey.

It was ten o'clock on a bright, spring night, and Abercrombie Smith lay back in his arm-chair, his feet upon the fender, and his briar-root pipe between his lips. In a similar chair, and equally at his ease, there lounged on the other side of the fireplace his old school friend Jephro Hastie. Both men were in flannels, for they had spent their evening upon the river, but apart from their dress no one could look at their hard-cut, alert faces without seeing that they were open-air men – men whose minds and tastes turned naturally to all that was manly and robust. Hastie, indeed, was stroke of his college boat, and Smith was an even better oar, but a coming examination had already cast its shadow over him and held him to his work, save for the few hours a week which health demanded. A litter of medical books upon the table, with scattered bones, models, and anatomical plates, pointed to the extent as well as the nature of his studies, while a couple of single-sticks and a set of boxing-gloves above the mantelpiece hinted at the means by which, with Hastie's help, he might take his exercise in its most compressed and least-distant form. They knew each other very well – so well that they could sit now in that soothing silence which is the very highest development of companionship.

"Have some whisky," said Abercrombie Smith at last between two cloudbursts. "Scotch in the jug and Irish in the bottle."

"No, thanks. I'm in for the sculls. I don't liquor when I'm training. How about you?"

"I'm reading hard. I think it best to leave it alone."

Hastie nodded, and they relapsed into a contented silence.

"By the way, Smith," asked Hastie, presently, "have you made the acquaintance of either of the fellows on your stair yet?"

"Just a nod when we pass. Nothing more."

"Hum! I should be inclined to let it stand at that. I know something of them both. Not much, but as much as I want. I don't think I should take

them to my bosom if I were you. Not that there's much amiss with Monkhouse Lee."

"Meaning the thin one ?"

"Precisely. He is a gentlemanly little fellow. I don't think there is any vice in him. But then you can't know him without knowing Bellingham."

"Meaning the fat one?"

"Yes, the fat one. And he's a man whom I, for one, would rather not know."

Abercrombie Smith raised his eyebrows and glanced across at his companion.

"What's up, then?" he asked. "Drink? Cards? Cad? You used not to be censorious."

"Ah! you evidently don't know the man, or you wouldn't ask. There's something damnable about him – something reptilian. My gorge always rises at him. I should put him down as a man with secret vices – an evil liver. He's no fool, though. They say that he is one of the best men in his line that they have ever had in the college."

"Medicine or classics?"

"Eastern languages. He's a demon at them. Chillingworth met him somewhere above the second cataract last long, and he told me that he just prattled to the Arabs as if he had been born and nursed and weaned among them. He talked Coptic to the Copts, and Hebrew to the Jews, and Arabic to the Bedouins, and they were all ready to kiss the hem of his frock-coat. There are some old hermit Johnnies up in those parts who sit on rocks and scowl and spit at the casual stranger. Well, when they saw this chap Bellingham, before he had said five words they just lay down on their bellies and wriggled. Chillingworth said that he never saw anything like it. Bellingham seemed to take it as his right, too, and strutted about among them and talked down to them like a Dutch uncle. Pretty good for an undergrad. of Old's, wasn't it? "

"Why do you say you can't know Lee without knowing Bellingham?"

"Because Bellingham is engaged to his sister Eveline. Such a bright little girl, Smith! I know the whole family well. It's disgusting to see that brute with her. A toad and a dove, that's what they always remind me of."

Abercrombie Smith grinned and knocked his ashes out against the side of the grate.

"You show every card in your hand, old chap," said he. "What a prejudiced, green-eyed, evil-thinking old man it is! You have really nothing against the fellow except that."

"Well, I've known her ever since she was as long as that cherry-wood pipe, and I don't like to see her taking risks. And it is a risk. He looks beastly. And he has a beastly temper, a venomous temper. You remember his row with Long Norton?"

"No; you always forget that I am a freshman."

"Ah, it was last winter. Of course. Well, you know the towpath along by the river. There were several fellows going along it, Bellingham in front, when they came on an old market-woman coming the other way. It had been raining – you know what those fields are like when it has rained – and the path ran between the river and a great puddle that was nearly as broad. Well, what does this swine do but keep the path, and push the old girl into the mud, where she and her marketings came to terrible grief. It was a blackguard thing to do, and Long Norton, who is as gentle a fellow as ever stepped, told him what he thought of it. One word led to another, and it ended in Norton laying his stick across the fellow's shoulders. There was the deuce of a fuss about it, and it's a treat to see the way in which Bellingham looks at Norton when they meet now. By Jove, Smith, it's nearly eleven o'clock!"

"No hurry. Light your pipe again."

"Not I. I'm supposed to be in training. Here I've been sitting gossiping when I ought to have been safely tucked up. I'll borrow your skull, if you can share it. Williams has had mine for a month. I'll take the little bones of your ear, too, if you are sure you won't need them. Thanks very much. Never mind a bag, I can carry them very well under my arm. Good night, my son, and take my tip as to your neighbour."

When Hastie, bearing his anatomical plunder, had clattered off down the winding stair, Abercrombie Smith hurled his pipe into the wastepaper basket, and drawing his chair nearer to the lamp, plunged into a formidable, green-covered volume, adorned with great, coloured maps of that strange, internal kingdom of which we are the hapless and helpless monarchs. Though a freshman at Oxford, the student was not so in medicine, for he had worked for four years at Glasgow and at Berlin, and this coming examination would place him finally as a member of his profession. With his firm mouth, broad forehead, and clear-cut, somewhat hard-featured face, he was a man who, if he had no brilliant talent, was yet so dogged, so patient, and so strong that he might in the end overtop a more showy genius. A man who can hold his own among Scotchmen and North Germans is not a man to be easily set back. Smith had left a name at Glasgow and at Berlin, and he was bent now upon doing as much at Oxford, if hard work and devotion could accomplish it.

He had sat reading for about an hour, and the hands of the noisy carriage clock upon the side-table were rapidly closing together upon the

twelve, when a sudden sound fell upon the student's ear – a sharp, rather shrill sound, like the hissing intake of a man's breath who gasps under some strong emotion. Smith laid down his book and slanted his ear to listen. There was no one on either side or above him, so that the interruption came certainly from the neighbour beneath – the same neighbour of whom Hastie had given so unsavoury an account. Smith knew him only as a flabby, pale-faced man of silent and studious habits, a man whose lamp threw a golden bar from the old turret even after he had extinguished his own. This community in lateness had formed a certain silent bond between them. It was soothing to Smith when the hours stole on towards dawning to feel that there was another so close who set as small a value upon his sleep as he did. Even now, as his thoughts turned towards him, Smith's feelings were kindly. Hastie was a good fellow, but he was rough, strong-fibred, with no imagination or sympathy. He could not tolerate departures from what he looked upon as the model type of manliness. If a man could not be measured by a public-school standard, then he was beyond the pale with Hastie. Like so many who are themselves robust, he was apt to confuse the constitution with the character, to ascribe to want of principle what was really a want of circulation. Smith, with his stronger mind, knew his friend's habit, and made allowance for it now as his thoughts turned towards the man beneath him.

There was no return of the singular sound, and Smith was about to turn to his work once more, when suddenly there broke out in the silence of the night a hoarse cry, a positive scream – the call of a man who is moved and shaken beyond all control. Smith sprang out of his chair and dropped his book. He was a man of fairly firm fibre, but there was something in this sudden, uncontrollable shriek of horror which chilled his blood and pringled in his skin. Coming in such a place and at such an hour, it brought a thousand fantastic possibilities into his head. Should he rush down, or was it better to wait? He had all the national hatred of making a scene, and he knew so little of his neighbour that he would not lightly intrude upon his affairs. For a moment he stood in doubt and even as he balanced the matter there was a quick rattle of footsteps upon the stairs, and young Monkhouse Lee, half-dressed and as white as ashes, burst into his room.

"Come down!" he gasped. "Bellingham's ill."

Abercrombie Smith followed him closely downstairs into the sitting-room which was beneath his own, and intent as he was upon the matter in hand, he could not but take an amazed glance around him as he crossed the threshold. It was such a chamber as he had never seen before – a museum rather than a study. Walls and ceiling were thickly covered with

a thousand strange relics from Egypt and the East. Tall, angular figures bearing burdens or weapons stalked in an uncouth frieze round the apartments. Above were bull-headed, stork-headed, cat-headed, owl-headed statues, with viper-crowned, almond-eyed monarchs, and strange, beetle-like deities cut out of the blue Egyptian lapis lazuli. Horus and Isis and Osiris peeped down from every niche and shelf, while across the ceiling a true son of Old Nile, a great, hanging-jawed crocodile, was slung in a double noose.

In the centre of this singular chamber was a large, square table, littered with papers, bottles, and the dried leaves of some graceful, palm-like plant. These varied objects had all been heaped together in order to make room for a mummy case, which had been conveyed from the wall, as was evident from the gap there, and laid across the front of the table. The mummy itself, a horrid, black, withered thing, like a charred head on a gnarled bush, was lying half out of the case, with its claw-like hand and bony forearm resting upon the table. Propped up against the sarcophagus was an old, yellow scroll of papyrus, and in front of it, in a wooden arm-chair, sat the owner of the room, his head thrown back, his widely opened eyes directed in a horrified stare to the crocodile above him, and his blue, thick lips puffing loudly with every expiration.

"My God! he's dying!" cried Monkhouse Lee, distractedly.

He was a slim, handsome young fellow, olive-skinned and dark-eyed, of a Spanish rather than of an English type, with a Celtic intensity of manner which contrasted with the Saxon phlegm of Abercrombie Smith.

"Only a faint, I think," said the medical student. "Just give me a hand with him. You take his feet. Now on to the sofa. Can you kick all those little wooden devils off? What a litter it is! Now he will be all rignt if we undo his collar and give him some water. What has he been up to at all?"

"I don't know, I heard him cry out. I ran up. I know him pretty well, you know. It is very good of you to come down."

"His heart is going like a pair of castanets," said Smith, laying his hand on the breast of the unconscious man. "He seems to me to be frightened all to pieces. Chuck the water over him! What a face he has got on him!"

It was indeed a strange and most repellent face, for colour and outline were equally unnatural. It was white, not with the ordinary pallor of fear, but with an absolutely bloodless white, like the under side of a sole. He was very fat, but gave the impression of having at some time been considerably fatter, for his skin hung loosely in creases and folds, and was shot with a meshwork of wrinkles. Short, stubbly brown hair bristled up from his scalp, with a pair of thick, wrinkled ears protruding at the sides.

His light-grey eyes were still open, the pupils dilated and the balls projecting in a fixed and horrid stare. It seemed to Smith as he looked down upon him that he had never seen Nature's danger signals flying so plainly upon a man's countenance, and his thoughts turned more seriously to the warning which Hastie had given him an hour before.

"What the deuce can have frightened him so?" he asked.

"It's the mummy."

"The mummy? How, then?"

"I don't know. It's beastly and morbid. I wish he would drop it. It's the second fright he has given me. It was the same last winter. I found him just like this, with that horrid thing in front of him."

"What does he want with the mummy, then?"

"Oh, he's a crank, you know. It's his hobby. He knows more about these things than any man in England. But I wish he wouldn't! Ah, he's beginning to come to."

A faint tinge of colour had begun to steal back into Bellingham's ghastly cheeks, and his eyelids shivered like a sail after a calm. He clasped and unclasped his hands, drew a long, thin breath between his teeth, and suddenly jerking up his head, threw a glance of recognition around him. As his eyes fell upon the mummy, he sprang off the sofa, seized the roll of papyrus, thrust it into a drawer, turned the key, and then staggered back on to the sofa.

"What's up?" he asked. "What do you chaps want?"

"You've been shrieking out and making no end of a fuss," said Monkhouse Lee. "If our neighbour here from above hadn't come down, I'm sure I don't know what I should have done with you."

"Ah, it's Abercrombie Smith," said Bellingham, glancing up at him. "How very good of you to come in! What a fool I am! Oh, my God, what a fool I am!"

He sank his head on to his hands, and burst into peal after peal of hysterical laughter.

"Look here! Drop it!" cried Smith, shaking him roughly by the shoulder. "Your nerves are all in a jangle. You must drop these little midnight games with mummies, or you'll be going off your chump. You're all on wires now."

"I wonder," said Bellingham, "whether you would be as cool as I am if you had seen —"

"What then? "

"Oh, nothing. I meant that I wonder if you could sit up at night with a mummy without trying your nerves. I have no doubt that you are quite right. I dare say that I have been taking it out of myself too much lately.

But I am all right now. Please don't go, though. Just wait for a few minutes until I am quite myself."

"The room is very close," remarked Lee, throwing open the window and letting in the cool night air.

"It's balsamic resin," said Bellingham. He lifted up one of the dried palmate leaves from the table and frizzled it over the chimney of the lamp. It broke away into heavy smoke wreaths, and a pungent, biting odour filled the chamber. "It's the sacred plant – the plant of the priests," he remarked. "Do you know anything of Eastern languages, Smith?"

"Nothing at all. Not a word."

The answer seemed to lift a weight from the Egyptologist's mind.

"By the way," he continued, "how long was it from the time that you ran down, until I came to my senses?"

"Not long. Some four or five minutes."

"I thought it could not be very long," said he, drawing a long breath. "But what a strange thing unconsciousness is! There is no measurement to it. I could not tell from my own sensations if it were seconds or weeks. Now that gentleman on the table was packed up in the days of the eleventh dynasty, some forty centuries ago, and yet if he could find his tongue, he would tell us that this lapse of time has been but a closing of the eyes and a reopening of them. He is a singularly fine mummy, Smith."

Smith stepped over to the table and looked down with a professional eye at the black and twisted form in front of him. The features, though horribly discoloured, were perfect, and two little nut-like eyes still lurked in the depths of the black, hollow sockets. The blotched skin was drawn tightly from bone to bone, and a tangled wrap of black, coarse hair fell over the ears. Two thin teeth, like those of a rat, overlay the shrivelled lower lip. In its crouching position, with bent joints and craned head, there was a suggestion of energy about the horrid thing which made Smith's gorge rise. The gaunt ribs, with their parchment-like covering, were exposed, and the sunken, leaden-hued abdomen, with the long slit where the embalmer had left his mark; but the lower limbs were wrapped round with coarse, yellow bandages. A number of little clove-like pieces of myrrh and of cassia were sprinkled over the body, and lay scattered on inside of the case.

"I don't know his name," said Bellingham, passing his hand over the shrivelled head. "You see the outer sarcophagus with the inscriptions is missing. Lot 249 is all the title he has now. You see it printed on his case. That was his number in the auction at which I picked him up."

"He has been a very pretty sort of fellow in his day," remarked Abercrombie Smith.

"He has been a giant. His mummy is six feet seven in length, and that would be a giant over there, for they were never a very robust race. Feel these great, knotted bones, too. He would be a nasty fellow to tackle."

"Perhaps these very hands helped to build the stones into the pyramids," suggested Monkhouse Lee, looking down with disgust in his eyes at the crooked, unclean talons.

"No fear. This fellow has been pickled in natron, and looked after in the most approved style. They did not serve hodsmen in that fashion. Salt or bitumen was enough for them. It has been calculated that this sort of thing cost about seven hundred and thirty pounds in our money. Our friend was a noble at the least. What do you make of that small inscription near his feet, Smith?"

"I told you that I know no Eastern tongue."

"Ah, so you did. It is the name of the embalmer, I take it. A very conscientious worker he must have been. I wonder how many modern works will survive four thousand years?"

He kept on speaking lightly and rapidly, but it was evident to Abercrombie Smith that he was still palpitating with fear. His hands shook, his lower lip trembled, and look where he would, his eye always came sliding round to his gruesome companion. Through all his fear, however, there was a suspicion of triumph in his tone and manner. His eyes shone, and his footstep, as he paced the room, was brisk and jaunty. He gave the impression of a man who has gone through an ordeal, the marks of which he still bears upon him, but which has helped him to his end.

"You're not going yet?" he cried, as Smith rose from the sofa.

At the prospect of solitude, his fears seemed to crowd back upon him, and he stretched out a hand to detain him.

"Yes, I must go. I have my work to do. You are all right now. I think that with your nervous system you should take up some less morbid study."

"Oh, I am not nervous as a rule; and I have unwrapped mummies before."

"You fainted last time," observed Monkhouse Lee.

"Ah, yes, so I did. Well, I must have a nerve tonic or a course of electricity. You are not going, Lee?"

"I'll do whatever you wish, Ned."

"Then I'll come down with you and have a shake-down on your sofa. Good night, Smith. I am so sorry to have disturbed you with my foolishness."

They shook hands, and as the medical student stumbled up the spiral and irregular stair he heard a key turn in a door, and the steps of his two new acquaintances as they descended to the lower floor.

* * *

In the strange way began the acquaintance between Edward Bellingham and Abercrombie Smith, an acquaintance which the latter, at least, had no desire to push further. Bellingham, however, appeared to have taken a fancy to his rough-spoken neighbour, and made his advances in such a way that he could hardly be repulsed without absolute brutality. Twice he called to thank Smith for his assistance, and many times afterwards he looked in with books, papers and such other civilities as two bachelor neighbours can offer each other. He was, as Smith soon found, a man of wide reading, with catholic tastes and an extraordinary memory. His manner, too, was so pleasing and suave that one came, after a time, to overlook his repellent appearance. For a jaded and wearied man he was no unpleasant companion, and Smith found himself, after a time, looking forward to his visits, and even returning them.

Clever as he undoubtedly was, however, the medical student seemed to detect a dash of insanity in the man. He broke out at times into a high, inflated style of talk which was in contrast with the simplicity of his life.

"It is a wonderful thing," he cried, "to feel that one can command powers of good and of evil – a ministering angel or a demon of vengeance." And again, of Monkhouse Lee, he said, – "Lee is a good fellow, an honest fellow, but he is without strength or ambition. He would not make a fit partner for a man with a great enterprise. He would not make a fit partner for me."

At such hints and innuendoes stolid Smith, puffing solemnly at his pipe, would simply raise his eyebrows and shake his head, with little interjections of medical wisdom as to earlier hours and fresher air.

One habit Bellingham had developed of late which Smith knew to be a frequent herald of a weakening mind. He appeared to be for ever talking to himself. At late hours of the night, when there could be no visitor with him, Smith could still hear his voice beneath him in a low, muffled monologue, sunk almost to a whisper, and yet very audible in the silence. This solitary babbling annoyed and distracted the student, so that he spoke more than once to his neighbour about it. Bellingham, however, flushed up at the charge, and denied curtly that he had uttered a sound;

indeed, he showed more annoyance over the matter than the occasion seemed to demand.

Had Abercrombie Smith had any doubt as to his own ears he had not to go far to find corroboration. Tom Styles, the little wrinkled man-servant who had attended to the wants of the lodgers in the turret for a longer time than any man's memory could carry him, was sorely put to it over the same matter.

"If you please, sir," said he, as he tidied down the top chamber one morning, "do you think Mr.Bellingham is all right, sir?"

"All right, Styles?"

"Yes, sir. Right in his head, sir."

"Why should he not be, then?"

"Well, I don't know, sir. His habits has changed of late. He's not the same man he used to be, though I make free to say that he was never quite one of my gentlemen, like Mr. Hastie or yourself, sir. He's took to talkin' to himself something awful. I wonder it don't disturb you. I don't know what to make of him, sir."

"I don't know what business it is of yours, Styles."

"Well, I takes an interest, Mr.Smith. It may be forward of me, but I can't help it. I feel sometimes as if I was mother and father to my young gentlemen. It all falls on me when things go wrong and the relations come. But Mr.Bellingham, sir. I want to know what it is that walks about his room sometimes when he's out and when the door's locked on the outside."

"Eh? you're talking nonsense, Styles."

"Maybe so, sir; but I heard it more'n once with my own ears."

"Rubbish, Styles."

"Very good, sir. You'll ring the bell if you want me."

Abercrombie Smith gave little heed to the gossip of the old man-servant, but a small incident occurred a few days later which left an unpleasant effect upon his mind, and brought the words of Styles forcibly to his memory.

Bellingham had come up to see him late one night, and was entertaning him with an interesting account of the rock tombs of Beni Hassan in Upper Egypt, when Smith, whose hearing was remarkably acute, distinctly heard the sound of a door opening on the landing below.

"There's some fellow gone in or out of your room," he remarked.

Bellingham sprang up and stood helpless for a moment, with the expression of a man who is half-incredulous and half-afraid.

"I surely locked it. I am almost positive that I locked it," he stammered. "No one could have opened it."

"Why, I hear someone going up the steps now," said Smith.

Bellingham rushed out through the door, slammed it loudly behind him, and hurried down the stairs. About half-way down Smith heard him stop, and thought he caught the sound of whispering. A moment later the door beneath him shut, a key creaked in a lock, and Bellingham, with beads of moisture upon his pale face, ascended the stairs once more, and re-entered the room.

"It's all right," he said, throwing himself down in a chair. "It was that fool of a dog. He had pushed the door open. I don't know how I came to forget to lock it."

"I didn't know you kept a dog," said Smith, looking very thoughtfully at the disturbed face of his companion.

"Yes, I haven't had him long. I must get rid of him. He's a great nuisance."

"He must be, if you find it so hard to shut him up. I should have thought that shutting the door would have been enough, without locking it."

"I want to prevent old Styles from letting him out. He's of some value, you know, and it would be awkward to lose him."

"I am a bit of a dog-fancier myself," said Smith, still gazing hard at his companion from the corner of his eyes. "Perhaps you'll let me have a look at it."

"Certainly. But I am afraid it cannot be tonight; I have an appointment. Is that clock right? Then I am a quarter of an hour late already. You'll excuse me, I am sure."

He picked up his cap and hurried from the room. In spite of his appointment, Smith heard him re-enter his own chamber and lock his door upon the inside.

This interview left a disagreeable impression upon the medical student's mind. Bellingham had lied to him, and lied so clumsily that it looked as if he had desperate reasons for concealing the truth. Smith knew that his neighbour had no dog. He knew, also, that the step which he had heard upon the stairs was not the step of an animal. But if it were not, then what could it be? There was old Style's statement about the something which used to pace the room at times when the owner was absent. Could it be a woman? Smith rather inclined to the view. If so, it would mean disgrace and expulsion to Bellingham if it were discovered by the authorities, so that his anxiety and falsehoods might be accounted for. And yet it was inconceivable that an undergraduate could keep a woman in his rooms without being instantly detected. Be the explanation what it might, there was something ugly about it, and Smith determined, as he turned to his books, to discourage all further attempts at intimacy on the part of his soft-spoken and ill-favoured neighbour.

But his work was destined to interruption that night. He had hardly caught up the broken threads when a firm, heavy footfall came three steps at a time from below, and Hastie, in blazer and flannels, burst into the room.

"Still at it!" said he, plumping down into his wonted arm-chair. "What a chap you are to stew! I believe an earthquake might come and knock Oxford into a cocked hat, and you would sit perfectly placid with your books among the ruins. However, I won't bore you long. Three whiffs of baccy, and I am off."

"What's the news, then?" asked Smith, cramming a plug of bird's-eye into his briar with his forefinger.

"Nothing very much. Wilson made 70 for the freshmen against the eleven. They say that they will play him instead of Buddicomb, for Buddicomb is clean off colour. He used to be able to bowl a little, but it's nothing but half-volleys and long hops now."

"Medium right," suggested Smith, with the intense gravity which comes upon a 'varsity man when he speaks of athletics.

"Inclining to fast, with a work from leg. Comes with the arm about three inches or so. He used to be nasty on a wet wicket. Oh, by the way, have you heard about Long Norton?"

"What's that?"

"He's been attacked."

"Attacked?"

"Yes, just as he was turning out of the High Street, and within a hundred yards of the gate of Old's."

"But who —"

"Ah, that's the rub! If you said 'what,' you would be more grammatical. Norton swears that it was not human, and, indeed, from the scratches on his throat, I should be inclined to agree with him."

"What, then? Have we come down to spooks?"

Abercrombie Smith puffed his scientific contempt.

"Well, no; I don't think that is quite the idea, either. I am inclined to think that if any showman has lost a great ape lately, and the brute is in these parts, a jury would find a true bill against it. Norton passes that way every night, you know, about the same hour. There's a tree that hangs low over the path – the big elm from Rainy's garden. Norton thinks the thing dropped on him out of the tree. Anyhow, he was nearly strangled by two arms, which, he says, were as strong and as thin as steel bands. He saw nothing; only those beastly arms that tightened and tightened on him. He yelled his head nearly off, and a couple of chaps came running, and the thing went over the wall like a cat. He never got a fair sight of it the whole

time. It gave Norton a shake up, I can tell you. I tell him it has been as good as a change at the seaside for him."

"A garrotter, most likely," said Smith.

"Very possibly. Norton says not; but we don't mind what he says. The garrotter had long nails, and was pretty smart at swinging himself over walls. By the way, your beautiful neighbour would be pleased if he heard about it. He had a grudge against Norton, and he's not a man, from what I know of him, to forget his little debts. But hallo, old chap, what have you got in your noddle?"

"Nothing," Smith answered curtly.

He had started in his chair, and the look had flashed over his face which comes upon a man who is struck suddenly by some unpleasant idea.

"You looked as if something I had said had taken you on the raw. By the way, you have made the acquaintance of Master B. since I looked in last, have you not? Young Monkhouse Lee told me something to that effect."

"Yes; I know him slightly. He has been up here once or twice."

"Well, you're big enough and ugly enough to take care of yourself. He's not what I should call exactly a healthy sort of Johnny, though, no doubt, he's very clever, and all that. But you'll soon find out for yourself, Lee is all right; he's a very decent little fellow. Well, so long, old chap! I row Mullins for the Vice-Chancellor's pot on Wednesday week, so mind you come down, in case I don't see you before."

Bovine Smith laid down his pipe and turned stolidly to his books once more. But with all the will in the world, he found it very hard to keep his mind upon his work. It would slip away to brood upon the man beneath him, and upon the little mystery which hung round his chambers. Then his thoughts turned to this singular attack of which Hastie had spoken, and to the grudge which Bellingham was said to owe the object of it. The two ideas would persist in rising together in his mind, as though there were some close and intimate connection between them. And yet the suspicion was so dim and vague that it could not be put down in words.

"Confound the chap!" cried Smith, as he shied his book on pathology across the room. "He has spoiled my night's reading, and that's reason enough, if there were no other, why I should steer clear of him in the future."

For ten days the medica1 student confined himself so closely to his studies that he neither saw nor heard anything of either of the men beneath him. At the hours when Bellingham had been accustomed to visit him, he took care to sport his oak, and though he more than once heard a knocking at his outer door, he resolutely refused to answer it. One afternoon, however, he was descending the stairs when, just as he was passing it,

Bellingham's door flew open, and young Monkhouse Lee came out with his eyes sparkling and a dark flush of anger upon his olive cheeks. Close at his heels followed Bellingham, his fat, unhealthy face all quivering with malignant passion.

"You fool!" he hissed. "You'll be sorry."

"Very likely," cried the other. "Mind what I say. It's off! I won't hear of it!"

"You've promised, anyhow."

"Oh, I'll keep that! I won't speak. But I'd rather little Eva was in her grave. Once for all, it's off. She'll do what I say. We don't want to see you again."

So much Smith could not avoid hearing, but he hurried on, for he had no wish to be involved in their dispute. There had been a serious breach between them, that was clear enough, and Lee was going to cause the engagement with his sister to be broken off. Smith thought of Hastie's comparison of the toad and the dove, and was glad to think that the matter was at an end. Bellingham's face when he was in a passion was not pleasant to look upon. He was not a man to whom an innocent girl could be trusted for life. As he walked, Smith wondered languidly what could have caused the quarrel, and what the promise might be which Bellingham had been so anxious that Monkhouse Lee should keep.

It was the day of the sculling match betweem Hastie and Mullins, and a stream of men were making their way down to the banks of the Isis. A May sun was shining brightly, and the yellow path was barred with the black shadows of the tall elm-trees. On either side the grey colleges lay back from the road, the hoary old mothers of minds looking out from their high, mullioned windows at the tide of young life which swept so merrily past them. Black-clad tutors, prim officials, pale, reading men, brown-faced, straw-hatted young athletes in white sweaters or many-coloured blazers, all were hurrying towards the blue, winding river which curves through the Oxford meadows.

Abercrombie Smith, with the intuition of an old oarsman, chose his position at the point where he knew that the struggle, if there were a struggle, would come. Far off he heard the hum which announced the start, the gathering roar of the approach, the thunder of running feet, and the shouts of the men in the boats beneath him. A spray of half-clad, deep-breathing runners shot past him, and craning over their shoulders, he saw Hastie pulling a steady thirty-six, while his opponent, with a jerky forty, was a good boat's length behind him. Smith gave a cheer for his friend, and pulling out his watch, was starting off again for his chambers, when he felt a touch upon his shoulder, and found that young Monkhouse Lee was beside him.

"I saw you there," he said, in a timid, deprecating way. "I wanted to speak to you, if you could spare me a half-hour. This cottage is mine. I share it with Harrington of King's. Come in and have a cup of tea."

"I must be back presently," said Smith. "I am hard on the grind at present. But I'll come in for a few minutes with pleasure. I wouldn't have come out only Hastie is a friend of mine."

"So he is of mine. Hasn't he a beautiful style? Mullins wasn't in it. But come into the cottage. It's a little den of a place, but it is pleasant to work in during the summer months."

It was a small, square, white building, with green doors and shutters, and a rustic trellis-work porch, standing back some fifty yards from the river's bank. Inside, the main room was roughly fitted up as a study – deal table, unpainted shelves with books, and a few cheap oleographs upon the walls. A kettle sang upon a spirit-stove, and there were tea things upon a tray on the table.

"Try that chair and have a cigarette," said Lee. "Let me pour you out a cup of tea. It's so good of you to come in, for I know that your time is a good deal taken up. I wanted to say to you that, if I were you, I should change my rooms at once."

"Eh?"

Smith sat staring with a lighted match in one hand and his unlit cigarette in the other.

"Yes; it must seem very extraordinary, and the worst of it is that I cannot give my reasons, for I am under a solemn promise – a very solemn promise. But I may go so far as to say that I don't think Bellingham is a very safe man to live near. I intend to camp out here as much as I can for a time."

"Not safe! What do you mean?"

"Ah, that's what I mustn't say. But do take my advice and move your rooms. We had a grand row today. You must have heard us, for you came down the stairs."

"I saw that you had fallen out."

"He's a horrible chap, Smith. That is the only word for him. I have had doubts about him ever since that night when he fainted – you remember, when you came down. I taxed him today, and he told me things that made my hair rise, and wanted me to stand in with him. I'm not straight-laced, but I am a clergyman's son, you know, and I think there are some things which are quite beyond the pale. I only thank God that I found him out before it was too late, for he was to have married into my family."

"This is all very fine, Lee," said Abercrombie Smith curtly. "But either you are saying a great deal too much or a great deal too little."

"I give you a warning."

"If there is real reason for warning, no promise can bind you. If I see a rascal about to blow a place up with dynamite no pledge will stand in my way of preventing him."

"Ah, but I cannot prevent him, and I can do nothing but warn you."

"Without saying what you warn me against."

"Against Bellingham."

"But that is childish. Why should I fear him, or any man?"

"I can't tell you. I can only entreat you to change your rooms. You are in danger where you are. I don't even say that Bellingham would wish to injure you. But it might happen, for he is a dangerous neighbour just now."

"Perhaps I know more than you think," said Smith, looking keenly at the young man's boyish, earnest face. "Suppose I tell you that someone else shares Bellingham's rooms."

Monkhouse Lee sprang from his chair in uncontrollable excitement.

"You know, then?" he gasped.

"A woman."

Lee dropped back again with a groan.

"My lips are sealed," he said. "I must not speak."

"Well, anyhow," said Smith, rising, "it is not likely that I should allow myself to be frightened out of rooms which suit me very nicely. It would be a little too feeble for me to move out all my goods and chattels because you say that Bellingham might in some unexplained way do me an injury. I think that I'll just take my chance, and stay where I am, and as I see that it's nearly five o'clock, I must ask you to excuse me."

He bade the young student adieu in a few curt words, and made his way homeward through the sweet spring evening, feeling half-ruffled, half-amused, as any other strong, unimaginative man might who has been menaced by a vague and shadowy danger.

There was one little indulgence which Abercrombie Smith always allowed himself, however closely his work might press upon him. Twice a week, on the Tuesday and the Friday, it was his invariable custom to walk over to Farlingford, the residence of Doctor Plumptree Peterson, situated about a mile and a half out of Oxford. Peterson had been a close friend of Smith's elder brother, Francis, and as he was a bachelor, fairly well-to-do, with a good cellar and a better library, his house was a pleasant goal for a man who was in need of a brisk walk. Twice a week, then, the medical student would swing out there along the dark country roads and spend a pleasant hour in Peterson's comfortable study, discussing, over a glass of old port, the gossip of the 'varsity or the latest developments of medicine or of surgery.

On the day which followed his interview with Monkhouse Lee, Smith shut up his books at a quarter past eight, the hour when he usually started for his friend's house. As he was leaving his room, however, his eyes chanced to fall upon one of the books which Bellingham had lent him, and his conscience pricked him for not having returned it. However repellent the man might be, he should not be treated with discourtesy. Taking the book, he walked downstairs and knocked at his neighbour's door. There was no answer; but on turning the handle he found that it was unlocked. Pleased at the thought of avoiding an interview, he stepped inside, and placed the book with his card upon the table.

The lamp was turned half down, but Smith could see the details of the room plainly enough. It was all much as he had seen it before – the frieze, the animal-headed gods, the hanging crocodile, and the table littered over with papers and dried leaves. The mummy case stood upright against the wall, but the mummy itself was missing. There was no sign of any second occupant of the room, and he felt as he withdrew that he had probably done Bellingham an injustice. Had he a guilty secret to preserve, he would hardly leave his door open so that all the world might enter.

The spiral stair was as black as pitch, and Smith was slowly making his way down its irregular steps, when he was suddenly conscious that something had passed him in the darkness. There was a faint sound, a whiff of air, a light brushing past his elbow, but so slight that he could scarcely be certain of it. He stopped and listened, but the wind was rustling among the ivy outside, and he could hear nothing else.

"Is that you, Styles?" he shouted.

There was no answer, and all was still behind him. It must have been a sudden gust of air, for there were crannies and cracks in the old turret. And yet he could almost have sworn that he heard a footfall by his very side. He had emerged into the quadrangle, still turning the matter over in his head, when a man came running swiftly across the smooth-cropped lawn.

"Is that you, Smith?"

"Hullo, Hastie!"

"For God's sake come at once! Young Lee is drowned! Here's Harrington of King's with the news. The doctor is out. You'll do, but come along at once. There may be life in him."

"Have you brandy?"

"I'll bring some. There's a flask on my table."

Smith bounded up the stairs, taking three at a time, seized the flask, and was rushing down with it, when, as he passed Bellingham's room, his eyes fell upon something which left him gasping and staring upon the landing.

The door, which he had closed behind him, was now open, and right in front of him, with the lamp-light shining upon it, was the mummy case. Three minutes ago it had been empty. He could swear to that. Now it framed the lank body of its horrible occupant, who stood, grim and stark, with his black, shrivelled face towards the door. The form was lifeless and inert, but it seemed to Smith as he gazed that there still lingered a lurid spark of vitality, some faint sign of consciousness in the little eyes which lurked in the depths of the hollow sockets. So astounded and shaken was he that he had forgotten his errand, and was still staring at the lean, sunken figure when the voice of his friend below recalled him to himself.

"Come on, Smith!" he shouted. "It's life and death, you know. Hurry up! Now, then," he added, as the medical student reappeared, "let us do a sprint. It is well under a mile, and we should do it in five minutes. A human life is better worth running for than a pot."

Neck and neck they dashed through the darkness, and did not pull up until panting and spent, they had reached the little cottage by the river. Young Lee, limp and dripping like a broken water-plant, was stretched upon the sofa, the green scum of the river upon his black hair, and a fringe of white foam upon his leaden-hued lips. Beside him knelt his fellow-student, Harrington, endeavouring to chafe some warmth back into his rigid limbs.

"I think there's life in him," said Smith, with his hand to the lad's side. "Put your watch glass to his lips. Yes, there's dimming on it. You take one arm, Hastie. Now work it as I do, and we'll soon pull him round."

For ten minutes they worked in silence, inflating and depressing the chest of the unconscious man. At the end of that time a shiver ran through his body, his lips trembled, and he opened his eyes. The three students burst out into an irrepressible cheer.

"Wake up, old chap. You've frightened us quite enough."

"Have some brandy. Take a sip from the flask."

"He's all right now," said his companion Harrington. "Heavens, what a fright I got! I was reading here, and he had gone out for a stroll as far as the river, when I heard a scream and a splash. Out I ran, and by the time I could find him and fish him out, all life seemed to have gone. Then Simpson couldn't get a doctor, for he has a game-leg, and I had to run, and I don't know what I'd have done without you fellows. That's right, old chap. Sit up."

Monkhouse Lee had raised himself on his hands, and looked wildly about him.

"What's up?" he asked. "I've been in the water. Ah, yes; I remember."

A look of fear came into his eyes, and he sank his face into his hands.

"How did you fall in?"

"I didn't fall in."

"How then?"

"I was thrown in. I was standing by the bank, and something from behind picked me up like a feather and hurled me in. I heard nothing, and I saw nothing. But I know what it was, for all that."

"And so do I," whispered Smith.

Lee looked up with a quick glance of surprise.

"You've learned, then?" he said. "You remember the advice I gave you?"

"Yes, and I begin to think that I shall take it."

"I don't know what the deuce you fellows are talking about," said Hastie, "but I think, if I were you, Harrington, I should get Lee to bed at once. It will be time enough to discuss the why and the wherefore when he is a little stronger. I think, Smith, you and I can leave him alone now. I am walking back to college; if you are coming in that direction we can have a chat."

But it was little chat that they had upon their homeward path. Smith's mind was too full of the incidents of the evening, the absence of the mummy from his neighbour's rooms, the step that passed him on the stair, the reappearance – the extraordinary, inexplicable reappearance of the grisly thing – and then this attack upon Lee, corresponding so closely to the previous outrage upon another man against whom Bellingham bore a grudge. All this settled in his thoughts together with the many little incidents which had previously turned him against his neighbour, and the singular circumstances under which he was first called in to him. What had been a dim suspicion, a vague, fantastic conjecture, had suddenly taken form, and stood out in his mind as a grim fact, a thing not to be denied. And yet, how monstrous it was! how unheard of! how entirely beyond all bounds of human experience. An impartial judge, or even the friend who walked by his side, would simply tell him that his eyes had deceived him, that the mummy had been there all the time, that young Lee had tumbled into the river as any other man tumbles into a river, and the blue pill was the best thing for a disordered liver. He felt that he would have said as much if the positions had been reversed. And yet he could swear that Bellingham was a murderer at heart, and that he wielded a weapon such as no man had ever used in all the grim history of crime.

Hastie had branched off to his rooms with a few crisp and emphatic comments upon his friend's unsociability, and Abercrombie Smith crossed the quadrangle to his corner turret with a strong feeling of repulsion for his

chambers and their associations. He would take Lee's advice, and move his quarters as soon as possible, for how could a man study when his ear was ever straining for every murmur or footstep in the room below? He observed, as he crossed over the lawn, that the light was still shining in Bellingham's window, and as he passed up the staircase the door opened, and the man himself looked out at him. With his fat, evil face he was like some bloated spider fresh from the weaving of his poisonous web.

"Good evening," said he. "Won't you come in?"

"No," cried Smith fiercely.

"No? You are as busy as ever? I wanted to ask you about Lee. I was sorry to hear that there was a rumour that something was amiss with him."

His features were grave, but there was the gleam of a hidden laugh in his eyes as he spoke. Smith saw it, and he could have knocked him down for it.

"You'll be sorrier still to hear that Monkhouse Lee is doing very well, and is out of all danger," he answered. "Your hellish tricks have not come off this time. Oh, you needn't try to brazen it out. I know all about it."

Bellingham took a step back from the angry student and half-closed the door as if to protect himself.

"You are mad," he said. "What do you mean? Do you assert that I had anything to do with Lee's accident?"

"Yes," thundered Smith. "You and that bag of bones behind you; you worked it between you. I tell you what it is, Master B., they have given up burning folk like you, but we still keep a hangman, and, by George! if any man in this college meets his death while you are here, I'll have you up, and if you don't swing for it, it won't be my fault. You'll find that your filthy Egyptian tricks won't answer in England."

"You're a raving lunatic," said Bellingham.

"All right. You just remember what I say, for you'll find that I'll be better than my word."

The door slammed, and Smith went fuming up to his chamber, where he locked the door upon the inside, and spent half the night in smoking his old briar and brooding over the strange events of the evening.

Next morning Abercrombie Smith heard nothing of his neighbour, but Harrington called upon him in the afternoon to say that Lee was almost himself again. All day Smith stuck fast to his work, but in the evening he determined to pay the visit to his friend Doctor Peterson upon which he had started the night before. A good walk and a friendly chat would be welcome to his jangled nerves.

Bellingham's door was shut as he passed, but glancing back when he was some distance from the turret, he saw his neighbour's head at the

window outlined against the lamp-light, his face pressed apparently against the glass as he gazed out into the darkness. It was a blessing to be away from all contact with him, if but for a few hours, and Smith stepped out briskly, and breathed the soft spring air into his lungs. The half-moon lay in the west between two Gothic pinnacles, and threw upon the silvered street a dark tracery from the stonework above. There was a brisk breeze, and light, fleecy clouds drifted swiftly across the sky. Old's was on the very border of the town, and in five minutes Smith found himself beyond the houses and between the hedges of a May-scented, Oxfordshire lane.

It was a lonely and little-frequented road which led to his friend's house. Early as it was, Smith did not meet a single soul upon his way. He walked briskly along until he came to the avenue gate, which opened into the long, gravel drive leading up to Farlingford. In front of him he could see the cosy, red light of the windows glimmering through the foliage. He stood with his hand upon the iron latch of the swinging gate, and he glanced back at the road along which he had come. Something was coming swiftly down it.

It moved in the shadow of the hedge, silently and furtively, a dark, crouching figure, dimly visible against the black background. Even as he gazed back at it, it had lessened its distance by twenty paces, and was fast closing upon him. Out of the darkness he had a glimpse of a scraggy neck, and of two eyes that will ever haunt him in his dreams. He turned, and with a cry of terror he ran for his life up the avenue. There were the red lights, the signals of safety, almost within a stone's-throw of him. He was a famous runner, but never had he run as he ran that night.

The heavy gate had swung into place behind him but he heard it dash open again before his pursuer. As he rushed madly and wildly through the night, he could hear a swift, dry patter behind him, and could see, as he threw back a glance, that this horror was bounding like a tiger at his heels, with blazing eyes and one stringy arm out-thrown. Thank God, the door was ajar. He could see the thin bar of light which shot from the lamp in the hall. Nearer yet sounded the clatter from behind. He heard a hoarse gurgling at his very shoulder. With a shriek he flung himself against the door, slammed and bolted it behind him, and sank half-fainting on to the hall chair.

"My goodness, Smith, what's the matter?" asked Peterson, appearing at the door of his study.

"Give me some brandy."

Peterson disappeared, and came rushing out again with a glass and a decanter.

"You need it," he said, as his visitor drank off what he poured out for him. "Why, man, you are as white as a cheese."

Smith laid down his glass, rose up, and took a deep breath.

"I am my own man again now," said he. " I was never so unmanned before. But, with your leave, Peterson, I will sleep here tonight, for I don't think I could face that road again except by daylight. It's weak, I know, but I can't help it."

Peterson looked at his visitor with a very questioning eye.

"Of course you shall sleep here if you wish. I'll tell Mrs. Burney to make up the spare bed. Where are you off to now?"

"Come up with me to the window that overlooks the door. I want you to see what I have seen."

They went up to the window of the upper hall whence they could look down upon the approach to the house. The drive and the fields on either side lay quiet and still, bathed in the peaceful moonlight.

"Well, really, Smith," remarked Peterson, "it is well that I know you to be an abstemious man. What in the world can have frightened you?"

"I'll tell you presently. But where can it have gone? Ah, now, look, look! See the curve of the road just beyond your gate."

"Yes, I see; you needn't pinch my arm off. I saw someone pass. I should say a man, rather thin, apparently, and tall, very tall. But what of him? And what of yourself? You are still shaking like an aspen leaf."

"I have been within hand-grip of the devil, that's all. But come down to your study, and I shall tell you the whole story."

He did so. Under the cheery lamp-light with a glass of wine on the table beside him, and the portly form and florid face of his friend in front, he narrated, in their order, all the events, great and small, which had formed so singular a chain, from the night on which he had found Bellingham fainting in front of the mummy case until this horrid experience of an hour ago.

"There now," he said as he concluded, "that's the whole, black business. It is monstrous and incredible, but it is true."

Doctor Plumptree Peterson sat for some time in silence with a very puzzled expression upon his face.

"I never heard of such a thing in my life, never!" he said at last. "You have told me the facts. Now tell me your inferences."

"You can draw your own."

"But I should like to hear yours. You have thought over the matter, and I have not."

"Well, it must be a little vague in detail, but the main points seem to me to be clear enough. This fellow Bellingham, in his Eastern studies, has got hold of some infernal secret by which a mummy – or possibly only this particular mummy – can be temporarily brought to life. He was trying

this disgusting business on the night when he fainted. No doubt the sight of the creature moving had shaken his nerve, even though he had expected it. You remember that almost the first words he said were to call out upon himself as a fool. Well, he got more hardened afterwards, and carried the matter through without fainting. The vitality which he could put into it was evidently only a passing thing, for I have seen it continually in its case as dead as this table. He has some elaborate process, I fancy, by which he brings the thing to pass. Having done it, he naturally bethought him that he might use the creature as an agent. It has intelligence and it has strength. For some purpose he took Lee into his confidence; but Lee, like a decent Christian, would have nothing to do with such a business. Then they had a row, and Lee vowed that he would tell his sister of Bellingham's true character. Bellingham's game was to prevent him, and he nearly managed it, by setting this creature of his on his track. He had already tried its powers upon another man – Norton – towards whom he had a grudge. It is the merest chance that he has not two murders upon his soul. Then, when I taxed him with the matter, he had the strongest reasons for wishing to get me out of the way before I could convey my knowledge to anyone else. He got his chance when I went out, for he knew my habits and where I was bound for. I have had a narrow shave, Peterson, and it is mere luck you didn't find me on your doorstep in the morning. I'm not a nervous man as a rule, and I never thought to have the fear of death put upon me as it was tonight."

"My dear boy, you take the matter too seriously," said his companion. "Your nerves are out of order with your work, and you make too much of it. How could such a thing as this stride about the streets of Oxford, even at night, without being seen?"

"It has been seen. There is quite a scare in the town about an escaped ape, as they imagine the creature to be. It is the talk of the place."

"Well, it's a striking chain of events. And yet, my dear fellow, you must allow that each incident in itself is capable of a more natural explanation."

"What! even my adventure of tonight?"

"Certainly. You come out with your nerves all unstrung, and your head full of this theory of yours. Some gaunt, half-famished tramp steals after you, and seeing you run, is emboldened to pursue you. Your fears and imagination do the rest."

"It won't do, Peterson; it won't do."

"And again, in the instance of your finding the mummy case empty, and then a few moments later with an occupant, you know that it was lamp-light, that the lamp was half turned down, and that you had no

special reason to look hard at the case. It is quite possible that you may have overlooked the creature in the first instance."

"No, no; it is out of the question."

"And then Lee may have fallen into the river, and Norton been garrotted. It is certainly a formidable indictment that you have against Bellingham; but if you were to place it before a police magistrate, he would simply laugh in your face."

"I know he would. That is why I mean to take the matter into my own hands."

"Eh?"

"Yes; I feel that a public duty rests upon me, and, besides, I must do it for my own safety, unless I choose to allow myself to be hunted by this beast out of the college, and that would be a little too feeble. I have quite made up my mind what I shall do. And first of all, may I use your paper and pens for an hour?"

"Most certainly. You will find all that you want upon that side-table."

Abercrombie Smith sat down before a sheet of foolscap, and for an hour, and then for a second hour his pen travelled swiftly over it. Page after page was finished and tossed aside while his friend leaned back in his arm-chair, looking across at him with patient curiosity. At last, with an exclamation of satisfaction, Smith sprang to his feet, gathered his papers up into order, and laid the last one upon Peterson's desk.

"Kindly sign this as a witness," he said.

"A witness? Of what?"

"Of my signature, and of the date. The date is the most important. Why, Peterson, my life might hang upon it."

"My dear Smith, you are talking wildly. Let me beg you to go to bed."

"On the contrary, I never spoke so deliberately in my life. And I will promise to go to bed the moment you have signed it."

"But what is it?"

"It is a statement of all that I have been telling you tonight. I wish you to witness it."

"Certainly," said Peterson, signing his name under that of his companion. "There you are! But what is the idea?"

"You will kindly retain it, and produce it in case I am arrested."

"Arrested? For what?"

"For murder. It is quite on the cards. I wish to be ready for every event. There is only one course open to me, and I am determined to take it."

"For Heaven's sake, don't do anything rash!"

"Believe me, it would be far more rash to adopt any other course. I hope that we won't need to bother you, but it will ease my mind to know that you have this statement of my motives. And now I am ready to take your advice and to go to roost, for I want to be at my best in the morning."

* * *

Abercrombie Smith was not an entirely pleasant man to have as an enemy. Slow and easy-tempered, he was formidable when driven to action. He brought to every purpose in life the same deliberate resoluteness which had distinguished him as a scientific student. He had laid his studies aside for a day, but he intended that the day should not be wasted. Not a word did he say to his host as to his plans, but by nine o'clock he was well on his way to Oxford.

In the High Street he stopped at Clifford's, the gunmaker's, and bought a heavy revolver, with a box of central-fire cartridges. Six of them he slipped into the chambers, and half-cocking the weapon, placed it in the pocket of his coat. He then made his way to Hastie's rooms, where the big oarsman was lounging over his breakfast with the *Sporting Times* propped up against the coffee-pot.

"Hullo ! What's up?" he asked. "Have some coffee?"

"No, thank you. I want you to come with me, Hastie, and do what I ask you."

"Certainly, my boy."

"And bring a heavy stick with you."

"Hullo!" Hastie stared. "Here's a hunting crop that would fell an ox."

"One other thing. You have a box of amputating knives. Give me the longest of them."

"There you are. You seem to be fairly on the war trail. Anything else?"

"No; that will do." Smith placed the knife inside his coat, and led the way to the quadrangle. "We are neither of us chickens, Hastie," said he. "I think I can do this job alone, but I take you as a precaution. I am going to have a little talk with Bellingham. If I have only him to deal with, I won't, of course, need you. If I shout, however, up you come, and lam out with your whip as hard as you can lick. Do you understand?"

"All right. I'll come if I hear you bellow."

"Stay here, then. I may be a little time, but don't budge until I come down."

"I'm a fixture."

Smith ascended the stairs, opened Bellingham's door and stepped in. Bellingham was seated behind his table, writing. Beside him, among his litter of strange possessions, towered the mummy case, with its sale number 249 still stuck upon its front, and its hideous occupant stiff and stark within it. Smith looked very deliberately round him, closed the door, and then, stepping across to the fireplace, struck a match and set the fire alight. Bellingham sat staring, with amazement and rage upon his bloated face.

"Well, really now, you make yourself at home," he gasped.

Smith sat himself deliberately down, placing his watch upon the table, drew out his pistol, cocked it, and laid it in his lap. Then he took the long amputating knife from his bosom, and threw it down in front of Bellingham.

"Now, then," said he, "just get to work and cut up that mummy."

"Oh, is that it?" said Bellingham with a sneer.

"Yes, that is it. They tell me that the law can't touch you. But I have a law that will set matters straight. If in five minutes you have not set to work, I swear by the God who made me that I will put a bullet through your brain!"

"You would murder me?"

Bellingham had half-risen, and his face was the colour of putty.

"Yes."

"And for what?"

"To stop your mischief. One minute has gone."

"But what have I done?"

"I know and you know."

"This is mere bullying."

"Two minutes are gone."

"But you must give reasons. You are a madman – a dangerous madman. Why should I destroy my own property? It is a valuable mummy."

"You must cut it up, and you must burn it."

"I will do no such thing."

"Four minutes are gone."

Smith took up the pistol and he looked towards Bellingham with an inexorable face. As the second-hand stole round, he raised his hand, and the finger twitched upon the trigger.

"There! there! I'll do it!" screamed Bellingham.

In frantic haste he caught up the knife and hacked at the figure of the mummy, ever glancing round to see the eye and the weapon of his terrible visitor bent upon him. The creature crackled and snapped under

every stab of the keen blade. A thick, yellow dust rose up from it. Spices and dried essences rained down upon the floor. Suddenly, with a rending crack, its backbone snapped asunder, and it fell, a brown heap of sprawling limbs, upon the floor.

"Now into the fire!" said Smith.

The flames leaped and roared as the dried and tinderlike debris was piled upon it. The little room was like the stoke-hole of a steamer and the sweat ran down the faces of the two man; but still the one stooped and worked, while the other sat watching him with a set face. A thick, fat smoke oozed out from the fire, and a heavy smell of burned resin and singed hair filled the air. In a quarter of an hour a few charred and brittle sticks were all that was left of Lot No. 249.

"Perhaps that will satisfy you," snarled Bellingham, with hate and fear in his little grey eyes as he glanced back at his tormentor.

"No; I must make a clean sweep of all your materials. We must have no more devil's tricks. In with all these leaves! They may have something to do with it."

"And what now?" asked Bellingham, when the leaves also had been added to the blaze.

"Now the roll of papyrus which you had on the table that night. It is in that drawer, I think."

"No, no," shouted Bellingham. "Don't burn that! Why, man, you don't know what you do. It is unique; it contains wisdom which is nowhere else to be found."

"Out with it!"

"But look here, Smith, you can't really mean it. I'll share the knowledge with you. I'll teach you all that is in it. Or, stay, let me only copy it before you burn it!"

Smith stepped forward and turned the key in the drawer. Taking out the yellow, curled roll of paper, he threw it into the fire, and pressed it down with his heel. Bellingham screamed, and grabbed at it; but Smith pushed him back and stood over it until it was reduced to a formless, grey ash.

"Now, Master B.," said he, "I think I have pretty well drawn your teeth. You'll hear from me again, if you return to your old tricks. And now good morning, for I must go back to my studies."

And such is the narrative of Abercrombie Smith as to the singular events which occurred in Old College, Oxford, in the spring of '84. As Bellingham left the university immediately afterwards, and was last heard of in the Soudan, there is no one who can contradict his statement. But the wisdom of men is small, and the ways of Nature are strange, and who shall

put a bound to the dark things which may be found by those who seek for them?

1894

THE LEATHER FUNNEL

My friend, Lionel d'Acre, lived in the Avenue de Wagram, Paris. His house was that small one, with the iron railings and grass plot in front of it, on the left-hand side as you pass down from the Arc de Triomphe. I fancy that it had been there long before the avenue was constructed, for the grey tiles were stained with lichens, and the walls were mildewed and discoloured with age. It looked a small house from the street, five windows in front, if I remember right, but it deepened into a single long chamber at the back. It was here that d'Acre had that singular library of occult literature, and the fantastic curiosities which served as a hobby for himself, and an amusement for his friends. A wealthy man of refined and eccentric tastes, he had spent much of his life and fortune in gathering together what was said to be a unique private collection of talmudic, cabalistic, and magical works, many of them of great rarity and value. His tastes leaned toward the marvellous and the monstrous, and I have heard that his experiments in the direction of the unknown have passed all the bounds of civilization and of decorum. To his English friends he never alluded to such matters, and took the tone of the student and *virtuoso*; but a Frenchman whose tastes were of the same nature has assured me that the worst excesses of the black mass have been perpetrated in that large and lofty hall, which is lined with the shelves of his books, and the cases of his museum.

D'Acre's appearance was enough to show that his deep interest in these psychic matters was intellectual rather than spiritual. There was no trace of asceticism upon his heavy face but there was much mental force in his huge, dome-like skull, which curved upwarn from amongst his thinning locks, like a snow-peak above its fringe of fir trees. His knowledge was greater than his wisdom, and his powers were far superior to his character. The small bright eyes, buried deeply in his fleshy face, twinkled with intelligence and an unabated curiosity of life, but they were the eyes of a sensualist and an egotist. Enough of the man, for he is dead now, poor devil, dead at the very time that he had made sure that he had at last discovered the elixir of life. It is not with his complex character that I have to deal, but with the very strange and inexplicable incident which had its rise in my visit to him in the early spring of the year '82.

I had known d'Acre in England, for my researches in the Assyrian Room of the British Museum had been conducted at the time when he was endeavouring to establish a mystic and esoteric meaning in the Babylonian tablets, and this community of interests had brought us together. Chance remarks had led to daily conversation, and that to something verging upon

friendship. I had promised him that on my next visit to Paris I would call upon him. At the time when I was able to fulfil my compact I was living in a cottage at Fontainebleau, and as the evening trains were inconvenient, he asked me to spend the night in his house.

"I have only that one spare couch," said he, pointing to a broad sofa in his large salon; "I hope that you will manage to be comfortable there."

It was a singular bedroom with its high walls of brown volumes, but there could be no more agreeable furniture to a bookworm like myself, and there is no scent so pleasant to my nostrils as that faint, subtle reek which comes from an ancient book. I assured him that I could desire no more charming chamber, and no more congenial surroundings.

"If the fittings are neither convenient nor conventional, they are at least costly," said he, looking round at his shelves. "I have expended nearly a quarter of a million of money upon these objects which surround you. Books; weapons, gems, carvings, tapestries, images – there is hardly a thing here which has not its history, and it is generally one worth telling."

He was seated as he spoke at one side of the open fire-place, and I at the other. His reading-table was on his right, and the strong lamp above it ringed it with a very vivid circle of golden light. A half-rolled palimpsest lay in the centre, and around it were many quaint articles of *bric-à-brac*. One of these was a large funnel, such as is used for filling wine casks. It appeared to be made of black wood, and to be rimmed with discoloured brass.

"That is a curious thing," I remarked. "What is the history of that?"

"Ah!" said he, "it is the very question which I have had occasion to ask myself. I would give a good deal to know. Take it in your hands and examine it."

I did so, and found that what I had imagined to be wood was in reality leather, though age had dried it into an extreme hardness. It was a large funnel, and might hold a quart when full. The brass rim encircled the wide end but the narrow was also tipped with metal.

"What do you make of it?" asked d'Acre.

"I should imagine that it belonged to some vintner or maltster in the Middle Ages," said I. "I have seen in England leathern drinking flagons of the seventeenth century – 'black jacks' as they were called – which were of the same colour and hardness as this filler."

"I dare say the date would be about the same," said d'Acre, "and, no doubt, also, it was used for filling a vessel with liquid. If my suspicions are correct, however, it was a queer vintner who used it, and a very singular cask which was filled. Do you observe nothing strange at the spout end of the funnel?"

As I held it to the light I observed that at a spot some five inches above the brass tip the narrow neck of the leather funnel was all haggled and scored, as if someone had notched it round with a blunt knife. Only at that point was there any roughening of the dead black surface.

"Someone has tried to cut off the neck."

"Would you call it a cut?"

"It is torn and lacerated. It must have taken some strength to leave these marks on such tough material, whatever the instrument may have been. But what do you think of it? I can tell that you know more than you say."

D'Acre smiled, and his little eyes twinkled with knowledge.

"Have you included the psychology of dreams among your learned studies?" he asked.

"I did not even know that there was such a psychology."

"My dear sir, that shelf above the gem case is filled with volumes, from Albertus Magnus onward, which deal with no other subject. It is a science in itself."

"A science of charlatans."

"The charlatan is always the pioneer. From the astrologer came the astronomer, from the alchemist the chemist, from the mesmerist the experimental psychologist. The quack of yesterday is the professor of tomorrow. Even such subtle and elusive things as dreams will in time be reduced to system and order. When that time comes the researches of our friends on the bookshelf yonder will no longer be the amusement of the mystic, but the foundations of a science."

"Supposing that is so, what has the science of dreams to do with a large black, brass-rimmed funnel?"

"I will tell you. You know that I have an agent who is always on the lookout for rarities and curiosities for my collection. Some days ago he heard of a dealer upon one of the Quais who had acquired some old rubbish found in a cupboard in an ancient house at the back of the Rue Mathurin, in the Quartier Latin. The dining-room of this old house is decorated with a coat of arms, chevrons, and bars rouge upon a field argent, which prove, upon inquiry, to be the shield of Nicholas de la Reynie, a high official of King Louis XIV. There can be no doubt that the other articles in the cupboard date back to the early days of that king. The inference is, therefore, that they were all the property of this Nicholas de la Reynie, who was, as I understand, the gentleman specially concerned with the maintenace and execution of the Draconic laws of that epoch."

"What then?"

"I would ask you now to take the funnel into your hands once more and to examine the upper brass rim. Can you make out any lettering upon it?"

There were certainly some scratches upon it, almost obliterated by time. The general effect was of several letters, the last of which bore some resemblance to a *B*.

"You make it a *B*?"

"Yes, I do."

"So do I. In fact, I have no doubt whatever that it is a *B*."

"But the nobleman you mentioned would have had *R* for his initial."

"Exactly ! That's the beauty of it. He owned this curious object, and yet he had someone else's initials upon it. Why did he do this?"

"I can't imagine; can you?"

"Well, I might, perhaps, guess. Do you observe something drawn a little farther along the rim?"

"I should say it was a crown."

"It is undoubtedly a crown; but if you examine it in a good light, you will convince yourself that it is not an ordinary crown. It is a heraldic crown – a badge of rank, and it consists of an alternation of four pearls and strawberry leaves, the proper badge of a marquis. We may infer, therefore, that the person whose initials end in *B* was entitled to wear that coronet."

"Then this common leather filler belonged to a marquis?"

D'Acre gave a peculiar smile.

"Or to some member of the family of a marquis," said he. "So much we have clearly gathered from this engraved rim."

"But what has all this to do with dreams?" I do not know whether it was from a look upon d'Acre's face, or from some subtle suggestion in his manner, but a feeling of repulsion, of unreasoning horror, came upon me as I looked at the gnarled old lump of leather.

"I have more than once received important information through my dreams," said my companion in the didactic manner which he loved to affect, "I make it a rule now when I am in doubt upon any material point to place the article in question beside me as I sleep, and to hope for some enlightenment. The process does not appear to me to be very obscure, though it has not yet received the blessing of orthodox science. According to my theory, any object which has been intimately associated with any supreme paroxysm of human emotion, whether it be joy or pain, will retain a certain atmosphere or association which it is capable of commuicating to a sensitive mind. By a sensitive mind I do not mean an abnormal one, but such a trained and educated mind as you or I possess."

"You mean, for example, that if I slept beside that old sword upon the wall, I might dream of some bloody incident in which that very sword took part?"

"An excellent example, for, as a matter of fact, that sword was used in that fashion by me, and I saw in my sleep the death of its owner, who perished in a brisk skirmish, which I have been unable to identify, but which occurred at the time of the wars of the Frondists. If you think of it, some of our popular observances show that the fact has already been recognized by our ancestors, although we, in our wisdom, have classed it among superstitions."

"For example?"

"Well, the placing of the bride's cake beneath the pillow in order that the sleeper may have pleasant dreams. That is one of several instances which you will find set forth in a small *brochure* which I am myself writing upon the subject. But to come back to the point, I slept one night with this funnel beside me, and I had a dream which certainly throws a curious light upon its use and origin."

"What did you dream?"

"I dreamed —" He paused, and an intent look of interest came over his massive face. "By Jove, that's well thought of," said he. "This really will be an exceedingly interesting experiment. You are yourself a psychic subject – with nerves which respond readily to any impression."

"I have never tested myself in that direction."

"Then we shall test you tonight. Might I ask you as a very great favour, when you occupy that couch tonight, to sleep with this old funnel placed by the side of your pillow?"

The request seemed to me a grotesque one; but I have myself, in my complex nature, a hunger after all which is bizarre and fantastic. I had not the faintest belief in d'Acre's theory, nor any hopes for success in such an experiment; yet it amused me that the experiment should be made. D'Acre, with great gravity, drew a small stand to the head of my settee, and placed the funnel upon it. Then, after a short conversation, he wished me good night and left me.

* * *

I sat for some little time smoking by the smouldering fire, and turning over in my mind the curious incident which had occurred, and the strange experience which might lie before me. Sceptical as I was, there was something impressive in the assurance of d'Acre's manner, and my extraordinary surroundings, the huge room with the strange and often

sinister objects which were hung round it, struck solemnity into my soul. Finally I undressed, and turning out the lamp, I lay down. After long tossing I fell asleep. Let me try to describe as accurately as I can the scene which came to me in my dreams. It stands out now in my memory more clearly than anything which I have seen with my waking eyes.

There was a room which bore the appearance of a vault. Four spandrels from the corners ran up to join a sharp, cup-shaped roof. The architecture was rough, but very strong. It was evidently part of a great building.

Three men in black, with curious, top-heavy, black velvet hats, sat in a line upon a red-carpeted dais. Their faces were very solemn and sad. On the left stood two long-gowned men with portfolios in their hands, which seemed to be stuffed with papers. Upon the right, looking toward me, was a small woman with blonde hair and singular, light-blue eyes – the eyes of a child. She was past her first youth, but could not yet be called middle-aged. Her figure was inclined to stoutness and her bearing was proud and confident. Her face was pale, but serene. It was a curious face, comely and yet feline, with a subtle suggestion of cruelty about the straight, strong little mouth and chubby jaw. She was draped in some sort of loose, white gown. Beside her stood a thin, eager priest, who whispered in her ear, and continually rised a crucifix before her eyes. She turned her head and looked fixedly past the crucifix at the three men in black, who were, I felt, her judges.

As I gazed the three men stood up and said something, but I could distinguish no words, though I was aware that it was the central one who was speaking. They then swept out of the room, followed by the two men with the papers. At the same instant several rough-looking fellows in stout jerkins came bustling in and removed first the red carpet, and then the boards which formed the dais, so as to entirely clear the room. When this screen was removed I saw some singular articles of furniture behind it. One looked like a bed with wooden rollers at each end, and a winch handle to regulate its length. Another was a wooden horse. There were several other curious objects, and a number of swinging cords which played over pulleys. It was not unlike a modern gymnasium.

When the room had been cleared there appeared a new figure upon the scene. This was a tall, thin person clad in black, with a gaunt and austere face. The aspect of the man made me shudder. His clothes were all shining with grease and mottled with stains. He bore himself with a slow and impressive dignity, as if he took command of all things from the instant of his entrance. In spite of his rude appearance and sordid dress, it was now *his* business, *his* room, his to command. He carried a coil of light ropes over his left forearm. The lady looked him up and down with a

searching glance, but her expression was unchanged. It was confident – even defiant. But it was very different with the priest. His face was ghastly white, and I saw the moisture glisten and run on his high, sloping forehead. He threw up his hands in prayer and he stooped continually to mutter frantic words in the lady's ear.

The man in black now advanced, and taking one of the cords from his left arm, he bound the woman's hands together. She held them meekly toward him as he did so. Then he took her arm with a rough grip and led her toward the wooden horse, which was little higher than her waist. On to this she was lifted and laid, with her back upon it, and her face to the ceiling, while the priest, quivering with horror, had rushed out of the room. The woman's lips were moving rapidly, and though I could hear nothing I knew that she was praying. Her feet hung down on either side of the horse, and I saw that the rough varlets in attendance had fastened cords to her ankles and secured the other ends to iron rings in the stone floor.

My heart sank within me as I saw these ominous preparations, and yet I was held by the fascination of horror and I could not take my eyes from the strange spectacle. A man had entered the room with a bucket of water in either hand. Another followed with a third bucket. They were laid beside the wooden horse. The second man had a wooden dipper – a bowl with a straight handle – in his other hand. This he gave to the man in black. At the same moment one of the varlets approached with a dark object in his hand, which even in my dream filled me with a vague feeling of familiarity. It was a leathern filler. With horrible energy he thrust it – but I could stand no more. My hair stood on end with horror. I writhed, I struggled, I broke through the bonds of sleep, and I burst with a shriek into my own life, and found myself lying shivering with terror in the huge library with the moonlight flooding through the window and throwing strange silver and black traceries upon the opposite wall. Oh, what a blessed relief to feel that I was back in the nineteenth century – back out of that mediaeval vault into a world where men had human hearts within their bosoms. I sat up on my couch trembling in every limb, my mind divided between thankfulness and horror. To think that such things were ever done – that they *could* be done without God striking the villains dead. Was it all a fantasy, or did it really stand for something which had happened in the black, cruel days of the world's history? I sank my throbbing head upon my shaking hands. And then, suddenly, my heart seemed to stand still in my bosom, and I could not even scream, so great was my terror. Something was advancing toward me through the darkness of the room.

It is a horror coming upon a horror which breaks a man's spirit. I could not reason, I could not pray; I could only sit like a frozen image, and

glare at the dark figure which was coming down the great room. And then it moved out into the white lane of moonlight, and I breathed once more. It was d'Acre, and his face showed that he was as frightened as myself.

"Was that you? For God's sake what's the matter?" he asked in a husky voice.

"Oh, d'Acre, I am glad to see you! I have been down into hell. It was dreadful."

"Then it was you who screamed?"

"I dare say it was."

"It rang through the house. The servants are all terrified." He struck a match and lit the lamp. "I think we may get the fire to burn up again," he added, throwing some logs upon the embers. "Good God, my dear chap, how white you are ! You look as if you had seen a ghost."

"So I have – several ghosts."

"The leather funnel has acted, then?"

"I wouldn't sleep near the infernal thing again for all the money you could offer me."

D'Acre chuckled.

"I expected that you would have a lively night of it," said he. "You took it out of me in return, for that scream of yours wasn't a very pleasant sound at two in the morning. I suppose from what you say that you have seen the whole dreadful business."

"What dreadful business?"

"The torture of the water – the 'Extraordinary Question,' as it was called in the genial days of 'Le Roi Soleil.' Did you stand it out to the end?"

"No, thank God, I awoke before it really began."

"Ah! it is just as well for you. I held out till the third bucket. Well, it is an old story, and they are all in their graves now anyhow, so what does it matter how they got there? I suppose that you have no idea what it was that you have seen?"

"The torture of some criminal. She must have been a terrible malefactor indeed if her crimes are in proportion to her penalty."

"Well, we have that small consolation," said d'Acre, wrapping his dressing-gown round him and crouching closer to the fire. "They *were* in proportion to her penalty. That is to say, if I am correct in the lady's identity."

"How could you possibly know her identity?"

For answer d'Acre took down an old vellum-covered volume from the shelf.

"Just listen to this," said he; "it is in the French of the seventeenth century, but I will give a rough translation as I go. You will judge for yourself whether I have solved the riddle or not."

"'*The prisoner was brought before the Grand Chambers and Tournelles of Parliament, sitting as a court of justice, charged with the murder of Master Dreux d'Aubray, her father, and of her two brothers, MM. d'Aubray, one being civil lieutenant, and the other a counsellor of Parliament. In person it seemed hard to believe that she had really done such wicked deeds, for she was of a mild appearance, and of short stature, with a fair skin and blue eyes. Yet the Court, having found her guilty, condemned her to the ordinary and to the extraordinary question in order that she might be forced to name her accomplices, after which she should be carried in a cart to the Place de Greve, there to have her head cut off, her body being afterwards burned and her ashes scattered to the winds.'*

The date of this entry is July 16, 1676."

"It is interesting," said I, "but not convincing. How do you prove the two women to be the same?"

"I am coming to that. The narrative goes on to tell of the woman's behaviour when questioned. *'When the executioner approached her she recognized him by the cords which he held in his hands, and she at once held out her own hands to him, looking at him from head to foot without uttering a word.'* How's that?"

"Yes, it was so."

" *'She gazed without wincing upon the wooden horse and rings which had twisted so many limbs and caused so many shrieks of agony. When her eyes fell upon the three pails of water, which were all ready for her, she said with a smile, "All that water must have been brought here for the purpose of drowning me, Monsieur. You have no idea, I trust, of making a person of my small stature swallow it all.'* Shall I read the details of the torture?"

"No, for Heaven's sake, don't."

"Here is a sentence which must surely show you that what is here recorded is the very scene which you have gazed upon to-night: *'The good Abbé Pirot, unable to contemplate the agonies which were suffered by his penitent, had hurried from the room.'* Does that convince you?"

"It does entirely. There can be no question that it is indeed the same event. But who, then, is this lady whose appearance was so attractive and whose end was so horrible?"

For answer d'Acre came across to me, and placed the small lamp upon the table which stood by my bed. Lifting up the ill-omened filler, he turned the brass rim so that the light fell full upon it. Seen in this way the engraving seemed clearer than on the night before.

"We have already agreed that this is the badge of a marquis or of a marquise," said he. "We have also settled that the last letter is *B*."

"It is undoubtedly so."

"I now suggest to you that the other letters from left to right are, *M*, *M*, a small *d*, *A*, a small *d*, and then the final *B*."

"Yes, I am sure that you are right. I can make out the two small *d*'s quite plainly."

"What I have read to you tonight," said d'Acre, "is the official record of the trial of Marie Madeleine d'Aubray, Marquise de Brinvilliers, one of the most famous poisoners and murderers of all time."

I sat in silence, overwhelmed at the extraordinary nature of the incident, and at the completeness of the proof with which d'Acre had exposed its real meaning. In a vague way I remembered some details of the woman's career, her unbridled debauchery, the cold-blooded and protracted torture of her sick father, the murder of her brothers for motives of petty gain. I recollected also that the bravery of her end had done something to atone for the horror of her life, and that all Paris had sympathised with her last moments, and blessed her as a martyr within a few days of the time when they had cursed her as a murderess. One objection, and one only, occurred to my mind.

"How came her initials and her badge of rank upon the filler? Surely they did not carry their mediaeval homage to the nobility to the point of decorating instrument of torture with their titles?"

"I was puzzled with the same point," said d'Acre, "but it admits of a simple explanation. The case excited extraordinary interest at the time, and nothing could be more natural than that La Reynie, the head of the police, should retain this filler as a grim souvenir. It was not often that a marchioness of France underwent the extraordinary question. That he should engrave her initials upon it for the information of others was surely a very ordinary proceeding upon his part."

"And this?" I asked, pointing to the marks upon the leathern neck.

"She was a cruel tigress," said d'Acre, as he turned away. "I think it is evident that like other tigresses her teeth were both strong and sharp."

1903

THE SILVER MIRROR

Jan. 3. – This affair of White and Wotherspoon's accounts proves to be a gigantic task. There are twenty thick ledgers to be examined and checked. Who would be a junior partner? However, it is the first big bit of business which has been left entirely in my hands. I must justify it. But it has to be finished so that the lawyers may have the result in time for the trial. Johnson said this morning I should have to get the last figure out before the twentieth of the month. Good Lord! Well, have at it, and if human brain and nerve can stand the strain, I'll win out at the other side. It means office-work from ten to five, and then a second sitting from about eight to one in the morning. There's drama in an accountant's life. When I find myself in the still early hours, while all the world sleeps, hunting through column after column, for those missing figures which will turn a respected alderman into a felon, I understand that it is not such a prosaic profession after all.

On Monday I came on the first trace of defalcation. No heavy game hunter ever got a finer thrill when first he caught sight of the trail of his quarry. But I look at the twenty ledgers and think of the jungle through which I have to follow him before I get my kill. Hard work – but rare sport, too, in a way! I saw the fat fellow once at a City dinner, his red face glowing above a white napkin. He looked at the little pale man at the end of the table. He would have been pale, too, if he could have seen the task that would be mine.

Jan. 6. – What perfect nonsense it is for doctors to prescribe rest when rest is out of the question! Asses! They might as well shout to a man who has a pack of wolves at his heels that what he wants is absolute quiet. My figures must be out by a certin date; unless they are so, I shall lose the chance of my lifetime, so how on earth am I to rest? I'll take a week or so after the trial.

Perhaps I was myself a fool to go to the doctor at all. But I get nervous and highly strung when I sit alone at my work at night. It's not a pain – only a sort of fullness of the head with an occasional mist over the eyes. I thought perhaps some bromide, or chloral or something of the kind might do me good. But stop work? It's absurd to ask such a thing. It's like a long-distance race. You feel queer at first and your heart thumps and your lungs pant, but if you have only the pluck to keep on, you get your second wind. I'll stick to my work and wait for my second wind. If it never comes – all the same, I'll stick to my work. Two ledgers are done, and I am well on in the third. The rascal has covered his tracks well, but I pick them up for all that.

Jan. 9. – I had not meant to go to the doctor again. And yet I have had to. "Straining my nerves, risking a complete breakdown, even endangering my sanity." That's a nice sentence to have fired off at one. Well, I'll stand the strain and I'll take the risk, and so long as I can sit in my chair and move a pen I'll follow the old sinner's slot.

By the way, I may as well set down here the queer experience which drove me this second time to the doctor. I'll keep an exact record of my symptoms and sensations, because they are interesting in themselves – "a curious psycho-physiological study," says the doctor – and also because I am perfectly certain that when I am through with them they will all seem blurred and unreal, like some queer dream betwixt sleeping and waking. So now, while they are fresh, I will just make a note of them if only as a change of thought after the endless figures.

There's an old silver-framed mirror in my room. It was given me by a friend who had a taste for antiquities, and he, as I happen to know, picked it up at a sale and had no notion where it came from. It's a large thing – three feet across and two feet high – and it leans at the back of a side-table on my left as I write. The frame is flat, about three inches across, and very old; far too old for hall-marks or other methods of determining its age. The glass part projects, with a bevelled edge, and has the magnificent reflecting power which is only, as it seems to me, to be found in very old mirrors. There's a feeling of perspective when you look into it such as no modern glass can ever give.

The mirror is so situated that as I sit at the table I can usually see nothing in it but the reflection of the red window curtains. But a queer thing happened last night. I had been working for some hours, very much against the grain, with continual bouts of that mistiness of which I had complained. Again and again I had to stop and clear my eyes. Well, on one of these occasions I chanced to look at the mirror. It had the oddest appearance. The red curtains which should have been reflected in it were no longer there, but the glass seemed to be clouded and steamy, not on the surface, which glittered like steel, but deep down in the very grain of it. This opacity, when I stared hard at it, appeared to slowly rotate this way and that, until it was a thick, white cloud swirling in heavy wreaths. So real and solid was it, and so reasonable was I, that I remember turning, with the idea that the curtains were on fire. But everything was deadly still in the room – no sound save the ticking of the clock, no movement save the slow gyration of that strange woolly cloud deep in the heart of the old mirror.

Then, as I looked, the mist, or smoke, or cloud, or whatever one may call it, seemed to coalesce and solidify at two points quite close together, and I was aware, with a thrill of interest rather than of fear, that

these were two eyes looking out into the room. A vague outline of a head I could see – a woman's by the hair, but this was very shadowy. Only the eyes were quite distinct; such eyes – dark, luminous, filled with some passionate emotion, fury or horror, I could not say which. Never have I seen eyes which were so full of intense, vivid life. They were not fixed upon me, but stared out into the room. Then as I sat erect, passed my hand over my brow, and made a strong conscious effort to pull myself together, the dim head faded into the general opacity, the mirror slowly cleared, and there were the red curtains once again.

A sceptic would say, no doubt, that I had dropped asleep over my figures and that my experience was a dream. As a matter of fact, I was never more vividly awake in my life. I was able to argue about it even as I looked at it, and to tell myself that it was a subjective impresson – a chimera of the nerves – begotten by worry and insomnia. But why this particular shape? And who is the woman, and what is the dreadful emotion which I read in those wonderful brown eyes? They come between me and my work. For the first time I have done less than the daily tally which I had marked out. Perhaps that is why I have had no abnormal sensations tonight. Tomorrow I must wake up, come what may.

Jan. 11. – All well, and good progress with my work. I wind the net, coil after coil, round that bulky body. But the last smile may remain with him if my own nerves break over it. The mirror would seem to be a sort of barometer which marks my brain pressure. Each night I have observed that it had clouded before I reached the end of my task.

Dr.Sinclair (who is, it seems, a bit of a psychologist) was so interested in my account that he came round this evening to have a look at the mirror. I had observed that something was scribbled in crabbed old characters upon the metal work at the back. He examined this with a lens, but could make nothing of it. "*Sanc. X. Pal.*" was his final reading of it, but that did not bring us any further. He advised me to put it away into another room; but, after all, whatever I may see in it is, by his own account, only a symptom. It is in the cause that the danger lies. The twenty ledgers – not the silver mirror – should be packed away if I could only do it. I'm at the eighth now, so I progress.

Jan. 13. – Perhaps it would have been wiser after all if I had packed away the mirror. I had an extraordinary experience with it last night. And yet I find it so interesting, so fascinating, tlat even now I will keep it in its place. What on earth is the meaning of it all?

I suppose it was about one in the morning, and I was closing my books preparatory to staggering off to bed, when I saw her there in front of me. The stage of mistiness and development must have passed unobserved, and there she was in all her beauty and passion and distress,

as clear-cut as if she were really in the flesh before me. The figure was small, but very distinct – so much so that every feature, and every detail of dress, are stamped in my memory. She is seated on the extreme left of the mirror. A sort of shadowy figure crouches down beside her – I can dimly discern that it is a man – and then behind them is cloud, in which I see figures – figures which move. It is not a mere picture upon which I look. It is a scene in life, an actual episode. She crouches and quivers. The man beside her cowers down. The vague figures make abrupt movements and gestures. All my fears were swallowed up in my interest. It was maddening to see so much and not to see more.

But I can at least describe the woman to the smallest point. She is very beautiful and quite young – not more than five-and-twenty, I should judge. Her hair is of a very rich brown, with a warm chestnut shade fining into gold at the edges. A little flat-pointed cap comes to an angle in front and is made of lace edged with pearls. The forehead is high, too high perhaps for perfect beauty; but one would not have it otherwise, as it gives a touch of power and strength to what would otherwise be a softly feminine face. The brows are most delicately curved over heavy eyelids, and then come those wonderful eyes – so large, so dark, so full of overmastering emotion, of rage and horror, contending with a pride of self-control which holds her from sheer frenzy! The cheeks are pale, the lips white with agony, the chin and throat most exquisitely rounded. The figure sits and leans forward in the chair, straining and rigid, cataleptic with horror. The dress is black velvet, a jewel gleams like a flame in the breast, and a golden crucifix smoulders in the shadow of a fold. This is the lady whose image still lives in the old silver mirror. What dire deed could it be which has left its impress there, so that now, in another age, if the spirit of a man be but worn down to it, he may be conscious of its presence?

One other detail: on the left side of the skirt of the black dress was, as I thought at first, a shapeless bunch of white ribbon. Then, as I looked more intently or as the vision defined itself more clearly, I perceived what it was. It was the hand of a man, clenched and knotted in agony, which held on with a convulsive grasp to the fold of the dress. The rest of the crouching figure was a mere vague outline, but that strenuous hand shone clear on the dark background, with a sinister suggestion of tragedy in its frantic clutch. The man is frightened – horribly frightened. That I can clearly discern. What has terrified him so? Why does he grip the woman's dress? The answer lies amongst those moving figures in the background. They have brought danger both to him and to her. The interest of the thing fascinated me. I thought no more of its relation to my own nerves. I stared and stared as if in a theatre. But I could get no further. The mist thinned.

There were tumultuous movements in which all the figures were vaguely concerned. Then the mirror was clear once more.

The doctor says I must drop work for a day, and I can afford to do so, for I have made good progress lately. It is quite evident that the visions depend entirely upon my own nervous state, for I sat in front of the mirror for an hour tonight, with no result whatever. My soothing day has chased them away. I wonder whether I shall ever penetrate what they all mean? I examined the mirror this evening under a good light, and besides the mysterious inscription "*Sanc. X. Pal.*," I was able to discern some signs of heraldic marks, very faintly visible upon the silver. They must be very ancient, as they are almost obliterated. So far as I could make out, they were three spear-heads, two above and one below. I will show them to the doctor when he calls tomorrow.

Jan. 14. – Feel perfectly well again, and I intend that nothing else shall stop me until my task is finished. The doctor was shown the marks on the mirror and agreed that they were armorial bearings. He is deeply interested in all that I have told him, and cross-questioned me closely on the details. It amuses me to notice how he is torn in two by conflicting desires – the one that his patient should lose this symptoms, the other that the medium – for so he regards me – should solve the mystery of the past. He advised continued rest, but did not oppose me too violently when I declared that such a thing was out of the question until the ten remaining ledgers have been checked.

Jan. 17. – For three nights I have had no experiences – my day of rest has borne fruit. Only a quarter of my task is left, but I must make a forced march, for the lawyers are clamouring for their material. I will give them enough and to spare. I have him fast on a hundred counts. When they realize what a slippery, cunning rascal he is, I should gain some credit from the case. False trading accounts, false balance-sheets, dividends drawn from capital, losses written down as profits, suppression of working expenses, manipulation of petty cash – it is a fine record!

Jan. 18. – Headaches, nervous twitches, mistiness, fullness of the temples – all the premonitions of trouble, and the trouble came sure enough. And yet my real sorrow is not so much that the vision should come as that it should cease before all is revealed.

But I saw more tonight. The crouching man was as visible as the lady whose gown he clutched. He is a little swarthy fellow, with a black, pointed beard. He has a loose gown of damask trimmed with fur. The prevailing tints of his dress are red. What a fright the fellow is in, to be sure! He cowers and shivers and glares back over his shoulder. There is a small knife in his other hand, but he is far too tremulous and cowed to use it. Dimly now I begin to see the figures in the background. Fierce faces,

bearded and dark, shape themselves out of the mist. There is one terrible creature, a skeleton of a man, with hollow cheeks and eyes sunk in his head. He also has a knife in his hand. On the right of the woman stands a tall man, very young, with flaxen hair, his face sullen and dour. The beautiful woman looks up at him in appeal. So does the man on the ground. This youth seems to be the arbiter of their fate. The crouching man draws closer and hides himself in the woman's skirts. The tall youth bends and tries to drag her away from him. So much I saw last night before the mirror cleared. Shall I never know what it leads to and whence it comes? It is not a mere imagination, of that I am very sure. Somewhere, some time, this scene has been acted, and this old mirror has reflected it. But when – where?

Jan. 20. – My work draws to a close, and it is time. I feel a tenseness within my brain, a sense of intolerable strain, which warns me that something must give. I have worked myself to the limit. But tonight should be the last night. With a supreme effort I should finish the final ledger and complete the case before I rise from my chair. I will do it. I will.

Feb. 7. – I did. My God, what an experience! I hardly know if I am strong enough yet to set it down.

Let me explain in the first instance that I am writing this in Dr.Sinclair's private hospital some three weeks after the last entry in my diary. On the night of January 20 my nervous system finally gave way, and I remembered nothing aftewards until I found myself, three days ago, in the home of rest. And I can rest with a good conscience. My work was done before I went under. My figures are in the solicitors' hands. The hunt is over.

And now I must describe that last night. I had sworn to finish my work, and so intently did I stick to it, though my head was bursting, that I would never look up until the last column had been added. And yet it was fine self-restraint, for all the time I knew that wonderful things were happening in the mirror. Every nerve in my body told me so. If I looked up there was an end of my work. So I did not look up till all was finished. Then, when at last with throbbing temples I threw down my pen and raised my eyes, what a sight was there!

The mirror in its silver frame was like a stage, brilliantly lit, in which a drama was in progress. There was no mist now. The oppression of my nerves had wrought this amazing clarity. Every feature, every movement, was as clear-cut as in life. To think that I, a tired accountant, the most prosaic of mankind, with the account-books of a swindling bankrupt before me, should be chosen of all the human race to look upon such a scene!

It was the same scene and the same figures, but the drama had advanced a stage. The tall young man was holding the woman in his arms. She strained away from him and looked up at him with loathing in her face. They had torn the crouching man away from his hold upon the skirt of her dress. A dozen of them were round him – savage men, bearded men. They hacked at him with knives. All seemed to strike him together. Their arms rose and fell. The blood did not flow from him – it squirted. His red dress was dabbled in it. He threw himself this way and that, purple upon crimson, like an over-ripe plum. Still they hacked, and still the jets shot from him. It was horrible – horrible! They dragged him kicking to the door. The woman looked over her shoulder at him and her mouth gaped. I heard nothing, but I knew that she was screaming. And then whether it was this nerve-racking vision before me, or whether, my task finished, all the overwork of the past weeks came in one crushing weight upon me, the room danced round me, the floor seemed to sink away beneath my feet, and I remembered no more. In the early morning my landlady found me stretched senseless before the silver mirror, but I knew nothing myself until three days ago I awoke in the deep peace of the doctor's nursing home.

Feb. 9. – Only today have I told Dr.Sinclair my full experience. He had not allowed me to speak of such matters before. He listened with an absorbed interest. "You don't identify this with any well-known scene in history?" he asked, with suspicion in his eyes. I assured him that I knew nothing of history. "Have you no idea whence that mirror came and to whom it once belonged?" he continued. "Have you?" I asked, for he spoke with meaning. "It's incredible," said he, "and yet how else can one explain it? The scenes which you described before suggested it, but now it has gone beyond all range of coincidence. I will bring you some notes in the evening."

Later. – He has just left me. Let me set down his words as closely as I can recall them. He began by laying several musty volumes upon my bed.

"These you can consult at your leisure," said he. "I have some notes here which you can confirm. There is not a doubt that what you have seen is the murder of Rizzio by the Scottish nobles in the presence of Mary, which occurred in March 1566. Your description of the woman is accurate. The high forehead and heavy eyelids combined with great beauty could hardly apply to two women. The tall young man was her husband, Darnley. Rizzio, says the chronicle, 'was dressed in a loose dressing-gown of furred damask, with hose of russet velvet.' With one hand he clutched Mary's gown, with the other he held a dagger. Your fierce, hollow-eyed

man was Ruthven, who was new-risen from a bed of sickness. Every detail is exact."

"But why to me?" I asked, in bewilderment. "Why of all the human race to me?"

"Because you were in the fit mental state to receive the impression. Because you chanced to own the mirror which gave the impression."

"The mirror! You think, then, that it was Mary's mirror – that it stood in the room where the deed was done?"

"I am convinced that it was Mary's mirror. She had been Queen of France. Her personal property would be stamped with the Royal arms. What you took to be three spear-heads were really the lilies of France."

"And the inscription?"

" '*Sanc. X. Pal.*' You can expand it into Sanctae Crucis Palatium. Someone has made a note upon the mirror as to whence it came. It was the Palace of the Holy Cross."

"Holyrood!" I cried.

"Exactly. Your mirror came from Holyrood. You have had one very singular experience, and have escaped. I trust that you will never put yourself into the way of having such another."

1908

THE PARASITE

I

March 24. The spring is fairly with us now. Outside my laboratory window the great chestnut-tree is all covered with the big, glutinous, gummy buds, some of which have already begun to break into little green shuttlecocks. As you walk down the lanes you are conscious of the rich, silent forces of nature working all around you. The wet earth smells fruitful and luscious. Green shoots are peeping out everywhere. The twigs are stiff with their sap; and the moist, heavy English air is laden with a faintly resinous perfume. Buds in the hedges, lambs beneath them – everywhere the work of reproduction going forward!

I can see it without, and I can feel it within. We also have our spring when the little arterioles dilate, the lymph flows in a brisker stream, the glands work harder, winnowing and straining. Every year nature readjusts the whole machine. I can feel the ferment in my blood at this very moment, and as the cool sunshine pours through my window I could dance about in it like a gnat. So I should, only that Charles Sadler would rush upstairs to know what was the matter. Besides, I must remember that I am Professor Gilroy. An old professor may afford to be natural, but when fortune has given one of the first chairs in the university to a man of four-and-thirty he must try and act the part consistently.

What a fellow Wilson is! If I could only throw the same enthusiasm into physiology that he does into psychology, I should become a Claude Bernard at the least. His whole life and soul and energy work to one end. He drops to sleep collating his results of the past day, and he wakes to plan his researches for the coming one. And yet, outside the narrow circle who follow his proceedings, he gets so little credit for it. Physiology is a recognized science. If I add even a brick to the edifice, every one sees and applauds it. But Wilson is trying to dig the foundations for a science of the future. His work is underground and does not show. Yet he goes on uncomplainingly, corresponding with a hundred semi-maniacs in the hope of finding one reliable witness, sifting a hundred lies on the chance of gaining one little speck of truth, collating old books, devouring new ones, experimenting, lecturing, trying to light up in others the fiery interest which is consuming him. I am filled with wonder and admiration when I think of him, and yet, when he asks me to associate myself with his researches, I am compelled to tell him that, in their present state, they offer little attraction to a man who is devoted to exact science. If he could show me something positive and objective, I might then be tempted to approach

the question from its physiological side. So long as half his subjects are tainted with *charlatanerie* and the other half with hysteria we physiologists must content ourselves with the body and leave the mind to our descendants.

No doubt I am a materialist. Agatha says that I am a rank one. I tell her that is an excellent reason for shortening our engagement, since I am in such urgent need of her spirituality. And yet I may claim to be a curious example of the effect of education upon temperament, for by nature I am, unless I deceive myself, a highly psychic man. I was a nervous, sensitive boy, a dreamer, a somnambulist, full of impressions and intuitions. My black hair, my dark eyes, my thin, olive face, my tapering fingers, are all characteristic of my real temperament, and cause experts like Wilson to claim me as their own. But my brain is soaked with exact knowledge. I have trained myself to deal only with fact and with proof. Surmise and fancy have no place in my scheme of thought. Show me what I can see with my microscope, cut with my scalpel, weigh in my balance, and I will devote a lifetime to its investigation. But when you ask me to study feelings, impressions, suggestions, you ask me to do what is distasteful and even demoralizing. A departure from pure reason affects me like an evil smell or a musical discord.

Which is a very sufficient reason why I am a little loath to go to Professor Wilson's tonight. Still I feel that I could hardly get out of the invitation without positive rudeness; and, now that Mrs. Marden and Agatha are going, of course I would not if I could. But I had rather meet them anywhere else. I know that Wilson would draw me into this nebulous semi-science of his if he could. In his enthusiasm he is perfectly impervious to hints or remonstrances. Nothing short of a positive quarrel will make him realize my aversion to the whole business. I have no doubt that he has some new mesmerist or clairvoyant or medium or trickster of some sort whom he is going to exhibit to us, for even his entertainments bear upon his hobby. Well, it will be a treat for Agatha, at any rate. She is interested in it, as woman usually is in whatever is vague and mystical and indefinite.

10.50 P. M. This diary-keeping of mine is, I fancy, the outcome of that scientific habit of mind about which I wrote this morning. I like to register impressions while they are fresh. Once a day at least I endeavor to define my own mental position. It is a useful piece of self-analysis, and has, I fancy, a steadying effect upon the character. Frankly, I must confess that my own needs what stiffening I can give it. I fear that, after all, much of my neurotic temperament survives, and that I am far from that cool, calm precision which characterizes Murdoch or Pratt-Haldane. Otherwise, why should the tomfoolery which I have witnessed this evening have set

my nerves thrilling so that even now I am all unstrung? My only comfort is that neither Wilson nor Miss Penclosa nor even Agatha could have possibly known my weakness.

And what in the world was there to excite me? Nothing, or so little that it will seem ludicrous when I set it down.

The Mardens got to Wilson's before me. In fact, I was one of the last to arrive and found the room crowded. I had hardly time to say a word to Mrs. Marden and to Agatha, who was looking charming in white and pink, with glittering wheat-ears in her hair, when Wilson came twitching at my sleeve.

"You want something positive, Gilroy," said he, drawing me apart into a corner. "My dear fellow, I have a phenomenon– a phenomenon!"

I should have been more impressed had I not heard the same before. His sanguine spirit turns every fire-fly into a star.

"No possible question about the bona fides this time," said he, in answer, perhaps, to some little gleam of amusement in my eyes. "My wife has known her for many years. They both come from Trinidad, you know. Miss Penclosa has only been in England a month or two, and knows no one outside the university circle, but I assure you that the things she has told us suffice in themselves to establish clairvoyance upon an absolutely scientific basis. There is nothing like her, amateur or professional. Come and be introduced!"

I like none of these mystery-mongers, but the amateur least of all. With the paid performer you may pounce upon him and expose him the instant that you have seen through his trick. He is there to deceive you, and you are there to find him out. But what are you to do with the friend of your host's wife? Are you to turn on a light suddenly and expose her slapping a surreptitious banjo? Or are you to hurl cochineal over her evening frock when she steals round with her phosphorus bottle and her supernatural platitude? There would he a scene, and you would be looked upon as a brute. So you have your choice of being that or a dupe. I was in no very good humor as I followed Wilson to the lady.

Any one less like my idea of a West Indian could not be imagined. She was a small, frail creature, well over forty, I should say, with a pale, peaky face, and hair of a very light shade of chestnut. Her presence was insignificant and her manner retiring. In any group of ten women she would have been the last whom one would have picked out. Her eyes were perhaps her most remarkable, and also, I am compelled to say, her least pleasant, feature. They were gray in colour, –gray with a shade of green, – and their expression struck me as being decidedly furtive. I wonder if furtive is the word, or should I have said fierce? On second thoughts, feline would have expressed it better. A crutch leaning against the wall

told me what was painfully evident when she rose: that one of her legs was crippled.

So I was introduced to Miss Penclosa, and it did not escape me that as my name was mentioned she glanced across at Agatha. Wilson had evidently been talking. And presently, no doubt, thought I, she will inform me by occult means that I am engaged to a young lady with wheat-ears in her hair. I wondered how much more Wilson had been telling her about me.

"Professor Gilroy is a terrible sceptic," said he; "I hope, Miss Penclosa, that you will be able to convert him."

She looked keenly up at me.

"Professor Gilroy is quite right to be sceptical if he has not seen any thing convincing," said she. "I should have thought," she added, "that you would yourself have been an excellent subject."

"For what, may I ask?" said I.

"Well, for mesmerism, for example."

"My experience has been that mesmerists go for their subjects to those who are mentally unsound. All their results are vitiated, as it seems to me, by the fact that they are dealing with abnormal organisms."

"Which of these ladies would you say possessed a normal organism?" she asked. "I should like you to select the one who seems to you to have the best balanced mind. Should we say the girl in pink and white? – Miss Agatha Marden, I think the name is."

"Yes, I should attach weight to any results from her."

"I have never tried how far she is impressionable. Of course some people respond much more rapidly than others. May I ask how far your scepticism extends? I suppose that you admit the mesmeric sleep and the power of suggestion."

"I admit nothing, Miss Penclosa."

"Dear me, I thought science had got further than that. Of course I know nothing about the scientific side of it. I only know what I can do. You see the girl in red, for example, over near the Japanese jar. I shall will that she come across to us."

She bent forward as she spoke and dropped her fan upon the floor. The girl whisked round and came straight toward us, with an enquiring look upon her face, as if some one had called her.

"What do you think of that, Gilroy?" cried Wilson, in a kind of ecstasy.

I did not dare to tell him what I thought of it. To me it was the most barefaced, shameless piece of imposture that I had ever witnessed. The collusion and the signal had really been too obvious.

"Professor Gilroy is not satisfied," said she, glancing up at me with her strange little eyes. "My poor fan is to get the credit of that experiment. Well, we must try something else. Miss Marden, would you have any objection to my putting you off?"

"Oh, I should love it!" cried Agatha.

By this time all the company had gathered round us in a circle, the shirt-fronted men, and the white-throated women, some awed, some critical, as though it were something between a religious ceremony and a conjurer's entertainment. A red velvet arm-chair had been pushed into the centre, and Agatha lay back in it, a little flushed and trembling slightly from excitement. I could see it from the vibration of the wheat-ears. Miss Penclosa rose from her seat and stood over her, leaning upon her crutch.

And there was a change in the woman. She no longer seemed small or insignificant. Twenty years were gone from her age. Her eyes were shining, a tinge of colour had come into her sallow cheeks, her whole figure had expanded. So I have seen a dull-eyed, listless lad change in an instant into briskness and life when given a task of which he felt himself master. She looked down at Agatha with an expression which I resented from the bottom of my soul – the expression with which a Roman empress might have looked at her kneeling slave. Then with a quick, commanding gesture she tossed up her arms and swept them slowly down in front of her.

I was watching Agatha narrowly. During three passes she seemed to be simply amused. At the fourth I observed a slight glazing of her eyes, accompanied by some dilation of her pupils. At the sixth there was a momentary rigor. At the seventh her lids began to droop. At the tenth her eyes were closed, and her breathing was slower and fuller than usual. I tried as I watched to preserve my scientific calm, but a foolish, causeless agitation convulsed me. I trust that I hid it, but I felt as a child feels in the dark. I could not have believed that I was still open to such weakness.

"She is in the trance," said Miss Penclosa.

"She is sleeping!" I cried.

"Wake her, then!"

I pulled her by the arm and shouted in her ear. She might have been dead for all the impression that I could make. Her body was there on the velvet chair. Her organs were acting – her heart, her lungs. But her soul! It had slipped from beyond our ken. Whither had it gone? What power had dispossessed it? I was puzzled and disconcerted.

"So much for the mesmeric sleep," said Miss Penclosa. "As regards suggestion, whatever I may suggest Miss Marden will infallibly do, whether it be now or after she has awakened from her trance. Do you demand proof of it?"

"Certainly," said I.

"You shall have it." I saw a smile pass over her face, as though an amusing thought had struck her. She stooped and whispered earnestly into her subject's ear. Agatha, who had been so deaf to me, nodded her head as she listened.

"Awake!" cried Miss Penclosa, with a sharp tap of her crutch upon the floor. The eyes opened, the glazing cleared slowly away, and the soul looked out once more after its strange eclipse.

We went away early. Agatha was none the worse for her strange excursion, but I was nervous and unstrung, unable to listen to or answer the stream of comments which Wilson was pouring out for my benefit. As I bade her good-night Miss Penclosa slipped a piece of paper into my hand.

"Pray forgive me," said she, "if I take means to overcome your scepticism. Open this note at ten o'clock tomorrow morning. It is a little private test."

I can't imagine what she means, but there is the note, and it shall be opened as she directs. My head is aching, and I have written enough for tonight. Tomorrow I dare say that what seems so inexplicable will take quite another complexion. I shall not surrender my convictions without a struggle.

March 25. I am amazed, confounded. It is clear that I must reconsider my opinion upon this matter. But first let me place on record what has occurred.

I had finished breakfast, and was looking over some diagrams with which my lecture is to be illustrated, when my housekeeper entered to tell me that Agatha was in my study and wished to see me immediately. I glanced at the clock and saw with sun rise that it was only half-past nine.

When I entered the room, she was standing on the hearth-rug facing me. Something in her pose chilled me and checked the words which were rising to my lips. Her veil was half down, but I could see that she was pale and that her expression was constrained.

"Austin," she said, "I have come to tell you that our engagement is at an end."

I staggered. I believe that I literally did stagger. I know that I found myself leaning against the bookcase for support.

"But – but —" I stammered. "This is very sudden, Agatha."

"Yes, Austin, I have come here to tell you that our engagement is at an end."

"But surely," I cried, "you will give me some reason! This is unlike you, Agatha. Tell me how I have been unfortunate enough to offend you."

"It is all over, Austin."

"But why? You must be under some delusion, Agatha. Perhaps you have been told some falsehood about me. Or you may have misunderstood something that I have said to you. Only let me know what it is, and a word may set it all right."

"We must consider it all at an end."

"But you left me last night without a hint at any disagreement. What could have occurred in the interval to change you so? It must have been something that happened last night. You have been thinking it over and you have disapproved of my conduct. Was it the mesmerism? Did you blame me for letting that woman exercise her power over you? You know that at the least sign I should have interfered."

"It is useless, Austin. All is over:"

Her voice was cold and measured; her manner strangely formal and hard. It seemed to me that she was absolutely resolved not to be drawn into any argument or explanation. As for me, I was shaking with agitation, and I turned my face aside, so ashamed was I that she should see my want of control.

"You must know what this means to me!" I cried. "It is the blasting of all my hopes and the ruin of my life! You surely will not inflict such a punishment upon me unheard. You will let me know what is the matter. Consider how impossible it would be for me, under any circumstances, to treat you so. For God's sake, Agatha, let me know what I have done!"

She walked past me without a word and opened the door.

"It is quite useless, Austin," said she. "You must consider our engagement at an end." An instant later she was gone, and, before I could recover myself sufficiently to follow her, I heard the hall-door close behind her.

I rushed into my room to change my coat, with the idea of hurrying round to Mrs. Marden's to learn from her what the cause of my misfortune might be. So shaken was I that I could hardly lace my boots. Never shall I forget those horrible ten minutes. I had just pulled on my overcoat when the clock upon the mantel-piece struck ten.

Ten! I associated the idea with Miss Penclosa's note. It was lying before me on the table, and I tore it open. It was scribbled in pencil in a peculiarly angular handwriting.

"MY DEAR PROFESSOR GILROY [it said]: Pray excuse the personal nature of the test which I am giving you. Professor Wilson happened to mention the relations between you and my subject of this evening, and it struck me that nothing could be more convincing to you than if I were to suggest to Miss Marden that she should call upon you at half-past nine tomorrow morning and suspend your engagement for half

an hour or so. Science is so exacting that it is difficult to give a satisfying test, but I am convinced that this at least will be an action which she would be most unlikely to do of her own free will. Forget any thing that she may have said, as she has really nothing whatever to do with it, and will certainly not recollect any thing about it. I write this note to shorten your anxiety, and to beg you to forgive me for the momentary unhappiness which my suggestion must have caused you.

"Yours faithfully;

"HELEN PENCLOSA.

Really, when I had read the note, I was too relieved to be angry. It was a liberty. Certainly it was a very great liberty indeed on the part of a lady whom I had only met once. But, after all, I had challenged her by my scepticism. It may have been, as she said, a little difficult to devise a test which would satisfy me.

And she had done that. There could be no question at all upon the point. For me hypnotic suggestion was finally established. It took its place from now onward as one of the facts of life. That Agatha, who of all women of my acquaintance has the best balanced mind, had been reduced to a condition of automatism appeared to be certain. A person at a distance had worked her as an engineer on the shore might guide a Brennan torpedo. A second soul had stepped in, as it were, had pushed her own aside, and had seized her nervous mechanism, saying: "I will work this for half an hour." And Agatha must have been unconscious as she came and as she returned. Could she make her way in safety through the streets in such a state? I put on my hat and hurried round to see if all was well with her.

Yes. She was at home. I was shown into the drawing-room and found her sitting with a book upon her lap.

"You are an early visitor, Austin," said she, smiling.

"And you have been an even earlier one," I answered.

She looked puzzled. "What do you mean?" she asked.

"You have not been out today?"

"No, certainly not."

"Agatha," said I seriously, "would you mind telling me exactly what you have done this morning?"

She laughed at my earnestness.

"You've got on your professional look, Austin. See what comes of being engaged to a man of science. However, I will tell you, though I can't imagine what you want to know for. I got up at eight. I breakfasted at half-past. I came into this room at ten minutes past nine and began to read the

`Memoirs of Mme. de Remusat.' In a few minutes I did the French lady the bad compliment of dropping to sleep over her pages, and I did you, sir, the very flattering one of dreaming about you. It is only a few minutes since I woke up."

"And found yourself where you had been before?"

"Why, where else should I find myself?"

"Would you mind telling me, Agatha, what it was that you dreamed about me? It really is not mere curiosity on my part."

"I merely had a vague impression that you came into it. I cannot recall any thing definite."

"If you have not been out today, Agatha, how is it that your shoes are dusty?"

A pained look came over her face.

"Really, Austin, I do not know what is the matter with you this morning. One would almost think that you doubted my word. If my boots are dusty, it must be, of course, that I have put on a pair which the maid had not cleaned."

It was perfectly evident that she knew nothing whatever about the matter, and I reflected that, after all, perhaps it was better that I should not enlighten her. It might frighten her, and could serve no good purpose that I could see. I said no more about it, therefore, and left shortly afterward to give my lecture.

But I am immensely impressed. My horizon of scientific possibilities has suddenly been enormously extended. I no longer wonder at Wilson's demonic energy and enthusiasm. Who would not work hard who had a vast virgin field ready to his hand? Why, I have known the novel shape of a nucleolus, or a trifling peculiarity of striped muscular fibre seen under a 300-diameter lens, fill me with exultation. How petty do such researches seem when compared with this one which strikes at the very roots of life and the nature of the soul! I had always looked upon spirit as a product of matter. The brain, I thought, secreted the mind, as the liver does the bile. But how can this be when I see mind working from a distance and playing upon matter as a musician might upon a violin? The body does not give rise to the soul, then, but is rather the rough instrument by which the spirit manifests itself. The windmill does not give rise to the wind, but only indicates it. It was opposed to my whole habit of thought, and yet it was undeniably possible and worthy of investigation.

And why should I not investigate it? I see that under yesterday's date I said: "If I could see something positive and objective, I might be tempted to approach it from the physiological aspect." Well, I have got my test. I shall be as good as my word. The investigation would, I am sure, be of immense interest. Some of my colleagues might look askance at it, for

science is full of unreasoning prejudices, but if Wilson has the courage of his convictions, I can afford to have it also. I shall go to him tomorrow morning – to him and to Miss Penclosa. If she can show us so much, it is probable that she can show us more.

II

March 26. Wilson was, as I had anticipated, very exultant over my conversion, and Miss Penclosa was also demurely pleased at the result of her experiment. Strange what a silent, colourless creature she is save only when she exercises her power! Even talking about it gives her colour and life. She seems to take a singular interest in me. I cannot help observing how her eyes follow me about the room.

We had the most interesting conversation about her own powers. It is just as well to put her views on record, though they cannot, of course, claim any scientific weight.

"You are on the very fringe of the subject," said she, when I had expressed wonder at the remarkable instance of suggestion which she had shown me. "I had no direct influence upon Miss Marden when she came round to you. I was not even thinking of her that morning. What I did was to set her mind as I might set the alarum of a clock so that at the hour named it would go off of its own accord. If six months instead of twelve hours had been suggested, it would have been the same."

"And if the suggestion had been to assassinate me?"

"She would most inevitably have done so."

"But this is a terrible power!" I cried.

"It is, as you say, a terrible power," she answered gravely, "and the more you know of it the more terrible will it seem to you."

"May I ask," said I, "what you meant when you said that this matter of suggestion is only at the fringe of it? What do you consider the essential?"

"I had rather not tell you."

I was surprised at the decision of her answer.

"You understand," said I, "that it is not out of curiosity I ask, but in the hope that I may find some scientific explanation for the facts with which you furnish me."

"Frankly, Professor Gilroy," said she, "I am not at all interested in science, nor do I care whether it can or cannot classify these powers."

"But I was hoping —"

"Ah, that is quite another thing. If you make it a personal matter," said she, with the pleasantest of smiles, "I shall be only too happy to tell you anything you wish to know. Let me see; what was it you asked me? Oh, about the further powers. Professor Wilson won't believe in them, but they are quite true all the same. For example, it is possible for an operator to gain complete command over his subject – presuming that the latter is a good one. Without any previous suggestion he may make him do whatever he likes."

"Without the subject's knowledge?"

"That depends. If the force were strongly exerted, he would know no more about it than Miss Marden did when she came round and frightened you so. Or, if the influence was less powerful, he might be conscious of what he was doing, but be quite unable to prevent himself from doing it."

"Would he have lost his own will power, then?"

"It would be over-ridden by another stronger one."

"Have you ever exercised this power yourself?"

"Several times."

"Is your own will so strong, then?"

"Well, it does not entirely depend upon that. Many have strong wills which are not detachable from themselves. The thing is to have the gift of projecting it into another person and superseding his own. I find that the power varies with my own strength and health."

"Practically, you send your soul into another person's body."

"Well, you might put it that way."

"And what does your own body do?"

"It merely feels lethargic."

"Well, but is there no danger to your own health?" I asked.

"There might be a little. You have to be careful never to let your own consciousness absolutely go; otherwise, you might experience some difficulty in finding your way back again. You must always preserve the connection, as it were. I am afraid I express myself very badly, Professor Gilroy, but of course I don't know how to put these things in a scientific way. I am just giving you my own experiences and my own explanations."

Well, I read this over now at my leisure, and I marvel at myself! Is this Austin Gilroy, the man who has won his way to the front by his hard reasoning power and by his devotion to fact? Here I am gravely retailing the gossip of a woman who tells me how her soul may be projected from her body, and how, while she lies in a lethargy, she can control the actions of people at a distance. Do I accept it? Certainly not. She must prove and re-prove before I yield a point. But if I am still a sceptic, I have at least ceased to be a scoffer. We are to have a sitting this evening, and she is to

try if she can produce any mesmeric effect upon me. If she can, it will make an excellent starting-point for our investigation. No one can accuse me, at any rate, of complicity. If she cannot, we must try and find some subject who will be like Caesar's wife. Wilson is perfectly impervious.

10 P. M. I believe that I am on the threshold of an epoch-making investigation. To have the power of examining these phenomena from inside – to have an organism which will respond, and at the same time a brain which will appreciate and criticise – that is surely a unique advantage. I am quite sure that Wilson would give five years of his life to be as susceptible as I have proved myself to be.

There was no one present except Wilson and his wife. I was seated with my head leaning back, and Miss Penclosa, standing in front and a little to the left, used the same long, sweeping strokes as with Agatha. At each of them a warm current of air seemed to strike me, and to suffuse a thrill and glow all through me from head to foot. My eyes were fixed upon Miss Penclosa's face, but as I gazed the features seemed to blur and to fade away. I was conscious only of her own eyes looking down at me, gray, deep, inscrutable. Larger they grew and larger, until they changed suddenly into two mountain lakes toward which I seemed to be falling with horrible rapidity. I shuddered, and as I did so some deeper stratum of thought told me that the shudder represented the rigor which I had observed in Agatha. An instant later I struck the surface of the lakes, now joined into one, and down I went beneath the water with a fulness in my head and a buzzing in my ears. Down I went, down, down, and then with a swoop up again until I could see the light streaming brightly through the green water. I was almost at the surface when the word "Awake!" rang through my head, and, with a start, I found myself back in the arm-chair, with Miss Penclosa leaning on her crutch, and Wilson, his note book in his hand, peeping over her shoulder. No heaviness or weariness was left behind. On the contrary, though it is only an hour or so since the experiment, I feel so wakeful that I am more inclined for my study than my bedroom. I see quite a vista of interesting experiments extending before us, and am all impatience to begin upon them.

March 27. A blank day, as Miss Penclosa goes with Wilson and his wife to the Suttons'. Have begun Binet and Ferre's "Animal Magnetism." What strange, deep waters these are! Results, results, results – and the cause an absolute mystery. It is stimulating to the imagination, but I must be on my guard against that. Let us have no inferences nor deductions, and nothing but solid facts. I KNOW that the mesmeric trance is true; I KNOW that mesmeric suggestion is true; I KNOW that I am myself sensitive to this force. That is my present position. I have a large new note-book which shall be devoted entirely to scientific detail.

Long talk with Agatha and Mrs. Marden in the evening about our marriage. We think that the summer vac. (the beginning of it) would be the best time for thewedding. Why should we delay? I grudge even those few months. Still, as Mrs. Marden says, there are a good many things to be arranged.

March 28. Mesmerised again by Miss Penclosa. Experience much the same as before, save that insensibility came on more quickly. See Note-book A for temperature of room, barometric pressure, pulse, and respiration as taken by Professor Wilson.

March 29. Mesmerised again. Details in Note-book A.

March 30. Sunday, and a blank day. I grudge any interruption of our experiments. At present they merely embrace the physical signs which go with slight, with complete, and with extreme insensibility. Afterward we hope to pass on to the phenomena of suggestion and of lucidity. Professors have demonstrated these things upon women at Nancy and at the Salpetriere. It will be more convincing when a woman demonstrates it upon a professor, with a second professor as a witness. And that I should be the subject – I, the sceptic, the materialist! At least, I have shown that my devotion to science is greater than to my own personal consistency. The eating of our own words is the greatest sacrifice which truth ever requires of us.

My neighbor, Charles Sadler, the handsome young demonstrator of anatomy, came in this evening to return a volume of Virchow's "Archives" which I had lent him. I call him young, but, as a matter of fact, he is a year older than I am.

"I understand, Gilroy," said he, "that you are being experimented upon by Miss Penclosa.

"Well," he went on, when I had acknowledged it, "if I were you, I should not let it go any further. You will think me very impertinent, no doubt, but, none the less, I feel it to be my duty to advise you to have no more to do with her."

Of course I asked him why.

"I am so placed that I cannot enter into particulars as freely as I could wish," said he. "Miss Penclosa is the friend of my friend, and my position is a delicate one. I can only say this: that I have myself been the subject of some of the woman's experiments, and that they have left a most unpleasant impression upon my mind."

He could hardly expect me to be satisfied with that, and I tried hard to get something more definite out of him, but without success. Is it conceivable that he could be jealous at my having superseded him? Or is he one of those men of science who feel personally injured when facts run counter to their preconceived opinions? He cannot seriously suppose that

because he has some vague grievance I am, therefore, to abandon a series of experiments which promise to be so fruitful of results. He appeared to be annoyed at the light way in which I treated his shadowy warnings, and we parted with some little coldness on both sides.

March 31. Mesmerised by Miss P.

April 1. Mesmerised by Miss P. (Note-book A.)

April 2. Mesmerised by Miss P. (Sphygmographic chart taken by Professor Wilson.)

April 3. It is possible that this course of mesmerism may be a little trying to the general constitution. Agatha says that I am thinner and darker under the eyes. I am conscious of a nervous irritability which I had not observed in myself before. The least noise, for example, makes me start, and the stupidity of a student causes me exasperation instead of amusement. Agatha wishes me to stop, but I tell her that every course of study is trying, and that one can never attain a result with out paying some price for it. When she sees the sensation which my forthcoming paper on "The Relation between Mind and Matter" may make, she will understand that it is worth a little nervous wear and tear. I should not be surprised if I got my F. R. S. over it.

Mesmerised again in the evening. The effect is produced more rapidly now, and the subjective visions are less marked. I keep full notes of each sitting. Wilson is leaving for town for a week or ten days, but we shall not interrupt the experiments, which depend for their value as much upon my sensations as on his observations.

April 4. I must be carefully on my guard. A complication has crept into our experiments which I had not reckoned upon. In my eagerness for scientific facts I have been foolishly blind to the human relations between Miss Penclosa and myself. I can write here what I would not breathe to a living soul. The unhappy woman appears to have formed an attachment for me.

I should not say such a thing, even in the privacy of my own intimate journal, if it had not come to such a pass that it is impossible to ignore it. For some time, – that is, for the last week, – there have been signs which I have brushed aside and refused to think of. Her brightness when I come, her dejection when I go, her eagerness that I should come often, the expression of her eyes, the tone of her voice – I tried to think that they meant nothing, and were, perhaps, only her ardent West Indian manner. But last night, as I awoke from the mesmeric sleep, I put out my hand, unconsciously, involuntarily, and clasped hers. When I came fully to myself, we were sitting with them locked, she looking up at me with an expectant smile. And the horrible thing was that I felt impelled to say what she expected me to say. What a false wretch I should have been! How I

should have loathed myself today had I yielded to the temptation of that moment! But, thank God, I was strong enough to spring up and hurry from the room. I was rude, I fear, but I could not, no, I COULD not, trust myself another moment. I, a gentleman, a man of honor, engaged to one of the sweetest girls in England – and yet in a moment of reasonless passion I nearly professed love for this woman whom I hardly know. She is far older than myself and a cripple. It is monstrous, odious; and yet the impulse was so strong that, had I stayed another minute in her presence, I should have committed myself. What was it? I have to teach others the workings of our organism, and what do I know of it myself? Was it the sudden upcropping of some lower stratum in my nature—a brutal primitive instinct suddenly asserting itself? I could almost believe the tales of obsession by evil spirits, so overmastering was the feeling.

Well, the incident places me in a most unfortunate position. On the one hand, I am very loath to abandon a series of experiments which have already gone so far, and which promise such brilliant results. On the other, if this unhappy woman has conceived a passion for me — But surely even now I must have made some hideous mistake. She, with her age and her deformity! It is impossible. And then she knew about Agatha. She understood how I was placed. She only smiled out of amusement, perhaps, when in my dazed state I seized her hand. It was my half-mesmerised brain which gave it a meaning, and sprang with such bestial swiftness to meet it. I wish I could persuade myself that it was indeed so. On the whole, perhaps, my wisest plan would be to postpone our other experiments until Wilson's return. I have written a note to Miss Penclosa, therefore, making no allusion to last night, but saying that a press of work would cause me to interrupt our sittings for a few days. She has answered, formally enough, to say that if I should change my mind I should find her at home at the usual hour.

10 P. M. Well, well, what a thing of straw I am! I am coming to know myself better of late, and the more I know the lower I fall in my own estimation. Surely I was not always so weak as this. At four o'clock I should have smiled had any one told me that I should go to Miss Penclosa's tonight, and yet, at eight, I was at Wilson's door as usual. I don't know how it occurred. The influence of habit, I suppose. Perhaps there is a mesmeric craze as there is an opium craze, and I am a victim to it. I only know that as I worked in my study I became more and more uneasy. I fidgeted. I worried. I could not concentrate my mind upon the papers in front of me. And then, at last, almost before I knew what I was doing, I seized my hat and hurried round to keep my usual appointment.

We had an interesting evening. Mrs. Wilson was present during most of the time, which prevented the embarrassment which one at least of

us must have felt. Miss Penclosa's manner was quite the same as usual, and she expressed no surprise at my having come in spite of my note. There was nothing in her bearing to show that yesterday's incident had made any impression upon her, and so I am inclined to hope that I overrated it.

April 6 (evening). No, no, no, I did not overrate it. I can no longer attempt to conceal from myself that this woman has conceived a passion for me. It is monstrous, but it is true. Again, tonight, I awoke from the mesmeric trance to find my hand in hers, and to suffer that odious feeling which urges me to throw away my honor, my career, every thing, for the sake of this creature who, as I can plainly see when I am away from her influence, possesses no single charm upon earth. But when I am near her, I do not feel this. She rouses something in me, something evil, something I had rather not think of. She paralyzes my better nature, too, at the moment when she stimulates my worse. Decidedly it is not good for me to be near her.

Last night was worse than before. Instead of flying I actually sat for some time with my hand in hers talking over the most intimate subjects with her. We spoke of Agatha, among other things. What could I have been dreaming of? Miss Penclosa said that she was conventional, and I agreed with her. She spoke once or twice in a disparaging way of her, and I did not protest. What a creature I have been!

Weak as I have proved myself to be, I am still strong enough to bring this sort of thing to an end. It shall not happen again. I have sense enough to fly when I cannot fight. From this Sunday night onward I shall never sit with Miss Penclosa again. Never! Let the experiments go, let the research come to an end; any thing is better than facing this monstrous temptation which drags me so low. I have said nothing to Miss Penclosa, but I shall simply stay away. She can tell the reason without any words of mine.

April 7. Have stayed away as I said. It is a pity to ruin such an interesting investigation, but it would be a greater pity still to ruin my life, and I KNOW that I cannot trust myself with that woman.

11 P. M. God help me! What is the matter with me? Am I going mad? Let me try and be calm and reason with myself. First of all I shall set down exactly what occurred.

It was nearly eight when I wrote the lines with which this day begins. Feeling strangely restless and uneasy, I left my rooms and walked round to spend the evening with Agatha and her mother. They both remarked that I was pale and haggard. About nine Professor Pratt-Haldane came in, and we played a game of whist. I tried hard to concentrate my attention upon the cards, but the feeling of restlessness

grew and grew until I found it impossible to struggle against it. I simply COULD not sit still at the table. At last, in the very middle of a hand, I threw my cards down and, with some sort of an incoherent apology about having an appointment, I rushed from the room. As if in a dream I have a vague recollection of tearing through the hall, snatching my hat from the stand, and slamming the door behind me. As in a dream, too, I have the impression of the double line of gas-lamps, and my bespattered boots tell me that I must have run down the middle of the road. It was all misty and strange and unnatural. I came to Wilson's house; I saw Mrs. Wilson and I saw Miss Penclosa. I hardly recall what we talked about, but I do remember that Miss P. shook the head of her crutch at me in a playful way, and accused me of being late and of losing interest in our experiments. There was no mesmerism, but I stayed some time and have only just returned.

My brain is quite clear again now, and I can think over what has occurred. It is absurd to suppose that it is merely weakness and force of habit. I tried to explain it in that way the other night, but it will no longer suffice. It is something much deeper and more terrible than that. Why, when I was at the Mardens' whist- table, I was dragged away as if the noose of a rope had been cast round me. I can no longer disguise it from myself. The woman has her grip upon me. I am in her clutch. But I must keep my head and reason it out and see what is best to be done.

But what a blind fool I have been! In my enthusiasm over my research I have walked straight into the pit, although it lay gaping before me. Did she not herself warn me? Did she not tell me, as I can read in my own journal, that when she has acquired power over a subject she can make him do her will? And she has acquired that power over me. I am for the moment at the beck and call of this creature with the crutch. I must come when she wills it. I must do as she wills. Worst of all, I must feel as she wills. I loathe her and fear her, yet, while I am under the spell, she can doubtless make me love her.

There is some consolation in the thought, then, that those odious impulses for which I have blamed myself do not really come from me at all. They are all transferred from her, little as I could have guessed it at the time. I feel cleaner and lighter for the thought.

April 8. Yes, now, in broad daylight, writing coolly and with time for reflection, I am compelled to confirm every thing which I wrote in my journal last night. I am in a horrible position, but, above all, I must not lose my head. I must pit my intellect against her powers. After all, I am no silly puppet, to dance at the end of a string. I have energy, brains, courage. For all her devil's tricks I may beat her yet. May! I MUST, or what is to become of me?

Let me try to reason it out! This woman, by her own explanation, can dominate my nervous organism. She can project herself into my body and take command of it. She has a parasite soul; yes, she is a parasite, a monstrous parasite. She creeps into my frame as the hermit crab does into the whelk's shell. I am powerless What can I do? I am dealing with forces of which I know nothing. And I can tell no one of my trouble. They would set me down as a madman. Certainly, if it got noised abroad, the university would say that they had no need of a devil-ridden professor. And Agatha! No, no, I must face it alone.

III

I read over my notes of what the woman said when she spoke about her powers. There is one point which fills me with dismay. She implies that when the influence is slight the subject knows what he is doing, but cannot control himself, whereas when it is strongly exerted he is absolutely unconscious. Now, I have always known what I did, though less so last night than on the previous occasions. That seems to mean that she has never yet exerted her full powers upon me. Was ever a man so placed before?

Yes, perhaps there was, and very near me, too. Charles Sadler must know something of this! His vague words of warning take a meaning now. Oh, if I had only listened to him then, before I helped by these repeated sittings to forge the links of the chain which binds me! But I will see him today. I will apologize to him for having treated his warning so lightly. I will see if he can advise me.

4 P. M. No, he cannot. I have talked with him, and he showed such surprise at the first words in which I tried to express my unspeakable secret that I went no further. As far as I can gather (by hints and inferences rather than by any statement), his own experience was limited to some words or looks such as I have myself endured. His abandonment of Miss Penclosa is in itself a sign that he was never really in her toils. Oh, if he only knew his escape! He has to thank his phlegmatic Saxon temperament for it. I am black and Celtic, and this hag's clutch is deep in my nerves. Shall I ever get it out? Shall I ever be the same man that I was just one short fortnight ago?

Let me consider what I had better do. I cannot leave the university in the middle of the term. If I were free, my course would be obvious. I should start at once and travel in Persia. But would she allow me to start? And could her influence not reach me in Persia, and bring me back to

within touch of her crutch? I can only find out the limits of this hellish power by my own bitter experience. I will fight and fight and fight – and what can I do more?

I know very well that about eight o'clock tonight that craving for her society, that irresistible restlessness, will come upon me. How shall I overcome it? What shall I do? I must make it impossible for me to leave the room. I shall lock the door and throw the key out of the window. But, then, what am I to do in the morning? Never mind about the morning. I must at all costs break this chain which holds me.

April 9. Victory! I have done splendidly! At seven o'clock last night I took a hasty dinner, and then locked myself up in my bedroom and dropped the key into the garden. I chose a cheery novel, and lay in bed for three hours trying to read it, but really in a horrible state of trepidation, expecting every instant that I should become conscious of the impulse. Nothing of the sort occurred, however, and I awoke this morning with the feeling that a black nightmare had been lifted off me. Perhaps the creature realized what I had done, and understood that it was useless to try to influence me. At any rate, I have beaten her once, and if I can do it once, I can do it again.

It was most awkward about the key in the morning. Luckily, there was an under-gardener below, and I asked him to throw it up. No doubt he thought I had just dropped it. I will have doors and windows screwed up and six stout men to hold me down in my bed before I will surrender myself to be hag-ridden in this way.

I had a note from Mrs. Marden this afternoon asking me to go round and see her. I intended to do so in any case, but had not excepted to find bad news waiting for me. It seems that the Armstrongs, from whom Agatha has expectations, are due home from Adelaide in the Aurora, and that they have written to Mrs. Marden and her to meet them in town. They will probably be away for a month or six weeks, and, as the Aurora is due on Wednesday, they must go at once – tomorrow, if they are ready in time. My consolation is that when we meet again there will be no more parting between Agatha and me.

"I want you to do one thing, Agatha," said I, when we were alone together. "If you should happen to meet Miss Penclosa, either in town or here, you must promise me never again to allow her to mesmerize you."

Agatha opened her eyes.

"Why, it was only the other day that you were saying how interesting it all was, and how determined you were to finish your experiments."

"I know, but I have changed my mind since then."

"And you won't have it any more?"

"No."

"I am so glad, Austin. You can't think how pale and worn you have been lately. It was really our principal objection to going to London now that we did not wish to leave you when you were so pulled down. And your manner has been so strange occasionally—especially that night when you left poor Professor Pratt-Haldane to play dummy. I am convinced that these experiments are very bad for your nerves."

"I think so, too, dear."

"And for Miss Penclosa's nerves as well. You have heard that she is ill?"

"No."

"Mrs. Wilson told us so last night. She described it as a nervous fever Professor Wilson is coming back this week, and of course Mrs. Wilson is very anxious that Miss Penclosa should be well again then, for he has quite a programme of experiments which he is anxious to carry out."

I was glad to have Agatha's promise, for it was enough that this woman should have one of us in her clutch. On the other hand, I was disturbed to hear about Miss Penclosa's illness. It rather discounts the victory which I appeared to win last night. I remember that she said that loss of health interfered with her power. That may be why I was able to hold my own so easily. Well, well, I must take the same precautions tonight and see what comes of it. I am childishly frightened when I think of her.

April 10. All went very well last night. I was amused at the gardener's face when I had again to hail him this morning and to ask him to throw up my key. I shall get a name among the servants if this sort of thing goes on. But the great point is that I stayed in my room without the slightest inclination to leave it. I do believe that I am shaking myself clear of this incredible bond – or is it only that the woman's power is in abeyance until she recovers her strength? I can but pray for the best.

The Mardens left this morning, and the brightness seems to have gone out of the spring sunshine. And yet it is very beautiful also as it gleams on the green chestnuts opposite my windows, and gives a touch of gayety to the heavy, lichen-mottled walls of the old colleges. How sweet and gentle and soothing is Nature! Who would think that there lurked in her also such vile forces, such odious possibilities! For of course I understand that this dreadful thing which has sprung out at me is neither supernatural nor even preternatural. No, it is a natural force which this woman can use and society is ignorant of. The mere fact that it ebbs with her strength shows how entirely it is subject to physical laws. If I had time, I might probe it to the bottom and lay my hands upon its antidote. But you

cannot tame the tiger when you are beneath his claws. You can but try to writhe away from him. Ah, when I look in the glass and see my own dark eyes and clear-cut Spanish face, I long for a vitriol splash or a bout of the small-pox. One or the other might have saved me from this calamity.

I am inclined to think that I may have trouble tonight. There are two things which make me fear so. One is that I met Mrs. Wilson in the street, and that she tells me that Miss Penclosa is better, though still weak. I find myself wishing in my heart that the illness had been her last. The other is that Professor Wilson comes back in a day or two, and his presence would act as a constraint upon her. I should not fear our interviews if a third person were present. For both these reasons I have a presentiment of trouble tonight, and I shall take the same precautions as before.

April 10. No, thank God, all went well last night. I really could not face the gardener again. I locked my door and thrust the key underneath it, so that I had to ask the maid to let me out in the morning. But the precaution was really not needed, for I never had any inclination to go out at all. Three evenings in succession at home! I am surely near the end of my troubles, for Wilson will be home again either today or tomorrow. Shall I tell him of what I have gone through or not? I am convinced that I should not have the slightest sympathy from him. He would look upon me as an interesting case, and read a paper about me at the next meeting of the Psychical Society, in which he would gravely discuss the possibility of my being a deliberate liar, and weigh it against the chances of my being in an early stage of lunacy. No, I shall get no comfort out of Wilson.

I am feeling wonderfully fit and well. I don't think I ever lectured with greater spirit. Oh, if I could only get this shadow off my life, how happy I should be! Young, fairly wealthy, in the front rank of my profession, engaged to a beautiful and charming girl – have I not every thing which a man could ask for? Only one thing to trouble me, but what a thing it is!

Midnight. I shall go mad. Yes, that will be the end of it. I shall go mad. I am not far from it now. My head throbs as I rest it on my hot hand. I am quivering all over like a scared horse. Oh, what a night I have had! And yet I have some cause to be satisfied also.

At the risk of becoming the laughing-stock of my own servant, I again slipped my key under the door, imprisoning myself for the night. Then, finding it too early to go to bed, I lay down with my clothes on and began to read one of Dumas's novels. Suddenly I was gripped – gripped and dragged from the couch. It is only thus that I can describe the overpowering nature of the force which pounced upon me. I clawed at the coverlet. I clung to the wood-work. I believe that I screamed out in my

frenzy. It was all useless, hopeless. I MUST go. There was no way out of it. It was only at the outset that I resisted. The force soon became too overmastering for that. I thank goodness that there were no watchers there to interfere with me. I could not have answered for myself if there had been. And, besides the determination to get out, there came to me, also, the keenest and coolest judgment in choosing my means. I lit a candle and endeavored, kneeling in front of the door, to pull the key through with the feather-end of a quill pen. It was just too short and pushed it further away. Then with quiet persistence I got a paper-knife out of one of the drawers, and with that I managed to draw the key back. I opened the door, stepped into my study, took a photograph of myself from the bureau, wrote something across it, placed it in the inside pocket of my coat, and then started off for Wilson's.

It was all wonderfully clear, and yet disassociated from the rest of my life, as the incidents of even the most vivid dream might be. A peculiar double consciousness possessed me. There was the predominant alien will, which was bent upon drawing me to the side of its owner, and there was the feebler protesting personality, which I recognized as being myself, tugging feebly at the overmastering impulse as a led terrier might at its chain. I can remember recognizing these two conflicting forces, but I recall nothing of my walk, nor of how I was admitted to the house.

Very vivid, however, is my recollection of how I met Miss Penclosa. She was reclining on the sofa in the little boudoir in which our experiments had usually been carried out. Her head was rested on her hand, and a tiger-skin rug had been partly drawn over her. She looked up expectantly as I entered, and, as the lamp- light fell upon her face, I could see that she was very pale and thin, with dark hollows under her eyes. She smiled at me, and pointed to a stool beside her. It was with her left hand that she pointed, and I, running eagerly forward, seized it, – I loathe myself as I think of it, – and pressed it passionately to my lips. Then, seating myself upon the stool, and still retaining her hand, I gave her the photograph which I had brought with me, and talked and talked and talked – of my love for her, of my grief over her illness, of my joy at her recovery, of the misery it was to me to be absent a single evening from her side. She lay quietly looking down at me with imperious eyes and her provocative smile. Once I remember that she passed her hand over my hair as one caresses a dog; and it gave me pleasure – the caress. I thrilled under it. I was her slave, body and soul, and for the moment I rejoiced in my slavery.

And then came the blessed change. Never tell me that there is not a Providence! I was on the brink of perdition. My feet were on the edge. Was it a coincidence that at that very instant help should come? No, no,

no; there is a Providence, and its hand has drawn me back. There is something in the universe stronger than this devil woman with her tricks. Ah, what a balm to my heart it is to think so!

As I looked up at her I was conscious of a change in her. Her face, which had been pale before, was now ghastly. Her eyes were dull, and the lids drooped heavily over them. Above all, the look of serene confidence had gone from her features. Her mouth had weakened. Her forehead had puckered. She was frightened and undecided. And as I watched the change my own spirit fluttered and struggled, trying hard to tear itself from the grip which held it – a grip which, from moment to moment, grew less secure.

"Austin," she whispered, "I have tried to do too much. I was not strong enough. I have not recovered yet from my illness. But I could not live longer without seeing you. You won't leave me, Austin? This is only a passing weakness. If you will only give me five minutes, I shall be myself again. Give me the small decanter from the table in the window."

But I had regained my soul. With her waning strength the influence had cleared away from me and left me free. And I was aggressive – bitterly, fiercely aggressive. For once at least I could make this woman understand what my real feelings toward her were. My soul was filled with a hatred as bestial as the love against which it was a reaction. It was the savage, murderous passion of the revolted serf. I could have taken the crutch from her side and beaten her face in with it. She threw her hands up, as if to avoid a blow, and cowered away from me into the corner of the settee.

"The brandy!" she gasped. "The brandy!"

I took the decanter and poured it over the roots of a palm in the window. Then I snatched the photograph from her hand and tore it into a hundred pieces.

"You vile woman," I said, "if I did my duty to society, you would never leave this room alive!"

"I love you, Austin; I love you!" she wailed.

"Yes," I cried, "and Charles Sadler before. And how many others before that?"

"Charles Sadler!" she gasped. "He has spoken to you? So, Charles Sadler, Charles Sadler!" Her voice came through her white lips like a snake's hiss.

"Yes, I know you, and others shall know you, too. You shameless creature! You knew how I stood. And yet you used your vile power to bring me to your side. You may, perhaps, do so again, but at least you will remember that you have heard me say that I love Miss Marden from the bottom of my soul, and that I loathe you, abhor you!

The very sight of you and the sound of your voice fill me with horror and disgust. The thought of you is repulsive. That is how I feel toward you, and if it pleases you by your tricks to draw me again to your side as you have done tonight, you will at least, I should think, have little satisfaction in trying to make a lover out of a man who has told you his real opinion of you. You may put what words you will into my mouth, but you cannot help remembering —"

I stopped, for the woman's head had fallen back, and she had fainted. She could not bear to hear what I had to say to her! What a glow of satisfaction it gives me to think that, come what may, in the future she can never misunderstand my true feelings toward her. But what will occur in the future? What will she do next? I dare not think of it. Oh, if only I could hope that she will leave me alone! But when I think of what I said to her — Never mind; I have been stronger than she for once.

April 11. I hardly slept last night, and found myself in the morning so unstrung and feverish that I was compelled to ask Pratt-Haldane to do my lecture for me. It is the first that I have ever missed. I rose at mid-day, but my head is aching, my hands quivering, and my nerves in a pitiable state.

Who should come round this evening but Wilson. He has just come back from London, where he has lectured, read papers, convened meetings, exposed a medium, conducted a series of experiments on thought transference, entertained Professor Richet of Paris, spent hours gazing into a crystal, and obtained some evidence as to the passage of matter through matter. All this he poured into my ears in a single gust.

"But you!" he cried at last. "You are not looking well. And Miss Penclosa is quite prostrated today. How about the experiments?"

"I have abandoned them."

"Tut, tut! Why?"

"The subject seems to me to be a dangerous one."

Out came his big brown note-book.

"This is of great interest," said he. "What are your grounds for saying that it is a dangerous one? Please give your facts in chronological order, with approximate dates and names of reliable witnesses with their permanent addresses."

"First of all," I asked, "would you tell me whether you have collected any cases where the mesmerist has gained a command over the subject and has used it for evil purposes?"

"Dozens!" he cried exultantly. "Crime by suggestion —"

"I don't mean suggestion. I mean where a sudden impulse comes from a person at a distance—an uncontrollable impulse."

"Obsession!" he shrieked, in an ecstasy of delight. "It is the rarest condition. We have eight cases, five well attested. You don't mean to say —" His exultation made him hardly articulate.

"No, I don't," said I. "Good-evening! You will excuse me, but I am not very w ell tonight." And so at last I got rid of him, still brandishing his pencil and his note-book. My troubles may be bad to hear, but at least it is better to hug them to myself than to have myself exhibited by Wilson, like a freak at a fair. He has lost sight of human beings. Every thing to him is a case and a phenomenon. I will die before I speak to him again upon the matter.

April 12. Yesterday was a blessed day of quiet, and I enjoyed an uneventful night. Wilson's presence is a great consolation. What can the woman do now? Surely, when she has heard me say what I have said, she will conceive the same disgust for me which I have for her. She could not, no, she COULD not, desire to have a lover who had insulted her so. No, I believe I am free from her love – but how about her hate? Might she not use these powers of hers for revenge? Tut! why should I frighten myself over shadows? She will forget about me, and I shall forget about her, and all will be well.

April 13. My nerves have quite recovered their tone. I really believe that I have conquered the creature. But I must confess to living in some suspense. She is well again, for I hear that she was driving with Mrs. Wilson in the High Street in the afternoon.

April 14. I do wish I could get away from the place altogether. I shall fly to Agatha's side the very day that the term closes. I suppose it is pitiably weak of me, but this woman gets upon my nerves most terribly. I have seen her again, and I have spoken with her.

It was just after lunch, and I was smoking a cigarette in my study, when I heard the step of my servant Murray in the passage. I was languidly conscious that a second step was audible behind, and had hardly troubled myself to speculate who it might be, when suddenly a slight noise brought me out of my chair with my skin creeping with apprehension. I had never particularly observed before what sort of sound the tapping of a crutch was, but my quivering nerves told me that I heard it now in the sharp wooden clack which alternated with the muffled thud of the foot fall. Another instant and my servant had shown her in.

I did not attempt the usual conventions of society, nor did she. I simply stood with the smouldering cigarette in my hand, and gazed at her. She in her turn looked silently at me, and at her look I remembered how in these very pages I had tried to define the expression of her eyes, whether they were furtive or fierce. today they were fierce – coldly and inexorably so.

"Well," said she at last, "are you still of the same mind as when I saw you last?"

"I have always been of the same mind."

"Let us understand each other, Professor Gilroy," said she slowly. "I am not a very safe person to trifle with, as you should realize by now. It was you who asked me to enter into a series of experiments with you, it was you who won my affections, it was you who professed your love for me, it was you who brought me your own photograph with words of affection upon it, and, finally, it was you who on the very same evening thought fit to insult me most outrageously, addressing me as no man has ever dared to speak to me yet. Tell me that those words came from you in a moment of passion and I am prepared to forget and to forgive them. You did not mean what you said, Austin? You do not really hate me?"

I might have pitied this deformed woman – such a longing for love broke suddenly through the menace of her eyes. But then I thought of what I had gone through, and my heart set like flint.

"If ever you heard me speak of love," said I, "you know very well that it was your voice which spoke, and not mine. The only words of truth which I have ever been able to say to you are those which you heard when last we met."

"I know. Some one has set you against me. It was he!" She tapped with her crutch upon the floor. "Well, you know very well that I could bring you this instant crouching like a spaniel to my feet. You will not find me again in my hour of weakness, when you can insult me with impunity. Have a care what you are doing, Professor Gilroy. You stand in a terrible position. You have not yet realized the hold which I have upon you."

I shrugged my shoulders and turned away.

"Well," said she, after a pause, "if you despise my love, I must see what can be done with fear. You smile, but the day will come when you will come screaming to me for pardon. Yes, you will grovel on the ground before me, proud as you are, and you will curse the day that ever you turned me from your best friend into your most bitter enemy. Have a care, Professor Gilroy!" I saw a white hand shaking in the air, and a face which was scarcely human, so convulsed was it with passion. An instant later she was gone, and I heard the quick hobble and tap receding down the passage.

But she has left a weight upon my heart. Vague presentiments of coming misfortune lie heavy upon me. I try in vain to persuade myself that these are only words of empty anger. I can remember those relentless eyes too clearly to think so. What shall I do – ah, what shall I do? I am no longer master of my own soul. At any moment this loathsome parasite may creep into me, and then — I must tell some one my hideous secret – I

must tell it or go mad. If I had some one to sympathize and advise! Wilson is out of the question. Charles Sadler would understand me only so far as his own experience carries him. Pratt-Haldane! He is a well-balanced man, a man of great common-sense and resource. I will go to him. I will tell him every thing. God grant that he may be able to advise me!

IV

6.45 P. M. No, it is useless. There is no human help for me; I must fight this out single-handed. Two courses lie before me. I might become this woman's lover. Or I must endure such persecutions as she can inflict upon me. Even if none come, I shall live in a hell of apprehension. But she may torture me, she may drive me mad, she may kill me: I will never, never, never give in. What can she inflict which would be worse than the loss of Agatha, and the knowledge that I am a perjured liar, and have forfeited the name of gentleman?

Pratt-Haldane was most amiable, and listened with all politeness to my story. But when I looked at his heavy set features, his slow eyes, and the ponderous study furniture which surrounded him, I could hardly tell him what I had come to say. It was all so substantial, so material. And, besides, what would I myself have said a short month ago if one of my colleagues had come to me with a story of demonic possession? Perhaps. I should have been less patient than he was. As it was, he took notes of my statement, asked me how much tea I drank, how many hours I slept, whether I had been overworking much, had I had sudden pains in the head, evil dreams, singing in the ears, flashes before the eyes – all questions which pointed to his belief that brain congestion was at the bottom of my trouble. Finally he dismissed me with a great many platitudes about open-air exercise, and avoidance of nervous excitement. His prescription, which was for chloral and bromide, I rolled up and threw into the gutter.

No, I can look for no help from any human being. If I consult any more, they may put their heads together and I may find myself in an asylum. I can but grip my courage with both hands, and pray that an honest man may not be abandoned.

April 10. It is the sweetest spring within the memory of man. So green, so mild, so beautiful t Ah, what a contrast between nature without and my own soul so torn with doubt and terror! It has been an uneventful day, but I know that I am on the edge of an abyss. I know it, and yet I go on with the routine of my life. The one bright spot is that Agatha is happy

and well and out of all danger. If this creature had a hand on each of us, what might she not do?

April 16. The woman is ingenious in her torments. She knows how fond I am of my work, and how highly my lectures are thought of. So it is from that point that she now attacks me. It will end, I can see, in my losing my professorship, but I will fight to the finish. She shall not drive me out of it without a struggle.

I was not conscious of any change during my lecture this morning save that for a minute or two I had a dizziness and swimminess which rapidly passed away. On the contrary, I congratulated myself upon having made my subject (the functions of the red corpuscles) both interesting and clear. I was surprised, therefore, when a student came into my laboratory immediately after the lecture, and complained of being puzzled by the discrepancy between my statements and those in the text books. He showed me his note-book, in which I was reported as having in one portion of the lecture championed the most outrageous and unscientific heresies. Of course I denied it, and declared that he had misunderstood me, but on comparing his notes with those of his companions, it became clear that he was right, and that I really had made some most preposterous statements. Of course I shall explain it away as being the result of a moment of aberration, but I feel only too sure that it will be the first of a series. It is but a month now to the end of the session, and I pray that I may be able to hold out until then.

April 26. Ten days have elapsed since I have had the heart to make any entry in my journal. Why should I record my own humiliation and degradation? I had vowed never to open it again. And yet the force of habit is strong, and here I find myself taking up once more the record of my own dreadful experiences – in much the same spirit in which a suicide has been known to take notes of the effects of the poison which killed him.

Well, the crash which I had foreseen has come – and that no further back than yesterday. The university authorities have taken my lectureship from me. It has been done in the most delicate way, purporting to be a temporary measure to relieve me from the effects of overwork, and to give me the opportunity of recovering my health. None the less, it has been done, and I am no longer Professor Gilroy. The laboratory is still in my charge, but I have little doubt that that also will soon go.

The fact is that my lectures had become the laughing-stock of the university. My class was crowded with students who came to see and hear what the eccentric professor would do or say next. I cannot go into the detail of my humiliation. Oh, that devilish woman! There is no depth of buffoonery and imbecility to which she has not forced me. I would begin my lecture clearly and well, but always with the sense of a coming eclipse.

Then as I felt the influence I would struggle against it, striving with clenched hands and beads of sweat upon my brow to get the better of it, while the students, hearing my incoherent words and watching my contortions, would roar with laughter at the antics of their professor. And then, when she had once fairly mastered me, out would come the most outrageous things – silly jokes, sentiments as though I were proposing a toast, snatches of ballads, personal abuse even against some member of my class. And then in a moment my brain would clear again, and my lecture would proceed decorously to the end. No wonder that my conduct has been the talk of the colleges. No wonder that the University Senate has been compelled to take official notice of such a scandal. Oh, that devilish woman!

And the most dreadful part of it all is my own loneliness. Here I sit in a commonplace English bow- window, looking out upon a commonplace English street with its garish 'buses and its lounging policeman, and behind me there hangs a shadow which is out of all keeping with the age and place. In the home of knowledge I am weighed down and tortured by a power of which science knows nothing. No magistrate would listen to me. No paper would discuss my case. No doctor would believe my symptoms. My own most intimate friends would only look upon it as a sign of brain derangement. I am out of all touch with my kind. Oh, that devilish woman! Let her have a care! She may push me too far. When the law cannot help a man, he may make a law for himself.

She met me in the High Street yesterday evening and spoke to me. It was as well for her, perhaps, that it was not between the hedges of a lonely country road. She asked me with her cold smile whether I had been chastened yet. I did not deign to answer her. "We must try another turn of the screw;" said she. Have a care, my lady, have a care! I had her at my mercy once. Perhaps another chance may come.

April 28. The suspension of my lectureship has had the effect also of taking away her means of annoying me, and so I have enjoyed two blessed days of peace. After all, there is no reason to despair. Sympathy pours in to me from all sides, and every one agrees that it is my devotion to science and the arduous nature of my researches which have shaken my nervous system. I have had the kindest message from the council advising me to travel abroad, and expressing the confident hope that I may be able to resume all my duties by the beginning of the summer term. Nothing could be more flattering than their allusions to my career and to my services to the university. It is only in misfortune that one can test one's own popularity. This creature may weary of tormenting me, and then all may yet be well. May God grant it!

April 29. Our sleepy little town has had a small sensation. The only knowledge of crime which we ever have is when a rowdy undergraduate breaks a few lamps or comes to blows with a policeman. Last night, however, there was an attempt made to break-into the branch of the Bank of England, and we are all in a flutter in consequence.

Parkenson, the manager, is an intimate friend of mine, and I found him very much excited when I walked round there after breakfast. Had the thieves broken into the counting-house, they would still have had the safes to reckon with, so that the defence was considerably stronger than the attack. Indeed, the latter does not appear to have ever been very formidable. Two of the lower windows have marks as if a chisel or some such instrument had been pushed under them to force them open. The police should have a good clue, for the wood-work had been done with green paint only the day before, and from the smears it is evident that some of it has found its way on to the criminal's hands or clothes.

4.30 P. M. Ah, that accursed woman! That thrice accursed woman! Never mind! She shall not beat me! No, she shall not! But, oh, the she-devil! She has taken my professorship. Now she would take my honor. Is there nothing I can do against her, nothing save — Ah, but, hard pushed as I am, I cannot bring myself to think of that!

It was about an hour ago that I went into my bedroom, and was brushing my hair before the glass, when suddenly my eyes lit upon something which left me so sick and cold that I sat down upon the edge of the bed and began to cry. It is many a long year since I shed tears, but all my nerve was gone, and I could but sob and sob in impotent grief and anger. There was my house jacket, the coat I usually wear after dinner, hanging on its peg by the wardrobe, with the right sleeve thickly crusted from wrist to elbow with daubs of green paint.

So this was what she meant by another turn of the screw! She had made a public imbecile of me. Now she would brand me as a criminal. This time she has failed. But how about the next? I dare not think of it – and of Agatha and my poor old mother! I wish that I were dead!

Yes, this is the other turn of the screw. And this is also what she meant, no doubt, when she said that I had not realized yet the power she has over me. I look back at my account of my conversation with her, and I see how she declared that with a slight exertion of her will her subject would be conscious, and with a stronger one unconscious. Last night I was unconscious. I could have sworn that I slept soundly in my bed without so much as a dream. And yet those stains tell me that I dressed, made my way out, attempted to open the bank windows, and returned. Was I observed? Is it possible that some one saw me do it and followed me home? Ah, what

a hell my life has become! I have no peace, no rest. But my patience is nearing its end.

10 P. M. I have cleaned my coat with turpentine. I do not think that any one could have seen me. It was with my screw-driver that I made the marks. I found it all crusted with paint, and I have cleaned it. My head aches as if it would burst, and I have taken five grains of antipyrine. If it were not for Agatha, I should have taken fifty and had an end of it.

May 3. Three quiet days. This hell fiend is like a cat with a mouse. She lets me loose only to pounce upon me again. I am never so frightened as when every thing is still. My physical state is deplorable – perpetual hiccough and ptosis of the left eyelid.

I have heard from the Mardens that they will be back the day after tomorrow. I do not know whether I am glad or sorry. They were safe in London. Once here they may be drawn into the miserable network in which I am myself struggling. And I must tell them of it. I cannot marry Agatha so long as I know that I am not responsible for my own actions. Yes, I must tell them,even if it brings every thing to an end between us.

tonight is the university ball, and I must go. God knows I never felt less in the humor for festivity, but I must not have it said that I am unfit to appear in public. If I am seen there, and have speech with some of the elders of the university it will go a long way toward showing them that it would be unjust to take my chair away from me.

10 P. M. I have been to the ball. Charles Sadler and I went together, but I have come away before him. I shall wait up for him, however, for, indeed, I fear to go to sleep these nights. He is a cheery, practical fellow, and a chat with him will steady my nerves. On the whole, the evening was a great success. I talked to every one who has influence, and I think that I made them realize that my chair is not vacant quite yet. The creature was at the ball – unable to dance, of course, but sitting with Mrs. Wilson. Again and again her eyes rested upon me. They were almost the last things I saw before I left the room. Once, as I sat sideways to her, I watched her, and saw that her gaze was following some one else. It was Sadler, who was dancing at the time with the second Miss Thurston. To judge by her expression, it is well for him that he is not in her grip as I am. He does not know the escape he has had. I think I hear his step in the street now, and I will go down and let him in. If he will —

May 4. Why did I break off in this way last night? I never went down stairs, after all – at least, I have no recollection of doing so. But, on the other hand, I cannot remember going to bed. One of my hands is greatly swollen this morning, and yet I have no remembrance of injuring it yesterday. Otherwise, I am feeling all the better for last night's festivity. But I cannot understand how it is that I did not meet Charles Sadler when I

so fully intended to do so. Is it possible — My God, it is only too probable! Has she been leading me some devil's dance again? I will go down to Sadler and ask him.

Midday. The thing has come to a crisis. My life is not worth living. But, if I am to die, then she shall come also. I will not leave her behind, to drive some other man mad as she has me. No, I have come to the limit of my endurance. She has made me as desperate and dangerous a man as walks the earth. God knows I have never had the heart to hurt a fly, and yet, if I had my hands now upon that woman, she should never leave this room alive. I shall see her this very day, and she shall learn what she has to expect from me.

I went to Sadler and found him, to my surprise, in bed. As I entered he sat up and turned a face toward me which sickened me as I looked at it.

"Why, Sadler, what has happened?" I cried, but my heart turned cold as I said it.

"Gilroy," he answered, mumbling with his swollen lips, "I have for some weeks been under the impression that you are a madman. Now I know it, and that you are a dangerous one as well. If it were not that I am unwilling to make a scandal in the college, you would now be in the hands of the police."

"Do you mean —" I cried.

"I mean that as I opened the door last night you rushed out upon me, struck me with both your fists in the face, knocked me down, kicked me furiously in the side, and left me lying almost unconscious in the street. Look at your own hand bearing witness against you."

Yes, there it was, puffed up, with sponge-like knuckles, as after some terrific blow. What could I do? Though he put me down as a madman, I must tell him all. I sat by his bed and went over all my troubles from the beginning. I poured them out with quivering hands and burning words which might have carried conviction to the most sceptical. "She hates you and she hates me!" I cried. "She revenged herself last night on both of us at once. She saw me leave the ball, and she must have seen you also. She knew how long it would take you to reach home. Then she had but to use her wicked will. Ah, your bruised face is a small thing beside my bruised soul!"

He was struck by my story. That was evident. "Yes, yes, she watched me out of the room," he muttered. "She is capable of it. But is it possible that she has really reduced you to this? What do you intend to do?"

"To stop it!" I cried. "I am perfectly desperate; I shall give her fair warning today, and the next time will be the last."

"Do nothing rash," said he.

"Rash!" I cried. "The only rash thing is that I should postpone it another hour." With that I rushed to my room, and here I am on the eve of what may be the great crisis of my life. I shall start at once. I have gained one thing today, for I have made one man, at least, realize the truth of this monstrous experience of mine. And, if the worst should happen, this diary remains as a proof of the goad that has driven me.

Evening. When I came to Wilson's, I was shown up, and found that he was sitting with Miss Penclosa. For half an hour I had to endure his fussy talk about his recent research into the exact nature of the spiritualistic rap, while the creature and I sat in silence looking across the room at each other. I read a sinister amusement in her eyes, and she must have seen hatred and menace in mine. I had almost despaired of having speech with her when he was called from the room, and we were left for a few moments together.

"Well, Professor Gilroy – or is it Mr. Gilroy?" said she, with that bitter smile of hers. "How is your friend Mr. Charles Sadler after the ball?"

"You fiend!" I cried. "You have come to the end of your tricks now. I will have no more of them. Listen to what I say." I strode across and shook her roughly by the shoulder "As sure as there is a God in heaven, I swear that if you try another of your deviltries upon me I will have your life for it. Come what may, I will have your life. I have come to the end of what a man can endure."

"Accounts are not quite settled between us," said she, with a passion that equalled my own. "I can love, and I can hate. You had your choice. You chose to spurn the first; now you must test the other. It will take a little more to break your spirit, I see, but broken it shall be. Miss Marden comes back tomorrow, as I understand."

"What has that to do with you?" I cried. "It is a pollution that you should dare even to think of her. If I thought that you would harm her —"

She was frightened, I could see, though she tried to brazen it out. She read the black thought in my mind, and cowered away from me.

"She is fortunate in having such a champion," said she. "He actually dares to threaten a lonely woman. I must really congratulate Miss Marden upon her protector."

The words were bitter, but the voice and manner were more acid still.

"There is no use talking," said I. "I only came here to tell you, – and to tell you most solemnly, – that your next outrage upon me will be your last." With that, as I heard Wilson's step upon the stair, I walked from the room. Ay, she may look venomous and deadly, but, for all that, she is beginning to see now that she has as much to fear from me as I can

have from her. Murder! It has an ugly sound. But you don't talk of murdering a snake or of murdering a tiger. Let her have a care now.

May 5. I met Agatha and her mother at the station at eleven o'clock. She is looking so bright, so happy, so beautiful. And she was so overjoyed to see me. What have I done to deserve such love? I went back home with them, and we lunched together. All the troubles seem in a moment to have been shredded back from my life. She tells me that I am looking pale and worried and ill. The dear child puts it down to my loneliness and the perfunctory attentions of a housekeeper. I pray that she may never know the truth! May the shadow, if shadow there must be, lie ever black across my life and leave hers in the sunshine. I have just come back from them, feeling a new man. With her by my side I think that I could show a bold face to any thing which life might send.

5 P. M. Now, let me try to be accurate. Let me try to say exactly how it occurred. It is fresh in my mind, and I can set it down correctly, though it is not likely that the time will ever come when I hall forget the doings of today.

I had returned from the Mardens' after lunch, and was cutting some microscopic sections in my freezing microtome, when in an instant I lost consciousness in the sudden hateful fashion which has become only too familiar to me of late.

When my senses came back to me I was sitting in a small chamber, very different from the one in which I had been working. It was cosey and bright, with chintz- covered settees, coloured hangings, and a thousand pretty little trifles upon the wall. A small ornamental clock ticked in front of me, and the hands pointed to half-past three. It was all quite familiar to me, and yet I stared about for a moment in a half-dazed way until my eyes fell upon a cabinet photograph of myself upon the top of the piano. On the other side stood one of Mrs. Marden. Then, of course, I remembered where I was. It was Agatha's boudoir.

But how came I there, and what did I want? A horrible sinking came to my heart. Had I been sent here on some devilish errand? Had that errand already been done? Surely it must; otherwise, why should I be allowed to come back to consciousness? Oh, the agony of that moment! What had I done? I sprang to my feet in my despair, and as I did so a small glass bottle fell from my knees on to the carpet.

It was unbroken, and I picked it up. Outside was written "Sulphuric Acid. Fort." When I drew the round glass stopper, a thick fume rose slowly up, and a pungent, choking smell pervaded the room. I recognized it as one which I kept for chemical testing in my chambers. But why had I brought a bottle of vitriol into Agatha's chamber? Was it not this thick, reeking liquid with which jealous women had been known to mar the

beauty of their rivals? My heart stood still as I held the bottle to the light. Thank God, it was full! No mischief had been done as yet. But had Agatha come in a minute sooner, was it not certain that the hellish parasite within me would have dashed the stuff into her — Ah, it will not bear to be thought of! But it must have been for that. Why else should I have brought it? At the thought of what I might have done my worn nerves broke down, and I sat shivering and twitching, the pitiable wreck of a man.

It was the sound of Agatha's voice and the rustle of her dress which restored me. I looked up, and saw her blue eyes, so full of tenderness and pity, gazing down at me.

"We must take you away to the country, Austin," she said. "You want rest and quiet. You look wretchedly ill."

"Oh, it is nothing!" said I, trying to smile. "It was only a momentary weakness. I am all right again now."

"I am so sorry to keep you waiting. Poor boy, you must have been here quite half an hour! The vicar was in the drawing-room, and, as I knew that you did not care for him, I thought it better that Jane should show you up here. I thought the man would never go!"

"Thank God he stayed! Thank God he stayed!" I cried hysterically.

"Why, what is the matter with you, Austin?" she asked, holding my arm as I staggered up from the chair. "Why are you glad that the vicar stayed? And what is this little bottle in your hand?"

"Nothing," I cried, thrusting it into my pocket. "But I must go. I have something important to do."

"How stern you look, Austin! I have never seen your face like that. You are angry?"

"Yes, I am angry."

"But not with me?"

"No, no, my darling! You would not understand."

"But you have not told me why you came."

"I came to ask you whether you would always love me—no matter what I did, or what shadow might fall on my name. Would you believe in me and trust me however black appearances might be against me?"

"You know that I would, Austin."

"Yes, I know that you would. What I do I shall do for you. I am driven to it. There is no other way out, my darling!" I kissed her and rushed from the room.

The time for indecision was at an end. As long as the creature threatened my own prospects and my honor there might be a question as to what I should do. But now, when Agatha – my innocent Agatha – was endangered, my duty lay before me like a turnpike road. I had no weapon, but I never paused for that. What weapon should I need, when I felt every

muscle quivering with the strength of a frenzied man? I ran through the streets, so set upon what I had to do that I was only dimly conscious of the faces of friends whom I met – dimly conscious also that Professor Wilson met me, running with equal precipitance in the opposite direction. Breathless but resolute I reached the house and rang the bell. A white cheeked maid opened the door, and turned whiter yet when she saw the face that looked in at her.

"Show me up at once to Miss Penclosa," I demanded.

"Sir," she gasped, "Miss Penclosa died this afternoon at half-past three!"

1894

THE SECRET OF COUSIN GEOFFREY'S CHAMBER*

I

"There are Annie and Margaret Ducie – that makes two – and the Ladies Lascelles, five: I don't see how we can squeeze in another young lady, by any possibility!"

Mrs.Pagonel was the speaker; and it was the sixth time that Beatrice and I had heard her say this, always winding up with a piteous appeal to us.

"Girls, what am I to do?"

"Really, mother dear, I don't see what you can do," said Beatrice, "except just write and say the truth, and that we are very sorry and so forth."

"What's the trouble, mother?" asked Hugh Pagonel, appearing in the doorway, ready equipped for his day's shooting.

"Oh! my dear, didn't you hear at breakfast? Those tiresome Mortons – at least they are charming people, I'm sure – only it is inconvenient – they have written to ask if they may bring a young lady, a niece of theirs, to stay here for the New Year's Eve Ball."

"Oh! never mind, mother, pack her in somehow or other, can't you? The more the merrier. Let her take my room, and I could have a shake-down anywhere."

"You are the kindest of boys," his mother said, looking fondly up at his stately height and bright, good-tempered face; "but it would be of no use, my dear, thank you. I could not offer a young lady a room in the bachelors' row, up a separate staircase and all: impossible! and it wouldn't do to make room for her by putting a maid there. No, no, I really must write, as Beatrice proposes, only it does so vex your father to seem inhospitable."

"Can't Bee and Katie put up together for those two nights?"

"Katie is to be badly enough quartered as it is," said Mrs.Pagonel, smiling at me; "we mean to put her into that little oak cupboard, which really is too small to turn round in, and Bee will give up her room to the Miss Ducies, and sleep in my dressing closet. It is wonderful how little accommodation there is in this great rambling place."

---

* The main incident of this story is one which really took place. (*A.C.D.*)

"Well, I can only see one thing to be done, mother," said Hugh; "give Miss What's-her-name the choice of staying away, or sleeping in Cousin Geoffrey's chamber."

"Really, mamma, we never thought of that," said Beatrice; "it is never used as a sitting-room – why not put a bed there for once? You don't really believe that it is haunted, do you?"

"Not exactly, but such a dreary soom, and on the ground floor away from everybody. I could hardly put a guest there."

"No, mamma, I never thought of your putting a guest there; but why should not Miss Morton sleep in your dressing closet? She must put up with close quarters – and I will have the little stretcher bed put into Cousin Geoffrey's room."

"My dear child, I would not on any account risk your nerves meeting with any shock."

"My nerves are in no danger, mother, I assure you," said Beatrice, in her quiet, rather demure manner. "I don't believe in ghosts."

"That is no reason why you should not be afraid of them," I remarked; "you had much better let me sleep in the haunted room. I do believe in ghosts, you know, and I should not at all mind seeing one; it would be great fun."

"I think we have used you ill enough already, Katie," said Mrs. Pagonel; "we don't treat you much like a visitor," and, with her sweet smile, she held out to me a hand, which, with its delicacy and look of exquisite keeping, its soft palm and nervous fluttering fingers, always seemed to me so like herself and her whole character. I had by no means lost my childish pleasure in admiring it, and in fingering her many bright rings, and I took it into both my own hands as I answered her last speech.

"Indeed, I should hope not! No place ever seems half so like home as dear old Ernscliff."

"We'll settle it as I proposed, please, mamma," Beatrice said, with the sober, well-judged decisiveness which she usually brought to the rescue in her mother's many small worries and uncertainties. "I will take all the trouble if you will let me, and I will go at once and desire Mrs.White to see that the room is well aired before the 31st."

And, after making an orderly arrangement of her work, she left the room.

"I'm off too, now, mother," said Hugh, who had waited good-naturedly to see if he could be of any use. "Bee is a capital girl, isn't she? she always hits on the right thing; and if she should see the ghost, I hope, she'll ask him where the treasure is; for, by Jove, it's wanted!"

He left the room; and his words, light as they were, called up a deep sigh from his mother, of which I partly knew the cause, for I was too much

like a child of the house not to be aware that there were money embarrassments at Ernscliff Castle, which weighed heavily upon them all. The dear old squire, the kindest, but not the wisest of men, had been led into foolish speculations, which had resulted in severe losses. To meet these demands he had been obliged to effect a heavy mortgage on his estate; and the loss of income which this involved could not fail of being a serious annoyance and difficulty to a family like the Pagonels – warm-hearted, open-handed people, with a considerable position in the county to keep up, with the endless expenses belonging to a large estate, and with numerous traditions of hospitality and charity, to break through any of which would have broken Squire Pagonel's heart as well. I knew that Mrs.Pagonel had been anxious that the New Year's gathering of county neighbours, which was one of the institutions of Ernscliff Castle, should not take place this year; but her husband could not bear to give it up, especially as Hugh, whose birthday fell on the last day of the year, was to come of age, and his father had long determined that this event should be celebrated by a ball.

"Let us economize in some other way," he had said, as his custom was, and as his wife knew that he would say again when she should demur to a month in London, or a trip to Scotland, or any other pet scheme which involved the spending of money. So, with a little sigh, she has resigned herself, only trying feebly to introduce little economical amendments into the arrangements, to which, of course, the old servants opposed all their *vis inertiae*, and which would never have been carried through, but for Beatrice's marvellous gift of managing everything and everybody. She had, as usual, been head in all the plans, and I had tried to be hands and feet; for, as I have already said, I was like another daughter of the house, though our relationship – for we did "call cousins" – was of the vaguest and most distant kind. My father, General Seaton, and Mr.Pagonel at Ernscliff, had been school fellows and brother officers; and their friendship had been cemented by the marriage of both, within a few years of each other, with two girls, distant relations, who had been brought up together.

My father and mother had been for the last ten years in India, and I had been left under the care of an excellent kind-hearted lady who took a small number of pupils, and under whose roof I had led a healthy and satisfactory life enough; but Ernscliff, where I spent all my holidays, was the home of my heart; and it made me sad to think that this was probably my last visit there for many years, as I was to join my father and mother in India in a few months' time.

It was a place to attach any child, and especially an imaginative one like myself, used to the monotonous confinement of a London square. The

park was wild in the extreme, a wide stretch of wood and hill and moorland, and the castle was a heavy dark-red mass of building, standing at the very edge of a steep descent, at the foot of which nestled the quaint little old-fashioned village, so directly below, that a stone could easily have been thrown from one of the castle windows down straight into the market-place. Inside it was a queer rambling house, full of narrow passages, and large long vaulted rooms, and unexpected staircases round dangerous corners, leading to haunted looking attics and ranges of dungeon-like cellars, charming for hide-and-seek, as we had often found, Hugh and Beatrice and I. The entrance-hall was of dark oak, with a stone floor, and with two heavy arched doors leading from it to the dining-room and library, and a third, rarely opened, which belonged to the room I have mentioned before – the blue chamber of the house – the haunted apartment known as Cousin Geoffrey's room. A gloomy, grewsome place it certainly was, partly because it had never, for generations, been made use of, so that it had gradually become a sort of hospital for disabled furniture and a receptacle for lumber. It took its share in the quarterly sweepings and scrubbings; but at other times I do not think the housemaids frequented it much; and, though I never heard any well-authenticated story of ghostly sights or sounds being seen or heard there, there was a vague horror of the place, which, as well as its quaint name, had been handed down from generation to generation among the traditions of Ernscliff Castle.

When Hugh had gone out shooting, and Mrs.Pagonel had settled herself to her note-writing, I fell to musing on all I had ever heard of this room, and I was surprised to find how very little it was. The subject had hardly ever been mentioned before us in our nursery days; and I knew that Mrs.Pagonel, who believed every one's nerves to be as delicately irritable as her own, would not encourage its discussion now; but I resolved, on the next opportunity, to ask Beatrice or Hugh to tell me who was this dead and gone Cousin Geoffrey, who was supposed to haunt the chamber which he had given his name.

The opportunity soon came. Dinner-hours in those days were earlier than they are now, and the blessed institution of five o'clock tea did not yet exist; but Beatrice was in advance of her age in this respect, and she had infected me with her propensity for tea-drinking at irregular hours. It had become a practice with her and me to find ourselves, in the dusk of the winter afternoons, on the large rug of furs which was spread before the wide old-fashioned hearth in the entrance-hall: there, crouching in the corners, out of the blaze and into the warmth, we used to sit and chat, and drink tea, which we waylaid on its road from the kitchen to the housekeeper's room; and there Hugh would often join us, glad to sit and rest before dressing-time, though his mud-coated gaiters and damp

shooting-jacket were not presentable in the civilized drawing-room regions. Those hours were some of the most delightful in my many happy days at Ernscliff; it was so easy to talk, so charming to listen, while the red firelight through weird glares and ghostly shadows across the dark hall, and while a cheerful accompaniment was kept up by the crackling logs and the click of Beatrice's never-idle knitting needles.

On this evening we assembled rather earlier than usual, with aching arms and sore fingers, after a busy afternoon spent in dressing the castle with holly, in honour of the approaching Christmas.

As we drew round the fire, Hugh, who had good-naturedly come in early in order to help us in our task, asked his sister if her arrangement held good for New Year's Eve.

"Yes," she answered, smiling; "the mother was rather afraid about the ghost; but it is the best plan, and I am quite willing to take the risk."

"I wish I knew the real story about that room," said I; "it was always tabooed in the nursery, and I have only heard bits and scraps of it; tell it me, Bee, won't you?"

"I would with pleasure, but I really do not know it," said Beatrice, demurely. "*I* don't take much interest in ghost stories."

"I can't make out that there is any ghost in the case," said Hugh; "but the other day, when I had to look up a lot of musty old family papers, I read the whole history of the man who used to live in that room. He didn't begin life as a ghost, you know."

"Oh! then, do tell it nicely, and make a story of it," I said, cowering closer into my corner, in expectation of something delightfully horrible.

"Well, it dates back to the days of Queen Bess. The Pagonels of that time – not our branch of the family, you know – had the ill-luck to be Papists, and, after being rather in favour as long as Mary reigned, they found themselves quite in a wrong box after her sister came to the throne. The family consisted of two brothers, Ralph, the possessor of Ernscliff, and Geoffrey, the younger, who, I believe, had hung about the house contentedly enough, doing everything that nobody else chose to do, as younger brothers did in those days, till there was some trouble between them about a certain beautiful cousin, one Beatrix Pagonel, who had been brought up with them both, and whom they both fell in love with."

"Which did she like best?"

"She liked the eldest brother best, like a well brought-up young woman. In this instance I don't much wonder, for, judging by their portraits, Ralph had the best of it. That is his picture over there; it is too dark to see it now, but you remember what a fine, handsome face it is."

"I would not praise it, if I were you," said Beatrice, smiling, "for it is the image of yourself."

"I'm glad I'm so good-looking. I only hope I shan't live to be hanged like my ancestor."

"Hanged? What had he done?"

"You shall hear. The Pagonels stuck to their faith when times changed, the only alteration being that their old chaplain disappeared for a little while, and then reappeared in the character of secretary and house-steward – a very transparent deceit I should think, but I dare say nobody wished to get the family into trouble. Now the story goes that somewhere in the intricacies of the castle there was a hiding-hole, so remote and so skilfully concealed that it defied discovery; the secret of which used to be in the possession of the head of the family, and of one confidant only chosen by himself. It is said that even the political or religious fugitives who had sometimes taken shelter there had been led to and from it blindfold, such was the jealousy with which the Pagonels guarded their precious secret. In Ralph Pagonel's day he had chosen for his confidant his brother Geoffrey; and, trusting to this place of refuge, where the old priest and all his pious belongings could be stowed away at a moment's notice, they practised their religion more fearlessly than most folks of their persuasion in the glorious days of good Queen Bess. At last, a few years after Ralph's marriage, the coolness between him and Geoffrey seems to have ended in an open rupture. Ralph Pagonel turned Geoffrey out of doors, with high words, which I have no doubt he deserved, and Geoffrey went off, vowing to be revenged on his brother."

"Oh! I know what he is going to do – he gave information."

"When next the little congregation at Ernscliff assembled for prayers, one who was always on the watch on these occasions came to give notice that the sheriff's officers were in the neighbourhood. When they arrived, everything was prepared to receive them, and Mr.Pagonel and his wife welcomed them politely, trusting to baffle them, as they had done before; but fancy their dismay and their fury, when they saw Geoffrey appear, bringing with him the poor old priest and all the sacred vessels which had been hidden in the hiding-hole of which he only knew the secret!"

"Wretched man! no wonder he can't rest in his grave."

"I don't know that he ever had a grave."

"Is he still living then, like the Wandering Jew? I hope he won't come back some day and claim the estate, Hugh."

"Wait till you hear the end. How far all these ins and outs are true I can't tell, but it is certain that Ralph and Beatrix Pagonel, and Francis Rivers, priest, are among those who died on the scaffold, and that Geoffrey was permitting take possession of the estate 'in consideration of good service rendered to the Crown.' He seems to have led a most

miserable life here, shunned by everybody as a traitor and a fratricide, and to have shut himself up at last quite alone in the castle, in that dreary room, having driven even his servants away."

"I don't feel as if I could pity him."

"He was supposed to have become a great miser, for he squeezed all he could out of his tenants; and it was believed that vast sums were accumulated in the castle while he lived here; but when our branch of the family took possession they found not a coin in the house and no signs of wealth – not even a trace of the family plate or jewels, which had been extremely valuable."

"When did your people come into the estate?"

"When this wretched man disappeared mysteriously, which he did at last. There is no record among the papers of the exact way in which his absence was first discovered; probably from his queer hermit way of life, not for a long time; but after some months had elapsed his cousin, our ancestor, came and took possession."

"Where can the hiding hole be?" I asked.

"To tell you the truth, I don't believe it ever existed. There are no end of closets and corners in all parts of the house, as you know, where a person who knew the place well could play at hide-and-seek very cleverly with a stranger; I fancy that is the origin of the story."

"And has any one ever seen this horrible Cousin Geoffrey?"

"I never heard of his being seen, but I have no doubt the horror which was felt for him caused his room to be shut up; and that of course would lead to all kinds of stories; and then there was a great belief that he had left a treasure buried somewhere, and might appear in approved ghost fashion to show its whereabouts."

"O Bee, what a chance for you!"

Beatrice laughed, and said she was in no way desirous of an interview with her unpleasant ancestor, though she added with a sigh:

"Anything short of that I would go through for the chance of finding the treasure."

"Ah! and wouldn't I?" said Hugh. "I can't bear to see the dear old squire look so careworn. I'd do anything to put things square for him."

"Not *anything*, Hugh?" his sister said, with emphasis; and I saw in the firelight how the colour mounted to his forehead as he answered:

"What do you mean? Why do you say that?"

"Because I know there are some things which you would not do for any one," she answered. "Did you hear mamma say that Miss Barnett is coming to the ball with the Lascelles?"

I didn't know why the name of the great Blankshire heiress struck unpleasantly on my ear, but it certainly did, and Hugh's free, gay laugh had never been so welcome.

"Oh! no, hang it," he answered; "we are not quite come to that: I'd sooner have

"My hollow tree,
My crust of bread and liberty."

There was a pause, and his tone was quite grave and sad, when he said a moment after:

"But at all events, I'll never do anything to add to his cares God helping me."

Nobody spoke, and we all sat and looked at the fire, and I felt – I don't know how. Hugh Pagonel had always been very dear to me; all, and more than all that our close intimacy warranted – brother, companion, champion; but I had never thought of him in any other light; and when, with the shy consciousness of my seventeen years, had come the feeling that our friendship could not be as close and free as that of myself and Beatrice, I had been more irritated and chafed than confused by the conviction. But the idea which Beatrice had suggested was strangely distastful to me; it made me realize how dreary it would be to see Hugh married another woman; and I found myself recollecting with a pang that my father had no fortune independent of his profession, and that for Hugh to marry a penniless wife would to take the surest way of adding to the squire's embarrassments. As I raised my eyes I met Hugh's fixed upon me with a look as sad and earnest as my own could have been. For the first time, his gaze confused me, and it was a relief when the sound of the great clanging house-bell scattered us in our different directions to dress for dinner.

II

On New Year's Eve the guests assembled for the coming-of-age ball that night, and to stay over the next day; when a tenants' supper was to take place. There is no need to describe them; they were pleasant, good-natured people, most of them old friends and neighbours of the Pagonels; and, as I had met them, year after year, during my holiday visits at Ernscliff, they were all kind in their notice of me, and civil in their regrets

at hearing that this was my last stay there before leaving England. The only stranger, besides the Miss Morton whose coming had caused so much discussion, was Miss Barnett, the heiress, who came with the Lord Lieutenant's party from Lascelles Acres. I could not help looking at her with much interest, and I am afraid I felt an uncharitable vexation at finding her to be a remarkably sweet-looking girl, very young, and simple in appearance and manner, and so unaffectedly delighted with the grand old castle, and the wide expanse of park through which they had driven, that I could almost have accused her, spitefully, of wishing to win Hugh's heart by praising the home which he loved so dearly. With my childish notion of what an heiress must be like, I was rather surprised to see her dressed in a sober, dark-coloured linsey, and coarse straw bonnet of the plainest kind; but, when we all went to dress after dinner, I heard Lady Lascelles telling Mrs.Pagonel that she had persuaded "Isabella to bring her jewels, as she thought they really were worth seeing;" and accordingly she entered the great drawing-room where we were to dance blazing with diamonds, which gleamed from the bosom of her white lace dress, and shone like stars in her thick plaits of light brown hair. She blushed a little when they were admired by all who felt intimate enough to speak of them to her, and anxiously explained that Lady Lascelles had made her wear them, as if she dreaded being supposed to have herself wished to make the display; and again I felt unreasonably annoyed – angered at the pretty diffident manner which formed such a piquant contrast to her gorgeous ornaments, and cruelly mortified when a glance at the mirror showed me my tall figure in a dress of the simplest muslin (manufactured by my own fingers under the superintendence of Mrs.Pagonel's maid), and my dark hair with a simple wreath of holly laid across it. The consciousness that my face was wreathed into a peculiarly crabbed and unlovely form warned me to recover my temper, and try to acquire something less unlike the sweet looks of the heiress; and I turned away from the mirror and endeavoured to throw myself into the interest of the moment. The ball began and went on with great spirit: I had plenty of partners, and should have enjoyed myself thoroughly, if it had not been that Hugh did not once dance with me – a state of things unprecedented at any of the Ernscliff festivities since I was seven years old. Last year I should have taken him to task for his neglect as fearlessly as if he had been my brother; now I could only fret in wardly while I tried to assume an extra gaiety of manner whenever he was near me, especially if Miss Barnett was his partner.

The result was that I was thoroughly tired before the end of the evening, and heartily glad when I heard the guests who were not staying at Ernscliff order their carriages; and, when the squire insisted that the ball should wind up with Sir Roger de Coverley, I stole away into a small

room adjoining the drawing-room, and always known as the "spirit chamber"– not, I believe, from any ghostly association, but simply from the preference of the Pagonel ancestry for having something at hand, Gamp-like, to which they "could put their lips when so disposed." It was fitted up as a little boudoir, and there I found Beatrice alone, looking so blue and cold, that I exclaimed at the sight:

"What have you been doing to yourself, Bee? You look like a ghost."

"Don't talk about ghosts!" she said, with a little shiver; "I am so ashamed of myself, Katie! I have a regular fit of *nerves* upon me tonight – so unlike me!"

"Are you not well, dear Bee?"

"Quite; but it is so foolish! You know I can't dance long without getting a pain in my side, and it is the same with Margaret Ducie; so we came in here to rest, and then our partners would come with us; and somehow they began asking about the family pictures in the hall, and that led to talking about Cousin Geoffrey's room, and they made me tell the story."

"And you frightened yourself? Oh! Bee, what a triumph! I thought you were much too wise to care for ghosts or goblins."

"That didn't frighten me; but then Margaret told us their horrible Ducie ghost-story, and Captain Lascelles capped it with something worse. You know I always dislike that sort of ghost talk, which seems to me such waste of time and trial of nerves for nothing; but I could not stop it, and none of them knew that I was to sleep in that dreary, lonely room tonight."

"And you shan't sleep there," I cried; "you shall have my room, Bee, darling. I shan't mind sleeping downstairs in the least."

"No; I'm not quite so selfish as that," she said. "I shall be all right when I get to bed and to sleep; I can't think why I have such a silly fit; it is very unlike me, I flatter myself – very odd."

"Not odd at all, my dear, when you consider that you were up at five this morning dressing the supper-table, and have been hard at work ever since. You may have prodigious strength of mind, but in body you are not a Hercules; and nerves belong to the body, don't they?"

The dance was over, the guests departing; and we had to emerge from our retreat. At the door Hugh was standing, leaning against the wall, and looking gloomy enough, but gazing fixedly across the room. Following his eyes I saw, with a thrill of pain, that they were riveted on Miss Barnett, who was looking peculiarly soft and attractive as she stood listening to Captain Lascelles, the light flashing from her splendid jewels.

"Do you admire her, Hugh?" I heard Beatrice whisper.

"I admire her jewels," he answered; "but her hair is hardly dark enough to set them off. Wouldn't they look well in black hair? I certainly do like diamonds."

"Most people do," his sister said, smiling.

"I wish I thought that I should ever be able to dress up my wife in such jewels as those," he answered.

"Well," she glanced with her demure gravity at his face, "you know the way, Hugh; faint heart never won fair lady."

"Ah! but the jewels must be of my giving, or I shouldn't value them a rush," he said; and as he moved off to hand some lady to her carriage, I felt my heart wonderfully lightened, and was ready to respond cordially when Beatrice began to sing Miss Barnett's praises.

It was some time before the various guests were shown to their rooms; but as soon as they had disappeared in their different directions I drew Beatrice into the little closet where I was to sleep. She was looking white and over-tired; and though well aware that it was not easy to persuade her to relinquish a plan, I was determined that she should not pass the night in that dreary room downstairs.

"Beatrice," I began, trying to be very authoritative, "I am going to help you out of your dress, and wrap you up in my dressing-gown, and then I shall carry my goods downstairs and bring yours up. I am quite determined to change places with you tonight."

"You shall do nothing of the kind, Katie: I am quite ashamed of myself as it is, but you can't suppose I'm quite so selfish!"

"Selfish? but really and truly I should enjoy the fun. You know I like an adventure, and here is the chance of one for me; and I am not feeling in the least nervous tonight."

"I wouldn't on any account. Couldn't we both squeeze in here for this short part of a night?"

And she glanced at the tiny bed which had been with difficulty wedged in from wall to wall of the little cell. I laughed at the idea, but was charmed to see this sign of wavering; and by a few more vehement words I carried my point, for indeed Beatrice was over-tired and unhinged, and had not the strength to oppose me. In one thing, howeyer, she was unpersuadable; she insisted on helping me to carry down my garments, and on seeing me safely installed in my apartment. This I allowed her to do, knowing that the servants were still about, and that therefore her night journey through the gloomy house would not be as eerie as it sounded.

The door of Cousin Geoffrey's room gave a dismal creak as it swung back on its rusty hinges, and the candle which each of us carried only made the great cavern of darkness look more impenetrable. Truly it was a dreary room, even apart from the memories of sin, and remorse, and

lonely wretchedness which seemed to hang heavily about it. Like most rooms in Ernscliff Castle, it was panelled with oak: the window recesses were of such depth as to form small rooms, testifying to the immense thickness of the walls, and were only half concealed by the scanty curtains, so fusty and ragged that I think they must have come down from the days of Cousin Geoffrey himself. There was a dreary array of dilapidated chairs, broken tables, and odds and ends of furniture banished for their ugliness from the more civilized parts of the house, and a space had been cleared in the middle for the light stretcher – a reminiscence of the squire's campaigning days – for a hastily-arranged dressing-table and a sponging-bath – the latter an essentially everyday, nineteenth-century affair, which was quite a cheering sight amidst so much dilapidation and decay. The housemaid had forgotten, or had been afraid to visit the room since dark, and the logs on the hearth had smouldered themselves away. This was the first thing which struck Beatrice, and with a shiver she exclaimed:

"Oh, dear, they have let the fire out! how excessively dreary!"

"Never mind," I cried, "it is all *en règle*; much more ghostified than if it were warm and light, like any commonplace room. Now, Bee, make haste to bed. Here, bundle these things over your arm – good-night."

"I can't bear to leave you," she said, lingering; but my spirit was now thoroughly made up to the adventure, and I would not hear of giving it up. I laughed at all Beatrice's demurs and scruples, told her that she would be a ghost herself if she stayed any longer shivering in the cold; and finally dismissed her, saying, as I gave her a last kiss, and saw her wistful, troubled look at me:

"My dear, you needn't make yourself unhappy! you know I don't possess nerves – I never was afraid of anything in my life."

Foolish, boastful words, which I had often said before, but which I was never to say again!

III

As the last sound of Beatrice's receding footsteps died away, I did feel rather lonely and queer; but rallying my spirits, and telling myself that it was "capital fun," as Hugh would have said, I began bustling about and preparing for bed, without leaving myself time to get nervous. I was soon out of my ball-dress, and in my warm dressing-gown and fur-lined slippers, which felt very comfortable in that cold, cellar-like atmosphere.

The unplaiting of my hair was a longer business, and I could not help falling into a reverie as I sat opposite the glass, and forgetting cold and fright and all things in speculating as to whether Hugh would, after all, repair the family fortunes by marrying Miss Barnett. With an ingenuity in self-torture which never, I think, exists in perfection except at seventeen, I built a series of most gloomy castles in the air – saw Hugh married to the heiress; Beatrice settled far from Ernscliff, and the dear old place closed against me forever; and then I indulged in a hearty fit of the dismals over my own future – in a strange country, and with parents who were little more to me than a vague memory and a name. I sat mournfully gazing into the depths of the looking-glass, when I suddenly found that a pair of gloomy painted eyes, from the wall behind, were looking back at me with the earnest, solemn gaze which always lives in the fixed eyes of a picture. I hastily turned and looked at the portrait, which I had not noticed before, but on which the rays of my candle happened now to fall. It represented a young man, not uncouth to look upon, though there was a peering, near-sighted contraction about the eyes, and a sort of suppressed sneer on the mouth, which gave an unpleasant expression to the otherwise handsome features. No doubt this was the wretched Geoffrey Pagonel: whose portrait but his would have been thus banished from the hall, where all the others hung in honoured remembrance? The haunting eyes of the picture made me shiver. I could hardly help gazing at it, fascinated, and felt as if in another moment the painted lips would begin to move, and the painted finger be raised to point out the buried treasure. Oh, it was very well to laugh and joke about the ghost in the cheerful rooms upstairs; but it was very different in this gloomy, darkened chamber, and with those spectral eyes glaring at me from the walls. A sensation as if cold water were running down the back of my neck suddenly warned me that I was getting overpoweringly nervous: there was nothing for it but to hurry over my preparations, and plunge into the safe harbour of my bed, where I could draw the clothes over eyes and ears, and try to sleep away the haunted hours till daylight. With a sudden resolution I sprang up, and in doing so struck the candlestick with my elbow; it fell with a crash to the ground, the light being of course extinguished in the fall, and myself left in total darkness!

That was a horrible moment; and yet there was something ludicrous in the adventure which gave me courage; and I instantly remembered that the fire in the hall had been burning cheerily a few minutes before, and, moreover, that a box of lucifer-matches and a pair of unlighted candles were always to be found on the mantelpiece there. To finish undressing in the dark, *tête-a-tête* with that dreadful picture, was not to be thought of; and, though not very sure of my bearings, I began to grope my way in the

direction where I believed the door to be, stretching out my hand before me in hopes of finding the handle. Suddenly my foot caught, probably in a hole in the ragged carpet; I fell forward and was saved by the wall, or rather the door, for it yielded as I fell against it, and as I stumbled forward I heard it close with a sharp click behind me. I must be in the hall, of course; but why was it in such total darkness? Could that blazing fire have gone out entirely in so very short a time? And even if it had, was there no glimmer from the staircase-window, which I knew had no shutters? – and why was there such a strange, close smell, as if there was hardly any fresh air in the place? I stood for a moment bewildered; then I determined to grope my way along the wall, where I must come in time to the table, which stood only a few paces to the right of the door leading into Cousin Geoffrey's room. I groped on – on – on – till I was suddenly brought up by another wall, at right angles: turning the corner, I groped on there, and this time I was stopped by stumbling against what seemed to be a chest or box, about as high as my waist. I still felt my way on, and there seemed to be other chests, sacks, boxes. Oh! where was I? Was there any cupboard in the room, into which I had unwittingly strayed? No; I was sure that there was none. Again and again I felt high and low for a door-handle; but the wooden walls were hopelessly smooth; there was no trace of the door by which I had entered, though I felt sure that I must have groped more than once quite round my prison. It appeared to be a small room; long, but very narrow; raising my hand above my head, I could feel no roof. Bewildered, scared, I believe – for I really hardly know – that I began to scream, the conviction rushing suddenly over me that my light words had been awfully fulfilled – that I had found the hidden room, the existence of which nobody now believed in; perhaps, too, to judge by the presence of these chests and sacks against the walls, I had found the missing treasure. My voice re-echoed drearily. No help came; no sound, no stir was to be heard. Never – never can I remember without a shudder, the feeling of utter desolation which struck cold on my heart at that moment – the sense of being cut off from all human help; alone, in the cruel, unfriendly darkness, I knew not where! I think I could almost have gone mad; but fortunately the very feeling that my senses were leaving me gave me strength to make one last strong effort to regain composure. First, I heartily commended myself to the protection of God; and then I was able to recollect that, after all, my situation was more ludicrous than terrible. I must be in some unknown recess in the thickness of the wall – probably the outer wall – and, of course, though it might be a work of time to discover the spring which I must have unwittingly pressed, it would be easy to effect my deliverance by removing a panel. The housemaid would come to call me at eight or nine o'clock, and all I had to do was to reserve my voice, instead

of screaming it away, so that I might make her hear and understand when she should enter the room. With this resolve, I sank down on the ground where I was – somewhere in the middle of the little narrow cell – and stretching out my hand, I felt along one of the chests, if chests they were, to ascertain if it was to be trusted as a support for my back. Oh, heaven! what, *what* met my hand? – what was hanging down the side of the chest? My cold fingers closed on other fingers; stiff, unyielding fingers; fleshly, bony. Something – I dared not think what – something which had probably been stretched along on the flat top of the chest – yielding to my frightened clutch, fell down close to me – almost over me, with a horrible rattle, which echoed drearily. Terror, sickening terror, overwhelmed me, and for the first time in my life I must have become entirely insensible; for I remember recovering by slow degrees the consciousness of where I was. When it all came back to me, my first impulse was to crouch up and draw my dress close round me, lest it should touch that horrible, nameless thing. And then a fresh dread came over me. How long had my swoon lasted? Was it not very likely that the housemaid had come and gone while I was unsensible and incapable of making her hear? If so, might not days, nay, weeks elapse before anyone entered the fatal room? There was something too fearful in the idea that they might be searching for me everywhere, wondering at my disappearance, while I should be starving, dying, suffering all the agonies of a lingering torture, close to them. I thought of the poor bride in the old ballad of the "Mistletoe Bough;" and the tears which I could not shed over my own situation began to flow freely at the recollection of a horror which was long over and past, if indeed it ever existed in real life. On, on, on crept the lingering hours, and I could not at last help feeling sure that my worst fears must be realized. Day must surely become, though there was no day for me in my narrow tomb. It seemed as if the ball had happened ages ago; as if I must have been many, many hours shut up here. The intense cold which I felt, the first which burned my throat, the sinking weakness in all my limbs, strengthened this conviction. Were these the first beginnings of the slow agony which was to end in death?

The horror of this thought swept away all self-control, and I broke out into a frantic cry:

"Will no one help me? – will no one hear me? Oh! I can't – I can't die here! – die like this!" and I shrieked violently.

Oh! joy of joys! I was answered. Yes, there was a voice – a loud, strong voice, though it sounded strangely muffled, and yet not very far off.

"What is it? What the deuce has happened? What is the matter?"

"Oh! is it Hugh? I am here, Hugh – I – Katie – oh! do let me out."

"Katie? Where on earth are you? Your voice seems to come out of the wall."

"Yes, I am, I am in the wall; I do believe it is the hiding-hole, and oh! I don't know what there is here – such horrors! Can't you take me out, Hugh? dear, dear Hugh."

"Of course; but how the deuce did you ever get in?"

"From that dreadful room – Cousin Geoffrey's room. I was sleeping there instead of Bee."

"Oh! then I had better go round to that room." And his voice receded, leaving me greatly bewildered as to his present whereabouts. Just as the dreadful sense of loneliness began to creep over me again, I heard the joyous sound of tramping feet and opening doors – and then his dear, cheery voice, always welcome – how welcome now! – sounded from the opposite side and much more clearly, "Speak, Katie, I can't tell the least where you are."

"Oh! here, here! Oh! you won't leave me again, Hugh! I fell: I must have touched a spring. Where am I?"

"How uncommonly queer! My poor Katie! You are in the thickness of the outer wall, I fancy. Well! this is a funny state of things!"

In a minute he said, in a calm, serious voice, which went a long way towards quieting my nerves:

"Katie, I must leave you for a few minutes. I might fumble here forever before I touched the spring, as no doubt you happened to do. The best way will be to take out a panel, and for that I must get Adams and his tools. Luckily he has been sleeping here, because of all the ball carpentry. I sha'n't be away long, but probably he is not up, so it may take some minutes; ten perhaps."

"Not up? What can the time be?"

"Just half-past six by the watch."

"Not six in the morning? Oh! I thought I had been here for ages. I thought I must have missed the housemaid when she came to call me. Hugh – you're not gone, are you?"

"Not gone, but going."

"But don't, don't!" I cried; "if you are only away five minutes, I know it will seem an hour, and I can't bear it – I can't indeed;" and, ashamed as I was of my childishness, I could not prevent my voice from dying away in a burst of sobs and tears. Hugh's answer came back in fond, caressing tones, such as I had never heard from him before:

"My poor little darling Katie," he said, "you have had a cruel shock. We shall never forgive ourselves for what we have exposed you to. But you must be reasonable, dearest Katie, and trust me that I won't be

one minute longer than I help. I'm going now, my Katie – don't be afraid. You will be all right and safe in a very few minutes now."

I heard his footsteps die away; but before I had time to become thoroughly nervous again I heard other feet and other voices gathering in the room, and speaking to me in tones of pity and consternation, but of amusement too, which did me great good: for in my feelings of horror and dismay, I had lost sight of the absurd side to my adventure. Beatrice was there, and I heard the squire's good-tempered voice, and his wife's gentle tones; and then came back again the voice that I liked best of all, and soon I was aware that Adams was busy at the panel, and at last – oh, blessed moment! – I saw the light of their candles, and the familiar figures in all sorts of quaint deshabilles. I felt myself drawn out through the narrow aperture and upheld by Hugh's strong supporting arms, and overwhelmed by the sudden sense of relief and safety, I let my head fall helplessly upon his shoulder, and I remember no more.

In a few moments I was conscious again, and found myself laid on the bed, Mrs.Pagonel and Beatrice attending on me, while the squire and Hugh seemed to be intent on examining the contents of the mysterious cell which I had so strangely been the means of discovering. I heard exclamations of wonder and satisfaction, and then of dismay – and Mrs.Pagonel interposed, and said that I must at once be taken to some warmer and more cheerful room. The squire accordingly came forward to give me the support of his arm, but not before I had seen a look of sick horror on his broad, ruddy face, and heard him mutter to Hugh, "Horrible! Is it not well written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, saith the Lord'?"

All that day I was thoroughly upset; suffering from headache to such a degree that I could do nothing but lie still and endure. Towards evening, however, I fell into a deep sleep, from which I awoke to find myself out of pain; and drawing aside the bed-curtains – I was in Mrs.Pagonel's room – I was well pleased to see Beatrice sitting by the fire, presiding over a most tempting-looking tea equipage.

"Oh! Katie, I am so sorry," were her first words.

"There is nothing to be sorry for, Bee: it is all over, and I am quite well now," I said, rising, and proceeding to twist up my hair and arrange my dress, and then seating myself in the arm-chair which she was drawing close to the fire for me; "but do tell me: have I really found the hiding-hole?"

"That you have," answered Beatrice, handing me a cup of tea, which I enjoyed as never tea was enjoyed before; "the hiding-hole, and the treasure as well! Such hoards, Katie! chests and sacks full of coins, and all the jewels and plate of which we have the lists among our family papers,

but which have always been missing, you know. O Katie, how can we thank you? This will put an end to papa's anxieties, I do believe!"

"Thank heaven! Oh! that is worth all I went through. But, Bee, how came those treasure there, do you suppose? What can have become of the wretched man? I can't tell you what horrible fancies I had about him."

"Are you sure they were fancies?" said Beatrice, very low: then as I looked questioningly at her, she said with a shudder – "Yes, my poor dear Katie; he must have really met with the fate which you were afraid of – how it happened, of course, no one can say – and after all, we may be jumping to a wrong conclusion; but a skeleton they have found there: surely it must be his – he must have starved to death in the midst of all the wealth he had hoarded."

"Yes and sold his soul for! Poor wretched man!" I answered with a shiver: the whole subject was to me too painful for discussion, and when Bee added that one could hardly pity such a wicked man, I could not echo her words; the horror was only a vague, unreal seeming romance to her, seen though the mists of so many hundred years, but to me it was a frightful reality – a thing of today.

I was not well enough to take part in the tenants' supper; but I came down into the little "spirit chamber," and there the guests visited me, one or two at a time. My last visitor was Hugh, who, as soon as he was released from his arduous task of proposing and responding to toasts, and keeping order among his tenants, came to ask how I was.

"You look dreadfully white, Katie," he said, sitting down near me; "not at all the better for your night in Cousin Geoffrey's room! How lucky it was that I could not sleep after the ball, and thought at last I'd go out before light, and try to get a shot at a wild duck!"

"Oh! that was how it was?"

"Yes: from my hearing your voice so plainly outside the house, I fancy there must be a shaft somewhere leading to the outer air – but we'll turn the place regularly out tomorrow. Poor Cousin Geoffrey! he's done us a good turn after all, hasn't he? and those bones of his shall have Christian burial at last."

I could not think about this part of the subject; Hugh saw it, and went on quickly:

"And do you know that you've discovered a perfect mine of wealth for us? My father says a great portion must go in charity before he can feel sure that it won't bring a curse with it: but even so, there'll be enough bullion to pay off this mortgage which has been worrying his life out."

"I am so glad!"

"Ah! and what am I? I wonder if you have the least idea how wretched I have been these last few days."

I felt that, weak and shaken as I was, I could not answer without beginning to cry, and in a moment Hugh went on:

"Tomorrow, Katie, will you let me show you all the quaint old plate and the jewels? Such jewels! Miss Barnett may hide her diminished head forever. But one of them I must show you now – I can't wait till tomorrow."

He took my hand, and held over the third finger a diamond hoop, heavy and old-fashioned in setting, but the stones of great size and brilliancy.

"Katie, dearest, we have been looking out these jewels in the lists which we have: shall I tell you the name by which this described there? The troth plight, the betrothal ring: it has been handed down as such evidently from one generation of us Pagonels to another. Katie, don't you and I belong naturally to each other? Won't you promise me not to go to India? May I not put the ring upon your finger?"

And so it was that Hugh was enabled to carry out his wish of decking his wife in jewels surpassing the Barnett diamonds, and this was what came of my terrible New Year's Eve in Cousin Geoffrey's Chamber.

1895

HOW IT HAPPENED

She was a writing medium. This is what she wrote:

I can remember some things upon that evening most distinctly, and others are like some vague, broken dreams. That is what makes it so difficult to tell a connected story. I have no idea now what it was that had taken me to London and brought me back so late. It just merges into all my other visits to London. But from the time that I got out at the little country station everything is extraordinarily clear. I can live it again – every instant of it.

I remember so well walking down the platform and looking at the illuminated clock at the end which told me that it was half-past eleven. I remember also my wondering whether I could get home before midnight. Then I remember the big motor, with its glaring headlights and glitter of polished brass, waiting for me outside. It was my new thirty-horse-power Robur, *which had only been delivered that day. I remember also asking Perkins, my chauffeur, how she had gone, and his saying that he thought she was excellent.*

"I'll try her myself," said I, and I climbed into the driver's seat.

"The gears are not the same," said he. "Perhaps, sir, I had better drive."

"No; I should like to try her," said I.

And so we started on the five-mile drive for home. My old car had the gears as they used always to be in notches on a bar. In this car you passed the gear-lever through a gate to get on the higher ones. It was not difficult to master, and soon I thought that I understood it. It was foolish, no doubt, to begin to learn a new system in the dark, but one often does foolish things, and one has not always to pay the full price for them. I got along very well until I came to Claystall Hill. It is one of the worst hills in England, a mile and a half long and one in six in places, with three fairly sharp curves. My park gate stands at the very foot of it upon the main London road.

We were just over the brow of this hill, where the grade is steepest, when the trouble began. I had been on the top speed, and wanted to get her on the free; but she stuck between gears, and I had to get her back on the top again. By this time she was going at a great rate, so I clapped on both brakes, and one after the other they gave way. I didn't mind so much when I felt my footbrake snap, but when I put all my weight on my side-brake, and the lever clanged to its full limit without a catch, it brought a cold sweat out of me. By this time we were fairly tearing down the slope.

The lights were brilliant, and I brought her round the first curve all right. Then we did the second one, though it was a close shave for the ditch. There was a mile of straight then with the third curve beneath it, and after that the gate of the park. If I could shoot into that harbour all would be well, for the slope up to the house would bring her to a stand.

Perkins behaved splendidly. I should like that to be known. He was perfectly cool and alert. I had thought at the very beginning of taking the bank, and he read my intention.

"I wouldn't do it, sir," said he. "At this pace it must go over and we should have it on the top of us."

Of course he was right. He got to the electric switch and had it off, so we were in the free; but we were still running at a fearful pace. He laid his hands on the wheel.

"I'll keep her steady," said he, " if you care to jump and chance it. We can never get round that curve. Better jump, sir."

"No," said I; " I'll stick it out. You can jump if you like."

"I'll stick it with you, sir," said he.

If it had been the old car I should have jammed the gear-lever into the reverse, and seen what would happen. I expect she would have stripped her gears or smashed up somehow, but it would have been a chance. As it was, I was helpless. Perkins tried to climb across, but you couldn't do it going at that pace. The wheels were whirring like a high wind and the big body creaking and groaning with the strain. But the lights were brilliant, and one could steer to an inch. I remember thinking what an awful and yet majestic sight we should appear to anyone who met us. It was a narrow road, and we were just a great, roaring, golden death to anyone who came in our path.

We got round the corner with one wheel three feet high upon the bank. I thought we were surely over, but after staggering for a moment she righted and darted onwards. That was the third corner and the last one. There was only the park gate now. It was facing us, but, as luck would have it, not facing us directly. It was about twenty yards to the left up the main road into which we ran. Perhaps I could have done it, but I expect that the steering-gear had been jarred when we ran on the bank. The wheel did not turn easily. We shot out of the lane. I saw the open gate on the left. I whirled round my wheel with all the strength of my wrists. Perkins and I threw our bodies across, and then the next instant, going at fifty miles an hour, my right wheel struck full on the right-hand pillar of my own gate. I heard the crash. I was conscious of flying through the air, and then – and then —!

When I became aware of my own existence once more I was among some brushwood in the shadow of the oaks upon the lodge side of the

drive. A man was standing beside me. I imagined at first that it was Perkins, but when I looked again I saw that it was Stanley, a man whom I had known at college some years before, and for whom I had a really genuine affection. There was always something peculiarly sympathetic to me in Stanley's personality; and I was proud to think that I had some similar influence upon him. At the present moment I was surprised to see him, but I was like a man in a dream, giddy and shaken and quite prepared to take things as I found them without questioning them.

"What a smash!" I said. "Good Lord, what an awful smash!"

He nodded his head, and even in the gloom I could see that he was smiling the gentle, wistful smile which I connected with him.

I was quite unable to move. Indeed, I had not any desire to try to move. But my senses were exceedingly alert. I saw the wreck of the motor lit up by the moving lanterns. I saw the little group of people and heard the hushed voices. There were the lodge-keeper and his wife, and one or two more. They were taking no notice of me, but were very busy round the car. Then suddenly I heard a cry of pain.

"The weight is on him. Lift it easy," cried a voice.

"It's only my leg!" said another one, which I recognized as Perkins's. "Where's master?" he cried.

"Here I am," I answered, but they did not seem to hear me. They were all bending over something which lay in front of the car.

Stanley laid his hand upon my shoulder, and his touch was inexpressibly soothing. I felt light and happy, in spite of all.

"No pain, of course?" said he.

"None," said I.

"There never is," said he.

And then suddenly a wave of amazement passed over me. Stanley! Stanley! Why, Stanley had surely died of enteric at Bloemfontein in the Boer War!

"Stanley!" I cried, and the words seemed to choke my throat – "Stanley, you are dead."

He looked at me with the same old gentle, wistful smile.

"So are you," he answered.

1913

(текст на задней стороне обложки
белым курсивом на фиолетовом фоне)

There is hardly anyone who has not read at least one story by Conan Doyle, but no one can claim to have read all his works, not even in Britain, for no really complete works of his have ever been published.

English man of letters Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930) is known as the creator of the immortal Sherlock Holmes and as one of the founders of the detective genre. He is far less remembered as the author of historical, science fiction and adventure stories, and still less, if ever, as the author of fascinating stories infused with mystery and mysticism.

Conan Doyle could have spoken about himself the following words of his hero: "My versatile mind is open to the eerie and the fantastic." He always took a keen interest in unknown, mysterious and supernatural phenomena and the powers of the human mind. No wonder, therefore, he spent nearly fifty years studying and successfully practising Spiritualism – the most amazing phenomenon of our reality. The mystery of Life and Death, the puzzles of the human mind unfathomable for run-of-the-mill rationalists always appealed to Conan Doyle, just as nowadays they still appeal to us. This collection throws a light on the hitherto not very well-known aspects of his oeuvre, and the reader will certainly enjoy these superb stories and appreciate their skilfully woven intrigue.

Paul Guéléva