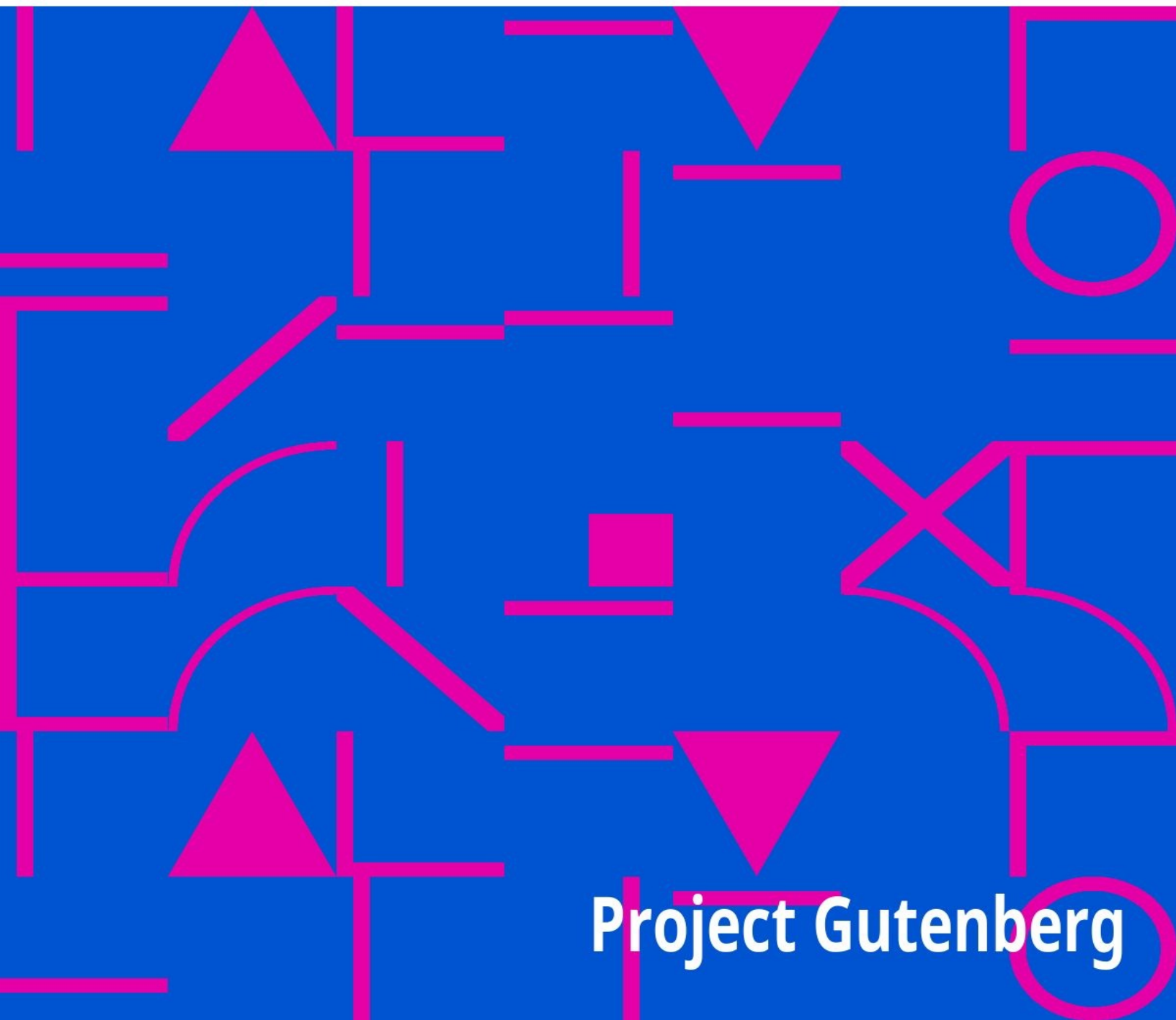


Tales of the Wonder Club, Volume II

M. Y. Halidom

An abstract geometric pattern on a blue background, featuring various pink shapes including triangles, squares, circles, and lines. The pattern is dense and covers the entire lower half of the page.

Project Gutenberg

The Project Gutenberg eBook, Tales of the Wonder Club, Volume II, by
Alexander Huth, Illustrated by John Jellicoe and Val Prince

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere at no cost and with
almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or
re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included
with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org

Title: Tales of the Wonder Club, Volume II

Author: Alexander Huth

Release Date: January 2, 2011 [eBook #34817]

Language: English

Character set encoding: ISO-8859-1

***START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK TALES OF THE
WONDER CLUB, VOLUME II***

E-text prepared by Greg Weeks, Stephen Blundell,
and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team
(<http://www.pgdp.net>)

TALES OF
THE WONDER CLUB.

BY
DRYASDUST.

VOL. II.

Decoration

ILLUSTRATED BY
JOHN JELlicoe AND VAL PRINCE,
AFTER DESIGNS BY THE AUTHOR.

HARRISON & SONS, 59, PALL MALL,
Booksellers to the Queen and H.R.H. the Prince of Wales.
All rights reserved.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY A. HUDSON AND CO.,
160, WANDSWORTH ROAD, S.W.

Transcriber's Note:

Although not present in the original publication, the following list of contents has been provided for convenience:

	PAGE
CHAPTER I. BURIED ALIVE.—THE LANDLORD'S STORY.	5
CHAPTER II. DER SCHARFRICHTER.—THE ARTIST'S SECOND STORY.	61
CHAPTER III. THE THREE PAULS.—THE ARTIST'S THIRD STORY.	154
CHAPTER IV. THE WAXEN IMAGE.—THE HOSTESS'S STORY.	238
CHAPTER V. IN WHICH OCCURS MR. PARNASSUS' BALLAD—THE CHIEFTAIN'S DESTINY.	322
CHAPTER VI. A TALE OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION.—THE BARBER'S STORY.	338



LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

	PAGE
ARTIST AND MODEL	<i>Frontispiece</i>
PERSIAN GULF	<i>Title Page</i>
BURIED ALIVE	5
EXECUTION	61
THE THREE PAULS	154
THE WAXEN IMAGE	238
CHIEFTAIN'S DESTINY	322
THE BASTILLE	338

CHAPTER I.

BURIED ALIVE.—THE LANDLORD'S STORY.

"Bravo, Oldstone! A very capital story!" cried several members at once. "It is a pity our host isn't here to have heard it."

"I heard a good part of it, though, gentlemen," said a voice from a dark corner of the room (for the lights had been extinguished, though it was still murky without).

"What, are you there, Jack?" cried Mr. Crucible. "We none of us saw you."

"Well, sir," said the landlord, "finding that I was not wanted outside as I thought, I ventured to enter the room quietly, so as not to disturb the story."

"Well done, Jack," said Hardcase, "and so you heard all, eh? Well, what do you think of it?"

"Pretty nearly all, I guess, sir," replied the landlord, "and a curious one it is, too, and no mistake. But talk of being buried alive, I could tell you a queer adventure that happened to myself, if you gentlemen would care to hear it."

"Only be too glad, Jack," said Oldstone. "Out with it; there is nothing like a good story to beguile the time in weather like this."

Our host, thus encouraged, drew his chair close to the fire, and his example was immediately followed by his guests. Then, refilling his yard of clay and lighting it in the fire, he gave one or two preliminary whiffs, and commenced his story thus:—

Well, gentlemen, when I was a youngster, that is to say, a lad of nineteen, I fell deeply in love with my Molly, who, though I say it, was the finest lass in the village and for miles round it. For all the world like my Helen, at her age, bless her dear heart! She was the daughter of a rich miller—his only child. Well, it had been a long attachment, for Molly and I were play-mates when we was little, but when I grew to be about nineteen, and my father began to see that I was head over ears in love with Molly, he forbade me to see any more of her, because he

and old Sykes—leastways, Molly's father, the miller—wasn't friends, d'ye see.

Nevertheless, Molly and I used to get a peep at each other on the sly like, and often took long walks together when no one was near.

Well, old Sykes also objected to me keeping company with his daughter, and sometimes suspecting what was up, used to lie in wait for us, and catch us in the lane as we was coming home from our walk. Then he'd give us both a "blowing up," for old Sykes wasn't partickler nice in his language, and Molly was locked up in her room while he went to complain of me to my father. This sort of thing occurred more than once, and Sykes, not knowing how to put a stop to it in any other way, sent his daughter on a visit to an aunt of hers some distance off.

I didn't know nothing of this for some time, and still went hovering round the house, expecting to see Molly at the window. Now, there happened to be at that time an epidemic running through the village, as proved fatal to many, carrying off both the young and the old, and when my father saw how pulled down I was in health and spirits, which was all along of my not having seen Molly for many a week, he took it into his head that I had caught the epidemic, and sent for a doctor. The doctor came, felt my pulse, and looked at my tongue, and pronounced me very bad, but said that he did not see the usual signs of the epidemic.

He ordered me, however, to be put to bed, and prescribed me some physic. Instead of doing me any good, it only made me worse, for the doctor was ignorant of the true cause of my low spirits. I was forced to keep in bed, and could do nothing night or day but think of Molly. My father, seeing me rapidly grow worse, but still ignorant of the cause—though he knew that I had been very much cut up about Molly—began to take on so—I being his only son—that the doctor was afraid that he would have to take to his bed. Once, shortly after Molly's disappearance, he told me that she had caught the epidemic and had died.

He hoped by this tale to bring me to my senses, and that I should soon forget her, and begin courting some other girl, but it had a very different effect upon me, and I rapidly sunk from worse to worse. When the doctor called again, he found me in a dangerous state, and he came to the conclusion that it must be the epidemic after all. Whether I really had caught the epidemic in addition to my love-sickness I can't tell. All I know is that I felt so bad that I didn't expect to live, and even the doctor said it was all over with me.

My death was expected daily, and when one morning the doctor came and found me stiff and cold, he gave out to my parents that I was dead. I was no more dead than I am at the present moment. It is true that I could not budge an inch, and I have no doubt that I looked thoroughly dead, but my mind was as clear and as sharp as possible.

"Poor young man," I heard the doctor say. "So hale and strong, too. Who'd have thought it?"

"Oh, my poor son! my poor son!" wept my father. "You whom I thought to rear to be the prop of my old age, now you are torn from me for ever."

"Calm yourself, sir," said the doctor, "else you will make yourself ill."

"How can I calm myself?" cried my father, in agony. "Was he not my *only* son? and I—I—fool, wretch, that I was—I killed him!"

"*You* killed him!" cried the doctor. "How? Surely you rave, sir."

"Yes," persisted my father; "the poor boy was in love with a maid whose father is my enemy. I objected to his marrying her, as did also the girl's father, who wishing to save his daughter from my son sent her away to live at the house of an aunt in the village of H—— in ——shire. As my son knew nothing of this, I told him, thinking to make him forget her, that the maid was dead, but the poor boy took on so dreadful about it, that it has been his death, and I—yes I am his murderer!" and I thought his sobs would choke him.

"It was very wrong and foolish of you," said the doctor, "to tell him so, when you saw him so weak and ailing, yet you did it with a good intent, and I do not see that you can justly accuse yourself of being his murderer."

"Yes, yes," sobbed my father, bitterly, "I have killed him—my son, my *only* son!"

Now I had discovered a secret. Molly was not dead, but living at her aunt's. I knew her address; if I could but be restored to life, I might see her once again. I longed to be able to call out: "Father, I am not dead—comfort yourself," but my tongue refused utterance. I tried to move my limbs, and did all that was in my power to show signs of life, but I still lay powerless—paralysed, for I was in a trance. Oh! the agony I suffered! How long would it last? Should I be really nailed up in a coffin and buried alive? Oh, horror!

Some of my friends the neighbours were called in to see me and mourned over my corpse.

"Poor Jack!" one of them said; "if lads of his kidney are not proof against the epidemic, who may hope to escape?"

The next day an undertaker was sent for to measure me for my coffin.

"Where will all this end?" thought I. "Shall I awake before the coffin is made?"

This was my only hope; but if not, all was lost. Once nailed down, nailed down for ever. The thought was agony.

Here I was, struck down in the flower of my youth, to all appearances dead, yet with my mind keenly alive to all that was going on around me. Oh, that I could become insensible! I knew not how long this dreadful trance would last; all I knew was that if it lasted more than a day or two longer it would be all up with me. I was laid out in state, and all that day and the next friends poured in to gaze upon my corpse.

As the time grew nearer for my funeral the more despairing I got. At length the coffin arrived. I shuddered. Had my last moment actually come? What could I do? Nothing.

"Oh, Heaven!" I cried within myself, "for what fell crime am I doomed to bear this agony of soul?"

Two undertakers now lifted me from my bed, one of them seizing me by the shoulders, the other by the feet, and I felt myself placed within a leaden coffin supported upon trestles. I did my utmost now to make one last desperate effort to rouse myself out of my trance, but in vain.

"Oh, if they should nail me up!" I thought.

Then I was left alone all day, and remember a great bustle and whispering going on in the house. All were talking of my funeral. At length the fatal hour arrived! The undertakers entered my room again. Good Heavens! they were actually going to solder me down. The next instant the leaden lid was down upon me, and I was soon tightly secured. Then commenced the knocking in of the nails of the outer coffin. How painfully distinct was the sound of the hammer! I remember counting each nail as it was driven in. At length the task was completed, and I only awaited the hearse to carry me to my last home.

Then there was more bustle, the meeting of friends, etc., when after waiting a little longer, I heard the footsteps of the bearers. I felt myself lifted upon the shoulders of the men and carried downstairs. A crowd had evidently collected round the door, for I heard the muffled sound of voices gossiping, but could not distinguish what they said. Only the tolling of the church bell jarred upon my ears. Then the procession began. How slowly it moved along!

"Oh! if I could even now awake!" thought I, "it might not be too late. If I could make sufficient movement with my limbs to overturn the coffin, or even had strength to call out, I should even now be saved."

But all in vain—rigid, motionless as ever, in spite of my earnest prayers to be restored to life. I felt myself borne leisurely on—whither? Oh, horror! to the cold and narrow grave—to the abode of the dead. My last hope died within me when I felt the procession stop, and I knew that it was already arrived at the cemetery. I remember hearing faintly the tones of the parson's voice as he read the ceremony for the burial of the dead. The coffin was now lowered into the grave, and I heard with awful distinctness the words "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust," followed by the rattling of the three handfuls of earth upon my coffin lid. My last hope was now gone. In another moment I should be covered up with mould and left alone to die miserably.

"Oh!" groaned I, in spirit, "it is all over with me!" as I heard the mould tumbling heavily upon me.

I knew that the grave was now covered up, for the voices of my friends were quite inaudible, and all was silent.

What a terrible feeling of isolation was mine! Cut off completely from the rest of the world by some feet of earth, alive, yet supposed to be dead, deserted by friends and doomed at length to awaken only to suffer a death of all deaths most horrible! Had I still believed Molly to be dead, it would have been some consolation to me to die; nay, how gladly would I have welcomed death that I might meet her in a better land. But, alas, I knew that Molly still lived, and after death I should be further away from her than ever. This thought was agony to me. One thing, however, somewhat consoled me, though it was but poor consolation.

"We must all die," I thought.

Molly must die, too. It might be years before she left this earth, still I should see

her again sooner or later. But then came another, thought which, do all I could, I was unable to banish from my mind. In the meantime Molly might marry someone else, and rear up a large family of children, and what could I be to her then if I ever chanced to meet her in the other world? If ever human soul knew agony, mine knew it then. I longed for no eternity without Molly, and I remember praying that my spirit might be utterly annihilated and become as insensible as the clay that I was about to leave behind me. It was a dreadful and an impious prayer, but when during life, one dear idol has monopolised the heart and there reigns supreme, even the fear of eternal damnation is insufficient to drive it from its throne.

"Oh, that I could die quickly and be at rest for ever!"

Then I prayed fervently a long, heartfelt, earnest prayer, after which I felt more calm, more resigned to my fate. I had no hopes of being rescued and being brought back to life—that hope had quite left me. I now only wished for a speedy and peaceful death. Many weary hours I lay on my back within my narrow prison—rigid—immovable—a living soul amongst the dead. The silence that reigned around was intense, almost inconceivable to those accustomed to the busy world without.

I missed the rustling of the leaves, the chirping of the birds, the distant lowing of cattle, the hum of human voices, every sound of life; all was still, for it was *the silence of the grave*. The only sound at all audible, and that was so indistinct and muffled from the pile of earth that covered me that, had my sense of hearing not been excited to an abnormal pitch, I should not have heard it, and that was the sound of the church clock as it struck the hour. I had been buried in the morning at about ten o'clock, and I remember counting the hours until ten o'clock at night. Every hour appeared to me a century, until, exhausted with the agony of mind I had endured, I fell asleep and dreamed of Molly. I thought that I was by her side walking under the trees in a part of the country that I had never seen before.

There was a house at some distance, which she said belonged to her aunt. I was telling her all about how I came to be buried alive, and she was listening to me and looking up in my face with tearful eyes, for she had heard that I was dead. I also dreamed that I saw a serpent moving in the grass at her feet. I sprang up and beat it severely with my cane. At first it attempted to defend itself, but at length it escaped from me severely bruised.

The dream then changed from one subject to another, but Molly was by my side

throughout. It was exceedingly vivid, and I doubted not at the time but that I was by her side in reality.

I know not how long I had been asleep when I heard a confused noise while still in a dreaming state, and I awoke to find myself once more in my coffin.

"Oh, why was not this dream allowed to last?" I groaned to myself, and tried to fall asleep again, hoping to take up the thread of my dream at the point that I had lost it, but in vain, for now I heard the same noise in reality over my head. It was the sound of men's voices. Who could they be? Was I still dreaming? No!

They were the resurrectionists, or the "body-snatchers," as we generally call them. They had come to rob my body in order to sell it to some doctor. How my heart beat for joy!

"I shall be saved! I shall be saved!" said I to myself.

"O merciful God!" I prayed in spirit, "who scornest not to make the meanest of thy creatures thine instruments, I thank Thee for having heard my prayers and delivered me from this fearful death. I am unworthy of all thy mercies, O God! Perform thy miracles on men more worthy."

The body-snatchers had now shovelled all the earth away that covered me, and they began to lift the coffin out of the grave. Had it been my friend's coffin instead of my own, I should have stigmatised the men who attempted to disinter his body as thieves, robbers, a set of midnight marauders; but in the present instance I blessed them as my deliverers, as my brothers. My heart yearned towards them, for my hopes began to revive.

It would be discovered that I was not dead, at least, I hoped so, and when my trance should pass off I should be able to find some way of seeing Molly again. The next moment the outer coffin was wrenched open; then they proceeded to force the leaden one. This was soon done, and I now felt the chill night air. To lift me out, thrust me headfirst into a sack, and shovel the earth into the grave again, was the work of a moment, and I now felt myself laid across the shoulder of one of the men, and carried off.

"Where was I bound for?" I asked myself.

The men began talking together, so I resolved to listen—to learn, if possible, what they were going to do with me.

"A fine corpse, Bill," said one body-snatcher to the other.

"Aye, my word," replied Bill, "but what a weight he be!"

"Ah! I dare say; these youngsters are so full of blood and muscle," said the other.

"Tell you what it is, Tom," said my bearer, "you must lend me a hand or I shall never bring him safely to the doctor's to-night. Here, just take him on your shoulders a bit!"

I then felt myself transferred from the shoulders of Bill to those of Tom.

"Begad! you're right," said the latter. "He be a load, surely."

"Well," said Bill, "the doctor has got the full worth of his money, and no mistake. For less than ten guineas I wouldn't have undertaken the task on such a night as this. Hark! how the wind howls. My teeth chatter in spite of myself. Poor Jack! Many's the good draught of malt he has drawn for me in his father's tap-room!"

"Peace, you fool!" cried Tom; "don't talk so loud, or the thing will get wind in the village, and we shall get torn to pieces. Hush! there is someone behind the hedge."

Then they walked on in silence for some time, and on the way I was once more hoisted on to the shoulders of Bill.

"Oh, you beggar, what a weight you be!" said Bill, addressing me. "Well, we're paid for it, so I suppose I must carry you," and off we trudged again.

"This is the way to Dr. Slasher's house," said Tom. "I see a light in the windows; he is awaiting us."

"Well," said Bill, "we've been pretty punctual. It is not much past twelve o'clock. Here we are at last."

The two men stopped, and one threw some earth against the doctor's window. The next moment I heard footsteps within, and the door was opened noiselessly.

"Hush!" said the doctor's voice.

The two men entered the house, when I was taken out of my sack and deposited upon a table in the doctor's study. It was the same doctor who had attended me during my illness.

"Fine specimen, sir," said Bill, "and tough work enough we've had to get him, neither; the ground's as hard as a brick-bat."

"Ah!" said the doctor, abstractedly, feeling me all over.

"Yes, sir," said the other; "and how heavy he be too!"

"Humph!" said the doctor.

"It is a bitter cold night," said Bill. "The wind howled among the trees while we was at work enough to make one's blood curdle."

"Ha!" said the doctor; "I know what that means. A glass of grog wouldn't be unacceptable, unless I mistake."

"Well, sir, you've just guessed about right," said Bill. "A glass of grog now and then, just to keep out the cold is a very fine thing, as you, being a doctor, sir, I've no doubt are well aware."

"Ha! ha!" laughed the doctor. "I perceive you understand the theory of the circulation of the blood. Well, as you have done your work well, I'll just put the kettle on the hob, and you shall have a good stiff glass apiece."

"That's the sort of thing, eh, Tom? The doctor is a real gentleman, and no mistake."

Tom acquiesced, and soon the doctor produced a tall bottle of brandy, and more than half filling two tumblers, and popping a couple of lumps of sugar into each glass, he lifted the kettle from the hob and filled them up to the brim. Then, stirring up the sugar at the bottom with the handle of his dissecting knife, he handed a glass to each of his creatures across my body.

"Here's luck, sir," said one of them, nodding.

"I looks towards you, sir," said the other, sipping his grog.

"Thanks, my man, thanks," said the doctor.

"A——h!" gasped Bill, after a deep draught, and smacking his lips, "this is something like a glass of grog. I feel myself again. I'd as lief set out again after another subject to-night as not."

"Well, mate," said Tom, draining his glass, "I guess we'd better toddle."

The doctor then counted out twenty guineas, and gave the men ten apiece.

"Thank ye kindly, sir," said they, "and when again you be in want of our services, your honour knows where to find us. Good-night, sir."

"Good-night," responded the doctor, as he showed them out and closed the door.

I was left alone for a moment, but when he returned he might begin dissecting me at once, and that would be horrible, for I was still in my trance. I hoped he would defer operations until the morrow. In the meantime I hoped to come to. Then I heard the doctor's footsteps in the passage, and here he was again. Would he really cut me up before I could call out or defend myself? Good Heavens! What was he about now? He had tucked up his shirt sleeves and seized his dissecting-knife!

All was lost. My hopes had been raised only to be dashed to the ground. My last hour had come. Already I felt the point of the murderous instrument against my chest. Rip!—an incision had been made!

"Hullo!" cried the doctor, dropping his dissecting-knife. "What is this? Why the man's not dead!"

The fact was, I was gradually recovering, and my blood had already begun to flow. The intense mental agony I had endured had caused a cold sweat to break out on my forehead. The incision luckily was not very deep, but I bear the mark of the wound to this day.

The doctor staunched the blood with his handkerchief, muttering to himself, "And have I been obliged to pay twenty guineas for a living subject? Humph! I've a good mind to cut him up all the same, no one would be any the wiser for it."

I began to fear lest he might do so in real earnest; however, he bound up my wound and carried me into his own bedroom, where he placed me on a mattress on the ground. He wiped the perspiration from my forehead and felt my pulse.

"He'll come round," he muttered to himself; "already he shows signs of life. I would not for the world, though, that this got known in the village. I should lose all my practice, and yet I don't know how to keep the matter quiet, it *must* ooze out."

Life was rapidly returning. I began to open and shut my eyes and to breathe,

though with some difficulty. By degrees, however, I managed to breathe more freely.

"Ah, ha!" said the doctor, noticing the rapid change, "getting all right, now—eh?"

I remained in the same state for about an hour more, when the doctor began undressing and preparing to turn in for the night. In another moment he was between the sheets and snoring loudly. Soon after I fell asleep myself.

The following morning on awaking, I felt almost myself again. I could move my limbs and sit up in bed, though I still felt very weak.

"Well, how are we now?" asked the doctor, seeing that I moved with comparative ease. "A nice trick you've played me. Do you know that you have done me out of twenty guineas—by coming to life again—eh? I hoped to have cut you all up by this time—and I might have done so, too, easily enough at the time, but I suppose if I were to try it on now you'd halloa."

Then he began to ask me all sorts of questions, to which I answered feebly. In reply to a question of his as to whether I felt hungry, I nodded my head, and the doctor went to prepare me a cup of broth. When he returned and I had partaken of it, new strength came back to me, and I was able to relate to him all my sufferings while he listened attentively. Well, day after day I improved in health under the doctor's care, till I at length completely recovered. One morning after I was up and dressed, and breakfasting with the doctor (N.B.—Nobody, not even the doctor's servant, knew anything about either the removal of my body from the grave or of my coming to life again, for the doctor took good care to keep me locked up for a time in his bedchamber.) Well, breakfasting one morning with the doctor, I noticed that he looked rather thoughtful and confused.

"Now, I'll tell you what your thoughts are, doctor," said I, "and you see if I haven't guessed right."

"Well," said he, somewhat surlily.

"You are afraid that the affair about digging up my body may get known, and will damage your reputation, and you do not know how to keep it secret. Is it not so?" I asked.

"Well, sir," said he, "you've just guessed about right, but what is to be done?"

"Listen to me," said I. "I have a plan."

"Indeed!" said he, opening his eyes.

"Yes, a plan to kill two birds with one stone," I said. "It is to your interest that this affair should not be known—eh? Well, it is to my interest, too. All will go well if you do as I propose."

"What is that?" asked he, with eagerness.

"First you must lend me a complete disguise, consisting of one of your old wigs, a pair of tortoiseshell spectacles, and one of your suits of clothes. Secondly, you must lend me a certain sum of money to keep me for, say, a fortnight. I'll pay you back in due time, when my plan has succeeded. You needn't be afraid. You can trust Jack Hearty—eh?"

"Yes, certainly," said he, with some hesitation. "But how? I don't understand."

"Never mind that," said I; "you will know all in good time."

"Well, Jack," said he, "I know you for a sharp fellow and an honest—so I will trust you. I don't know what your scheme is; but if it fail, and the worst comes to the worst, why I can but be exposed, and there is an end of it."

"Well said, doctor," said I; "now let us commence to put the scheme into practice."

He then took from his wardrobe rather a threadbare suit of black clothes, which I immediately donned. Then I tried on an old powdered wig with a pigtail and a pair of lace ruffles, next a pair of tortoiseshell spectacles with glasses as big as a crown piece. I next corked my eyebrows, slightly stained the tip of my nose with red and made a few false wrinkles in my forehead. The doctor placed a gold-headed cane in my hand and a large signet ring on my forefinger. I then took a book under my arm, and at parting the doctor gave me a purse of gold to put in my pocket, and off I started. The doctor laughed immoderately at my successful disguise, and I heard him say as I was leaving the house, "I don't know what he means to be up to, but some devilry, *I'll* lay a farthing."

Well, gentlemen, the next thing I did was to walk straight off to catch the stage, which would pass by the village of H——, where Molly was staying with her aunt. I remember I had to run for it, and pretty hard, too, but I caught it up. Tearing along as fast as my legs could carry me, I passed by a group of villagers,

some of my friends amongst them, and I heard the following remarks:

"Here comes the doctor, running for his life!"—"Go it doctor, you'll catch it up!"—"My eyes, don't he run!—who'd have thought the old boy had so much life in him?"

"It ain't the doctor, though; it's another man. I don't know him, Jim, do you? I wonder how long he has been in the village. I never see him before."

As I was stepping into the coach I heard a voice behind me say, "I thought it was Dr. Slasher, Bill, didn't you?"

"Yes, at first," said another; "he's like him—leastways the clothes is."

"By the way," said the first, "I wonder when the doctor will be ready for another subject. I suppose poor Jack's cut up long since."

"Hush! you fool," said the other.

By this time I had taken my seat in the coach, and looking in the direction of the voices, I recognised my friends of the other night, Tom and Bill. Off we then started. The coach was full of men I knew as well as my own father, most of them my customers. I appeared absorbed in my book, so as not to get entangled in conversation with anyone, for fear that my voice might betray me.

Two men, who appeared to be strangers to each other, began entering into conversation.

"Dreadful business this epidemic, sir," said the younger of the two to the elder.

"Yes, it is indeed," replied the elder; "the young fare the same as the old, they say, but I am a stranger in the place."

"Oh, indeed, sir," said the first speaker; and then added, "Yes, sir—that's true enough—the young die as soon as the old. Hardly a week ago died young Jack Hearty, son of old Hearty, as keeps the Headless Lady—a lad of nineteen, and as hale a young fellow as ever you'd find in a day's march. He was taken suddenly ill, and died in a very few days.

"Poor young fellow! who'd have thought that he would have gone along with the rest? He was an only son, too, and they say his father is devilish down in the mouth about it."

"Dear me! dreadful, to be sure," replied the elder.

The conversation then changed to various topics, and became general, the only one not joining in it being myself. I still pored over my book, appearing not to take an interest in anything that was being said, although my ears were open to catch every word.

"Who's that cove?" I heard one say to his neighbour.

"Oi doan't knaw, Oi'm sure," replied the one addressed, being a lusty farmer. "Oi never see'd un in these parts afore—looks loike a doctor."

"Why don't he speak?" said the other. "He won't talk to no one."

"Maybe un's too proud," said the former.

"I'd like to kick the surly devil," said his companion.

"What'll you bet Oi doan't make un speak?" said the countryman.

"Bet you a halfpenny you don't get a word out of him," said the first speaker.

"Done," said the farmer, and turning suddenly upon me, accosted me thus:—

"Oi zay, governor, you bes a doctor, b'aint ye?"

I drew myself up with an air of dignity, and said with a frown, and in a feigned voice: "Did you address *me*, sir?"

"Ees," said the bumpkin, unawed by my assumption of dignity; "and Oi axes ye if ye b'aint a doctor."

"Well, sir," I said; "and if I am!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" he laughed coarsely. "Oi knowed ye was. Oi thought Oi knowed the breed. Vell, you doctors has made a pretty harvest of late, Oi reckon," said the farmer, bluntly.

"How so, sir," I asked. "I do not understand you."

"Vhy, vith the patients as has died in this here hepidemic," said he. "They must have brought grist to your mill, if Oi'm not mistook."

"What epidemic?" I asked, feigning surprise. "I am a stranger in these parts, and know nothing of the epidemic."

"Vhy, ye doan't mane to zay that ye never heard of th' epidemic as all th' vorld is a talking of," said he.

"All the world!" I cried, in astonishment. "All your little village, I suppose you mean—no, I am entirely ignorant of this malady."

"Vell then, doctor," said the boor, "if ye'd only set up in our village, there's a snug little business going on for the loikes of you."

"Humph!" I grunted, not deigning to make other reply.

"Yes, indeed, sir," said a man in the opposite corner of the coach, joining in the conversation, but more respectfully than my friend the farmer. "I assure you that a doctor's services are very much needed in these parts. They say the malady is spreading."

The last speaker was a man I knew as well as I know my own face in a looking-glass, and whom I had served to innumerable pints of our home-brewed ale—a crony of mine, in fact, yet he failed to see through my disguise.

"Dear me!" said I. "I hope it will be nothing very serious. I regret not being able to make myself useful, as I have several important cases to attend to a long distance off."

"Oh, it has been very bad indeed, sir, hereabouts," said the same man. "Most cases have been fatal. The death that has been most talked of in the village is that of poor Jack Hearty, a lad of nineteen, as strong and as good looking a young fellow as any in the village. He was took bad, as it might be, yesterday, and struck down to-day in the very flower of his youth."

"You don't say so?" said I.

"Yes, sir," he resumed; "and I'll be bound to say you wouldn't find a finer young fellow in all England."

"Really!" said I, inwardly feeling flattered.

"Ah!" said another, with a sly wink. "I think I could tell you what hastened Jack's death as much as anything."

"What was that?" I asked.

"There was a young woman in the case, they say," said the man, whom I also

knew intimately.

"Well, sir," said I, with a well-feigned innocence; "and this young woman——?"

"Well, I believe he died pining for her, and folks say as how it was the hepidemic."

"Ah!" I said with a sigh. "That is an epidemic we all catch some time or other, but most folks get over it, I fancy."

"Well, yes," said the man; "most folks, as you say, do, but poor Jack was very hard hit indeed, sir. I happen to know the young woman, too—as fine a wench as you'll meet with in the whole kingdom."

"Ah! indeed," I said. "They would have been well matched then, had they married?"

"They would indeed, sir," was the reply. "They'd have made a pair as you wouldn't meet every day. Well, well," he sighed; "he's gone now, poor fellow, so the wench must look out for someone else."

"Did the girl take it much to heart, think you?" said I.

"Aye, I'll warrant she did, sir," said he, "though I can't say for certain, seeing as how her father sent her away from home to get her out of Jack's way. But she'll have heard all about it by this time. Poor girl! I am sorry for her. She'll have to wait a long time before she finds another like Jack."

"Perhaps she may never marry," I suggested; "that is if she really loved him."

"Can't say I'm sure, sir. You see the maid is quite young yet, and has got lots of admirers; what with one and what with another, she may in time forget Jack and take to someone else," said my friend.

"You have heard no rumours as yet, I suppose, of her showing any partiality towards anyone," I demanded, timidly.

"No, sir, I can't say that exactly, but then it is so shortly after Jack's death, that it isn't likely she would just yet. Still there's a young fellow, the son of a squire, as is very sweet upon her, and is always following of her about. If she could manage to catch him, she'd do well, but the young gent's father don't approve of it, and is like to cut him off to a shilling if he marries her. Folks say that the young squire is a bit of a scamp, and don't mean marriage. It'll be a pity if the

maid goes wrong, for she is a good girl, and no mistake."

Now this was gall and wormwood to me. I knew that that rascal young Rashly had been hovering about Molly's house for some time. He had often crossed me in my walks with Molly, and we hated each other like poison, but I also knew that Molly couldn't bear the sight of him, for she was really and truly in love with me, yet the very mention of his name coupled with hers made my blood boil. Mastering my emotion, however, I asked with as much apparent indifference as possible, "And this young gentleman, where is he now?"

"Oh, up to his larks, I'll warrant," said the man, with a laugh. "The girl's father has sent her away to live with her aunt, to get her out of Jack's way, as he is not friends with Jack's father, and I guess out of the way of the young squire, too; but young Rashly has been absent now some time from the village, and I'll be bound he has found her out by this time. Now that poor Jack's dead he'll have the way all clear before him."

"The devil take him," I muttered to myself. I was bursting with rage, and to conceal my emotion, I affected to stare out of the window at some object, while my heart beat underneath my borrowed waistcoat, and must have been audible but for the coach wheels. I appeared again absorbed in my book while the rest of the passengers discoursed upon general topics.

"Give us the halfpenny," I heard my bluff fellow-traveller say to his friend; "it's been fairly von." His friend's hand was buried for an instant, and the coin was transferred from his to the farmer's breeches pocket.

"That's zum business, onyrate," said the countryman, receiving the payment of the bet with a chuckle.

The stage then rolled on for some distance further, till some passenger called out:

"There is H——, any passenger for H——?"

"Yes, sir," said I; "I am for H——."

The stage stopped, and with trembling hands and beating heart I squeezed past the other passengers.

"Good morning, gentlemen," said I, as I walked off.

The stage was set in motion again. There was no other passenger but myself for

the village of H——, so I strolled off with light step to the nearest inn.

Having refreshed myself with a light luncheon, I strolled about the country a bit until I came across—you may be surprised, gentlemen—but I actually came across the very same house with the very identical country round about it, including the wood, that appeared in my dream. I certainly *was* startled.

"Yonder, then, is the house of Molly's aunt," I thought, and I walked towards it, thinking all the while how I should introduce myself.

Before I reached the house, however, two figures in the distance under the trees of the wood attracted my gaze. I looked again. One of the figures, I was sure, could be no other than Molly herself, and the other I was equally certain was young Rashly.

I hastened my steps, but by a route so as not to come directly in front of them, for I wished to overhear their conversation. Having made a roundabout cut, I concealed myself behind some brushwood, where I could both see them distinctly, and hear all they said without being seen by them.

"Come, Molly," I heard young Rashly say, "enough of this. What is the good of making yourself miserable about young Hearty? He's dead now, poor fellow—he was a great friend of mine, but now that he is gone and can never come back to you, try to forget him. I wish to console you and to raise your spirits. Now, my dear girl, do try and forget him."

"Oh, never, never!" sobbed Molly, "I never *can* forget him. I shall never be able to love anyone else. Poor fellow! He died out of love for me, I know he did. Oh, Jack, Jack, I never can forget you—never, never!" and she sobbed as if her heart would break.

"Now, Molly, this is nothing but obstinacy; you can't call him back, however you may mourn for him. Just look at the position *I* offer you. *I* shall be able to make you more comfortable than Jack would have been able to make you. Is it nothing to be made a lady of? Don't be a fool, girl, and throw such a chance away. Hundreds in your place would jump at it."

"How can I accept such terms from a man I do not love?" cried Molly. "Would I not be one of the basest of women to persuade you that I loved you just to become your wife, when my heart is another's?"

"How can your heart be another's when Jack is no more?" asked he.

"Yes, yes; in death my heart shall still be his," Molly cried.

"Come, now, you're talking like a mad girl. Just listen to reason a bit. I will settle a good round sum a year upon you to keep you as a lady in a nice little cottage with a garden, where I shall always be able to come to pay you a visit in secret, when my father is out of the way."

"Then you never from the first intended to *marry* me," interrupted Molly, "you only—only—wanted to——"

"Why, actually *marry* you, no; I never intended that. *That* would be impossible, but——"

"Exactly; I understand you," answered Molly, proudly, "but I scorn your base proposals. If you were to lay the wealth of the universe at my feet, I would never barter my good name. So *this* is what you have been trying at all this time, to make me your minion.

"When first you visited me, you gave me to understand that your intentions were honourable, and though I loved you not, and never could, yet I respected you and felt compassion for you and tried to think of you as a friend. Now I neither pity nor respect you, but *despise* you. Go, sir, and never dare to speak to me again!"

"What a trump of a girl!" I muttered to myself.

"Molly! Molly!" cried Rashly, starting backward in amazement, "are you mad?"

"I should be mad to accept your proposals," replied Molly, calmly, but firmly. "Go, sir—all friendship between us is at an end."

"My dear Molly," began Rashly, "I beg of you, I entreat you to calm yourself—to take a more reasonable view of the matter. Come, let me persuade you, dear," said he, advancing and attempting to put his arm round her waist, but he was instantly repulsed.

He essayed again.

"Dare to touch me once more, sir, and I'll scream—I'll rouse the neighbourhood and expose you."

"Hush, hush!" said Rashly, nothing daunted, "be reasonable, there's a good girl, I'll do you no harm," and he ventured to touch her again.

"Back, sir, I say!" and she lifted up her voice to scream, but instantly his hand was on her mouth.

I could endure it no longer, but bursting from my hiding-place, and grasping firmly my gold-headed cane, I sprang to the spot.

"Who are you, sir?" I cried, boiling with rage, "that dare offer to insult my niece? Begone! or it will be the worse for you."

Both started, and Rashly turned livid and trembled.

"I thank you, sir," said Molly, "for interfering."

Then thrusting Rashly aside, I cried; "Molly! I am your uncle, do you not know me?" trying to disguise my voice all the while, which was rather a difficult matter, boiling with passion as I was then.

"I do not know you, sir, though I believe your intentions to be good," said Molly.

Then seizing Molly by the hand, I whispered in her ear; "Silence!—not a word—I am Jack risen from the grave."

A piercing shriek, and Molly fell fainting against a tree.

"Who are you, you vagabond?" cried Rashly, now for the first time recovering from his surprise. "She does not know you. What have you been saying to the poor girl to frighten her so? You are an impostor, sir. Be off and mind your own business!"

"Impostor! eh?—vagabond, eh? I'll show you who is a vagabond, you scoundrel!" said I, and lifting my cane, I laid it about him with all my might and main like a cavalryman cutting down his foe.

Rashly at first attempted to defend himself, and flew at me like a tiger; he tried to snatch the cane from my hand, but I hit him so severely across the knuckles that I made him howl out in spite of himself. I cut him right and left over head, shoulders, arms and legs, hacking and slashing with the force of an infuriated madman, accompanying each blow with such epithets as "scoundrel," "blackguard," till he burst out in a piteous cry and took refuge in flight. He never troubled Molly again.

The doctor's gold-headed cane had been broken with the force of the blows I had dealt my rival, for which afterwards I had to pay, but to return to Molly. She

gradually recovered her senses, and gazed at me wonderingly and full of fear.

"Be calm, Molly," I said in my natural voice, "it is I—Jack, risen from the grave, but still in the flesh and no spirit." Then taking off my spectacles and wig, I said, "Molly, do you not recognise these eyes and these locks, in spite of the rest of my disguise?"

She still looked fearful and distrustingly at me, but at length convinced that it was myself—and no one else—by my voice, she flew to my arms crying, "Oh, Jack, Jack!—is it really you?"

Of course, she wanted an instant explanation of my resurrection, which I by degrees gave; and having given it, I began to unfold to her my plan, thus.

"Molly," I said, "what I have told you and am about to tell you now must remain a secret between ourselves, otherwise my plan will fail. Well then, in the first place you must get me acquainted with your aunt, and give out that I am an elderly gentleman you have known some time, and that you have met me quite unexpectedly here. You must invite me to call at the house. I shall adopt the name of Dr. Crow. You must feign illness and send for me. Thus we shall be able to see a good deal of each other. I will also persuade your aunt that she is ill, so that we shall see still more of each other. I'll worm myself into her good graces and after about a fortnight or so, I shall ask your aunt's consent to our marriage. I shall tell her that I am a doctor in good practice, and shall be able to keep you well, and when I once get the right side of her, I doubt not that I shall obtain her consent. She will then write to your father, who will hardly say anything against a match so advantageous, although our ages may be apparently unequal.

"It is not likely that he will trouble himself to come down here to have a look at me, as he is at present laid up with the gout. He will in all probability write his consent. That once obtained, I shall make all necessary preparations for the marriage, and as for obtaining my father's consent—leave that to me."

"Oh, but, Jack! if your plan should fail—if your disguise should be seen through," began Molly.

"Leave all to me," said I. "So far I have been successful, for I have not been recognised yet. Fortune seems on my side. You must aid me in every possible way to carry out my plan."

"I will, Jack!" said she.

"Well, then," said I, "you must go home now to your aunt, and say you have met an old friend of yours quite by chance here—a certain Dr. Crow. Say also that I should like to call and make her acquaintance. Meet me again to-morrow in the wood, and invite me to the house. In time, I've no doubt, all will go well."

Molly promised to follow my instructions, and we parted.

It was then late in the afternoon, so I returned to my inn. There I found a snug little parlour, with a bookcase, so I beguiled the time as well as I could by reading until the clock struck the dinner hour. After a comfortable meal, I smoked a pipe of tobacco, strolled about the streets a little in the twilight, and turned into bed.

Next morning, after breakfast, I strolled out again into the wood. I walked about for an hour, perhaps, without meeting anyone, casting anxious glances all the while towards the house where Molly lived.

At length she made her appearance; not alone this time, but with another female. This must be the aunt, I thought—so much the better. Feeling the necessity of an excuse for hovering about so near the house, I feigned to be gathering wild flowers.

"Oh, aunt!" I heard Molly say as she came up, "here is Dr. Crow, the gentleman that I spoke to you about yesterday."

"Ah, Miss Sykes!" said I, lifting my hat in the most polite manner, "I hope I see you well this morning."

Molly gave me her hand, and introduced me to her aunt, who curtsied and smiled.

I said that I had come down here for a change of air, and that I was amusing myself with botanising.

"Oh, indeed!" said the aunt. "So that is your hobby, is it, Dr. Crow—well, and a very delightful one, too. I am very fond of flowers myself, and only wish I knew more about them. I do envy you scientific men. You always seem so happy and contented."

"Well, madam," said I, "there is nothing like having a hobby in life. It fills up many a weary hour and makes us forget the din and the bustle of the busy world around us. For my part, when I have no patients to attend to, I am always

occupied in some way or other."

"Dear me," said the aunt. "How very delightful!"

We walked on together, conversing agreeably as we went, and afterwards I was invited into the house. Need I say that I praised to the utmost the good taste of everything I saw there, her paperhangings, her worsted work, her crochet, etc. I was then shown some specimens of ferns and wild flowers that she had dried in a book, and she begged of me to write their classical names under them.

This was indeed a trial, as I had never learnt a single word of Latin, but it would not do to back out, so I exerted all my ingenuity to invent some crackjaw names. Among the rest I remember inscribing the words "*Rodus sidus*," "*Stenchiuss obnoxious*," and "*Herbus unnonus*." These names delighted Molly's aunt immensely, who believed she was already a Latin scholar. I found my way so well into the aunt's good graces that I was invited to call whenever I liked, and frequently asked to dinner.

As I did not like to call every day, for fear it should look bad, either Molly or Molly's aunt managed to feel unwell on the days that I did not call, and they found it necessary to send for me, so it came to much the same thing, as I saw Molly every day. Molly's aunt was one of that class of females who are always imagining that something or other is the matter with them. I soon saw, therefore, that to get thoroughly into her good graces, I must humour her in her whims.

Accordingly, I made out that she had this, that, or the other—indeed, I forget what it was exactly that I said ailed her—and promised to bring her some physic. This quite won her heart, so I at once set about making some liquorice water, endeavouring to disguise the taste of the liquorice as much as possible by adding salt, pepper, a little soap, some tobacco, and other nauseous ingredients. I wonder the mess didn't poison her, but so far from causing ill-effects, she informed me that it had really done her good.

Whether the good it had done her only lay in her imagination or whether the strange compound really did possess a medicinal property I cannot tell (I can hardly think the latter), but certain it was, she *did* seem better. I believe the real fact of the matter to be this. Molly's aunt was the daughter of a well-to-do retired butcher, and like many of her class, had over-indulged in high feeding, and consequently was always suffering from overloaded stomach. The mess that I gave her made her sick, and that, in reality, and not merely in imagination, effected a cure.

I then put her on a lower diet, recommended her plenty of walking exercise, and in a very short time there was a complete change in her constitution. She no longer felt dyspeptic and desponding, suffered no longer from nervous headaches, in fact, in her own words, she "felt quite a girl again." All the effect of my wonderful medicine. This, of course, was a feather in my cap, and she looked up to me more than ever.

A week and then a fortnight passed away, and I now thought it high time to break to the aunt my love affair with her niece, and ask her consent to our union. So I called upon her one morning and requested to speak with her alone. She received me in the back parlour, and begged me to take a seat. I did so, and began thus:—

"Ahem! Madam, I wished to talk to you upon a matter of some delicacy."

"Good gracious, doctor! What can have happened?" she exclaimed, observing a look of unwonted gravity in my face.

"Oh, nothing, nothing," I said; "at least, nothing of any great importance. Hear me. I am a physician of a certain age and in very good practice." I paused.

"Well, Dr. Crow," said the aunt.

"And I am still a bachelor," I continued.

"Well, sir," said she, wriggling about in her seat and looking coy, as if she guessed I meditated a proposal, and took the compliment to herself.

"Well, madam," said I, impatient to get through this painful duty, "to cut a long story short, I am in love with your charming niece."

"*Oh!* doctor," she exclaimed.

The "*Oh!*" was jerked out with a spasm truly painful, and her countenance fell visibly.

"I dare say you were not prepared for such a surprise, but I have known Miss Sykes now a long time, and I never saw anyone who could suit me better as a wife. Miss Sykes and I have talked the matter over together, and she only awaits her aunt's consent. Thank you, thank you, madam," said I seizing her hand, "I knew you would give it," before giving her an opportunity either to consent or refuse.

"Molly!" I cried, "come and thank your kind aunt for having given her consent to our happy union."

Molly entered, blushing and giggling.

"Come, Molly," said I, "come and thank aunt, for now we shall be as happy as two birds in a nest. I'll go and see about the licence, and we'll get married as soon as ever we can."

I laughed and appeared very merry, repeatedly seizing the aunt by the hand and patting her on the shoulder before she had time to get a word out.

"Stay, sir," said she, at length, "I can do nothing without the consent of my niece's father."

"Oh, that will be easily obtained, I am quite sure," said I, hopefully. "We will at once write a note, and all will be settled."

I brought her her desk, opened it, took out pen, ink, and paper, and placing a chair for her, induced her to write.

"Yes," I said, looking over her shoulder as she wrote, "that will do—not *too* cold. Say I am in a position to make his daughter comfortable, and that you think it is a very desirable match—yes, that's the sort of thing. Give it to me, I'll take it to the post." So saying, I snatched up the epistle, bounded from the house, and returned shortly, as happy as if everything were already settled.

In due time came a reply from old Sykes, to the purport that, though he would have chosen a younger man for his daughter, yet on the whole, considering that I had a pretty good business as a doctor, and could keep her well, he saw no reason why he should withhold his consent. Furthermore, he begged the aunt that if his daughter were to be married to hasten the marriage as much as possible, as young Rashly had been missing for some time, and folks said that he was down at H—— after her.

"Bravo! old Sykes," said I to myself, "Fortune seems to favour me indeed."

The next step that I intended to take was to obtain the consent of my father. Accordingly, I took leave of Molly for a time, stating that I had to absent myself on business, and promising a speedy return. I entered the stage and arrived at our village, where I put up at my father's inn. It was towards evening when I arrived.

"Landlord!" I cried, disguising my voice, "I wish to dine in half-an-hour."

"Yes, sir," said my father, coming towards me, bowing, and rubbing his hands.

"Have you got a good bed?" asked I, "for I wish to sleep here to-night."

"Yes, sir, capital beds, sir," said my father, "both clean and well aired."

"Very well, then, make me up one," said I, pompously.

"It shall be done, sir," said my father, obsequiously.

I occupied myself with reading until dinner-time. At length the dinner came up.

"A pint of your best port, landlord," I cried, magnificently.

My father returned with the port, crusted and cob-webbed, from the cellar, and I began my dinner. Having finished, I filled my pipe, and whilst my father cleared the table, I deigned to enter into conversation with him.

I began by asking him the number of inhabitants in the village, and then brought him out upon the subject of the epidemic.

"Ah! sir," said my father, deeply moved, "it carried off my only son some three weeks ago, and a finer lad you wouldn't see in all England. I hoped that he would have been the prop of my old age, but he was carried off, sir, along with the rest—struck down in the very spring of his youth, as you may say. Only nineteen was my poor boy when he was taken from me," and my father's eyes moistened as he spoke.

"Only nineteen!" I exclaimed. "Was he not strong?"

"Strong, sir! I believe you—strong as a lion," said my father.

"Dear me!" I said, "it is very strange that his youth and strength did not resist the malady."

"So everyone said, sir," replied my father, "but—but he had been ailing for some time before."

"What was his complaint before he caught this disease?" I asked.

"Ah! sir, that's just the point," answered my father. "I sadly fear that it was an epidemic of a more dangerous sort."

"How so?" asked I. "What do you mean?"

"Well, sir, my real opinion is now that the young man was too strongly attached to a maid whom he couldn't marry, and that undermined his health. Then came the epidemic, which he had not sufficient strength to shake off."

"Ah!" said I, "and why could he not marry her? Was the maid unrelenting?"

"Not that, exactly, sir. Indeed, I believe she was as much in love with him, but _____"

"But what?"

"Well, the fact of the matter is, sir, the girl's father and I ain't friends, and neither of us was willing to give our consent. The girl was sent off by her father to live at her aunt's, just to get her out of my son's way. I knew all about this, but I wasn't going to tell the young man, lest he should take it into his head to run after her, so, thinking to blunt his passion, I invented the story of her death, saying that she had been carried off by the epidemic, hoping that after a time, finding she was no more, that he would cease to think of her. But instead of that, he grew worse and worse, and I attribute his death to the lie I told about his sweetheart's decease."

"You did very wrong," said I, "not to give your consent."

"Well, but, sir, if I *had* given *mine*, the girl's father would not have given *his*," replied my father.

"If you had been the first to make up the quarrel, I have no doubt that he would have given his consent," said I.

My father seemed stung with this reproach, and took out his handkerchief to wipe his eyes.

"Ah, my poor son! my poor son!" sobbed my father. "What wouldn't I give to have him back again?"

"Would you give your consent to his marriage with the girl he loved if he could come to life again?" I asked.

"Ay, sir, that would I, only too gladly," replied my father, "but what's the use of talking now that he has gone from me for ever?"

"You speak like a man without faith," said I. "Have you no belief in an after life? Have you no hope of meeting him in Heaven?"

"That is the only hope I have left, sir," said my father, "but in the meantime——"

"Ah!" said I, "you cannot make up your mind to be consoled for his loss for the few short years that you have to remain upon earth."

"Well, sir, it's very hard to bear," said my father.

"Have you ever prayed?" I asked.

"Yes, sir," said he, "I say my prayers regularly."

"But do you say them earnestly?" said I. "Do you believe that if you ask a thing that you will receive what you ask for? For instance, if you were to pray for your son to be restored to life, do you believe that he really *would* be restored to life?"

My father stared in surprise.

"Well, to tell you the truth, sir, no," he said; "for we all know that when a man has been buried three weeks that he rarely returns. Even Lazarus was but four days under the earth. In fact, the thought of praying for his return after his spirit had once been yielded up never occurred to me. When David was bereaved of his child by Uriah's wife, he humbled himself whilst the child was yet alive with sackcloth and ashes, but when he heard that the child was dead, he rose and ate bread. What instance is there on record of one returning to life after being buried three weeks?"

"Pray, nevertheless," said I; "the mercy of God is boundless. Who knows but that _____"

"Oh, sir, sir," said my father, shaking his head, "you but mock me; it cannot be."

"It is impious of you to say it cannot be. Nothing is impossible with God," said I.

My father smiled faintly. I saw that he regarded me as a kind of well meaning madman, and after lighting my candle, he showed me the way to my room and shut me in for the night.

My room was some few doors off from my father's. I undressed and went to bed. I had not been in bed more than an hour when I heard my father's footsteps on the stairs. He, too, was going to bed. There was no other guest in the inn then, and all was quiet.

I allowed my father a quarter of an hour to get into bed. Then I opened my chamber door, and listened to hear if he was praying, for he always prayed aloud. I was satisfied that he was praying; what the precise words were I could not quite distinguish, but I fancied I heard my name mentioned once or twice. I returned to my chamber and closed the door. I allowed my father another hour to go to sleep. When the time had expired, I stepped on tip-toe across the passage and turned the handle of his bedroom door noiselessly. I peeped in. All was silent, or rather he was snoring loudly. Leaving the door ajar, I went back cautiously to my chamber to fetch the candle, and then softly and noiselessly I entered the room where my father lay asleep. I had provided myself with a pinch of salt, which I sprinkled in the flame, so as to give a look of ghostly pallor to my face. Then, tapping my father lightly on the shoulder, he started up in bed.

"Good heavens!" he cried, with every hair erect on his head—

"Jack! is it you?"

He spoke huskily, and his teeth chattered.

"Hush!" said I, in a sepulchral voice; "listen to me. Because you have prayed fervently, I have risen from my grave to comfort you. Grieve not for me, father, for I am happy. I have returned to thank you for having given your consent to my marriage. Molly is now mine in spirit, and I shall henceforth rest peacefully in my tomb. Farewell."

I strode towards the door, with long, silent, majestic strides, and closed it carefully after me, leaving my father staring after me into space and speechless with terror.

I was a very young man then, and a reckless devil-may-care sort of fellow,

otherwise I should not have attempted such a dangerous practical joke. The consequences might have been fatal; as it was, my father's nerves were terribly shaken, and I spoilt all his night's rest. When he brought up my breakfast the next morning in the parlour he looked pale and haggard.

"What is the matter, good man?" said I, patronisingly, in my usual feigned voice.

"Oh, sir!" said my father, excitedly, "I saw him last night!"

"Saw him!" I exclaimed. "Saw whom?"

"My son, Jack, sir. Oh, who would have believed it?"

"What! and has he returned to life, or was it his spirit?"

"Yes, sir, his ghost," said my father, with a look of awe, and then he began relating to me the whole particulars of his son's spiritual apparition.

"Then you followed my advice, and have been praying?"

"That I did, sir, with all my heart and soul," said my father.

"You told me last evening," said I, "that if your son should come to life again you would give your consent to his marriage. If you really repent having withheld your consent during his lifetime let me see that your repentance is true by writing me the following words and affixing your signature."

"What words, sir, must I write?" he asked.

"Write," said I, "'If my son is restored to me I will give my consent to his marriage, with the girl of his choice,' that is what you have to write."

"But—but—" began my father.

"Write what I tell you, and affix your signature," said I, gruffly.

"As you like, sir," said he, complying with my request. I blotted the sheet of paper, and placed it in my pocket.

"Now, sir," said I to my father, "I have a secret to tell you. Do not faint, but be prepared for a shock."

My father looked at me in astonishment.

"Your son lives," said I.

"What do I hear?—my son—my son lives?" he exclaimed, staggering backwards. Then recovering somewhat his composure, he asked, "But how? I myself saw him laid in the ground; besides, I tell you I saw his ghost last night."

"That was nothing but a distempered dream brought on by our conversation before you retired to rest," said I. "I tell you your son lives—he is in my care. Listen; but what I am about to tell you, you must keep to yourself, otherwise it will damage my reputation. Hearing that your son had been buried, I, being a doctor and in want of a subject for dissection, employed resurrectioners or body-snatchers to procure me your son's body. They stole it from his grave and brought it to my house. When I began to dissect I found that he was not yet dead. He has been at my house ever since, still very weak from his recent illness. He has related to me his love affair, and knows of the deception that you practised upon him. He begged me to procure for him his father's consent to his marriage, otherwise, he said he might die in real earnest."

"Oh, doctor, doctor!" cried my father, "can it be true? Oh, say that you are not jesting with me. Do not trifle with the feelings of a poor man!"

"I never trifle," I replied, with dignity.

"Then it is true, doctor, really true! O God be praised," and he clasped his hands convulsively, whilst the tears ran down his cheeks.

Suddenly his ecstasy abated, and he grew serious.

"What is the matter?" I asked.

"Oh, but, doctor, if—if after all what I saw last night were not a dream—if whilst during your absence from home, my son really has died, and appeared to me last night to let me know. What proof have you that the vision of my son last night was a dream?" he asked.

"What proof?" I exclaimed. "*This* proof," I cried, throwing off my disguise and speaking in my own natural voice again. "Behold me, father, risen from the dead!"

My father's surprise, consternation and joy was beyond all description.

"What!" he cried, "and are you really Jack risen from the grave? Come, let me touch you to be sure you are no ghost."

"Ha! ha! Ha! ha! ha!" he laughed, hysterically. "What! Jack, my boy, I see it all. Ha! ha! ha! ha!" and he wept upon my shoulder till I thought he'd go off in a fit.

"Hush! father," I cried, "and calm yourself. My resurrection must be a secret between us two, for motives of policy. Do you understand?"

"Why a secret?" he asked.

"Never mind now; that is part of my plan. If you tell a single soul you'll spoil all, and I am a ruined man," I said.

"I understand nothing of all this, Jack," said my father, "but you may count upon my secrecy; but I say, Jack, how long must I keep the secret, for I am burning to tell everyone in the village?"

"For Heaven's sake, hold your tongue," said I, "until I give you permission to let it out, or I am ruined for life."

"Well, well, Jack, mum's the word," said my father.

I then resumed my disguise and prepared to leave the inn.

"Why, what the devil are you going to be up to now?"

"Mum's the word," said I. "You shall know all when I return. Good-bye, father," and off I started.

I busied myself a good deal about getting everything in order for the wedding, and returned to H——, where without further bother I was married at the village church.

Fearful that if I threw off my disguise before the wedding that something or other, I could not tell what or from what quarter, would mar all and prevent the marriage just at the last moment, after having been so successful up to this time, this feeling, or presentiment of harm, vague as it was, induced me to keep on my disguise all through the ceremony, but when it came to signing my name in the register, I signed my real name—"John Hearty."

This created some sensation.

The aunt wanted me to explain myself. However, we hurried back to the aunt's house, where we at once threw off my disguise, explained all, and craved pardon for the deception I had practised upon her.

At first the aunt seemed a little cold. She was hurt at the deception being carried on so long.

There was no necessity for such tricks, she said, if she had been told all at the beginning; nothing would have been known to anyone else.

"Do you think I would trust a woman's tongue?" I said. "Come, now, aunt," I said, "though I am not a doctor, I did you quite as much good as a court physician could have done you. Yes, although the medicine was only liquorice water mixed up with other harmless filth."

"In that, too, I've been imposed upon, then," murmured the aunt.

"Nevertheless, I cured you," retorted I; "you yourself admitted it, and what is more, I took no fee."

Soon, however, Molly's aunt recovered her good humour, and all passed off with a hearty laugh.

The only difficulty now was to reconcile ourselves with Molly's father. The comedy was nearly at an end. I donned my disguise once more, and we started off together after the wedding breakfast to our native village, and driving up to old Sykes' house, we knocked at the door.

We entered, and I introduced myself as his son-in-law. He received us well, and wished us both health and prosperity. I did not know exactly how to break the ice, so I reflected a moment.

"Mr. Sykes," said I, still in my feigned voice, "I shall expect you this evening to dine with me at six o'clock at the 'Headless Lady.' Come, I will take no refusal. If we are to be friends together, I shall expect you, if not——"

He began to make an excuse about his gouty leg, saying that he never left the house.

"Oh, nonsense," said I, "that is just the reason you never get well. Going out now and then will do you good. I am a doctor, you know, and I advise you for your good. If you do not like to walk, make use of our coach."

He still hesitated, and at length said, "Well, the fact is, I never go to that house. The landlord and I are not friends. We have had some differences together of long standing, and——"

"Nonsense," said I, "that is no excuse at all. All men have differences now and then, but we must learn to forget and forgive."

"No," said Sykes; "he was very much in the wrong."

"Well, I've no doubt that he thinks you are in the wrong," said I. "Dine with me this evening there, and I'll undertake to make matters straight for you both. Hearty is a good and honest man, and is one of my best friends. I have known him these nineteen years. If you refuse to come, it will be an offence to me, mind that."

After a time I succeeded in softening him down a little, till I at length drew from him a reluctant consent, and, according to his word, he appeared that evening at our inn.

A grand dinner was prepared, before partaking of which I succeeded in joining the hands of the two bitter enemies.

Seeing that the hour had arrived for the divulging of the secret I explained all in a few words, threw off my disguise and craved his blessing.

Old Sykes was a crusty sort of a cove, and I expected that there would have been a scare, but we had got him into a good humour previously, and he was so much amused, in spite of himself, at the whole scheme that he wrung my hand heartily and laughed much over my odd adventures.

Dinner passed off gaily, and I secretly put the doctor in possession of his old clothes again. I paid him the money I owed him, and for ever kept secret the name of the doctor who had brought me to life again so cleverly.



"Why, Jack," said Mr. Oldstone, at the conclusion of our host's recital, "you can tell a story like the best of us."

"Ay, that he can indeed," chimed in Mr. Crucible and Mr. Hardcase.

"There is a great deal of poetry in Jack's story," remarked Mr. Parnassus.

Mr. Blackdeed said that it ought to be adapted to the stage.

"And was it ever discovered who unearthed you, Jack?" inquired Dr. Bleedem, who had a fellow feeling for the Dr. Slasher of Jack's narrative, as he could imagine what his own feelings would have been had he fallen a victim to the

infuriated villagers.

"No, sir," replied our host, "I never let out the truth, although I was pestered with questions all day long by every one in the village. At length, however, an old doctor in these parts died from the epidemic, and after his death, I gave out to the villagers that he was the man who had dug me up."

"Ah!" said Dr. Bleedem, "there was no harm in that."

"And the two body-snatchers, did you ever see *them* again?" asked Professor Cyanite.

"Ha! ha!" laughed our host, "and that *was* a joke, surely. One evening, shortly after my resurrection, leastways before everyone knew that I had come to life again, I was strolling through the cemetery alone where I had been buried, and sitting down upon my own grave, I began meditating upon my miraculous escape from death, when who should pass by but my two friends, Tom and Bill. I looked up as they passed. You should have seen how they took to their heels. My eyes! I shall never forget it."

"That was a rare joke, indeed," said our artist, "and that other young fellow, young Rashly, did you see any more of him?"

"Ay, sir," replied our host, "and that was another good joke. The Sunday after our marriage I appeared in the village church with Molly. How the people did stare, to be sure! I recognised young Rashly in the Squire's pew with his father. He could not see me, as I was behind a pillar, and he had not yet heard of my coming to life again. Seeing that he was without a hymn book, I stepped out suddenly from my pew, and crossing the aisle, offered him mine. I never shall forget his face. He turned as pale as a ghost, and was obliged to support himself against the back of the pew. He was nigh fainting, and his father was obliged to lead him out of church."

"Your resurrection must have made quite a sensation in the village then," said McGuilp.

"My word, it did, sir, and no mistake," answered the landlord. "Everybody in the village and for miles round it wanted to shake me by the hand and welcome me back to life. People used to come from long distances to hear me recount my adventures, till I grew quite sick of it, and shut myself up and wouldn't see nobody."

"Ay, ay, tedious work I've no doubt, telling the same story over and over again to every new comer," said Mr. Oldstone. "But tell us, Jack, did young Rashly ever discover who it was that gave him the thrashing?"

"Yes, sir, that, too, came out in time," said our host, "and devilish sheepish he looked, so they said, when he heard it was his old rival in disguise. He would have liked to have had me up about it before the assizes, but he didn't like the idea of exposing himself, and so the matter dropped. After a time, however, finding that all the boys in the village laughed at him whenever he walked abroad, he went to London, and I have never heard anything more of him."

At this moment someone knocked at the door.

"Come in!" called out several voices at once.

The door opened ajar, and the head of our hostess timidly appeared at the aperture.

"Beg pardon, gentlemen," said that worthy dame, "but could Helen be spared a little just to help me a bit?"

"Oh! how very annoying!" cried our artist, "just as the weather is clearing up and I was making up my mind for a long sitting."

"I am afraid I can't do without her, sir, just now," said our hostess, "but if you wouldn't mind waiting an hour or so, she will be at liberty."

"An hour without Helen!" exclaimed several members at once. "Oh, impossible! and then to be snatched from us again so soon!"

"I'll tell you what it is, Mr. McGuilp, and you, too, Dame Hearty," said Mr. Oldstone, "you are to blame, both of you. Such conduct can't be suffered to go unpunished; therefore, in the name of the club I condemn you both to contribute to the common entertainment by telling a story, each of you, when next called upon."

"Hear, hear!" cried several voices.

"Yes, a story from Dame Hearty, and a still longer one from Mr. McGuilp for having robbed us of Helen—a most just sentence!"

"Oh, gentlemen!" said our hostess modestly. "You wouldn't care to hear any of my stories; besides, I've forgotten them all long ago."

"Come now, Dame Hearty, there is no backing out," said Mr. Oldstone. "A sentence is a sentence."

"Well, sir, if it must be so, I'll try and think of one whenever the gentlemen of this respectable club choose to command my services. Come, Helen!" And our hostess led away her fair daughter by the hand amidst the groans of her ardent admirers.

"Now, Mr. McGuilp," said Mr. Oldstone as the door closed after Helen and her mother, "we have a full hour before us. I call upon you to fill up that period to the satisfaction of the club."

"Yes, yes!" shouted a chorus of voices; "out with it; no mercy on him. Let justice be done."

"Well, gentlemen, if you will allow me a moment to compose myself, I'll endeavour to satisfy you," said our artist. Then resting his head on his hand as if to call up from the depths of his memory some long-forgotten tale or legend, he said, "Gentlemen, I recollect a story in our family, handed down to me from some remote ancestor. I used to be frightened with it in my childhood. It is long ago now since I heard it related, but I will endeavour to give it you as perfectly as possible after the lapse of so many years."

"Well, we're all attention," said one of the members.

Then our artist, after stretching himself, folded his arms and commenced the following tale—



CHAPTER II.

DER SCHARFRICHTER.^[1]—THE ARTIST'S SECOND STORY.

A respectable ancestor of mine, far back in the middle ages, went to study at a German university. I cannot call to mind the name of it, but that is of no consequence. I think he studied medicine, but I will not be sure even of that. I know that he belonged to a "chor," or company of students who pride themselves on their liberty, who have their own laws and customs, who fight duels with rival chors, and who settle disputes among themselves by outvying each other in the drinking of beer, who revel in street brawls and other such respectable amusements, playing practical jokes upon the peaceful citizens; in fact, making night hideous.

I know not whether my ancestor was any better or any worse than his fellow students, but he seems to have entered with pleasure into all their amusements, and never to have held himself aloof when any mischief was going on. He was consequently looked up to rather than otherwise by his companions.

It was the custom then, and still is among Germans, especially among German students, to travel long distances on foot, going together often in large numbers and putting up at night, if they could, at some inn; if not, in some cottage, stables, or loft, with nothing but straw to sleep upon.

But German students are not pampered mortals, and can put up with very homely accommodation. If after a fatiguing day's march a student can find at his quarters sufficient beer, black bread, sausage, raw ham, or a little strong cheese, he is perfectly satisfied. Should he be so fortunate as to light upon a dish of "sauer kraut," he would fancy himself in the seventh heaven.

The German is hardy, yet studious, highly sensitive, and keenly susceptible to the beauties of nature. Though somewhat penurious, he is fond of good fellowship, and is a staunch friend.

The foot tour in Germany is a thing common to all classes, from the nobility down to the "handwerksbursch," or journeying mechanic, which latter class is often unmercifully persecuted by the university student. From time immemorial

there seems to have been a feeling of animosity between the two classes, as nearer home we find existing between the "town and gown."

The German student of the middle ages, as in our times, was fond of swagger, delighted in wearing high boots, enormous spurs, an exaggerated sword, a preposterous hat, was provoked to a duel on the slightest occasion, boasted of the number of "schoppen" or "seidel" of beer that he could stow away beneath his doublet, and ran up long bills without a thought of how they were to be paid.

In those days every student had his guitar or other musical instrument wherewith to serenade his "Liebchen" or lady-love, for that latter article was indispensable to the life of a student, and though much grossness and barbarity has been attributed to him, he is, nevertheless, at times capable of being elevated by a pure and refined passion, for he has much poetry in his nature, and is both sentimental and romantic in the extreme.

In all ages students have meddled much in politics, and princes have been known to tremble before their audacity and resolution.

But enough of this digression, gentlemen. My present tale demands only that you should call up in your minds the German student on his foot tour in the long vacation, with his keen relish of the beautiful, his lusty and well-trained frame that laughs at fatigue, his love of good-fellowship, his tender thoughts of home with the image of his lady-love.

"Which pined although it spoke not, and grew keen,
Entering with every step it took through many a scene."

—BYRON.^[2]

I must now return to my ancestor, who at the time this story commences was on one of these pedestrian rambles, accompanied by some twenty of his fellow students, all stout, hearty youths who could eat, drink, and fight with any in the university, and flirt, too, I've no doubt, when occasion tempted them.

These attributes, you will say, are not strictly necessary to the student preparing for honours, yet, nevertheless, somehow German students manage to find time for other amusements besides dry study. They *can* play, but when they *do* study, they study hard.

My ancestor at the time I speak of was a young man of about twenty, and had

already been two years at the university. We may presume, therefore, that he spoke German tolerably well, if not well.

I believe it was in the Harz mountains, the Thüringer Wald, and about those parts that he was travelling on foot with his friends.

They rose at daybreak and walked hard, with their knapsacks on their backs, singing or conversing as they went, reposing at noon in some shady spot to avoid the heat of the day. When the sun began to abate a little they would resume their journey till night overshadowed them, when they would encamp, as hungry as hunters, in some rude quarters, where they would make merry together over a simple but plentiful supper, and talk over the fatigues of the day.

They had been following this sort of life for some time, when one evening as they were hastening towards their quarters in groups of twos, threes, and fours, my ancestor asked of his friend, "What is the name of the township where we are to sleep to-night, Hans?"

"——dorf," answered his friend; "but we shall have to hasten in order to reach it before nightfall. Look, how the mist is rising!"

"Ah! so it is," replied my relative, whose name was Frederick, but who was never called otherwise than "Fritz" by his companions.

Our Fritz had remained behind to enjoy the last dying glow of a gorgeous sunset, and was wrapt in meditation, while his friend Hans hurried on.

"Now then, Fritz!" cried one, Max, "don't lag behind so; or are your English legs not strong enough for our German mountains?"

Our Englishman was stung at this taunt, implying, as it did a disparagement of himself and countrymen, however undeserved it was, for the Germans knew that he could outwalk the best of them when he chose. Yet it had the effect of making him hasten his steps a little.

The dusky hue of night fast overshadowed our students, and the mist now rose at their feet in thick clouds, so that it was with the utmost difficulty that they could find their way.

My ancestor was still a long distance behind the rest, but he was gaining fast on them, when in the darkness, he stumbled over a clump of rock and sprained his ankle. All hope of catching up his companions was now gone. The most he could

do was to hobble on slowly with the help of his staff, now losing his way, now finding it, whenever the moon peeped out to light up his path, then losing it again when the moon hid itself behind a cloud, till he began to despair of ever finding anything in the shape of a roof to shelter him from the night air during sleep, and he more than half made up his mind to encamp on the spot, but just then he felt a large drop of rain on his face, then another, and another.

It had been a broiling hot day, and the air was still sultry. Presently a flash of vivid forked lightning danced before his eyes, followed by a clap of thunder so terrific that it bid fair to burst the drum of his ear.

The storm was now overhead; the flashes grew more frequent and more vivid, and the thunder growled more fiercely than ever. In a few minutes the rain poured down in torrents, and the English student was drenched to the skin.

"Here is a nice situation for a man on a pleasure trip!" muttered my ancestor to himself. "Lost, in the dead of night, in the midst of a thunderstorm, in an open plain without shelter, drenched like a drowned rat, as hungry as a wolf, and hardly able to crawl, from a sprained ankle!"

His reflections were anything but of a pleasing sort, as you may imagine, yet he hobbled on as best he could, endeavouring to comfort himself with the vague hope of finding some sort of shelter for the night as soon as the storm should pass off.

After dragging on his limbs with exemplary patience for another half-mile, it being then about midnight, he perceived a light from a cottage window not very far distant. His courage began to revive, and with halting gait he made for the door of the cottage.

He knocked loudly, but no one answered. Thinking that he had not been heard for the rumbling of the thunder, he knocked again and again. Still no one came to the door.

"I mean to lodge here for the night," said the Englishman to himself, "if I have to break the door open to effect an entrance." And he kept up a furious knocking for about three-quarters-of-an-hour. At length he heard a harsh, grating voice within break out in a string of choice Teutonic oaths, and the word "schweinhund" (pig-dog) pronounced once or twice.

Footsteps were then heard descending the stairs, and the next moment a quaint-

looking personage appeared at the door in dressing-gown and slippers, with night-cap on head and candle in hand, and demanded in a surly tone what the "teufel" he wanted at that hour of night.

My ancestor apologised with much courtesy for having roused up so worthy an individual at such an unearthly hour, but pleaded that he was a poor benighted traveller, hungry and soaked to the skin.

"Then you should have moved further on," was the curt reply.

"But whither?" asked my relative.

"To the township. This house is not a 'wirtshaus.'"

"How far distant is it?"

"A mile."

By this he meant a German mile—equal to four English miles.

"A mile!" exclaimed the Englishman. "I could not walk a mile to save my life. I've sprained my ankle and can't move a step further. I'm sorry to put you to such inconvenience, my good fellow, but I really must put up here."

"But there is no accommodation," growled the inmate.

"No matter. I dare say you have a little straw; if not, the bare ground will do."

The inmate sulkily suffered the traveller to enter, and showing him into a parlour on the ground-floor, was about to leave him to himself.

"Stop a bit, my good host," said the student. "I must beg to remind you that I am as hungry as a wolf, and as cold as an icicle. If you could find me something in your larder to keep soul and body together, and light me a nice little fire to dry my clothes, you will make me your friend for life."

"Food! Fire! at this time of night!" exclaimed the host, with a look that seemed to say, "Is the man mad?"

"My dear friend," said the Englishman, putting his hand in his pocket and passing a Reichsgulden into the hand of his host, "I do not want you to do anything for me gratis. Make me as comfortable as you can for that—on my departure I'll give you more."

"Oh, mein Herr!" said our host, softening at the touch of the bright metal, "that alters the case entirely. You shall have everything you want. I am sorry I haven't another bed, but you can have some straw, and a fire to dry your clothes. I'll go and see directly what there is in the house by way of refreshment, for you must be hungry indeed!"

Our host left the apartment, and returned shortly with some firewood and a heap of straw.

To light a fire and arrange the straw for the traveller in a corner of the room was the work of a moment. He then hurried off to get supper ready, and returned soon afterwards with a dish of sausage, some black bread, some strong cheese and a bottle of "schnaps."

"Our fare is homely, you see, sir," said the host, apologetically; "but it is all we have in the house. We are poor people, and not accustomed to entertain travellers."

"Never mind that, mine host," said the student, "as long as there is plenty of it, we'll excuse the quality."

So saying, he began to strip himself and to hang his clothes before the fire. Then taking from his knapsack a clean shirt and another pair of hose, he donned his slippers and drew his chair close to the table.

The host, after trimming a lamp and lighting it, placed it in the centre of the table, and was just about to return to his bed, when the student called out with his mouth full of sausage, "What! mine host, will you not honour me with your company whilst I discuss my supper? Company helps digestion, you know, and I'm sure you wouldn't like to have my undigested supper on your conscience."

The host returned with a grunt, saying that he couldn't stop long, as he had to rise early on the morrow.

"Oh, so have I, good mine host," said my ancestor, "so we are equal. Come, sit down here, and let me see you toss off a glass or two of this most excellent schnaps. It will keep out the cold and give you pleasant dreams, besides adding a still richer tint to that glorious nose of yours."

"Humph!" replied the host, little pleased at this personal allusion; but he drew a chair to the table and made an effort at being sociable.

My ancestor until now had hardly had time to give more than a cursory glance at the features of his host, but finding himself now at table opposite him, he took a minute survey of his countenance in all its details.

The exterior of our host was striking, to say the least. He was a man of about five-and-forty, of middle height, broad rather than tall. His neck and chest might have served as a model for the Farnese Hercules. His hair and beard, which were matted and unkempt, were of a flaming red, and he was just beginning to turn bald. His brow was low, knotted, and streaked with red. His eyebrows, which were of the same tint as his hair, were enormous, and overhung a pair of small, deep-set brown eyes that moved furtively from right to left with the rapidity of lightning, giving to his countenance a remarkably sinister expression.

His complexion was florid, and the nose, which was large and bottle-shaped, was of so bright a red that it made the eyes water to look upon it, and spoke little for its owner's temperance. His ears, large and red, stood out at the sides of his head like those of an animal, and their orifices were carefully protected by fierce tufts of red hair. The back part of his head was excessively developed, and the jaw was large and massive. His arms were very muscular, and hairy as an ape's, with strongly-defined purple veins, and his hands, the fingers of which were short and stunted, were the colour of raw meat. The legs were somewhat short for the body, and slightly bowed.

My ancestor, as he scanned the grim features of his host, could not help imagining himself a prince in a fairy-tale who had been lured by the evil genius of the storm into the castle of some ogre, who would sooner or later devour him unless rescued by the good fairies. The ogre was not a communicative person. He had not opened his mouth once since he had taken his seat at the table, save to toss down a glass of schnaps.

At length the Englishman, curious to know something of the life and habits of this mysterious individual, was the first to break silence.

"You live in a very isolated spot, mine host," said he.

"Ja," was the laconic reply.

"Have you no nearer neighbours than those of the township?" demanded his guest.

"Nein," grunted the ogre.

"And do you enjoy this solitary existence?" pursued the traveller.

"Ja!" was the inevitable monosyllabic response.

"I shall not get much out of him," said my ancestor to himself, and again there was silence for the space of five minutes.

As if searching for some topic wherewith to renew the conversation, the student cast his eyes round the apartment, taking in at a glance the minutest article of furniture or other commodity that the room contained.

It was a homely, undecorated apartment, built after the fashion of the period, and differed little from most other apartments of the sort. If it was remarkable for anything, it was for its extreme simplicity, not to say nakedness, but there was one object hanging on the wall that at once attracted the traveller's eye. It was a two-handed sword of peculiar shape, and appeared bright and sharp as if ready for use.

"Aha!" exclaimed the Englishman, fixing his eye on the object, "you have been a soldier, I see."

"Not I," said the host.

"No? Ah! I see that your sword is not of the same form as those used in battle. It is probably antique—an heirloom, perhaps."

The man answered with a nod of the head.

"I thought so," said the stranger; "and yet it seems bright and well cared for. It has evidently been sharpened lately. Do you always keep it well sharpened?"

"On great occasions, yes," was the reply, and our host gave a peculiar wink, accompanying it with a significant gesture with both hands, in imitation of wielding the two-handed instrument over his head, then slapping his own neck he uttered a low whistle and a sort of chuckle thus: "Wh—ew!—click!" being his mode of expressing the action of cutting off a head.

"Ho! ho!" exclaimed the Englishman, "is that in your line?"

The ogre answered by a savage laugh.

At this moment the crying of a child was heard overhead, together with the harsher tones of its mother scolding it.

"Then you do not live perfectly solitary, as I thought," said the student; "you have also wife and children?"

"One boy only," replied the man.

"Ah! An only son—a great pet, I'll warrant," said his guest, finishing his last morsel of supper. "What age may he be?"

"Ten years old—fine boy—just like me—bringing him up like his father," said the strange individual.

"If he turns out like his father, he'll be a beauty," thought my ancestor. Then he asked aloud of his host:

"And what profession may that be that you wish to apprentice him to?"

"Like his father," was the curt reply; but it was followed by the same sort of expressive gesture that I have just described.

"What!" exclaimed the student, "to cut off people's heads?"

"Yes," replied the ruffian; "I am a Scharfrichter."

"A what?" inquired my ancestor, who though he could make himself generally understood in German, had never yet come across the word "Scharfrichter" in his vocabulary.

"A Scharfrichter," repeated the man, raising his voice. "Don't you know what that means? Why, one who cuts off heads."

"An executioner!" muttered the foreigner, half-aloud. "Have I been constrained to crave the hospitality of an executioner?"

These words were inaudible to his host, but the ruffian evidently observed a change in his guest's countenance when he informed him of the nature of his profession, for he hastened to reply.

"One sees at once that you are a foreigner, and unused to the customs of this country. You shudder at meeting an executioner, and sicken at the thought of cutting off a head. No matter, it is always so at first. In fact, the pleasure derived from seeing executions is an acquired taste; but I'll show you some sport to-morrow. There is to be some rare fun down at the township at daybreak," and the wretch gave another wink and a chuckle. "I'll show you how to cut off a head."

One blow—click!—cuts like cheese."

"Horrible being!" muttered my ancestor to himself in his native tongue. "Is it possible that anything human can actually revel in such brutality?" and he shuddered in spite of himself. Then he said aloud to his host—

"What was it that first gave you a taste for so horrible a profession?"

"Hm! I hardly know. I had a natural genius for it, I suppose. My father was a butcher, and I was brought up from infancy to see cattle slaughtered. At a very early age I took to slaughtering the animals myself. I seemed to take a liking to it from the very beginning. I happened to have an uncle at that time who was a Scharfrichter, and my greatest delight was to see him cut off the heads of the criminals. I began to long to do the same.

"I was a very young man when this uncle died, and as he had no male issue to take his place, and no one else seemed to come forward, I thought I would offer my services, and they were accepted. I have been headsman of the town these thirty years, and when I die my son will step into my shoes."

"But if he doesn't take to it?"

"He *must* take to it—he'll *have* to take to it."

"Why, are there not many other noble professions just as inviting as that of chopping off the heads of one's fellow-mortals?"

"Not for the son of a headsman. I see you are ignorant of the laws of this country. Here in Germany the son of a headsman is bound by law to adopt the profession of his father, and should the executioner have a daughter instead of a son, in that case, the man who marries his daughter is bound to be headsman. Then the Scharfrichter is obliged to build his house a mile away from other men, for he is a being hated and shunned by everyone."

"This then is the reason of your solitude?"

"It is; and so far is this superstitious fear of contamination carried in this country, that your citizen considers himself defiled if by chance he has eaten out of the same plate that a headsman has once used. Accordingly all vendors of crockery have orders to knock a chip out of every earthen vessel that they sell to the headsman."

"Dear me!" exclaimed my ancestor, "what a peculiar custom! I never heard that before. I certainly did remark that your crockery was in a most dilapidated state, but I didn't consider the remark worth making, although more than once in the course of the evening I felt inclined to ask you how on earth you contrived to knock out chips of such a peculiar shape by mere accident."

"Ah!" sighed the headsman, "what between the crockery-seller and——"

Here he put his finger to his lip and looked round the room suspiciously.

"What is the matter?" asked the student.

"Hush!" said the headsman, "it isn't always safe to talk of mischievous people—they are apt to appear. You know the saying, 'Talk of the devil.'"

"Well," said my ancestor, "but what has that to do with your broken crockery?"

"Hush!" answered his host, looking round him half-timidly; then whispered, "I have a certain mischievous lodger that does my crockery more harm than either the crockery-seller or my boy upstairs when he's fractious."

"Ah!" exclaimed the traveller in surprise, "you have a lodger in your house?"

"Ay!—a lodger who never pays his rent, and who drives me to my wit's end by shying my crockery at my head. Look here, what a cut he gave my wrist once in one of his pranks. I shall bear this mark to my grave." So saying, he bared his wrist and displayed a deep, livid wound, long since healed, but which left behind a scar which nothing could efface.

"An ugly cut, to be sure," remarked the Englishman. "But why on earth do you not get rid of so playful a lodger?"

"Get rid of him! I only wish the devil I could. He comes here uninvited and—— But let us not talk of him, or he may pay us another of his pleasant visits, when you will be able to make his acquaintance. He never stands upon ceremony, but comes just whenever he likes. He may be in the room now, for what I know. I shall be off to bed."

My ancestor gazed round the room, vainly endeavouring to discover in some hidden nook the object of his host's terror, when, marvellous to relate! a dish on the top shelf was pitched, as if by some invisible hand, from its post, and shattered into pieces against the opposite wall, nearly hitting him on the head as

it passed.

The traveller stared first at the shelf, then at his host, and turned pale.

"Good Heavens!" he cried. "What was that?"

"What was it? Ay! You may well ask what it is," answered his host, peevishly. "What in the devil's name should it be but that pest of a 'Poltergeist' again. I told you you would make his acquaintance ere long."

"A what?—a '*Poltergeist*'?"

"Ay, Poltergeist—a malignant spirit, whose chief delight seems to be to strike terror into the house of a poor honest headsman, and smash all his crockery that he has to pay for out of his hard-earned wages."

"Holy Virgin!" ejaculated my ancestor, crossing himself (for he was a good Catholic). "A malignant spirit! Saints protect us!"

But the words were hardly out of his mouth when crash! went another plate upon the floor, just grazing his host's auburn head as it passed.

"Oh! come now, my fine fellow," said our host, in a tone of mild remonstrance; "a little of that goes a long way."

Then turning to his guest, he remarked:

"I wonder why he honours me especially with his visits, and not other people. I shouldn't wonder if he is someone that I have had the honour of decapitating, and he comes to pay me an occasional visit in order to impress upon me that he hasn't forgotten the little service I did him."

A large pointed knife that lay peacefully on the table was then suddenly and powerfully thrown from the traveller's side, and remained with the point sticking in the panel of the door opposite.

"Ho! ho!" cried the headsman; "this is getting warm work. Now, my good friend, do let me entreat you to be more moderate in your manifestations, and if you are quiet, to-morrow I will send you a companion."

This promise, so far from quieting our spiritual guest, seemed to infuriate him more than ever, for the bottle of schnaps, more than half full, was now raised in the air and dashed to pieces on the table, the candle being overturned at the same

time, and falling flame downwards on to the spirit spilt on the table, it ignited, and in a moment everything was in a blaze.

"Fire! Fire!" cried the headsman, in a voice that roused up his wife and child, who came tumbling downstairs in no time, to learn what was the matter.

There is no knowing what mischief might not have taken place had not my ancestor, with great presence of mind, snatched up his damp clothes from before the fire, and succeeded in extinguishing the flame.

"What is the matter, Franz?" exclaimed our host's better half, appearing at the door just as matters were being set to rights again.

"Oh, nothing," said her fond spouse, "only that d——d Poltergeist again, who seems bent upon burning us all in our beds before he has done with us."

"Hush!" said his wife, "don't swear, or he may do as you say in real earnest. Come to bed now, or to-morrow you won't be able to get up in time. Remember ——"

"Ah, true; I must have my night's rest, as it would not do for my hand to tremble to-morrow when I mount the scaffold. *Gute nacht, mein Herr.*"

And our worthy host followed his partner out of the room, leaving my ancestor to his reflections.

"Well," soliloquised my relative, "of all the strange adventures that ever occurred to me, this beats all. Oh! there is not the slightest doubt that what I have just witnessed is the work of the infernal powers—some diabolical agency.

"When I see a knife jump up from the table by itself without anyone near and deliberately fix itself in the panel of the door before my very eyes; when I see a bottle of spirit overturned and broken in pieces, and then a candle after that knocked over as if on purpose to ignite the spirit, and withal no way of accounting for such a phenomenon; moreover, when I see plates and dishes hurled from one end of the room to the other, and apparently aimed at people's heads, and yet the perpetrator of such pranks has the power of making himself invisible to the naked eye, then, I say, this is not through human agency, but something superhuman, and as it is not exactly an angelic mode of proceeding, it must be the reverse."

My ancestor shuddered, and crossed himself. The manifestations, however, had

ceased for the night, and in five minutes our weary traveller was fast asleep.

His dreams that night were not of the pleasantest. He imagined that he mounted the scaffold with a crowd of eager eyes gazing at him, amongst whom were his friends and travelling companions. His host, the Scharfrichter, stood brandishing his terrible two-handed sword, and in another moment his head would have been off, but at the critical time the dream changed, and he was being pelted with crockery in the midst of a cemetery at night by innumerable sheeted "poltergeister."

These and such-like visions were flitting before his brain, when a loud thump at the door brought him back to earth again. There was the Scharfrichter before him, not in dressing gown and slippers, as on the previous evening, but attired in doublet and hose of a blood red, a black *barello* with scarlet cock's feather.

"Now then, mein Herr," said the headsman, taking down his fearful instrument from the wall, "time's up."

My ancestor, only just awake, rubbed his eyes and imagined that he was really and truly called away to execution, and that his last hour had come.

The executioner, seeing that he hesitated, added: "If you want to witness the cunning of my hand, now's your time."

My relation gave a sigh of relief when he began to recollect that his own head was quite safe, and that he was only called to witness the execution of another man.

"But I can't go; I have sprained my ankle," pleaded the Englishman.

"Oh, I don't intend to walk myself," replied the executioner. "I have my horse and cart ready, and can give you a lift."

"Oh, if that's the case," said the student, "I shall be glad to go, as I wish to meet my friends in the township."

"Come on, then," and the headsman assisted the Englishman into the cart.

As they were about starting, a little red-haired ruffian of about ten, stout and well-built, and bearing a striking likeness to our host, appeared on the threshold.

"Papa, you'll bring me home a football, won't you?" said the youth.

"Ay, my boy, that will I, a good sized one," answered his father.

"That's your son?" asked the student of his host. "Ah, a fine little fellow. Here, my little man," said he to the child, and slipping a small coin into his little fat fist, he patted him on the cheek and stepped into the cart.

"Ah, he's a fine boy," said our host with a paternal pride, as he whipped on his horse. "There is nothing of the milksop about him. *He's* not afraid of the devil himself."

"You do well to be proud of him. I'll warrant you buy him many a pretty toy," observed the Englishman.

"Buy him toys!" exclaimed the headsman, laughing. "As long as I bring him home a football now and then, he is quite content." And he laughed again.

"Well, that is a toy, isn't it?" said the student, not as yet comprehending the headsman's meaning.

"Yes, a toy that costs me nothing, and gives him no end of amusement. You should see how he kicks the heads about that I bring him home. It's quite a pleasure to see the youngster enjoy himself in his innocent way."

"You do not mean to say," said the Englishman, in horror, "that the football you promised him is to be a *human head*!"

"Aye, to be sure," replied the Scharfrichter. "What else should it be? What kicks he'll give it to be sure! Ha! ha! ha! that's the way to bring up boys; makes them hardy. *He's* not afraid of a little blood. Talk of his not taking a liking to my business! Why he's always saying to me, 'Papa, when I am big enough to wield your sword, you'll let me cut off heads, won't you?'

"'Yes, my boy, that you shall,' say I, for I like to give him encouragement. That's what I call bringing up boys well. I wouldn't give a fig for one of your milksops that scream or faint at the sight of blood, not I."

"Humph," muttered my ancestor, and he remained silent for some minutes, absorbed in meditation.

The headsman whipped on his horse in silence; at length he said to his guest: "Here we are at last. Look at yon crowd waiting to receive us."

My relative lifted his head, and sure enough there was the mound of earth

erected for the criminal already surrounded by soldiers, close to which thronged the crowd. All the inhabitants of —dorf were astir, and in the crowd our Englishman now recognised his fellow students. A cry of "*Der Henker! der Henker!*"^[3] arose on all sides. Room was at once made for the headsman and his companion, and Fritz's fellow students, seeing their friend arrive in a Henker's cart, pushed their way through the crowd to ask him all sorts of questions.

Fritz descended with difficulty after paying his host for his board and lodging, and joined his companions. In a few minutes more the criminal's cart arrived with the "*armer Sünder*," or poor sinner, accompanied by two priests. Loud execrations broke from the mob, amidst which the wretched being descended from the cart and mounted the scaffold. A dead silence reigned around. One of the priests whispered something earnestly in the ear of the condemned, who was as pale as death, and he took his seat on the chair prepared for him, while an expression of savage delight appeared on the countenance of the headsman.

He felt all eyes were upon him. The terrible two-handed weapon was raised aloft, and brandished over the Henker's head. One blow and the head of the unhappy wretch was severed from his body. Loud cheering rent the air as the Scharfrichter, holding the head of the criminal by the hair, presented it to the public gaze. But at this moment a most unexpected and revolting scene ensued.

Several persons from among the crowd rushed forward toward the scaffold with mugs, which they filled at the fresh fountain of blood spurting up from the severed neck of the criminal and drank off at a draught.

My ancestor sickened at so disgusting a spectacle, and demanded the reason of some bystander. He was informed that those persons believed human blood fresh from the neck of a beheaded criminal to be an infallible remedy for epileptic fits. The superstition exists to this day. Violent exercise after the draught, he was informed, was considered necessary, in order to effect a cure.

The crowd began to disperse, and my ancestor, leaning on the arm of a friend, also retired from the scene, disgusted with himself at having been present at such a spectacle. Before leaving the spot he had time to notice his host of the previous night start off in his cart towards home with the promised football.

Our English student was laid up for some little time with his sprained ankle, and some of his companions remained behind to keep him company, while others moved onward.

The ankle being cured, my relative continued his foot tour with his friends, and afterwards returned to the university, where he studied hard till the time came round for an examination, which he passed, and shortly afterwards returned to England.

We hear nothing more of my ancestor until ten or twelve years afterwards, when we again find him in Germany, whither he had been suddenly called to visit some relative, then in a dying state.

He arrived just in time to close his relative's eyes, after which he saw him quietly interred in his last home.

This sad office over, he was thinking of returning to England, when, in turning over the articles of his travelling trunk, he suddenly came across a German book belonging to a college friend of his, one Ludwig Engstein, that had been lent him when at the university, and which he had forgotten to return before leaving college. His friend used to live, he remembered, in Weimar, and not being far distant, he resolved to visit that town and to find out his friend's house.

Many changes take place in twelve years, and my ancestor only half expected to meet his fellow-student again. He might have changed his residence—he might be dead. Who could tell what might not have happened to him after so long a lapse of time?

Nevertheless, the Englishman, finding himself on German soil once more, resolved to enquire after the friend of his youth, and should he succeed in discovering him, to put him in possession of his book again, and chat with him over their student days.

Accordingly, he set off for the town of Weimar, and having arrived there, proceeded with the said book under his arm to the house of his friend. He had been once on a visit of a fortnight at his friend's house when a student, and had known his mother and sisters intimately, therefore he had no difficulty in finding the house again.

The town of Weimar had changed but little during these ten or twelve years, and once more he found himself on the old familiar doorstep.

"*Ist der Herr Advocat Engstein zu Hause?*" he demanded of an old woman who answered the door.

"*Ja, mein Herr,*" replied the crone. "What name shall I give?"

"Oh, never mind announcing me," said the Englishman; "I'll announce myself."

So saying, he pushed past the old woman, and knocked at his friend's study.

"*Herein!*" called out a voice from within, which my ancestor had no difficulty in recognising as his friend's, and the Englishman entered.

Ludwig Engstein was seated at a table strewn with papers and documents, and was busily writing. He was still young looking, but his friend Fritz noticed that his face had assumed a more thoughtful expression than when at the university. He was now a lawyer in good practice, and the moment his friend entered he was so busy that he did not even raise his head.

"I am sorry to disturb you, Herr Advocat," said Fritz, suddenly, "but I've come to return a book you lent me some time back."

And placing the book on the table, he marched straight out of the room, shutting the door after him. He then peeped through the key-hole and listened awhile to note the effect of his abrupt departure on his friend.

The young lawyer's ear caught his friend's English accent, and at once lifted his head, though not in time to catch a glimpse of his retreating figure.

I have said that Engstein recognised Fritz's accent as English, but little did he suspect that it was his old college friend who had called upon him and left so suddenly.

He looked surprised, took up the book upon the table to look at the title, and muttered to himself, "Who can it have been? I do not recollect now who it was I lent it to, but it must have been a long while ago."

He was about to ring the bell, and rose for that purpose when he noticed a face peeping at him through the opening of the door, which was now ajar.

"Who's that? Come in!" cried the lawyer.

"You are busy, Herr Advocat—another time. *Ich empfehle mich Ihnen*," said my relative, closing the door slowly after him.

But this time Ludwig had a better view of the Englishman's face.

"*Potztausend!*" exclaimed the lawyer; "I shall know that face. *Ach! lieber freund Fritz*. Can it be really you? *Nein was für ein angenehme Ueberaschung!*" he

cried, rushing forward and throwing the door wide open while he kissed his friend forcibly on both cheeks.

"Sit down here and tell me to what for a fortuitous and never-to-be-expected train of circumstances I am indebted for this friendly and to me most agreeable and blissful-past-days-recalling visit."

Fritz then went on to relate the circumstances of his relative's death, and how he had been called from home to attend him in his last moments.

"I am sorry for the death of your relation," said Ludwig, "but I cannot sufficiently express my extreme joy at seeing my old friend Fritz again after so many years! Ha! ha! ha!" he laughed, partly from delight at meeting his friend, and partly at his friend's mode of introducing himself.

"What for an eccentric and of you and your strange countryman-characteristic way of saluting your old friend after so long!"

And the German again laughed again heartily.

"And what for a busy and for-ever-with-documents-and-papers-occupied German business man, not even to notice his swiftly entering, and though long departed from German soil, speedily-vanishing and almost-forgotten English friend!" retorted Fritz, mimicking the high-flown, wordy phraseology of the German.

"No, on my honour, Fritz," replied his friend; "not forgotten, I assure you. Do you know that I had a dream of you only last night. It never struck me till now. It is strange that I should have dreamed of you just the night before your unexpected and to me most grateful arrival. How strange it is that our dreams often prognosticate coming events! It is as if the mind, partly freed from its material covering during sleep, received the power of peering with greater accuracy into that to-us-in-our-waking-state-obscure and unfathomable future which——"

"Precisely; I understand you," answered my relative, cutting short his friend's philosophic remark; "but let us talk a little over old times; that is if you are at leisure."

"Yes, to be sure," answered the lawyer; "what I am doing now has no need of hurry. Oh, by the way, Fritz, talking of old times, do you remember the night you spent at the house of old Franz Wenzel the Scharfrichter?"

"If I remember? Shall I ever forget it? ask, rather," answered my ancestor. "It seems to me only yesterday that I witnessed that execution; and then that Poltergeist—it seems as if I had witnessed his pranks only last night. I can remember the minutest incident that happened on that unhallowed evening."

"Well," resumed the lawyer, "poor old Franz is no more."

"What—dead, eh?"

"Ay, murdered. Horrible to relate, his body was discovered minus the head, which has been carried off or hidden somewhere, for it hasn't been found yet, but his son recognised the body by the clothes, besides Franz has never returned home since, so it must be he. There appears to be a mystery about it, however. The murderer has not as yet been discovered, neither can people guess at what prompted the murderer to take the life of a man who was never over-burdened with money. Then the head being cut off without care being taken to bury the body, and all, too, within a few steps of the Henker's own house. What could have been the murderer's object in carrying off the head?"

"A mere act of spite, I suppose," replied the Englishman.

"Well, it may be so," replied his friend, "for it seems that his life had been often threatened by the friends or relations of those he had beheaded. It may be as you say, out of spite. The murderer may, by way of wreaking his vengeance have cut off the head of the man who had put some friend or relation to death as a trophy, but why just at this moment? Why not before, as there has been no execution in the town lately? I believe there has been none since that execution we two witnessed together. If the avenger had made up his mind to avenge his friend, why did he not do so at once, instead of waiting these twelve years?"

"It may be some other private quarrel," replied Fritz. "Are you mixed up in it?"

"Yes, I shall be at the trial."

"It happened recently it would seem."

"Only two days ago."

"Then the body is still fresh—of course it has been exposed and examined?"

"Yes, but it was recognised at once by the family. I dare say it is buried by this time. I am going there to-morrow. If you have time, my friend, I should be most

glad of your company."

"Well, I don't mind giving you a day or so, as I am taking a holiday."

"Agreed, then; we start to-morrow."

The two friends then discoursed until dinner-time, when Ludwig invited Fritz to share his meal.

The Englishman accepted the offer, and they chatted and laughed the time away till the evening.

Ludwig lived quite alone. His sisters had married, his mother was dead. Ludwig was still a bachelor, and so was my ancestor at this time.

"You have not yet put your neck under the yoke it appears," said my relative to his friend, in allusion to the conjugal tie.

"Not I," replied his friend. "At least, not yet."

"I understand," said Fritz; "not married, but '*verlobt*'."

"No, nor that either."

"No? *Verliebt*, then, perhaps."

"No, neither '*verlobt*' nor '*verliebt*'."

"What!" exclaimed the Englishman, "not even that! Nevertheless, if I remember rightly, the student Ludwig Engstein was not once averse to the fair sex."

"Oh, recall not the follies of the past, my friend, or I may retaliate," answered the German.

"True, true," said the Englishman. "We all have our weaknesses, and youth is the season in which they mostly flourish, but now we have both grown into sober-minded *Philister*,^[4] and are more wary."

"Yes, yes," rejoined his friend; "we are not to be caught now by a pair of blue eyes, flaxen tresses, and a jimp waist, however well these charms may be set off with the allurements of dress. When men get to our advanced age, they want 'geist,' and look out for a good housewife who can cook them a dish of 'sauer kraut' or a 'pfankuchen' when '*das moos*'^[5] is wanting, which is another very useful accessory we desire to have thrown in."

Here he made a significant gesture with his finger and thumb, intended to express the counting of money.

"I hope, my friend, you have not become so worldly as to look upon marriage in the light of bettering yourself," said my relative.

"*Ach! lieber freund*," replied Ludwig. "It is all very well for you rich milords who have '*löwen*'^[6] to talk in that style, but we '*armer teufeln*' are bound to take even that into consideration."

"This is what the world makes of noble fellows when it has once got them in its grasp!" sighed my ancestor to himself, and he hastened to change the conversation.

They then discoursed on various other topics, sitting up to a late hour of night, until wearied with incessant talking, each retired to rest.

Early the next morning both were dressed and ready to start on their journey. They reached ———dorf towards evening, and having fixed their quarters at the very same inn they had put up at on their memorable tour, they beguiled the time until the morrow by discoursing with the townspeople about the mysterious murder.

The body, it seems, was not yet underground, but was to be buried the next day. They accordingly both resolved to examine it.

"The head has not been found yet?" asked Ludwig after supper of the landlord of the inn, who had come in for a gossip.

"No, sir, not yet," replied their host. "Ah, there are some strange rumours in the town about that same murder."

"Indeed!" cried Fritz; "what do the people say?"

"Some say one thing, and some another, but all seem to agree that there is something supernatural about the murder of the Henker."

"Something supernatural! Why—what reason have they to jump at that conclusion?"

"Well, sir, I don't know if you have ever heard of the Henker's Poltergeist, but it is a fact well known to all in the township."

"Yes, yes—even we know it. In fact—but never mind, proceed."

"Well, gentlemen, this Poltergeist—this evil spirit—that no doubt was permitted to haunt the headsman for his sins—for a headsman must of necessity be a cruel, hard-hearted, unnatural villain to choose such a profession."

"Well, well—this evil spirit."

"Well then the Scharfrichter, at least, so people say, had sold his soul to this demon, and when the time came round for him to give up his soul according to the bargain, he refused, and the demon wrested it from him by force by cutting off his head and carrying it away with him."

"Oh, but why this strange supposition? Why put down a thing to supernatural agency before sufficient time has elapsed to investigate the matter properly? A person is murdered, and the body discovered without the head, and because the

head cannot be found at once, you say that the devil has run off with it. My dear sir, the thing's absurd."

"Well, we must wait and see what evidence will turn up," said the host.

"Yes, but if everybody merely *waits* for evidence to turn up instead of actively searching for it, the matter will come to a standstill," said the Englishman. "I myself am interested in the murder, as I knew the Scharfrichter twelve years ago, when I was a student."

"Ah, in that case, sir—of course you would. By-the-by, there is another murder now talked about besides the Henker's. They seem to be getting in fashion."

"What! another body?"

"Well, sir, the body isn't exactly found yet, but there is a certain Count, well-known to be rich, who was taking a foot tour through the country alone. His family expected him home on a certain day, and as he hasn't turned up yet, they suspect that he has been robbed and murdered."

"That may be merely a suspicion. How long has he been missing?"

"Three days, they say."

"Three days! Why, a man doesn't bind himself to a day or two when out on a foot tour. He may remain another three days, or a week longer, and then return unhurt."

"Well, sir, it may be as you say, but as the Count was known by his relations to be a very punctual man, and never to fail in his appointments, you see, it is natural they should feel uneasy."

"True, especially as three days ago was about the time of the other murder, and they may get it into their heads that the two murders occurred in the same night. Was he a married man?"

"No, sir; quite young, they say."

"Humph! When did you say the body of the Henker would be buried—tomorrow?"

"About ten, I think, sir."

"Ah! then I must be there early, as I want to examine the corpse myself."

"Oh, decidedly, sir. I will bring you to the place to-morrow in good time."

Our friends now felt inclined for their night's rest, so their host showed them into a room with two beds, and wishing them a good night, left them to undress, and before many minutes had passed both were sound asleep.

The following morning early our two friends, in the company of their host, started from the inn to visit the corpse of the murdered executioner. As they entered the hall where the body lay exposed, Fritz instantly recognised the clothes; if not the identical vestments worn by the defunct twelve years ago, at least, of the same colour and material, being, as I have said before, a doublet and hose of crimson, a colour that he seems to have been partial to.

"Yes," said Fritz; "these are the Henker's clothes, I've no doubt."

Then, after examining the form laid out before him, he was observed to start slightly, and he added in a whisper to his friend: "Ludwig, this is not the body of Franz Wenzel—I'll take my oath of that."

"How! Not Franz Wenzel! Who else should it be, then?"

"That I am not prepared to say, but it is not the body of the Henker; that is certain. Remember that I passed a night at Wenzel's house; during that time I took note of the features and figure of the Scharfrichter, and though twelve years have passed since I saw him, I can swear——"

"But how! His own family have recognised him. What further proof would you have?"

Then addressing the landlord, Ludwig said: "Is it true, landlord, that his own family have recognised the body?"

"Yes, sir; at least, the son did. I don't know whether his wife did or not, as she has been laid up for ever so long with paralysis, poor soul. It may be she has never been informed of the murder. One does not like to frighten invalids, you know."

"Well, well—enough if the corpse has been recognised by the son."

"Yes, sir, he recognised it. It is true, he was a little the worse for liquor when they brought him before the corpse of his father; but when is he otherwise, for the matter of that? As sad a young dog as ever lived that same—inherits all the

vices of his father. Nevertheless, who is there in the township that does not recognise the Henker's red legs?"

"You see, therefore, my friend," said Ludwig, turning to his companion, "that you are mistaken. Everybody recognises him."

"I see nothing of the sort," replied the Englishman, doggedly; "and I am still prepared to swear that the corpse before us is not that of Franz Wenzel."

"My dear Fritz," said Engstein, "you are obstinate. What reason can you possibly have for saying so?"

"Observe the hands of the corpse," said Fritz, in a low tone. "Do they look like the hands of an executioner? They are long and delicate. Those of Franz Wenzel were hard, rough, and hairy, with square stunted fingers; besides, the headsman wore no ring. This hand, though no ring is visible, has a depression on the forefinger, as if the owner were in the constant habit of wearing one."

"Ha! say you so?" exclaimed his friend, and a strange expression came over his face.

"Then," pursued Fritz, "observe the clothes. Do they look as if they were made for the body? Franz Wenzel had enormously developed calves, and his hose fitted tightly. Do these hose fit tightly? Look at these limbs, that, compared with the Henker's, are but those of a boy."

"Humph! I believe you are right, Fritz, after all," said Engstein; "but it never would have struck me if you had not pointed it out, as it is so long ago since I set eyes upon him, and then only for a moment. You took a more complete survey of him, and your evidence may prove useful. We will look into the matter together. It is strange, however, that no one should have been struck in the same manner as yourself."

"Well, I don't know," responded Fritz. "The people in these small villages are not always of the brightest. Then the headsman's house being so far away from the town, few people have the opportunity of taking a minute survey of him. The people here content themselves with recognising the clothes. Franz's wife is laid up with paralysis, and has not seen the body, while his son only recognised it when in a drunken state. Do you call that sufficient evidence to prove that the corpse before us is that of the executioner? Would you like another proof that this is no more Franz Wenzel than I am?"

"Well," said Ludwig.

"I remember a scar upon the right wrist that he showed me the night I put up at his house," said the Englishman; "and which he told me had been inflicted on him by a piece of broken plate hurled at him by his Poltergeist. I remember that he said he should carry that mark with him to the grave. If this is the corpse of Franz Wenzel we shall not fail to discover the mark."

So saying, he bared the right arm of the corpse and examined it carefully. No such mark was to be found. The arm was free from scar or brand, and was delicate in form, almost like that of a maiden's. Moreover, there was a scanty covering of dark hair upon it, while the hair on the arms of the executioner, if you remember rightly, was red and profuse. Even Engstein remarked this, and was now convinced beyond a doubt that the murdered man was not Franz Wenzel.

"Is any search being made now for the head of the corpse?" demanded Engstein of his host, who had withdrawn some paces from the two friends, and consequently had not heard the doubt that had been suddenly cast upon the public opinion.

"No active search, I believe, sir," was the reply.

"We will make the search ourselves, my friend," whispered Engstein to Fritz; then added to his host, "My friend and I will take a stroll together. It is uncertain when we shall return to the inn, but get something savoury for us against we come back," and he waved his hand towards his host, who doffed his cap and walked towards his inn, while our two friends set off together in the direction of the Henker's house, which they reached in about an hour.

"Yes," said Fritz, "this is the place. I remember it well. What did our host tell us? That the murder took place only a few paces from the headsman's door. Let us look well round the spot. How solitary it is! Just the place where a murder would be committed. What do you say to yon hollow flanked with brushwood, Ludwig? Is it not a likely place for a murderer to await his victim?"

"You are right, Fritz, let us make a strict search, but if the head has been carried far distant——"

"Let us, nevertheless, search well here first," said my ancestor, and the two friends set to work at once, lifting up every bush and bramble, following every

track, until finally they came upon some blood stains.

An old dried well they discovered not far from this spot. Common sense would have suggested this as a likely place for the concealment of the missing head, and there is no doubt that the same idea struck the inhabitants of ——dorf, for there was evident traces of a great number of feet in the sand round about it; besides which there was a chip recently made in the brickwork, which appeared caused by the letting down of a rope or chain.

This seemed evidence enough for our two friends that the well had already been searched, and without effect. Further search in that direction appeared to them to be useless, especially as no bloodstains were to be found near.

They then proceeded to examine more closely than ever the bushes around, stamping on the ground to ascertain if a hole had recently been made, but the ground was firm, and there was nothing to attract suspicion save a few bloodstains, which, instead of leading up to the well as one would have imagined, led up to the foot of an old chestnut-tree, and there seemed to end.

On examining the bark of the tree attentively they observed blood also on the trunk, but this might have been occasioned by the splashing of the blood from the neck after the decapitation of the head. There was no hollow visible in the tree where suspicion would lead one to suppose that the head could be concealed; nevertheless, when men make up their minds to make a rigid search, they often pry into the most unlikely and impossible places, so our friends determined to ascend the tree to ascertain if by any chance the head could have lodged between its leafy branches.

Previous to mounting, Ludwig, who, together with his friend, had provided himself with a long branch wherewith to beat down the bushes, struck the chestnut-tree a blow on the trunk with the branch he carried, when a hollow sound proceeded from the tree, and instantly a large owl fluttered out from the foliage before their faces with its beak and plumage stained with blood. Blinded with the sunlight, it hovered distractedly hither and thither for a time, and then vanished with a screech.

"Did you notice the beak and feathers of the bird, Ludwig?" asked Fritz.

"I did," said Ludwig, "and what is more, I am convinced that the whole of this seemingly robust chestnut-tree is hollow, and I have not a doubt that the murderer, aware of the fact, has hidden the head of his victim at the bottom, and

that this fell bird has been gorging itself and its young upon it ever since."

"That is just my opinion," said Fritz. "Let us climb the tree and look within."

My ancestor was the first to mount, and having arrived at the point where the trunk divides itself into branches, he discovered a large hole thickly covered over with leaves. Sitting upon the edge, with his legs dangling within the hollow trunk, he proceeded to strike a light, and having ignited a taper, he commenced carefully to descend into the hollow of the tree. In his descent, however, his foot slipped, his taper extinguished itself, and he came down rather suddenly upon his feet. He soon became aware from a feeble smothered shriek that he was treading upon a nest of young owlets.

He began to dread lest he might encounter some venomous reptile in this unexplored region, but taking courage he struck another light and searched about. He had not looked long when he discovered what appeared to be a human scalp. He grasped it firmly by the hair, and by the light of his taper soon knew it to be in reality the head of a man, one half of which had been already eaten away to the bone.

"Eureka!" exclaimed Fritz, "I have it."

His friend uttered an exclamation of delight, while my relative clambered up again, and the two friends examined the disgusting treasure under the fair light of day.

"You see the hair is black," said Fritz. "I hope you are satisfied now that this is not the head of the Scharfrichter."

"There is no doubt about that now, I think," said Ludwig. "And do you know, Fritz, now that I scan these features, they seem familiar to me as my own in the looking-glass. Himmel! Can it be possible!"

"What?" demanded my ancestor, anxiously.

"Why, I'll swear that this is no other than my old friend and fellow-student, the Count of Waffenburg!" exclaimed Engstein.

"What! Graf von Waffenburg! Is it really so? I knew him well. Let me examine the features," said Fritz.

"Yes, it is he beyond a doubt," said Ludwig. "We had a quarrel once, and I

wounded him in the cheek. Here is the wound I myself inflicted; but afterwards we became staunch friends."

"True," said Fritz. "I remember the duel well, being present myself on the occasion. What a curious coincidence! It is certainly he, and no other. The more I look at the features the more satisfied I am. Let us hasten with this proof of the identity of the murdered man to the township and spread abroad the news of the murder of the count. His relations will then come to claim his body."

The two friends then made a covering of chestnut leaves for the head, and tying it up in a handkerchief, retraced their steps towards the township, discoursing on the cunning of the murderer, who appeared to them to be no other than the Scharfrichter himself.

"For when a body is found minus the head," argued Ludwig, "and dressed in the clothes of another man, and that other man is nowhere to be found, it follows as a matter of course that the man missing must be the murderer."

"Yes," said the Englishman, "unless the murdered man had previously stolen the clothes of another, and then afterwards been murdered by some unknown assassin."

"But when the deceased has been proved beyond a doubt to be the Graf von Waffenburg, a man whose name is above so ridiculous a suspicion," said Engstein.

"Oh, of course the blackest suspicion attaches itself to Wenzel," said Fritz; "yet, in the case of a mysterious murder, evidence, occasionally of so startling and unexpected a nature, turns up as to completely alter the state of the case."

"The headsman is missing, and a corpse has been found dressed in his clothes. We presume, therefore, that *he* is the murderer, but if after a time the Henker's corpse should also be found——"

"Oh, in that case," said Ludwig, "the aspect of the whole affair would be changed. Well, we must wait for further evidence. To-morrow the case will begin in court, and my services will be required. I doubt not before long that sufficient light will be thrown on the subject to enable us to discover the true murderer."

Thus our two friends chatted by the way, till in due time they arrived at the township, and having deposited the head of the murdered man at the town hall, where the body had been exposed, they spread abroad the result of their

expedition, and clearly proved to the somewhat obtuse inhabitants their error.

On the following morning, then, the trial began. The court was crowded to suffocation. Evidence of a very extraordinary nature had turned up, so it was said, and Ludwig Engstein, attired in his professional robes, was preparing to conduct the case.

My ancestor was amongst the crowd, and had placed himself as near as he possibly could to his friend.

"Call in Gottlieb Kräger," cried the examiner.

A hoary peasant entered the witness-box, and the examination proceeded in this wise:

"You are a farmer from the village of ——, are you not?"

"I am."

"Just inform us, if you please, what you were doing on the night of the murder."

"I was returning home after selling some cattle at the ——dorf market, and it was about midnight when I passed close to the Henker's cottage. I heard cries and groans as of someone being murdered not far off. I stopped and listened for a moment, then set off on tip-toe to the spot whence the sounds proceeded. It was very dark, and the groans at length ceased.

"I placed myself behind some brushwood to watch who should issue from the copse, when a friar passed me."

"Stay, are you quite sure the friar came from the very spot from whence you heard the groans?"

"Well, as to swearing to it, I don't know, but I heard the sound as of brushwood being trampled under foot, and the next instant the friar passed close to me. He did not appear to observe me, but moved onward in the direction of the village of Ahlden."

"Did you follow him or take any further notice of him?"

"To say the truth, I was too frightened to move, but I kept my eye on him as far as I could see him."

"But you tell me it was very dark."

"Just at that moment the moon had burst from behind the clouds, and enabled me to see distinctly."

"Well, did you observe anything peculiar in the manner or gait of the friar?"

"Yes; after he had passed me some ten paces he halted, as if he were counting money, after which he threw away something that glittered in the moonlight and then walked on. I followed stealthily behind to discover what it was that he had thrown away, when I picked up this."

The witness held up a long silk purse knitted with silver beads.

"Give it to me—so—can you recollect anything else about this friar? Could you manage to catch a glimpse of his face?"

"No, I could not exactly distinguish the features, but——"

"But what?"

"I observed a peculiar patch in his amice over the left shoulder."

"Should you be able to swear to the amice?"

"Aye, that I should, among a thousand."

"Is this the amice of the friar you saw issue from the copse?" asked Ludwig, holding up a patched amice such as is worn by the Capuchin friars.

"The very same, I'll swear to it."

"Take care, you are on your oath."

"Well, if it is not the same, it is one made after the same fashion, patch and all complete. I'll swear to the shape of the patch, for I observed the garment well."

"Enough; you may retire. Call in Hans Schultz."

A dapper little man with oiled hair and closely-shaven face entered the court, and having taken his post at the witness-box, gave his evidence as follows:—

"I am by profession a barber. The morning after the murder I was shaving an elderly gentleman in my shop. I suggested that a little hair dye would improve his personal appearance, and offered him a bottle. He refused to buy it, so I placed it on a table behind me, and continued to shave him. Whilst I was

recommending the hair dye to my customer I noticed a Capuchin friar pass several times in front of my shop. He appeared to be listening to our conversation.

"Shortly afterwards he entered the shop and begged for alms for the convent. I gave him a kreuzer, and after he had chatted a little he left the shop. I could not see his face well, as he kept it covered with his hood, but I remember that he had a red beard. He had hardly left my shop when on looking on the table behind me I found the bottle of hair dye gone. No one else but the friar and my customer had entered the shop since I laid the bottle down upon the table, yet I could not suspect my customer of having stolen the bottle, and I was much at a loss to conceive what a Capuchin friar should want with hair dye.

"I concluded, therefore, that I must have been mistaken, and must have laid the bottle down somewhere else without thinking, so I thought no more of it.

"On the same day I was called to cut the hair of a gentleman at the other end of the village, when I passed a friar who appeared to be the same as he who not long ago had entered my shop. I looked at him in the face, but he had a black beard. I could have sworn it was the same, for his amice was patched in a peculiar manner on the shoulder, as was that of the first friar."

"Is this the amice that the friar wore?" asked Engstein, holding up the patched garment.

"It is like it. I could all but swear to it."

"Did you address him when you met him, as you thought, a second time?"

"I was about to do so, but he pulled out his beads, and began counting them. Not liking to disturb him in his devotions, I passed on, thinking that after all I might have been deceived."

"That is sufficient, you may go."

The little barber left the court, and another witness was called for.

"Your name?"

"Max Offenbrunnen."

"Profession?"

"I am host of the Bear Inn in the village of M——."

"Can you tell us anything that happened at your inn within this last week?"

"Yes; three days after the murder a Capuchin friar stopped at my inn and called for a tankard of beer. He kept his hood down all the time, so that I could not see his face, but I remember that he had a black beard, and I also noticed that he had a patch in his amice over one shoulder of rather an unusual form."

The patched garment was held up again in court, and recognised also by the third witness, after which he proceeded as follows:—

"He called for more beer, and I began to enter into conversation with him and asked him where he came from. He told me from a Capuchin convent at W——, about a mile off. Just at that moment another friar, an old friend of mine, passed my inn, who belonged to the aforementioned convent.

"'Then you know each other,' said I to my friend the second friar, and I sought to bring them together, but my friend, after eyeing the former from head to foot, denied all knowledge of him. The first friar then somewhat confusedly stammered an excuse, saying that he had spoken without thinking, but that he had intended to say St. Mary's, another Capuchin convent, six miles further off. Then my friend the second friar said that he knew all the friars at St. Mary's, but still denied that he knew this one.

"The former began to mumble that he had only lately arrived, and began to turn the conversation. My friend whispered to me that he didn't believe he was a friar at all, but someone in disguise. After my friend had left, the former friar called for more beer (I never saw a friar drink so much beer as this one), and being curious to discover who the man was I tried to draw him out. At first he answered cautiously, but after drinking deeper he became less cautious and more confidential, but his utterance was now thick and unintelligible. He drew his chair closer to mine, and seemed about to let me into some secret, when some other customers of mine at the next table began to talk about the murder.

"I noticed that the would-be friar started, and instead of continuing his conversation with me, got up suddenly and muttered some excuse for taking his departure. He paid me hurriedly by lying down a Reichsgulden, saying that whatever change there might be I might keep for myself. He had hardly left my house when certain of the guard who had been on the track of the murderer stopped to question him, and finding he could give no satisfactory account of

himself, took him into custody."

Other witnesses were then examined in their turn, among which were certain members of the family of the murdered count, and a certain Fraulein von Berlichingen, his affianced bride, all of whom recognised the body to be that of the missing Graf von Waffenburg. The silken purse with silver beads picked up by the first witness was also recognised by Fraulein von Berlichingen as having been knitted by herself and presented by her to her lover.

The remains of the murdered count were decently interred. The melancholy event caused no small commotion in the neighbourhood. The funeral was followed by a large crowd of relatives and intimate friends, among which were our two heroes Fritz and Ludwig. The grief of Fraulein von Berlichingen was too great to allow her to appear at the funeral. She was inconsolable, and shortly afterwards entered a convent.

But to return to the trial.

The prisoner was now conducted into court. He was a man somewhat passed middle-age, though his frame was square built and powerful, and his hair, beard, and eyebrows were of a deep black, yet an observer might have noticed that whenever a ray of sunlight entered the court and shone full in the face of the prisoner that his hair and beard turned to a glowing purple, demonstrating beyond a doubt the presence of dye. Those who chanced to be stationed near the prisoner declared afterwards that the hairs of his head towards the roots were of a bright red, and many were they who recognised, in spite of this disguise, the person of Franz Wenzel, the executioner.

The prisoner, however, when examined, gave his name as Adolf Schmidt, and denied stoutly that he was Franz Wenzel, or to having ever had dealings with such a person.

He denied having stolen a bottle of hair dye for the purpose of disguising himself, and maintained that he was an honest citizen who had donned a holy garb for penitence, which had been imposed upon him by his father confessor.

The prisoner was then asked if such were the case, why he had tried to deceive the host of the Bear Inn and the Capuchin friar when they asked him whence he came. To this the prisoner replied that he loved not to gratify the idle curiosity of others respecting his private affairs. Ludwig Engstein then asked the prisoner how he came in possession of the friar's amice, for which he responded that it

had been lent him some time ago by his father confessor, who had obtained it from some Capuchin friar of his acquaintance.

When asked for particulars concerning his father confessor, he replied vaguely and confusedly, and when begged to be more explicit, he refused, saying he had private reasons for not divulging the affairs of his friends.

Other witnesses were then called for, who stated that they had been robbed of money and various sorts of ware more than once within the last three years, about half a (German) mile from the house of the Scharfrichter by a man who wore a mask, and who corresponded in height and width of person to the prisoner. Among these latter was a Jew pedlar, who three years ago had been robbed of a large sum and various articles of clothing, among which he declared was the identical friar's amice held up in court, and which he perfectly remembered to have patched himself.

This and such like evidence naturally went very much against the prisoner; neither will it be wondered at that his disguise was easily seen through, and his person recognised as that of Franz Wenzel, the executioner. He was consequently found guilty of wilful murder and finally condemned to be beheaded. The day of the execution was fixed, and the prisoner conducted to the condemned cell.

We have mentioned before in an early part of this story that the profession of the headsman was hereditary, that the law forced the son of an executioner to follow in the steps of his father.

The unhappy wretch then, according to this law, was doomed to lose his life at the hands of his own son. Much speculation, however, among the inhabitants of —dorf had arisen as to whether the law would actually enforce so rigorous a decree, and whether the son of the Scharfrichter would rebel against it if it did, or bow submissively to so harsh and unfeeling an order.

Some there were who thought that an exception ought to be made in this case, and a new Henker selected, as it was hard for the son to suffer for the crimes of the father; but even if the law were disposed to be lenient, who was the new aspirant to be? Who would like to come forward to offer his services?

The office of the Scharfrichter was in such bad odour that it would be difficult to find a man in the whole village who could be persuaded to undertake the task, even by the offer of a large reward.

However, after much speculation and gossip, the inhabitants came to the conclusion that everything might be done with money, and that someone would be certainly found to accept the bribe.

Others began to spread throughout the village that the man had already been found, and ventured to point out such or such a citizen as the new practitioner. Meanwhile the law had remained passive and had not troubled itself to make an exception in the case, and the burgomaster who had the superintendence of such affairs was far too phlegmatic and indifferent even to give the matter a thought.

He knew that an execution had to take place, that someone would be paid for amputating the head of the criminal, but whether it was to be one man's duty or another's was all the same to him.

The headsman's trade was hereditary, and he (the burgomaster) had never heard of any such innovation as that of selecting a new headsman during the lifetime of the rightful heir; therefore, as a matter of course, the young Scharfrichter was to decapitate his own father, and there was an end of the matter.

What to him were the feelings of the son at being forced to obey so unnatural a dictate? He was paid for it like anyone else, and very good pay he got, too.

What to him was the additional anguish of the criminal at being executed by his own son? He knew well enough that his son would step into his shoes when he himself should be deprived of office, and if he didn't like to lose his head at the hands of his own son, he ought to have reflected before he committed the murder.

Now, the burgomaster had a confidential servant, one Heinrich Göbel, a man of heartless and revengeful nature, who cherished an ill-will against the prisoner's son for having dared to supplant him in the affections of a certain blue-eyed damsel, the daughter of a tavern-keeper in the village.

The father of the lady in question was not over pleased with the attentions of either of these individuals towards his Lieschen, one of the aspirants for his daughter's hand being a drunkard, the son of an executioner, who besides the stigma inevitably attached to his character for life, would be obliged to maintain his daughter by the scanty proceeds of his loathsome profession.

The other, a man of notoriously bad character, and dependent upon the wages he received from his master for a living. Of the two, the maid herself decidedly

favoured Leo Wenzel, the young headsman, and seeing this, Heinrich Göbel inwardly resolved to take vengeance on his rival upon the first opportunity.

Whilst plotting vengeance thus in his heart, Göbel sought his master and shaped his conversation in this wise:

"Herr Bürgermeister, this will be a somewhat difficult business, this execution."

"How so?" inquired his master.

"Why, according to law," answered his servant, "young Leo will have to take the life of his own father."

"Well, what of that?" said the burgomaster.

"They say he is a young man of spirit, and he might refuse to take his father's life."

"Refuse! would he? The law will force him."

"But if he is obstinate and persists? He is a young man of spirit."

"Ugh! I hate these young men of spirit, they are always making trouble and subverting order. Well, if he makes a disturbance, he will be imprisoned, that's all."

"Yes, yes, of course; but for all that, if he positively refuses to lift his arm against his father, the law cannot force him to do it."

"Well, not exactly, but—but what has put it into your head that he *will* refuse? He will be rewarded for his services."

"But if he could not be tempted by a reward, if by chance he should refuse at the last moment to act the part of executioner towards his own father, and no one should be found to accept the post—why, in that case, if *my* services should be accepted, I should be most glad to officiate."

"What, *you*, Heinrich! *you* turn Scharfrichter! Ha! ha!—this is something quite new. I was not aware that that was anything in your line."

"Well, sir, knowing your dislike to a disturbance among the populace (a thing very likely to occur if the headsman should not be found at his post)—rather than such an old vagabond as Franz Wenzel should get off in the confusion, why, I'll undertake the job myself."

"You would? Ha! ha!—but stay, if there *should* be a disturbance (which Heaven forfend, as any excitement sadly upsets my digestion), I am not so sure that I should like my servant to take upon himself the office of Scharfrichter, for the odium of the populace that he would naturally incur would reflect likewise upon his master, and——"

"Well, sir, if you fear that, I should then advise another line of conduct."

"Indeed! What may that be?"

"To keep young Leo in ignorance that it is his father that he is called upon to execute. Listen to me! The Scharfrichter's house is a mile distant; our villagers have a superstitious dread of the spot, and are not likely yet to have communicated with the young man, and I know that he hasn't been in the township since he was last called to swear to the identity of the murdered man, then commonly believed to be his father. You will recollect that he identified the corpse as that of his father. In his lonely dwelling, he can have heard nothing of the trial, and is consequently still under the impression that it is his father that has been murdered.

"Now, if you will leave the matter to me I will contrive that he shall not be undeceived until too late."

"Yes; but how?"

"First of all I will go there myself with the news that the murderer of his father has been arrested, that the day has been fixed for his execution, and that he will have the pleasure of trying his hand for the first time in his life on his father's murderer. Everything will go straight, provided he has as yet heard nothing from other tongues."

"But if he has?"

"Then our plan is frustrated; but I go to ascertain that, and if he has not, the greatest care must be taken that no one communicates with him from this town, to which end you should give orders for the gates of the town to be closed for some days, under the excuse that you have been robbed of certain valuables, and have taken this precaution to catch the thief. It would be as well, perhaps, to hurry on the execution as quickly as possible."

"Well, but there is one point I don't understand. Supposing all to go on smoothly,

as you seem so confident that it will, won't the young man recognise his father when led up to the scaffold in the 'poor sinner's' cart, and afterwards takes his seat on the chair placed for him?"

"There is our great difficulty, but let us hope for the best. The prisoner, as you know, took the precaution to dye his red head black in order to escape recognition. This will aid our project. The 'poor sinner's' garb that he will don the morning of the execution will also help the disguise. Young Leo is but a superficial observer, and before he has well taken note of the criminal his head will be off."

"You are very hopeful as to the success of your scheme, but if the father, in his last moments, makes himself known to his son—should rush into his arms to embrace him and say: 'My son, do you not know me? I am your father—you will not have the heart to execute your own father, the author of your existence.'"

"We must prevent this. Let a handkerchief be tied round his jaw that he cannot open his mouth to speak. This, after all, will be nothing more than is usually done to catch hold of the head in order to exhibit it to the public after decapitation, the only difference being that it is generally tied on after the criminal has taken his seat on the scaffold, while in this case it will be done before. Another bandage should be bound round his eyes at the same time, which is also customary; thus a great portion of the prisoner's face will be hidden. His arms will be pinioned firmly to his sides, so as to render all attempt at the removal of the bandage impossible, and everything will pass off quietly."

"Well, well, you're a queer dog. See that it *does* pass off quietly, that's all, and don't bother me any more about it. Mind, I leave the matter entirely in your hands."

"Never fear, sir, I am off at once to the house of the Scharfrichter; trust everything to me. Stay, you had better issue an order for the gates of the town to be closed at once. You can give me a pass before I start, or they will shut me out with the rest."

"True; just wait one moment. Here—the pen and ink—so now be off as fast as you can."

Off started the servant of the burgomaster with the order to the gatekeeper to close the gates, and the pass which was to admit none but himself, and after the gatekeeper had received the necessary instructions, Heinrich passed rapidly

through the gates and directed his steps towards the house of the Scharfrichter. He chuckled to himself as he contemplated the success of his scheme.

"What would the death of his father at my hands be to him to the discovery of having taken his father's life himself! That will be revenge indeed! Now to the fulfilment of my scheme there is no obstacle."

He had proceeded about an English mile on his way when, suddenly lifting his eyes, he descried in the distance the figure of an aged man, who appeared to be going the same road as himself. He hastened his steps, and soon overtook the veteran, whom he now recognised as one of his fellow citizens, a certain Gustav Meyer, and known to be one of the greatest gossips in the neighbourhood.

"Good-day, Gustav," said Göbel, with forced good humour. "Where are you off to on those venerable pins of yours?"

"Ach! lieber, freund Göbel!" exclaimed the loquacious old man; "how are you? I have not seen you for an age. You have grown proud since you have been in the burgomaster's service, and forget that it was I who got you the situation, for you never come to see me now, though we used to be such cronies, you know. But you young folks never think it worth while to give us old fogies a call to see how we are. Why, I might be dead and buried for all you would know about it, and even if you did hear of it, I suppose it would be all the same to you, eh?"

"Well, well, 'ingratitude is the reward of the world,' as the proverb says, and we old fogies with one foot in the grave and the other about to follow must make up our minds to be put on the shelf. We all have our turn; I have had mine, you are having yours, but old age comes at last, and then there is an end of us all, even to the best of us. Even I have been young, friend Göbel. Ha! ha! You'd hardly think so to look at me now with these silvery locks and tottering limbs. I say you'd hardly think so now, would you, eh? Now, how many years should you think I could count, friend Göbel, tell me?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," said Göbel, impatiently.

"I am hard upon ninety years old, and all tell me that I carry my years well. I may say I haven't had a day's illness in all my life. I have nearly all my teeth yet, and——"

"I have no doubt all you say is very true, my friend," interrupted Göbel; "but you have hardly answered my question satisfactorily yet. I asked you where you

were going?"

"Friend Göbel," said the old man, "now I'll just tell you what I propose doing this morning, just by way of stretching my old limbs, seeing that I have not had a walk for an age. It does old folks good to go out for a stroll every now and then in the country. Too much staying at home over the fire isn't good, even for the likes of me."

"Well, well," broke in Göbel, beginning to lose all patience. "I asked you where you were going."

"Did you? Ah yes, I had nearly forgot. We old folks are apt to lose our memories at times, you know, my friend, so you young folks ought to have compassion on us, and recollect that we were once like you, and that you will one day become like us, therefore——"

"This is insufferable," burst out Göbel, whose forbearance was quite at an end. "I ask you a plain question, and I expect a plain answer. I repeat the question—Where are you going?"

"Hoity, toity! friend Göbel," cried the old man, in great surprise. "What! so impatient with your old friend Gustav! Don't you remember how often I have taken you upon my knee and danced you? We used to be great friends then. Don't you recollect? But I suppose you have forgotten all that now, eh?—since you have become a man. Let me see, how long ago must that be? Full thirty years ago, if it's a day, I'll warrant."

"Will you, or will you not, give me a plain answer to a plain question. Tell me where you are going?" cried Göbel, now quite furious, and shaking the old man violently by both shoulders.

"Softly, softly! friend Göbel," cried the veteran, much alarmed. "Save my life. Prithee, save my life, and I will tell you where I am going, if you will have patience."

"Well, tell me at once, and let us have no more chattering," said Göbel, leaving go his hold.

"Well, in the first place, then," began old Gustav, recovering himself—"in the first place——but stay, upon second thoughts, I'll just leave you to guess where I am going. Now, where do you think?"

"Dotard, have a care!" cried Göbel, threateningly, "and trifle with me no longer. Tell me where you are going, or——"

"Well, well, friend Göbel, I'll tell you; don't be afraid, don't let two such old friends as we are quarrel for a trifle—I'll tell you where I am going, although I must say that I think you seem to take an uncommon interest in the doings of an old man like me, who, though he be an old friend——"

"Take care now!"

"Well, well, my friend, wait one moment; I'll tell you. I told you before that I would tell you, and I will be as good as my word, if you will have one moment's patience—for patience, friend Göbel, patience, I say, is a virtue that we ought all to cultivate, and which we all of us more or less are sadly wanting in. But to proceed; though, after all, my friend, what hurry can you possibly have to learn so simple a fact? It appears to me that the world has grown wondrously impatient since my time; that is, if everybody is like you, but as I said before ——"

"Tell me! tell me!" screamed Göbel, seizing his venerable friend a second time by the shoulders.

"Well, then, my friend," said Gustav, drawing out his words at a most provoking length, "if I *must* tell you, and you are quite sure that you have sufficient patience to listen to me, learn that I am going to pay a visit at the house of the Scharfrichter, to have a quiet little gossip. You know I am fond of a nice little gossip. Well, I am just going to have a little chat with that poor young man Leo Wenzel. What do you think? He doesn't know yet that his father is the real murderer, for he lives so far off and no one ever goes near the house to tell him the news, and he is still under the delusion that his father has been murdered and that the assassin has not yet been caught. Poor young man, I shall have to break the news very gently to him, for he will feel it deeply. He must know the truth sooner or later, so I have taken upon myself to be the first to communicate the unwelcome news.

"According to the law he will be obliged to take the life of his own father. It will be a dreadful blow to him, poor boy, and I am sure I don't know how he will be induced to act executioner in the present instance. I know not if the law in this case will make an exception and choose someone else in his place; it will be very hard upon him if the law really should insist on being carried out to the very letter. Let us hope that mercy will be shown to the son, but in any case it is a

very dreadful affair, so I thought I would just go to comfort him a little, to see how he takes the matter, and give him courage, in case——"

"I thought as much!" muttered Göbel to himself; then aloud to his friend, "So that is where you are going is it? Ah, then I will save you the trouble. Being a matter of no importance, you need not be in a hurry. Listen to me; my master has lost certain valuables, and has given orders for the gates of the town to be closed until he has discovered the thief, and has strictly commanded me to arrest any person I might find leaving the town, until his valuables shall have been recovered. I should be sorry to suspect you, but as the law respects the person of no man, it is my painful duty to take you back to the town. Let us have no more cackling or resistance, but come at once."

"But, my dear friend Göbel!" pleaded the veteran, "you surely can't suspect—you will not for one moment imagine—nay, if you have any doubt of my honesty search me. I can assure it will be useless, I am innocent."

"If you are innocent, you will be proved so in due time, meanwhile I have orders——"

"But, friend Göbel, I assure you again and again upon my oath that I have taken nothing. There—look—search me all over, if you will, and let me go in peace. Is not my character enough? Am I not well known in ——dorf? Have I ever been known to touch my neighbour's goods? Pray satisfy yourself that I have taken nothing, and let me go. Why trouble yourself to bring back a man to the town to be searched whom you know to be innocent. Besides, it will upset my plan. I wouldn't miss my little gossip with young Leo for all the world just at this moment. Just consider, my friend——"

"Cease your cackling and come along with me!" shouted Göbel, seizing him by the collar and dragging him forcibly back towards the town.

"But—but——" stammered the astonished and terrified old man.

"But me no buts, but do my bidding instantly, Sir Driveller, or it will be the worse for you."

So saying, he dragged his old friend home again at a hurried pace, regardless of his tottering limbs and of his prayers and entreaties.

It was just mid day, and the sun shone hot, when Göbel returned to the township, perspiring at every pore, and deposited his charge, more dead than alive, within

the walls of —dorf. He then retraced his steps under the broiling sun, cursing and swearing as he went at his plan having been so nearly frustrated by the cackling gossip of an old dotard.

"*Potz—Himmel, Donnerwetter, Schock, Schwerer, Noth, noch mal!*" he muttered to himself. "A pretty obstacle in my path! *Tausend Teufel!* I had a mind to dash his brains out on the spot, the old idiot, for his drivelling."

With these and such like elaborately strung together oaths the servant of the burgomaster beguiled the time, until at length he arrived at the door of the Scharfrichter's house, where he discovered young Leo at work in his garden. The young executioner looked up at the sound of stranger footsteps, and though he would rather the visitor had been anyone else than his rival, yet upon the whole he was not displeased to see a human face after so long. His manner even warmed towards his visitor when he saw him advance with a smile on his face and an extended hand.

"Leo," began Heinrich Göbel with feigned friendship, "we have long been enemies, but everything has an end. I have now come to offer you my hand in friendship, for henceforth we are no longer rivals, but friends. Lieschen, think of her no more. Her father positively refuses to give her to either of us, so she has at length plighted her troth to another man."

"What! Lieschen? Impossible!" cried Leo, mopping his forehead.

"Ay, my friend, it is too true; nay, pray calm yourself. I, too, loved her as you did, but since the matter has turned out thus, I have made up my mind to console myself by paying my addresses to another as soon as possible."

"You never *could* have loved her as I loved her," gasped out Leo, as he staggered for support against the garden wall.

"Well, well, my friend, I knew you would feel the blow, but calm yourself and dismiss these gloomy thoughts. I have better news than that in store for you."

"What care I for news now that *she* has deserted me?" groaned Leo distractedly.

"Come, come now, let me comfort you a little," said Göbel. "What do you think? *The murderer of your father has been discovered!*"

"What do I hear? Caught? Safe?"

"Ay, the murder has been proved, and the murderer condemned to die by the sword. The execution has been fixed for the day after to-morrow. It will take place at daybreak as usual, and you will have the satisfaction of taking vengeance on your father's murderer with your own hands. You will wield your father's sword for the first time in your life before an admiring crowd. Think of that."

"Vengeance at last!" cried the young headsman, with flushed face and distorted features. "Vengeance at last! Thank God! thank God!"

"Bravo, old friend!" cried Göbel, slapping his heartily detested rival on the shoulder in the friendliest manner possible. "I knew you would take heart at this piece of news. Come, let us sit down together and console ourselves."

Leo, then entering the house, took from a cupboard a large bottle of schnaps and two glasses. The two companions, seating themselves, began to drink deeply and to chat incessantly, the subject of the discourse being the particulars of the murder according to the version of Göbel. We need hardly say that the whole was a fabrication of Heinrich's own brain. At length the servant of the burgomaster rose to take his departure, and having enjoined his rival to be of good cheer, bent his steps again towards the township, chuckling by the way at his own devices. Arrived at the gates of the town, he showed his pass, and was permitted to enter without let or hindrance. Hurrying through the streets until he reached the burgomaster's house, he presented himself before that worthy, whom he found seated at a table before a plate of sausage, and in the act of draining to the dregs an enormous tankard of beer.

"Well, what news?" asked his master.

"Oh! the very best; he took the bait greedily. It was quite a pleasure to see how he enjoyed the news. No one had been before me, so I had him all to myself. The matter will now go off as smoothly as could be desired; but, by the saints! I had a narrow escape of failure."

"Indeed! How was that?"

"When I was nearly half way to the Scharfrichter's house, who should I see just ahead of me but that cursed old gossip, Gustav Meyer. I stopped him and asked him where he was going. *Potztausend!* what a chatterbox! I thought I should not get an answer out of him before nightfall, and when I did, where do you think he was going? Why, straight to the house of the Henker to have a quiet chat with

young Leo upon the subject of the murder, and reveal to him all that I had taken such pains to keep secret. He seemed delighted at the idea of being the first to deliver the news."

The burgomaster laughed heartily.

"Well, what did you do?" said he, at length.

"What did I do! I told him his presence was particularly wanted at the township, and seizing him by the collar, dragged him all the way back again, regardless of his cackling. I informed him that you had lost some valuables, and had given me orders to arrest anyone leaving the town on suspicion. He was indignant at the charge. Protested, declared his innocence, and spoke of the high character he had always borne in the town, etc., etc. He seemed in despair at being deprived of his little gossip with the Henker's son, and begged and entreated me to let him have it out quietly; but, deaf to all his chattering, I dragged him home again in spite of himself, and lodged him safely within the gates of the town. *Donner und Blitzen!* but it was enough to raise the bile of a saint to listen to the wanderings of that antique driveller, to say nothing of having one's plan so nearly frustrated; by such a worm as that too!"

Here and again the burgomaster burst into a loud laugh, in which Göbel, in spite of himself, joined.

"Ah," said he, at length recovering himself, "there is one thing yet to be done. I must go to the jailor of the prison with private orders from you to prevent the prisoner having an interview with his son, should he ask for one. This accomplished, there will be no more difficulty."

"Ah, yes," said the burgomaster, "it would be as well. But what an interest you seem to take in this case, Heinrich! One would imagine that you had a private grudge against the prisoner."

"I like to see things well done," was the reply, and the servant shortly after left the presence of his master.

A great sensation was caused in ———dorf when it was given out that the execution had been hurried on a week, and much speculation arose as to what could have been the burgomaster's motive. Half the town already knew by the tongue of old Gustav of his having been arrested by the servant of the burgomaster on suspicion of having robbed his master of certain valuables just at

the very time when he (Gustav) was contemplating the pleasure he would have in being the first to communicate the melancholy tidings of the murder to the young headsman. They therefore concluded that Leo must still be in ignorance of the real state of the case. The other half of ——dorf, however, never gave a thought as to whether he knew it or not; enough for them that someone was going to be beheaded and that they should have a spectacle to vary the monotony of their humdrum lives.

At length the fatal day arrived. The gates of the town were thrown open (for the servant of the burgomaster gave out that the thief had been discovered and the valuables regained), and now all ——dorf was in an uproar, while crowds of peasants from all the surrounding villages flocked to witness the bloody spectacle.

The scaffold, or the mound of earth which was to serve as such, had been erected half way between the township and the house of the executioner, and was already surrounded by a file of soldiers, around which thronged the mob so closely that they were every now and then repulsed by the military. From the sea of human heads that inundated the place of execution resounded a hum of voices, in which salutations, sallies, bad language, coarse jokes, and coarser laughter, together with murmurs and imprecations, and an occasional scream from the women when the crowd pressed too closely, were confusedly mingled, and resembled at a little distance the bleating of an immense flock of sheep. Classes of all sorts were jostled together, from the lowest grade of handwerksbursch to the university student. There were pretty peasant girls in their holiday costumes, and sturdy peasants from all parts of the country. There were Jew hawkers, sharpers, pickpockets, ruffianly bullies, cripples, and mendicants. There were mothers with young children in their arms, which latter contributed their feeble cries to the general buzz.

All had turned out to feast their eyes upon the death of a fellow mortal. Nor was this an ordinary execution like that described in an earlier part of this story. No; this was an exceptional case—something out of the common way, a sublimer spectacle.

In this case the condemned was no obscure handwerksbursch, of whose career the multitude knew nothing, and cared as little about. The criminal was no less a man than Franz Wenzel, the far-famed Scharfrichter, who had amputated the heads of "poor sinners" for the last thirty or forty years, and was now doomed to lose his own.

The interest in the case was considerably heightened when it was known that the veteran executioner was to be operated upon by the hands of his own son. Then the facts of the murder were so strange, so unnatural. Fancy the cunning of that hardened old sinner, the ex-headsman, who, according to his own confession, made in prison the day before the execution, had waylaid, robbed, and murdered the innocent Count of Waffenburg, a scion of one of the most wealthy and respected noble families for miles round, disguised as a Capuchin friar, and in order to conceal the identity of the murdered man, had dismembered the head of the corpse, which he had endeavoured to hide for ever from the eye of man by throwing it into the trunk of a hollow chestnut tree. Then having stripped the corpse of its clothes, and afterwards having stripped himself of his outer garments, he dressed up the corpse of his victim in his own well known crimson-coloured doublet and hose, thereby conveying the idea to the public mind that the corpse found was his own, after which, returning to his house close by, having again donned the friar's habit, he deposited the sword usually set apart for the beheading of criminals, and in this case used for amputating the head of the murdered count, and wiping it well, he lighted a fire on his hearth where he burned one by one the habiliments of his victim. He then left his house a second time, still disguised as a friar and laden with his ill-gotten treasure, passed once more the scene of the murder and wandered all night in the direction of ——. How strange the evidence, too, that convicted him, the theft of the bottle of hair dye, the remarkable patch on his amice. Every particular of the murder had an indescribable interest in the minds of the populace of —dorf and its surrounding villages. No wonder the adjacent townships vomited forth their scum of the curious, idle, and depraved! This was a sight not to be missed on any account, and would furnish them with gossip for the next six months at least. At length, when the long streaky rose-tipped clouds announced the approach of the fatal hour, the crowd burst out simultaneously into a cry of "He comes! he comes! the Henker comes!"

The crowd made room for a young man in a cart, who, having thrown the reins on the horse's neck, passed through the file of soldiers and mounted the hillock of earth, armed with the two-handed weapon that he was about to use for the first time in his life.

"Look!" said one of the crowd; "it is young Leo, after all. I thought they had found a substitute."

"What a hard-hearted young ruffian to consent to take the life of his father with his own hands!" said another.

"And he doesn't seem to feel it a bit," said a third; "why, he is actually smiling."

"Some folks say that he does not know who it is that he is going to behead," said a fourth.

"Not know that the criminal is his father?" exclaimed the former speaker. "Nonsense, I don't believe it."

The young headsman was attired in a buff leather jerkin slashed with red and hose of a dark green. He appeared about two-and-twenty, and was as yet beardless. He was considerably taller than his father, but his frame, though powerfully built, was devoid of that excessive and almost preternatural muscular development that characterised that of the old executioner. His hair was of a reddish brown, his complexion florid, his eyes light blue, and his features, though somewhat coarse, had something in them not altogether disagreeable. He leaned firmly on his sword and gazed around calmly on the crowd, when suddenly the human sea became violently agitated and began to groan and hiss in its fury.

The cause of this tumult became speedily known. It was the arrival of the "poor sinner," who was drawn in a cart between two priests and habited according to the custom of the condemned on such occasions. Loud hooting and execrations burst forth on all sides from the crowd as it made way for the condemned cart.

"But that is not Franz Wenzel," said one to his neighbour. "The old Henker had red hair; this man's hair is black."

"Fool, don't you know how that is?" said his neighbour. "Haven't you heard yet how he dyed his hair black in order not to be recognised?"

"No, did he though?" said the former. "But look! why is his head tied up so with two handkerchiefs? I can't see anything of his face."

"H'm, I don't know; some innovation I suppose. The handkerchief always used to be tied on when on the scaffold in my time," answered his friend. The criminal had now alighted from the cart, and, followed by the two priests, ascended the place of execution, where he took his seat on the chair placed for him. The assistant executioner, whose face was most successfully disguised with a black mask, pushed his way through the crowd and mounted the platform.

"Who is *he*?" was a question asked by everyone of everybody; "and why is he masked while Leo, who bears the sword, is unmasked?"

"Who knows? Perhaps he is the new headsman that they all talked about, and young Leo will not really behead his own father; but we shall see."

The crowd had grown more curious than ever. Every one stood on the tip-toe of expectation with his eyes and mouth wide open. An intense silence reigned around, during which the man in the mask bound the criminal firmly to his seat with a strong cord, then seizing the handkerchief that was tied round the head of the condemned, he gave the signal for the blow. The two priests who had hitherto been whispering consolation in the ear of the criminal now retreated a few paces to the rear, while young Leo advanced, flushed and triumphant, his whole countenance distorted with an expression of malice and revenge. Before brandishing his sword to give the final blow he lowered his head close to the ear of the victim and hissed out in accents sufficiently audible to be overheard by that part of the crowd that had assembled nearest to the scaffold: "Wretch! thine hour has come at last. Learn now the vengeance of a wronged son. Thou shalt see if I am the son of my father or no, and whether it is for nothing that I have been bred a Scharfrichter. Prepare now, for thou art soon to learn how I have profited by my lessons—whether I am an apt pupil. My sword is sharpened well on purpose for thee, and when thou feelest the cold steel close to thy neck, then, then, to h——l with thee, and bear throughout eternity the curses of a ruined son!"

During this speech of the young headsman the criminal was observed to tremble convulsively, as if struggling to speak, but the assistant executioner grasped the handkerchief still tighter round his head and repeated the signals impatiently.

"Did you hear?" said one of the foremost in the crowd. "Did you hear how he cursed his father? He actually reproached him in his last moments for having brought him up a Scharfrichter! Oh! the unfeeling young villain! What a heart he must have."

"Ah! neighbour," answered another, "these executioners are not like other mortals; they do not know what it is to feel. They are brought up to kill their fellow creatures as butchers are to kill cattle, and they think nothing of it. Bless you, there is nothing these men would not do for money."

"'Tis strange, too," said another close by. "I always thought young Leo loved his father. I never thought so bad of him as to think that he would curse him in his dying moments, wretch though he may have been."

"Take my word for it, neighbour," said a sturdy inhabitant of ——dorf, "that

young Leo does not know yet that it is his father."

At this moment everyone suddenly broke short his discourse, and the crowd again was silent for a moment. The two-handed weapon was raised high in the air, glittered for a moment in the rays of the rising sun, then descended with the rapidity of lightning, while the head of the murderer having slipped out of the handkerchief with the force of the blow, fell with a crash on the platform.

A loud cheer is raised by the crowd, and young Leo having thrown away his sword and pushed aside the assistant executioner, has seized the head of the criminal and torn off the bandage from his eyes. He holds it high in the air by its purple locks and gloats with fiendish satisfaction on its writhing features. The muscles of the face are fearfully convulsed, as if the spirit had not as yet quite departed, but still lingered about the corpse, being loth to leave its tenement. The eyes roll hideously and appear to gaze reproachfully upon the face of the young executioner. Suddenly a change comes over the features of the young man. His countenance, the moment before so flushed with triumph and revenge, now assumes a ghastly pallor; a cold sweat breaks out on his forehead, his matted locks stand on end. His eyes start from his head, his jaw drops low. Then, with a preternatural shriek, he drops the head, which rolls down the hillock of earth among the crowd, staggers and falls heavily upon the platform, gasping out "*Oh, Gott! mein Vater!*"

No words can describe the sensation created among the crowd at this horrible scene. Questions and explanations ensued, and a rush was made towards the scaffold. Assistance was at length procured, and the son of the late executioner was lifted from the ground and driven toward his own house in the cart that he had set out in that morning to execute his fearful mission. A doctor was sent for, who declared that he was in an apoplectic fit. In time, however, he recovered, and the doctor left someone with him to attend to him and keep him quiet. Nevertheless, when he came to reflect upon what had happened that morning, in spite of all restraint, he rushed wildly into the chamber where his poor paralytic mother lay on her death-bed, and losing all caution and reflection in his emotion, he related in a wild and excited manner the dreadful events of the day. The result may be anticipated. The poor woman, long given up by the doctors, sank under the startling news, and expired almost instantaneously.

Young Leo, who, with the exception of his drunkenness had really nothing very bad in him, now gave way to the most excessive grief, for he loved his mother tenderly. He felt himself now guilty of the murder of both his parents, and refused all consolation. What had he now to live for, thought he. His father he had murdered with his own hands and sent with curses to the tomb; his mother, so dear to him he had hurried to the grave through his insane want of self-restraint. His lady-love, false (as he thought), for secretly they had plighted their troth together. What was life to him now but a burden? He loathed it. These gloomy thoughts clouded his mind with a profound melancholy, a deep incurable despair. On the following morning Leo Wenzel, the young executioner, fell upon his own sword, yet moist with the blood of his father, by him so unconsciously shed on the day before.

With the death of Leo Wenzel the family became extinct, and the profession of the Scharfrichter went begging. But who was the assistant executioner? Nobody could find out. He had disappeared as mysteriously as he had made his appearance. Some said it was one, and some another, while the most settled belief was that it could be none other than the arch-fiend himself who had come to carry off the Henker's soul. In the confusion that followed the swoon of young Leo he had vanished, and no one had seen whither. No human being could have passed through a crowd without being seen by someone, therefore it must have been the arch-enemy of mankind. Thus reasoned the people of ——dorf.

And Lieschen, what became of her? Poor girl! the news of her lover's suicide, for she had truly loved the youthful headsman, had completely overwhelmed her. She fell into a decline and outlived her lover but one year.

The servant of the burgomaster was mistaken in believing that after Leo's death the course would be now clear for him. His heartless scheme had come to light (for it was difficult to keep anything long a secret in ——dorf), and he found the door of Lieschen's house closed upon him for ever.

He soon knew himself hated by all the town, and tradition goes on to relate that some years afterwards, when he was in the service of another master, his employer having missed certain articles of plate and called in the police to search his coffers, they found not only the missing articles, but also a black mask and a suit of sad coloured clothes, recognised as having been worn by the assistant on the day of Wenzel's execution.

Finding his reputation lost in ——dorf, he deemed it advisable to retire to

another village, where he afterwards married. The last we hear of him is that he ultimately accepted the office of Scharfrichter, and took up his abode in the house of Franz Wenzel, where he reared up a long line of executioners, which was only broken many years later by the profession of the Henker ceasing to be obligatory.

But what of our two friends Fritz and Ludwig? We had nigh forgotten them. That they were both of them present at the execution is undoubted from certain passages in their correspondence after my ancestor had left Germany for ever. The day after Wenzel's execution was the last time they met on earth. They each of them passed the remainder of their days in their own respective countries though they corresponded frequently. The most recently dated letter from Ludwig Engstein bears with it the news of his marriage, and in a postscript he mentions having been just informed that since the execution of Franz Wenzel the tricks of the Poltergeist had ceased for ever.

Murmurs of applause were upon every lip as our artist finished his narrative, when Mr. Oldstone, rising, thus addressed the club. "Gentlemen; I think you will all agree with me that my friend Mr. McGuilp has fully earned his sitting from the fair Helen?"

"Yes, yes," cried several voices; "he has paid us beforehand. Let him have his rights."

At this moment the door opened ajar and the head of Dame Hearty appeared at the aperture to inform the club that her daughter was now at their disposal.

"Let her be brought in!" shouted a chorus of voices. "It is but fair that we should have one more look at Helen before Mr. McGuilp walks off with her."

Helen then appeared in the doorway and was greeted enthusiastically by the whole club, in the midst of which the painter, after looking at his watch and ascertaining that it was yet early enough for a good sitting, left the room and made for his studio, where, having set his palette, he was joined shortly afterwards by his fair model. Having arranged his colours and placed his canvas on the easel, he sat contemplating the portrait he had commenced so recently. Alas! how flat and insipid his poor work looked after having gazed on the bright original! It was but the first painting, it is true, and we know that nothing really good can be done at once; but, then, what drawing he found to correct now that

he looked at his work with a fresh eye! The awfulness of the difficulties in art now rose up in his mind to appal him, and he uttered a sigh.

"Can all the glazing and scumbling in the world," muttered he to himself, "ever advance this portrait one step towards the divine original?"

Thus musing, the painter seized the canvas in both hands and breathed over its surface. Immediately afterwards, mixing up some colour sparingly, he scumbled over the entire surface of the portrait. Helen, whose eye dwelt upon the artist's every movement, whether from curiosity, or from some mysterious sympathy she felt for the young painter, demanded of him why he breathed on the face of her picture.

"To breathe into it the breath of life, Helen," replied McGuilp, smilingly.

Helen opened her large blue eyes with an expression of half wonderment, half doubt, not knowing whether the painter spoke in jest, or whether an artist really had some occult power in his very breath that could vivify the canvas. How was she to know, poor innocent child! Village bred and born in an age, as our readers will recollect, before photography had rendered too familiar the representation of the human face even for the veriest peasant any longer to wonder at the art by which it is produced?

In the days we speak of the painter's art was the only mode of transfixing the lineaments of a dear friend or parent and rendering them immortal. Painters, too, were much less common then than now-a-days, for art was still in its infancy in plain matter-of-fact old England. The painter, or limner as he was then called, was a being of far greater interest than at the present day. He was patronised by royalty and nobility, and though the prices that he received for his works were considerably less than in our times, and he was nearly always a poor and needy individual, yet he met with a certain amount of respect from his patrons, as they knew that by his hand alone could they hope to become immortal. Everyone liked to see his own features represented upon canvas, or those of his wife and family. Oft times his favourite horse or dog. In order to secure the services of the limner therefore, it was necessary to court him, nor was this respect or appearance of such ever denied him, save perhaps by the pampered menial of some nobleman or wealthy squire, who looked superciliously down upon the itinerant painter as a being far inferior to himself. We will hope, however, for the honour of humanity that the number was comparatively small that measured the painter's respectability by the length of his purse.

Indeed, the titled and the wealthy seem to have prided themselves in doing everything in their power to set the example of respect towards a disciple of the fine arts. Among this class the painter had seldom anything to complain of; in fact, provided he were affable in manner, decent in appearance, could paint the ladies' hands and ears small enough to please them, their eyes sufficiently large and languishing, and, lastly—but which was of no small importance—could represent faithfully the texture of their silks and satins, their lace, velvet, fur, or swansdown, oh, then he was caressed, petted, and acknowledged by all as a most agreeable member of society and sure of making his fortune. But woe to him if he were above his business and attempted high art—we mean subject pictures that were not portraits. However much he might be gifted in that line, his friends would instantly desert him, and he might starve in a garret. His patrons knew nothing of high art and cared as little. All they wanted was to see their own effigies adorning the walls of their mansions, and as long as the limner was content to be of service to them they were willing to support him, but no longer. It was set down as an axiom that the human *face* divine—by which they meant their own faces—was the highest aim that a painter could aspire to. This was the sort of high art they wanted, and no other.

A painter must be content with the work his patrons set him to do and not indulge his own caprices. Well, well, admitting the range of the painter's art to have been cramped and limited, has any age or country the power to cramp the genius of an artist? Is high art only to be found in imaginative pictures? Does not a portrait become high art under a master hand? Can that be called a mechanical art that gives intellect or sentiment to the eye, firmness or softness to the lip, the natural bloom to the cheek, truth and beauty to the whole? Few, let us hope, even in this matter of fact age, but would rank the real artist before the photographic artisan who usurps his name. If, in the present age, now that we are accustomed to a much more rapid process of reproducing the human face, there are to be found those who honour the true artist, imagine how his art must have been held in honour when it was the only way of immortalising men! It need not be wondered at that among those classes where the appearance of a painter was less common, that the respect he inspired almost amounted to awe in certain instances. This was the case with our Helen, who never having set eyes before on a real artist, looked with awe and wonder on our painter as a species of magician who possessed an art not merely unknown in her humble sphere, but which she was sure that the worthy members of the club were alike ignorant of, however learned they might be in other respects. The painter's youth and good looks, together with his possessing this mysterious art at such an early age,

elevated him at once into a hero in her eyes. Then there was the strange fact of his having seen and spoken to a ghost in the same house where she herself had been born and bred, the very ghost she had been frightened so often with in her childhood, but which was, nevertheless, so chary of its appearance that it had found no one for upwards of half a century worthy of revealing itself to until now, and had chosen for that purpose the young artist before her, and that, too, the very first night that he arrived at the Inn. What was there peculiar in the organisation of our painter, that he should have been selected before all others to gaze on the august presence of one risen from the dead? The haunted chamber had been repeatedly slept in by all the members of the club in turn, and by many strangers beside, for years back, and yet never before within the experience of our host had the headless lady vouchsafed a parley with any one of them. The preference, therefore, shewn towards our friend McGuilp by the tenant of the haunted chamber had raised him at once in the esteem of the whole club, and the marked respect with which he was treated by the other guests, all of them older men than himself, did not fail to escape the quick eye of Helen, who felt inwardly flattered that the man for whom she had conceived so warm a sympathy, should be so honoured among his better fellows.

Our artist and his model had been left together for upwards of three-quarters of an hour, during which time McGuilp had not opened his mouth to exchange a single word with his sitter, a habit of his when unusually engrossed in his work. He had glazed and scumbled, chopped and changed about his drawing, laid on impasto, worked upon the background, and so absorbed was he with his picture, the time had passed as if it had been five minutes. A considerable change, however, had taken place in the portrait. There was more life and vigour, the tints were more natural and the head now stood more out in relief. Helen never once attempted to break the silence, but remained modest and immovable in her position as a statue. Had she been a vain and foolish girl or a coquette, she might have been irritated by the painter's silence, misconstruing it into a sign of insensibility to her charms, but no such thought for a moment entered the head of our Helen. On the contrary, she looked with the deepest awe and reverence on the painter whose art required so much silence and concentration, and instead of calling away his attention from his work by some frivolous remark, she mentally resolved to aid him to the utmost by posing as patiently as it lay in her power.

Nevertheless, after a long sitting, a change is apt to come over the face of the sitter. The muscles become flaccid, the colour vanishes, the eye grows vacant, and an expression of languor and weariness takes the place of the bright healthy

look that the sitter bore at the commencement. This is especially the case with young people, and so it was with Helen, who, spite of her laudable endeavours to do justice to her portrait painter, had unconsciously grown several shades paler, and had so altered in expression that our artist, finding it impossible to continue his work, deemed it advisable to give his model a little repose.

"That will do, Helen, for the present," said he; "take a little rest, until you can call back the roses to your cheek and the life to your eye. There, then, you may look if you like, but there is much to be done yet, I can tell you."

"Oh, I think you have done wonders this sitting," said Helen, as she stood contemplating her own portrait from behind the artist's chair, with her head resting on her hand.

"It appears to me as like as it can possibly be already. I do not see what more there is to do to it."

"Do you not, Helen?" said McGuilp. "Then you are very easily satisfied, but it is not so with us. We artists are the most discontented people under the sun. We know that however well a portrait may be painted, it can never come up to the original, and yet we are never contented, even with our utmost endeavours to approach it."

"Then, we who know nothing about your art are happier in our ignorance than the artists themselves who have studied art all their lives," remarked Helen.

"Very often," replied McGuilp with a sigh; "nevertheless, there is a pleasure in the mere pursuit of art, however far removed the work of the artist may be from his ideal, that he would not exchange for the calm satisfaction of the uninitiated who perceive no fault."

At this moment a sound of cheering and clapping of hands proceeding from the club-room interrupted the dialogue between the painter and his model.

"What can all that noise mean?" ejaculated Helen. "Ah, I can guess. Mother has just finished telling her story to the gentlemen of the club, and they are applauding her."

"Is it so, Helen?" said McGuilp.

"Well, as they have been enjoying a story from which we have been excluded, I see no reason why we should not have a story all to ourselves. What do you

say?"

"Oh, by all means," said Helen; "but I am a poor storyteller. Pray do not ask *me* for one, but if you know of a story, why of course I am all attention."

"Let me see, then," said McGilp. "What sort of story would you like to hear?"

"Oh, tell me something about Italy. *I should* like to hear so," answered Helen.

"Would you? Then I think I can remember a little circumstance that occurred in Italy within my experience, which I will relate to you if you will resume your seat, for I have but little time to lose. We can work and talk at the same time. Your colour has now returned, and my story may possibly help to preserve it until the end of the sitting."

Helen then resumed her seat, and McGilp having seized once more his palette and brushes and placed himself in front of his easel, continued his portrait whilst he related the following story.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Scharfrichter or executioner; literally, "the sharp judge."

[2] The reader is begged to excuse the anachronism. Byron did not write these lines until several years later.

[3] Another name for headsman or hangman.

[4] Philister or Philistine.

[5] The moss. Slang word among German students for money.

[6] Löwen—also money.

CHAPTER III.

THE THREE PAULS.^[7]—THE ARTIST'S THIRD STORY.

During my travels in Italy I happened once to be sojourning for some time in an obscure and sequestered Italian village high up in the Apennines, that chain of mountains which runs through the entire peninsular like the backbone of some antediluvian monster.

They are curious places, those Italian villages, with their tall, narrow houses and small windows, built up the slant of a mountain like steps of stairs. Their quaint roofs, balconies, arches, and buttresses, with at every step some rustic shrine containing a rude painting or representation of the Virgin Mary (the Madonna as they call her) or other saint. The narrow, dirty, ill-paved streets, the tumbling-down houses, from the windows of which the picturesque but dirty inhabitants may almost shake hands with one another across the road.

Then the odd nooks and angles in the by-streets that meet the stranger's eye on either hand as he ascends the uneven and slippery path-way leading to the highest point of view, which is generally crowned by some ruined feudal castle or fort built upon a rock and overgrown with ivy. They have a distinct character of their own, these mountain villages, and are as unlike as possible to anything seen in England. A mere verbal description is inadequate to give the faintest idea of their extreme picturesqueness. They require to be seen, and when this is impossible, a picture or sketch must give the next best idea of them to the mind of the stranger. I have several studies in oil-colour of these places within my portfolio, which you may look at for a moment if you like.

There, you see that it is quite unlike anything you ever saw before. Look at those figures in the foreground, how picturesque and yet how simple their costume is! Well, but to proceed: the village where I was staying, when the fact that I am about to relate occurred, was one of the sort you see here. Ah! here is a sketch of the very place, and there is the name of it written underneath. I remember that it had a certain celebrity in the country round about it, as the cathedral (!) in the chief piazza or square boasted of a miraculous picture of the Madonna, that had the reputation of turning up its eyes, and in this manner contrived to heal great

numbers among the faithful who were blind, deaf and dumb, maimed, halt, or lame.

I cannot say that I ever witnessed one of these miracles, but that may have been from my want of faith; yet the tales that I heard of miraculous cures from persons of some repute, the arch-priest of the parish amongst the number, were most startling.

I had taken up my quarters in a comfortable rustic inn, not in the town itself, but on a separate hill in an isolated spot, being built in its own grounds, fertile with olive trees, which grew up the sides of the hill nearly to the door of the house.

The inn was frequented almost entirely by artists. Sometimes we were a large company, composed of all nations, when we would dine together "al fresco" under the shade of the vine which formed a verandah on one side of the house. At other times I would be left alone in the inn. The hill on which I lived commanded an extensive view of the surrounding mountains, including the township with its old ivy-grown tower overlooking all, and which appeared as if it were sliding down the mountain side.

I experienced an indescribable feeling of delight in rambling alone through this romantic scenery on a hot summer's day, beneath a perfectly cloudless sky, without a breath of wind to rustle the leaves of the shady trees, amidst a solitude like that of the desert, and a silence unbroken save by the chirping of the birds and the chattering of the cicada, or at intervals, perchance, the distant shepherd's pipe, or the wild barbaric chant of the mountaineer. With what rapture, I remember, would I step from crag to crag, trampling the bush and bramble under my feet, and startling away the green lizards in my path! Quaffing the beauties of nature at every step, the dreamy influence of the balmy atmosphere intensifying my feelings for the beautiful to an abnormal degree.

It was on one of these sultry days during my rambles that I was taking shelter from the burning sun under the shade of a wide-spreading oak, reclining lazily on the soft moss, and listening to the chirping of the grass-hoppers, when my ear was attracted by the sound of the bleating of goats, and shortly afterwards I heard the voices of two peasants which seemed familiar to me. They were discoursing together in the dialect of their own village, a very different lingo from the pure Tuscan, and perfectly unintelligible to one lately coming from Rome, yet a prolonged stay in these parts rendered it familiar to me. I recognised the voices as belonging, one of them to a goatherd who supplied me with milk in

the morning, the other to a peasant who possessed a vineyard, a small barrel of whose wine I had bought the day before.

"Ohè! Antonio," cried Guiseppe, the goatherd, to his friend, "so I hear you have sold a *quarteruolo* of wine to the Signor Inglese (the English gentleman) who lives on the hill."

"Well, Compar,"^[8] said his friend, "and what of that?"

"I suppose you made him pay well for it, eh?" demanded the goatherd.

"Well," answered Antonio, "I make my friends pay sixteen pauls the *quarteruolo*, but he, being an Englishman, I charged double."

"What!" exclaimed the goatherd, "thirty-two pauls for a *quarteruolo*!"

"Ay, and he paid me money down without haggling about the price, like one of our '*paini*.'^[9] These Englishmen are real gentlemen—they let themselves be cheated without wincing. Those are the sort of men I like to deal with. I was quite angry with myself afterwards at not having asked four times the sum; he would be sure to have paid me."

"*Accidente!* what a swindler!" exclaimed Guiseppe. "Well, they tell me these English roll in wealth; that gold is as common in their country as beans here. They say the streets are paved with it. How I should like to go to those parts, and come back with my pockets filled with the gold that these idiots throw away like dross. I wouldn't fatigue myself all day long in the mountains for a piece of '*maritozza*'^[10] or a dish of '*polenta*.'"^[11]

"Ha! ha!" laughed Antonio, "I've no doubt of it. I should like to see *you* with money, friend Peppe. You'd make a rare use of it."

"*Per Bacco!* wouldn't I?" answered the goatherd; "you wouldn't catch me sober again until the day of my death. If I could sell my milk to the Englishman at the rate you sell your wine, I'd soon make my fortune."

"Well," said Antonio, "I would try it on if I were you. Perhaps milk isn't to be had in his country."

"Perhaps not," said the goatherd, musingly. "It must be a curious country from all accounts. They tell me they never see the sun from one year's end to the other, and, indeed, how can they, when the sun is here all day? I hear, too, that

the fog is so thick that you are obliged to cut it through with a knife as you go along the streets, and that the inhabitants are obliged to burn lamps all day long."

"Yes, I have heard so, too," answered Antonio, "and that they have no wine in their country. Well, upon the whole, I'd sooner live where I am."

"Ah, but the gold that is to be found about the streets," said Guiseppe, "you forget that."

"What would be the good of all the gold, if there is no wine to buy with it?" replied Antonio. "I am very well content to live by the sale of my wine——"

"At the rate you sell it to Englishmen, I've no doubt," broke in Peppe, with a laugh.

"Well, my friend, of course we all try to get what we can, where we can, and how we can," pleaded Antonio. "That's only business. I'd be a fool if I didn't."

"Well, Compar, I suppose we are all much alike in that; but don't you think that after having cheated the Englishman out of all that money, you could lend me three pauls?"^[12]

"Ah, Peppe, you rascal, I thought that was coming," laughed Antonio. "What! lend *you* three pauls! Why, when do you think you would be able to pay me?"

"Well, I make two pauls a day by the sale of my milk and go halves with my *padrone*.^[13] That is a paul a day for us apiece. In three days, therefore, I shall be able to pay you the entire sum. If I can manage to gull the Englishman, I may pay you sooner," responded the goatherd.

"Ah! Peppe," said Antonio, "I know you to be a slippery customer. How am I to be sure you will pay me within that time?"

"I give you my word of honour," cried Peppe.

"Ho! ho! what is that worth?" laughed his friend.

"May I die of an accident, if I don't! May the earth open and swallow me up! May the Madonna cause my mouth to fall off if I fail in my word. May——"

"There; that is enough," interrupted his friend. "Here are the three pauls. Take them, and if you fail to pay me back in three days' time—not one hour later, may all the curses that you have invoked upon yourself be fulfilled."

This was all I overheard of the dialogue. Shortly after this they must have separated, as I heard soon the voice of the goatherd in the distance, chanting in that wild strain, with a prolonged dwelling on the last note peculiar to the peasantry in the Italian mountains.

It was past midday when I rose from my mossy couch and sauntered leisurely home, where, having partaken of a light lunch, I continued working upon my picture—a large landscape—until sundown. I was at that time the only guest at the inn, and I have no doubt that mine host and his family made as much out of me as they could in one way or another, yet they were as honest as the people in those parts mostly are, and when not occupied with writing home I was in the habit of joining the family circle after supper, when they entertained me with the gossip of the village and stories of brigands, by whom the country was much infested, while I, in return for their information, related to them many things about my own country, my travels, etc. The conversation that I had overheard that morning, however, between the goatherd and his friend I deemed not of sufficient importance to relate to the family; in fact, I had forgotten all about it before I reached the inn.

The unscrupulous manner in which people cheated among these simple seeming peasantry rather amused than annoyed me. And as for the simple incident of one peasant borrowing three pauls from another, it was a fact so uninteresting to me, that I never gave the matter a second thought.

Little did I imagine that the transaction of the three pauls that I by chance overheard that morning was to be the commencement of one of the drollest waggeries that ever came within my experience.

It was more than a week after the incident that I have related occurred that I left my inn one morning to paint out of doors at the distance of a mile or so. As I journeyed along the road, laden with my painting materials, I came in sight of the goatherd's hut, built upon a hill, and though it was yet distant, I descried a figure in the act of leaving the hut, but which I could distinctly see was not the goatherd.

The figure had descended the hill, reached the road, and was then making towards me. I had now no difficulty in recognising my friend of whom I had bought the wine. He appeared to be anything but in good spirits, for he advanced scratching his head and with his eyes fixed on the ground.

This was our first meeting since our transaction of the barrel of wine, and had I

been in a less good humour I might have taxed him with swindling me in good round terms, but with the fresh morning air in my face and the enchanting landscape around me, I felt in no humour to quarrel with anyone. I thought, however, I would make him aware that I knew how he had served me without losing my temper.

"*Buon giorno, Antonio,*"—(Good-day, Anthony)—I said, cheerfully.

"*Ah! Eccellenza; buon giorno,*" replied he, with a sickly attempt at a smile.

"You seem a little out of spirits, eh?" said I. "Now, what would you say if I could read your thoughts?"

"You read my thoughts, Eccellenza! You joke with me."

"No," replied I; "without joking I will tell you what is passing in your mind. You have just come from the house of Guiseppe the goatherd, and you are disappointed because he has not paid you the three pauls that he promised to pay you after three days. Am I right?"

"*Per Bacco!*" exclaimed Antonio. "Surely your Excellency is a saint, and it has been revealed to you. How else could you have known that?"

"Does that surprise you," said I. "What would you say if I could tell you more? If I could tell you the day and the hour that you lent the three pauls to your friend? What would you say if I told you it was last Tuesday week in the forenoon, and how you first hesitated to lend the money, having some doubt as to your friend's integrity, but how, after having invoked certain curses on his own head in default of his not being able to pay, you at length yielded, and lent him the three pauls?"

"*Diavolo!* Eccellenza must be a saint indeed to know all that," cried the peasant, dumbfounded.

"Would you like to know more?" I asked. "At the expiration of the three days you have been regularly every morning to the house of the goatherd, expecting to receive the three pauls, and each time he has sent you away with a different excuse."

"*O anime sante mie del Purgatorio!*"^[14] exclaimed the peasant, crossing himself devoutly. "Either your Excellency is a saint, or you have the demon within you."

"Ha! say you so?" said I. "I will even venture to prophecy that you will never get

the three pauls."

"Oh, pray don't say that, Signor. Pray don't say that I shall *never* be paid. Why should your Excellency think so?" asked the peasant, dismally.

"Why! do you ask? Because the saints love you not," said I.

"How, Signor? Was that also revealed to you? Why should they not love me? How have I merited their wrath?" he asked, whiningly.

"By charging me twice the sum you charge other people for that *quarteruolo* of wine, and for repenting afterwards that you had not asked me four times the sum, as, being an Englishman, you thought to get it out of me."

"*Corpo di San Antonio di Padova!*"^[15] cried the peasant, casting up his eyes. "Is nothing to be hid from you? Well, Eccellenza, what serves it to deny the truth, since you know everything? I am a poor man, and when an opportunity occurs for bettering myself, I am apt to do what most men do who know what want is."

"Well, my friend," said I "you will find through life that 'honesty is the best policy,' and that 'cheats never prosper,' at least, for long. For when the cheat is discovered, his reputation is lost for ever, while the honest man who sticks steadily to his labour, and puts aside his scanty earnings, not wasting them in drinking or gambling, in the end is blessed by the saints who give him fortune."

"That is most true," replied the peasant. "Eccellenza has spoken like the preacher," and seizing my hand, he kissed it, and was about to proceed on his journey.

"Stay," said I. "Would you like to earn two pauls?"

"Willingly, Eccellenza; but how?" he asked.

"Help me to carry these traps to my camping place, and carry them back again when I return this evening," said I.

Without further parley he relieved me of my burden, and we both trudged on together.

At first we walked on in silence, but after the first half-mile, to relieve the monotony of the walk, I began to question my companion as to the reception his friend Guiseppe had given him and the excuses he had made for not being able to pay his debt.

"Well, Eccellenza," he began, "you, who know everything, are well aware that I called at Peppe's house at the time appointed for the payment of the debt, and that not being able to pay me, he excused himself by saying that the goats had given so little milk, that he could not fulfil his promise as he expected, but he promised faithfully to repay me on the morrow. I called the next day, when he begged me to be patient with him, as he had lost the money through a hole in his pocket. I was annoyed at this, but called again on the morrow, hoping at least to get a portion of the money back; but no such luck. This time he pleaded that his wife had been suddenly seized with the fever, and begged me not to be too hard upon him.

"Then take care that she is better to-morrow,' said I, 'for I want my money.'

"The next day (that was yesterday) I called again, and his wife informed me that her husband had caught the fever, and was dangerously ill. She hoped, however, that it would soon pass over, and he would be able to pay me as he had promised. I went again this morning to Peppe's house as usual for the money, when his wife came out to me with tears in her eyes, to inform me that her husband died last night. I began to lose patience, and said that, dead or alive, I meant to have my three pauls back; and off I went, cursing and swearing. It was then that your Excellency met me."

As Antonio finished speaking we had already arrived at our camping place, and I commenced arranging my painting materials. The latter part of Antonio's narrative immensely amused me, as I had both seen and spoken to Peppe that morning early when he brought the milk as usual to the door of the inn, and he never looked in better health in his life. I remember upbraiding him for putting water in the milk, and telling him not to try on his tricks with me, as Englishmen knew what good milk was, adding that if I caught him at it again, I should change my goatherd. I suppose something like a smile must have passed over my countenance at the idea of Peppe pretending to be dead, in order to get off paying three pauls, for Antonio, eyeing me narrowly, said,

"What say you, Eccellenza? You know everything. Tell me if Peppe is really dead, or whether this is also a pretence."

I put on a wise look, and said, looking him full in the face, "I know him to be alive."

"Ha! say you so, Eccellenza?" cried Antonio, starting up from his seat on the ground. "Then *per Crispo!*^[16] I'll murder him when I catch him."

"There is no occasion to do that, my friend," said I. "You will not get your three pauls back the sooner if he hasn't the money."

"I'll go to his house again, though, if your Excellency can dispense with my services for the present," said Antonio, "in the hopes of catching him; though, if he is alive, he will be away in the mountains, feeding his goats; but no matter, I'll enter the house and see for myself if the bed is empty or no."

"Go then," said I, "and return in an hour to let me know the result of your visit."

Off started Antonio, as fleetly as the wind, and before I could have thought it possible, returned without appearing out of breath.

"Well?" said I, working steadily on my picture without looking up.

"Well, Eccellenza," he began, "I went straight to the house, and tried the door, but it was locked, and there was no one within. I peeped through the window, but could not catch a glimpse of the bed. I descended the hill in a rage, when at some little distance, I saw Peppe's wife. I ran to her and told her that I wanted to speak to her husband, as I had found out that he was living. She persisted in saying that it was false, and that her husband lay dead in his bed."

"Then let me see the corpse," said I.

"She replied that she was not going to fatigue herself to mount the hill again to show me the corpse. That if I didn't choose to believe her, I needn't.

"Give me the key of the house, then," said I, "that I may go in and satisfy myself."

"She replied that she never trusted anyone with the key of her house, and turned away.

"I then lost my temper, and told her that both she and her husband were a couple of swindlers, who had schemed to defraud me of my money. Then she burst into tears again, and said that if I really wished to be convinced that her husband was dead, I might go to the church myself this evening, where the corpse of her husband would be lying in state,^[17] and that I might hide myself in one of the confessionals, and watch all night to see if he moved at all, and that if he stirred ever so little, never to believe her again.

"Now, you see, Eccellenza, how artful women are. She hopes in that way to intimidate me and to make me believe that her husband is dead in real earnest.

She fancies that I would be frightened to spend a whole night inside the church with a corpse, and that I won't go. If, then, I should call at her house to-morrow she would be sure to tell me that her husband was already buried. I do not for a moment believe that her husband will be exposed in the church all night, feigning to be dead; but, just to give her the lie, I am determined to do just as she says, and hide myself in one of the confessionals, that I may be able to tell her that I passed the night in the church, and there was no corpse to be seen."

"Do so, my friend," said I. "I am most curious to hear how this affair ends."

As we were discoursing together Antonio suddenly broke short his discourse.

"Hark, Signor!" he cried. "Do you hear? Those are death-bells that are tolling in the village. Can someone really have died, or has Peppe's wife set them tolling to impose upon me all the more? What say you, Signor? Would she carry out the joke as far as all that?"

"There is nothing like doing a thing well," I answered, evasively.

"I shall be able to find out from the sacristan for whom he has been tolling the bell this morning," said Antonio, "and if that knave of a Peppe is not dead yet, may I die of an accident if I don't worry him to the death. You must know, Eccellenza, that three pauls to us poor devils is a consideration, unimportant though the sum may be *alla vostra Signoria*.^[18] What a conscience the man must have to try and swindle me out of what I lent him in friendship, after swearing to me on his word of honour and invoking all sorts of curses on his own head if he failed to pay me on the day he promised! Had not your Excellency positively assured me that he still lives, I should be inclined to think that he had died in real earnest, as a punishment for his broken faith."

I was amused at the word "conscience" from the lips of a man like Antonio, and the old fable of "the pot calling the kettle black" flashed across my mind. We are wonderfully alive to the weak points of others' consciences where our own interests are concerned, but are too often wanting in equal rigour over ourselves. How true is that parable in Scripture of the mote and the beam!

In order to proceed with my narrative, I must pass on to the following day. Feeling slightly indisposed from a fever on waking that morning—nothing serious, but just enough to prevent me from painting out-of-doors, as I had intended—I kept my bed later than usual, and called to my landlady to bring me a basin of broth.

As she entered my bedchamber with the steaming fluid, I noticed by the animated expression of her face that she had news of unusual importance to communicate to me.

"Oh, Signor!" she exclaimed, as she hastened to place the broth on a table beside me, "what do you think has happened in the village? A miracle! a miracle! nothing short of a miracle, blessed be the Madonna. *Si Signor*," she added, in answer to a smile that she observed on my countenance, "one of the most wonderful miracles that ever our blessed Virgin has deigned to vouchsafe to us, her unworthy servants. Blessed be her holy name for all eternity!"

"Well," said I, calmly sipping my broth, "another miracle! let's hear it."

"Ah! Signor, you do not believe in miracles," said the hostess; "but how will you deny *this*? Just hear. You may not have heard, perhaps, that poor Peppe the goatherd died suddenly of a fever, and was laid out in the church, where he remained all last night. Some robber, towards the morning, broke into the church, and would have robbed the alms-box. He had succeeded in unscrewing it from the wall and bursting it open—at least, I presume so, for how else could he have got to the money?—and was seated on the ground, counting his gains—a most incredible amount, chiefly consisting of gold. I am sure I don't know where it all came from, for only yesterday when I put in a *baiocco*^[19] myself, the sound it made showed me that it was all but empty. Well, as I was saying, he was counting his gains by the light of the candle, placed at the head of the corpse, when our blessed lady caused life to return to the defunct, who, leaping up suddenly from his bier, seized the robber by the throat, and called aloud for help. Our honest Peppe held the sacrilegious miscreant as in a vice until the sacristan entered the church to light the candles. You may imagine, Signor, the dismay of the sacristan at seeing the corpse that had been laid out in the church all the previous evening, now resuscitated, and holding in his grasp the wretch who had attempted to defraud the church of the alms that pious souls had given to support her.

"The worthy sacristan had not recovered from his surprise when the people began to pour in by twos and threes to hear mass, all of them starting and falling back in horror at the spectacle before them.

"A miracle! a miracle!" cried the sacristan, at length. 'Behold the Virgin has been merciful to us. Blessed be the name of the Madonna!'

"At that instant the arch-priest himself entered, attired in his robes.

"'What is this?' he cried, in astonishment, retreating several steps. 'Holy saints! was not this the corpse laid out in the church last evening?'"

"Here the sacristan broke in.

"'A miracle, Signor *Arciprete*, a miracle! a most undeniable miracle. I caught this robber this morning attempting to rob the alms-box, when lo! it pleased the Madonna to give back life to the dead in order to save her holy church from being violated by sacrilegious hands.'

"The good Peppe, still holding fast the robber, informed the arch-priest and the congregation that every word the sacristan had spoken was true; that he had been dead, but had been miraculously called back to life again by the grace of our blessed Lady in order to secure the thief.

"'You lie! you lie! You know you lie!' gasped out the burglar, as he tried to free himself from the iron grasp of the resuscitated corpse. 'Impostor! knave! swindler,' he called out, nearly suffocated by the firm grip of Peppe.

"But his words were lost in the sensation caused by the crowd, who permitted no explanation on the part of the criminal. The guard having now arrived, he was walked off to prison amid the execrations of the crowd. The arch-priest, who, through all this scene had remained stupefied for a time, as well he might, at length broke silence.

"'There is some mystery that I am as yet unable to comprehend. I am informed by the sacristan that he discovered the burglar in the act of robbing the alms-box of the church, and the money on the ground that you all see, he avers to have been taken out of the alms-box. Now, in order to extract the money from the alms-box the thief must previously have broken it open, yet I see no marks of violence on the box of any kind.

"'Then there is another thing worthy of notice. The alms-box was emptied only last week, in order to distribute its contents amongst the poor. How comes it now, then, there appears such a large quantity of money, which, you see, consists chiefly of gold and silver, besides paper money; and that diamond ring I see, whence is that? I think it will be found that the heap of money on the ground will be too large a sum to enter into the box. If it cannot enter, how could it have come out of it?'"

"'All the greater miracle,' cried the sacristan, devoutly.

"'True, true,' cried the people. 'A double miracle! Great is the power of the Madonna.'

"'Well, well, my people,' said the arch-priest, 'I own that I am puzzled beyond measure; nevertheless, as it has pleased our gracious Lady to let us find this goodly sum here in the middle of the church, it is clear that she has but one intention—namely, that the sum should be distributed for the glory of her name. Therefore, let the treasure be replaced in the alms-box for the enlargement and decoration of the church.'

"This decision of their pastor was approved of by the pious flock, and the sacristan hastened to fill the box with as much of the treasure as it was capable of containing, while still a large portion remained over. This, together with the diamond ring, the arch-priest took possession of, declaring that the whole sum should be used for the enlarging and fitting up of his church."

Having concluded her narrative, my worthy hostess perceived something like a smile of incredulity on my countenance, which seemed rather to irritate her. However, I comforted her by saying that I would investigate the matter myself, and if, after a careful and strict inquiry, I could not account for the whole matter by natural causes, I would then become as much a believer in the miracle as she was herself.

This seemed to pacify her, and she encouraged me in seeking every possible means to disprove it. Accordingly, in an hour's time I was up and dressed, and bending my steps towards the township. Part of this curious tale I had already accounted for in my own mind. That Peppe had not been dead, but had feigned to be so, that I knew. The supposed robber I concluded must be Antonio. I supposed that the latter, having discovered at length the imposition practised upon him by his companion, a quarrel had ensued, in the midst of which they had been surprised by the sacristan; but I could guess no more than this.

The affair of the treasure being found in the church completely puzzled me, and my curiosity being aroused, I set straight off to the house of the arch-priest, whom I knew intimately, to hear either the confirmation or confutation of my hostess's statement.

On passing the church in the chief piazza or square of this little town, I met the sacristan, whom, having been an eye-witness to the whole, I stopped and inquired as to the truth of the rumour that had spread so quickly throughout the village. He put on a sanctified look, crossed his hands upon his breast, and rolled

up the white of his eyes, solemnly declaring that every word I had heard was true, that he himself had been an eye-witness to the whole affair from first to last.

Then, after recounting to me the whole proceedings in a long rigmarole, he wound up by calling on all the saints to open the ground under his feet to swallow him up, if what he spoke was not the truth. He then took his leave.

Now, I never did like the appearance of this sacristan. He was a young man, sallow and emaciated, with an extremely repulsive countenance and an expression of low cunning and avarice, which he sought to hide under an affectation of sanctity and cringing humility. He seemed unable to look you full in the face, though I often caught him observing me out of the corners of his half-closed eyes.

He would have been the last man in the world whose word I should have taken for gospel, and there was something in the manner in which he told his story that impressed me with the idea, that whatever mystery there might be connected with the discovered treasure, that *he*, in some way or another, was interested in the affair being regarded as a miracle. I therefore attached very slight importance to his testimony. In fact, I merely addressed him in the hopes of discovering some discrepancy in my hostess's narrative, being aware how much a story gains in telling; but, to my surprise, I found the two accounts remarkably consistent. A step or two further took me to the house of the arch-priest, which, being open, I entered, and was welcomed on the landing by that worthy.

"Ah! Signor Vandyke," he said—you are always called by your Christian name in Italy—"it is long since I've had the pleasure of seeing you. You do not often honour our humble township with your presence. You have been hard at work as usual, I suppose, eh?"

I replied that I had given myself a holiday for once in a way, not feeling in a humour for work, and had called upon him for the purpose of inquiring into the truth of a reported miracle in the village. Hereupon he beckoned me upstairs, made me sit down at a table, and pouring out for me a tumbler of his own wine from a huge jug, he proceeded to fill another for himself; then tapping his snuff-box, a priest's inseparable companion, and taking from it a copious pinch wherewith to clear his brain, this dignitary recited to me the whole story of the miracle, differing in little or nothing from the other accounts that I had heard of it. Knowing him to be a thoroughly trustworthy and conscientious man, I felt

sure that he would not willingly deceive me; but fancying he might in some way or other have been deceived himself, I proceeded to cross-question him, though I could not find that he contradicted himself in anything.

When I asked if he could vouch for the occurrence being a miracle, he replied:

"I can only vouch for what I saw. The resuscitated corpse was holding the accused in his grasp, while I had the sacristan's word that the corpse had suddenly become re-animated under his very eyes, and had seized the burglar after he had succeeded in extracting the money from the alms-box. I must confess I am puzzled at the whole of that sum having been extracted from the coffer, when, with the greatest pains the sacristan could not replace more than half of it. I have the rest here, as you see, and with it a handsome diamond ring. That is the wonderful part, for who wears diamonds in these mountains?"

I was now perfectly sure of one thing namely, that the treasure had never been extracted from the alms-box at all, but had been found in some other manner. The testimony of the sacristan, as I have said before, weighed little or nothing with me. So far from it, indeed, that I began to see more clearly than ever that there had been some trick or imposture, at the bottom of which was the sacristan himself.

I did not give the arch-priest the result of my reflections, but restrained myself until I should obtain further evidence. We had discoursed for full a couple of hours on the subject, and when I rose to depart I told him that I was as complete a sceptic as before, as far as the miraculous character of the event was concerned, though I placed every reliance in his statement. I said I was perfectly sure of unveiling the mystery before long, and when I had done so I should at once let him know.

"And the delinquent," asked I, with my hand on the doorhandle, "where is he?"

"Locked up, to be sure; ready to be taken to-morrow to Gennazzano, there to await his trial."

"Could I exchange a word with him?"

"If you wish. I shall have to give you a line to the guard, in order to admit you. Just one moment,—here—with this pass they will let you enter."

"Thank you very much. Till we meet again—*Addio*."

It was now growing towards evening as I hastened my steps towards the lock-up house, where I delivered the arch-priest's note to the guard, who immediately gave orders to the turnkey to admit me. On entering the cell I found Antonio, as I had expected, pacing up and down dejectedly.

"Well, Antonio," said I, "I have come to have a chat with you and to hear all about the miracle that happened this morning."

"Ah! Signor, is it you?" cried he. "Now, was there ever an unluckier mortal on earth than I?"

"Nonsense," said I, "about being unlucky. I have come to comfort you in your trouble and to hear all about the miracle."

"Miracle! The devil a miracle," exclaimed Antonio. "They've miracled me within four walls, who am innocent as the babe unborn, whilst they have let go two of the greatest rascals in the village. It will be a miracle if I escape incarceration for life when I take my trial at Gennazzano."

"Come," said I, consolingly, "you must not look so gloomily at things. I will do what I can to get you off, but you must tell me exactly how the whole affair happened."

"Ah! that I will, Signor, and with pleasure," said he.

Walking me up and down his narrow cell, the turnkey waiting at the door with his bunch of keys the while, he began his story thus:—

"You will remember, Eccellenza, that before parting from you last, I informed you of my intention of concealing myself within the confessional of the church and to remain there all night, for the purpose of observing attentively if the would-be corpse of Peppe there laid out should make any movement or betray the slightest signs of life.

"At a late hour, therefore, when all was dark—that is to say, about three hours after Ave Maria—I entered the church, and there was my late friend attired as a corpse with a candle left burning at his head, as is the custom, you know, Signor, in these parts. I approached him, though not without a certain tremor, for to me there has always been something solemn and awful in being left alone with the dead, especially at midnight when the corpse is laid out in state in the middle of the church, with nothing but the feeble light of one candle to illumine its ghastly features.

"Nor did this feeling at all abate when I reflected, that in all probability the supposed corpse was not really dead, but only feigning to be so. If anything, I felt more terrified. However, I advanced steadily, and gazed full in the face of it. It was very pale, and perfectly motionless, and I began to think that this must be death, and that your Excellency had been mistaken in being so positive that my friend was yet alive.

"I fancied that perhaps you had seen his spirit and had mistaken it for himself in the flesh. I forebore to touch the corpse from that same feeling of awe that I have just described, and though at the time I was perfectly satisfied that he was really dead, yet I still resolved to sit up all night, concealed within the confessional, so as to be able to tell your Excellency on the morrow that I had fulfilled my promise.

"I accordingly shut myself in, and gazed steadfastly at the features of the corpse, never taking my eyes off all the time, in order to assure myself beyond a doubt whether this were really death or merely its counterfeit. I gazed long and intently, but in vain did I endeavour to discover the slightest breathing or other signs of life. Whether the dim light of one candle prevented me from seeing sufficiently well, I know not.

"All was silent as the tomb, and as I gazed in breathless suspense, hour after hour flew by, till at length I heard the old church clock toll forth the dread hour of midnight. The last stroke had hardly died away—How shall I describe to you my terror, oh, Signor?—when suddenly I heard the church doors violently shaken. You know how nervous one becomes in the dead of the night at hearing any sort of noise unexpectedly that one cannot account for. Imagine, then, my sensations, Eccellenza, if you can, when, hidden within the confessional at this witching hour of night, with every nerve on the stretch, and looking out into the solemn gloom of the church, illumined only by the solitary candle placed at the head of the corpse—when all honest peasants, with their families, were in bed and fast asleep, and the greatest silence reigned everywhere, suddenly to hear a bang and a crash at the old church doors, which soon gave way—you know how rotten they are, Signor—and there entered, cursing and swearing, a troop of—well, upon my soul, Signor, I took them to be emissaries of the arch-fiend, sent to secure the soul of the defunct.

"However, after having attentively examined their forms, which were hardly less wild than those of the foul fiends themselves, if all accounts of them be true, I satisfied myself that they were, after all, human—men of flesh and blood like

ourselves. Signor, they were the brigands.

"I should say there were about a dozen of them, for I did not think of counting them, so great was my fright. They rushed helter-skelter into the church, and without as much as glancing at the corpse, seized the candle that stood burning near its head, and, striding towards the altar placed the candle thereon and proceeded to count their ungodly gains. I trembled in every limb; a cold sweat broke out on my forehead, and I felt my hair stand up, while my teeth chattered in my head.

"What would happen next? Would the Madonna send a thunderbolt to destroy these sacrilegious wretches, and perhaps myself at the same time? I quite expected something of the sort. I am sure it is quite a wonder that my hair hasn't turned white from the terrors I underwent last evening.

"Well, Eccellenza, I presume these ruffians, after having laid wait for the mail on the high road and robbed a number of poor gentlemen of all they had about them, had made off with their ill-gotten treasure in the dead of the night, and, passing through the village on their way, descried the glimmer of the candle through the chinks of the church door, and thought they would take this opportunity of dividing their spoil.

"The treasure was a goodly heap, consisting of gold, silver, and paper money, besides a few gold watches, which they all drew lots for, and a magnificent diamond ring, which the brigand chief claimed for himself.

"'Now, my men,' said he after an equal portion had been allotted to each, 'I think every man in my band has had a fair share of the booty. This ring alone I claim the right of disposing of as head of the band, seeing that it cannot be divided; yet, to show you all in what high estimation I hold fair play, and how loath I am to possess even a *baiocco* more than my valiant companions without deserving it, I will award this ring to the man who shall first succeed in hitting yon corpse on the nose with it, I myself taking share in the pastime, and as captain of the band claiming for myself the first shot.'

"Enthusiastic cheers greeted this decision of their chief, and the game began. The captain had the first throw, but missed. Then a second picked up the ring and also threw, but missed likewise. Then a third, with the same result, and so on, till the seventh, who, more dextrous than the rest, hit the corpse such a stinging whack on the nose that it suddenly jumped up, shook its head, extended its arms, and leaped down from the bier.

"You see, the rascal had been shamming, after all, sir, and, wearied out with feigning death, had actually gone to sleep. Now, although I was half prepared for such a resuscitation, the effect upon me was electrical; but I recovered from my surprise soon enough to enjoy the confusion of the brigands, who in their terror and dismay at what they took to be a miracle wrought by the saints on purpose to punish their impious conduct, took to their heels, stumbling over one another in their flight, and letting drop all their treasure on the ground unheeded, scampered out of the church as fast as their legs could carry them.

"I was infinitely amused at the fright and discomfiture of these lawless ruffians, and at another time should have laughed heartily at their sudden dispersion, but my rage at having been imposed upon, and the thoughts of vengeance I harboured against my false friend somewhat damped my mirth. No sooner were the brigands safely out of the church than Peppe, who was now sufficiently wide awake to comprehend the situation, after closing the church doors carefully, proceeded to spread a large handkerchief on the ground and to collect together all the gold and silver that had rolled about into every corner of the church, and which I've no doubt he thought he alone was entitled to.

"It was at this moment that I made a sudden burst from the confessional, and rushing towards him, seized him by the throat.

"'Villain!' I cried, 'your imposture is found out. Was it thus you hoped to swindle me out of my three pauls?'

"'Ah, friend Antonio,' exclaimed he, quite unmoved, 'is it you? Now I am glad that with your own eyes you have witnessed the miracle that the saints have wrought upon me in order to enable me to pay back the debt I owe to my best friend.'

"'Liar!' cried I; 'blaspheme not. Think not to impose on me again. Give me my three pauls at once.'

"'Three pauls!' he exclaimed. 'How on earth should I possess so contemptible a sum? Come, sit down here, and we will divide this goodly treasure between us.'

"Now, I knew that I had just as much right to the treasure as my friend, since it remained unclaimed, and therefore to divide it between us was nothing more than fair, nor did I thank Peppe for inviting me to take my share of it. Chance had thrown it in our way, and therefore I was entitled to the half of it.

"Nevertheless, I did not consider myself obliged to cancel my friend's debt because of the good fortune that had befallen us, but was determined that he should still pay me the three pauls out of his share when the whole should be divided, for the principle of the thing, for I am very punctilious as to principle, especially when my interests are affected.

"However, I said nothing until after we had divided the treasure equally. This being done, some debate arose as to what we should do with the diamond ring. Peppe thought he had a right to it, as he said it was all through him that the brigands had been put to flight and had left us in possession of the treasure. He even called me ungrateful and unreasonable when I disputed it with him, after having allowed me a share of the booty. I was not to be put off in this way. I told him that I had a right to an equal share of the treasure, and owed no thanks to him for the accident of good fortune that had befallen us both. As to the ring, I said that if either of us had a right to it more than the other it was myself, as he was my debtor.

"'Avaricious man!' exclaimed he, 'do you still think of exacting your miserable three pauls after my generosity in making you a sharer of the treasure that belonged properly to me? Have I not already paid you over and over again the paltry debt I owed you? If the Madonna had not brought me miraculously back to life you would have had nothing.'

"'Peace, blasphemer!' cried I. 'Do you think to befool me again with your imposture?'

"'*Imposture!*' he exclaimed, with an air of injured innocence. 'Why, did you not see me rise from the dead with your own eyes?'

"'Come, now,' said I, losing all patience, 'do you think that I was not sharp enough to suspect your plot from the very beginning, knowing what sort of character I had to deal with? Do you imagine I couldn't see through all your shamming—that I didn't see your breast heaving?'

"'*My breast heaving! The breast of a corpse heaving!*' he ejaculated. 'Strange hallucination! Trust me, my dear friend, you must have been slightly in liquor, and saw double.'

"'And do you think that I did not observe that worn out with feigning death so long, you really fell asleep,' said I, heedless of his insult, 'and that I did not hear you snore like a hog?'

"I snore like a hog!" he exclaimed. "My dear friend, believe me, you must have been *very strongly* in liquor."

"No more in liquor than you," I cried, with some vehemence. "That you were sound asleep I can swear, nor would you have awoke till morning, had not one of the brigands hit you on the nose with that ring. Then, naturally forgetting your caution, you jumped up, stretched yourself, which act of yours being sufficient under the circumstances to strike terror among the brigands, who, imagining no doubt, what you would like me also to believe—viz., that a miracle had been wrought to bring you back to life again, took to their heels and left their treasure behind them."

"Now, you can't well expect me to believe in what you affect to consider a miracle, seeing that I have been an eye-witness to your antics from the very beginning, and as for trusting you with the ring until it shall be converted into money, that would be too much for you to expect from me, after the insight you have given me into your character."

"Come now, old fellow," said he, gaily, and with most provoking good humour, "let us have no more words about it. We'll toss up for it. Nothing can be fairer than that."

"I do not agree either to toss up for it or to draw lots for it, as I am usually unlucky," I replied, firmly.

"Then we'll settle it between ourselves as the brigands did. If I hit you on the nose with it, it is mine. If you can hit me with it, it shall be yours. Come—here goes."

"I object to these proceedings," I replied.

"What will you do, then? Will you cut it in half with a knife?"

"Nor that either," said I.

"Well, now," said he, "you are one of the never-contented. I see you are determined by hook or by crook to keep the ring all to yourself."

"No," I replied, 'I do not wish for anything that is not strictly fair. What I propose is this—viz., that I should keep the ring in my possession until you have disbursed the three pauls out of your share. Then, after the ring has been estimated by a trustworthy party and turned into money, then we will share the produce equally.'

"Ho! ho!" laughed he, 'so that's what you are after, is it? Ha! ha! I see it all. You fancy that under the excuse of waiting for your three pauls (which I know as well as you do yourself you do not care a straw for, since you have become enriched with the half of my treasure) that I am going to allow you quietly to abscond with the ring, which may be worth as much as all the treasure put together, for what I know, never to be heard of afterwards. Well, that is a cool idea! Ha! ha! ha!'

"I protest," said I, 'that such a thought never entered my head.'

"Oh, of course not," said he, incredulously. 'Friend Antonio, it is clear that our respective mothers hatched neither of us two yesterday. I am only a poor goatherd, yet I have learnt as much of the world from watching the antics of my goats as you have in trailing and pruning your vines. We are both of us men, and we know what men are. We all have our wants, and our brains were given us to supply them.'

"Yes," replied I, 'in a conscientious and legitimate manner, and not to over-reach our fellow-men in the shortest and most unscrupulous way that our petty interests may dictate, to the scandal of all good saints and the blessed Madonna at their head.'

"And here I launched out into a moral strain for at least an hour, hoping to bring him round by dint of argument and persuasion to my view of the case, but finding him at the end of that time still obdurate, and in the same state of hardness of heart as before—for who can moralise with such a heathen as Peppe?—I attempted to seize the ring by force, intending to keep it until he should pay me the debt he owed me, but he was before me, and a scuffle ensued, he declaring that he would not suffer me to keep the ring in my possession, and I being equally firm in refusing to let him keep it in his without first paying me my three pauls.

"He promised faithfully to pay me the debt when he should have changed one of the pieces of money that fell to his lot; until then, however, I remained firm in

my resolution. Words had by this time led to blows, and the conflict was getting desperate, when, it being now fairly morning, we were interrupted by the sacristan entering the church to light the candles on the altar.

"Starting back in wonderment and terror at what he naturally believed to be a miraculous resuscitation, it was some time before he was sufficiently calm to hear from me the true account of the case.

"At length, recovering from his stupor, his eyes sparkled with an avaricious light at the divided treasure on the ground, and his skinny fingers opened and shut convulsively. Then gazing furtively over each shoulder, he put his finger to his lip, winked, and whispered hoarsely, 'My friends, the secret of your newly-acquired wealth is as yet only known to us three. I think you will find it to your interest that it should not be known to more, as in that case it might come to the ears of the arch-priest, who would be sure to deprive you of every penny of it, in consideration of its being found in his church. Reflect well, my friends; there is but one way to swear me to secrecy.'

"'And that is?' asked I.

"'To let me have an equal share of the treasure,' said he, impudently. 'What other way would you buy my silence?'

"We both violently opposed this proposition, considering it no less than an act of brigandage, and however Peppe and I might differ in opinion on many subjects, we both agreed that this was a piece of extortion to which we were not bound to submit. I said that I would sooner await the decision of the arch-priest, which would perhaps, after all, not be such as he—the sacristan—represented it, and Peppe swore that he would knock his dastardly brains out in the middle of the church before he would let him touch a *baiocco*.

"'Think again, my friends,' said the sacristan, exchanging his customary look of sanctity for one of deep cunning and malignity. 'Think again, and decide quickly. In another minute the arch-priest will enter the church to perform mass. All the inhabitants of the village will be pouring in. There is no time to be lost. Either let me have a third of the treasure, or I shall swear by all the saints to the arch-priest that I caught *you*, Signor Antonio, in the act of robbing the alms-box, and that the Madonna wrought a miracle before my very eyes by raising *you*, Signor Guiseppe, from the dead in order to chastise the burglar for his sacrilege.'

"'He will not believe thee, thou imp of Satan!' roared Peppe.

"'We shall see,' rejoined the sacristan, with a malicious chuckle, and rubbing his hands.

"At this moment the arch-priest entered, attired in his robes, and all the congregation at his heels.

"'Oh, Signor Arch-priest!' began the sacristan, in a loud voice, before the assembled multitude, rolling up his eyes and crossing himself with mock devotion, 'I have witnessed this morning a miracle with these very eyes.'

"'A miracle!' exclaimed the arch-priest and all the congregation in chorus.

"'Ay,' persisted the sacristan; 'a genuine, undeniable miracle. As I entered the church this morning to light the candles on the altar, I discovered this burglar (pointing to me) in the act of robbing the alms-box. He had just succeeded in extracting all that treasure that you see on the ground before you, and which was doubtless all of it placed in the box by our blessed Lady's own hands for the use of her holy church. For who else in our little village could have amassed such a sum, or, having amassed it, would have been willing to put it all of a heap within the alms-box?

"'Well, Signor Arciprete, just as the sacrilegious knave was about to count his unhallowed gains, lo! a miracle, such as these eyes never before beheld, and may never see again before they close for ever in peace.'

"'Well, well,' said the arch-priest, impatiently.

"'Well, Signor Arciprete mio, will you believe it? Yon image of our blessed Lady suddenly raised its arm in a commanding attitude, and with a voice of ineffable sweetness blended with severity cried out to yon corpse, or, rather, that man, who was a corpse only last night, as all good people may recollect, "Corpse! arise and seize yon sacrilegious ruffian by the scruff of the neck!" The words were no sooner out of the blessed image's mouth, when up leapt the corpse from his bier, and seizing the burglar with an iron grasp, continued to hold him until vostra Reverenza entered the church!'

"The arch-priest remained dumbfounded for a time, not knowing what to say; but just as I was about to break silence and try to exculpate myself, my voice was immediately drowned by the multitude crying out, 'Down with him! down with him! Down with the thief, the burglar, the heathen! Let him not seek to exculpate himself with lies. Hear him not; he is guilty of sacrilege! Down with

the Protestant! Blessed be the holy man who was raised from the dead and the good sacristan to whose eyes the miracle was vouchsafed! Down with the Jew, the Protestant, the heretic! *Away with the miscreant! away with him.'*

"I saw and heard no more. Hurried away, midst the hootings and execrations of the crowd, I was flung into prison, where I have remained ever since the morning."

There was much in Antonio's story that moved me to laughter, though not a smile appeared upon the face of the narrator himself throughout the whole recital. There was an air of truth, too, about his manner that left no doubt in my mind that he had retailed the facts of the case as they had occurred without adding to or taking from them in the minutest particular.

I was then able to tell him the sequel of the story; how the arch-priest had put the greater part of the treasure into the alms-box, and, for the rest, the sum being too large to enter all of it into the box, he had taken charge of it, together with the diamond ring, and had designed the whole sum to be expended for the benefit of the church.

On hearing this he replied that he had rather that the money should be disposed of in that way than that blackleg of a sacristan should get a penny of it. He said that he was perfectly sure that the arch-priest had only so disposed of the money from a sincere belief that it had been miraculously placed in the alms-box, he himself being the dupe of his own rascally sacristan to whom he trusted implicitly.

He was of opinion that had he been allowed to explain himself to the arch-priest, his reverence would have granted him, if not his proper share of the sum, at least some portion of it. I promised him that I would lay his case before the arch-priest, and do what I could to get him liberated from prison. He thanked me, and slipping a small coin into the turnkey's hand, I quitted the cell.

It was now quite dark, so I thought I would make the best of my way home, where my supper awaited me. The following morning was rainy, and not being able to work out of doors, I resolved to call again upon the arch-priest, and finding him at home, I related to him my interview with the prisoner and the statement he gave of the case.

My reverend friend looked thoughtful for a time, shook his head, and hinted that the prisoner's veracity might not be depended on.

"However," he added, "the tale seems feasible, and I desire nothing more than that the prisoner should have justice. I will probe the matter to the bottom, and if he has spoken the truth I will get him liberated as soon as possible, and will moreover give out publicly in the church that what we had erroneously taken for a miracle was nothing more than a curious combination of circumstances perfectly natural, though strange, and that I had been imposed upon by the villainous and profane lies of my sacristan. It will require time to prove all this; meanwhile, Antonio must take his trial at Gennazzano. He left here at five o'clock this morning."

"So early!" I exclaimed. "I wanted, if possible, to prevent his going."

"You take great interest in his case," said my friend.

"I like to see mysteries cleared up as soon as possible," I replied. "I know that the love of the marvellous is so great among the ignorant in these parts, that they prefer persisting to believe in a miracle, even in the face of facts which explain it away in the most natural manner possible. This proneness to attribute to supernatural causes everything that we are unable to account for on the first glance, and to yield ourselves up implicitly to the belief of what is irrational, absurd, improbable, without first weighing thoroughly the *pros* and *cons* of the case, is one of the unmistakable signs of a barbarous and uncultivated intellect, and ought to be discouraged as a trait unworthy the dignity of human nature by everyone who has the improvement and well-being of his fellow creatures at heart."

The arch-priest smiled drily, as if he had taken my last speech to himself; then, after a pause, he began:

"No Christian man will deny that miracles have been wrought, or will dare to call in question those of our blessed Lord or of His saints. If, then, he acknowledges these, why should he try to combat the existence of modern miracles, seeing that everything is possible to the Almighty? What! Shall we limit the power of the Omnipotent, or dare to measure things infinite by our finite faculties? It would be the height of presumption for anyone to maintain that these things cannot be, or that our Heavenly Father cares less for His creatures now than he did in the days of yore."

"No wise man, Christian or otherwise," I replied, "would deny that any wonder were possible to the Divine author of the universe, the Great Source of all things wonderful. Yet science, the gift of God Himself, mind you, since He in the first

place created us with intellect to see into, in some measure, however darkly, His wonderful workings, in order that we might be taught to admire them and thereby come to a more perfect knowledge of His unspeakable greatness—science, I say, reveals to us that our universal Father rules all nature by means of certain fixed laws, from which we have no reason to believe that He would turn aside for a trifle—to excite mere wonderment among an ignorant multitude by performing such a conjuring trick as a bleeding crucifix or weeping Madonna. Our Lord Himself was chary of His miracles, and when asked for a sign would often refuse; yet when He did perform miracles, they were invariably to do good, and not to excite wonderment. If many intelligent people disbelieve in modern miracles, it is because they have not come within their experience, or that many seeming miracles they have been able to explain by natural causes.

"They have been made, moreover, doubly cautious in receiving hearsay miracles for gospel from the numerous cases of imposture that have been discovered among the priesthood in all countries where the Roman Catholic religion has prevailed. Then, why should miracles only be wrought in little sequestered villages, among the ignorant and superstitious, and not in large towns, in the presence of an intelligent and investigating population? Why, moreover, should they be more prevalent in mountainous districts than in any others? Why? Save that from the topographical configuration of the country, the inhabitants of mountain villages are necessarily more shut out from intercommunication with their kind than the dwellers in more accessible regions, and consequently cut off from that interchange of ideas so necessary to the development of the human intellect.

"Because their minds thus necessarily forced into one narrow channel till the intelligence borders on that of the brute, and is kept down to that pitch by a coarse and monotonous diet, which hard labour enables them to earn but scantily, and, finally, because by intermarrying closely among their own narrow population they reproduce offspring, if anything, more stunted in intelligence than themselves—to say nothing of other natural influences which help to produce cretinism, goitre, and deformity—and thus shutting out from their poor benighted intellects their last chance of fair play.

"Ignorant by force of circumstances, superstitious because they are ignorant, naturally discontented, with a life of hard labour that barely supplies that life's necessities, what wonder that the human mind thus stunted and oppressed by all its surroundings, should seek an outlet? That that outlet should be one that held out promises of a better time to come than they are ever likely to see in their

plodding every-day life?

"What wonder that such a one should throw himself more entirely upon the comforts of the religion that his village priest holds out to him than one more contented with his earthly lot, or that, superstitious as he is ignorant, he should daily hope for some miracle to be wrought for his own special benefit? Is it too much to infer that a mind in which faith reigns supreme and reason is hushed to sleep may be deluded by its senses—that it may imagine it sees or hears anything that it desires to see or hear?

"Is this an irrational solution of the stories so common of pictures of the Virgin or other saints moving their eyes or speaking? Then just consider when the average intelligence of a scanty population is at this ebb, what temptation this holds out to the priest of the parish whose office it is to rule his little flock by maintaining order and restraining crime, to strike awe into his congregation and keep alive their fanatical faith by some pious fraud in the shape of a crucifix that bleeds by an easy mechanical contrivance, an image of the Madonna that sheds tears, or a picture that rolls its eyes!

"These tricks were known to the heathen priests of antiquity long before the introduction of Christianity, and have been repeatedly carried out since by the priests of Rome. It is to the successful delusion of these poor benighted wretches that the Church of Rome owes her vaunted laurels. These are your miracle seers! To these alone do the saints vouchsafe to perform their wonders! As for the intelligent and wise, if they go to a church on purpose to see a miracle, and come away without seeing it, they are told by the priest that it is because they lack faith, that they do not go in the proper spirit, that their natures are too material, that such sights are reserved only for the faithful, and that few are sufficiently spiritualised to behold them.

"So you see there is no way of catching a priest napping. He will always find some hole to creep out of. Like an eel, he will slip through your fingers at the very moment that you may think you have got him. Should any individual be bold enough to force his way through the wonder-gazing crowd, and publicly demolish the miracle-working image or picture and reveal to the devout bystanders the paltry mechanism by which they have been deluded, people's eyes would at length be opened, all miracles be liable to suspicion, and reason at length admitted into some share of man's being.

"But there are difficulties that beset so bold an expedient. In the first place, a

man must be possessed of more than an ordinary amount of courage to face the fury of a fanatical mob whom he knows to be ready to tear him in pieces should he attempt to rob them of their darling prejudices, or dare to break one chip off their sacred wood or stone.

"Secondly, the wonder-working image or picture is generally in an inaccessible place, high up on the wall or surrounded by railings, to prevent a too close scrutiny. Thirdly, the miracle often exists merely in the imaginations of devout believers, without any aid of mechanism on the part of the priest. In this case, if any man were daring enough to step forward and openly to break in pieces the supposed miraculous image or picture, and, having done so, was unable to detect in the fragments any trace of machinery or means of imposture whatever, the fame of the miracle would then gain ground, and the daring unbeliever be guilty of sacrilege."

When I had got thus far, my friend the arch-priest drew himself up and was about to reply in a lengthy rejoinder, when he was suddenly interrupted by the servant girl of his household bursting hurriedly into the room and crying out at the top of her voice, "Oh, Signor Arciprete, have you heard the news? The *vetturino* of the mail has just arrived. He says that the night before last the mail was stopped on its way to Rome by a band of brigands, who robbed the passengers, consisting of six English gentlemen and others, of everything they had about them. Gold, silver, and paper money—quite a heap—besides some gold and silver watches, and, among other things, a diamond ring of great value, belonging to one of the English gentlemen. The soldiers are on the track of the brigands already, and a heavy reward is offered to whosoever shall give such information as shall lead to their discovery.

"Poor Luigi! He says that he himself was robbed of his silver watch and paper money, amounting to forty pauls, all he possessed in the world. I do hope they'll catch the nasty wretches. I myself would see them executed. *Gesu Maria!* What hungry wolves! But I must be off now to tell all the people in the village, or else that horrid gossip Maria Giovanna will be before me, and I always like to be first."

So saying, she bounced out of the room, slamming the door after her, and we were left once more alone.

There was a pause, and my friend was the first to break silence. The thread of his ideas had been broken by the girl's sudden entry into the room with the startling

news, so he did not resume his discourse, but after a while observed:—

"I suppose you see in the wild tale of this girl a corroboration of the prisoner's statement, and a link in the chain of evidence."

"Well," said I, "it looks like it, does it not? The heaps of gold and silver, the paper money, the gold and silver watches, and, moreover, the diamond ring. It certainly looks as if the mystery were beginning to clear up."

"Softly, my friend, softly," rejoined the priest, who still grudged the event to natural causes. "Do not be rash in jumping at conclusions, for the evidence is not yet complete. Let us first satisfy ourselves that the girl's tale is true, for reports get wind about our village—one hardly knows how—without the least vestige of truth in them. I will speak to the *vetturino* myself, and if the tale prove true, or partly true—for, depend upon it, the story will have lost nothing in the telling—need it do away entirely with the miracle?"

"For instance, suppose instead of being a band of a dozen brigands, it should have been only one brigand, and that brigand your friend Antonio himself. That he alone, laden with his treasure, and being attracted by the light of a candle that he descried through the chinks of the church door, forced his way into the church to count over his booty. Supposing this to have been the case, the miracle may, nevertheless, have occurred precisely as related to me by the sacristan."

"You are very ingenious," said I, "in suggesting an improbability in order to support your miracle, but, if you recollect, the sacristan declared that he caught Antonio in the act of breaking open the alms-box."

"That may have been a mistake caused by the excited state of his mind on the occasion. However, I will see Luigi at once, and learn from his own lips the true state of the case, for I am as anxious to get at the truth as you are."

"Then let us lose no time in speaking to him at once," said I. "The weather is clearing up now, and as I have nothing better to do, I will accompany you in your stroll down to his house."

This was agreed on; so, putting on our hats, we found ourselves once more among the dirty streets, until we reached the house of the *vetturino*. Here we found him in front of his own door, surrounded by a crowd of eager peasants, who were listening with avidity to the recital of his adventures.

"*Buon giorno, Signor Arciprete,*" said Luigi, raising his hat as we approached.

"*Buon giorno, Luigi*," responded the arch-priest. "There is a strange tale current in the village about you and your passengers having been robbed on the high road. Can it be true."

"Perfectly true, Reverenza," was the reply. "Only the night before last we were assaulted by at least a dozen banditti armed to the teeth, and my passengers, six of whom were English gentlemen, along with myself."

"Stay," said the arch-priest. "You are perfectly sure there were a dozen of them?"

"A dozen at the very least, your Reverence, I could swear."

"Tell me," said the arch-priest, "did you see Antonio the prisoner amongst them."

"Antonio?" inquired the *vetturino*, in extreme surprise.

"Ay," replied the arch-priest. "He that hath been accused of robbing the church and is now at Gennazzano awaiting his trial. You will have heard the tale by this time."

"I certainly did hear a wonderful story, Reverenza, but did not know how far to credit it," replied the *vetturino*. "The night was very dark and I could recognise no faces."

"But, *Corpi di Bacco!* Antonio! Why I always considered Antonio as an honest man, a simple *vignauolo* who earned his bread by the sweat of his brow, and whom, for his steady plodding, the saints had awarded by granting him a better share of this world's goods than most of his fellows."

"Ay, ay," said several bystanders at once, "we all thought so, too, Signor Arciprete. Still, what we all saw with our own eyes, only yesterday morning, made us change our opinion."

The arch-priest looked thoughtful, and then enquired of Luigi if he knew anything of Peppe, the man who had been raised from the dead.

"Peppe!" exclaimed the *vetturino*, laughing, "ay, do I, and a greater rascal never walked God's earth. That is why I was so cautious in believing a story in which Peppe the goatherd was mixed up. I never yet heard any tale in which he figured but had some devilry at the bottom of it."

"You do not believe, then, in the miracle?"

"Not upon such testimony," replied Luigi. "I should believe *you*, Signor Arciprete, if you had seen it with your own eyes," he added, respectfully.

"All I can declare is," replied the priest, "that I saw the man Peppe, apparently dead, and decked out as a corpse, placed within the church upon his bier, and the morning after, as I entered the church to say mass, I saw him as alive as ever again, still in his shroud, and appearing to dispute the treasure with Antonio. As for the rest, it was communicated to me by Ricardo, my sacristan. Do you know Ricardo?"

"I do," replied Luigi, in a tone of deep meaning.

"Well," said the arch-priest, "what do you think of him?"

"Well, Signor Arciprete," said the *vetturino*, hesitatingly, "as he is your sacristan, perhaps you would not like to hear *what* I think of him."

"Speak out, man," said the arch-priest. "If I find him unworthy of his post, I shall discharge him. Come, now, what do you know about him?"

"Since your Reverence presses me," replied the *vetturino*, "I must confess that I have found him to be just such another scamp as Peppe the goatherd, if not worse, and, in spite of all his mock piety, I have found him to be as cunning a knave as I know for miles round. Grasping as an eagle, wily as a serpent, and withal as poor spirited as a hare, seeking to cover his knavery with the cloak of religion; imagining that no one can see through his hypocrisy."

"You surprise me," exclaimed the arch-priest; "but what proof have you of his knavery?"

"Well, in the first place," replied the *vetturino*, "he is in debt with almost every man in the village, myself among the number, and not in one instance has he been known to repay what he has borrowed. I have pressed him over and over again, but he always sneaks out of it by some lame excuse, even when I know he has been able to pay me. He wanted to marry my sister once, because he thought there was a little money to be had, but when he spoke to my mother about her dowry, and received for reply that she did not intend to give her daughter to one who sought her for her dowry, and that he who would marry her must support her himself, he very soon slunk off. Not that I'd have given my consent to such a scarecrow marrying my sister, even if he *had* been less grasping. Then, would you believe it, your Reverence, he actually had the impudence to insult my sister

when he encountered her alone, as he thought, in the campagna. He little knew that I was only a short distance behind. I came upon him unawares in time to overhear part of his impertinent conversation, and I gave him such a thrashing as will make him remember Luigi the *vetturino* as long as he lives.

"Then, there is no doubt that it was he who picked the pocket of poor old Matteo when he happened to be drunk; everybody believes that, besides several other dirty tricks that I will not weary your patience by relating, though I could if I would. As for cheating at cards, he is quite an adept, and yet, with all this, he walks with his eyes hypocritically fixed on the ground, counting his beads and crossing himself, as if he were a very saint. But he doesn't take *me* in, your Reverence, however he may impose on our simple peasantry, for when a man is a *vetturino*, he sees other towns besides his own, and gets to know people of all sorts. I have been in Rome, and have picked up a thing or two."

"Well, enough for the present, Luigi," said the arch-priest. "I will enquire into this matter; meanwhile I intend to take a stroll with this gentleman. Till we meet again," and he waved his hand to the *vetturino*.

"A rivederla, Signor Arciprete," responded Luigi, raising his hat respectfully.

"You see now," said I to my friend, as we strolled together from the narrow streets into one of the main roads, "that there is some evidence to support my view of the case. I never did think much of your sacristan; his face was enough for me, but after the evidence you have just heard, methinks you would do well to rid yourself of such an ornament to your church."

"It is odd," replied my friend, "that I never suspected him of being that sort of character. On the contrary, I thought him a most exemplary young man. It is not long ago since he informed me of his ardent desire to enter holy orders."

"A fine priest he'd make!" said I, laughing. "The church has no need of him, for there are too many of his sort among your priesthood already. Not that he wouldn't be popular," I added, soothingly. "On the contrary, he would be able to manufacture miracles by the cart-load, I warrant, in order to satisfy his flock's thirst for the marvellous. He would probably die in the odour of sanctity and be canonised after his death."

"My friend, my friend," said the arch-priest, gravely, "our church is not, as you think, rash in canonising a man a saint. Our lawsuits are extremely rigid, and long—so much so, that many a holy man has been rejected as a saint on account

of the insufficient evidence of his miracles."

Then he proceeded to enlarge upon the miracles of the saints of old and all the legendary lore of his religion, and thus he entertained me until we found ourselves once more at the door of his house.

"Signor Arciprete," said the aforementioned servant girl, whom we discovered on the threshold, conversing with an elderly peasant, "here is a man who wishes to speak to you in private. He says he has something to communicate."

"Show him into my study," said the arch-priest. "I suppose you do not mind my friend being present?" said he, addressing the man and glancing at me.

"No, Reverenza," said the peasant, shutting the door of the priest's study behind him, "it was only to bring you some information concerning the brigands."

"Ha!" exclaimed the arch-priest, pricking up his ears. "Proceed."

"Well, your Reverence," began the peasant, "hearing that a reward had been offered to anyone able to give such information as should lead to the discovery of the brigands, I thought I would make known what happened to me on the very night of the robbery, which I hope may prove of some use to the brigand-catchers.

"It was long past midnight when I was returning from Civitella, having purchased a hog there, which I was leading along by a string attached to its hind leg, when in the darkness I heard the sound of many voices, and upon listening attentively I recognised them as belonging to the brigands, into whose hands I had fallen twice before, and I began to be alarmed for my hog, which I made sure would be seized as a prize, and accordingly hid myself behind a tree until the whole band should have passed by. I was near enough to hear every word they said, but their voices seemed neither to grow louder nor to grow less.

"At length the moon breaking from behind a cloud, revealed to me the features of the brigand chief. He was standing erect whilst the rest of his band were squatting or lounging around him in a circle. He then proceeded to harangue them.

"I trembled from head to foot, and felt that my only chance of escaping observation was to continue rooted to the spot without disturbing the dead leaves that lay strewn at my feet, but the wretched animal, my companion, commenced grunting and squealing, as if purposely to mark my whereabouts, and I made

sure every moment that the brigands would be down upon us both.

"Hush!" I cried, coaxingly.

"Grunt," went the brute, louder than ever.

"Madonna mia Santissima!" I muttered, crossing myself, 'preserve a poor man and his pig from the depredations of these marauders!'

"I know not if our good lady vouchsafed to hear my prayer, but certain it was that the brigands paid no attention whatever to either of us, so engrossed did they all seem with the oration of their chief, every word of which fell distinctly on my ear in the stillness of the night, and I must own that the tenor of it surprised me, for instead of the profane oaths, fiendish laughter, or the planning of some new daring exploit, as I should have expected from such men, I now listened to a pious discourse, filled with godly phrases such as you, Signor Arciprete, might have used yourself from the pulpit. I think I can give you almost word for word the discourse as it ran.

"My comrades," he commenced, 'we have for many years toiled together in an arduous and perilous profession; at war with society, wresting from the innocent and good their hard-earned substance to supply our own wants, instead of getting our own livelihood honestly and by the sweat of our brow, as God hath decreed. Oppressed in our turn by the avengers of our victims, we are hunted like wolves, and have to take refuge from our pursuers in the most inaccessible parts of the mountains, in caves, in forests and such-like secret places.

"Rest has departed from our slumbers—for what man can rest in the fear that the vigilant myrmidons of the law with which he has lived at enmity are ever on his track?

"Like Ishmael, our hand is against every man, and every man's hand is against us. This is the lot of the brigand, as we all know. Born and bred in danger, nurtured from the breast, not with the milk of human kindness, but by the blood of his fellow men; his childish joys, the groans and sufferings of his mutilated victims; feasting on horrors from his earliest youth, unbridled and brutal in his appetites, his highest ambition through life to be a hardier ruffian than his father before him.

"Have we not, my friends, committed every sort of atrocity of which degraded humanity is capable? Nay, revelled in it, impiously defying that very God whom

we ought humbly and reverently to thank as the Author of our beings? Let each of us look back upon our past lives and ask ourselves how we have thanked Almighty God for his innumerable blessings.

""How have we repaid His ineffable love and care over us? Has it not been by subverting His wise laws, despising His holy ordinances, brutalising our natures, even to a degree lower than the very brutes themselves? My brethren, we may be powerful against the weak and against the law, yet there is One above us more powerful than ourselves, to Whom we shall all one day have to give an account. Let us fight no longer against God; for what is man when matched against Omnipotence. Deem it not cowardice, my friends, to relinquish a life of evil now that your souls have received the light of truth, but rather thank God for His infinite mercy in vouchsafing so great a miracle through His Holy Mother to save our souls from the bottomless pit.

""I confess that almost from my earliest youth I never have looked upon religion as aught but priest-craft, and scoffed at all miracles as tricks of the priesthood to impose upon the ignorant and simple; but what shall we say, my brethren, to the miracle we have all so lately witnessed, or how shall we attempt to explain it away? Was it not the intervention of the blessed Virgin herself to scare us—the impious desecraters of her holy Church—from our evil ways? Could anything short of Divine power have raised the dead at the lonely hour of midnight within the very church itself, and have struck such terror into us, the hardy sons of the mountains, who never yet quailed before mortal man?

""Tell me, my friends, if in all my wild life, in all our joint villainies and wicked enterprises, in the very face of death, if you have ever known me to lack courage before to-night?"

""Never, Capitano, never,' cried several voices at once. 'We know your courage to be undaunted, and that there is no mortal man that you stand in awe of; but when it comes to running counter to spirits raised from the dead, or devils from hell, that is quite another sort of thing, and a man need be the arch-fiend himself to be without fear.'

""Just so,' replied the brigand chief; 'then, since none of you are able to accuse me with a lack of human courage, you may know that my exhortation to you to repent and alter the course of your unholy lives is not the mere words of a craven soul who fears the law and seeks to shun the just penalty of his misdeeds, but those of a repentant sinner miraculously brought to conversion through the

intervention of the blessed Madonna, whom, in her boundless mercy, she had deigned to bring to a sense of his wickedness, even in the very midst of his crimes.

"Let us turn from our evil ways, oh, my comrades! Take the advice of a brother sinner, more deeply dyed in iniquity than any of yourselves, and repent ere it be too late! What can atone for all our past wickedness save the utter renouncement of our evil ways, a life of rigid penance and the entire devotion of ourselves to God? Marvel not, then, my comrades in wickedness, that you hear the man once your chief and foremost in wrong, exhort you to throw down your arms, divest yourselves of your trappings, and don the holy convent garb, in order that by a life of fasting and prayer you may endeavour to open up a communication with Heaven, and wrest your souls from the hands of the Devil. I myself will set you the example.

"As I have been the first to incite you to evil, so will I be the first to exhort you to repentance. Follow me, all ye that have a mind to save your souls. Yet I no longer command, but entreat you for your own good, for I aspire no longer to be your chief, but to live humbly as your fellow labourer in Christ, to whom be all honour and glory, now and for evermore. Amen.'

"As the chief brigand terminated his harangue the pale grey of the morning sky lighted up the faces of the whole band, so that I could now distinguish the features of each individual and the various expressions of their countenances. Several appeared deeply affected, with tears of repentance standing in their eyes, others sullen and obdurate. Some with a look of vacant astonishment, others scowling and suspicious, or with a suppressed grin.

"Their chief's harangue seemed to call for a reply, and there was a silence of some minutes, during which period the members of the band appeared debating among themselves by means of winking and nudging as to what their reply should be, and who should take it upon himself to speak for the rest. I observed that they looked towards a sturdy brigand, whom next to their chief they honoured with the deepest veneration. To him they turned as the mouthpiece of the gang, and seemed to intimate that they would abide by his decision.

"This man, who appeared wrapt in thought, finding himself thus appealed to, and feeling that he represented the sentiments of the whole band, at length addressed his chief in these words:—

"Signor Capitano, we are ready as ever to follow you to the very jaws of death,

according to our oath. We have served you long and faithfully in all your deeds of daring and crime, and we will not abandon you now in your change of sentiment, knowing, as we do, that you are still the same brave and generous man as ever, and as such will always remain, in whatever capacity, whether as the lawless brigand of the mountains, or as a holy monk in the retirement of the convent cell; therefore, in the presence of the whole band I repeat my former vows of fidelity and friendship, and reiterate my protestations of following you through life, to the utmost ends of the earth, if need be. The discipline of our monastic life will be merely the exchanging one life of hardships for another no less hard, therefore we cannot be charged with cowardice or idleness, since there are duties before us that will call forth all the courage and endurance of our natures.

"As for learning and psalm-singing, it has never been exactly my speciality; nevertheless, I quite agree with you, Captain, that the life we have been in the habit of leading for years past is not the best to suit us for Heaven, and I am not ashamed to say that I have long had qualms of conscience for my past misdeeds, and had resolved upon repentance at some future period, but never did I look back upon the past with such horror and remorse as at the present moment, having now been brought to a thorough knowledge of my crimes and of the bountiful mercy of our blessed Lady to us miserable sinners, as shown in the undoubted miracle that we all so clearly witnessed.

"After having received so great a proof of the blessed Virgin's love and care for us, would it not be the blackest ingratitude to continue in mortal sin? Would it not be the most egregious folly as well, after having had Divine warning to alter our lives, still to persist in preferring death and hell to the sublime promises held out to the good?

"Why longer delay, then, my friends? Think of your precious souls, and repent while there is still breath left in your bodies. It may not be long ere we shall be captured and executed. How shall we pass our last moments on earth, or how brook the vengeance of a just God with all our crimes upon our heads?

"Enough, then, of pusillanimous disbelief and impotent struggling against Divine will. Let us hasten to the nearest convent, confess our sins, then, with a clean breast and humble spirit, endeavour to atone for the past by a life of penitence and prayer, that we may fearlessly meet our end as men and Christians.'

"This exhortation was universally applauded, and as every man is governed by the public opinion of the little circle wherein he lives and moves, so even those who had shown themselves obdurate and suspicious felt themselves forced to yield to the overwhelming tide of changed opinion, feeling ashamed of being left in the minority.

"The chief, doffing his hat, fell upon his knees and thanked the Most High for his conversion and that of his whole band, in which prayer all the rest reverently joined. Then rising from their knees, but with heads still uncovered, they walked on towards the convent, singing an 'Ave Maria,' by the way.

"I did not know what to make of all this, for as yet I had heard nothing of the miracle, but I had hardly reached home safely with my pig, when I heard from almost every mouth in the village of the great miracle wrought on the night of the robbery."

The peasant having concluded his narrative, was dismissed with an assurance from the arch-priest that should his revelation lead to the capture of the brigands he would be duly rewarded. Nevertheless, he informed him that he was not the person to apply to, and that he should mention the affair to the authorities.

Being left once more alone with my friend, I asked him what he thought of the man's tale, and whether or no it corroborated the statements made by Luigi and Antonio. All three witnesses bore testimony to a plurality of brigands, which seemed to me completely to overthrow my worthy friend's hypothesis as to there being only one brigand.

I confess, though, I was still puzzled by the peasant's wonderful story. I could hardly bring myself to believe in the utter and simultaneous conversion of a whole band of brigands, even though they *had* been terrified and thwarted for a moment in their crimes by an apparent miracle, and yet what object could the man have had in inventing such a lie, knowing, as he must have done, that he was not entitled to the reward until after the capture of the brigands.

My friend the priest suggested that possibly he might have been fool enough to expect payment beforehand, and that he had concocted this fable on the strength of it. The man was simple enough, it is true, but there was an air of truth about the manner in which he told his tale that induced me to give credit to it, strange though it appeared.

In any case, I knew that the truth or falsity of the man's statement would soon be

made manifest, for the brigand-catchers, once sent off in the direction indicated by the peasant, would not fail to call at the convent and inquire if the brigands were taking shelter there, in which case the monks would be forced to deliver up their charge into the hands of justice. As it happened, the brigand-catchers had already started in search of their prey, though in quite an opposite direction.

But let us return to our landlady, who had been impatiently awaiting me, having now prepared my noon-day meal some time.

"The signor is late to-day," she said, as I entered. "I fear he will find the macaroni cold."

"No matter," I replied. "I have a good appetite, from having been very busy all the morning."

"The signor has been busy—yes? And yet I notice that he left all his painting tools at home," observed the landlady.

"True, my good woman," I replied. "The morning being rainy, I was prevented from painting out-of-doors, but I have been very busy, nevertheless."

"Indeed, Signor," she exclaimed, "what could have occupied you so much as to forget your dinner, if I may be permitted to ask?"

I expected this question, knowing that my hostess inherited the vice of curiosity, in common with the rest of her sex, in a marked degree.

"How was I occupied?" I repeated. "Why, how else than by searching to the bottom that confounded miracle you were so full of all yesterday and the day before."

"Oh, Signor, how you talk!" exclaimed my hostess, horrified. "What! do you mean to say that the Blessed Virgin has not wrought among us the greatest miracle ever heard of in these parts?"

"Well, if this is one of the greatest," I replied, "I should advise her to give up miracles for the future, for she is no hand at them."

"How say you, Signor?" cried the landlady, shocked at my levity, and crossing herself again and again. "Oh, you Protestants believe in nothing! What! Is it not a great miracle to raise the dead?"

"It would be, if it were true," I interrupted.

"If it were true!" she repeated. "How should it not be true? Have you not heard that the arch-priest himself believes it, that all the village believes it, that the good Ricardo the sacristan was an eye-witness of the miracle?"

"I must have better testimony than his in order to believe in the miraculous character of the story you related to me. However, I have since looked into the case myself and find it to be a gross piece of imposture."

"*Imposture!*" cried the hostess. "Impossible! Who has been imposing—his reverence, perhaps?"

"No," I said; "the arch-priest was only one of the dupes. His rascal of a sacristan was at the bottom of all the mischief. That scoundrel Peppe, too, was another prominent actor in the farce."

"What do I hear?" exclaimed my landlady; "the pious Ricardo and the holy Peppe called 'rascal' and 'scoundrel.' You surely mistake their characters."

"We are all liable to make mistakes sometimes," said I; "but I will hope, for their own sakes, that they are not as black as they appear."

"You mystify me, Signor," she replied; "but I am sure you must be labouring under a gross mistake, for as a proof of Peppe's being a holy man, he has been doing nothing but miracles since he was raised from the dead."

"What is that you say?" cried I, pricking up my ears.

"Why, Signor, you must know that as soon as Peppe left the church on the morning of the miracle he was followed by a great crowd of the faithful."

"Of the curious and the idle, you mean," I observed, interrupting her. "Well, proceed."

"Who followed him to the door of his house," she continued; "and as divers of them were labouring under sore diseases, they besought him to touch them that they might be healed. Well, very many of them went away cured; others, he said, he was unable to cure on account of their want of faith."

"The artful dog!" said I, smiling. "Now, I'll be bound to say he made all those who imagined themselves cured pay him well."

"Oh, they all gave him something, of course, from a *baiocco* upwards, according to their means. They tell me the worthy man has made a heap of money by his

miraculous touch."

"Miraculous humbug!" I exclaimed, half-amused and half-angry at the success of such a vagabond.

"*Humbug!* say you still?" cried my hostess. "How can it be humbug, if he really *has* cured the sick?"

"Come now," said I; "perhaps you will oblige me with a list of the diseases that this new saint professes to have cured."

"Willingly," she replied.

"In the first case, there is old Margherita, who lives at the bottom of the dell, and has been suffering much from nervous headaches; he but touched her forehead, and she walked away declaring herself cured. Then there was poor old Carluccio, who goes about begging from one place to another. He suffered much from rheumatism; but having been touched by Peppe on the parts affected, he immediately pronounced himself much better, if not quite cured. Then the girl Lucia, who lives half-way down the hill, and who used to suffer from the jumps, she likewise has not complained since. Then, again, Pietro, the vignauolo, who was suffering from stomach-ache, felt himself considerably better some few hours after he had been touched by Peppe. Brigida, the daughter of old Angeluccio, has for some time been the victim of a deep melancholy. Since she received the magic touch she has done nothing but laugh and sing, Giacomuccio, the idiot boy, complained of loss of appetite, but after Peppe had touched him he went home and ate up all the *maritozza* in the house. Then the number of children he has cured is something fabulous; at least, so their parents say."

"Well, well, my good woman," said I; "but these are all trifles. Can you give me no great cure that he has effected, such as giving sight to the blind, causing the lame to walk, the dumb to speak, the deaf to hear, and the like?"

"One blind man came to be cured," replied my hostess; "but he, so Peppe said, had not sufficient faith, so of course no cure could be effected. It was the same with a cripple who had a withered arm, a man who had the small-pox, as well as several others. He said he could do nothing with them, as they were wanting in faith."

"I thought as much," said I. "All those whom he could not induce to believe were cured, he sent away as not having sufficient faith—the wily rascal! Now, my

good woman, I really *do* wonder at your placing faith in such trash. If you knew as much about Peppe's character as I do, you would very soon cease to look upon him as a saint. Besides, what are the diseases you tell me he has cured? Headaches, jumps, nervousness, low spirits, want of appetite, etc.—trifles all of them.

"He was supposed by all to have been miraculously raised from the dead, and they therefore concluded that he must have been a holy man, for such a miracle ever to have been wrought upon him, and being so esteemed, they at once jumped at the conclusion that he was gifted with power to work miracles. Accordingly, all the scum of the village turns out and follows him, placing implicit faith in his power to cure them of their half imaginary complaints. They receive his touch, pay their money, and their imagination worked upon, they fancy themselves healed. This is the secret of all his boasted success, for you say yourself that in all those cases that were worth healing he signally failed."

"Be that as it may, Signor," replied the woman, "you will hardly pretend to account for the miracle wrought upon Peppe himself in that manner. How could a man be raised from the dead by imagination? I don't see how."

"You don't? Then I will tell you; listen."

I here proceeded to retail the account of Peppe's feigned decease in order to escape paying his debt of three pauls; the entrance of the brigands into the church with the spoil, since proved to have been robbed from six English travellers and others who were making their way towards Rome on that very night; the dividing of the spoil upon the altar, and the diamond ring that remained over, with which one of the brigands dexterously succeeded in startling Peppe out of the sleep into which he had fallen, by hitting him on the nose, and finally, the confusion of the brigands at the sight of what they supposed to be a resuscitated corpse.

I also related how they had abandoned the treasure in their flight, and how Peppe, taking advantage of his position, proceeded to gather together the said treasure, intending to keep it all for himself. How Antonio at this moment burst from his hiding place in the confessional, whither he had resorted in order to satisfy himself whether his friend's death were genuine or spurious. How both of them disputed the treasure, how they agreed to divide it equally, and how the diamond ring became a bone of contention. How they were surprised by the sacristan early the next morning. The sacristan's avarice, revenge, and hypocrisy.

I dilated on the story, not omitting the minutest particular, and winding up with the subsequent conversion of the brigands, and letting her know upon what authority I had come to the knowledge of these facts.

The discomfiture of my hostess at hearing her darling miracle explained away by natural causes, and those, too, of so ridiculous a nature, was truly pitiable. I believe, in her heart, she wished that I had never put up at her inn, so that I might not have dispelled the sweet illusion.

Not many days after my hostess had become convinced of the spuriousness of her once cherished miracle, the brigand-catchers returned after their fruitless search, but being put upon the right scent immediately on their return, they set off at once to the convent, where they commanded the monks, in the name of the law, to deliver up the prisoners. It was, however, too late. The brigands in the meantime had written a full confession of their crime to the Pope, with an account of the miracle and of their sudden determination, in consequence, of leading holy lives for the future, and had received from His Holiness pardon and absolution, on condition that they should follow out their virtuous intentions.

The document, with the pontifical seal affixed to it, was placed into the hands of these emissaries of the law, who had now nothing to do but to retire. The brigands had been transformed into monks; so far no one had anything to say but the six English travellers, the victims in the late robbery, and who had lost no time on their arrival in Rome in informing the government of their loss, and urging the immediate capture of the brigands; having heard of the extraordinary turn the affair had taken, now impatiently demanded their money back.

Believers in the late miracle now grew scarcer and scarcer every day, the eyes of the most obstinate being now open to conviction by overwhelming evidence. Peppe had lost his prestige as a saint, and the headaches, jumps, fits of melancholy, loss of appetite, and other small evils of which his patients had thought themselves miraculously cured, came back again as before to the indignant faithful, who, armed, in a body laid siege to the house of the "soi-disant" saint, vowing to burn his dwelling over his head, if he refused to give back to each the money that under false pretences he had extorted.

There is no knowing what an infuriated Italian mob may not be guilty of perpetrating in the height of its fury; but let its rage be once drawn aside by some novel excitement or emotion, its fury will evaporate, expending its force through another channel. It might have gone hard with Peppe, if a trifling incident had

not served to avert the fury of the mob when at its climax. This was the arrival of the diligence with the six Englishmen, whose pecuniary losses we have before alluded to, and who have arrived to claim their money from the arch-priest.

Trifling as this incident was, it proved sufficient to induce the inhabitants of this sequestered village to abandon their purpose, and their curiosity now being raised to its height, they relinquished their victim for a time, in order to have a good stare at the six illustrious strangers who had fallen a prey to the brigands, while Peppe, taking advantage of the general confusion, made his escape from the back door of his hut, and was soon lost to view in the thick grove of olive trees that flanked the slopes of the hill.

My story now draws towards a close. The money was returned to the owners, who were received with courtesy by the arch-priest, from whose very lips they heard a detailed account of the late miracle, and so delighted were they with the simplicity and urbanity of their new acquaintance, that they each made him a handsome present out of the money restored to them, for the benefit of his church, and perhaps as a slight compensation for the dissatisfaction he must have felt at the miracle not proving genuine.

The diamond ring likewise fell to the lot of the arch-priest, with the full permission from the donor to dispose of it as he might think fit, and after an exchange of compliments and civilities, the Englishmen took their departure.

The duplicity and avarice of the sacristan having now fairly come to light, he was dismissed, and another chosen to supply his place. Meanwhile the trial of Antonio was going on in the township of Gennazzano. Being summoned to appear as a witness, I was forced to go, and had the satisfaction of being mainly instrumental in the acquittal of my friend, who returned to his native village, where on his arrival he was carried in triumph over the heads of the cheering populace.

The sum presented to the arch-priest, together with the diamond ring, which had been taken to Rome to be estimated and converted into money, was expended by our pastor in alleviating the sufferings of the poor amongst his flock, after which there remained a surplus sufficient to purchase two silver candlesticks for the altar of San Rocco, the protecting saint of the village.

Peppe had judiciously hidden himself in the mountains until the fury of his patients had considerably abated, but Antonio discovering him one day, renewed his claim to the three pauls. I forget the excuse he made on this occasion, but I

know for a certainty that the debt was never repaid during the whole of my stay in that part of the country.

Some months passed over without anything worthy of record, but the sequel of this narrative is to come. A friar, unknown to the inhabitants of our village, appeared one Sunday morning to perform mass in the Church of San Rocco. His shaven crown, bronzed skin, and high aquiline features made him an object of intense veneration among the devout congregation, as being unmistakable signs of a pure and austere life. He was a man of middle age, tall, and well knit, his beard on the verge of turning grey. The features were worn, but energetic, yet a physiognomist might have observed that the eyes were somewhat small in comparison with the rest of the face and moved rather too rapidly and furtively from left to right than was strictly necessary to complete the physiognomy of one whose life had been completely devoted to religious contemplation. His arrival had created a sensation in the village, and many who had never confessed from one year's end to the other, impelled by curiosity, flocked to the church that day to confess to the stranger monk, imagining, no doubt, that the absolution of one from afar and unknown in the villages was more valid than that of the arch-priest or any more familiar prelate.

Familiarity breeds contempt, as we all know, therefore we so often find that Roman Catholics prefer confessing to some priest or friar that they meet for the first time, and are not likely to meet again, rather than to their parish priest, to whom the most secret thought of their inner lives is already known.

Among those who flocked to confess to the stranger monk, whose majestic bearing had impressed everyone with his sanctity, were our two friends Antonio and Peppe, who, having neither of them confessed for a very long time, sought this opportunity of disburdening their souls of those sins they were ashamed of confessing to a priest of their own native village.

Antonio, to whom I am indebted for the sequel of this tale, declared to me that he experienced a thrill he was unable to account for as the friar entered the confessional; but setting this down to nervousness at not having confessed for so long, he endeavoured to concentrate his thoughts, and began what is called a "general confession," commencing with the sins of his earliest childhood down to those of recent date.

Fancying that he might have been guilty of avarice in pressing too hardly on his friend for the debt of the three pauls and of sacrilege in having hidden all night

in the confessional, and afterwards quarrelling with his friend over the treasure within the very church itself, it occurred to him to relate the whole circumstance to the father confessor, not omitting the entry of the brigands and their subsequent fright at what they supposed to be the sudden resurrection of one from the dead.

Now, Antonio during the whole of this confession had his eyes fixed upon the countenance of his confessor, which he could see distinctly through the grating. It struck him from the first that the features of the monk were familiar to him, yet he could not call to mind where or under what circumstances he had seen them before. He had been racking his brain for some time past in order to recollect where he had ever met him, but to no purpose.

He observed that when he began enumerating all the peccadilloes of his early years the confessor evinced the utmost indifference, yawning every now and then, and not deigning a reply; but as soon as he began to talk about the miracle and the treasure abandoned by the brigands in their fright, he immediately pricked up his ears and changed colour.

"Eh, what?" he cried, suddenly waking out of a doze. "Just oblige me by beginning that again, will you?"

Antonio, though somewhat surprised at the monk's abrupt change of manner, nevertheless set it down to the natural interest that so extraordinary a tale inspired, and recommenced his story, detailing nicely every circumstance, especially the feigned death of Peppe; with an exact description of his own feelings at the time.

Now it happened that Peppe, being in church, and seeing his friend on his knees at the confessional, thought he could do no less than confess likewise, so, falling on his knees on the opposite side to his friend, he prepared to pour out his soul through the opposite grating, into the left ear of the father confessor, as soon as his friend should have risen from his knees.

Antonio at length having finished, and received absolution, remained a moment or two in prayer, whilst Peppe took his turn. Whatever the subject of Peppe's confession might have been, it had an extraordinary effect upon the monk. He became visibly agitated, and the muscles of his face twitched nervously.

"Then it wasn't a miracle, after all," he gasped, throwing himself back, while something strongly resembling an oath rose to his lips, but was instantly stifled.

His bronzed features had become livid, and hastily giving his absolution, he hurried from the confessional.

Our two friends had remained behind the rest of the congregation, and on rising from their knees and finding themselves alone in the church, each advanced towards the other in a spirit of Christian forgiveness, and shook his friend warmly by the hand, the subject of the three pauls being dropped on this occasion.

"By the way, Peppe," said Antonio, after a short interchange of genial conversation, "did you ever set eyes on that confessor before, think you?"

"Well, now you mention it, friend Antonio, his features *do* seem familiar to me, yet I can't call to mind where I have seen him," answered Peppe.

"Ah!" suddenly ejaculated Antonio, "I have it. If that monk is not the head brigand whom you so miraculously scared away by rising from the dead, may I be—shot."

"*Per Baccounaccio!* friend Antonio, you're right," exclaimed his friend; "it *is* the very same. I thought I knew him all the while. Well this is strange; and we have been confessing to a brigand chief!"

"True," said Antonio; "but of course you have heard that in consequence of the supposed miracle, he and the rest of his band became converted and took holy vows, having received a full pardon from the Pope for their past misdeeds. He now performs mass, and therefore his absolution is worth just as much as that of any other ecclesiastic."

"Yes, yes; I've no doubt," replied Peppe; "but, I say, Anthony, if you had but noticed how uncommonly interested he became in the middle of my confession! That was because I confessed to him the trick I played upon you, old friend, that night. You remember, eh? Ha! ha! Well, as soon as I began to talk about jumping up from the dead, and how the brigands scampered away helter-skelter, leaving their treasure behind them in their flight, I noticed him change colour, and he grew impatient to know more. I thought it strange that he should appear to take such interest in the matter. Now I can account for his look of remorse that puzzled me so before. He is angry with himself at being frightened into turning monk by a sham miracle."

"I, too, noticed the very same thing, friend Peppe," said Antonio, "when I

likewise confessed the same story. I'll lay my life that he now repents him of having turned monk. Perhaps he suspected that we recognised him, and that was the reason he hastened away so after confession. I wonder where he is now?"

The mysterious monk had disappeared; so had the two silver candlesticks on the altar. Extraordinary coincidence! Had they also vanished by a miracle?

They were on the altar when our two friends went to confess, as both of them declared. Perhaps the new sacristan had taken them away to clean after the departure of the congregation.

No; the sacristan was questioned, he knew naught but that they were still on the altar. The affair caused much gossip and surmise, and much time was lost in loud talking and angry gesticulations. The arch-priest at length appeared on the spot, and our two friends Antonio and Peppe communicated to him their suspicions—viz., that the unknown friar, whom both of them recognised to be no other than the brigand chief himself, had purloined the silver candlesticks immediately after confession, and made his escape into the mountains. Search was now made for the thief, but the day was already far spent and the monk had had ample time to reach the convent before his pursuers thought of going in search of him.

On the following day the arch-priest called at the convent in person, acquainted the monks there with his loss, and stated his suspicions. He was informed by them that the band of brigands who had only lately become converted and had entered their order, and who, up to the present time, had shown themselves most exemplary in conduct, to the great surprise of their brother monks, had suddenly decamped in the dead of night, no one knew how. They had evidently resumed their former profession, as they had left their cassocks behind them, and their arms, which had been hung up in the chapel as trophies of their conversion, had been removed.

The affair of the silver candlesticks was unknown to the rest of the order, but shortly afterwards a silversmith in Rome, to whose shop a handsome pair of silver candlesticks was brought for sale, having some scruples at receiving stolen goods, and distrusting much the appearance of the person who brought them, sent secretly to the police, who took in charge the suspected party. Now it happened about that time in the vicinity of Rome, that a certain band of brigands had been guilty of the most fearful outrages. The police were already on their track, and the capture of the suspected vendor of stolen goods subsequently led to the discovery of the whole band, which was soon identified as the same which

had once received the Pope's pardon and had entered into holy orders. They were accordingly tried, condemned, and executed on the summit of the fort of St. Angelo, which is built on the ruins of the ancient tomb of Hadrian, on the banks of the Tiber.



By the time our artist had finished his story, and received Helen's warm eulogium on the same, the sitting had already come to an end. Dame Hearty now knocked at the door to ask if her daughter could be spared, as she found that she really could not go through her household duties without her.

"Just one moment," said McGulp; "there, Helen, just place yourself once more as you were, and I shall have finished with you for the day. Just one more touch."

The artist then began working rapidly for some ten minutes, as if his life were at stake, when suddenly throwing himself back in his chair, as if exhausted after some stupendous effort, he exclaimed: "There now!"

These magical words were the signal for Helen's liberation, and now both mother and daughter placed themselves behind the artist's chair and proceeded to criticise his work.

"Oh my! what a love of a pictur'!" exclaimed Dame Hearty; "and how exactly like our Helen. Oh, if ever! Well I never! I do declare," etc.

"And how you have improved it this sitting! Why, last time I thought there was no more to do to it, but now it is life itself."

"You flatter me, Helen," said McGilp; "for I assure you that the portrait is still in a most crude and unfinished state."

"How say you?—still unfinished?" cried Helen. "Well, if you go on at that rate, by next sitting I shall expect to hear it speak."

"Come, Helen," said her mother, "we must be off, for we have no time to lose. Another time, when we have less to do, I shall be most happy to let you assist the gentleman to finish his pictur'," and curtseying to McGilp, she led her daughter out of the room, while the painter was left to the uninspired operations of cleaning his palette and brushes, and putting his studio in order previous to joining the other members of the club.

FOOTNOTES:

[7] A paul is half a franc.

[8] A corruption of the word *compare* (godfather) which is used as a familiar appellation among the peasantry, even when no such relations exists between them.

[9] Painsi, the grade between a peasant and a gentleman.

[10] A sort of pudding made of chestnut flour.

[11] A species of cake made of Indian corn, used much among the Italian peasantry, being cheaper than bread.

[12] A paul is half a franc, and equal to five pence.

[13] Padrone, master.

[14] Oh, my holy souls of Purgatory!

[15] Body of St. Anthony of Padua!

[16] A corruption of per Cristo.

[17] It is the custom in Roman Catholic countries for the dead to be exposed in the centre of the church for twenty-four hours upon a bier, with a candle burning.

[18] To your Lordship.

[19] A halfpenny.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WAXEN IMAGE.—THE HOSTESS'S STORY.

We have alluded before the commencement of our late story to a clapping of hands proceeding from the club-room, announcing the termination of some tale from our hostess.

It will be remembered that the tale of our landlady had come to an end previous to the commencement of our artist's narrative. Let us entreat our reader, then, to take a retrospect glance, and imagine himself seated in the club-room, in the company of its worthy members and our buxom hostess, whilst the painter was deeply absorbed in his portrait of the fair Helen.

Dame Hearty, after continued pressing, and some diffidence on her part, seemed finally to be collecting her ideas, which process was performed by casting down her eyes and toying with the corners of her apron; then as if suddenly inspired, she abruptly smoothed down her apron on her lap, and dovetailing the fingers of each ruddy hand within those of the other, she hemmed once or twice and proceeded in the following strain.

When I was a girl, gentlemen, about the age of my Helen, I was just such another as she, though I dare say you would hardly believe it, to look at me now; but ask my good man and he'll tell you the same. Look at my Helen, and you will see what your humble servant was at her age. I had the same rosy cheeks, like two ripe apples, the same laughing blue eyes and sunny hair, and as for spirits, why, Lord bless you, the dear child ain't nothing to what her mother was at her age.

Well, gentlemen, I was always for gaming and romping, and folks would say that there wasn't a lass like Molly Sykes for miles round. In fact, I used to be called the pride of the village, though I say it, that shouldn't. At the time I speak of, I was at the village school, and there was hardly a young man in the village that did not come a courtin' after me, but I paid no attention to none of them, as I had been attached from childhood to my Jack, then a spruce lad of some eighteen summers, but I laughed and joked with all, so I was always popular.

The only school friend I ever had was a young girl about my own age—an orphan, one Claribel Falkland, of an extremely delicate and sensitive nature, the sweetest temper in the world, and of a beauty which in my heart I felt surpassed my own, for it was more the beauty of a high-born lady. I see before me now her pale oval face with her large lustrous hazel eyes, her smooth dark nut-brown hair, and her slim graceful figure which seemed to glide rather than walk about. I recollect, too, her low soft voice that had music in the very tone of it, and her sweet look radiant with the innocence of her heart. I know not how two beings of such opposite temperaments should ever have become such fast friends, for Claribel was pensive and melancholy, and of a studious turn, poring over every book she could get hold of, whilst I, on the contrary, was a perfect hoyden, always laughing and playing the fool when I ought to have been at work.

However strange it may appear, it is certain that a sympathy stronger than that generally found between two sisters grew up between us. But let me pass on to describe certain peculiarities in the constitution of my young school friend. In the first place, she had been from childhood a sleep walker, a phenomenon that I soon discovered, for poor Claribel being an orphan and having no home of her own, used to live with us, and we two always slept together.

At first this peculiarity gave me no little alarm, as she would often rise in the middle of the night, light a candle and wander all over the house, and I was afraid that some night she would set the house on fire.

However, no accident ever occurred, and to my surprise I found that she seemed just as cautious in her sleep as if she had been in her waking state, always shading the flame with her hand and using such extreme caution when passing near the curtains or anything else at all likely to catch fire, that I used to doubt sometimes if she really could be asleep.

Being warned by the doctor never to address her or touch her whilst in this state, lest the shock should be too great for her, I, at first, used to follow her with my eyes about the room, and if she left the chamber, I generally used to rise and follow softly after, at some distance, lest an accident should befall her. But finding soon that she was just as certain of her footing in her sleep as in her waking moments, I began to abandon my fears, and thought no more of this peculiarity.

Indeed, as she was in the habit of rising every other night, I soon felt far too sleepy to trouble myself about her. But soon this strange power in her began to

develop itself, and to take a stranger and more interesting form.

She would now get up at night, sit herself down at a table, take pen, ink, and paper, and fill sheet after sheet with close writing and elegant composition. This was particularly the case if she had left a task uncompleted during the day. In the morning it was sure to be found finished, and generally better done than if it had been accomplished during her hours of waking; nor was she herself conscious of it until she examined her exercise the next morning.

If I perchance should have an uncompleted task on hand, she would invariably finish mine before her own. But this phenomenon in my young friend, however strange and unaccountable it may seem, sinks into utter insignificance before a far more terrible one which I am now about to describe.

You may think I exaggerate, gentlemen, or that it was the effect of my own overwrought fancy, produced by sleepless nights of watching over my young friend, but there are witnesses living yet who saw what I saw, and who are ready to give their testimony. The doctor of this village, together with his assistant, the rector, and two women living close by, are among these I speak of, besides others. Let them speak for themselves if you will not believe my word.

The phenomenon to which I have above alluded was the power, if I may so call it, of dividing herself in two, or becoming two separate beings; that is to say, of making a duplicate of herself. This extraordinary and fearful gift had evidently been noticed by others before it fell under my own observation, since for a long time previous to seeing it myself it was reported throughout the village that Claribel Falkland had appeared in two places at the same time.

To this, however, as to all other village gossip, I paid no attention, knowing well how trifles get exaggerated after passing through many mouths, and how sometimes reports are circulated without an atom of truth for their foundation. I can only tell you, however, gentlemen, what I saw with my own eyes, believe it, or not, as you will. One morning, then, after returning home from school, Claribel having been unable to attend from some slight indisposition, I entered the room suddenly where my friend was seated. I remember, too, that I had never felt in better health in all my life, when there, to my utter consternation, was not only my friend, seated as was her wont, in an easy chair, with her head resting on her hand, but another figure, the exact counterpart of herself, a duplicate Claribel, leaning over the back of her arm-chair, exactly in the same position as my friend happened to be at the time.

I remained at the door, my eyes and mouth wide open, in mute horror, unable to advance a step or utter an exclamation, until my friend, looking up and inquiring the reason of my surprise, the figure behind the chair instantly vanished. I then proceeded to relate to her the vision, which she, however, smiled at and affected to treat as a temporary delusion on my part, the result of indigestion or disordered state of my nerves. I persisted that I was in the most perfect health, and that I had seen what I chose to style her "double."

She declared to me that she herself had not been conscious of it, and that, therefore, whatever I might say to the contrary, it *was* a delusion. She answered even with some irritability—very unusual to her—which made me think that she had long been aware of this phenomenon in herself, but wished to keep it secret from others.

Seeing she was displeased, I said no more, and half persuaded myself that I had been deluded by my senses. She had been living with us for some time previous to the first appearance of the spectre, but after this first visit the apparition repeatedly presented itself, often as many as five or six times in the same day, though sometimes disappearing for a week or a month, and then returning. I observed that the figure always appeared clearer and more defined the more my friend appeared absorbed in some favourite occupation, or when in a deep reverie. In whatsoever way she happened to be occupied, whether in reading, writing, reckoning, or in earnest conversation, the spectre would instantly appear behind her, imitating her every movement with the precision of a looking-glass.

Of course, this peculiarity in her constitution caused no slight terror to myself, as well as to my father, who was then alive, and some intimate friends; yet after a time, finding that the visits of the apparition boded no harm, and getting accustomed to the same, we hailed our spiritual visitant as a welcome guest, cracking jokes in its presence, and even addressing it with so little appearance of reverence, that had it not been a very good-tempered spectre, it must have resented our rudeness. But the double never showed any resentment, unless treating us all with silent contempt may be considered as resentment. Indeed, it had never been once known to utter a sound; neither did it appear to be conscious of our presence.

I remember on one occasion, for a frolic, throwing a heavy book at its head, but this had no further effect than to disturb for a moment the luminous ether of which the spectre appeared composed, and which speedily re-settled itself, while the phantom seemed unconscious of having received injury or insult of any kind.

The book passed through its head as if it had been air or smoke, and fell to the ground. I was bold enough once to walk up to it and take it by the arm, and found to my surprise, that there was a slight resistance, like that of muslin or crape, but it melted within my grasp, and I noticed that wherever I placed my hand, that that part of the figure was instantly wanting, and did not right itself until I withdrew my touch.

Sometimes the whole figure would disappear if I came within two paces of it, and it was not always of the same consistency, being sometimes less palpable than at others. This I observed to be dependent upon the greater or less absorption of my friend in her occupation or reverie. It is also remarkable that the more clearly defined and life-like the phantom appeared, the more exhausted and haggard grew my friend, and *vice versa*.

But I must now return to the second visit of our spiritual companion.

You may well imagine my terror and consternation at its first appearance, yet when the first shock had passed over, I should probably never have related the vision to a single soul, and set down everything to hallucination, had I not shortly after caught a second glimpse of the spectre. This time my friend and I happened to be playing chess together, when, whilst waiting for her to move, I distinctly saw the double leaning over her chair, as if in the act of assisting her in the game.

"Look, Claribel," I cried; "there it is again, you can't deny it this time," whereupon the figure instantly disappeared.

Now, as my friend still persisted that it was nothing more than my delusion, I began to be alarmed for my own health, and acquainted my father with what I had seen. He, too, laughed at me, and called it a silly girlish fancy, but said no more until I had seen it again three or four times, going immediately to my father each time after the vision had presented itself, and describing to him exactly the attitude and the gestures of the apparition on each successive visit.

Then my father became alarmed for the state of my health, and a doctor was sent for, that I might be bled. But on the doctor's arrival, he could detect nothing wrong with me; but just to satisfy my father, ordered me a little harmless physic, and took his departure. Believing that whether the doctor perceived it or not, that I must really be in a very bad state, I took all his medicine in regular doses, and at the times prescribed, carrying out his injunctions to the letter.

Nevertheless, the vision continued, appearing several times a day, and remaining sometimes almost half the day at a visit. Upon hearing all this, my father called for the doctor again, and positively insisted on my being bled this time. I remember that I was averse to the operation, never having undergone it before, and imagining that the pain would be much greater than I found it in reality. I therefore begged—finding my father so determined—that my friend might be present during the operation to give me courage.

This was assented to, and my friend was called into the parlour, looking pale and trembling, as if she fancied herself guilty of the pain about to be inflicted on me. She remained stationary in front of me, with a look of sweet commiseration in her face, but without uttering a word.

Once or twice I thought she was going to speak, but she checked herself, and then I noticed a struggle going on within her, as if she would have said, "Ought I not to prevent this operation, and openly confess that what my friend has seen, is not an hallucination, but a reality; a phenomenon belonging to my constitution? But, no; I dare not."

This was how I read the expression of her face. However, the operation passed over with far less pain than I had expected, when, oh, wonderful! on looking up again at the face of my friend, who was standing motionless as a statue, I perceived once more her double, not this time as usual, standing behind her and imitating her attitude, but pacing up and down the room with rapid steps and wringing her hands, as if in despair.

Feeling somewhat weak from loss of blood, I forbore to cry out, but my wild looks attracted the attention of my father and the doctor to the spot my eyes were fixed upon, when, following the direction of my eyes, both suddenly started in extreme terror, such as I have never seen expressed before or since upon the faces of any two of the stronger sex.

The doctor halted in tying on the bandage, and trembled like an aspen, while my father staggered and fell against the wall. For some minutes not a word was spoken, when my friend probably guessing the cause of our alarm, suddenly turned her head in the direction of their gaze, when the apparition instantly vanished. Each looked at the other, and the doctor declared that such a case had never before occurred in all his experience, nor would he have believed it had he had other testimony than that of his own eyes.

My friend then, her eyes filled with tears, begged of us all present to keep the

matter a secret, and not to publish it throughout the village. Upon being questioned concerning the phenomenon, it appeared that what we had all seen was a reality, having as she alleged been seen by others before. She said that she was not conscious of its presence, save by the looks of consternation she saw depicted on the faces of others; that she had no control over the apparition, as it would appear and disappear without her knowledge, and that she had never seen it herself but once—in the looking-glass—when it caused her such a preternatural horror that she never afterwards used a looking-glass without a shudder.

This phenomenon in her nature, moreover, made her very unhappy, as on this account people used to shun her, considering the apparition as the work of the Evil One, and deeming her guilty of some fearful crime, for such a judgment ever to be permitted to persecute her.

The doctor and my father, their first surprise once over, attempted to console her, assuring her that they neither of them conceived her capable of anything like a crime, recommending her to keep quiet and not to worry herself on that account.

The doctor, to console her, further promised to keep her secret; but, in spite of his earnest assurances that he would not breathe a word of it to mortal man, a pamphlet appeared shortly afterwards in the doctor's own name, announcing a new form of contagious nervous disease, in which the visual organs of a healthy individual might become so affected by contact with a person suffering from hallucinations as to cause him to see or fancy he sees the object reflected on the retina of the patient by his diseased imagination. An instance of this was given as having occurred in the village, and though the names of the parties concerned were not given in full, the neighbours had no doubt as to whom was meant by C — F —.

The pamphlet made some stir at the time, and poor Claribel, my bashful and retiring friend, found herself made the lion of the season, and pestered past all endurance by anxious inquiries and impertinent visits from strangers, who came from far, hoping to have their curiosity gratified by a re-appearance of the spectre. If such was their object in calling, and it undoubtedly was, they one and all of them went away terribly disappointed, for not in one single case did the apparition vouchsafe to manifest itself.

Nevertheless, these continued visits from strangers to one so shy and retired as my friend, made her excessively nervous, and were beginning to undermine her

health, which, the doctor perceiving, he gave instant orders that she should receive no visits but those of her most intimate friends.

Visitors still continued to call for some little time afterwards, but were refused admittance on the plea of my friend's delicate health, and their visits grew fewer and farther between, till at length they ceased altogether, and Claribel's health began to improve.

As everything has an end, even the gossip of a little village, so in time people grew tired, both of hearing or retailing what they had heard and retailed so often before, till at length nobody believed a word about the apparition; and because they could not explain the cause of the phenomenon, hushed their minds to sleep by calling it imposture, delusion, ignorant credulity, and the like.

The ghost had never appeared to them or to those who had taken so much trouble as to come from afar on purpose to see it, and the deduction was that as the spirit had refused to manifest itself to such respectable people as these, it was not likely that it had ever vouchsafed to make its appearance to anyone, so the affair was settled.

Time rolled on, and both my friend and I were promoted from pupils to teachers in our school. The gossip of the village had long ceased; in fact, Claribel's spiritual tormentor had discontinued its visits now for so long that she began to hope that they had ceased for ever.

Claribel was now fast ripening into womanhood, and found herself no longer shunned and whispered about as a person guilty of some horrible crime which had called down the just vengeance of Heaven upon her, but passed by like any other, without allusion to the past; nay, more, she began to be courted by people in general, being known as a young woman of most excellent character. Being of an extremely prepossessing appearance, it was natural that she should be made a mark for all the young men of the village to discharge their amorous glances at, and she soon found herself surrounded by a crowd of swains who talked soft nonsense to her, and who would fain make her believe that they were dying with love for her.

Claribel, however, turned a deaf ear to them all. She was not a girl to be wooed by soft nonsense; indeed, you would have said she was a girl not likely to marry at all, she was so retired and showed such indifference to the conversation of young men, and took no pains whatever to set herself off to advantage in their eyes. Nevertheless this did not deter admirers from flocking around her. In fact, I

rather think her coldness and apparent negligence of dress and general personal appearance rather incited them the more. I have called her indifferent to personal appearance; not that she was not scrupulously clean and neat; no one could be more so. But there she was content to remain.

She cared not to deck herself out with bows and ribbons, by the wearing of trumpery jewellery, or by any exaggerated fashion of wearing her hair. It is just this simplicity in woman which attracts most men, and it is natural enough that it should do so, as it argues a certain forgetfulness of self, a modest and unselfish nature, which is the basis of every womanly virtue, and therefore to be sought after in a wife. Foolish women imagine that men are to be caught by being run after. They therefore spare no expense in their toilet, study arts and graces, and omit nothing which they think ought to captivate the opposite sex; but as they too often over-step the bounds of modesty, their flimsy designs are seen through, and they find themselves laughed at by those they had hoped to make their prey.

Claribel had known such women in her time, and pitied rather than despised them, for there was nothing harsh in her nature. She was often quizzed in her turn by many a jimp-waisted hoyden for being a dowdy, but she would pass by their remarks with a good-humoured smile, and say little, for she was of few words.

Our school was now well filled with pupils, who, one and all, grew most attached to my young friend—to both of us in fact—but I rather think that she was the favourite.

There was not a person in or out of the school that could say a word against Claribel Falkland; there was something so inoffensive, so modest, and, at the same time, winning about her; such consideration for others, such a looking out of herself, if I may so term it. Then she had the knack of teaching—a rare gift—and was as mild and patient as a lamb, thus endearing all hearts towards her.

One day when giving a lesson in geography to her class (this was about a year after the last apparition of the spectre) I, who was giving a lesson in arithmetic to some younger children in the opposite corner of the schoolroom, was suddenly startled by a scream of surprise from the girls of my friend's class.

"Look! look! oh, just look, Miss Sykes," they cried in terror, "look, *there are two Miss Falklands!*"

I raised my eyes at the cry, and saw to my dismay, my friend's old tormentor—

the double—behind her, as usual, and imitating her action, my friend being at that moment in the act of pointing to a map. I walked across the room to my friend, hoping to drive away the spectre in so doing, but it remained some minutes longer before it entirely disappeared.

I caught the eye of my friend, who looked mournfully at me, and added in a low tone of voice, as I passed her, "Is it not provoking? Could anything be more annoying?"

I did not tell the schoolgirls that I myself saw the figure, and tried to laugh them out of a "silly fancy," as I called it, fearing that I might be called upon as a witness, should this report reach the ears of the school-mistress, and it might prejudice folks against my friend as a teacher, so I affected harshness, and said I begged I should hear no more of such stuff, and the affair dropped for the time; but now that the double had recommenced its visits, it came frequently, and always in class time, to my friend's great discomfiture.

Of course, there was no getting out of it now. The school-mistress was called, and saw the same thing; and I myself was obliged to see it with the rest. The school-mistress was very much bewildered, as well she might be. She declared she did not know what to make of it. She could hardly bring herself to think that it was a messenger of good, and Miss Falkland's character was so unimpeachable that she could still less believe that anything bad should be permitted to torment her. In fact, she did not know what to think, so she called for the rector of the parish, that he might speak with the apparition; and if it should prove an evil one, to exorcise it.

The rector came, but being disappointed in seeing the spectre, came a second, third, and fourth time, with the like success, till at length he went away in a huff, and begged they would trouble him no more.

One Sunday, however, as the rector was in the middle of his sermon, his eyes being fixed on our school, we noticed him suddenly turn pale and tremble. He was unable to go on with his sermon. I followed his eyes, and found, as I half expected, my friend and her double seated close together. The girls shrieked and started, and a commotion was being made in the church; so much so, that Claribel was obliged to get up and walk out, her double following close at her heels.

Fancy poor Claribel, who was like a nun in her love of solitude and retirement, having to walk out of church through a crowd of people all the way home again

with a duplicate of herself following in her footsteps!

You must not suppose that the matter stopped here. The remarks of the rustics who met her on the way, the village gossip that now broke out afresh—worse than ever before—the suspicious looks she received on all sides, all contributed to mortify her; but what appeared to completely break her spirit was the sudden falling off of one half of her pupils. Of course, she could make no doubt as to the cause of this. Even the rest of the pupils, she thought, grew colder to her, and they, too, dropped off one by one, until the poor girl had not a single pupil left.

When matters arrived at this point it was hinted to her by the school-mistress that on account of the great damage this unfortunate peculiarity of hers had done the school, that it was better for her on the whole, to leave. The school-mistress added that she was aware that it was no fault of my young friend's, and it was with much regret that she was obliged to part with her; yet what could she do? She could not afford to lose all her pupils; and thus it was my poor friend lost a situation upon which she depended to begin her little savings. Much and bitterly did she weep over her cursed existence, and earnestly prayed that she might be liberated from her tormentor.

Since she had left her position as a school teacher she had led a life of such rigid retirement that it was with the greatest difficulty she could be persuaded to leave the house, even in my company, to take the air and exercise that her health required. She refused to see anyone unless it was the rector, who would occasionally call in the evening to take a dish of tea with us.

It was on one of these visits, when we were seated round the fire, conversing agreeably—the rector was relating some amusing anecdote, to which we were all listening attentively, the rector himself laughing at his own story—when suddenly we noticed that he stopped short in the middle of his laughing, turned pale, and rose from his chair.

The cause of this sudden change immediately became apparent to us all. There, immediately behind the chair of Claribel, who had been listening attentively to the rector, with her chin resting on her hand, was her double in exactly the same position, with its eyes fixed intently on the rector's face. The rector having started to his feet, assumed a tone and manner which he in vain strove to render firm, and conjured the figure in the name of the Holy Trinity, if it were a thing of evil, to come out of her and trouble her no more; but his exorcism fell as upon the wind, the spectre apparently not hearing his words, and departing at its

leisure some two or three minutes afterwards, appearing again once or twice in the same evening during the rector's visit.

The following Sunday prayers were read publicly in the church, with the view of dispelling the evil spirit, as it was called, and mention of the phenomenon was made in the rector's sermon, but all to no purpose. The spectre would appear and disappear whenever it chose, its coming being never heralded by any particular signs, and its vanishing just as uncertain.

If anyone particularly wished it to appear, it was as if the spectre took a malicious delight in disappointing them; if, on the other hand, its presence was exceedingly undesirable, it would be almost certain to appear.

Of the numerous admirers of Claribel it will be necessary for me only to mention two. The first was one John Archer, an ardent and virtuous youth, aged twenty-one, whose honest English face revealed the sincerity of his heart. He held the post of gamekeeper on the estate of Lord Edgedown. He was bold and generous, but of a nature so bashful and timid in matters regarding our sex, that he would have allowed himself to be cut out in a love affair by a man not possessing one half his merit or his good looks.

As my father was on good terms with the father of John Archer, John was always a welcome visitor at our house, and thus began his acquaintance with Claribel. I really think if he had persisted in his suit, as a more courageous lover would have done, that he must at last have won the love of Claribel. I know that Claribel had the highest esteem for him, and had learnt to sympathise with him as one noble nature sympathises with another.

They grew to treat each other as brother and sister, but this was all. The other lover was a totally different sort of man. Richard de Chevron was a scion of a noble house, had received the education of a gentleman, and could mix in the highest society; but he was debauched, profligate, a gamester, and a drunkard, of a mean and spiteful disposition, with nothing noble whatever in his character and not even good looking, but he had that persistency in wooing which John lacked, added to a very smooth tongue and plentiful flow of language. Neither was he quite without accomplishments; he could both play and sing well, and dance to perfection; qualities which might have won the heart of a less austere maiden than my friend Claribel. But Claribel retired, as she was, in disposition and a perfect dunce in that education which mixing in the world gives, had yet by nature, by way of compensation, such a marvellously acute perception of human

character, that it bordered on the prophetic in many instances. In a word, she was a physiognomist.

On seeing Richard de Chevron for the first time, she had taken an instant aversion to him, without ever having heard anything against his character, and though De Chevron tried hard to dispel the sinister impression with which he could not fail to observe he had inspired her—and I must own that he did his best—yet that impression never left her, but, on the contrary, deepened after every visit.

Now, Richard de Chevron was nephew to Lord Edgedown, and heir-apparent to that earl's fortune and estates; at least, he often used to hint as much, but this was evidently more brag, as he was a younger son, and was known to be no particular favourite with his uncle on account of his dissipated habits. He had also the hopes of coming in for another fortune, so he said; that of Squire Broadacre, a relative on his mother's side, whose estate joined that of Lord Edgedown's; but whether all this were true or not, it made not the slightest difference to Claribel in her estimation of the man. She still saw in him a low, debauched, false, and perjured villain, seeking to hide under a mask of studied courtesy the evil promptings of his reptile heart.

Even had De Chevron succeeded in making Claribel marry him, such a match could have brought nothing but misery to her, even from a pecuniary point of view, for at the time we knew him he had not a penny of his own, and was, besides, head over ears in debt.

Men of the De Chevron class do not often mean marriage when they go a-courting, unless it happens to be particularly to their interest. What they want is a fortune, and not a wife. If the former can be had without the latter, why so much the better; if not, they are content to put up with the latter incumbrance for the sake of being able to pay off their debts.

Now, poor Claribel was an orphan, without a penny in the world. What good could his attentions bode the poor child? Claribel, however, was not mercenary, and had she been capable of loving any man, she would have been contented to live on a crust, and to have worked hard for it; but she appeared not to be destined for earthly affection. The nearest approach she ever made towards that passion commonly called love was the deep friendship she had entertained for the youthful gamekeeper.

Now, to meet with a rival in the person of his uncle's gamekeeper was gall and

wormwood to Richard de Chevron. He knew that John Archer was a young man of trust who received a good salary, and was of a rank nearer to that of Claribel's than his own was, and his attentions would be more readily looked upon as earnest.

Besides, John was good looking and noble, and had it not been for his excessive modesty in coming forward, would have been the very man of all men most likely to ensure the love of such a girl as Claribel. The intentions of De Chevron were not honourable, whatever his protestations might have made them out. He could not afford to marry Claribel, nor did he ever for a moment meditate such a thing.

Had an intimate friend asked him in confidence if he really entertained thoughts of marriage towards the girl he so ardently professed to love, he would have burst out laughing in his face, and asked him if he took him for a fool. No; he simply desired to win the heart of Claribel, and succeeding in that, he looked upon his prey as certain. But as yet he had not succeeded; nay, more, he had a favoured rival—a young man of good natural advantages, and in every way qualified to make Claribel happy, even though he were only his uncle's gamekeeper and had not received a gentleman's education. He thought of the difference of Claribel's treatment of this young boor and that of himself—he, the scion of a noble house!

Then jealousy began to gnaw his heart, and he found it to his interest that John Archer should be removed for ever from his path. Being perfectly unscrupulous and selfish, he cared not what means he employed to execute his design, as long as no suspicion should be attached to himself.

He could have waylaid and murdered his rival, if he chose; have introduced poison in his cup, or bribed an assassin to murder him, but none of these modes suited De Chevron. The law was vigilant, inquiries would be made, and the murder probably traced to his own door. His reputation would suffer, to say nothing of his own life being endangered. He would have no accomplices, as he knew that no man was to be depended upon; he would trust to no one but himself and his own resources.

Like a wily Jesuit, he would work in the dark, would be the cause of all the mischief that his own atrocious brain could dictate, but himself remain hid. Now, when Richard de Chevron first met John Archer at my father's house, he treated him with coldness, not to say haughtiness. He now completely changed his

tactics. He saw that the least show of contempt or dislike towards the young gamekeeper, who was a general favourite—and especially with Claribel—would be construed into jealousy on his part; and though this was really the case, it did not suit him that everyone should know it; therefore he entirely altered his conduct towards his rival, and nothing now could be more kind and courteous, more apparently generous than his treatment of his uncle's gamekeeper.

He apologised if by any former brusqueness of manner he had offended him, pleading that he had not had the opportunity hitherto of studying his estimable character, but that after long observation he had learnt to appreciate his noble qualities, and should henceforth entertain for him the highest esteem and friendship. He would pat him playfully on the shoulder, call him his friend, would make him every now and then some trifling present, and even put in a good word for him to my friend Claribel.

All this had the appearance of generosity, as De Chevron designed it should have, and thus avert suspicion from himself. We were all of us at home much surprised and pleased at this extraordinary change, especially as he had ceased for a time to persecute Claribel with his attentions.

Richard de Chevron appeared to be turning over a new leaf. When I say we were all deceived in De Chevron's behaviour, I must not omit to state that there was one exception, and that was Claribel herself, who from the first had behaved with a freezing coldness towards De Chevron, and, little as she knew of the world and its wickedness, had such an instinctive distrust of this man, that when he began to speak favourably to her of John Archer, she trembled violently, and looked into his face with such a searching glance that it seemed to peer into the inmost recesses of his soul.

De Chevron cowered beneath her gaze; he felt himself distrusted, and was probably little flattered at the opinion of himself he saw written in her eyes. Nevertheless, he would not have shown for the world that he was disconcerted; he was a practised dissembler, and instead of being abashed, grew more witty and talkative than ever, more and more friendly to his rival, only I noticed that he avoided the eyes of Claribel as much as possible.

The fact was, he feared her; he, the artful, experienced man of the world, crouched like an abject slave before a simple village maiden. His guilty soul could not brook the chaste glance of innocence. He knew himself to be a false degraded wretch, and quailed before her moral superiority.

However, Richard de Chevron had worked himself into favour with all of us; in fact, we grew delighted with him, still excepting Claribel, who seemed very unreasonably prejudiced against him, as we all thought. She would declare to me in private that from the very first the aspect of De Chevron had been repulsive to her; but of late, so far from having overcome her impression, he had grown perfectly intolerable in her eyes; nay, that she was seized with such horror and loathing when he was in the room as she could not find words to express.

She had a presentiment of evil, and it seemed to her, moreover, as if he were using some occult power over her that she, however, was determined to resist.

I tried to laugh her out of these fancies as being quite unfounded, and attributed them to her nerves being over-wrought from want of sufficient air and exercise; but all without avail; she remained as confirmed as ever in her prejudices. It is now some time since I made allusion to Claribel's spiritual visitant. She had long been undisturbed by its visits; indeed, ever since De Chevron and John had commenced calling at the house, and even before. It is uncertain whether either of them had ever heard of the phenomenon. I rather think not, as De Chevron, who mixed almost entirely in the upper circles, would not easily have come in the way of our village cackle, especially as he was often absent from the village for months at a time; and as for John, being constantly engaged on Lord Edgedown's estate, he knew comparatively little of the world without. But whether they did or not, it is certain that the subject was never broached during all that time.

We have mentioned before that Claribel's spiritual visitor was fitful and capricious in its visits. It might appear at any moment; but then we had been free from its company for so long, that we had dared to hope that it had forgotten all about us and would never return, until one morning new fears arose in my mind from a little circumstance which I shall now relate to you.

Observing that my young friend rose from her couch looking poorly, I inquired into the cause of her jaded looks.

"Oh, Molly," she replied, "I've had such a dreadful dream about poor John. I am sure that some danger threatens him."

"What danger do you imagine threatens him, Claribel?" said I. "Tell me your dream."

"I really do not know if I can," she replied; "it was so very confused. I thought

that John Archer stood in danger of his life at the hands of Richard de Chevron, and yet it was not Richard de Chevron, but another; then, again, it was. I remember something about a murdered man, and fearing it was John Archer, but on examining the corpse it was another. Then I remember seeing John Archer handcuffed, and in great agony of mind, and I thought him guilty of the murder, and then he was not guilty. Then the dream began to change in such a manner as it would be impossible to relate it; but throughout I remember the fiendish face of Richard de Chevron. I was seized with an inexpressible horror, and could bear it no longer; then I awoke."

"My dear Claribel," said I, "pray do not disturb yourself for such a ridiculous dream. You ought to know that all dreams are mad, the offspring of impaired digestion or——"

But she impatiently cut me short by a wave of the hand, as if she were determined to believe in the warning character of her dream, despite all my sophistry.

However, I attempted a second time to account for the dream by the aversion she had taken to Richard de Chevron at first sight and her constantly brooding over her unfounded impressions. I tried argument, I tried ridicule; but finding her proof against either, I held my tongue and took up a piece of work.

Claribel had thrown herself into an arm-chair, and there sat listlessly, without occupying herself or hardly exchanging a word with me. Once, indeed, she gasped out to herself "Oh, that I could save him!" and then relapsed into her usual silence.

About five minutes after, chancing to look up, I observed that my friend appeared to be more languid than ever. She was dreadfully pale, her lips colourless and slightly parted, the eyes half-closed. I thought she was in a swoon, and now somewhat alarmed, I rose and advanced towards her.

"Claribel," I cried, "what ails you—are you unwell?"

She waved me away with her hand, so imagining it was nothing more than a little weakness, I withdrew myself and resumed my work. Soon afterwards she appeared to rally, and sat up in her chair. Her colour had returned somewhat, and her eye seemed brighter, but her voice was still weak as she muttered, "I have seen him. Oh! why did you disturb me?"

"Seen him!" I exclaimed. "Seen whom?"

"John Archer," she replied.

"Nonsense," said I; "you have been dreaming."

"I tell you, Molly," she replied, rather pettishly, "I have seen him, and would have warned him had you not disturbed me."

"Silly child," said I; "you have been dreaming; but you looked so very ill that I grew alarmed, for I thought you were in a swoon."

Just then my father entered the room and commenced talking on household matters, so our conversation dropped; nor did I give it a further thought until the evening, when John Archer made his appearance, as he frequently did, to take his tea with us.

"Good evening, Mistress Claribel," said he. "You were in a mighty hurry to quit my company this morning after paying me such an unexpected visit. Methinks you are chary of your presence. It is a mystery to me how you appeared and disappeared from me without my perceiving either the coming or the going of you."

"How say you, Master John?" said my father, pricking up his ears. "Do you say that our Claribel paid you a visit this morning?"

"Ay, sir," replied John; "at about nine o'clock this morning, as I was walking along with my gun, on his lordship's estate, I suddenly saw Mistress Claribel coming straight in front of me. She looked as if she were about to speak to me, when all of a sudden—I'm sure I can't tell how—she disappeared. I looked round about me, and called her, but there was no one.

"Then I began to be alarmed, thinking something must have happened to Mistress Claribel, and that I had seen her ghost. I could not let the day pass by without dropping in to call to see if she were all right."

"You must be mistaken, John," said I. "I assure you that Claribel has not left the house all day. She has felt rather unwell."

"Not left the house!" exclaimed Archer. "Why I saw her quite plain this morning."

"You must have been dreaming," said my father.

But I noticed that he gave a glance of peculiar meaning at my friend and self. I knew what was passing in his mind. I, too, shared the same apprehensions. John Archer must have re-encountered Claribel's second self, her much dreaded double. I then recalled the words of Claribel that morning.

"I have seen him. Oh, why did you disturb me?"

My poor friend, I observed, was dreadfully confused as my father's eye rested on her. The colour mounted to her cheeks, then vanished again, leaving her deadly pale, and she seemed desirous to escape notice. Her restlessness became extreme when John began persisting that he had not been dreaming, that he could vouch for what he had seen, etc., etc.

"You should get yourself bled, Master Archer," said my father; "you can't be well."

"I assure you I am in the very best of health," persisted John.

"And I assure you, Master Archer, that Claribel has not quitted this house to-day, to my certain knowledge," said my father.

"What, not for a moment?" went on Archer, most annoyingly. "How say you, Mistress Claribel, was it not you I saw this morning on Lord Edgedown's estate as I was walking along with my gun over my shoulder?"

Claribel grew red and pale by turns, and her lips began to move, as if she felt herself forced to give some answer; but at that moment my father seemed troubled with a violent fit of coughing which drowned her reply. John waited quietly until the coughing was over, and then began again.

"Do you mean to say it was not you I saw this morning?"

The coughing was resumed, and strange enough, always returned just as John Archer began to open his mouth. John looked in wonderment, first at Claribel, then at my father, then at Claribel again, and finally at me. He had unwittingly touched upon a sore place. This he seemed to be aware of; but how he had been to blame was a mystery to him.

He suddenly changed the conversation, and began discoursing on indifferent topics. The coughing ceased for that evening. As he rose to go we followed him to the door, and I observed that Claribel, who was the foremost, whispered something secretly into his ear at parting. I myself was immediately behind her,

and overheard the hurried words, "John, you have an enemy. Beware!"

Then she put her finger quickly to her lips, to prevent him giving any outward expression to his wonderment, and the door closed upon our guest.

"You silly girl," said I to my friend as we were undressing that evening, previous to retiring to rest. "What nonsense of you to try and infect that young man with your own ungrounded fears. Do you think I did not overhear what you said?"

She looked a little downcast at this, but then instantly recovering, by way of consoling herself, she ejaculated, "Nevertheless, I have warned him," and she clasped her hands above her head enthusiastically.

No further word was said about John Archer that night. On the following morning I had occasion to call upon a neighbour who lived some four or five miles off. I rose early, and started off on foot. As I was returning home it came on to rain in such torrents that I was forced to take shelter under a little shed that was annexed to a small hut standing alone upon a hill, far from any other human dwelling.

It was the only place at hand, and had it not been for the excessive inclemency of the weather, I might have thought twice before choosing such a place of refuge, for this was the abode of Madge Mandrake as she was called—a personage feared by all, far and wide, both young and old. She was renowned in the villages round about for her skill in telling fortunes, in concocting drugs of every description, from love philtres to the deadliest poisons, not less than for malice in bringing to pass all sorts of trouble upon those who had had the misfortune to offend her. If a cow died, it was Madge's doing; if the milk turned sour, or the crops were blighted, Madge was accused of it; if a person died suddenly, or an accident happened to anyone, Madge likewise had the credit of it. Her dwelling, therefore, was shunned by all, and when she ventured to walk abroad and to mix in crowded thoroughfares, she had but to lift her crutch to send the whole populace flying helter-skelter, for fear of being enchanted into unclean beasts, reptiles, and other loathsome things.

You may imagine then, gentlemen, my feelings; though naturally courageous at finding myself obliged to seek shelter near the house of so formidable a personage, I did my utmost to make no stir, so as not to betray my whereabouts.

There was a small window that looked from the cottage into the shed, but so begrimed with dirt that I should not have been able to take a peep into the house,

had it not been for a pane of glass that was wanting. Through this I was enabled to see the interior of this unhallowed dwelling without being perceived. Before I ventured to peep through it I heard two voices conversing together.

I held my breath, and listened. The former was the harsh, cracked voice of the crone herself; the latter was evidently that of a man, and appeared to belong to a person of culture, for the tones were soft and modulated. I began to fancy I recognised them; nor was I mistaken, as you shall hear soon.

"Well, Master de Chevron, and how have you been progressing in your work since I saw you last?" said the crone.

"Satisfactorily enough for my purpose, my good Madge," replied the other voice. "I have brought it with me for your approval."

Here the speaker, whom I could now recognise as no other than Richard de Chevron, drew from under his cloak something carefully wrapt up in tissue paper. Having unwound the paper, he discovered a small statue of a man, about a foot in height, apparently in wax.

"Why, you have got it as like as could be!" exclaimed the crone. "Yes, that is John Archer, sure enough; there is no mistaking him."

My curiosity began to be roused, and Claribel's apprehensions for John's safety rushed across my mind. Though I was not near to the figure, I could see plainly that it was intended for a likeness of John Archer, and that it carried a gun over one arm. The hag seized the image in one hand with a sort of fiendish glee, and commenced mumbling some inarticulate sounds.

I trembled from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet, for I had heard of this way of working mischief on one's enemies from afar, and I feared lest some dreadful harm should happen to poor John, so I offered up a hasty prayer for his safety.

"The charm is said," croaked the witch. "Now let the work begin."

Here she set the image upright, and taking a long sharp pin she seemed about to transfix the waxen image with it; but I noticed that her hand trembled violently. I still continued to pray fervently, whereupon the witch was seized with such a fit of sneezing and wheezing that she was unable to proceed in her work.

"Why, Madge," said De Chevron, "what is the matter? How have you managed

to catch such a cold all of a sudden?"

"Odds blood! I know not," answered the beldam; "it is as if I was in church."

At the word "church" the wheezing came on again.

"Ah! I see," said De Chevron; "It is the wind that is howling through that broken pane of glass," and he pointed to the very pane through which I was peeping.

I thought my last hour was come, for I was sure to be discovered. However, I ducked down in a corner, whilst De Chevron stopped up the missing pane with a filthy rag without even catching a sight of me.

Rising again to my feet, I managed to open the little window the least bit ajar, but just enough to see and hear all. My fright was so great all this time that I had unwittingly slacked a little in my prayer, and just at that moment Madge made a desperate plunge with the pin, which appeared aimed at the heart of the image; but as I had now recommenced my prayers, alas, somewhat too late, the pin missed its mark, but pierced the barrel of the gun, which, together with the thumb of the figure, fell upon the table.

"Better next time, Madge," said De Chevron. "Try again."

She made another essay, and then another, but missed the figure altogether.

"I am not as young as I was," she said, by way of apology, "and neither my eyesight nor my hand are to be relied upon as of old."

However, she aimed again and again at the figure, but with the same result.

"Why, you *are* getting old, Madge!" said De Chevron, surprised at her repeated failures. "Come, let me put the pins in."

Seizing the image with one hand and a long pin with the other—(here again my breath failed me through fear, and I omitted to pray)—he first pierced the arm of the figure that supported the gun in one place, and then in another higher up. He then took a third pin and seemed about to pierce the image in the region of the heart, when I, now really alarmed for the victim, again offered up a short and fervent prayer.

De Chevron instantly dropped the pin, as if it had been red hot; but immediately taking up another, he made a furious thrust at the body of the image, but his hand went off widely from the mark, leaving the image unscathed.

"Why, how is this?" exclaimed De Chevron, in astonishment.

"Ha! ha! Master de Chevron," laughed the witch, "you are no better than old Madge after all."

"Well, this *is* strange!" muttered De Chevron to himself, after having tried once or twice more and failed.

"Are you quite sure you have repeated the charm aright, Madge?"

"Quite sure," replied the crone; "but, beshrew me, if I don't think there is some hostile element at hand that counteracts the charm. Just look at the way Grimalkin arches his back and ruffles his fur."

I now noticed a huge black tom cat, of a size that I never remember to have seen before or since, whose luminous eyes flashed red and green by turns from an obscure corner of the hovel.

"There! there! *there!*" cried De Chevron, furiously, accompanying each word with a thrust, but missing each time.

Then, in his rage at being foiled thus, he raised the image in order to dash it to the ground; but the wax having melted somewhat in his hand, it stuck to his fingers like pitch, and he was obliged to disengage it gently and place it on the small table just underneath the window through which I was peeping.

"I'll tell you what it is, Madge," said he, "there is more witchcraft in this countercharm, whatever it is, than in all your skill. There must be, as you say, some contrary influence at work. How else should it be possible for me to fail every time, as if I were smitten with the palsy? Let us go out and see if anyone is lurking near the hut."

So leaving the image on the table, he strode towards the opposite door, which he opened wide, followed by the beldam.

Not a moment was to be lost. The instant their backs were turned I cautiously opened the window, and introducing my arm until it touched the table beneath, I secured the image, re-closed the window noiselessly, and flew as fast as my feet could carry me through the pelting rain with the image under my shawl.

I had hardly reached home, quite out of breath, when Claribel came running to me, pale and trembling, and wringing her hands.

"Oh! Molly, dear," she cried, sobbing, "what do you think has happened to that poor young man John Archer?"

"What is it?" I asked, anxiously. "Anything in connection with Richard de Chevron?"

"I cannot exactly say that," she replied. "It seems to have been purely an accident. This is how it was. His gun suddenly burst in a most unaccountable manner whilst he was carrying it over his arm, and carried off one of his thumbs. No surgeon could be procured at the time, and the wound appears to have gangrened and to have infected the whole arm. The surgeon, who has only just arrived, says that it will be necessary to remove the arm to save his life."

"Not for worlds!" cried I, with animation. "I'll be responsible for his life. There," said I, producing the waxen image and hastily withdrawing the two pins still sticking in the arm of the figure, and which in my hurry I had omitted to extract till now. "There, now the mortification in the arm will have stopped. Send directly to the surgeon that the operation will be no longer necessary. Nay, I will go myself."

"What does all this mean?" asked Claribel, astonished beyond measure.

"No matter now," I answered. "I am off at once. If you like you may come with me; but first let me lock up this image in a place where it will not be touched."

So saying, I put on my bonnet and shawl again, and dragging Claribel after me, we ran with all our might and main to the cottage where poor John lay stretched on a pallet, the surgeon with his knife ready sharpened for the operation, standing over him, about to commence. Another second would have been too late.

"Hold your hand, doctor!" I cried, suddenly. "The mortification has ceased, and the operation will be no longer necessary. I will be answerable for this young man's life without his losing his arm."

I spoke with an authority that completely astonished the doctor, for he looked bewilderingly first at me and then at my friend; but at length said, "I understand nothing of all this. I have been called here by this young man's family to give my professional opinion, and I say that unless he submits to lose his arm, his life will be endangered."

"But the mortification has ceased. Would you amputate a limb without necessity

for so doing?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, then, look for yourself. Where is the mortification?"

Here the surgeon glanced at the arm, and looked wondrous wise.

"The mortification has ceased beyond a doubt," he said at length. "Well, I never saw such a thing in all my life. What! am I dreaming," he muttered. "I do not understand all this. How came you, Miss Molly, to—to——"

"Hush!" said I.

Then lowering my mouth to his ear, I whispered a few words, and put my finger to my lip, to enjoin silence. The doctor arched his eyebrows till they nearly touched the roots of his hair, screwed up his mouth to the size of a buttonhole, and gave vent to a prolonged "wh-e-w!"

He soon after left the house, and we were left alone for a while to comfort the sufferer. During the few moments that we were left alone together I recounted briefly the whole of my adventure.

Both John and Claribel were completely thunder-struck at my recital, and Claribel muttered half to herself and half to me, "And to think that it should be Richard de Chevron, after all. I knew he was a villain."

John speedily recovered. He had received no further injury than the loss of his thumb. He often called at our house afterwards, and upon seeing the waxen image immediately recognised it as a likeness of himself. It being now beyond a doubt that Richard de Chevron, out of jealousy, had conspired against the life of John Archer and being equally certain in my own mind, from a knowledge of De Chevron's character, that he would not let his victim slip so easily through his fingers, but, foiled in his first attempt, would lose no time in employing some other means of removing his rival from his path, I began to rack my brains in search of some scheme to thwart the machinations of this villain.

"What if he should make another waxed image, and shutting himself up in his own house, carry out his infernal spells without interruption?" I said to myself. If so, what could I do?

John Archer should have our constant prayers; beyond this there was no

impediment to De Chevron's evil designs. The law would give us no redress. I was very sure of that. Witchcraft had ceased to be believed in, and the case would be dismissed. One thought, indeed, crossed my mind for a moment, which I mentioned to Claribel, and this was to pay back De Chevron in his own coin by converting the image of John Archer into a likeness of De Chevron and experimenting upon the villain from afar in the same manner as he had designed to practise against John Archer.

It was but a momentary thought and a sinful, and the proposal was rejected by Claribel instantly and with horror.

"Should we," said she, "put ourselves on a level with a murderous villain, using against him the same unhallowed means that he himself had not hesitated to use against his victim?"

But besides the light in which my friend had put my proposition, there was another argument against the scheme that perhaps had more weight with me. In order to change the image from the likeness of John Archer into a likeness of De Chevron it would be necessary to destroy the image altogether first, and this, for what I knew, might put John Archer's life in peril. This last argument decided me, and I resolved to guard the image as jealously as possible, and to proceed against De Chevron by natural means solely. An idea flashed across me that there might be some countercharm against evil spells if we could only find it out. Indeed, I remembered to have heard that there was, and musing thus within myself, I suddenly recollected to have heard a couplet in my childhood that ran thus:

"Vervain and Dill
Keep witches from their will."

These two herbs, then, were countercharms. I was resolved to try the experiment, so procuring some of each without more delay, I gave them into the possession of John Archer, who promised me to wear them always about him; and whether or no De Chevron ever made any further attempt against the life of his rival by means of magic I know not, but if he did he must signally have failed, as for ever so long afterwards Archer enjoyed the most perfect health and remained free from any further accident.

Whether De Chevron suspected that John Archer possessed some countercharm against which his evil spells were vain, or if he again essayed his magic after his first defeat, we know not, but certain it was that he still cherished hatred against his rival, upon whom he was determined to bring trouble, if not by necromancy, at least by natural means.

For some time past he had not been near us. This was evidently to ward off suspicion from himself and check the village gossip. However, soon after the disappearance of the image—whether or no he suspected it was I who purloined it and wished to brave the matter out—he called and informed us that he was going to London on important business, and had come to take leave of us for a time. There was nothing in his manner that appeared the least constrained or abashed. On the contrary, he seemed more lively and witty than usual, asked kindly after all our family, and even John Archer, whom he said he had not seen for a long time, although he had heard of his misfortune, for which he professed great sympathy, and hoped the poor fellow would not take his loss too much to heart; adding that it was lucky that they had managed to save his life without amputating his arm.

Throughout all his discourse his manner had so much of frankness and sincerity that I could hardly bring myself to believe that he was the same villain whose infernal plot against the innocent John Archer, I had accidentally unravelled. I began to think that somehow or other I must have been under a delusion, until chancing to glance towards a glazed cupboard in which the wax figure stood upright and was easily discernable from where I stood, the whole of my recent adventure came back to me forcibly. Yet there sat the author of this unhallowed deed, this would-be murderer, smiling and chatting and paying compliments with the easy grace of a courtier, with a countenance frank and open as a spring

morning. How could a girl of my age, ignorant of the world and its wickedness, possibly imagine that a heart so black could be concealed underneath so smooth an exterior? Had I not had positive proof of his villainy within reach, I should certainly never have believed him capable of such a deed. Even as it was I was obliged to gaze frequently at the cupboard in order to reassure myself that I was not dreaming and to prevent myself from being won over by his tongue.

De Chevron was a quick observer, and noticed our furtive glances towards the cupboard. Then fixing his spy-glass in his eye, he looked in the same direction; but either saw or affected to see nothing. Afterwards he got up and walked about the room, conversing the while, and in so doing passed several times in front of the cupboard, looking in casually as he passed.

I felt sure that he must have seen the image, though there was nothing in his manner that I could discover at all confused or unusual. I believe he would have braved the matter out if I had told him to his face that it was I myself who had stolen the image after I had overheard with my own ears this villainous plot against poor John. He was just the sort of man who would have looked me full in the face and denied ever in his life having been in Madge Mandrake's cottage.

He would have tried to make me believe that I had been the victim of some fearful delusion from my over-excited fears or what not, that the image was not of his making; would have denied ever having set eyes on it before. Nor would, in all probability, have seen any likeness whatever to John Archer, and would have treated as nothing more than a coincidence the fact of John's gun and the loss of his thumb occurring at the same time that the gun and thumb of the waxen figure were damaged by old Madge's pin thrust.

He would have asked me if I thought him capable of believing in such trumpery, and would have tried to laugh me out of my superstition. All this I should have expected from him, such was his amount of assurance. Once I had it on the tip of my tongue to ask him what he thought of the image, and if he knew anyone it resembled; and would have done it, too, as I was anxious to observe what effect a sudden allusion to the image would have had upon him, but at that moment my father, who knew nothing of the affair of the waxen image, entered the room, and the conversation took another direction.

Shortly afterwards he left the house, promising to call again after his return from London. As he had been so particular in telling us of his intended visit to London, of course, I believed him. What reason could I have had for not doing

so? Nevertheless, it proved to be all a falsehood. He never had any intention of going to London at all; and never left the village.

But why this deceit? you will naturally ask. Listen, and tell me if you could have imagined a scheme so diabolical as the following ever entering into human brain. To carry out his base designs he hired a certain pedlar, one Michael Rag, well known to be a shady character, and envious of John Archer's comparatively easy circumstances, so having talked him over, if not by bribery, at least by instigating him in a manner suggested by his own natural cunning as calculated to excite the covetous disposition of the tool he intended to use for his own purposes, to purloin John Archer's silver watch, a present he had received from his master for his faithful services.

This watch De Chevron represented to the pedlar as being one of superior workmanship, and far too good for a man of John Archer's position to wear. He blamed his uncle for lavishing handsome presents upon undeserving hangers-on. Who, after all, was John Archer? He (De Chevron) could remember him in worse circumstances even than the pedlar himself. Whence his good fortune? From his merit? Pooh! It was easy enough for any man to keep a good place when he had once got it, if he wasn't quite a fool. Then as to his getting it in the first place, mere luck. Why, as if there were not many a better man than John Archer for such a post. Was he more honest than any other? Bah! every man is honest until he is found out to be the contrary.

Thus, first by raising the pedlar's cupidity by a vivid description of the watch, then by giving an additional stimulant to his envious nature by representing the owner of the watch as unworthy of such a present, he finally wound up by insinuating, rather than broadly stating, that the pedlar himself was a man of merit and deserved being in a better position than John Archer, if all men had their rights.

In fact, such was De Chevron's power of persuasion, that he at last, by dint of subtle arguments, made irresistible by the courteous grace by which they were set off, and, moreover, making it appear that he himself could have no object in giving such advice, that he at length succeeded in making the pedlar believe that he was a very ill-used man, and that as fortune had been so niggardly to him, considering his merits, whilst she squandered her favours on the undeserving, that it was quite excusable in him; nay, it was his duty, and nothing more than what he owed to himself to seek his own fortune by appropriating a portion of that superfluous wealth unjustly held back from him by the capricious goddess

and given into unworthy hands.

It was not difficult for De Chevron to ignite the already too inflammable cupidity of the pedlar. A hint was enough. From that hour the watch was doomed. Seeing that his words had had their effect, he applauded the determination of the pedlar, and added that though he had no interest in mixing himself up in such affairs, yet he liked to encourage enterprising men, and he himself would furnish him with the means of making his booty doubly sure, and without which he represented it would be madness to make the attempt.

He showed him that John Archer always carried a gun with him, that he was a hot-tempered young fellow, and would shoot him as soon as look at him if he attempted and failed.

"One must use all one's resources, in case of need," he added, and suggested that the securest way to obtain the watch would be to administer to Archer a glass of drugged wine, which he might easily induce the unsuspecting youth to accept. This drug (which De Chevron had in his possession and which was probably concocted by his friend and ally, Madge Mandrake) produced instantaneous sleep for full five hours on the person partaking of it. It was agreed then that the pedlar should carry in his coat pocket a bottle of the said drugged wine, together with a wine glass, that towards evening he should wander about a certain unfrequented road which bordered on Lord Edgedown's estate, and near which Archer was sure to be at a certain hour.

Should he catch sight of John Archer, he was to accost him civilly, invite him to converse, then after a time produce the bottle and glass and say that he had some dozens of very choice wine which if he (John Archer) could only induce his lordship to buy that it would be the making of his fortune. He would then pour out a glassful, which he would offer the young gamekeeper to try himself; should he refuse, he was to press him so urgently that he would at length be forced to comply.

When Archer should have once tossed off the glass, Mike would wait some moments until he was in a perfectly sound sleep, when he would be enabled to steal not only his watch and what else he might have in his pockets, but also his gun.

The pedlar jumped at the proposition, and armed with his bottle of drugged wine, he set off the selfsame evening for the spot agreed upon, followed at a distance by De Chevron himself, just to give the alarm, as he suggested, by a

sharp shrill whistle, should anyone approach to interrupt their design.

Backed up by the help of De Chevron, the pedlar knew no fear, nor did it ever enter his head, so blinded was he by greed, that De Chevron could possibly have any object in thus lending him his help.

The evening arrived. It was now about a week after De Chevron's supposed departure, and so close had been his confinement to the house all this time, that I do not believe there was a soul in all the village but believed that he was absent on business in London at the time.

As the evening agreed upon drew in, De Chevron, disguising himself as best he might in a large loose cloak that he never had been seen to wear and a hat unlike that he was known by in the village, set out in the dusk towards the lonely road, following the pedlar at a considerable distance. The pedlar advanced towards the spot singing.

"Good morrow, Master Archer," he said, as the young gamekeeper made his appearance from behind a hedge, "and how does the world go for you? Easily enough, eh?"

"Well enough, for the matter of that," replied Archer, carelessly.

"Ah! you lucky dog, your bread and butter's cut for life. Wouldn't I like to be in your shoes without doing you any harm!" said the pedlar.

"Would you?" laughed Archer. "Why, I'm sure you have no reason to complain of your lot. A pedlar's is a good business."

"Well, I don't exactly complain," replied the pedlar, with proud humility; "but—but——"

"But," interrupted Archer, "we all like to be a little better off than we are. Isn't that it?" asked the gamekeeper, with a laugh.

"Well, I dare say you are not far wrong, Archer my boy," said the pedlar, wheedlingly. "It's natural you know, ain't it? By the way, Johnny old fellow, do you think you could do an old friend a great favour? It won't cost you anything. I'm not going to ask you to lend me any money."

"Well," said John, "what is it?"

"Why, the fact is," said Mike, "that I have got some fine stuffs that will do for

curtains or to cover chairs with. I've got carpets, mattresses, and I don't know what all. Besides which I have got some excellent wine, superfine quality, which if you could induce your master to buy, my fortune would be made."

"It would be useless," answered John Archer. "His lordship never buys either stuffs or wine from country hawkers, but has up everything from London."

"Well, I suppose he would, you know, a great man like him. Still, when a good thing comes in your way, something unique, like this wine of mine, why, it would be madness to let it slip through your fingers without even giving it a trial. Look here now." Here he produced the bottle. "This wine I am in the habit of always carrying about with me as a sample. Here, just taste it. It'll do your heart good." Here he poured out a glass.

"Thank you, no," said Archer.

"Nonsense, man," said the pedlar, "what are you afraid of?"

"Nothing," replied Archer, "only I don't care about it, thank you."

"Drink, drink, man. What's the matter with you?"

"Drink it yourself, I won't rob you of it," said John.

"Oh, as to that, Jack my boy, I'm not niggardly in offering my wine, especially when I meet old friends, you know, besides, I am interested in your tasting this, because, you see, when you have once drunk this little glassful you will be better able to speak well of it to your master, and he *might* honour me so far as to purchase a dozen. But, interest apart, take a glass for old friendship's sake, or I shall take offence. Come, no excuse; here you are!"

John Archer, wearied out by the pedlar's importunities, could resist no longer, and suspecting nothing, tossed off the glass at a gulp.

"Good, indeed," he had barely time to say, as he gave back the glass. "Gramercy! how is this? My head swims. I—I——"

He was unable to finish his sentence, but fell like a log to the ground. The pedlar's eyes glistened as he witnessed the speedy effects of the drug. In another moment his fingers were fumbling in the waistcoat pocket of the prostrate John Archer, and he had succeeded in transferring the watch from the gamekeeper's pocket to his own.

He then began rifling his other pockets, but there was little else worth taking on poor John's person—a few loose coins, perhaps, nothing more.

At this moment De Chevron came up, and lifting the gun from the ground, said, "This gun is yours, Mike."

Then, retreating a few paces behind the pedlar, he levelled the gun at his head, but not being quite correct in his aim, the bullet lodged in the man's shoulder. Mike gave a yell of agony on finding himself wounded, but he still might have imagined that the gun had gone off accidentally and had thus hit him in the shoulder, had not De Chevron immediately come up and with one tremendous blow on the head from the butt end of the gun, felled him to the ground.

"Treachery!" feebly gasped out the wretched man.

Then followed a second blow, a third and even a fourth, until the unhappy dupe spoke no more. To drag the body to a ditch thickly overgrown with nettles and brambles which completely concealed it from view was the work of the moment, having previously despoiled the corpse of its recently acquired treasure and restored the same to the pocket of its owner, who still lay in the arms of Morpheus. Then replacing the gun by the side of its sleeping master, and bedaubing the gamekeeper's clothes with blood, he first poured out the contents of the pedlar's bottle on the grass, then started homewards.

No one appears to have met him, either before or after the murder. Circumstances seem to have been peculiarly favourable to him that evening, for chancing to be excessively windy at that hour, and the road being of loose white sand, not a single footprint was to be discovered the next morning. It was somewhere about midnight when John Archer woke up from his trance. His first wonderment was how he got there. He imagined that he must in some way or other have become intoxicated. Then he thought of the pedlar. It was strange, he did not remember having drunk more than one glass, but it was not until he reached his cot that he was aware of the plight he was in.

Where did all that blood come from? he asked himself. He must be wounded he thought. However, he examined himself all over and could discover nothing. The barrel of his gun was discharged, too, and the butt end of it stained with blood. He was more bewildered than ever. He then related the whole of the circumstances to his parents, who, however, could not bring themselves to believe otherwise than that their son must have been intoxicated, although his character for sobriety was well known.

The blood stains, however, and the discharged barrel still remained a mystery and became the subject of much conjecture amongst his friends. The blood, as he owned himself, did not proceed from any wound he had received. Whose blood was it then? The butt end of his gun being stained with blood would argue violence used against some person or animal.

John was known to be an honest and humane man—the very last man in the world to commit murder; still, under the influence of intoxication he might have committed a rash act. When questioned as to whether he remembered anything, he shook his head, and merely related his interview with the pedlar, from whom he felt confident of not having accepted more than one glass of wine. His manner throughout all this questioning was open and frank, and everyone agreed that, mysterious as the affair appeared, they were quite sure that young Archer was innocent of murder.

The day after, however, a waggoner's dog passing by the scene of the murder was observed by its master to be sniffing and burrowing in a certain ditch. The waggoner took no notice of the circumstance at first, until the dog set up a howl and refused to leave the spot. It then seemed to be tearing or dragging some heavy substance with its teeth, and finally succeeded in leaving bare the body of the pedlar. The pedlar had already been missed in the village, and the waggoner at once recognised the body. He lost no time in rousing the neighbourhood, for he dreaded being discovered near the corpse, lest he should be implicated in the murder.

The body of the pedlar was removed to the nearest cottage, and a surgeon sent for immediately to examine it. Contrary to everybody's expectation, the surgeon pronounced that life was not yet extinct, though he held out no hopes at all of ultimate recovery.

He did all he could do under the circumstances, gave his instructions to the inmates of the cottage, and said that he would call again. Then arose the question, who could be the perpetrator of the deed? Suspicion immediately attached itself to John Archer.

Witnesses came forward and deposed that they had met John Archer with blood on his clothes and the butt end of his rifle also stained with blood. The wounds on the head of the all-but murdered man appeared to have been inflicted by the butt end of a rifle, therefore this was strong evidence; but there was yet stronger. The bullet having been extracted from the dying man's shoulder, was at once

recognised by all as belonging to John Archer, his bullets being marked always in a peculiar manner, added to which it fitted exactly into the bore of Archer's rifle.

This last evidence was considered conclusive, and John Archer was conducted off to prison to await his trial at the next assizes. Imagine the grief and dismay of poor John's aged parents, who had looked forward to his being the prop of their old age, at hearing that their only son had been arrested on a charge of murder. Imagine the shame and confusion of John himself, the surprise and indignation of his intimate friends, including ourselves, who still believed in his innocence.

As for poor Claribel, she was struck completely dumb at the news; she could not believe her ears. It was not for a considerable time that she could realise the fact; but when she did, she neither fainted, burst into tears, nor behaved in any way extravagantly. Her grief was too deeply seated. She moped about the house with her eyes fixed, as if she were walking in her sleep. It was just this calm, in a nature like hers, that I dreaded far more than any violent transport of grief, for I feared that the shock had been too great for her, and had turned her brain. What made the affair doubly painful to her was that the village people had already begun to couple her name with John Archer's.

Folks speaking of the arrest would say that it was Claribel Falkland's young man that had been arrested for murder, although there had never been anything like an engagement between them.

When she recovered herself somewhat, she said, "Molly, depend upon it, that De Chevron is at the bottom of this."

Now, although I knew De Chevron to be a hardened villain and capable of any atrocity, I did not see myself how he could possibly be connected with the murder, he being absent from the village at the time. Neither did I for a moment believe John Archer capable of the crime. The evidence against him was singularly unfortunate, it is true; but no one who knew the man as intimately as we did could really have believed him guilty. It was clear that someone must have committed the murder. Who, then, was likely to have done so?

De Chevron was a villain, we knew, but that was no proof that he was the murderer. However, I excused this seeming unreasonableness in my friend, considering the state of her mind at the time, and merely suggested:

"But he is in London, my dear."

"I tell you he is mixed up in the affair," persisted Claribel. "I was warned of this in my dream."

"I fear that would have little weight in a court of justice," I replied.

"De Chevron is the murderer, and no one else," she persisted, doggedly.

"But, my dear Claribel," said I, soothingly, "allowing that he is a wicked, heartless villain, just think for a moment how you would support your accusation in a court of law. A pedlar is found murdered in a ditch, and a gentleman of De Chevron's condition now in London, where he has been for the last week, is accused of the murder. Consider the absurdity of the idea."

"How do you know he has been in London all the time?" asked my friend.

"Well, I grant you, I did not see him go," said I; "but when a man gives out that he is going away from a place, and has not been seen by anyone since, especially when it is in a little village like this, where everybody knows everybody else's business, the probability is that he has left."

"Do not be too sure," said Claribel. "We must examine into the affair."

"Oh, that is easily done," said I; "but even should he not have departed, if he should have changed his mind and remained here, what does that prove? Besides, what motive could a gentleman have in taking the life of a poor, unknown, itinerant pedlar?"

"To lay the blame on John Archer, his rival, and get him into trouble," was my friend's reply. "Do you not think him capable?"

"I think him capable of anything that's bad," said I; "but that's not the point. You must, first of all, have reason enough on your side to prove that he did, which you have not. Look, now, at the evidence against young Archer. A young man returns home to his family after midnight, his clothes disordered and bloodstained, his gun discharged, and the butt end of it clotted with blood. When questioned, he is unable to give any satisfactory account of himself. Says he remembers nothing but having accepted one glass of wine from a pedlar. He relates that he woke up towards midnight and discovered that he had been sleeping for hours in the open air, near to the spot where the body of the pedlar is found on the day following.

"His friends do not believe him guilty because, forsooth, he has earned a

reputation for truthfulness, steadiness, and sobriety; yet might not the opposite party contend that it was not impossible that he might, once in his life, have broken through his custom of rigid abstinence, and in a moment of intoxication, picking a quarrel with the pedlar, first discharged his gun at him—for, remember that the bullet extracted from the pedlar's shoulder has been recognised as Archer's bullet—and afterwards, finding his adversary not mortally wounded, had hastened his death by knocking out his brains with the butt end of his rifle. That he had afterwards himself fallen into a drunken sleep and entirely forgotten the events of the preceding evening is not at all impossible. This would be the more charitable way of looking at the affair; but, alas, there is another circumstance that puts it in a more serious light, and that is the hiding of the body. The body has been discovered in a ditch, carefully concealed from view by weeds and brambles. This argues reason. Is it probable that a man who commits homicide in a drunken brawl, being so drunk at the time as to fall down on the damp ground and sleep there the whole night through, that he should have been sufficiently master of himself to drag off the body of his victim and successfully conceal it from view in an overgrown ditch?"

"I cannot and will not believe him so base as to be guilty of wilful murder, neither will I believe that he committed homicide in a fit of intoxication. If he took the pedlar's life at all—I say *if* he did—why, then I lean towards the belief that he did it whilst under some evil spell of Richard de Chevron's. What do you believe, Molly?"

"No matter, dear, what I believe," said I; "I am a woman, like yourself, and too likely to be influenced by my feelings. I do not wish to believe him guilty, and should be very much surprised and horror-struck if he really were so, after the good opinion we all have had of him. But all that goes for nothing. I merely tell you how the world will judge him."

Poor Claribel could not help seeing that it was likely to go hard with John.

"Oh! if they should condemn him unjustly and execute him!" she cried, in agony.

Poor child! It was all I could do to comfort her. I told her the law was not rash in condemning anyone to death; that inquiries would be made, that the real perpetrator of the deed could not fail to be discovered, sooner or later, when he would suffer the penalty of the law, and the innocent man be acquitted. I had attempted to excite hopes in her that I myself dared hardly entertain, and that she, poor child, I could see, looked upon as poor consolation.

We both retired to rest that night with heavy hearts, but the next morning Claribel woke up with a smile on her face, although she looked very pale and worn.

"Molly, dear, I saw him last night," she said.

"Did you, really? What, John Archer?" I asked, for I no longer now doubted her word when she spoke in this manner.

"Yes," she replied, "and I promised to call again to give him consolation."

"How did you manage to speak to him?" I asked.

"By signs only; but he understood me."

"Was he asleep?" I asked.

"No; he was tossing restlessly on his pallet."

"Then he could not possibly imagine he had been dreaming."

"I think not, as this is the second time I have appeared to him in the spirit."

"I remember you told me once before that you had seen him, and he himself confirmed it, although I know that you never left the house that day. But, tell me, did no one see you enter?"

"What matter if they did? Bolts and bars are no obstacles to a spirit."

"And you passed through prison walls and bolted doors without opposition?"

"I did, and I promised that I should be with him again in his cell as the clock struck two, so that he might be quite sure that he had not been dreaming."

"You will keep your appointment, of course?" I said.

"If I do not, I do not know who it will be that will prevent me."

Here our conversation ceased, and we passed our time as usual until it drew towards two o'clock in the afternoon, when my friend suddenly stopped in the middle of talking and said,

"Do not disturb me, Molly dear, or allow anyone else to. I am going to John."

Then throwing herself back in an arm-chair, she appeared almost immediately in

a sound sleep, resembling a swoon. I then observed, as it were, two outlines to her form, for a cloudy substance like a halo began to envelop her, which, widening as it rose upwards, from the body began to solidify or partially so, and to assume the exact form and features of Claribel. Having separated itself from her person, it passed rapidly before my face like a gust of wind, causing my hair to stir and crackle as if singed with a candle,^[20] and passing head foremost through the window with inconceivable velocity was instantly lost to my view.

An indescribable feeling of horror passed over me at being left thus alone with what appeared to be the corpse of my friend. The next moment my father entered the room, and fearing lest he should wake my friend in the middle of her trance by his talking, I ran to the door and begged he would not enter, as Claribel felt rather poorly and he might awake her, so he prudently retired to another room, when I gently turned the key of the door and kept watch close to the clay of my friend until the spirit should return to re-animate it.

Let us now take a peep at John in prison. Poor fellow! He had not slept a wink all night. He rose worn and languid. Disdaining his frugal breakfast of bread and water, with arms folded, eyes fixed and head sunk upon his breast, he paced dejectedly up and down the narrow limits of his cell.

"Is this John Archer?" he soliloquised. "Is this the man once surrounded by friends, the hope and pride of his parents, the favoured servant of Lord Edgedown, honoured and respected by all, now handcuffed and led off to prison on a charge of murder to await an ignominious trial, and probably be condemned to hang by the neck till he is dead in the presence of a jeering rabble? It cannot be. I must be transformed. I must be dreaming. This is not John Archer. Is John Archer a murderer? Can I really have committed a murder in a state of delirium which has obliterated all recollection of the crime committed? It must be so. How else could I have slept all night on the bare ground and on awaking find my gun discharged, my clothes bloodstained, and even the butt end of my rifle besmeared with blood?

"How is all this to be accounted for? I must have committed murder. Who will believe me if I assert my innocence, or how will the law be brought to look upon the crime as committed during temporary insanity? No; I shall be found guilty, condemned, and executed. I do believe that the vision of last night that appeared to me bearing the form and features of Claribel was my guardian angel come to apprise me of my doom.

"Oh, Claribel, Claribel! must we then for ever be parted? But what was that vision? Claribel in the flesh? For so it appeared; for sure it was no dream, yet how could that be? Could she herself have broken through bolts and bars or obtained a pass to speak to me alone? Impossible! Was it, perchance, some fiend having taken upon himself the likeness of those divine features in order so to mock me? Or was it merely an hallucination of my distempered brain? Whatever it was, I would that it were here again so that I might feast my eyes once more upon its lovely features ere I die."

He paused suddenly, for now, whether it were some trick of the senses, some hallucination conjured up by his over-excited brain, in the opposite corner of his cell something like a bluish vapour appeared, which seemed to grow denser, to solidify until it grew into the semblance of a human form, bearing the features of—whom?

"Claribel!" gasped out the prisoner, hardly above his breath, for his voice died within him and he remained awe-stricken. "What! Do I rave? Oh, beauteous image! Claribel! Claribel! Tell me, oh, my guardian angel, hast thou come to announce my doom, to solace my last moments? Oh, if it be thou indeed, Claribel, in the flesh and no delusion of my senses, come to me, let me feel the pressure of thy hand."

At this moment he sprang forward and attempted to seize the hand of the figure, which he had no sooner touched than it melted in his grasp, causing him to feel such a supernatural terror that he staggered backwards and gave an involuntary shriek.

The figure put its finger to its lip, the forefinger of the very hand that had vanished into thin air at the material touch of John Archer, but which had immediately resumed its previously defined form upon the withdrawing of Archer's hand.

"Angel or fiend!" he exclaimed. "Whatever thou art, that comest to me in this lovely guise, declare thy mission, unveil to me the future, and spare not mine ears if my doom be sealed. If there be hope——"

Here the figure again put its finger to its lip in token of silence, for Archer, now somewhat over his first surprise, spoke no longer in a husky whisper, but in a loud voice.

"Tell me, tell me," continued the prisoner, lowering his voice, "thou who seemest

no being of this world, and who doubtless art cognisant of secrets beyond our ken, tell me in pity how I have deserved this fate. Say, have these hands really been dyed in the blood of one of my fellow-men during the lapse of some passing insanity? Say, why am I here? Dost thou, O spirit, think me guilty?"

The phantom answered not, save by a look of commiseration and a slow shake of the head.

"I see that thou thinkest me not guilty. I thank thee for that. Mine innocence may yet be proved."

The spectre's features lighted up with a look of hope, as if it would answer "I wish it may."

"Angelic being!" he pursued, "vouchsafe me but one word. Say, will the true murderer be found?"

Another look of hope lighted up the spirit's features.

"He will, he will; I feel he will!" exclaimed the prisoner, enthusiastically. "Thank Heaven! But one word more. Dost know the criminal?"

The same look again, accompanied this time by a slight inclination of the head.

"Ah! thou knowest him? His name, his name; tell me!" Here the figure appeared somewhat confused, as if struggling to speak; then gliding rather than walking up to the wall of the cell, it traced with its finger the letters of a name in characters that appeared burnt into the stone, during which operation a crackling sound was heard similar to that before alluded to, and Archer, who had watched the movements of the figure with straining eyeballs and in breathless silence, gave a yell of surprise and agony as he read the name *Richard de Chevron*, and sank on the floor of his dungeon in a swoon.

A jingling of keys in the passage was now audible, and the next moment the jailor had entered the cell. Hearing the voice of the prisoner discoursing loudly, curiosity had led him to the door of his cell, but what was his dismay and consternation at finding the prisoner in a swoon on the floor, whilst over him, as if to protect him, lent the fair youthful form of a maiden, who after fixing her eyes intently for a moment, pointed to the writing on the wall.

The jailor, perfectly dumbfounded, would have asked her in surly tones, how she came there, and who let her in, but the presence of the figure filled him, in spite

of himself, with such awe that he could not utter a word. Then glancing at the writing on the wall and then again at the figure of the maiden, who looked at him in a manner that made him feel he knew not how, as he afterwards declared, he observed her rise to her feet, retreat one pace, and pointing once more to the writing on the wall, gradually dissolved herself into a mist and disappeared from his sight.

The jailor's courage now fairly left him, his knees knocked together in a panic, and he dropped his bunch of keys on the ground. At length recovering from his first surprise, he gazed around him, and found himself alone with the prisoner, who was still in his swoon. The first thing that he did was to secure the door of the cell, then walking up to the prisoner, shook him roughly, and assailed him with questions.

"Beautiful vision!" cried Archer, now awaking from his swoon, "thou has saved my life by denouncing the true murderer. Were it not for thee I might—— But where art thou? Gone—Fled? Has it, then, been all a dream? Oh!" he groaned, as his eyes caught the jailor bending over him.

"Come, be of good cheer, young man," said the jailor, kindly. "It was no dream, or if it was, we have both been dreaming, and had the same dream. I, too, saw the lady. I'll swear to that in any court of justice. Well, I never believed in ghosts before, young man. I never did, upon my word, but after what I have just seen with these eyes——"

"What! you saw her, too?" interrupted Archer. "You? Then it was no dream, but a divine vision sent by Providence to preserve the innocent. Look, there is her writing on the wall."

"What means that name, young man?" asked the jailor, gravely.

"She traced it with her own finger. I asked her to reveal to me the name of the true murderer, and that was the name she traced upon the wall."

"You are not imposing upon me, young man?" inquired the jailor, suspiciously.

"Not I," answered Archer, frankly. "Did you not see her yourself?"

"True, true," quoth the jailor; "I remember that she pointed to the writing and then vanished. Well, upon my soul, I do not know what to think of the matter. I have been here thirty years come Michaelmas, but what I have seen to-day passes all the experience of Miles Gratelock. I'll inform the authorities of what

has taken place at once, and I'll yet hope to see you out of this place; for to tell you the honest truth, lad, I don't think you capable of the murder, and never did; yet appearances," he added, "appearances, you know, must be taken into consideration, and they are often against us. However, we'll hope for the best."

Here the kindly jailor left the cell, and locking the door after him went straight to the authorities and laid the whole matter of the vision before them. As may be anticipated, the story was ridiculed. Some said that the jailor had been bribed by the prisoner to concoct such a narrative; others declared that the jailor must have been drunk, and having forgotten to lock the door of the cell some young female may have found admittance, and to cover his negligence he had trumped up this improbable story.

They, however, took the trouble to visit the cell of the prisoner and to examine the writing on the wall, which they all declared themselves to be at a loss to guess with what material the prisoner himself could have written the name. The prisoner was questioned and cross-questioned, but was not found to contradict himself in anything. A piece of chalk was then put into the prisoner's hand and he was ordered to write the same name underneath that supposed to have been written by the spirit, but the handwriting was perfectly dissimilar. The jailor was then called, and had to do the same, but neither in this case did the writing at all resemble the burnt characters on the wall.

Now, however mysterious this affair might have appeared to the authorities, yet to convict a gentleman of De Chevron's standing, or indeed any man upon such evidence as this, would be as absurd as it would be unfair; nevertheless, the story of the apparition in the prisoner's cell and of the writing on the wall spread like wildfire through the village, and had the effect of shaking the belief of many who had hitherto believed Archer guilty, and confirming more than ever in their previous belief those who still maintained him innocent.

The general currency of this story, too, gave rise to inquiries as to the intimacy that had existed between John Archer and De Chevron. A certain amount of intimacy it was proved had existed between them, but so far the evidence was rather on De Chevron's side, as witnesses came forward to prove that De Chevron had always shown himself most friendly towards young Archer, and had occasionally made him some trifling present.

There was no evidence that they had ever fallen out together, and therefore there was no reason at all to suspect De Chevron of the malicious conduct attributed to

him of committing a murder himself in order that an innocent man should be convicted of it. To strengthen the absurdity of the supposition, it was alleged that De Chevron had been absent in London at the time of the murder, thereby proving an *alibi*. Others not being satisfied with this statement, desired that it should be proved beyond doubt that De Chevron was in London at the time. Upon examination, however, the evidence was not quite so favourable to De Chevron this time. More than one witness deposed to having seen him at the window, although he had not been seen out of doors. It was proved that he had never quitted the village, although he had given out to his friends his intention of going to London; but he sought to exculpate himself by saying that he had announced to his friends his intended departure for London in order that he might avoid visits and enjoy the strictest seclusion for a time, as he was studying for the law.

This excuse was deemed sufficient, and might have satisfied all parties, had not still more startling evidence turned up. In the meantime the all but defunct pedlar had sufficiently recovered in order to give a detailed account of the occurrences on the night of the murder, and of De Chevron's duplicity and treachery, although he owned himself at a loss to conceive the motive of the attempted murder.

He acquitted John Archer of being implicated in any way in the crime, and denounced De Chevron as a double-dealing murderous villain. His evidence was taken down in writing by the surgeon who attended him, in the presence of several witnesses, and it was proposed that both John Archer and De Chevron should be confronted with the dying man.

This was accordingly done. The half-murdered pedlar managed to sustain life by an almost preternatural effort until the arrival of the two individuals. Upon the appearance of De Chevron his eye kindled with an incredible animation, considering his dying state, and although his utterance was now difficult, he succeeded in denouncing him as his murderer in sufficiently plain terms to be understood by all present. When his eye caught John Archer, the dying man stretched forth his hand to him, craved his pardon for the evil he had done him, but adding that it was all at the instigation of De Chevron, for the carrying out of some private scheme of his own. De Chevron endeavoured to justify himself, alleging that the man raved and that such testimony could not be depended upon. The pedlar, however, had given his evidence so clearly and concisely that it was accounted valid, after which he sank back and expired.

Now, whilst the evidence of the pedlar that had been taken down was being read out mention was made of the bottle of drugged wine said to have been given to the pedlar by De Chevron in order to carry out his base designs. A search was accordingly made for the bottle, which, being found, though empty—or, rather, nearly so—it was taken to a chemist, who found sufficient of the liquor left to analyse, which, when done, it was pronounced to contain narcotics of the most potent sort.

The house of De Chevron was next searched, and in a secret drawer of his desk was discovered a powder which upon being examined proved to contain similar ingredients to those discovered in the dregs of the wine at the bottom of the bottle. Besides this powder were found at De Chevron's lodgings sundry bottles of wine, all bearing exactly the same label as that found in the ditch close to the murdered man.

This evidence was considered conclusive, and De Chevron was seized for the purpose of being conducted to prison; but, despairing now of ever getting acquitted, and dreading to fall into the hands of justice, the miserable man suddenly drew out a pistol from his pocket, and holding the barrel to his forehead blew out his brains on the spot.

This last rash deed of De Chevron's caused even more sensation in the village and the parts adjacent than the mysterious murder of the pedlar. The wretched suicide was interred without obsequies in the centre of two cross roads, with a stake driven through his body, according to the usual custom.

I need not say that John Archer was freely acquitted, and welcomed once more among us with hearty cheers. Even those who had been the most bitter against him at first now came forward to extend to him the hand of friendship.

How the poor lad seemed to enjoy his liberty after his incarceration! But yesterday imprisoned for murder, shunned by all his friends and hated by everybody, with the prospect of an ignominious death before him. To-day openly acquitted, restored to the bosom of his family, surrounded by his friends, and receiving their congratulations. In an instant he had forgotten all his past woes, and thought himself amply compensated for all his suffering by being again allowed to visit his lady-love.

I will leave you to imagine, gentlemen, the joy of us all, and especially of Claribel, at John's acquittal, as well as the importunate questioning of the neighbours concerning the apparition of Claribel to John within the prison cell.

There are many people who profess to know their neighbours' business better than they do themselves. According to this sort of people—and there are many in the village to this day—John Archer's marriage with Claribel Falkland was a thing already settled. The day had been fixed upon, and all was in order—in fact the kindly neighbours had made everything as easy as possible for the young couple, whereas John had never yet opened his lips in the way of love to the idol of his heart, being, as I have before mentioned, of a shy and reserved temperament. Yet so sure were the neighbours of John's private affairs, that one of his friends said jocularly that when their banns should be published in church that he would stand up and forbid them, as in marrying Claribel he would be committing bigamy, seeing that she could make herself two persons at once. Would that the neighbours had been in the right as to the future of this pair, for a couple better suited for each other could not have been found; but, alas, who is master of his fate? Who can pry into the secret ways of Providence? It little boots to speculate on what the future of these two amiable and ingenuous natures would have been if everything had gone well, for a dire fate was in store for them. But let me not anticipate.

It was a winter morning, but remarkably fine for that time of the year, when Claribel and I went out together for a ramble in an adjacent wood. We had been laughing and chatting by the way, when suddenly I observed the features of my friend to become overcast. When I inquired the reason of her sadness, she replied,

"I know not how it is, Molly, but somehow or other I feel as if some danger were threatening John."

Now, I had long ceased to laugh at her for what I used to look upon as mere nervous fancies, so many of them having proved well founded, but I merely suggested to her that perhaps she did not feel well, and that we had better return home.

"Yes, yes, Molly," she said; "for Heaven's sake let us return at once, as I feel more and more sure that poor John is in some danger. You remember my presentiment about Richard de Chevron, which you laughed at. Was that well founded or not? Well, as I felt certain then that some harm was in store for John, so do I now. Come, let us hasten our steps."

"God forbid," said I, "that poor John should fall a victim a second time to treachery or witchcraft," and we hurried home, never halting until we reached

my father's house.

On entering the parlour Claribel gave a hasty glance at the glazed cupboard where she had placed the waxen image intended as a likeness of John Archer, and which she had not looked at for ever so long. It was wanting.

"Molly!" she cried, in great anxiety, "where is the waxen image? What can have become of it? Just ask your father if he has removed it."

Now, being winter time, there was a blazing fire in the room, and my father, who was at this time laid up with the gout, would draw himself up to it and smoke his yard of clay. He was absent from the parlour when we entered, but we found his chair ready placed for him.

"Good heavens! Molly, what's this?" cried Claribel, in alarm, as she touched the mantelpiece over the fireplace. "Can it be? No; yes, it *is*—*the waxen image molten away!* Who can have done it? Oh, wretched being that I am! Go, and at once, to the house of John, and inquire after his health."

I was preparing to execute her commission, and was just upon setting out alone to John's house, which was not far from our own, when one of the neighbours, a woman—one of the most notorious gossips of the place, whose sole delight was to be the first to deliver bad news—met me at the door as I was just going out.

"Oh, Molly my dear, have you heard the sad news? Lack-a-day! who'd have thought it? Oh, lauk-a-daisy-me! poor Claribel! how she will take on about it to be sure!"

"Speak out, woman!" cried Claribel, from the parlour, for she had heard every word through the open door. "Speak out. What has happened?"

"Oh Lord! my dear, that poor young man John Archer, as you appears to have been so fond of well, my dear, he's gone—yes, *dead*, struck down by a sudden fever, they say—in the very spring-time of his youth; it's hardly a quarter of an hour since, so I thought I'd come at once to tell you."

This communication, partly interrupted by sobs and partly by want of breath, for the bearer of the sad news had set off as fast as her legs could carry her, in order to be the first to communicate it, had a terrible effect on the nervous system of my poor friend Claribel. Forgetting her usual self-composure in her extreme anguish, she gave utterance to a shriek so piercing and doleful, that it seemed to shake the very house to its foundations, and sank back into the nearest chair in a

swoon. The scream brought my father to the door to inquire what was the matter, while the good neighbour—for in spite of her mania for delivering bad news, she was still a woman at heart—bustled about to procure restoratives and to sprinkle water on my poor friend's face until she recovered.

The news we had heard was only too true, for, sad to relate, poor John Archer, who up to that very morning had been the picture of robust health, suddenly fell the victim of a violent fever that carried him off within a few hours. The doctors were at a loss to account for the disease, as there was no fever at that time in the neighbourhood. It was an isolated case. During his delirium he was heard to give vent to certain incoherent ravings, frequently calling out, "The waxen image! the waxen image!" He was heard to couple the names of De Chevron and Madge Mandrake together, but the bystanders, his parents, understood nothing of his meaning.

There remains little more to relate. It appears that my father when left alone in the house had been prying into every nook and corner of it for his snuff-box, which he had lost, until he stumbled upon the little waxen image in the glazed cupboard, of the history of which he knew nothing, but which he instantly recognised as intended for a likeness of John Archer, imagining that either myself or Claribel had been amusing ourselves with endeavouring to represent the lineaments of our common friend in wax, and thinking it very good and clever, he thought it would make a pretty chimney ornament, and accordingly placed it on the mantelpiece when the fire was yet low. Afterwards, he had heaped on fuel, being very cold that day, and shortly afterwards had been called away by a neighbour on business. In the meantime the fire had blazed up and so heated the room that before he returned to the parlour there was nothing left of the effigy of John Archer but a shapeless heap of wax.

On recovering from the swoon my poor friend reproached herself in the severest terms with not having foreseen such a contingency, adding that she alone had been the cause of John's death, as she ought to have locked the cupboard and taken away the key. I strove to reason with her and comfort her, but she was deaf to all consolation. The sad event of John's death had cast a gloom over us all. As for Claribel, poor soul, it was a shock from which she never recovered. She drooped and pined away from that hour, and outlived young Archer but one month. Peace be to their ashes!

On concluding her affecting narrative, our worthy hostess thrust a corner of her

apron into her eye in order to staunch a rising tear called into existence by tender recollections of her poor deceased friend and her unfortunate lover, but she was soon cut short in the indulgence of her grief by the boisterous applause that simultaneously ensued from all the members of the club. This was the cheering and clapping of hands before alluded to that had attracted the attention of our artist while painting from the fair Helen in the opposite room, and which, as our reader will recollect, was the signal for the young portrait painter to commence his Italian story of "The Three Pauls."

"And so that rascal De Chevron cheated the gallows after all," broke in Mr. Oldstone, during the pause that succeeded the tumultuous cheering that greeted the relation of Dame Hearty.

"But what became of Madge Mandrake? You have not told us that. She didn't escape scot-free, surely?"

"Well, you see, sir, the law had no actual hold on her," replied the hostess; "but I have every reason to believe that she died hard. She was discovered dead one day on the floor of her hovel, in her day clothes, her eyes fixed and starting from her head, her features distorted, and her fingers extended like claws, as if grasping the floor. Some thought she had died in a fit, but, whatever the cause of her death, it is certain she must have suffered great agony, and I cannot look upon the mode of her death otherwise than as a judgment for her many sins. She had never been known to enter a church within the memory of man, and though she had led a notoriously bad life, it seems that the parish could not deny her a Christian burial, and she was interred in the old churchyard yonder with all due ceremony, but report said at the time that she had frequently been seen since by those who happened to be passing through the churchyard late at night or thereabouts, and that should a thunderstorm burst over the head of the benighted traveller, as he wended his weary steps past this abode of the dead, a shadowy form with a steeple-crowned hat and astride on a broomstick might be seen riding through the murky air, and behind her a black tom cat with a pair of flame-coloured eyes. Yells and groans, mingled with demoniacal laughter, were said to have been heard, as if proceeding from beneath the ground by those who happened to pass through the churchyard close to her grave after nightfall. Owls, bats, carrion crows, and other obscene birds would be found perched on the head of her grave, and, scared at the footsteps of a stranger, would fly screeching away.

"At least, this is what the country folk would say; but never having seen nor

heard any of these things myself, gentlemen, I cannot vouch for their authenticity, yet there are few folks in the village to this day but would not put themselves much out of the way in order to avoid passing through that same churchyard on a stormy night."

"In fact," remarked Mr. Crucible, "there is every reason to believe that the old lady was d——"

A storm had for some time past been gathering overhead, and just then a terrific clap of thunder prevented the conclusion of Mr. Crucible's sentence from being audible.

"Lauk-a-daisy-me! what a peal!" exclaimed Dame Hearty. "It was enough to shake the house down. I'm terrible frightened of thunder. It makes me feel alloverish like."

"I shouldn't wonder," suggested Mr. Blackdeed, "if old Madge on her broomstick should be riding overhead. Just go out and see, Dame Hearty, will you?"

"Not I, sir, not for the world," quoth our hostess. "And pray don't talk of that horrible person in such weather, or I shall go off in a fit. Already I begin to fancy I see her before me, with her nose and chin meeting like a lobster's claws, with hardly room enough between them for a decent-sized hazel nut.

"How I can call to mind, too, her grizzly beard, like a well-used scrubbing brush, that left you in doubt as to whether she really could belong to our sex! Then her beetle brows overhanging her sockets like a dragoon's moustache, and all but concealing her small deeply-sunk and viperish eyes, which gleamed with envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness."

"There, did you see that flash!" exclaimed Dr. Bleedem. "Just wait a moment; here it comes."

A second tremendous crash resounded, causing the window panes to revibrate and the whole house to rock to its foundations.

"Lord have mercy upon us!" cried the hostess in extreme terror.

"That is a judgment sent on you by old Madge for speaking ill of her," said Professor Cyanite.

"Oh! hold your tongue, naughty man, do," said our hostess, half playfully, half in

terror. "Here comes the rain in torrents. How it pours! Well, gentlemen, if you'll excuse me, I've got to attend to the house."

"Certainly," cried several members at once, "and many thanks for your very interesting story."

Our hostess curtsied, said they were very welcome, and left the room.

FOOTNOTES:

[20] A better simile would be "as if charged with electricity," or "like sparks emitted from an electric machine," as this case, which is founded on fact, and which, together with other similar phenomena, is probably of electric origin. (*Vide* Mrs. CROW'S "Nightside of Nature.") Yet we must bear in mind that we are speaking at a time before electricity created that furor in the world that succeeded the discoveries of Benjamin Franklin, and that it is only an unsophisticated country landlady who is speaking, whose science goes no further than the making of an apple pudding, roasting a leg of mutton, or frying a beefsteak.



CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH OCCURS MR. PARNASSUS' BALLAD—THE CHIEFTAIN'S DESTINY.

"Wretched weather, eh?" remarked Mr. Oldstone. "We shall have to call for lights soon. Here, Cyanite, a game of chess, what do you say? A story from whom ever loses."

"Thank you," replied the Professor, "but I have a letter to write which is of some importance."

"Come now, Crucible, have at *you*," quoth Oldstone.

"I have not played for years," replied Crucible, "and as I have no story wherewith to pay the penalty and am consequently out of practice and sure to lose and——"

"What do you say, Blackdeed?" asked Oldstone.

"Well, to say the truth," answered the chemist, "I find myself much in the same position as my friend Mr. Crucible, for were I to lose, an event which amounts to a dead certainty, I am perfectly sure I should not be able to pay the forfeit, even if I were to be imprisoned for it."

"Perhaps you'll oblige me, Hardcase," said the antiquary.

"Another time, thank you, Oldstone," replied the lawyer; "but the fact is that I've promised Bleedem a game of cards."

"Well really, gentlemen, I don't know what has come over you all," said Mr. Oldstone. "Perhaps Mr. Parnassus will oblige me, as nobody else will."

"Well, I never piqued myself upon being much of a chess-player," replied Parnassus, "but as the other gentlemen have refused, and I have nothing particular to do, I don't mind doing you a favour, and if I lose and don't happen to recollect a story, well I must owe it you."

"Agreed," said Oldstone. "Draw your chair to the table and set the board."

The game began. Hardcase and Bleedem also had taken their seats and commenced theirs. Professor Cyanite retired to write his letter, whilst Messrs. Blackdeed and Crucible drew their chairs up to the fire and talked politics.

A stillness reigned through the club as the last-mentioned gentlemen conversed together in a low tone and the rest remained absorbed in their several occupations. Suddenly, in the midst of this unusual silence, the triumphant voice of Mr. Oldstone was heard to cry out the magic word, "check-mate."

"Now then, Parnassus, my boy," said he, rubbing his hands, "a story, you know; there's no getting out of it. Give us a little ode or ballad like that you gave us once before, on the night of our grand saturnalia."

"When I can think of one and a propitious moment presents itself, I am at your service, but these gentlemen, you see, are otherwise occupied; besides, here comes Helen to lay the cloth for supper."

"Well, Helen," cried Mr. Oldstone, "and what has become of your enamoured portrait painter?"

"Mr. McGuilp?" inquired Helen, blushing deeply. "Is he not here? I left him some time ago cleaning his palette and brushes."

"Ah! here he comes at last," exclaimed Crucible, halting in the middle of his politics. "Lucky dog! to be able to have so much beauty all to himself."

"Well, if he *has* had Helen to himself all this time, we've had a story during his absence," said the antiquary.

"Ah, but so have we," said McGuilp. "Haven't we Helen?"

"Yes, we have indeed, and a long one," replied Helen.

"The deuce you have," said Crucible. "Upon my word, Mr. McGuilp, I think that's hardly fair; first robbing us of our lady and then telling her a story all to yourself, from which we are debarred."

"Come now," retorted McGuilp, "are we not quits? Have you already forgotten my story of the 'Scharfrichter,' with which I purchased a sitting from Helen? If Helen and I have had a story together from which you have been shut out, at least you have had one that we have not enjoyed."

"Yes, Crucible, I think it is all fair," said Oldstone, backing up his young friend.

The cloth now being laid, the members drew their chairs to the table, and the supper went off amidst laughter and jovial conversation. The bottle went round a few times at the last before the cloth was finally cleared, when each drew round the fire, which was now blazing fiercely, our host having just put on a fresh log, and each lighting his pipe, waited, according to custom, for someone to broach a new story.

"Now, Parnassus, my boy," said Oldstone, "we are quite ready for your story. What is it to be?"

"Well then, gentlemen, since I must pay my forfeit, I will, according to a wish expressed by Mr. Oldstone, sing you a little ballad of my own composing."

"Yes, yes; hear, hear! A song, a song! Make ready for a song."

The members re-settled themselves on their chairs, and pronounced themselves "all attention," while the young poet, throwing himself back carelessly in his chair and crossing one leg over the other, began in a clear rich voice, the following ditty.

THE CHIEFTAIN'S DESTINY.

CANTO THE FIRST.

A skiff is seen upon the main,
The purple wave of Oman's sea;
Her prow doth long to kiss again
The perfumed shores of Araby.
A gentle Zephyr fills the sail.
But, ah, too soft, too mild the gale
For one on board, who, mounted high,
Scans the far shore with eagle eye.

'Tis Selim's bark that, long away,
Hath wandered on the salt sea foam,
And brings him after many a day
Back to this land, though not his home.
What in the distance glads his eye?
A sight none other can descry—

The kerchief he his mistress gave
Now from her casement high doth wave.

The signal yet is but a speck,
The cloud has vanished from his brow;
Yet chafing still, he walks the deck
Impatiently from helm to prow,
As if his eagerness could urge
His vessel faster through the surge.
But as the craft now nigher drew,
The signal note his swarthy crew.

Now gaily speeds the gallant bark,
Soon within grasp of land once more;
The sun has set, yet 'tis not dark.
Each swarthy sailor leaps ashore,
Yet almost ere they can alight
Their captain scales a dizzy height,
And in the moonlight hand in hand
Two lovers at the casement stand.

"Oh, Selim! why this long delay?"
A soft voice whispers 'neath the moon.
"I've wept for thee full many a day,
Watching the sea from morn till noon,
In hope— But hist! there're footsteps nigh;
The Caliph keeps a watchful eye.
The moon is up, thou must be gone—
One kiss. Farewell. We meet at dawn."

Zuleika to her bower turned—
Her jasmine bower's perfumed shade;
A fever in her bosom burned.
That night upon her couch being laid,
The nightingale that woos the rose
Breaks not so much on her repose
As the loud beating of her heart
With feelings she will ne'er impart

To mortal man, save him alone
Who wooed and won her from her sire.
Her love in secret long hath grown,
And much she fears her parents' ire;
She knows her father sets his face
Against her lover's impious race,
But still, her troth is plighted now.
"Or him or Death," thus ran her vow.

CANTO THE SECOND.

Zuleika's beauty from her birth
Had been such as might well entice
The saints above to visit Earth
From Mahommed's gay Paradise;
Her raven tresses shamed the night,
Her step so proud and yet so light,
'Twould seem as though she trod the air,
Like Peri; nor was she less fair.

An eye that mocked the wild gazelle,
A voice, although untrained by art,
Sweet as a strain of Israfel,
The strings of whose melodious heart
A lyre are, with tones so sweet
That angels listen at his feet,
And the stars sink to the ground
When those living chords resound.

That cheek that paled the rose in hue
Grows pallid, and her bosom heaves;
Those lips, like rosebuds in the dew
Enclosing pearls within their leaves,
Are trembling, and her fairy form,
Like lily bending to the storm,
Quivers as an aspen grove,
With sore misgivings of her love.

The Caliph was a man of might;
Zuleika was his only child,
He scarce could bear her from his sight,
Nor was he of a temper mild;
And woe to him, the caitiff Giaour
Who fell in dread El Amin's power.
Zuleika sighs, what fears appal
Her soul, lest this should him befall.

The maiden slumbered scarce that night,
Or she slumbered but to dream,
Such dreams as bravest souls affright;
Then waking with a start or scream,
She soon forsook her fitful sleep,
O'er Selim's likely fate to weep,
Till the morning star's dim ray
Now heralds the approach of day.

The morning shed a ghastly light,
Appearing to Zuleika's eye
Full ominous. The clouds in sight
Like streaks of blood across the sky,
While gazing on the distance drear,
Hark! what footsteps greet her ear?
She spies afar at fullest speed
Her lover on his Arab steed.

CANTO THE THIRD.

One bound, and he is by her side;
She greets him with a sorrowing eye.
"What ails thee now, my love, my bride,
And wherefore dost thou deeply sigh?
There is a shade upon thy brow
That I have never seen till now.
Shake off these moods, dispel all fear.
Is't not enough that I am here?"

Zuleika heaved a heavy sigh.
"Oh, Selim, if thou still art mine,
Take me, and this instant fly
Unto thy home across the brine;
For if there's danger hovering nigh
With thee, and not alone, I'd die.
Set off at once, nor more delay;
See how yon orb leads on the day."

"Nay, loved one, but I have a vow.
Seest thou yon peak where clouds do lower;
That mountain doth contain, I trow,
A talisman of mighty power
Within its heart, and I have sworn
To seize it ere to-morrow's dawn.
When at thy feet the gem I lay,
Then, but not erst, our wedding day.

"This is the vow I must fulfil,
And ere we fly across the main
The talisman, come good or ill,
Is thine. I've sworn it thee to gain.
It gives eternal life and youth,
Annuling time's remorseless tooth.
The mountain opens once a day;
'Tis guarded by a Genii grey."

"Thou shalt not run this risk for me,"
Zuleika cried. But Selim's brow
Grew darker. "Never maid," quoth he,
"Shall counsel me to break my vow.
Know'st thou not a warrior's word
Is sacred ever as his sword?
An thou wouldst be a chieftain's bride,
Cease me for my vow to chide."

Then round his neck her arms she flings.
"Oh, Selim, hear me once and stay.
Azrael flaps his dusky wings,

Al Hassan smiles and points the way."
These words in boding tones she saith—
"Thou ridest on to certain death.
Last night I dreamed, my chieftain free,
That Eblis ope'd its jaws for thee."

Then with a smile he sought to lure
Her fancies from their dark abode.
"Thy maiden fears to but conjure
These phantoms that the mind corrode."
Then added, whilst his brows he bent,
"Unworthy were I my descent,
Could I be scared from this my theme
By warning through a word or dream.

"With thee I through the world would rove;
But ere I seek to make thee mine,
I'd prove me worthy of thy love,
For I am of a Gheber line.
The chieftain of a race whose breath
Flows freer in the face of Death;
No coward fear can e'er entwine
Its coils around a heart like mine.

"Think'st thou a warrior bred in strife
And nurtured at the breast of woe
Could bide a tame voluptuous life,
Or stand in dread of mortal foe?
I tell thee, girl, I live to brave
The hairbreadth chances of the grave;
Full weary were my life to me,
Were danger not a luxury.

"I carve my fate with my right arm,
My life I dedicate to thee,
I'll guard thee 'gainst the world from harm,
And hold thee like a warrior free,
Though Eblis' self should seek to wrest
Thee from this true and loving breast.

The sun is high; cease to repine.
Farewell. The charm ere eve is thine."

CANTO THE FOURTH.

He on the pommel lays his hand,
And lightly leaps into his seat;
His steed impatiently the sand
Is pawing with his eager feet.
Now forward, and away! away!
Fast onward speeds that charger gay;
Fleet as the wind is Selim's flight
To reach the goal ere fall of night.

His charger's mettle's at the test,
For until the setting sun
Gilds yonder slope he must not rest;
His and his master's will are one.
The journey will brook no delay
To stop for water on the way,
So onward fly at fullest speed
The rider and his barb Djerid.

Still onward flies the goaded steed;
Full half the day is sped and gone.
In foam and sweat the bold Djerid
Still towards the mountain's base rides on.
Now with a crash the mountain's side
Is rent in twain. A cavern wide
Displays to view a jewelled hall;
'Tis guarded by a Genii tall.

Arrived now at the mountain's base,
One hour ere the set of sun,
The cavern yawns before his face,
And soon the charger's course is run.
A voice of thunder from the cave,
That shakes the mountain, utters, "Slave,

Forbear this sacred soil to tread,
Thy death be else on thine own head."

But Selim draws from out his vest
A bough, plucked from some distant shore—
A magic bough, compelling rest
On those whom he should wave it o'er.
He waves it, and the Genii sleeps;
No guardian now the threshold keeps.
He enters; views the jewel bright
Suspended from the cavern's height,

One wrench, 'tis his, that jewel bright;
That talisman, that oft of yore
Sages have searched for day and night,
And burned their midnight oil for.
Caressing now his brave Djerid,
Still mounted, yet spurs on his steed.
Now, as the sun sinks 'neath the main,
The cavern closes once again.

But now the clouds eclipse the sky,
The air grows sultry, and the wind
Is lulled, yet on Djerid doth fly;
The mountain is left far behind.
"Zuleika! Oh, my love, my bride.
Who now shall tear thee from my side?
If not to-night, to-morrow's morn
Shall see this gem thy brow adorn."

The lowering sky grew black as night,
And vivid flashes rent the air,
No human dwelling lay in sight—
For miles and miles the plain seemed bare.
An awful stillness reigned around,
A horse's hoofs made all the sound,
And even Selim 'gan to fear
Some unknown danger hovering near.

And still more sultry grew the air,
And peal on peal of thunder rolled,
No wild beast ventured from his lair;
Yet onward sped that courser bold—
O'er crags, through marshes, bush or briar,
He trampling tore with feet of fire,
When sudden, without shriek or yell,
The horse was struck, the rider fell.

CANTO THE FIFTH.

A lightning flash hath cleft a rock,
And formed a chasm in the stone.
Within the cleft, with mighty shock,
Selim from off his steed is thrown.
His limbs are jambed between its walls;
In vain for aid he loudly calls.
No earthly power now can save
The victim from his living grave.

In vain he puts forth all his strength
To free him from the horrid cleft;
Those limbs so free are bound at length,
For of all power he's bereft.
Eternal life is in his hand
To live on thus dread Fate's command,
His doom is sealed, he cannot die,
But lingers through eternity.

Zuleika waits the coming morn
With heaving breast and watchful eye.
She scans the plain at early dawn
But nought of her lover can descry.
No tidings through the livelong day
No footsteps tread that haunted way;
Day after day, yet no return;
His fate she now herself will learn.

Then mounting at the break of day
Her milk-white palfrey, leaves her home
Behind her, and away! away!
Upon her lover's tracks to roam.
The noontide sun's fierce glowing ray
Checks not her palfrey's onward way;
She goads him on, nor slacks his speed
Till pants for thirst her jaded steed.

No water near his thirst to slake
Beneath that glowing sultry sky.
Her maiden fears now 'gin to wake,
as were some threatening danger nigh.
Her palfrey rears and ere a groan
Escapes her, a stout arm is thrown
Around her. As she calls aloud
The Genii stands half-fiend, half-cloud.

Then whisking her high up in air,
The fiend in voice of thunder cried,
"Behold thy lover in his lair;
Thou'st torn for ever from his side.
Nought can avert his destiny,
For ever through eternity
Within yon cleft he must abide.
I claim thee now to be my bride."

"Oh, Allah!" cried she, "hear my prayer:
Help me this Genii to defy.
If Selim's bride I may be ne'er,
Take back my soul and let me die!"
Her prayer is heard; her gentle soul
Now wanders towards a higher goal,
And in those realms of endless light
The angels greet a sister sprite.

Then Selim, gazing high in air,
Beholds his loved one, hears her pray.
He cries aloud in wild despair,

The Genii clasps a thing of clay;
Relaxing then his giant force,
To Earth he hurls her lily corse.
Now lie for ever side by side
Th' undying chief and his dead bride.

Zuleika's palfrey wanders home,
Alas! without its gentle freight.
El Amin hath set out to roam
For tidings of his daughter's fate.
Ne'er more to see her was his lot;
The Genii guards that haunted spot,
And close where his Zuleika lay,
The chieftain lingers to this day.

Scarce had the last word of the song died in the echo, than unbounded applause once more shook the old panelled walls of the "Headless Lady." After which Mr. Oldstone, rising and seizing the young poet by the hand, poured forth so warm an eulogium on his poetical talent as to make that young gentleman blush up to the roots of his hair.

The laurel crown was even hinted at again. This, however, Mr. Parnassus modestly but firmly refused, saying that he could not sit crowned in the midst of such a talented assembly merely because his weak endeavours to entertain the company were given out in rhyme instead of in prose; besides which, he added, that he had merely paid the forfeit agreed upon for losing at chess, and that he was entitled to no thanks or marks of honour for merely discharging his debt.

The laurel tree outside was therefore suffered to continue its growth until some future occasion, and after various comments on our friend Parnassus' poem, and much pleasant conversation, the company broke up for the night, and each lighting his candle, retired to his own chamber.

CHAPTER V.

A TALE OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION.—THE BARBER'S STORY.

The following morning broke fine but frosty, and the members of the club being up sufficiently early for that time of the year, they all agreed to take a long stroll before breakfast in the adjacent wood. Indeed, the members of our club lived so thoroughly in an atmosphere of punch and tobacco-smoke that an outing every now and then was requisite in order to air their brains.

They strolled out, accordingly, by twos and threes, passing over fields glittering with hoar-frost, until they came to a stile, which having crossed over, they found themselves immediately in a wood.

It was a fine old place—that same ancient piece of woodland, where huge oaks and beeches were interspersed with the fir, pine and birch. The fantastic roots that shot out from the gnarled trunks of the majestic oaks, like giants' limbs writhing in mortal agony, were coated here and there in broad irregular patches of dank moss and variously-tinted lichen. Their distorted colossal branches, stripped of their leaves and silvered at their extremities with the hoar-frost, seemed struggling to catch the first beams of a winter sun, while the shadowy outline of the misty purple mass of distant trees brought out in bolder relief and more vigorous hue the foreground thickly strewn with richly-tinted leaves of russet, scarlet and orange. The dank fungus, luxuriant in its foul growth, emerged from the velvet moss as if to outvie in glow the variegated richness of the dried leaves of the forest.

It was a scene to awaken the soul of a poet, to inspire a landscape painter with increased love of his art; and as our two friends McGuilp and Parnassus strolled arm-in-arm together through this region of enchantment, leaving their footprints in the crisp frost, which they traversed with the buoyant footsteps of youth, leaving the elder members considerably in the rear, each felt himself drawn towards the other by a bond of common sympathy. It is not necessary to record every expression of enthusiasm that escaped the lips of our two friends, nor to follow minutely the philosophic meditations of the more mature members of the club who brought up the rear, as at every step the scene unfolded new and fresh

beauties to their view.

Let it suffice our reader that their morning's walk proved highly beneficial to them all, for they returned with marvellous appetites to the inn, where a sumptuous breakfast of eggs and bacon, coffee, hot rolls, etc., had just been spread for them by the fair hands of our Helen, who waited to greet them on the doorstep.

The usual merry bantering from each member of the club in turn succeeded, as a matter of course, and was replied to on Helen's part by a pretty rustic coyness or smart repartee. Our artist thought he had never seen her look to such advantage as now, glowing in the full morning light. He noticed, too, that she was more sprucely dressed than usual. What could it mean? As he asked himself this question, the church bells of the village began to chime. The mystery was out—it was Sunday, and McGuilp's hopes of a sitting fell to the ground.

"How say you—Sunday again?" exclaimed Mr. Oldstone, as he sat down to his hot coffee. "Dear me! how the week has passed away!" Then passing his hand over his chin, he said, "I omitted to shave this morning. My hand shook so, owing to the stiffness of my night-cap last night before I went to roost. It will not do to appear at church with a chin like Hamlet's 'fretful porcupine,' and as I cannot shave myself, I must inquire if there be not someone skilled in the noble science of barber-craft in the village. How say you, Helen, my girl, know you not some knight of the razor, some nimble and expert mower, who will rid me of this crop without finding it necessary to combine the art of the leech at the same time?"

"Aye, sir," answered Helen; "there is young Master Suds, the village barber, successor to Old Hackchin, whom folks say never was much account. Young Suds is lately from France, where he has been improving himself in his art. He has introduced into the village all sorts of new modes for trimming the hair and wigs, with numerous other French novelties. You would be sure to be pleased with him, sir."

"Humph!" muttered Mr. Oldstone, who was much too old-fashioned an English gentleman to be over partial to our friends across the channel. "I don't want my head frizzled, thank you, but a firm, steady, English hand to shave me—a man that is not above his business, and who will not bore me to death with his gossip."

"Oh, as to that, sir," replied Helen, "it is part of a barber's profession. Many folks

think it a recommendation. I am sure our villagers are delighted with his store of news."

"No doubt, no doubt," said Oldstone, testily. "He had better cut it short, though, with me. However, send for this young blade, and tell him I wish to see a sample of his art. I shall be ready for him directly after breakfast."

And off tripped our landlord's pretty daughter in obedience to the antiquary's orders.

"Pon my life! Crucible, this bacon is delicious," said he, helping himself afresh. "What say you, Blackdeed?"

Both gentlemen acquiesced, as did also the other members in turn.

"And the eggs divine," said Dr. Bleedem, bolting one at a mouthful.

"Excellent," joined in McGuilp and Parnassus, filling their plates.

The meal passed off pleasantly, and the last member at table had scarcely wiped his mouth with his napkin when Master Suds was announced.

"Here, Helen, my dear," said Oldstone, "you may clear away now, and then you may call in your gallant. I am sure you will excuse me, gentlemen, for making you spectators to my operation?"

"Certainly," answered the club all round.

"There, that will do, Helen; now call him in."

Helen disappeared with the breakfast things, when a timid knock at the door was heard.

"Come in," roared sundry voices at once, and Master Suds appeared upon the scene, with his shaving tackle in a bag, and having his hair frizzled up in a caricature of the latest French fashion.

"Bong jour, Mounseers," he began, with a flourish.

"Don't mounseer me, you young whipper-snapper," said the antiquary; "but learn to speak the king's English when Englishmen honour you with their custom."

"Pardong, mounseer—that is, I mean, I beg pardon, gentlemen; but habit, gentlemen—habit, you know—is rather difficult to get rid of, and when one has

just come from foreign parts, like myself, one is apt to——"

"Cut it short, young shaver," said Oldstone, "and bend you to your task. Are your razors sharp?"

"Mais oui, mounseer—that is——"

"If I catch you mounseering me again, I'll make that French pate of thine and this English fist acquainted, so mind," said the insulted antiquary.

This terrible threat imposed temporary silence on our knight of the lather, who soaped and sudded away for a time without a word.

During this pause the spectators of the operation, who were seated or standing about the room, conversed together in groups in an undertone. Mr. Blackdeed and Mr. Crucible appeared to be particularly engrossed in conversation, but the tone they spoke in was inaudible to the ordinary listener. Not so, however, to Mr. Oldstone, whose ears were unusually sharp, and rendered more so on the present occasion from the position of forced quiet that he was obliged to maintain under the barber's hands. To judge by the tragedian's action, a looker-on might have supposed him quoting from one of his own melodramas, and imagined him to say, "Fly with me, dearest; leave for ever the roof of a tyrant father, and take shelter in the heart of one who is ready to lay down his life for thy sake." While Mr. Crucible might have been supposed to be rehearsing the lady's part, and to say, "Oh! tempt me not, Alonso; you know him not. I dare not fly with thee."

The ears of Mr. Oldstone, however, interpreted the gesticulations in a very different manner. Nothing could be more plain to the ears of this worthy than these words from the tragedian. "The political state of France will be a great interruption to all kinds of business." He could hardly believe his ears, or that anyone could dare to use such treasonable words within the sacred precincts of the club, so he listened again, and this time caught a few disconnected words in Mr. Crucible's tone of voice, such as 'stocks,' 'bonds,' 'premiums,' 'interest,' and the like.

Suddenly the whilom president of the grand saturnalia of the Wonder Club was observed to start violently.

"Why, you rascal, you've cut me!" he cried to the barber.

"Pardong Mounseer, mais ce n'etait pas ma faute," said the confused barber.

"What! French again, you monkey, to my face! Would you add insult to injury?" said the incensed antiquary.

But calming down at length, said, "Well, well, lad, I acquit you this time, for I verily believe that those two gentlemen in the corner there (pointing to Messrs. Blackdeed and Crucible) are more to blame than yourself for startling me out of my self-possession by the tenor of their conversation.

"Mr. Blackdeed, and you too, Mr. Crucible, you are both perfectly aware that such conversation is not to be tolerated in the club. I am surprised and grieved to be obliged to remind two such old members of our society of their duty, and in order to put a check upon such lamentable want of discipline, I condemn you Mr. Blackdeed to recite one of your own tragedies at full length, and you Mr. Crucible to be ready with a story when next called upon."

Both of the gentlemen addressed looked abashed, and muttered something in the shape of an apology. Having conscientiously discharged his duty, Mr. Oldstone re-settled himself on his chair, and the operation proceeded.

Master Suds was the first to endeavour to restore equanimity.

"A fine day, sir," he said, "for this time of the year."

"Humph!" grunted the antiquary, who was soaped up to the eyes, and was forced to keep his mouth shut to avoid having the lather rubbed down his throat.

"Yes, sir," continued the barber, "as you say, sir, it *be* fine weather surely, but it be still finer t'other side of the channel, *à Paris*; that is to say, where I have been staying for the last six months. Fine city Paris, sir, very. *Mon Dieu*, what streets! what shops! What a treat it be of a morning to rise early and take a promenade on the Bullyvards!"

"On the what?" inquired his customer.

"On the Bullyvards. Ah! I see, sir, you do not understand what that means. Well that is the name the French give to those streets as has trees a running alongside of 'em. Ah! sir, fine people the French, in their way—understand more of barbercraft than they do in this country. Why, an English barber who has never been out of his own country is quite an ignoramus alongside a French barber. But I could teach a trick or two to some of my countrymen in the line that would astonish them, having been over there long enough to get into the manners and customs of the natives. But I say, sir, what a nation they be for quarrelling

amongst themselves, to be sure! There's this here revolution still going on. What it will all end in goodness only knows. What do *you* say, sir?"

"I don't know, and I don't care," replied Mr. Oldstone, irritably. "They may all go to——"

A fresh rub of the lather over his mouth prevented the antiquary from finishing his sentence. The pertinacious barber was not to be put down.

"Ah, sir," he continued, "I could tell you some mighty strange tales about that same revolution."

"Oh, indeed!" broke in Mr. Hardcase. "The members of this club are fond of hearing tales, but they don't relish much anything connected with politics. In fact the tales permitted within these walls are almost entirely of the supernatural order."

"The supernatural!" ejaculated the barber. "Parbleu! is that still believed in this country? I promise you our French friends don't believe in that, or anything else, for aught I know."

"I know they don't, the infidel puppies," growled the antiquary; "but we do. Do we not, gentlemen?"

"Ay, indeed!" answered the members of the club with one accord.

"Do you indeed, gentlemen!" exclaimed the astonished barber. "Well, it ain't often that one finds gentlemen of your standing that will own so much, but as you gentlemen all declare you believe in such things, I don't mind telling you that I myself am also a believer."

"Ah!" said Mr. Oldstone, beginning to be interested.

"Yes, sir, I am indeed," replied the barber.

"Come, now," said Mr. Crucible, "if you could tell us of some experience of yours that bordered on the supernatural, I'd answer for Mr. Oldstone's listening to you."

By this time the antiquary was released from the clutches of the barber, and Mr. Hardcase, wishing to profit by the occasion, took his place on the chair, and a second edition of the lathering began.

"Well," said Oldstone, feeling himself considerably more comfortable, and throwing himself back complacently in an easy-chair, "you say—ahem!—that you—you, at least I have been given to understand that you have, at some period of your life, had some experience—ahem!—of the supernatural."

"There, I knew he was burning to hear a story," cried all the members at once, quizzingly.

"Well, Mounseer Suds, out with it, let's hear."

Thus encouraged, the barber put on a grave and important look, and began his story in these words.

Well then, gentlemen, since you deign to encourage me, I must next trespass on your patience whilst I enter upon some particulars about my family. I was born in this village some five-and-twenty years back, and at a very early age the genius of the barber began to develop itself in me. My father was a barber before me, and so was my grandfather and great-grandfather, too, as I have heard my father say. In fact, from time immemorial the Suds have been barbers. Descended from a long line of this honourable profession, and literally reared in lather, having my youthful imagination fired by the tales of my father and grandfather of the great people they had shaved in their day, what wonder that, at a precocious age, I should yearn to wield the weapon of my ancestors, and even aspire to be more eminent in the line than any of my predecessors? It was the height of my father's ambition—who was great in his way, and added to the ordinary routine of business the higher branches of the art, such as bleeding, tooth drawing, quack salving, and the like—that I, his only son, should step into his shoes, and hand down the name of "Suds" in all its unblemished purity.

"Joe," he would say to me, "when I am gone to my long account, who will there be to support your poor mother unless you fix upon some honest trade for a livelihood?"

"And what trade should I fix upon, if not yours, father?" I would reply.

"Well, Joe, my boy," he would say, "if you would be a true barber, and uphold the honour of the family, recollect that no excellence is achieved without constant practice. The primary rules of barber-craft are simple. Keep your razors sharp and free from rust, your water boiling; spare not the lather, and rub it well in before you begin to shave; dip the razor in the boiling water, and work with a steady hand."

I promised him that I would abide by his instructions, and although up to a certain age I was not permitted to handle a razor, I was, nevertheless, always in my father's shop, and watched with admiring eyes the masterly way in which my progenitor finished off his customers. In the case of a tooth having to be drawn, or a vein opened, I was never missing, and great was my pride should my father call upon me now and then to render him some trifling assistance. I might have been about seven years old when I made my first essay.

It was about Christmas time, and my father had just killed a pig, which he had left hung up by the legs in the yard. Being left alone for a few minutes, a bright idea struck me. I would try my "prentice han" on the carcase of the porker. So, locking all the doors so as not to be interrupted, I mixed up a lather and, with one of my father's well-sharpened razors, I commenced operations. Whilst thus busily employed, I was attracted by the sound of smothered laughter, and looking up at the window of our next-door neighbour's house, which looked into our yard, I beheld some dozen of the neighbours, who had been called in to witness my performance. I thought they would have died with laughter. However, nothing daunted, I proceeded diligently with my task, until my father, rattling at the door, demanded instant admittance. I was forced to admit him, and when he saw what I had been about, he quickly snatched the razor from my hand, and calling me "a dirty young dog," administered to me a slight kick behind, although I thought at the time, by the expression on his face, and likewise by that on my mother's, that my parents felt inwardly proud of their son.

An interval of two years now elapsed before I again put hand to razor. I remember that at this time I was nine years old, and it was when I was at this tender age that my poor father caught a fever and died.

As you may suppose, gentlemen, it was a terrible blow to my poor widowed mother, who, besides the grief she naturally felt for the loss of an affectionate husband, found herself now alone in the world with a growing lad to support as well as herself by the scanty proceeds of the business.

It was some little time before I could realise the fact that my father was actually dead. When my mother first brought me the startling news I heard it in a sort of stupor, resembling insensibility, out of which I did not awake until the undertaker arrived with the coffin, when the whole extent of our calamity seemed to dawn upon me for the first time, and I fairly howled for grief. Whilst thus indulging my sorrow, a few neighbours dropped in to see my father laid out in his coffin before he was nailed down. I heard my mother make something like

an apology for showing her husband's body before it had been shaved. I stopped short in my sobbing and mused awhile. It was then the custom to shave a corpse before consigning it to its last home. Who was to perform this duty?

Here the instinct of the barber came over me. Not a moment was to be lost if I really intended to put my plan into practice. Yes, I myself would shave my father's corpse, and no other. Accordingly, as my mother was showing out the neighbours and listening to their well meant condolences on the threshold, I quickly locked myself into the room with the corpse, having previously procured the apparatus necessary for the operation. I bore in my mind my father's instructions, "Keep your razor sharp, and free from rust; let the water be boiling, and don't spare the lather, but rub it well in before you begin." I now proceeded to put my father's advice into practice; so, lathering well the face of the corpse, and rubbing the suds well in, I proceeded to wield the razor with a dexterity at first that surprised me with my own performance and encouraged me to attempt something of that "nonchalance" of style that I had observed my father adopt whilst shaving his customers, but which is not looked upon as quite safe until one has undergone considerable practice.

Now, this was only my second attempt; still, I was so elated at having gone through the shaving of both cheeks as well as the throat, without a single cut, that I already deemed myself a proficient in the art, and affected that air of ease and careless grace I have just alluded to whilst I attempted the scraping of the upper lip, when, oh, horror! the razor gave an untimely slip, and sliced my father's nose off! I dropped the razor in my fright, and I really wonder I did not go off in a fit on the spot, such was the thrill of terror that seized me as I gazed on the ghastly hideousness of my father's corpse as it lay noseless in its coffin. I staggered and almost fell to the ground, but mustering all my courage, I picked up the nose and clapped it on in its place. I remember that in my eagerness and hurry I stuck it on the wrong way, with the nostrils upwards, which gave an appearance at once fearful and ludicrous to its ghastly features. It rolled off, however, immediately, and I hastened to rectify my mistake, and after much care and adroitness, succeeded in poising the feature nicely in the centre of the face, in the hopes that it would adhere of its own accord to the spot, and proceeded with the operation; but, alas, no sooner had I begun to meddle with the upper lip, than off rolled the nose again, so I just let it be this time until I had completed the operation.

Having, with the exception of this trifling accident, shaved the corpse of my father to a nicety, I wiped off the lather, replaced the nose, and quitted the room,

carrying back my shaving tackle to the shop.

Shortly afterwards my mother entered the room, and was surprised at finding the corpse already shaved. She had intended shaving it herself. I was silent on the subject, and she inquired no further into the matter, being too absorbed with her grief.

Presently the undertaker returned to nail up the coffin, and my mother hastened to give my father one last parting kiss before he was nailed up for ever. Suddenly I heard a shriek, and rushing into the room, found my mother in hysterics. The cause was obvious. In approaching her lips to those of her defunct spouse, the nose had unexpectedly rolled off, causing a shock similar to that I experienced myself when I so unskilfully amputated my father's nasal protuberance. When my mother came to, I made a clean breast of my awkwardness, for which I received a severe scolding, accompanied by sundry boxes on the ear. At length the coffin was nailed up, and I followed it with my mother to the grave, but for nights afterwards, my noseless father haunted me in my dreams, carrying a basin of suds in one hand, and holding his nose between finger and thumb with the other, as if to reproach me with my awkwardness.

When I related these dreams to my mother, she became uneasy in her mind, and declared that all through my awkwardness my father was unable to find rest in the tomb. She was a great believer in dreams, visions, omens, prophecies, and the like, and said that the dream boded no good. Being a mere child then, I became infected with her fears, though as I grew up I began to reason with myself that a dream of that sort might very well be accounted for by the excited state of my brain at the time and tendency of my waking thoughts, without jumping at once at the conclusion that there was anything supernatural in it.

For some time after my father's death I used to pester my mother with many of those questions that children are so fond of asking, and mothers find so difficult to answer—viz., concerning Heaven, and a future state after death. She used to tell me that Heaven was a place for all good people, far, far away, high up above the stars, where good folks lived on for ever, and never grew old, and never to die any more; that they were very happy, and knew no more pain or sorrow, but became as the angels, and had wings and sang praises to God all day long on a cloud. Moreover, that it was very light and bright there, that all was endless sunshine, and the angels were dressed in shining garments, etc.

Still, I was anxious to know more about Heaven; how long it took to get there—

being so far off; whether father wouldn't get tired flying all that distance, and if so, where he would stop to rest on the road; what sort of amusements there were in Heaven, and finally whether there was any shaving there. This last question was a puzzler. I was not to be put off by mother telling me that angels didn't require shaving, for then I argued that if father had gone to Heaven, he would be out of employment, and consequently miserable and not happy, for I knew what pleasure my father took in his business. Now if my father could not be happy without employment, the only employment he cared about being shaving, and if in Heaven that employment were not permitted or encouraged, it followed that my father could not be in Heaven, for who ever heard of a soul in Heaven and not happy?

My next question was whether there were any shaving in the other place. This was equally difficult to answer, for if my mother should admit that there was, then I should have argued that my father must be there, which would not have been a consoling idea, and if not, where should he be, since he could not be in either of these places? My mother was fain to confess that she did not know much about it, but said she would ask the minister. Whether she did or not, I never ascertained. I began to reflect for myself. The apostles were good men, as I had been given to understand, and good men always went to Heaven. Yet from their effigies upon the old stained-glass windows of the village church, they were all represented with long beards. Therefore barber-craft could not be encouraged in Heaven. Nothing could be more conclusive than this. My doubts were at rest for ever, but I felt less happy than before I began to argue on these matters.

Ever since my father's death the whole weight of the business fell upon my mother. Even in my father's lifetime she had so profited by his lessons as to be able to lend a helping hand occasionally when the customers were numerous and was thought to possess no inconsiderable skill in the art, but now that my father was no more, she had to put her shoulder to the wheel for her very bread. As for myself, it was long before our villagers could be induced to place any confidence in my shaving, the report of my father's unlucky amputation having spread like wildfire through the neighbourhood.

At length a strange gentleman passed through the village, and calling at our shop, demanded to be shaved. My mother not being in at the time, I offered my services, which were accepted, and acquitted myself to the entire satisfaction of my customer. The gentleman chancing to mention to someone that he had been shaved by a mere boy, and better than he had ever been shaved in his life, my fame began to spread in the village, and from that day we were in no want of

customers.

Business went on swimmingly until I was twelve years old, when I had the misfortune to lose my poor mother. I was now quite alone in the world, so in order to instruct myself more fully in the higher branches of the art, such as wig making, hair-cutting, etc., I offered myself as apprentice under the late Mr. Hackchin, under whose tuition in the wig line I vastly improved, although even from the beginning my shaving was universally preferred to his. Lor, sirs! his razors were never sharp, his water always lukewarm, and his hand shook as with the palsy. The fact was, he was getting old, was my poor employer, and ought, in my opinion, to have given up business long before he did, when he might have retired from the field with all due honours, and handed down his name unstained to posterity.

Well, gentlemen, not to wear out your patience, I will at once proceed to the very heart of my story—plunge into the very thick of the lather, as my poor father used to say—being about the time of my going abroad, and the reason of it. It was now some time since I had begun to cast sheep's eyes on the pretty Sally Snip, daughter of Simon Snip, the village tailor. We met by stealth, took long walks together of a Sunday in the green lane, danced together on the green on holidays, exchanged tokens, breathed vows of eternal fidelity, and all the rest of it. Our interviews were detected at length by Sally's parents, who looked on our attachment with no favourable eyes. Old Snip was ambitious, and designed quite another match for his daughter than a penniless young barber like myself, and gave me plainly to understand that if I did not *sheer* off he would *baste* my broadcloth for me. I was in a rage, but smothered it for prudence sake, yet didn't I wish in that moment that I had the shaving of him—wouldn't I have scraped him, that's all! Well, words grew high; I protested that my intentions were strictly honourable, etc., etc., but all to no purpose; the obstinate old parent wouldn't see what was for his daughter's good, and I left him very much disgusted. A few stolen interviews were attempted after this, but were all frustrated, and I soon saw we were not destined for one another, so we met for the last time, wept, embraced, and vowed still to love each other to eternity.

Now, there is no knowing but I might still have sought to renew my interviews, had not an extraordinary circumstance occurred to alter my determination. On the very night after our parting I was tossing restlessly on my bed, between sleeping and waking, when all of a sudden—whether it was a dream, I know not, but I fancy that I was awake—all at once there stood by my bedside the spirit of my father in the habiliments of the grave, unblemished in whiteness as the suds

he used in his lifetime, and, approaching me solemnly, said,

"My son, all that has happened is for the best. Stick to thy trade, and rival the most illustrious of thy ancestors, to which end thou must visit Paris. I will guide thy steps. Practise incessantly. We shall meet again."

With these words the vision vanished, and I felt myself bathed in a cold sweat.

I slept no more that night, but rose early the following morning. My determination was fixed, for a parent's command from the other side of the tomb was not to be combated, so I scraped together my slender earnings, tied up my bundle, took leave of my employer, and paid my passage over to Paris.

Soon after my departure Sally Snip became the wife of Daniel Nimble, an aspiring apprentice of old Simon's. This was my first love, and, like most first loves, ended miserably. Few men there are I wot who can boast of having loved but once, and of having lived uncrossed in that love to the end of the chapter. But I digress.

No sooner arrived in Paris than I began searching out the names and addresses of the most celebrated men in the hair line of the day with a view of offering my services as assistant. The day after my arrival I passed a large and handsome shop, evidently a first-rate business, with a large printed card in the window. Now, although at that time I had not the remotest knowledge of the French language, and consequently could not possibly understand what was written on the card, yet an indescribable I-don't-know-what, an inexplicable "*je-ne-sais-quoi*" (perchance a spiritual dig in the ribs from my father), induced me to interpret the words, "*A boy wanted.*" I was as certain as I am of my own existence that the proprietor was in want of an assistant and that my services would be accepted, so I entered the shop, addressed the proprietor in English, which, it is needless to say, was perfectly unintelligible to him. However, by expressive signs, I told him I was an adept, and that he couldn't do better than engage me. He smiled, the bargain was struck, and from that day I commenced my career in a foreign land.

My employer was one Pierre le Chauve, a hair-dresser who had an extensive business in the Rue St. Honorè, and who was especially renowned for the neatness and elegance of his wigs. He also cut hair, manufactured fancy soaps, hair oil, hair dye, perfumery, and the like. He had one daughter, Mademoiselle Pauline, of some eighteen summers, as neat a little grisette as ever trod the Champs Elysées or the Bois de Boulogne on Sundays, and who presided at the

counter and sold articles of perfumery to the Parisian exquisites, with whom she chatted with the most charming ease and grace and bewitching naïveté.

Pauline was the thorough type of a French girl. Eyes of dark hazel, set wide apart in her head, nez retrousee, rather wide mouth and exceptional teeth, small hand and foot, jimp waist, and a countenance capable of every possible shade of expression, while her voice, by nature pitched in a high key, rose to shrillest treble when under any excitement.

Besides myself, there was another assistant, one Jacques Millefleurs, a conceited French puppy, who fancied himself irresistible, and used to persecute his employer's daughter with the most marked attentions whenever her father's back was turned, and which she, it must be confessed, did not appear to be entirely indifferent to, although, at the same time, she gave him plainly to understand that she intended to flirt with whomever she liked without asking *his* permission, and that he had no right whatever to monopolise her. Jacques was of an exceedingly jealous temper, and could ill brook this tone from the object of his affections; this she knew well, and often took a malicious delight in provoking him by putting on her best airs and graces and being doubly fascinating whenever a handsome customer came to the shop. It was then that Jacques would grow pale, and dart vicious side glances from the corners of his eyes; but Pauline took no notice of him whatever, but flirted more and more, as if to aggravate him. After the customer had departed they would have a lovers' quarrel, and then they would make it up again, and so on from day to day.

Now, all this could be of very little interest to me, even if I had understood their conversation, for had I not my own secret grief? Was it to be supposed that I could forget Sally in a day? No; whilst I in silence counted and separated the hairs destined to be woven into the scalp of a wig, or whilst shaving a customer or cutting his hair, my soul was in the green lane with Sally, or behind her at church, or under her window at night, watching for a momentary glimpse of her shadow on the window blind. In fact, whatever happened to be my employment, Sally was ever uppermost in my thoughts, and still continued to be so, even some time after the sad news reached me that she had married Daniel Nimble. This shock at first was terrific, but, gradually subsiding, I resolved at length that, as she had so soon forgotten me, not to think of her any more, which in time I succeeded in doing. From being moody and silent, I now became more talkative, for I had begun to pick up a few phrases in French.

Mademoiselle Pauline encouraged me in my progress, and was pleased to take a

great interest in me, much to the disgust of her admirer, Jacques Millefleurs, who began to look upon me as a probable rival. I daily improved in the French language under my fair tutor, and day by day she gained upon me, for she certainly had the most winning manners. The more I talked with her, the less I thought of Sally, till at last she succeeded in completely supplanting her in my heart, and I found myself, before I was well aware of it, head over ears in love with the fascinating grisette.

Here was a to do. Murder will out. Love and a cough are two things one can't hide, as the proverb says.

The odious Jacques *must* discover my passion ere long, and a quarrel will be inevitable. Not that I feared the likes of him, gentlemen. Don't suppose it for a moment. Why, I'd take half a dozen or so of such fellows one off and another on, and thrash the whole lot of them as easy as a game of ninepins. Well, but to proceed, gentlemen. What I foresaw soon happened. One day while taking my French lesson under Mademoiselle Pauline, and we were chatting away merrily enough without taking any notice of Jacques, who was arranging pots of bears' grease on the shelves in the background, our heads drew very close together, and we were looking very fondly into each other's eyes and whispering rather low.

Now, I knew that there was no engagement between her and Jacques, therefore I had every right to pay her just the same attention that he did, and I intended to let him know it. Well, my head might have touched hers, or my locks may have intermingled with hers as we pored over the French grammar together. However this may have been, something or other seems to have exasperated my rival, for I heard him mutter to himself something like *Cochon d'un Anglais*. I was getting on in my French now and understood the words, so turning round, I said,

"Did your remark refer to me, Monsieur Jacques?"

"*Oui à vous*," he said, furiously, now losing all command over himself, and heedless of the consequences; "and I repeat my remark."

Here he repeated his obnoxious epithet with an invective against my countrymen in general.

"Hold there!" I cried, for I began to feel my English blood boil in my veins, and in the best French I could muster, said,

"Retract your words. I give you one chance to apologise, and if you refuse——"

Before I could finish my rival's legs had formed a right angle, and I received a *savât* in the eye. Stung by the pain, and still more by the insult, I felt the strength of our whole line of barbers rush into my veins, and clenching my fist convulsively I let forth so terrible a blow in the chest of my adversary as to make him measure his length upon the floor, and cause the back of his head to resound against it like a cocoanut. Miss Pauline screamed, but the next moment my rival had bounced upright upon his feet, and seized a razor. Another scream from Pauline as he was making towards me, razor in hand, but this time I took up a chair and with it gave him such a blow over the knuckles as made him drop the razor and yell in agony. I laid down the chair, thinking that the fight was now over, but the Frenchman sprang on to me again like a hungry tiger, and so unexpected was the movement that I nearly lost my balance, but with great adroitness I managed to trip him up, and he fell under me.

He now began to bite and to scratch, but I seized his hair and banged his head against the ground several times. He then clutched me anew, and we began rolling over and over on the floor, Pauline screaming all the while, but extricating myself at length from his grasp, I bounded to my feet, and before he had time to rise placed one foot upon his throat. At this moment my employer attracted by his daughter's screams, entered.

"*Mille diables!*" he cried, fiercely, "*ques-ce-que ce tappage la? Ah! ça, Monsieur Godam,*" said he, turning full upon me, "*esce que vous êtes entré chez moi pour enseigner le box à mes élèves?*"

Here Pauline broke in.

"No, I assure you, dear papa, it was not the Englishman's fault. Millefleurs began the quarrel. I saw him kick the Englishman in the eye."

"Ha! Monsieur Jacques, you did kick the Englishman in the eye?" inquired my employer; "and what for did you kick the Englishman in the eye?"

"Because he used undue familiarity towards Mademoiselle," said Jacques, doggedly.

Le Chauve glanced suspiciously first at me then at his daughter, but Pauline, stung at Jacques' mean attempt at exposing me as well as herself to her father's obloquy, rose in all the pride of injured womanhood, as if to take the whole burden of defence upon herself, and standing erect with compressed lips and white with passion, cried,

"It is false, 'tis a base lie! The Englishman never treated me otherwise than with the greatest respect, nor have I ever received at his hands any of those attentions that in my indulgence I have permitted from yourself. Think not, however, Master Jacques, that this calumny will serve your turn, or that I am blind to the paltry motives that prompted it. Your absurd jealousy is seen through, and has met with its just chastisement. What was it to you, I pray, even if the Englishman *had* paid me attention? Must you be the only one to pay me attention? You know very well that I have never granted you any right to monopolise me, however your conceit may have deluded you. Beware, therefore, in future how you attempt to calumniate either myself or this Englishman, for as sure as you are born you will not succeed in your scheme, and know, once for all, Monsieur Jacques Millefleurs, that for the future I wish all those attentions that you have been pleased to lavish upon me so profusely whenever my father's back was turned, to cease. Respect me as your employer's daughter, for I vow never to be anything more to you."

She ceased; but during her harangue, Pauline's deportment was majestic—it was sublime. No longer was she the little grisette with the cock-nose and the wide mouth, but a tragedy queen pronouncing a malediction. She appeared now at least half a head taller, so imposing was her attitude. The roses and smile had deserted her countenance, and were supplanted by a ghastly pallor, while from her dark eyes flashed a withering scorn, under which Jacques appeared to quail like a whipped hound, but which feeling his natural pride sought to overcome.

Rage, grief, jealousy, and confusion struggled in his breast for the mastery, as he stood speechless, with clenched fists, teeth set, flushed face, and straining eyeballs fixed upon the ground, to which the tears would start spite of all his efforts to repress them. His hair disordered and dirty, as well as his clothes, from his fall, he looked altogether the very picture of maniacal despair.

"Ha! Jacques," said his employer, "is this true? What! have you dared to raise your eyes to my daughter, and that, too, behind my back, without my permission—*hein?*"

Jacques, overcome with shame and speechless, never lifted his eyes from the ground, whilst the large tears, blinding him and overflowing, fell heavily on the floor.

"*Prenez garde, Monsieur Jacques,*" said Le Chauve, "for, *parbleu!* if I hear any more of these clandestine overtures with my daughter I'll discharge you on the

spot. And you, too, Ma'meselle Pauline, you, too, were much to blame in not telling me at once of this boy's insolent pretensions. But, tell me once more, who began this ridiculous quarrel? Who gave the first blow?"

"Please, sir," said I, now speaking for the first time, "I was taking my French lesson with your daughter, when Monsieur Jacques was pleased to call me '*cochon*,' and abused my country. I demanded an apology, which he refused, and before I was aware of it, kicked me in the eye. I gave one straight blow with my fist, *comme ça*"—(here I imitated the blow to show him how an Englishman could knock a Frenchman down)—"and he fell full length upon the floor."

"Yes, it is true, papa," broke in Pauline; "the Englishman has spoken the truth."

"*C'était bien fait, c'était bien fait*," said her father; "go on."

"Then," resumed I, "Millefleurs sprang again to his feet, and seized a razor."

"Ha! he seized a razor? Is that so, Monsieur Millefleurs? Did you seize a razor?"

Jacques was silent as before, while I proceeded, "I then seized a chair."

"You seized a chair, *hé bien!*"

"And I knocked the razor out of his hand. He fell to the ground with pain, and yelled."

"*Encore, bien fait—après?*"

"He jumped up again, and pounced upon me like a tiger, and nearly knocked me over, but I tripped him up in time, and he fell to the ground, together with myself, and then we rolled over and over each other on the floor, till I at length succeeded in extricating myself, and placed my foot upon his neck, when you entered, sir."

"*C'est bien vraie*," burst in Pauline again; "the Englishman has given an exact account of the quarrel."

"Ha! is that so?" asked Le Chauve. "*Hé bien!* Monsieur Jacques, you have refused to apologise to the Englishman for insulting him and kicking him in the eye. Now, I command you to apologise to him, or out of my shop you shall go at once. Do you hear?"

"Non; *mille fois non!*" cried Jacques, stamping with rage, forgetful alike of the respect due to his master and the presence of Pauline, "I would sooner die first."

"Then prepare at once to leave my house. Take up your bundle and walk!"

The peremptory manner in which these words were said caused Jacques to pause and weigh matters.

"If my employer actually does send me off," he probably said to himself, "then adieu to Pauline for ever, but if I consent to apologise, I shall remain here, and may in time succeed in cutting out the Englishman."

This was probably his mode of reasoning, for he was too good a politician not to know where his interests lay, so changing his tone entirely, and gulping down with difficulty something that was rising in his throat, and which, if he had given expression to, would probably have resembled an ingenious French oath, he replied with great apparent calmness,

"Monsieur Le Chauve, you have always been a good master to me, and I have always tried to prove myself worthy of your kindness, and I should be sorry to leave you for a trifle, therefore I will obey you, and will demand pardon of *mon cher confrere l'anglais*, for having in a moment of ungovernable passion kicked him in the eye, and insulted him."

This was said in turning towards me, and in all humility.

"And you, Monsieur Suds, if you forgive him, offer him your hand."

I extended my hand towards my fellow assistant, which he took in his, and I expressed sorrow for the part I had had in the quarrel, but I noticed that the hand of Jacques Millefleurs was icy cold.

"*Allons mes enfants*," said Le Chauve, "now don't let me hear any more of these silly quarrels, but go in peace."

We both set about our respective duties, but I knew enough of the Frenchman's character to be sure that his apology did not come from his heart, but had been forced out of him from motives of policy, and I was not at all sure that this would be the last of such quarrels, but had no doubt that he would vent his petty spite upon me on the very next opportunity.

I had hardly re-settled myself, and proceeded with my wig, when a stranger of dignified appearance entered and demanded to be shaved. I had no difficulty in recognising in him a countryman. Glad of an opportunity of speaking English again after so long, I answered him in his own mother tongue.

"Want to be shaved, sir? Yes, sir."

"Ah, you are English!" he said.

"Yes, sir, one of the latest imported," said I. "Only arrived here a month ago to perfect myself in the art of barber-craft amongst these foreigners. Served under Mr. Hackchin in the village of D——, in ——shire, where I have learnt to shave, cut hair, make wigs, mix hair grease, and all the rest of it, and as for tooth drawing, bleeding, and quack salving, you won't find the likes of me in all the countryside. My name is Suds, sir, at your service. Maybe you have heard tell of my father or my grandfather. The Suds have been barbers from time immemorial."

"Oh, indeed?" said the stranger. Then muttered to himself, "Suds—Suds—I fancy I have heard the name before."

And I should just think he had, gentlemen. Why, my grandfather once shaved His Majesty King George I., or George II., or Queen Anne, or one of that lot, I forget which, as my father used to tell me.

Well, gentlemen, when I had got my countryman fairly lathered, and had commenced operations, I noticed that he glanced half-quizzingly at my eye, which was now black and swollen from the kick I had received from my adversary.

"You seem to have a bad cold in your eye, Mr. Suds," he remarked, with an ill-repressed smile.

"No, sir," I replied, "it is not exactly that."

"Not a cold!" exclaimed he, feigning astonishment. "Dear me! it's very like one. Then if I might venture to guess, I should say you had been in a fight, and got the worst of it."

"Well, not exactly, sir," said I; "not the worst of it; no, not the worst of it. It is true I had a slight difference of opinion this morning with a young man of the shop, a mere trifle—an affair of jealousy, that's all, sir."

"And I presume that that neat little baggage in the corner of the shop with the jimp waist and well starched cap was the fair cause of this trifling jealousy—am I right?"

"Well, really, sir, your penetration is such that it serves not to deny it," said I. "If you had only arrived five minutes earlier, you would have caught me at it tooth

and nail. Oh! it was fine, sir. He caught me a kick in the eye unawares—French fashion you know, sir. Englishmen don't like that sort of game, it takes them by surprise; but you should have seen how I floored him with a good English blow in the chest that made him measure his length upon the ground. You should have heard what a whack his head came against the floor. It sounded for all the world like an empty cask. It will ache for him this next fortnight to come, I'll warrant."

"Oh! then England *wasn't* thrashed after all?" said he.

"Not a bit of it," said I, proudly.

"Well, you seem a smart lad," said he. "I don't mind giving you a job to do every morning during my stay in Paris. Suppose you come every morning to my hotel to shave me."

"With pleasure, sir," said I.

"Here is my address," said he, handing me a card.

I read the name Lord Goldborough, Hotel —, Rue —, No. 25 *au premier*. I fell into a sort of stupor at the discovery that I had been shaving a real live lord, without knowing it. So taken aback was I, that I forgot to stuff his pockets with bears' grease, tooth powder, fancy soaps, hair dye, tooth and nail brushes, etc.

Before I had well recovered, he was out of the shop. He had left an English paper behind him by mistake, and a letter, the former of which I perused, while the latter I placed in my pocket, to return to him on the morrow at his hotel.

No sooner had my countryman left the shop than Pauline asked me if he wasn't an Englishman.

"Yes," I replied, glad of an opportunity of making myself big in her eyes and of inspiring my rival with awe and respect for me; "his name is Lord Goldborough, *un grand milord*, who has known me many years, and all my family. In fact," said I, "he is distantly connected with us."—(I did not say on account of our both being descended from Adam).

I told them in the shop that he had engaged my services every morning at his hotel to shave him, for old acquaintance sake, and finally that he had called on me on purpose, under the excuse of being shaved, to lend me that paper to read, where there was a long account of the great political deeds of a celebrated English minister related to us both; in fact, no less a man than the renowned

William Pitt. There's no harm in making yourself as big as you can when you are sure of not being found out—eh, gentlemen?—and when you do come out with a lie, tell a good 'un whilst you're about it—that's my morality.

Pauline raised her eyebrows and looked at me archly, half incredulously. Jacques, who had been sulkily combing out some bunches of hair for wig-making behind the counter, looked up for a moment, his mouth wide open with astonishment, then resumed his work.

I little knew at the time how dearly I should have to pay for a few idle words. These are dangerous times to jest in, gentlemen, especially t'other side of the water, and if you happen to have an enemy. I was inexperienced in these matters then, but I have bought my experience since, and dearly enough I had to pay for it.

On the following morning I hastened to keep my appointment with my noble countryman. I found him very affable and condescending, and he was pleased to compliment me on my skill in barber-craft. He talked to me much about England and my family, of politics, of the French, etc., and asked me how I liked foreign parts. I naturally felt flattered at the interest he seemed to take in me, but I knew how to keep my place, always styling him "my lord" and "your lordship." In fact, we got on capitally together. When I returned to the shop I bragged of the intimacy between my patron and myself, not always sticking literally to the truth, but colouring my reception a little highly to excite envy and respect in my rival and interest in Pauline.

After this I went regularly every day to his lordship, and came back after every visit with an extravagantly coloured account of my noble customer's bounty and friendship for me, as well as the unlimited share of his confidence that I enjoyed. Pauline's smiles grew daily more winning, and Jacques scowled more and more savagely from behind the counter.

One morning, as I was preparing as usual to start for my noble patron's hotel, an ugly-looking ruffian, dressed in the preposterous fashion of the "incroyables," entered the shop, and strutting up to my employer, who was hard at work on a new wig, said, "Citoyen, you harbour a '*suspect*.'"

"Not I, my friend, I assure you," said Le Chauve. "It is a mistake; I have no one in the house but my wife and daughter and two apprentices—one an Englishman lately arrived."

"Just so, an Englishman, a spy of the English Government; a most dangerous character, and on the most intimate terms with Lord Goldboro', who is himself a spy."

"It cannot possibly be my assistant Suds," muttered my employer to himself.

"*Oui, Suds, c'est bien lui, le voici,*" and he showed a warrant for my immediate arrest.

"*Mais c'est impossible, monchère, ce pauvre garçon, si jeune, si innocent,*" pleaded my kind employer.

"Nevertheless, I have my orders. If he is innocent, he will be proved so. I come not to dispute whether he be innocent or guilty, but to arrest him," said the incroyable. "*Allons, où est-il?*"

Now, concealment I knew to be impossible, resistance futile. The only thing to be done was to face the matter out boldly and trust to Providence. (Of course, I made no doubt as to whom I had to thank for my arrest.) So walking bravely into the shop, without any show of fear, I thus accosted the incroyable, "So, citoyen, it appears you have orders to arrest me. I will not dispute your authority, although I know myself to be innocent of the charges brought against me. I can pretty well guess *which* of my kind friends has been so considerate as to procure for me a safe night's lodging free from expense, and his motive in doing so."

Here I darted a withering glance at Jacques, who cowered beneath my gaze, and another pleading one at Pauline, as if I would say, "You see how I am betrayed, and by whom."

Pauline stood pale as death—or rather, leant against the wall for support. She seemed unable to utter a word, and yet seemed struggling with herself to defend me. As if spell-bound, she looked on in mute horror, until the guard entered the shop, and I had barely time to say, "*Au revoir, Monsieur le Chauve; adieu, Mademoiselle Pauline.* I am innocent, whatever my enemies may try and make me out, and doubt not but I shall be able to prove my innocence. Await my speedy return. *En evant, gards,*" and off I was conducted by the soldiers.

I was hardly out of the shop when a piercing female shriek reached my ears, and poor Pauline had fallen fainting to the ground. I saw and heard no more, for though I was outwardly calm, my brain was racked with the direst apprehensions.

Here I was being led openly through the streets of Paris like a felon—whither? To prison—to the Bastille, to be tried; possibly, nay probably, to be condemned to death. What for? What had I done? "Nothing; I am innocent," I said to myself. "No matter, so have others been that have likewise perished by the guillotine," I thought I heard a voice inwardly say. "Executions are now of daily occurrence, and not individuals, but hundreds of individuals, perish for they know not what. Marat, from out his obscure lodgings, and seated up to the neck in his warm bath, doth complacently issue forth his bloody orders, from which not even innocence itself is free. Oh, the malignity of human nature!" thought I. "Base, base Jacques Millefleurs! for who else could have betrayed me? And Pauline, poor girl! what would become her?"

Then came another thought forcing its way through my brain, despite my efforts to crush it. Pauline for the present, it is true, was disgusted with Millefleurs, especially for this last dastardly act of his, but women are proverbially fickle—the whole French nation is volatile—and after my death, and she had shed a few transient tears belike to my memory, Jacques *might* work himself into her good graces again, and even *marry* her—the thought was agony. The mere fear of death itself was perhaps the last thought that occupied me, for I felt I had no parents to regret me; on the contrary, I felt consoled in the thought that I should see them again in the other world. No; it was not mere death that I feared so much; but then, to leave Pauline, to be cut short in my brilliant career, before I had established my fame!

These were thoughts that galled me. Nevertheless, I tried to console myself. Perhaps things might not be so black as my imagination had painted them, and even if they should be—even if I should die by the guillotine for an imagined State offence—it was not like being gibbeted alive in my own country for a highway robbery or murder. No; there was something aristocratic in the idea of being guillotined, for did not the scaffold reek with noble blood?

Amid such reflections as these I was conducted by the guard to the gates of the Bastille, and before I was well aware of it, found myself in a spacious cell, and heard the lock turned upon me. Here a singular and never-to-be-forgotten scene was presented to my view. The prison was crowded with men and women of all ranks and ages, many of whom were to die on the morrow, yet most of them appeared to have no fear of death whatever. Here and there were knots of friends who seemed determined to make the most of their short stay in this world, and to enjoy life to the utmost. Here was dicing and card playing, laughing, joking, and swearing, as if they thought it prime fun to die in company. Surely these men,

thought I, must be accustomed to death, as they say eels are to skinning, that they no longer mind it.

There were, however, prisoners of another cast, persons who preferred spending their last moments on earth in prayer and pious meditation. Parents took leave of their children, children of their parents, friends parted from friends, lovers from lovers. Tears flowed on all sides. Profane mirth and ribald jests mingled discordantly with pious oraisons and tearful farewells. Others again were sullenly awaiting their doom with crossed arms and heads drooping on their breasts, keeping apart from the others, being too proud to pray, and yet indifferent to the amusements of the more light-hearted.

Well, days, weeks, passed by, I suppose, for I do not recollect what time elapsed during my incarceration, as I kept no count, being in a kind of mental stupor all the time, nor could I bring myself to believe that the scene before me was real, and not a dream. All the events from the time of my arrest, flitted through my mind like a vast phantasmagoria.

Since my imprisonment, I had been tried, found guilty, and condemned to death. The day had been fixed, and yet it weighed but lightly upon me, being nothing more than what I had expected and prepared myself for. Each day brought new arrests, and each day some of my companions were led forth to execution. It is wonderfully consoling to find that others are about to share a like fate as one's self. This I found by experience, for, engrossed as I was, with my own selfish thoughts, I still found time to be touched with the misfortunes of others, and on several occasions I offered consolation, and received consolation from many of my fellow prisoners. In some instances I had struck up quite a warm friendship with the inmates of my cell, but alas! our intimacy lasted but long enough for us to know, love, and esteem each other. No sooner had I begun to feel for my fellow sufferer as a friend and brother, than the following day he was certain to be torn from me, and led off to execution. One of these friendships formed in prison, especially dwells upon me; perhaps because it was one of the longest.

My friend was a young man of my own years, and of noble family, as he said. He told me also his name, but I have forgotten it. He was imprisoned because it was thought he entertained aristocratic opinions, and was a devout Catholic. He was in love, but the idol of his affections belonged to an atheistical family. It had been the dream of his ambition to eradicate the heretical opinions she had imbibed and convert her to the Catholic faith. He was looked upon with suspicion by her family, who, disapproving of the match, were instrumental in

placing him in the Bastille. I ventured to condole with him, though he needed not my consolation, as his comfort was in his religion. Of all my companions in prison, I found him the most resigned.

When I had learnt his tale, I told him mine, saying that I was a poor *perruquier-barbier* who had left his country for a while to complete his art studies, and who, happening to fall in love with his employer's daughter, had, through the jealousy and malice of a rival, who had falsely accused him, found himself imprisoned in the Bastille, and condemned to death. He was touched with my tale as I had been with his, for our histories had something in common. We were both in love, in prison, and condemned to death. We wept together, we embraced, we kissed (Frenchmen always kiss); and though he was a gentleman of noble family, and I only a lowly barber, yet, on the brink of the grave, all distinctions are levelled, so we embraced, and called ourselves brothers in adversity. How I prayed and longed that our lives might be spared, that we might the longer enjoy each other's friendship, or that we might quit this world in each other's company! But fate willed it otherwise. On the morrow, he whom I had learnt to love as a brother was torn from me and led to the scaffold. My life seemed now a blank. Whilst my friend lived in his troubles, I forgot my own; now that he was no more I began to realise all the horrors of my situation.

At length the eve of my execution arrived. I tried to give myself up wholly to pious meditation, so throwing myself down in the corner of my cell, I endeavoured to recall all my past life, to repent of my sins, and pray for a speedy and peaceful end; but then the guillotine rose up before me in all its terrors, and bodily fear would usurp the place of holier thoughts. The nearer the hour drew, the more vividly everything painted itself to my mind's eye. I must leave Pauline without a word of farewell. The heartless turnkey, inured to scenes of death and misery, would witness me depart to execution without a tear. Then the insolence of the brutal guard, the gaping crowd, the scaffold, and surly executioner, the cold steel close to my neck, one terrible shock and then—then—eternity—a vast blank—an unexpected world—doubt, suspense, *perhaps*, total annihilation.

"Merciful God!" I exclaimed in agony, "is there no hope? I ask not for length of days, but only time to repent. Let me not be ushered into Thy awful presence unprepared. Help me to my salvation, and fit me for my end." Here I shut my eyes and prayed long and fervently, after which I felt more resigned. I heard the clock toll forth the hour of midnight, and most of the inmates of my cell were fast asleep. I now felt a chilly sensation creep over me, an indescribable awe, as if in the presence of something more than mortal. I opened my eyes and was

aware of a vaporous form or column of luminous ether standing beside me, which gradually growing more distinct, shaped itself into the bearing and lineaments of my father. My breath forsook me. My eyeballs straining from their sockets, fixed the cloudy image without my having the power to remove them, and I was unable to utter a word.

Presently a low, though distant, voice (whether it proceeded from the figure or not, I cannot say, for it seemed to come from a distance and to sing through my head) uttered these words: "My son, it has pleased Heaven for once that the innocent shall be spared and the wicked punished. Fear not, for I am sent to protect you. Another has been provided to take your place at the scaffold. In another minute he will be here. When you hear the key turn in the lock and see the door open wide, be ready to fly with me."

"Fly with you, father!" I mentally cried. To which the spectre answered, "I will envelop you in my essence, and being invisible myself to others, will make you likewise invisible. Thus, as the new prisoner enters, we will pass unseen by the turnkey through the open door, and so on, past the guard, till we find ourselves outside. Once past all danger, I will conduct you to the seashore, where a vessel awaits you to carry you back to England."

Each word was uttered slowly and distinctly, and whilst he was yet speaking I heard the key grate against the lock, and the door of my prison being flung open, a fresh prisoner entered, accompanied by the jailor. What was my surprise when, by the light of the jailor's lanthorn, I recognised my old rival, Jacques Millefleurs!

I had no time to speculate on the "how" or the "wherefore" of his arrest, but in obedience to my father's orders I passed fearlessly through the open door, which was immediately closed after me. I passed the guards, not without a certain tremor, yet no one appeared to see me or impede my course. I hurried past the outer gate, and quickening my pace, soon left the Bastille and its terrors far behind me.

Morning at length dawned, and as I passed through the streets I observed that nobody looked me in the face, but rather looked through me into space, as if I were air. I was thus aware that I was still invisible, so entering a diligence, arrived in due time at Calais.

"This is the vessel," said the voice, in my ear. "Embark—the wind is fair. Farewell," and I found myself once more alone and visible, for sundry passers-

by stared at me in surprise, no doubt wondering how I had made my appearance there all of a sudden, not having been on the spot a moment ago.

I hastened to take my place on board, and having set sail, arrived, after a good passage, at Dover. How the dear old white cliffs and the grand old castle seemed to welcome me back to my native land! How thankful I felt for my recent miraculous preservation! How joyfully I leapt ashore, and with what buoyancy I trod my native land again! It was as if I had never breathed the air of liberty till now.

Once more in the land of the free, after a hearty meal, I took the stage, and travelled until I reached my native village; and here I am, gentlemen.



"Upon my word, Mr. Suds," broke in Dr. Bleedem as the barber concluded his story, "if you have many more tales of that sort you'll soon rival the members of the club. What do you say, Mr. Oldstone. Was not that story worthy of a member?"

Mr. Oldstone could not go so far as to admit that any one member of the club had ever been equalled in story telling by a barber, and that, too, a Frenchified barber, but he condescended to give a complacent look of approval at the young man without directly answering the question put to him, and then addressing him said, as he pulled out his watch, "I don't know if you are aware of it, Mr. Suds, but the absorbing interest that you have forced us to take in your narrative has made us quite forget church time, and it now wants but a quarter to one o'clock."

"You don't say so," cried several voices at once. "Sure enough," said another, "here are all the people coming out of church."

"What!" cried our late story teller, in alarm, "have I really, through my talk, prevented your honours from exhibiting your chins at divine service, as a sample of my art? This is indeed a sin my soul must answer."

"Well, gentlemen," said Mr. Oldstone, "time past cannot be recalled, all we can do is, to try to make up for it by going to church this afternoon."

"Stop! stop! Mr. Suds, whither away so fast," he cried, as he saw the young man making towards the door with his tackle in his hand. "You have not told us what became of Pauline. You finished your story rather too abruptly; it requires a sequel. Come, let's hear it."

The youth returned, after closing the door, and resting the tips of his fingers against the back of a chair, proceeded gravely thus: "Little more remains to be told, gentlemen. I heard from Pauline not long since. Her letter runs as nearly as I can recollect in these words:

"Dear Mr. Suds, I write to you for the first and last time. Perhaps I should not have written to you at all. If I have erred from maiden modesty in so doing, I hope you will excuse me. I really could not let so great a friend pass from me without a word. I heard of your escape by chance, and you may imagine my extreme delight and thankfulness at the joyful news, though I never could learn in what manner you effected it. Enough for me that you are safe in your own free country, far from the broils of civil discord and intestine misery.

"Alas! my friend, if I may be allowed to call you by that name, I have suffered much since we parted; so much, indeed, that were you to see me now, you would not know me again for the gay capricious Pauline of former times, whose eyes and complexion you were once wont to praise. Forgive me, my friend, forgive me, Mr. Suds, if I have already said too much, and bear with me still, while I yet disburden my heart of more. The words tremble on my pen, my hand refuses to write what my heart dictates, for fear of incurring your displeasure and contempt, rather than brook which I would that my hand would paralyse, that I might never touch pen more; that my lips were sealed that I might never more express the feelings that rise and crave for utterance, ay that my heart itself would cease to beat. I can no longer restrain my pen. My eyes fill with tears as I write. Pardon my temerity. I feel I must speak or die.

"Dear Mr. Suds, did you ever imagine that from the very first moment that you introduced yourself at my father's shop that my heart was no longer my own? Did you know that the attentions of the odious Jacques Millefleurs which my vanity only induced me to encourage, from that time became loathsome to me, and my heart told me too truly the reason why?

"Oh! my dearest friend, if you knew how hard it has been to me to persist in dissimulation for so long, to hide from my father and from Millefleurs that which was passing in my bosom!

"Oh! if you knew the shock I received when I witnessed your arrest and the deadly hatred that I bore towards Jacques Millefleurs for being the cause, oh, then my love! then, I say, you would pardon me all, ay, even the hideous crime I perpetrated for your sake. Know then, my loved one, that it was I—I,—your

Pauline, who accused Jacques to the government for conspiring against it, even as he had falsely accused you, and caused him to be arrested and condemned! Know you that whilst your bark was peacefully crossing the channel that Jacques Millefleurs was taking your place at the scaffold? You are avenged, and through me, though I know your noble nature must recoil at such retaliation. Enough, he is judged; peace be to his soul.

"But, alas, evil though he may have been, will his crimes help to wash out one iota of the stain of my guilt? Shall I ever feel the stings of remorse less keenly because I committed the rash and mean act in the very torrent of passion?"

"Oh! my friend, I feel I have merited your contempt and scorn for having given way thus to the promptings of my evil nature. I fancy I see you start and shrink back whilst reading these lines, and saying to yourself, 'Can Pauline have been guilty of so black a crime?' No wonder you shrink back in horror and loathing; yet, loathe me as you will, you cannot loathe me as much as I loathe myself. I thought revenge would be sweet, but now the bitterness of remorse has filled my heart. The remembrance of my crime is intolerable to me; it haunts me night and day. I feel that nothing short of the sacrifice of my whole life can do aught towards atoning for so black a deed.

"Yes, my friend, many and bitter have been the tears of remorse that I have shed, very bitter the reproaches I have launched against myself. But to what purpose all this? What should your young and innocent soul know of the torments I bear within? Enough, my resolution is fixed never to be changed.

"Start not, friend, when I tell you that I have renounced the world and its vanities, and intend to retire into a convent, there to atone by a lifetime of fasting and prayer for the fell crime that harrows my soul. I was once vain enough to dream of becoming your bride, but now I am called upon to be the bride of Heaven. Shortly after you receive this I shall have taken the veil. Think no more of one unworthy to find a place in your thoughts. Forgive me if you can. Farewell, yours, Pauline."

"These, gentlemen, are the words of her letter, as well as I can recollect. The letter bears no date or address, but it bore the post-mark, 'Brussels.' As the letter did not appear to crave an answer, I wrote none and thus the matter dropped."

"Poor girl!" broke in Parnassus, with a sigh; "her crime was great, no doubt; but done in the very heat of passion; and then, her repentance is extremely touching."

"Yes," said Mr. Blackdeed, "she winds up in a manner quite dramatic."

The members of the club then expressed, severally, their approbation of the barber's narrative, upon which the young man bowed and scraped, and hoped he should be able to satisfy the honourable members as well on a future occasion, if his services should be required, and then quitted the inn. In the afternoon our members attended divine service, to a man; and, after a stroll in the wood, returned home in the evening, which they spent in their usual jovial manner.

Transcriber's Note:

Minor typographical errors have been corrected without note.

END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK TALES OF THE WONDER CLUB, VOLUME II

***** This file should be named 34817-h.txt or 34817-h.zip *****

This and all associated files of various formats will be found in:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/3/4/8/1/34817>

Updated editions will replace the previous one--the old editions will be renamed.

Creating the works from public domain print editions means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG-tm concept and trademark.

Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for the eBooks, unless you receive specific permission. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the rules is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. They may be modified and printed and given away--you may do practically ANYTHING with public domain eBooks. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

*** START: FULL LICENSE ***

THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE
PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg-tm mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase "Project Gutenberg"), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg-tm License (available with this file or online at <http://www.gutenberg.org/license>).

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. "Project Gutenberg" is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation ("the Foundation" or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is in the public domain in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg-tm mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg-tm works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg-tm name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by

keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg-tm License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg-tm work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country outside the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg-tm License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg-tm work (any work on which the phrase "Project Gutenberg" appears, or with which the phrase "Project Gutenberg" is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work is derived from the public domain (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase "Project Gutenberg" associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg-tm License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg-tm License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg-tm.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg-tm License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg-tm work in a format other than "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg-tm web site (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other

form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg-tm License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg-tm works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works provided that

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg-tm works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, "Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation."
- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg-tm License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg-tm works.
- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.
- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from both the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and Michael Hart, the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread public domain works in creating the Project Gutenberg-tm collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain "Defects," such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the "Right of Replacement or Refund" described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark, and any other party distributing a Project

Gutenberg-tm electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS,' WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg-tm work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg-tm work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg-tm

Project Gutenberg-tm is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg-tm's goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg-tm collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg-tm and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4

and the Foundation web page at <http://www.gutenberg.org/fundraising/pglaf>.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's principal office is located at 4557 Melan Dr. S. Fairbanks, AK, 99712., but its volunteers and employees are scattered throughout numerous locations. Its business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887, email business@pglaf.org. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's web site and official page at <http://www.gutenberg.org/about/contact>

For additional contact information:

Dr. Gregory B. Newby
Chief Executive and Director
gbnewby@pglaf.org

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg-tm depends upon and cannot survive without wide spread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations (\$1 to \$5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit <http://www.gutenberg.org/fundraising/pglaf>

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg Web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: <http://www.gutenberg.org/fundraising/donate>

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works.

Professor Michael S. Hart is the originator of the Project Gutenberg-tm concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For thirty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as Public Domain in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Each eBook is in a subdirectory of the same number as the eBook's eBook number, often in several formats including plain vanilla ASCII, compressed (zipped), HTML and others.

Corrected EDITIONS of our eBooks replace the old file and take over the old filename and etext number. The replaced older file is renamed. VERSIONS based on separate sources are treated as new eBooks receiving new filenames and etext numbers.

Most people start at our Web site which has the main PG search facility:

<http://www.gutenberg.org>

This Web site includes information about Project Gutenberg-tm, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.

EBooks posted prior to November 2003, with eBook numbers BELOW #10000, are filed in directories based on their release date. If you want to download any of these eBooks directly, rather than using the regular search system you may utilize the following addresses and just download by the etext year.

<http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext06/>

(Or /etext 05, 04, 03, 02, 01, 00, 99,
98, 97, 96, 95, 94, 93, 92, 91 or 90)

EBooks posted since November 2003, with etext numbers OVER #10000, are filed in a different way. The year of a release date is no longer part of the directory path. The path is based on the etext number (which is identical to the filename). The path to the file is made up of single digits corresponding to all but the last digit in the filename. For example an eBook of filename 10234 would be found at:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/0/2/3/10234>

or filename 24689 would be found at:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/2/4/6/8/24689>

An alternative method of locating eBooks:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/GUTINDEX.ALL>

*** END: FULL LICENSE ***