

WILFRED MONTRESSOR:

OR, THE

SECRET ORDER OF THE SEVEN.

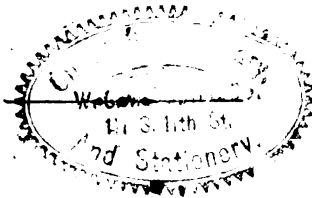
A ROMANCE OF

LIFE IN THE NEW YORK METROPOLIS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"ABEL PARSONS, OR THE BROTHER'S REVENGE," "FLORENCE DE LACEY," ETC., ETC., ETC.

With Ninety Illustrations, from original designs.



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44

INTRODUCTION.

"DEAR Reader, a word with you."

"Well, sir."

"Are you a critic?"

"Of course I am."

"But why of course?"

"Are not all readers critics? The day of aristocracy is over in the literary as in the political world. Everybody writes and everybody reads. I have bought your book—I shall read it and criticise it."

"And pray, by what rules of criticism are you governed in your judgment of literary productions?"

"Rules, sir? the fewer the better. I know what I like and what I dislike. If I like your book—but, in truth, I concern myself little with the merits of anything I read."

"What then?"

"Fault-finding is my forte. I have an eye for blemishes, imperfections; and, if I discover them, I give no quarter."

"I rejoice to hear it."

"Have a care; modesty is more becoming and more promising than blind, presumptuous confidence."

"In authors or in critics?"

"In authors, sir, above all men. You have written a romance—you have put yourself in competition with great names, Scott, Bulwer, Dickens; and yet, great as these authors are, they have their faults. Scott has faults, Bulwer has faults, Dickens has faults; in my judgment, sir, Dickens has great faults."

"But these writers have great merits."

"True, sir, very true. And with the shouts of their admirers still ringing in your ears, you have entered the field of romance. You were under no compulsion to write, yet you have written this book—you have winked at its publication—virtually you ask me to read it—and when you ask me to read a book, you assume the obligation of pleasing me."



"Granted—my book will please you."

"Well, really, you are—"

"Do not mistake me. It is your humor to find fault. I shall please you by offering the means of indulgence to your humor. If you persist in reading my book, you will discover many and grievous faults—imperfections in the plot—inconsistencies in the characters—perhaps a want of interest in the incidents."

"I like your candor, sir; but you cannot mean that you have taken the pen, with malice prepense, to write a bad book?"

"No, truly; I have taken the pen as the novice in chivalry buckles on his armor—as the unacknowledged sculptor grasps the chisel. Great names can be achieved only by great deeds; but shall none save Wellington go into battle? shall none save Powers work in marble? If, in the judgment of wise and learned men, I stand within the precincts of the realm of Art—not an empiric, nor an imitator—this book is not a failure."

"Tush, tush! wise and learned men seldom read novels and romances. If you really wish to succeed in this department of literature, to get fame and money, you must write to the million, sir, to the million."

"Fame is precious, and money in these days a *sine qua non*; but the true artist must needs let them come to him without seeking."

"'Jim along Josey!' I see them coming at a snail's pace."

"The true artist envies not the men of action, their achievements or their possessions. His world is the invisible, spiritual world of art—his daily paths are in the regions of the beautiful and the sublime—he converses familiarly with the illustrious, and who, in their works, live immortal and unchangeable."

"Put such stuff in your romances, sir. A bit of sentiment at the beginning or end of a chapter is not amiss. But I tell you it will not do. You wish success, or you would not write. You must obtain it as others obtain it. You must consult the popular taste. You must write for the million. Study Sue, Dumas, Dickens, James—not their books, sir; they abound with great faults, but their cunning as authors, their tricks and devices to tickle the fancy of the multitude. Why, there is much in a title. Let me see—what have we here? 'Wilfred Montessor; or, the Secret Order of the Seven'—hum! ha! 'Wilfred Montessor; or, the Secret Order of the Seven.'"

"How do you like the title?"

"A name is a name—Wilfred Montessor or Joe Duggins—the difference is trifling. The first branch of the title should be more

striking—more startling—as The Castle of Death—The Bloody Parricide—The Pirate of Earthquake Island.”

Any such title would be inappropriate. There is nothing about the Castle of Death, or the Bloody Parricide, or the Pirate of Earthquake Island in my romance.”

“It would be better, perhaps, if there were. The Secret Order of the Seven—that is more promising, but I cannot understand it. What do you mean by the Secret Order of the Seven?”

“You will discover as you proceed.”

“Yes, yes, but a title should be clear and intelligible. The Secret Order of Freemasons, or of Jesuits, or of Odd-Fellows would be clear and intelligible. The Secret Order of the Seven is a coinage of the brain for which you are solely responsible.”

“That may or may not be.”

“I trust that your book is not written to advocate the existence or uphold the principles of the secret orders which are extending their fungous exorcences far and wide over the land. I give you notice in advance that I am opposed to all secret societies.”

“Why?”

“Because—because they conceal their doings from the public—as good a proof as can well be given that their doings are evil.”

“Very well—you are a married man—a member of a mercantile firm—a director in the Bank of America—and one of the vestry of Trinity Church. Will you have the goodness to relate frankly the saying and doings of to-day in your family and counting-house—in the bank parlor and the vestry room?”

“How, sir; would you pry into the secrets of my household and business, of the Bank and Church with which I am connected?”

“Ah! you have secrets, then. You conceal your doings from the public—as good a proof as can well be given that they are evil.”

“But—ahem!—you perceive—ahem!—the difference.”

“You have secrets—all men have secrets—secrets which from motives of interest, delicacy or cunning they hide from friends and foes. Come forth with me, dear Reader, into Broadway. Exercise for the body and amusement for the mind are always to be found in a jostle with the populace.”

“A lively scene, sir, a lively, bustling scene.”

“In opposing currents the tide of human life sweeps on—men, women, children, in pairs or singly, some hurrying forward, some advancing listlessly. They laugh, they talk, yet what untold secrets nestle in their hearts. That man yonder chatting gaily with a friend

is a merchant in extensive business ; he flings the sparkling *bon mot* from his lips with the hideous fiend Bankruptcy staring him in the face. And those ladies—mark the lovely blonde on the right as she treads the humble pavement in such bravery of dress, and with a rattling musketry of words and smiles delights her companion—words and smiles which are the impenetrable disguise of a broken heart. Tarry a moment—on the other side of the street a young maiden trips gracefully along, leaning on the arm of an elderly gentleman, with a merry speech she glances archly and fondly in the face of her protector, and at the same instant drops a sprig of geranium.”

“A trifling circumstance.”

“Trifling to you—trifling to the unheeding multitude—but not trifling to the handsome clerk with a salary of four hundred per annum, against whom the doors of the cautious guardian are barred relentlessly. To him it is the signal of love and hope. Soon he will steal cautiously from the marble walled store to secure the bruised geranium leaf, and to-night in his chamber he will revive it with kisses, and place it beneath his pillow to carry him in dreams to the presence of the beloved.”

“How do you know these things, sir?”

“I am of the ‘Secret Order of the Seven.’”

“The deuce you are! Is not this book then a fiction?”

“A fiction, and yet a reality. Within a score of years many of the events recorded in these pages have actually transpired. Mine has been the task to mingle them together artistically ; and, from scenes of daily life in this metropolis, to construct the fabric of Romance. I have attempted to heighten the interest of the incidents themselves by partially disclosing the movements of the secret agency which produced or controlled them. I have striven to invest ordinary occurrences with the charm of mystery. If the veil which hangs before the actors in this written drama be impenetrably dense or transparently clear, it is woven by unskillful hands. I would that you should perceive uncertainty. Truth, like the sun, reveals all things ; but Romance, like the crescent moon, showers down her light, and by the shady margin of rivulets, and in the deep recesses of spicy groves, the Zephyrs whisper together, and beings of wondrous power and beauty lurk unseen.”

“A truce to your fine sentences! Good day, sir, my path is yonder.”

“Shall we not jog on together, dear Reader?”





CHAPTER I.

THE MAN OF THIRTY-FIVE AND THE GEORGIAN.



HE abodes of opulence in the commercial metropolis of the Union rival the palaces of London in richness of furniture and splendor of decoration.

It was a fine afternoon in the early part of the month of June, 1828.

The sky was cloudless; the air balmy, and quiet as an infant's breathing. In light and shadow, curiously mingling, lay the great city. On the paved streets were painted, in darkening colors, the outlines of long rows of houses and stores, the figures of massive public buildings, and the spires of many churches. Elsewhere shone the rays of the declining sun—even on the wide thoroughfares they embraced the extending shadows—through shop windows, and along the fronts of buildings, and upon the house-tops, they poured their glowing brightness. The homes of the desti-

tute—the sick man's chamber—the wards of the hospital—the felon's dungeon—smiled beneath their genial influence.

Joyously, too, they stole through half-closed blinds into a spacious apartment on the first floor of a private mansion in St. John's square. The curtains of flowered silk, depending gracefully from supporters of carved wood richly gilded, impaired, but did not wholly subdue, the luster of the sunlight.

The large saloon was pervaded with calm, tranquil, delicious beauty. Exotic flowers, in oriental vases of alabaster, slightly perfumed the air.

On a mahogany sofa, lined with damask velvet inwrought with leaves and flowers of gold and silver embroidery, reclined a man of medium stature, spare, yet sinewy in his person, and of a striking physiognomy. The flush of early manhood had passed from his cheeks, and a few deep lines of care or thought were visible on his lofty brow. His dark eyebrows, exquisitely carved, projected unusually, and invested the upper portion of his features with an expression of dignity and power. His nose was Grecian; his mouth small, with regular teeth, and lips slightly yet voluptuously rounded. The chin and lower part of the face were covered with a thick glossy beard of a color somewhat darker than his hair. There was a mysterious fascination in the steady glance of the large lustrous eyes that beamed beneath the projecting eyebrows. Changing from a deep blue to a dark chestnut with the changing shadows of light; brilliant, penetrating, powerful, they revealed the existence of a proud, indomitable spirit, able to read the thoughts of others, and by persuasion or artifice to rule their hearts and control their actions.

Calm self-possession, confident self-reliance, without pretense, without ostentation—these were the prominent ideas suggested by that man's countenance.

He was dressed in pantaloons of black casimir, an embroidered Marseilles vest, and a brocade dressing-gown of a fanciful pattern. A costly diamond breast-pin sparkled in his bosom and relieved the snowy whiteness of his linen. On his feet he wore Turkish slippers of rose-colored morocco.

He was reclining in an attitude of careless ease apparently absorbed in thought.

At his side, sitting on a low footstool, was the Georgian.

The pure blood of the race of Mount Caucasus, whence have sprung the Grecian, the Roman, the Teuton, was perceptible in every limb and feature of the handsome youth.

Arrayed in the splendid costume of a royal page in an oriental court—an embroidered frock coat extending to the knees, fastened by loops, and a sash tied gracefully around the waist; a rich Cashmere shawl, flowing silk trowsers, Persian sandals and a Turkish cap of crimson velvet, with tassels of gold—the Georgian inclined gently toward the thoughtful occupant of the sofa.

The page was a woman in disguise!

The Cashmere shawl had fallen negligently from the shoulders, and the loops of the embroidered coat were unfastened in the neck. The bosom was partially exposed. Beneath a waistcoat, trimmed with the finest lace of Ispahan, rose in undulating curves the voluptuous contour of a bust of exquisite symmetry and proportion.

The unstudied negligence and grace of the Georgian produced the effect of the most refined coquetry.

But for this, notwithstanding the beauty of her features and the faultless symmetry of her person, the disguise would have been complete. The feminine softness of her complexion, and the extreme delicacy of the mingled shades of red and white that played upon her cheeks, were relieved by the majesty of a brow of dazzling whiteness, and of eyes beaming with passionate emotion and masculine energy of will. Even the curling ringlets of light brown hair that escaped the luxurious embrace of the Turkish cap of crimson velvet, and hung profusely over her small delicate ears and around her graceful neck, scarcely extended to the embroidered collar turned back upon her rounded shoulders.

Three years previously, she had traversed many leagues of territory in Central Asia with a single attendant, a young boy of her own country and lineage, to manifest her love and devotion to an American traveler who had been her father's guest and her preserver from an ignominious and horrible captivity. The costume in which she was arrayed had disguised her sex during many days of anxiety and fatigue.

The Georgian woman gazed with untiring interest upon the countenance of her companion. He was buried in a profound reverie.

From an impulse of tenderness, rather than a desire to disturb his train of reflection, she gently raised his hand to her lips and covered it with caresses.

The traveler started from his reverie and glanced inquiringly upon her.

"My lord is thoughtful to-day," said the Georgian, slowly and hesitatingly. She spoke with a foreign accent, but the tones of her voice were gentle and melodious.

"It is my birth-day, Zorah."

The features of the page brightened with joy.

"To-day, Zorah, I am thirty-five years of age."

Zorah gazed tenderly in the face of the speaker, and with grave solemnity replied :

"May the Great Being who made the sun and the stars, bestow length of days and treasures of delight upon my lord!"

"Life is a thing to endure, rather than to enjoy."

The Georgian shook her head and exclaimed eagerly :

"Since the hour when I first looked upon the face of my lord, life has been full of enjoyment to me."

"You are very beautiful, Zorah, and you deserve to be happy," said the other, gently clasping the soft tapering fingers of the white hand that reposed in his.

At this moment the speaker surveyed the costume of the Georgian.

"The Oriental costume becomes you, greatly: you were thus arrayed when I encountered you at Damascus."

"My lord remembers it?"

"Perfectly, Zorah. Yet, to-day, when I requested you to array yourself in the dress of an Eastern page, I knew not that you still possessed these rich habiliments."

"My lord is not displeased with me?"

"No, Zorah. Thus attired, you are fair and lovely as the Grecian Adonis." With a gentle smile, the speaker continued: "Thus attired, Zorah, you might steal the hearts of a thousand maidens."

"I love only my lord."

"You love me truly," said the traveler seriously, even sadly. "Alas! for you and for me, that I have no heart to bestow in return."

"My lord permits me to love him," said the Georgian, with a glance of tenderness.

"You are dear to me, Zorah."

The lightning does not follow the thunderbolt with more surprising swiftness in the tempests of the tropical climes, than did the wild flush of joyous ecstasy on the cheeks, brow, and neck of the Georgian woman, at these simple words of tenderness.

She covered the speaker's hand once more with fond caresses and inclined her head gracefully, as if fearful of losing the slightest intonation of his voice.

"But an affection like yours—so constant, so tender, so devoted—deserves a higher reward. You are a daughter of the sunny valley of Khasreman, where dwells the spirit of beauty and of love. Its crystal

waters, its sublimated air, its glorious sunshine, have stamped their impress on your person and your soul. Pure, sparkling, fervid, you are capable of loving with the most exquisite tenderness, the most engaging vivacity, the most passionate adoration."

"I love my lord."

"And if I were to die, Zorah?"

The Georgian bowed her head for an instant. When she turned her face again to her companion, her eyes were suffused with tears. She replied not, however, but thrusting her hand deeply in the folds of her dress she drew forth a Turkish poniard. The hilt sparkled with pearls and diamonds, and the blade of polished steel was sharp and pointed. With a significant gesture, she placed the point of the dagger against her bosom.

The expression of her countenance, the gesture, were not unnoticed by the traveler; but repeating the words, "If I were to die, Zorah," he added, "you would love another."

The Georgian started to her feet with an exclamation of mingled grief, astonishment, and horror. Her slight form rose to its full height, her cheek crimsoned, her nostrils were tremulously dilated, her eyes flashed with emotions of wounded pride and tenderness.

The paroxysm of excited feeling passed away, and she said, very sorrowfully:

"My lord believes that I am unworthy."

The sympathy of the man was awakened by the deep emotion of the woman, and extending his hand to her, he replied:

"You mistake, Zorah; I did but try you."

The Georgian sank upon the footstool, and reclined her face upon the bosom of her companion. Her tears flowed freely; yet in the midst of her depression she manifested the rare gentleness and tenderness of her nature.

With an ineffable expression of truth and love she raised her head, and riveted the searching glance of her soft blue eyes upon the impassive countenance of the traveler.

The calmness of conscious power was rivaled, if not surpassed, by the earnestness of true, unwavering affection.

Her glance was averted for an instant; then placing her hand over her heart, she said, with a slight intonation of scorn:

"Zorah cannot love another."

The traveler rose from his reclining posture, and gently caressed the brow of the youthful page.

Without perceptible emotion, he said to her:

"Therefore you will understand me, Zorah, when I have revealed the cause of my apparent coldness to you. Long before I knew you, I loved truly and ardently one of the daughters of my people."

"Months ago my heart whispered to me the secret of my lord," replied the Georgian, sadly. Then, under the influence of a strange curiosity, she asked: "And the love of my lord—was she beautiful?"

"Almost as lovely as yourself, in the early prime of your maidenhood."

"And she still lives?"

"She still lives."

Zorah clasped her hands together in silent agony, and fixed her eyes despairingly on the speaker.

"But she is dead to me."

In speechless wonder Zorah listened, and all unconsciously her face brightened.

"She is married—she is the wife of another."

"And my lord loves her no longer?"

"No longer, Zorah."

The Georgian could not restrain an exclamation of joy, and a celestial splendor diffused itself over her countenance. Yet, suddenly, she checked her manifestations of delight. True affection is ever thoughtful, ever regardless of self; and the idea occurred to her that she might be rejoicing in the misery of others—perhaps in the hidden sorrow of the man she loved.

With the most touching expression of sympathy and compassion in her features, she rose from the footstool on which she was sitting. She approached her companion, placed one hand upon his shoulder, and pressed her cheek tenderly to his; then she kissed his eyes, his eye-brows, his forehead, and standing upright before him, said in a tone of inquiry:

"And my lord sorrows for the lost love of the daughter of his people?"

"Listen to me, Zorah."

The Georgian crouched at the feet of the traveler. Her cheek of velvety softness reposing on his knee, her eyes upturned to his countenance, she awaited his recital. Her features betrayed the intense interest of her soul.

CHAPTER II.

THE NARRATIVE—HAMET.



AM a native of this land, Zorah—of this queenly city. Here were passed the days of my boyhood and my early youth. Afterward, in the seminaries of my own land and in the universities of Europe, I studied science and art, and became versed in the lore of the ancients and the moderns.

“When I was yet a child, my mother became an angel. My father died during my residence at the University of Göttingen, and left me the sole heir of an immense fortune.

“I was young, ardent, and curious. After completing my term of study, I traveled through nearly all the countries of Europe. I traversed mountains and rivers; I visited ruins and battle-fields; I mingled in the society and amusements of the capitals.

“For a time I yielded to the dominion of the passions. Follies attracted and absorbed me: I learned wisdom by experience. The knowledge of men was forced upon me by the exigencies of my position.

“Still young, I returned to my native city. I abandoned my early follies, and thenceforth I resisted, successfully, the corrupting influences of wealth and leisure. I passed my time in the routine of society, the delights of literature, the care and management of my estate. Weeks, months, flew on, and my heart was untouched by the master passion.

“Six years ago, on my birth-day, I saw, for the first time, Mary Cameron.

“I loved her, Zorah.

“Surpassingly strange was it that I, who had looked unmoved on the proudest beauties of the European courts, should have been captivated, at sight, by a young, timid, inexperienced maiden.

“Such was Mary Cameron when first I beheld her. Though not resembling you, gazelle of the sunny vale, she was very beautiful. Her form was graceful, and her expressive features beamed with ap-

paren' artlessness and truth. I did not distrust her, Zorah; yet I descended to a slight artifice. I concealed from her the knowledge of my wealth, even my real name. I wished to be loved for myself alone. She lived in retirement, with her widowed mother, and my artifice was not detected. I passed for a student who gained a precarious livelihood by the profession of literature.

"I prospered in my suit; the delicious consciousness of possessing the heart of the woman I adored, dawned upon my soul. The hours flew on, winged with joy. I never wearied in the society of my beloved one. Her cheerful pleasantry was inexhaustible, her intellect was improved by the studies we pursued together, and her tenderness daily grew more confiding and unreserved.

"My birth-day was approaching, the thirtieth of my life. Then I resolved that I would reveal to her my name, my position; that I would ask her to be mine.

"On the morning of my birth-day I received a note from Mary Cameron. I broke the seal joyously. The note informed me that the writer was on the eve of contracting a nuptial engagement with a retired merchant of the city, and that she wished me to discontinue my visits to her.

"The handwriting was hers. I was stupified, horror-struck. Under an uncontrollable impulse, I flew to her residence to demand an explanation. I was refused admittance. Two days afterwards the journals announced the marriage of Owen Tracey to Mary Cameron.

"I suffered horribly.

"I learned that Owen Tracey was a man of fifty years of age, violent in his temper, and miserly in his habits. He had amassed a competent fortune in the India trade, and had retired from active business; but the lust of accumulation was the dominant influence that controlled his actions.

"And that maiden, so young, seemingly so true, so chaste, so tender, had yielded to the base love of gold. Alas! it was too true.

"From that hour I was calm, fearfully calm. The trust, the hope of life, was gone. An ardent, passionate man, I sank into a lethargy of feeling. I blamed no one; I had deceived myself. Yet I felt bitterly that the illusion of my dream of love had passed away for ever, and that henceforth my heart would be desolate.

"I traveled.

"I have wandered among the isles of the Southern Ocean; amid African deserts; even through the distant regions of Central Asia.

"I have returned hither.

"That woman and her husband are still living in this city."

The speaker paused. The Georgian changed not her position, but with a steady, earnest gaze, she strove to penetrate the depths of his spiritual being.

"I cannot forget that I have loved, Zorah, but I sorrow no longer for the false heart that deceived and betrayed me."

The traveler spoke with a measured intonation of voice which indicated the total absence of passion or emotion. He was grave, dignified, and impassive. The memories of the past awakened neither sighs nor tears, for the fountains were dried up.

The Georgian rose from her humble posture, and with a gesture of determination, grasped the diamond-hilted poniard.

"I will avenge my lord on the false woman!"

"Already am I avenged."

Zorah looked inquiringly.

"The consciousness of ill desert is the scorpion of the soul. It stings perpetually. It is hell!"

"My lord speaks truly."

"Zorah, I murmur not at her treachery; I take no delight in her punishment. The passions are dead within me. In the great highway of life, in which I am plunged, I may soon meet, or overtake her. My soul is evenly balanced. I have neither scorn nor compassion, pride nor sympathy, for the woman whose slightest glance erewhile flushed my cheek and thrilled my heart. I remember that such things were, with strange inexplicable doubts of my personal identity."

"My lord is unhappy," said the Georgian, sadly.

"The will controls the feelings. The man of thirty-five endures the present and defies the future. The will hath power, Zorah, wondrous power."

"I bow to the will of my lord."

"You are gentle, loving, obedient. For your sake, I would that I could utterly forget the past. It cannot be. Yet you are mine, mine for ever. Deeply as my trust in human nature has been shaken, I do not doubt your fidelity, and I will never spurn from my side the being who clings to me even with the certainty of unrequited tenderness."

A radiant expression of joy beamed on the features of the Georgian.

"In the presence of my lord," said Zorah, with a proud, tender glance, "I, too, will defy the future; for Love hath greater power than the Will."

"In woman," was the calm reply.

With a bewitching smile the Georgian sank upon the low footstool.

The man of thirty-five disengaged the poniard from her grasp and held it above her, as if threatening to strike.

Zorah did not falter or shrink, but seemed the rather to covet the advancing blade.

"You are mine, Zorah," said the traveler, gently, "to cherish, not to slay. And, therefore, as I withdraw this steel from your bosom, must I also, as far as in me lies, withdraw from your spirit every source of mental uneasiness. I have revealed to you my past history that there may be no concealment between us." ●

"My lord——"

"And now, Zorah," continued the man of thirty-five, interrupting the Georgian, "although you speak to me as the wives of the patriarchs spoke to their husbands in the days of old, and although your manner of speech is pleasant to my ears, I must instruct you in the customs of the people among whom we dwell."

An emotion of surprise was visible on the features of the page.

"In this land of the West there are neither lords nor princes. The law is supreme, and under the law every man enjoys freedom of thought and equality of rights. Nor are the women the slaves of the men as in the empires of Asia, but their companions and equals."

The Georgian's eyes sparkled with wonder and delight.

"Henceforth, Zorah, address me by the name which I taught you when we were sailing hitherward on the great waters. Can you repeat it?"

"My lord taught me to say 'Wilfred.'" She hesitated an instant, and continued: "'Wilfred Montessor.'" "

"It is the name by which I am known among my people," said the man of thirty-five; "hereafter I am Wilfred to you, as you are Zorah to me."

"Dearest Wilfred," exclaimed the Georgian, clapping her hands and smiling archly.

"And how do you like my country, Zorah? In this northern clime you will sigh perhaps for the sunny valley of Khasreman."

"It is Wilfred's country and mine," said Zorah, rising. Then crossing the apartment she threw open the window-blinds and exclaimed:

"How beautiful, Wilfred. The East can boast no lovelier sky than this."

The sun was setting in sublime magnificence. Rays of golden light darted almost horizontally through the tangled shrubbery and pleasant shade trees of St. John's Park, and played fantastically on the walls

THE SECRET ORDER OF THE SEVEN.

THE MAN OF THIRTY-FIVE AND THE GEORGIAN.—Page 8.



of the saloon. And over the trees, as if resting upon their waving tops, and on either side of the lofty steeple, and upward still almost to the zenith, were masses of clouds of wonderful and dazzling beauty.

Rapidly the sun went down—the crimson, the orange, the purple and the violet faded from the sky; and even while they gazed, the shadows of evening were gathering around them.

As Wilfred Montessor and the Georgian resumed their former positions, the door of the apartment opened noiselessly, and a youth, not exceeding the age of fifteen, entered, bearing in his hands a large oval salver of burnished gold, of exquisite workmanship. Upon the salver were Chinese cups and saucers of a curious antique shape, spotlessly white, except the rims, which were of a deep orange color. The cups were filled with coffee of Mocha, newly prepared, in the manner of the Oriental cities. The fragrance of the exhilarating beverage, at once delicate and powerful, penetrated instantly to the remotest part of the saloon. Vessels of silver, richly chased, containing sugar and cream, were placed upon the salver in the midst of the small cups glowing with the dark purple fluid.



The youth advanced slowly toward the man of thirty-five and the

Georgian. He paused before them, sank gracefully upon one knee, and resting the salver lightly upon the other, inquired respectfully:

“Will my lord and mistress take coffee?”

The features of the youth were of the Oriental cast, resembling, in some degree, those of the woman before whom he was kneeling. His eyes, covered with long dark eye-lashes, were small, sparkling and vivacious. The general expression of his countenance was that of intelligence, activity and cunning.

Her dress was simple, yet rich and tasteful. A coat of invisible-green cloth, with broad, short flaps, lined with dark maroon colored silk, buttoned closely around the waist; pantaloons of black casimir with wide crimson stripes on the sides, passing down to the ankles, and boots of French calfskin, highly polished, constituted his principal attire. His person, though not yet fully developed, was displayed to great advantage by his apparel.

The Georgian took a cup of the fragrant Mocha from the salver, and presented it to Montessor. Then adding some sugar and a few drops of cream to another cup, she commenced sipping the coffee with a small golden spoon.

“It is delicious, Hamet; it is perfect,” said Zorah, with a smile, looking at the youth.

It was touching to see the expression of respect, of devotion, of gratitude, that beamed on the face of the boy, Hamet.

The love of his mistress, the desire of ministering to her comfort, her happiness, and her safety, were the moving impulses of his existence. Therefore, he had accompanied her in her perilous flight to Damascus; therefore, he had followed her from country to country in his pilgrimage of love. To live for her, perchance to die for her, from the pure attachment of kindred blood and country, was the purpose of his soul. The slightest mark of approbation from his mistress sent a thrill of joy to his heart.

“We have tasted none better than this at Mecca, or at Alexandria,” said Zorah, turning to her companion, Wilfred Montessor.

The eyes of the youth followed those of the Georgian woman.

“None, Zorah.”

When the twain had finished sipping their coffee, and had replaced the empty cups and saucers upon the salver, the boy Hamet rose to retire.

“One word, Hamet,” said Montessor.

The youth stood in silence, gazing at the master of the house.

“The Octagon chamber, Hamet: are all things prepared as I commanded you?”

"I have done as the master commanded."

"And the dresses in the ante-room?"

"They are ready."

"And the bandages of silk for the eyes of the strangers?"

"I have procured them."

"It is well," said the man of thirty-five.

As the youth reached the door of the saloon, he added :

"Bring lights, Hamet, and then repair to the station assigned you."

In a few moments a dozen wax candles, placed in two massive silver candelabra, illuminated the magnificent apartment. The lofty ceiling, with its projecting borders of acanthus leaves, reflected a pleasing luster.

Upon the walls were suspended *chef d'œuvres* of Titian, Rembrandt, and Salvator Rosa. The furniture was gorgeous and costly. The floor was covered with a Persian carpet of the richest dyes. On a ground-work of purple and violet were wrought fantastic figures, in colors of crimson, orange, blue, and silver.

The grassy turf on the banks of a mountain rivulet gives a louder echo to the light tread of the fawn, than did the soft, yielding, elastic tissue of Persepolis to the retiring footsteps of Hamet, the Georgian youth.



CHAPTER III.

THE SECRET ORDER.



HE man of thirty-five rose from the sofa, and with stately strides traversed the apartment. His eyes glanced at the dial of a splendid chronometer, set in a statuette of silver bronze, that stood on the mantelpiece.

"The hour is approaching," he said, turning to the Georgian, "when the strangers will arrive."

"I am the page of Wilfred," replied Zorah; "I will go to the ante-room."

"Not yet, Zorah," said Montessor.

The Georgian woman, still seated on the footstool, reclined against the rich velvet cushion

of the sofa.

"Have I unfolded to you the object of the assembly in the octagon chamber this evening?"

A gesture of dissent was the sole reply of the Georgian.

"I have no secrets from you, Zorah," continued Wilfred Montessor.

Zorah bounded toward the speaker with the swiftness of the gazelle, laid her cheek upon his shoulder and looked confidently in his face.

He caressed the glowing cheek, and clasping her soft delicate hand resumed the promenade which had been briefly interrupted.

"Life, Zorah, is action. There are those who dream away existence in luxurious idleness: they sleep and live not.

"Time is measured to the animal creation by the pulses of the heart, not the vibrations of the pendulum.

"The butterfly of a day, reveling in flower gardens, and fields of clover and spear-grass, is longer lived than the chrysalis of a week.

"I pine, Zorah, for action. I am sated with pleasure, wearied with travel.

"In this, my native city, there are thousands of men, and women, and children, with desires, interests, passions.

"In this city are rich men, surrounded with plenty, residing in houses of splendor.

"In this city are poor families, suffering for want, living in miserable garrets and cellars.

"In this city are congregated merchants and artisans; tradesmen and laborers; lawyers and doctors; professors of science and of quackery; brokers and gamblers; libertines and harlots; burglars and pick-pockets; the votaries of fashion, of wealth, of passion, and of crime.

"In this city is the woman that I loved and her husband.

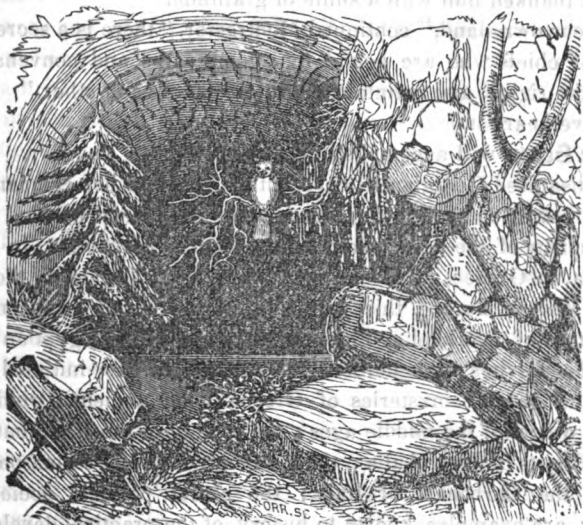
"I will mingle with the living hordes of this great metropolis. I will dive beneath the surface into the hearts and souls of the people.

"Here I will act."

"Wilfred will be the friend of the wretched, the oppressed, and the destitute," said the Georgian.

"Power is not uniformly benevolent, Zorah. The fiat of Omnipotence has prescribed the conditions of human life."

"Wilfred will sustain the right and denounce the wrong," said the woman, pensively.



"Good and evil are mingled in strange proportion in the wisest designs.

"Perchance we are the creatures of destiny.

"Nevertheless, here in this city, I will act. There is much to learn, there is much to perform.

"The satrap has his myrmidons, the conqueror his soldiers, the Grand Lama his priests: I must have subordinates, agents, tools.

"The stronger will, Zorah, ever controls the weaker. The most acute and vigorous minds are liable to be swayed and governed by sympathy, by passion, and by interest.

"But a greater power than all is the **POWER OF MYSTERY!** The human soul bows to it with reverence and submission.

"Wonderful, very wonderful, to the traveler, is that mysterious river of the Alps, which, deserting the bright sunlight of the upper world, rolls its pellucid waters, furlong after furlong, through dark subterraneous channels in the bowels of the earth."

The words of Montressor excited strongly the emotions of the Georgian. Her countenance flushed with kindling enthusiasm.

"I will veil my acts in mystery. I will operate unseen on the hearts, the minds, the destinies, of others. None shall understand me, Zorah, but you."

"The secrets of Wilfred will rest secure in my heart."

"I trust you, Zorah."

Zorah thanked him with a smile of gratitude.

"In your own land," continued Montressor, "there is a secret association of chiefs who are bound by solemn oaths and covenants to respect the rights, and maintain the interests, of each other."

"I have heard it."

"**The Seven** will accomplish my designs."

The disguised Georgian listened with surprise to her companion.

"The power of secret organization has ever been wielded by the master spirits of the descendants of the Caucasian tribes. In Egypt, in Judea, in Greece, in Rome, in Ancient Scandinavia, in the countries of Modern Europe, this power in various forms has controlled the fortunes of mankind. The sacred orders of the Egyptian priesthood; the Levites; the heroes—the sages—the Few initiated in the lesser and greater mysteries of Greece; the ancient Druids; the military orders of the middle ages; the society of the Illuminati; the Vehme Courts of Westphalia; the Ancient Order of Freemasons; the Jesuits; the Carbonari of Italy; the secret political societies of France; are examples, known to history, of the practical development of this principle.

"Even at this day the world is filled with the ramifications of secret, organized, intelligent power.

"The central governing force, in each mighty circle of influence, is the mind—the will of **ONE** man.

"He speaks, and his will is obeyed.

"Great is the power of MYSTERY.

"There are societies in existence whose secrets are so faithfully preserved, that neither their names, nor their objects, nor the number of their members, are known to the uninitiated. Their effects only are perceived.

"Men wonder when the unseen electric flash loosens suddenly the silver cord of life.

"At the University of Gottingen, I, Wilfred Montessor, was initiated into the mysteries of a secret society, which has been in existence nearly two hundred years, and which has extended its branches through half the countries of Europe.

"To-day its mandates are irresistible.

"And yet the uninitiated know not its name—suspect not its existence.

"THE SEVEN shall accomplish my will."

"And who are THE SEVEN?" timidly inquired the Georgian. She had listened, scarcely comprehending it, to the language of Wilfred Montessor.

"THE SEVEN are not yet, Zorah," replied Montessor, "but the hour is at hand.

"In a brief time after my return to this city, the idea of the **Secret Order of the Seven** was suggested to my mind by the occurrence of a series of strange and startling events.

"It governed my actions.

"In various disguises, I traversed the length and breadth of the city. The mansions of the rich and the hovels of the poor were opened to me—I surveyed every phase of society with critical attention.

"I investigated the history, the deportment, the characters of men in the different walks of life: I sought for originality and energy, the elements of active exertion and of success.

"Society is subdivided into sections: the hero of one section is, perchance, unknown to the masses composing the others.

"From the crowds of living men that tread the streets of this great city I have selected six.

"I am the seventh.

"And the seventh shall rule the others by his will and the power of mystery.

"Socially, their position is diverse.

"It is strange!

"They do not know me—they do not know each other; yet they have consented to be initiated into the **Secret Order of the Seven**.

"**THE SEVEN** will be a wall of adamant round about you, Zorah."

"Wilfred is my protection," said Zorah, proudly.

"I, Wilfred, am the Seventh."

Then glancing once more at the illuminated dial, he added: "The hour is come! To your post, my Georgian page, and remember the directions of the morning."

Wilfred Montessor and Zorah left the apartment.



CHAPTER IV.

THE INITIATION.



WILIGHT had come and gone. The dark concave sky sparkled with myriads of stars.

By night, as well as by day, the avenues of the great metropolis resound with the tramp of men and women upon the smooth flagging of the side-walks—the clicking of iron-shod hoofs, and the rumbling of revolving wheels over the stony pavements.

But Chapel-street even in the vicinity of Canal-street is a quiet, retired, unpretending street, comparatively deserted by pedestrians and omnibusses. It is neither the residence of commercial enterprise, manufacturing skill, nor fashionable pride.

Backward and forward on the western side of the street loitered a single pedestrian.

“This is a curious adventure,” muttered the pedestrian, in an under tone; “but I have given a pledge, which I will perform at all hazards.”

“Yonder is the high gate surmounted with iron spikes. My instructions are to approach the gate cautiously, and to rap gently three times upon it.”

The pedestrian sauntered slowly up the street, and returning, paused in front of the high wooden gate. He glanced hastily around—no person was visible.

He rapped—once—twice—thrice.

The gate swung open immediately, and a shrill, peculiar voice, exclaimed:

“Advance—the First.”

A long covered passage-way, dimly lighted at the farther extremity,

was disclosed to the view of the pedestrian. Near the gate stood the boy Hamet, disguised in a black silk domino.

The pedestrian entered the passage-way, and the gate closed behind him.

"You are a stranger," said the youth in the domino, "and you seek the Seventh."

"I seek him," replied the stranger.

"Kneel then," said Hamet, placing his right hand gently on the shoulder of the other.

The pedestrian sank upon one knee at the bidding of the youth.

A strange voice was heard saying :

"The proud shall be abased—the humble shall be exalted."

The youth in the domino then produced a long narrow bandage of glossy silk, which he placed over the eyes of the kneeling stranger, and fastened securely with a knot.

The strange voice was again heard saying :

"Darkness cometh upon the sons of men, and light cometh out of darkness."

The youth in the domino extended his right hand and clasped the hand of the man who knelt before him.

"Rise and follow me," he said.

The blind folded pedestrian followed his conductor in silence. Having arrived at the extremity of the passage-way, the youth stopped, and with the open palm of his hand struck upon the wooden panels that arrested his progress.

"Who comes there?" demanded the strange voice.

"The First of the strangers," replied the conductor immediately ; "he seeketh the Seventh."

"The true earnest seeker ever finds what he seeketh."

The youth Hamet knocked gently with his closed hand, saying loudly :

"Once—for the First."

The sliding door, which formed the extremity of the passage-way, gradually disappeared, and the evening air blew freshly upon the faces of the youth and his companion.

Hamet led the stranger out of the passage-way and left him.

The stranger was in the open air,—blind folded, alone ! He knew not whether to turn to the right hand or to the left.

The strange voice was heard again, saying :

"Such is man in his ignorance and blindness—he gropes helplessly in the dark—let him reverence and obey the higher powers—the

teachers, the enlighteners. Wo, wo, wo, unto the man standing in the dark paths of the world—the proud and self-sufficient man who rejects the guidance of the great leaders: he shall stumble and fall and none shall help him.”

Presently the blindfolded man was taken by the hand and led forward; he passed in various directions over graveled walks, by the side of clumps of shrubbery, and beds of fragrant flowers, through gates and doorways, and subterraneous passages. He was utterly bewildered in his judgment of the distance and direction of his nocturnal promenade. Not a word was spoken by his conductor, and he awaited the termination of the adventure with silent yet growing curiosity.

At length, after mounting several steps, and passing through a narrow hall, covered with oil cloth, he was ushered into a small parlor or ante-room. The bandage was removed from his eyes, and he eagerly surveyed the apartment. His eyes, however, were dazzled by sudden exposure to the light, and some moments elapsed ere he could clearly distinguish the objects presented to his vision.

The stranger was a young man, becomingly arrayed in rich and fashionable attire. He possessed handsome, expressive features, and a fine, florid complexion.

Before him stood the page of Montessor, the disguised Georgian, Zorah.

The exceeding beauty of the page and the magnificence of the Oriental costume, in which he was arrayed, attracted the attention of the stranger.

He addressed a casual inquiry to the disguised Georgian.

The page of Montessor placed the fore finger of the right hand lightly over the lips, indicating thus to the questioner either that the organs of speech were mute or that the obligation of absolute silence was resting upon him.

Upon a semi-circular table, which stood against the wall of the ante-room, were lying a number of glittering vestments of silk, heaped negligently upon each other.

The page took one of the garments from the table, and approaching the stranger, intimated by a slight gesture, that it was intended for him.

The elegant cloth cap, worn by the young man, was deposited in a small closet of the ante-room; and with the assistance of the page he was soon arrayed in a fanciful silk vestment of Tyrian purple, lined with snow-white linen of the finest texture, and trimmed with ermine.

The sleeves were loose and flowing, and the gown itself, though gathered around the waist and securely tied with a silk cord and tassels, hung in graceful folds about the person. A circular hood, attached to the wide rolling collar of the vestment of ceremony, was thrown over the head, and closely drawn around the neck. The portion of the hood which corresponded to the face of the wearer was elaborately and fantastically decorated on the outer side, and was provided with apertures for the eyes and mouth.

The disguise was absolutely impenetrable.

The page of Montressor placed himself near a door on the western side of the ante-room, and beckoned to the disguised stranger.

He obeyed the signal.

As he slowly advanced, the page threw open the door, and made a low, reverent obeisance.

The stranger crossed the threshold of THE OCTAGON CHAMBER.

The door was instantly shut.

The apartment into which the young man had been admitted was a large octagon chamber, with a vaulted dome or ceiling. A chandelier of bronze was suspended from the highest point of the dome. The shades of the lamps were of ground glass, richly and variously colored, and the light which beamed through them, fantastically brilliant and changeful, produced an imposing effect. The walls were hung with Persian tapestry inwoven with grotesque images and figures, and with mystic hieroglyphics and emblems. A carpet of fine Peruvian wool, whose superb blackness, surpassing the blackness of ebony, was relieved by small stellar spots of blue and crimson, was spread loosely upon the floor. Underneath the chandelier was a circular table, rising toward the center, eight or ten feet in diameter. Its surface was covered with blue velvet, and a variety of strange implements and weapons were laid upon it. Around the table were disposed in regular order, seven massive arm-chairs, of Jerusalem oak, curiously carved.

One of the chairs was occupied.

The person of Wilfred Montressor was disguised in a vestment of ceremony precisely similar to that of the young man, the stranger who had just entered the octagon chamber.

He rose slowly from his seat upon the entrance of the stranger, and turning toward him, pointed significantly to the vacant chair on his right.

The young man approached the table, and stood in front of the arm-chair.

The twain seated themselves in silence.

At intervals of six or eight minutes, the door of the octagon chamber was thrown open, and one unknown personage after another glided into the apartment, and took a seat at the circular table.

All were similarly arrayed in gorgeous vestments of ceremony.

The seven chairs were occupied.

The sitters in them were silent.

At length a strange voice was heard, whose solemn tones filled the chamber, saying :

“Fear not—doubt not—delay not! The coward fears, the doubter disbelieves, the idler sleeps, when the voice of a brother in danger and distress calls upon him for action.

“If any man be fearful, or suspicious, or slothful, wherefore doth he live, or why doth he seek to enter the Secret Order of the Seven?

“Behold! the doors are open. Let him depart!”

Suddenly, as these words were uttered, the doors of the octagon chamber, two in number, opened widely.

No one moved, or rose, or left the chamber.

The doors were closed again, and the strange voice was heard saying :

“The Seven are here.”

The sitters in the seven chairs were silent.

At length, one of the seven, in a monotonous voice, which sounded harshly through the narrow opening in the silk hood, addressed the others :

“The strong man snaps the flaxen cord with one of his fingers.

“The rope which no man can break, is of flaxen cords twisted together.

“In union there is strength.

“Lo! we are Seven!

“Who is the First?” demanded the speaker, in an elevated tone.

The hooded personage on the right, laying his right hand upon his breast, replied :

“I am the First.”

“Who is the Second?”

The next personage on the right replied :

“I am the Second.”

“Who is the Third?”

The next personage replied :

“I am the Third.”

“Who is the Fourth?”

"I am the Fourth."

"Who is the Fifth?"

"I am the Fifth."

"Who is the Sixth?"

The hooded personage on the left of the speaker replied, with a gesture similar to the others:

"I am the Sixth."

"Who is the Seventh?"

The questioner, Wilfred Montessor, continued calmly:

"I am the Seventh."

And a strange voice was heard, saying:

"The first shall be last, and the last shall be first."

"Lo! we are Seven," said the former speaker, "we are brethren.

Brethren, we dwell in mystery.

"Mysteriously are we born, mysteriously do we live, mysteriously we die.

"Our number is mysterious—the number Seven.

"Coincidences are the sport of the fopling in science and learning; the sage regards them.

"In six days was the world created, and the Creator rested on the Seventh, and hallowed it.

"Seven were the Pleiades, when the stars sang together the great anthem of Creation.

"Seven were the sleepers who scorned the words of the prophet. Seven were the wise men of Greece. Seven were the heroes of Christendom.

"Seven were the ancient wonders of the world.

"On seven hills stood Imperial Rome, the mistress of the kingdoms of the earth.

"Seven are the sacraments of the church.

"Seven are the great planets of the solar system.

"Seven are the days of the week, the stages of life, the decades of human existence.

"And the seventh ever possesses sacredness and power.

"The day of days is the seventh.

"The heaven of heavens is the seventh.

"The seventh son hath power over disease; and the seventh son of the seventh son is a seer who looketh into the mysteries of futurity.

"Lo! we are Seven! And I am the Seventh."

A strange voice was heard, saying:

"Great is the power of the Seven."

THE SECRET ORDER OF THE SEVEN.



THE OCTAGON CHAMBER.—Page 28.

The speaker in the arm-chair continued:

"Brethren, the power which is concealed in darkness and in mystery is irresistible.

"The sea wears away the strongest battlements, and engulfs the proudest armaments; yet a small insect toils mysteriously in its depths, and overtops it with reefs and islands of coral.

"The great war-tower defies the assaults of time, and the might of the elements; yet the mole and the rat undermine it, day by day, and night by night, till it totters and falls with a crash of thunder.

"In the sea of life, among the towering schemes of men, THE SEVEN will act unseen.

"Which of us, in the progress of days, and months, and years, shall not see a lion in the road, a cloud in the sky? Which of us shall not need the assistance of his brethren?"

And the strange voice was heard again, saying:

"If any man desire not the sympathy and aid of his brethren, in the hour of difficulty and of danger, that surely cometh:

"If any man desire not to toil for the honor and safety of a brother in distress:

"Wherefore doth he live, or why doth he seek to enter the Secret Order of the Seven?

"Behold! the doors are open. Let him depart, and swear not."

As before, the doors of the octagon chamber opened suddenly, and the sitters in the seven chairs remaining seated, they closed again.

Wilfred Montessoro continued:

"We are the brethren of the Secret Order of the Seven. Listen to the oath of brotherhood."

The speaker rose from his seat, and the others rose also.

"We solemnly promise and swear, in the sacred names of Honor and of Truth, that in sickness and health, in summer and winter, by day and by night, we will strive, with diligence, faith, and courage, to uphold and maintain the cause of a brother in anxiety, distress, and peril."

And the strange voice was heard, saying:

"Promise and swear."

Each of the seven, holding the right hand steadily above the head, said in a slow, measured voice:

"I solemnly promise and swear!"

The seven again seated themselves, and the Seventh proceeded calmly:

"The names of the Seven no man knows save the Seventh.

"Remember, brethren, ye toil in secret. Beware of idle curiosity. It is not meet that ye know one another."

The strange voice was heard, saying:

"If any man ask, in his heart, 'Who is my brother?' let him look around him. Behold, his brother is at his side."

Wilfred Montessor continued:

"The order of nature is simple and unchangeable. There are many actors, there is one directing, pervading, will. Therein do we derive the motto of our Order, 'The Good of All through the Will of One.'

"Whichever of you desires the place of the Seventh," said the speaker, rising, "let him take the seat in which no man sitteth."

Wilfred Montessor slowly made the circuit of the table.

Not one of the others changed his position.

"By your consent I am here," said the speaker.

The six bowed in silence.

"Ye are not slaves, brethren:

"These are your privileges, as members of the Secret Order of the Seven: To communicate privily with the Seventh whenever you desire the assistance of your brethren. To demand a meeting of the Order at any time, and a full explanation of the results of the combined action of its members. And for the better exercise of these privileges, preserve the key of the door of this chamber."

The speaker rose, and passed once more around the table, whispering a few words in the ears of each of the six personages. He resumed his seat.

"Ye are not slaves, brethren:

"Ye are actors in the grand drama of life. Ye are of the Secret Order of the Seven.

"In this Order there are many cycles.

"Soon, perchance, each one of you shall be the founder, the Seventh of a new cycle.

"I am the Seventh, and yet, perchance, I am also a subordinate.

"The naked eye surveys the heavens.

"The stars which it beholds are the sentinels upon the out-posts, and a great army, which cannot be numbered, lies encamped in the unseen, illimitable space beyond them.

"Ye are master spirits, brethren:

"Fear not—doubt not—delay not."

The Seventh, Wilfred Montessor, was silent.

Presently the door of the apartment leading to the ante-room was opened.

And the strange voice was heard, saying:

“One by one, as ye came, depart!”

The first of the seven rose, and withdrew to the ante-room.

Zorah, the page of Montessor, was in attendance.

The young man was immediately divested of the disguise he had worn. Then he was again blindfolded, and conducted by a circuitous route to the covered passage-way leading into B——street.

At length the six strangers had departed.



CHAPTER V.

THE EXPLANATION—THE DEPARTURE.



ORAH, the disguised Georgian, entered the octagon chamber.

Wilfred Montessor was alone, and the vestment of ceremony was lying on the circular table before him.

“You have acquitted yourself well, my Georgian page, in this farce of the Secret Order of the Seven.”

The words of Montessor excited a mingled feeling of pleasure and surprise in the Georgian.

“Do not misunderstand me, Zorah. At another time I will instruct you in the history and character of the six personages. They are conspicuous among their fellows. The Napoleons of the world, small and great, are superstitious; they are influenced by the shadows, the types of things.

It is the calm, serene, reflecting mind, that penetrates the inner sanctuary of life.

“A serious, solemn thing, is the existence of secret, organized power, moving and acting under the intelligent will of one man. Smiles and tears, hope and despair, life and death, hang upon it perpetually. It is no farce. These decorations, Zorah—the forms—the ceremonies—were a farce, a trick, a juggle. And so are all the forms and ceremonies of the actual world around us. They are nothing, less than nothing.

“Mummeries and shows are they, in which courtesy, justice, science, and religion, the great reformers of society, arrayed in foppery and tinsel, excite alternate reverence and derision.

“And yet the men of a nation, in halls of legislation and in churches, in camps, and parlors, and assembly rooms, speculate

gravely upon them, and wrangle and dispute bitterly and fiercely. Thus mere matters of form excite bloody and revengeful feuds, in which the claims of courtesy and justice, the dignity of science, and the sacredness of religion, are disregarded and despised. With the inconsistency of thoughtless prejudice, the same men unite in immoderate ridicule of the forms and ceremonies adopted by other nations."

Montessor paused an instant, then offering his arm to the disguised Georgian, he said :

"We will retire, Zorah. I have still an engagement for this evening, and I must improve my toilet a little."

"And this chamber?" said Zorah.

"Hamet has his orders," replied Montessor.

The man of thirty-five and the page left the octagon chamber, and passed through an elegant conservatory into the hall of the main edifice. They slowly mounted the staircase. A winding balustrade of carved mahogany extended from the hall to the upper story of the mansion.

The hall was illuminated by a Chinese lamp, suspended from the ceiling.

Near the termination of the first flight of stairs, on the left hand, was a door partially open. Absorbed in different trains of reflection, Montessor and Zorah, almost unconsciously, entered the apartment to which it conducted. On a dressing bureau of rose-wood and maple, stood a concave mirror in a splendid gilt frame. A small lamp was burning in front of the mirror, and cast a feeble light on the rich furniture of the chamber.

The faint rays which dimly revealed the drapery of the windows, the ottomans, the Turkish carpet, reflected from the concave mirror, shone with redoubled power on a magnificent bedstead of polished mahogany, surmounted by a canopy splendidly decorated with gilt ornaments. The luxurious couch and pillows were nearly hidden from the eye by the festooned curtains of silk tapestry which hung gracefully from the arching canopy.

On a low table, standing near the dressing bureau, were sundry articles adapted to the purpose of the toilet.

Zorah seated herself quietly upon an ottoman and watched the movements of the traveler, Wilfred Montessor. The slight change in his toilet was soon effected, and the man of thirty-five, dressed with exquisite taste in the fashion of the times, approached the Georgian. A shade of melancholy was visible on her countenance.

"You have heard me speak of Mrs. Willoughby," said Montessor, gently. "She was a friend of my mother in the days that have gone by for ever. By a curious coincidence, on this very day—my birthday, Zorah—her only son, Frederick Willoughby, has attained the age of twenty-one years. In honor of this event she has invited a large circle of friends and acquaintances to partake of the hospitalities of her mansion."

Zorah said, pensively :

"And Wilfred must leave me?"

"For a brief period, Zorah."

The Georgian rose from the ottoman and placed her arm tenderly around the neck of Montessor. The latter, looking at his watch, added :

"It is nearly eleven o'clock, Zorah ; my absence will not exceed two hours."

"The hours pass wearily, very wearily, in the absence of my lord."

Montessor gazed earnestly upon Zorah's countenance.

"You have not told me of this, until now : but I have not been unmindful of you, Zorah. My mother's friend shall be yours also."

He pressed the Georgian lightly to his bosom, and imprinted a kiss upon her lips. There was a tenderness in his parting caress, and the heart of Zorah thrilled with unwonted rapture.

"I shall return soon," said Montessor, "but do not sit up for me, Zorah ; you are fatigued, and require rest."

He left the apartment. Zorah stood motionless near the ottoman ; she glanced hastily at his retiring figure. She listened to the slight echo of the footsteps as he descended the staircase and traversed the hall : she heard the loud reverberation of the closing door.

He was gone.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ROUT—THE MOTHER AND THE SON.



THE distance from Varick-street to Bond-street is less than half a mile. In a few minutes after leaving the Georgian, Wilfred Montessor was ushered into a splendid suite of apartments in the residence of Mrs. Willoughby.

Mrs. Willoughby was standing in the center of a spacious drawing-room, surrounded by a small circle of friends, with whom she was conversing. She was a tall, stately woman, of commanding appearance and polished manners. Her features were large, the forehead broad and high, and the eyes of a dark gray color. She was

fifty years of age, yet her hair still retained its raven blackness, and her cheeks and temples were still unvisited by the lines of approaching old age. She was a woman of strong intellect, and of great personal dignity; at times, under the pressure of circumstances, she was capable of exhibiting a freezing hauteur which repressed the slightest approach to familiarity.

The entrance of Wilfred Montessor was perceived by Mrs. Willoughby. As he came forward to pay his respects, she disengaged herself from the group of friends who surrounded her, and advanced to meet him.

He was received with marked courtesy. After the interchange of friendly compliments and inquiries had taken place, Mrs. Willoughby continued the conversation by remarking:

“ You have come back to your old friends, Mr. Montessor: proba-

bly to convince us that you still exist; and then, as becomes so adventurous a traveler, to desert us for strange lands and strange faces."

"No, Mrs. Willoughby: I have returned to spend the remainder of my life in my native land. The desire of traveling, like most other human desires, is exhausted by indulgence."

"Can you content yourself with our republican simplicity—you who have been accustomed to the pomp of Oriental princes and are so much a citizen of the world?"

"Pardon me, my dear madam, I am not ambitious of that title. I am a citizen of the United States of America. At different periods of my life I have visited nearly every quarter of the globe. I have become acquainted with the condition of the people, and the practical operation of government, in many portions of the old world."

"And you love your country still?"

"Patriotism is not a virtue—it is a law of our nature. He is a monster who breathes not more freely in his native air, who treads not more familiarly his native soil. The comparison with other nations, however, has elevated my sense of pride in the general condition of my countrymen."

"I am delighted to perceive that you have not yielded to the foreign mania which attacks so many of our young men who have traveled. I hate demagogues and detest vulgarity," said Mrs. Willoughby, in a modulated tone of voice; "yet because we are surrounded with politicians and vulgar people, there is no reason that we should sigh for the servility and profligacy of European courts."

"The caste of birth," said Montessor, "has many ludicrous developments. I have seen nobles who were boors, and valets who were gentlemen."

"The aristocracy of birth is a false aristocracy," said Mrs. Willoughby, "and yet I have a predilection for the scions of old families."

"The blood of your Norman ancestry asserts itself in defiance of your calm judgment."

A glance of pride unconsciously flashed from the dark gray eyes of the lady, but she continued:

"The true aristocracy of society is the aristocracy of polished education and refined manners. Men and women of intellect, refinement and taste, are entitled to occupy an exclusive position."

Montessor assented with a bow.

"Enough of this, however. You will find many acquaintances of the olden time among the coteries which throng my apartments. There has been marrying and giving in marriage, during your pil-

grimage through the East, so that you must not be surprised at any changes you may discover."

"And your son, Mrs. Willoughby?"

"Frederick is well," said the mother, with a smile.

"And of age?"

"A man in years, but a novice in practical business. I shall be highly gratified, Mr. Montessor, if your regard for me will induce you to bestow a few hints upon my boy in relation to his conduct. Your knowledge of the world, and experience in the affairs of life, will give a stamp of authority to the most cursory observations."

"Advice is a useless commodity," said the man of thirty-five, "which even the beggar receives with scorn. I shall be happy, however, to render any essential service to Frederick."

Mrs. Willoughby thanked the speaker and remarked:

"I have spared neither pains nor expense in Frederick's education. Unless I am mistaken in him, he has good principles and a manly sense of honor; but the temptations of youth are infinite, and a mother can never cease to feel anxiety for her offspring. His personal advantages, too,—" the mother paused, simply adding, in a subdued tone, "Frederick is coming hither."

The young man, whose approach was thus heralded, was indeed strikingly handsome. He wore a coat of black cloth, a vest of figured satin, striped casimir pantaloons, and light morocco boots. The collar of his shirt was turned down over a silk cravat of varied and brilliant hues. The upper part of the throat and neck was spotlessly fair; his chin was full and rounded; his cheeks were ruddy and slightly dimpled; and the general contour of his face displayed the perfections of manly beauty. The glance of his light blue eyes was alternately joyous and tender. An abundance of brown curly hair shaded his brow and temples. His person was rather above than beneath the ordinary stature, and exhibited the muscular fullness which belongs to the early years of manhood.

He bowed respectfully to his mother, and shook hands with Montessor.

"We were talking of you," said Mrs. Willoughby, addressing her son. "Since you have come to answer for yourself, I will leave your cause in your own hands."

And so saying, the lady of the mansion returned to her former position.

With a respectful, tender glance at his mother, the young man remarked:

"Mothers are partial judges, Mr. Montessor."

"It is an amiable weakness in them," said Montessor, "not a crime."

Willoughby gazed silently at the speaker for a moment, and then replied with a smiling expression of countenance :

"My mother has often spoken of you, Mr. Montessor, and I have learned to appreciate your real character. Yet I am inclined to adopt the opinion of some ladies of my acquaintance, that you are dreadfully sarcastic."

"In the apprehension of the multitude," said the man of thirty-five, "truth is the bitterest sarcasm."

"Much depends upon the tone and manner."

"Truth never flatters," remarked Montessor. "Flattery is the necessary aliment of vanity, and is always acceptable."

"Is vanity then so general?"

"Deal as plainly with the women you meet in society as their mirrors do, and your curiosity will soon be gratified."

"And the men?"

"We are of the graver sex," said Montessor; "confidence for confidence. Give me your own portraiture of yourself, and I will dissect it: then you shall judge of me."

"I dare not speak of myself to such a critic as you," replied Willoughby, hesitatingly, "but if you will take my arm and thread the mazes of this joyous company with me, I may be able to interest or amuse you with the portraiture of others."

Wilfred Montessor took the young man's arm and was conducted slowly through the crowded apartments. The rooms were large, handsomely furnished, and illuminated by magnificent chandeliers.

The beauty and fashion of New York were present. Grave judges and learned professors, lawyers and merchants, authors and dandies, matrons and unmarried daughters, blue stockings and belles, in petty groups, conversed together, or jostled each other in their promenades. The scene was attractive and animating.

At a piano, in one of the apartments, a professor of music was playing a brilliant fantasia. The rich swell of the eolian attachment mingled strangely, yet pleasantly, with the hum of the gay throng.

The card-room was occupied by several whist parties, and the chances of the game were narrowly watched by a score of interested spectators. The players were mostly elderly gentlemen and antiquated maiden ladies of an uncertain age. These are the people who prefer quiet to noise, and whist to dancing.

In almost every group or coterie around him, Montessor saw the familiar faces of old acquaintances. A bow of recognition,—sometimes a few words were interchanged as he passed on with his companion. Many were unknown to him. His casual inquiries in relation to the persons who attracted his attention were readily answered. There was a mixture of good sense and pleasantry in the sketches of Frederick Willoughby that operated insensibly upon the feelings of the traveler. The gravity of his demeanor yielded to the genial influence of an ardent, joyous spirit. His conversation became less didactic without losing its terseness and brilliancy.

“We have nearly completed our circuit,” said Willoughby, after a brief pause in the conversation; “will you be presented to any of these belles or savans?”

“Not now, Willoughby. The belles will shine, and the savans will lecture, without me.”

“But you admire beauty?”

“I admire beauty without pretension,” said Montessor.

“Beauty without pretension is rare,” replied Willoughby, with a smile; “but the choicest flowers bloom in this delicious atmosphere.”

The young man had scarcely finished the sentence, when his glance was turned accidentally toward the opposite side of the large saloon through which he was moving.

He interrupted Montessor’s reply, and with some animation remarked:

“Yonder is a flower. Come with me, and judge for yourself.”

On a rose-wood chair, in a careless attitude, sat a man of fifty-five or sixty years of age. His physiognomy was coarse and unprepossessing, yet by no means destitute of expression. He had a low forehead, a sharp pointed nose, and prominent cheek-bones. His shaggy scowling eye-brows and restless gray eyes were indicative of a harsh and vindictive temper. But the lower part of his face, although sallow and wrinkled, was well-formed; the mouth and chin particularly. In moments of repose, and in the interchange of the ordinary courtesies of society, a pleasant smile sometimes hovered around his lips, and redeemed his features from decided ugliness.

A woman of serious, dignified demeanor, arrayed in a dress of rich watered silk elegantly trimmed with blonde, and wearing a light head-dress of gold net-work that partially concealed the thick braids of her black, glossy hair, was leaning gently upon the back of the chair. Near her stood a young man, not more than twenty-six years of age, slender in his person, with regular, handsome features. He was

dressed in the extreme of the prevailing fashion. Great as was the contrast between the heavy ungraceful personage who was seated in the chair, and the gay, lithe bachelor standing before him, a critical observer could readily discern a family resemblance. The elliptical mirror that distorts the features of the human countenance, and deforms its symmetry, does not destroy its prevailing and essential characteristics. Toward this group Frederick Willoughby advanced with his companion.

The face of the lady was turned toward the gray-headed man, and the classic regularity of her chiseled profile was alone visible. As Willoughby approached, however, she changed her position slightly and looked toward him.

Then was perceived the rare beauty of the lady. There was no fullness of contour in her person or her features, but there were faultless symmetry and regularity. The transparency of her complexion excelled that of the finest statuary, and the calm, serene dignity of her countenance, apparently revealed the existence of a soul upheld and governed by conscious rectitude. Her eyes were large, intensely black, and shaded with long fringed eye-lashes. When fully dilated, the varied, yet subdued, expression of her glance, inspired the conviction that beneath the serene surface of her outward being there were slumbering the repressed emotions of a tender ardent, sensitive nature.

Willoughby bowed respectfully to the lady and the two gentlemen, and presented his friend.

"Mr. and Mrs. Tracey—Mr. Alfred Tracey: Mr. Montessor."

Mrs. Tracey turned thoughtfully toward the stranger.

Their eyes met.

The cheeks of the lady flushed slightly, and a nervous tremor pervaded her person. With her delicate gloved hand she grasped tightly the chair upon which she was leaning.

The countenance of Montessor was unmoved; and the full black orbs that were fixed upon him with a strange expression of anxiety and wonder fell abashed beneath his penetrating glance.

The self-control of Mrs. Tracey was habitual. None, save Montessor, observed her temporary agitation.

Frederick Willoughby chatted gaily with Alfred Tracey, and occasionally addressed a remark to Owen Tracey and his wife. Their replies were brief. The merchant spoke in a blunt, yet not uncourteous manner, and the lady with singular ease and propriety.

Montessor was grave and silent. He was coolly and critically

examining Mrs. Tracey ; perhaps he was instituting a comparison, in his mind, between her personal appearance and the pictured form of Mary Cameron, that haunted his memory.

Mrs. Tracey was conscious of the scrutiny she was undergoing, but she did not seem to notice it : her attention was, apparently, directed to the young men who were conversing in her presence.

At length her husband raised his sharp gray eyes, and spoke to her in a loud whisper ; so loud as to be heard distinctly by the other gentlemen :

“Mr. Montessor is studying your character, my dear !”

The young men glanced toward the traveler, and a slight sneer was perceptible on the face of Alfred Tracey.

Never before did so slight a *change* produce such a total alteration in the expression of a human countenance. The handsome features of the younger Tracey, scarcely moved by the fleeting emotion, glittered with a cold, sneering, demoniac smile.

Bowing gracefully to the lady, Wilfred Montessor addressed the merchant without hesitation or embarrassment.

“If the character of Mrs. Tracey be as faultless as her person she need not fear the judgment of the most acute and penetrating observer.”

“Do you hear, my love ?” said Owen Tracey ; “Mr. Montessor admires you.”

“Mr. Montessor is contending, perhaps, with some faint recollections of the past,” remarked Mrs. Tracey, gravely, to her husband ; “we have met in former years.”

The merchant cast a sharp, suspicious glance at his wife, but remained silent.

“I have traveled over half the globe,” said Montessor, “since I had the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Tracey, then Miss Cameron, I think ?”

The lady bowed.

“You have visited Paris, I presume,” inquired Owen Tracey, bluntly.

“I passed nearly two years there in my younger days,” replied Montessor.

“Paris is said to be a delightful city. Another season, my dear,” said the merchant with a bland smile, addressing his wife, “our long projected trip to Europe shall come off, unless I change my mind.”

“You will like Paris, Mrs. Tracey,” said Montessor, calmly. “There is much to be seen and enjoyed, with an intelligent companion, in that great center of art and refinement. It is good philosophy,

also, to see the world for ourselves in its wonderful variety and its incessant turmoil. The pleasures of memory endure when every other resource has vanished."

Montessor resumed the arm of his companion.

"You knew Mrs. Tracey, then, previous to her marriage?" said Frederick Willoughby, as they passed to the card room.

The traveler assented.

"She lived rather obscurely, it is said, during her early life. Indeed, she rarely goes into society now, although she is much courted by the best circles of the city. My mother thinks her a very superior woman, and her personal charms are certainly of the highest order. She employs much time in reading and study, and is a proficient in the modern languages. The wonder is that a person of so much elegance and good sense should have married a man like Owen Tracey. He is fond of her, I believe; but they are as unlike as possible in their tastes and feelings, and their union cannot be happy. She never complains, however—never chides him for his gaucheries, or even blushes at them. Her good sense, tact and suavity of manner, rectify all his absurdities. It is supposed—people will talk, you know, and will solve concealed mysteries—that she married for money, and that she is determined to make the best of her bargain. It is mere suspicion or scandal; likely enough, perhaps, for all the young fellows say that the sex is becoming more and more mercenary, and that the most powerful eloquence in affairs of the heart is the jingling of the pockets."

Montessor was musing.

At this moment the loud, sonorous tones of a French horn fell upon the ear.

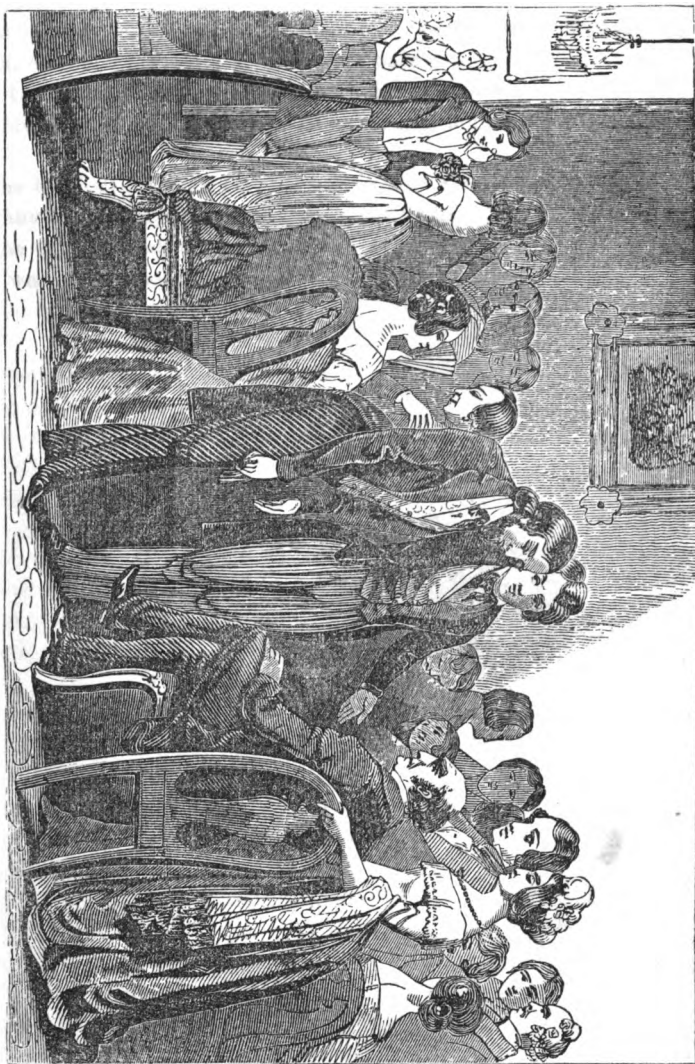
"Excuse me, Mr. Montessor, I have a partner for the waltz, and I must go in pursuit of her."

Two large saloons, connected by folding doors, were devoted to dancing. The waltz, the cotillon, the galopade, followed each other, in rapid succession. The flush of pleasurable excitement added new charms to the gay, joyous groups of dancers.

The man of thirty-five surveyed the animated scene for a few minutes, and then sauntered leisurely into the reception room.

The reputation of Wilfred Montessor for wealth, talents, and even eccentricity—his marked, attractive, yet incomprehensible physiognomy—his quiet, imperturbable manners, rendered him an object of general attention. The friends of former years, many of whom had not seen him since his return from the East, flocked around him

THE SECRET ORDER OF THE SEVEN.



AN EVENING PARTY AT MRS. WILLOBUGHY'S.—Page 40.

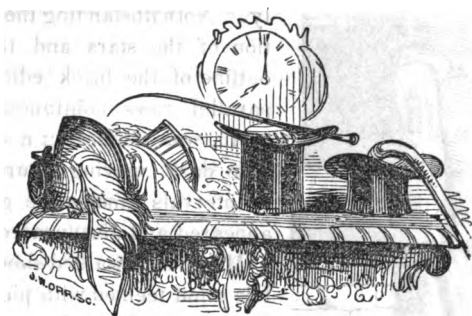
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With exquisite tact he turned the conversation from topics personal to himself, and a discussion ensued on the nature and genius of Asiatic society and government. The views of Montessor were bold and original, and were expressed in a precise, yet polished phraseology which charmed his hearers. An hour passed rapidly.

Several times during this period he caught a glimpse of Mrs Tracey, though she did not join the circle that immediately surrounded him.

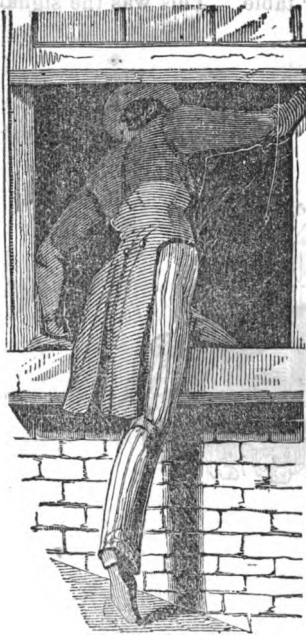
The band struck up a favorite march, and the guests of Mrs. Wiloughby moved slowly toward the supper table. This was the signal for the departure of Montessor.

It was one o'clock.



CHAPTER VII.

THE MURDER.



THE night breeze was deliciously cool. The southerly winds, which had recently kissed the waves of the Atlantic, danced in whirling eddies over the pavements.

The street lamps were burning dimly. Notwithstanding the double reflection of the stars and the lamps, the outline of the brick edifices, rising in parallel rows continuously from the earth, was visible but a short distance. The dark, moving figures, that glided at intervals among the gloomy streets, appeared and disappeared like specters.

Montessoro walked slowly homeward. His mind teemed with pictures wrought by the power of the great artist, Thought. As in a diorama, the scenes were continually shifting; but in all were present the face, the form of the woman he had loved. Now a gentle smiling maiden, with an expression of hope and joy—and again a serene, thoughtful, accomplished lady, unmoved and undazzled amid the gaities of fashionable society.

He banished these bewildering images, and sought to analyze the ideas and purposes which had recently controlled his actions. Most men deceive themselves, as well as others, in the motives of their conduct. They act hesitatingly, inconsistently, blindly, from confused, and even contradictory notions and prejudices. Montessoro had few weaknesses; above all, he was accustomed to scrutinize himself.

His uniform success in the accomplishment of his designs, whether small or great, was mainly attributable to the existence of this

quality. He rarely misjudged others—still more rarely, himself. His intellect was vigorous, his genius fertile, his acquirements great; yet he never over-estimated his powers, or his attainments. Almost intuitively he discerned the means to an end; he triumphed over the difficult; he did not attempt the impossible.

In the midst of his reflections, Montessor arrived at the door of his residence. He admitted himself by a night key, and groped his way through the hall and along the stairway to the entrance of the bed chamber in the second story. The door was ajar. He pushed it open, and stole softly into the apartment.

All was quiet. In a small recess on the opposite side of the chamber stood a night lamp. The flickering flame emitted a few straggling rays of light, which scarcely penetrated the midnight gloom. Dark shadows moved strangely upon the walls—the dark, grotesque shadows of chairs and dining-tables, and of the rich couch, with its drapery and its gilded canopy—rising and falling continually.

The cool night air fanned the cheeks of the traveler. A little surprised, he advanced toward the nearest window. The sash was raised, and the blinds were partially opened. Montessor looked out upon the tinned roof of the conservatory; upon the thick darkness which enveloped the garden; upon the lofty arch bespangled with stars, that rose above the city. He mused by the window in profound silence. His thoughts flowed rapidly, excursively.

A slight moan, scarcely louder than the rustling of a leaf, arrested his attention.

He closed the blinds, gently, and approaching cautiously the bedside, whispered:

“Zorah.”

No reply was made—the sleeper stirred not; but the low moaning sound fell distinctly upon the ear.

With quick, noiseless steps, Montessor crossed the apartment. He raised the night lamp, and striking off the hard emerusted wick, with the point of an ivory tooth-pick, he hastened once more to the bedside.

The Georgian was lying upon the couch in a constrained posture. Her hair was disheveled, and her face, somewhat shaded by the thick tresses, was buried in the stiff pillow.

An involuntary exclamation escaped the lips of Montessor. Upon the figured coverlet, the pillow—even upon the night-dress of Zorah—were clots of fresh blood. He called to her loudly by her name, but she stirred not. With one arm he gently raised her head from the

pillow and turned her face toward him. The blood was still oozing from the mouth and nostrils. She breathed very slowly, and her eyes were closed as if in sleep.

Montessor rang the bell repeatedly and violently. A minute had scarcely passed, when the sound of light footsteps was heard upon the staircase.

"Fly, Hamet, and bring hither Doctor Everard: your mistress is dying."

Half-dressed, bewildered, alarmed, these words sounded in the ears of the youth Hamet. He did not delay a moment to complete his toilet or make inquiries. Rushing from the house, he sped toward the residence of the physician with the fleetness of a greyhound.

In a brief space of time Hamet returned with Doctor Everard, and ushered him into the bed-chamber.

The boy, full of anguish and terror, crouched upon his knees at the threshold of the apartment.

With a calm, measured tread, Doctor Everard entered the chamber, and approached the magnificent couch. By the light of the small lamp which Montessor had deposited on the projecting arm of a sedan chair, the features of the physician were clearly discernible. His chin was broad and prominent, his mouth large, his cheeks somewhat pale and sunken. He had a Roman nose, dark expressive eyes, and a forehead whose height and amplitude of dimensions, gave a majestic grandeur to his countenance. His hair was black and glossy, with a dash of silver-gray about the temples. It was abundantly thick, except for a hand's breadth, from the forehead to the top of the cranium—a space which was entirely bald.

He was above the medium stature, and walked with a slight stoop, as happens frequently in men of studious habits. The haste of a midnight call had not interfered with his habitual and scrupulous neatness of dress.

His countenance was invariably grave, thoughtful, serious. He was never amused by pleasantry, or irritated by passion. The scenes of physical pain, of mental suffering, and of death, which continually surrounded him, had chastened his spirit. And his hours of leisure were given to occult, mysterious studies, that tended in the highest degree to spiritualize his thoughts and feelings.

Montessor was seated upon the couch. The person of the Georgian, motionless, insensible, almost lifeless, reposed languidly in his arms. He had parted the clustering brown hair at the medium line of her dazzling brow, and the ringlets, bedabbled with gore, hung

stiffly around her neck. With a fine embroidered handkerchief, dipped in orange water, Montessor was carefully removing the traces of blood from her features.

He looked up as Doctor Everard approached. The doctor deposited his broad brimmed hat deliberately upon the cushion of the sedan chair, and placed his ivory headed cane by the side of it.

In a few whispered sentences, Montessor related to the physician the circumstances which had attended his discovery of Zorah's condition.

Doctor Everard carefully and critically investigated the case. The pulse was rapid, irregular, fluttering; the cheeks flaccid; the lips pale and bloodless; the eyelids were closed, and on being gently raised, the pupils were seen widely dilated; the breathing was slow, laborious, slightly convulsive. He pressed his ear firmly against the region of the heart, and listened attentively. Upon raising his head, the anxious inquiring gaze of Wilfred Montessor was fastened upon his countenance.

The doctor hesitated a moment, then in a grave and solemn tone addressed the traveler:

"Death is inevitable."

A low peculiar wail of agony burst from the lips of the youth, Hamet.

Montessor brushed away a few trickling tears, and said, and a voice slightly changed:

"Come hither, poor Hamet."

The boy crept upon his hands and knees to the bed-side of his mistress. He remained kneeling upon the carpet, with his hands clasped upon his bosom, and his eyes swimming in tears, turned toward the pale, immovable face of the Georgian.

"A large blood vessel has been ruptured," added Doctor Everard; "she bleeds internally."

"And there is no hope?"

"Life is ebbing away with every pulsation of the heart. The excitation of the vital fluid is essential to the action of the human organism—each moment it is escaping from the fountains."

"But surgery, doctor?"

"Surgery has its limits," replied Doctor Everard; "the knife cannot penetrate these depths with any hope of success."

"And she must die, unaided?"

"She must die," said Doctor Everard, sadly.

Again a moaning cry was uttered by Hamet.

"Death is a mystery," said Montressor,— "the opprobrium of your art."

"Death is the universal law of organic creation," remarked Doctor Everard, thoughtfully; "a mystery, indeed; but life is the greater mystery." Slowly, almost unconsciously, the doctor traversed the apartment.

"Ah! the mystery of life. The soul is an essence which perceives, reasons, judges, wills: it is I. The body is an organic structure, of curious workmanship, compounded of bones, and muscles, and ligament; of arteries, and veins, and nerves; of tissues, wondrously involved in a multiplicity of complex organs. The knife of the anatomist, with the aid of the microscope, reveals to the eye the amazing variety of its parts. But what principle is that which binds the soul to the body, which renders the material and immaterial organisms capable of acting and reacting upon each other? What mysterious principle is that which chains the soul to earth, and at the same time makes the earthly structure the organ of perception to the soul? Is it the radiating caloric that springs into being with the friction of the first revolving atoms of the human frame, and warms and illumines the entire fabric, until disease has clogged the wheels of action, and overcome the moving impulse? Is it a portion of the magnetic fluid which pervades the solar system, and by its wondrous power maintains the equilibrium of material worlds, diverted to a specific organism, absorbed in it, and remaining with it, until the force of adhesion is destroyed by an extrinsic cause? Or is it a part of some more tangible, divine aura, floating in waves of lustrous splendor around the throne of the Deity, whose existence can be realized only by the finer susceptibilities of the diembodied spiritual essence?"

He paused, and speaking in a low tone, as if questioning himself, he added:

"Life—what is life?"

The eyes of Montressor were stedfastly fixed upon the countenance of Zorah, but he had listened, not without interest, to the words of Doctor Everard.

The silence was broken by Montressor. He bowed his head toward the cheek of the Georgian, and in sweet, gentle tones, said, audibly:

"Zorah—dear Zorah, speak to me."

Hamet looked wistfully at the face of his mistress.

The countenance of Zorah remained absolutely impassive.

"It does not seem possible, Doctor," said Montressor, with emotion

“that this young creature, whose tenderness for me was the life of her life, should be insensible to such an appeal. It is but a few hours since I beheld her flushed with health, radiant with beauty. Her blue eyes beamed tenderly upon me, her lovely features were robed in smiles, her sweet accents sounded pleasantly in my ears. She hung upon my words, sad though they were, with strange delight. Now I call upon her—Zorah!—and she replies not! Indeed, she must be dying.”

Doctor Everard stopped at the bed-side, and again consulted the pulse of the Georgian.

“She is sinking rapidly, Mr. Montessor.”

“Doctor,” said Montessor, with some vehemence, “will your skill in medicine avail nothing at this fearful crisis? If you cannot restore her to life, at least restore her to momentary consciousness.”

“It is barely possible,” said Doctor Everard; “the attempt, if successful, will only accelerate the fatal moment.”

“She is dying, you tell me: I long to meet her glance once more—to hear her parting words. She is the only being on earth, Doctor, that loves me—that I——”

Montessor paused abruptly, and fell into a reverie of a singular character. He was speculating on the nature of his emotions toward Zorah.

He was aroused by the approach of Doctor Everard with a glass of water. The doctor fumbled a moment in his waist-coat pocket, and produced a small silver spoon. He poured a single spoonfull of water into the mouth of his patient, and attentively watched the result.

“She is unable to swallow,” muttered the doctor, “a draught would be unavailing. I will try the experiment, however, with some drops of a powerful solution of prussic acid.”

The doctor drew from a side pocket in his frock-coat, a large leathern pocket-book, and took therefrom a small vial, which he uncorked. He parted the lips of the Georgian slightly, by pressing one hand gently upon the chin, and holding the vial in the other, he suffered several drops of the liquid to fall upon the tip of the tongue.

No perceptible effect was produced.

At brief intervals he repeated the experiment four or five times.

The results were unsatisfactory. The breathing was quickened, and there were convulsive twitchings of the tongue and the muscles of the face, which gradually passed away; but no signs of returning consciousness.

Doctor Everard desisted.

“The medicine is powerless,” he remarked.

“The art is ever powerless in the hour of need,” said Montessor, with bitterness.

“Not so,” said Doctor Everard; “the resources of medicine are infinite; but there is a law above them, the universal law of death. Every agent in nature is remedial; the fresh air restores the wretch gasping for life in a noisome dungeon; the fountain calms the feverish pulses of the drunkard; the knife removes malignant excrescences: for lesser evils there are specifics, almost innumerable.”

“Boasting, doctor, is not proof. Zorah must die—is dying. With all the boasted resources of your art, I appeal to you in vain for an interval of intelligent consciousness.”

“My resources are not yet exhausted,” said Doctor Everard, gravely.

Montessor gazed silently at the speaker.

“The mysterious connection of the soul and the body is an enigma. The human frame is subject to spiritual as well as material agencies.”

“But who can wield the spiritual agencies?”

“The man who is endowed with strong sympathies, and a powerful, concentrated will—in other words, the man whose spiritual being is pervading, animating, external to himself; not crushed and buried under the grossness of his physical organization—”

“Yourself, then?”

“When the material excitement of the nerves shall have disappeared,” said Doctor Everard, “I will test the power of my will upon the patient. I will give the signal by raising my right hand, after which the result must be awaited in perfect silence.”

“You believe in Animal Magnetism—in Mesmerism?”

“Great truths are often concealed in the rubbish of false systems,” replied Doctor Everard. “The nostrums of vulgar charlatans, compounded in utter disregard of the rules of science, have frequently led to valuable discoveries. Animal Magnetism and Mesmerism are false names for an important truth.”

Montessor turned from the countenance of the dying Georgian—he was watching for the signal of Doctor Everard.

“Whatever the vital principle may be—whether caloric, the magnetic fluid, or a divine aura—it is similar in all human, perhaps in all living, organic beings. To this unknown affinity may be traced many of the involuntary sympathies which pervade the universal family of man. Through the medium of this incomprehensible fluid, the will of one individual operates directly upon the consciousness of another

Perhaps a species of attraction, depending for its effect upon the steady exercise of a powerful volition, combines temporarily the portions of the fluid appertaining to two distinct bodies, thus rendering all their physical and mental operations subordinate to the dominant will."

Doctor Everard ceased speaking. The favorable moment had arrived. The features of Zorah were perfectly calm.

The doctor assumed an erect position at the distance of three or four feet from the couch. He fixed his eyes firmly and steadily upon the closed eye-lids of the Georgian, and raising his right hand slowly, he pointed with the extended fore-finger toward the narrow space between the eye-brows.

Hamet was still kneeling upon the carpet, with his hands clasped sorrowfully.

Seconds—minutes—a quarter of an hour passed in breathless silence. The doctor retained his erect attitude with unflinching perseverance,—his extended fore-finger motionless,—his glance clear, steady, unwavering.

The eyes of Montessor, partially closed, scanned the features of Zorah.

The breathing of the Georgian had gradually become slower, without increasing in difficulty. Indeed, the convulsive, jerking motion of the chest had almost entirely disappeared.

Suddenly there was a slight movement of the head, and one arm was extended. The cheeks were evidently flushed.

"Zorah, dear Zorah," said Montessor.

The eye-lids of the dying Georgian opened gradually, and her soft blue eyes, beaming with ineffable tenderness, sought the face of the speaker.

A heavenly smile was playing upon her features.

Her eyes closed again.

Montessor held a corpse in his arms—the spirit of the Georgian had passed away without a struggle.

Zorah was dead!

The progressive march of a dangerous malady, the despairing prognostic of the physician, the convulsive efforts of expiring nature, are dreadful to the quiet watchers that surround the couch of suffering; yet none of these totally extinguish hope. The spirit of love clings tenaciously to the most desperate chance of recovery. It is the awful presence of death, alone, that gives certainty to despair.

Hamet, the Georgian boy, uttered a cry of anguish, buried his face

in the bed-clothes, and wept bitterly. His grief was fearful; heavy, prolonged sobs agitated his bosom.

The attention of Montressor had been arrested in the moment of dissolution, by marks of violence on the person of the Georgian. He sat unmoved, during several minutes, gazing intently upon them.

Meanwhile Doctor Everard had quietly departed.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE DECISION.



AMET." The youth looked up.

Montessor had risen from the couch and was standing by his side.

"Rise, Hamet; I have some inquiries to put to you."

The youth rose, but his tearful eyes were turned toward the corpse.

"My mistress is dead!—the lady Zorah," murmured the boy.

Then bursting into tears, he exclaimed:

"Oh! that I could die for her."

"It is a selfish wish, Hamet," said Montessor, calmly.

The youth gazed wildly at his master.

"We know not how we live," said Montessor, abstractedly; "still less do we understand why we live. Through weary spaces of time we wander in dark ravines, amid tangled thickets; the gleams of sunshine that occasionally penetrate the gloomy recesses only reveal the bogs and quicksands around us, and even in darkness and in sunshine are we conscious that the arrow of the invisible archer is aimed at our hearts. We live and suffer—the dead are released from suffering. Zorah is happier than we."

The boy listened to the speaker, and replied sadly:

"The lady Zorah, my mistress, will look upon me, will speak to me no more."

"True, Hamet: you do well to weep. The world is desolate when the loved are taken from us."

"Taken from us," he repeated slowly: these words recalled him from his abstraction.

"Answer me, Hamet; at what time did you go to your chamber last evening?"

"It was nearly midnight. I would have waited in the ante-chamber until the master's return, but the lady Zorah bade me retire."

"And you soon fell asleep?"

"I know not—the ringing of the bell awoke me."

"Did you hear any noise after you retired?"

"None, indeed."

The youth did not seem to understand the purport of these questions.

"Come hither, Hamet," said Montessor, turning down the corner of the figured coverlet, and partially unveiling the neck and bosom of the deceased Georgian.

There were livid, discolored spots about the throat which contrasted strangely with the translucent whiteness of the surrounding skin. The number and character of the marks clearly revealed their origin. On the right side of the windpipe was a dark livid discoloration deeply indented; on the left, four smaller spots, of a light bluish color, coincided with the fingers of a hand of ordinary size. The firm contracted gripe of some daring ruffian had left an indelible impression on the person of the Georgian.

"Your mistress has been murdered," said Montessor, in low suppressed tones



The boy surveyed the marks of violence with an expression of horrible suffering.

A sudden impulse of curiosity roused Montessor to action. He snatched the night-lamp from the sedan chair, and hastily traversed

the chamber. He scrutinized with care the dressing bureau and the table standing near it; displaced, one by one, the various articles lying upon them, and narrowly searched the multifarious drawers and recesses.

His glance rested upon the window.

Returning to the couch, he said energetically :

“Do you see that window, Hamet? The house has been entered by a burglar. The watch, Maltese diamond cross, and other trinkets which Zorah was accustomed to leave upon the top of her dressing bureau, are missing. The villain has sought to escape detection by the commission of violence.”

“It is I who have done this!” said Hamet, striking his clenched fist upon his forehead.

“You, Hamet?”

“At the midnight hour, in the absence of my lord, I deserted my watch. I slept while the beast of prey was prowling in search of plunder around the home of my mistress.”

“Poor boy,” said Montessor, laying his hand upon Hamet’s shoulder. “Do not aggravate this misfortune by self-reproach. You are not to blame—moreover, you have a duty to perform.”

Hamet turned quickly toward the speaker.

“Her murderer has escaped,” Montessor added, quickly.

An expression of savage fury inflamed the countenance of the Georgian boy.

“He shall die!” exclaimed Hamet, fiercely.

“We must first discover him.”

“The law! the police!” eagerly exclaimed the youth.

Montessor mused.

“It is uncertain, Hamet,” said the man of thirty-five, “what course I shall deem it best to pursue. The murderer of Zorah shall not go unpunished; but he has escaped for the present, and his detection may be attended with extreme difficulty.”

“My lord will employ his servant?” asked Hamet, anxiously.

“The dens of the city shall be swept of their vile miscreants,” said Montessor, “to unmask this ruffian. The strangers will assist us, Hamet. And much will depend upon an active, discreet, trusty messenger. You must become acquainted with the streets and alleys of this great city. By day and by night, you must be ready to go in any direction, to assume any disguise, that may be necessary, and to deliver, faithfully, the oral and written messages entrusted to you.”

“By day and by night, I will be ready,” said the youth, vehemently.

"You may retire," continued Montessor, gently waving his hand, "I would be alone."

The youth knelt for an instant by the couch on which the Georgian was lying, and pressed his lips to the hand, whiter than marble, chilled and stiffened with the frosts of death, which reposed on the stained coverlet. Then rising in the sorrow of renewed tears, he slowly withdrew from the apartment.

Wilfred Montessor was alone in the chamber of death.

For a time he was strangely agitated. He walked hastily once or twice across the room—paused suddenly to gaze upon the countenance of the Georgian—caressed her cold pale cheeks, and then threw himself carelessly into the sedan chair, near the couch, covering his face with his hands. In a few moments he rose and repeated the same routine of action. This continued during an hour or two.

At length his calmness and self-possession were comparatively restored; the current of his ideas, which had been singularly confused, flowed clearly and connectedly. He traversed the chamber slowly, with measured steps.

He was communing with himself.

"Zorah is dead !

"She loved me truly, disinterestedly, and she has perished. My parents are in the grave; my heart has been withered by treachery; even the tender plant which twined itself around me for support, has been torn from me by the hand of violence.

"Zorah was an object of interest, if not of affection.

"Henceforth I am utterly desolate. Treachery and violence are fearful enemies to individual and social happiness. I have suffered from both; I am doubly stricken. Events cluster strangely together.

"To-night I have seen the woman that I loved and her husband. To-night Zorah has been murdered.

"Wherefore was this deed accomplished? Why did not the man of violence secure his plunder and spare the life of the innocent? Her blood was more precious than diamonds.

"Perchance—nay, the thought is too horrible. The wretch shall be hunted down relentlessly. The law—the police.

"In this city the law is uncertain, the police inefficient.

"Justice must be stimulated with gold, or its eye sees not, its hand grasps not the offender against the rights of others. A complaint to the police will lead to one result—investigation.

"Yes; unfeeling, prying, curious officials, will come into this chamber of mourning; they will examine the furniture—they will

THE SECRET ORDER OF THE SEVEN.



"ZORAH IS DEAD."—Page 53.

inspect the raiment—the person of the victim they will inquire into her history, her habits, her relations to others; they will reason coolly and flippantly upon the marks of violence, and solve the mystery of crime by plausible conjectures. These officials are great babblers. To-morrow the details will be emblazoned in the journals, and the heart will be sickened by the comments of thoughtless reporters and editors. At the corners of the streets, in bar-rooms, and oyster-cellars, and brothels, the name of Zorah will be heard, mingled with oaths and obscene jests. Vagabonds and thieves will give utterance to the suspicions of their polluted souls.

“A legal investigation by the police, in these days, is a friendly warning to the criminal; he is officially advised of his danger. I will not invoke the assistance of the police. At my command are gold and the power of the Seven. These will suffice.

“Doctor Everard did not suspect violence; the rupture of a blood vessel in the chest is the frequent result of natural causes. The burglar, Hamet, and myself, are the only persons in existence who are cognizant of this terrible offense. The criminal will be lulled into security by the apparent apathy of the avenger. Fear begets caution, but there is neither fear nor caution in the absence of danger.

“In the meantime, a secret, invisible power, will invade the haunts of crime. This murder is not the act of a neophyte. The slightest clue will be tracked with steady, invincible perseverance. A city is like a great desert in its magnitude and barrenness, but it is full of eyes. No man moves unwatched from the palace or the hovel.

“The mode, the degree of punishment must depend upon the character of the criminal. The law cannot interfere, for the crime will be concealed; but the hardened offender is easily ensnared. And what matters it, if it be death upon the gallows, or a living death in the dungeon, or the slow biting torture of a harrassed mind and a goaded conscience?

“That woman, does she not suffer punishment?

“She remembers! As I stood gazing upon her face, still expressively beautiful, and into her dark trembling eyes, the spectral shadows of withered hopes and feelings were tugging at my heart. I felt them, but I heeded them not.

“We are measurably creatures of habit and of instinct: hours after death, the muscles of the body quiver and contract with the prick of a needle.

“I wander from the dead to the living—from the true to the false. It is sacrilege.”

Montressor paused before the couch and contemplated the pale, immovable features of the Georgian.

He whispered audibly—

“Zorah.”

For a moment he fancied that she was about to speak—he bent eagerly forward.

The night breeze from the window was playing with a stray ringlet upon her forehead.

Nothing more.

“She will not reply! Zorah, Zorah! do not desert me utterly. If the spirits of the dead are permitted to visit the homes of their earthly existence, do not forget me.

“Come to me in the watches of the night, in waking visions and in pleasant dreams, and hover, bird-like, around my pillow, that I may feel the light pressure of celestial wings upon my eye-lids, and my lips; that my soul may be enchanted by the entrancing melodies of the angels.

“Heretofore I miscalculated my position and my feelings. I did not deem that such a blow as this could affect me so powerfully—there were unexplored depths in the labyrinth of the heart whose waters had not been turned into bitterness.

“It is over. Now, I am prepared for action. The sympathies of our nature are ever at war with its energies. The soul vibrates between the love of enjoyment and the desire of power.

“While the sympathies exist, we feel; when they die, we act. Mine died with Zorah.

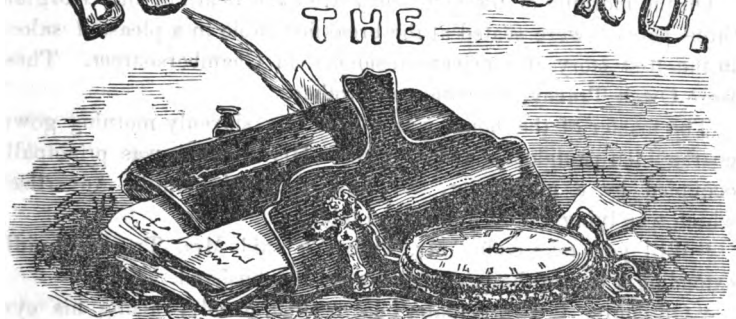
“The animalcule that darts hither and thither with perpetual velocity in a drop of vinegar, obeys a mysterious impulse of its being. So does the leviathan of the great deep when he lashes the foaming waves.

“Man acts intelligently. Two motives—the center of two series of combinations—momently impel me. Others will arise. These elements of success are mine: gold, an indomitable will, and the power of the Secret Order of the Seven. I seek justice, not revenge.”

The night wore slowly away. The dim light of the morning broke at length upon the sleepless eyes of Wilfred Montressor.

BOOK SECOND.

THE



DISCOVERY.

CHAPTER I.

A BREAKFAST SCENE.



ROUGH and tempestuous is the sea of life. The waves of care in ceaseless surges rise from its troubled depths. Clouds hang perpetually in the sky, and bleak, unwholesome winds lash the surface of the waters. Without a rudder or a chart the bark of the life-voyager is launched into the perilous ocean. It scuds at the mercy of the winds and waves—hither and thither it pursues its wild, uncertain coursings. Huge rocks threaten it, and the jagged cliffs of volcanic islands and hidden shoals, white with foaming breakers.

Oh! child of vanity, exult not in your frail bark—trust not in its sails of gossamer, nor in the oars resembling eagles' feathers that you wield so dexterously. You have escaped, as by miracles, the rocks, the cliffs, the shoals; but the awful whirlpool is before you.

Another bark—another—another—yet another!

And they, the voyagers—tossing on the stormy sea of life within hailing distance—are they to each other as friends and brothers, or rather as fierce ravening wolves?

On the morning of the fourth day after the death of the Georgian, three persons were seated at the breakfast table in a pleasant saloon in the first story of a private residence in Chambers-street. These were Owen Tracey, his wife, and brother.

The master of the house was attired in a slovenly morning gown, coarse linen pantaloons, and slippers. His attention was principally occupied by a newspaper, the New York Mercantile Advertiser, which was lying before him on the table.

"Will you take coffee, Mr. Tracey?" said Mrs. Tracey, timidly extending a cup of the beverage toward her husband.

"Of course I will, madam," he replied, gruffly, raising his eyes from the newspaper. "Don't I always take coffee at breakfast?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Tracey, still holding the cup toward him.

"Then what the deuce is the reason that you ask me such a question? I hate to be pestered with useless questions. There, don't spill the coffee over my dressing gown."

"It was not my fault."

"Certainly not, madam. I am always to blame, whatever may happen. You are an immaculate personage, my dear," said the elder Tracey, with a sarcastic sneer.

"I am to be treated with respect," said the lady, with an undefinable dignity of expression.

"Who wishes to treat you with disrespect?" said the husband; "but don't bother me when I am reading the newspaper—I hate to be interrupted."

Mrs. Tracey turned to Alfred Tracey, and silently dispensed the hospitalities of the table. The young man received her attentions with a mixture of deference and regard, which insensibly soothed her feelings. He commenced a playful description of a bridal party at which he had been present on the preceding evening. His voice was subdued, his manner kind and gentle, and Mrs. Tracey was unconsciously beguiled into conversation.

"By the by," said the young man, raising his voice slightly, "the party at the Willoughbys went off handsomely."

"Gaily, at least, to the dancers."

"And pleasantly, I trust, to you."

"I do not estimate very highly the pleasures of large assemblies," said Mrs. Tracey, with a sigh.

"Nor do I; but the Willoughbys belong to the ton, and their soirees are rendered attractive by the presence of the most fashionable people in the city.

Mrs. Tracey assented, and the young man continued: "The lion of the evening was Mr. Montessor, the rich traveler, whose singular recognition of you excited my surprise. He seems to have been an old acquaintance of yours?"

"I knew him previous to his departure for the East," said the lady reservedly.

"His riches, or his eccentricities, have excited some interest in the fashionable circles," said Alfred Tracey, keenly scrutinizing the countenance of the person whom he was addressing, "His name has been connected also with a nice bit of scandal. It is said that he has had a beautiful Georgian woman under his protection, and that his residence, in St. John's Square, where he has been living *en garcon*, is fitted up in a style of oriental magnificence. All the young fellows about town have been crazy to see her, but the game is all up with them. Fred. Willoughby told me, yesterday, that she was taken suddenly ill on Friday night, during the absence of Montessor, and died a few hours afterward. He added that Montessor had refused to see his friends, and was in a state of mind bordering on distraction."

These sentences, slowly and distinctly uttered, were listened to by Mrs. Tracey without interruption. The unembarrassed countenance of the listener defied the penetrating gaze of the young man. If any suspicions in relation to the former acquaintance of Mrs. Tracey and Wilfred Montessor had gained access to his bosom, they were, at least for the time, completely destroyed. Her reply was calm and collected.

"I pay little attention to scandal, Alfred. We cannot judge of a man like Mr. Montessor by the ordinary rules of human conduct. The qualities of his mind and heart, at the time I knew him, were such as to excite universal esteem."

"Of whom are you speaking?" asked Owen Tracey, turning abruptly from the newspaper.

"Mr. Montessor."

"Ah! the proud upstart we met at Mrs. Willoughby's the other evening. Pray, madam, where did you become acquainted with him?"

"He visited at my mother's, occasionally."

"And you met him in society?"

"No, sir."

"Ah! you did not go much into society at that time, I believe?"

"No, sir."

"Money makes the mare go. You are rich now, madam; that is your husband is rich, and you visit where you please. Money is the great lever of society."

"Yes, sir."

"'No, sir,' and 'yes, sir.' You are devilish short this morning," said the elder Tracey, with the glance of a demon. He slowly folded up the journal he had been perusing, and threw it carelessly upon a sofa behind him.

At this moment a domestic entered the apartment and handed a card to the master of the house.

Owen Tracey glanced at the inscription, and audibly pronounced the name, "Francis Mortimer."

"The gentleman is waiting," said the servant.

"Show him into my sitting-room," said Mr. Tracey; "I will be with him in a few minutes."

The domestic retired, and the elder Tracey commenced sipping his coffee.

"It is cold," said he, returning the cup to Mrs. Tracey; "another cup, madam."

He sipped the smoking beverage, then glancing toward his wife, he inquired:

"Who made this coffee?"

"I made it."

"You! so I supposed: and why in the name of common sense, did you not suffer Margaret to make it—she is hired for such purposes?"

"Margaret prepared the coffee yesterday morning, and you did not like it."

"You have improved on it with a vengeance. It is devilish poor stuff, madam; devilish poor stuff."

"Brother!" interposed Alfred Tracey.

"Well, sir?"

"You are unreasonably harsh this morning."

The retired merchant hastily inquired of the young man:

"When did this lady, my wife, constitute you her champion?"

"Brother, you forget yourself strangely. I constitute myself the champion of any lady who is grossly insulted in my presence."

"Stop, Alfred, for Heaven's sake!" cried Mrs. Tracey.

The eyes of Owen Tracey glowed with the ferocity of a tiger. With his hands placed upon his knees, he bent forward on the table, and in a harsh, grating voice, muttered distinctly:

"It is you, Alfred, who forget yourself. I received you into my house to save you from want, not to endure your impertinence."

A cold, glittering smile played upon the features of the young man; but he did not reply, and the next moment Owen Tracey left the apartment.

Mrs. Tracey burst into tears.

"This brother of mine is a heartless scoundrel," said the young man.

The lady instantly checked her tears, and turning to Alfred, observed, gravely:

"The man of whom you are speaking is my husband."

"And my brother."

"Say no more, Alfred; my feelings have been sorely tried, and triumphed for the moment over the necessities of my position. Do not aggravate the sufferings which you cannot relieve. And remember, also, that a wife who respects herself, and who desires the respect of others cannot listen to remarks derogatory to her husband from any quarter."

The young man was about to reply, but Mrs. Tracey continued, imploringly:

"Spare me, Alfred."

"I am silent on the forbidden topic. Yet surely you will permit me to regard you as a dear sister, and to evince my desire for your happiness, and my sympathy for your sufferings."

Mrs. Tracey listened, not without surprise, to the young man's appeal. Her judgment of his disposition and character was insensibly shaken by the apparent openness and earnestness of his language.

"I am not ungrateful for the kind wishes of those who take an interest in me," she said, tremulously; and then added, with a faint smile—"but not a word of sympathy."

"You will accept my friendship?" said Alfred Tracey, eagerly.
"You will be my friend?"

"If you deserve it," replied the lady, seriously.

"I comprehend you, Mrs. Tracey. I have heretofore suspected

that you entertain an unfavorable opinion of me—perhaps, not without reason. I plead guilty to many of the follies, and some of the vices, of youth. The restraints of parental tenderness, and the benefits of a regular system of mental training, have been wanting to me: and I have grown up to manhood under the influence of associations which have not tended to instruct or elevate me. I cannot palliate my faults, but I sincerely regret them.”

“You have talents, Alfred—good feelings.”

“I know what you would say. Do not seek to persuade me into a more reputable course of action. What I need, principally, is a friend to whom I can freely unburden myself, who will be interested in my progress, and will reciprocate my esteem. It seems to me that the existence of such a tie would add new charms to life, and render the world a theater of honorable exertion.”

It would be difficult to analyze the precise effect which the language of the young man produced upon Mrs. Tracey. Her thoughts had been agitated by the vulgar coarseness of her husband, and the interference of Alfred Tracey had excited a sense of mingled sorrow and displeasure. She had been accustomed to regard the latter as a young man, not destitute of intellect or acquirements, whose time was devoted to frivolous, perhaps profligate, pursuits. But the display of manly feelings and honorable intentions, which he had just made, disarmed her prejudices and her suspicions.

“You do not answer me, my sister,” continued the young man, in a tone of entreaty.

“My friendship can avail you little,” said Mrs. Tracey, sadly. “I live among my books, and have accustomed myself to their society.”

“It is thither, chiefly—to your pleasant library and its silent guests—that I desire to be admitted.”

“You will be welcome there, Alfred, at any time.”

“And we will read together the works of the great authors who have rendered themselves immortal by their genius. Shall it not be so, my sister? I am constrained to acknowledge that I have only dipped occasionally into the English classics. I feel that the delights of novelty will be greatly enhanced by the assistance of your refined taste and critical knowledge.”

“Flattery, Alfred, between friends!” said Mrs. Tracey, with a very grave expression of countenance.

“I do not flatter you, but I am not insensible to your merits.”

“Praise and flattery are so nearly identical,” replied the lady, “that they are not easily distinguished by the best understandings.

It is too much the way of the world to seek to win friendship by appeals to self-love ; yet, I presume, that few are satisfied with the results of such efforts. True friendship, Alfred, is sparing of words, and prodigal of deeds."

The young man bowed respectfully. On rising from the table, he expressed his intention of commencing his visits to the library at the earliest convenience. .



CHAPTER II.

THE BROKER—THE LOAN.



THE gentleman who was ushered into the sitting apartment usually occupied by Owen Tracey, was Francis Mortimer, himself a stock broker, engaged in heavy operations in Wall-street.

His person was tall and commanding—his countenance prepossessing, though the features were large and somewhat irregular. His dark hair curled gracefully upon his temples and forehead, and his eyes, of a jet black, and a mingled expression of keen penetration and amiable mildness, which rarely failed to inspire

confidence and esteem, even in a stranger. He was fashionably dressed in an olive-colored casimir coat, a figured Marseilles vest, striped pantaloons, and morocco boots.

He threw himself into a large arm-chair, which stood near the hearth, and played carelessly with a watch key that dangled from his bosom. His mind was occupied, perchance, with the details of some financial speculation.

At the entrance of Owen Tracey, he rose and advanced with a friendly air toward the retired merchant. He shook hands with him, and addressed him in those bland, persuasive tones, which give peculiar force to the merest commonplaces.

“Good morning, Mr. Tracey. I trust I have the pleasure of seeing you in good health this morning?”

“Good morning, Mr. Mortimer: pretty well, sir?”

“Time has touched you lightly, with his frosty fingers; you have changed but little, my dear sir, since you were a daily visiter at your counting-room in Front-street.

No man, of fifty years of age, receives a compliment upon his personal appearance with indifference. The countenance of Owen Tracey relaxed into a smile, and he said jocosely :

“Those were the golden days of my life, Mr. Mortimer.”

“Ah! my dear sir; whatever you touch turns into gold, or good bank notes and available securities, which are quite the same thing.”

“Except my Hallowell stock,” said Owen Tracey, with a quick, sharp glance at the broker.

“No, Mr. Tracey, not excepting the Hallowell stock. Your usual good fortune has saved us in that adventure. A sudden rise occurred at the Board on Saturday, and I deemed it for our interest to sell out our joint shares at the advance.”

“At cost and interest, Mr. Mortimer?” inquired the merchant, eagerly.

“Rather better than that, my dear sir,” replied the stock broker, with additional suavity of manner. Then taking from an inner coat-pocket a leathern wallet of diminutive size, he opened it and handed a piece of paper, covered with figures, to Owen Tracey.

“Be seated, Mr. Mortimer—be seated.”

The merchant put on his spectacles and began to examine the figures.

“The paper contains a statement of all the transactions in the Hallowell stock,” said Mr. Mortimer, by way of explanation. “You can go over it carefully at your leisure. You will perceive that we have extricated ourselves from a hazardous speculation, not only without loss, but with a clear profit of one thousand dollars. *Ecce signum!*”

The broker again resorted to his wallet, and taking therefrom a roll of bank notes, he counted out five bills, of the denomination of one hundred dollars, and placed them on the desk of the old merchant. A gleam of pleasure played upon the countenance of Owen Tracey, as he glanced alternately from his visiter to the bank notes.

“The golden days are not yet over,” continued Mortimer, with a ringing, musical laugh, that echoed the miserly delight of the other.

“A capital hit,” replied the merchant, “and quite unexpected. I had made up my mind to a loss on the Hallowell.”

“Fifteen per cent in twenty-four hours, is a great rise, Mr. Tracey. There has been some tight cornering in the Hallowell stock which has not leaked out as yet.”

“Could we not have done better still, by holding on a few days?”

“A great risk, my dear sir—a great risk. I should not be surprised if the Hallowell stock were to-day as flat as a pan-cake.”

"Indeed! well you know best." The speaker laid his hand upon the bank notes and continued: "As the old proverb goes, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."

"Not always, not always, Mr. Tracey. You have embarked with me several times, not unsuccessfully, in hazardous speculations. Now if you are disposed to venture a great game, I feel confident that I can propose a scheme to you by which we can pocket twenty thousand dollars a piece in sixty days."

"Twenty thousand dollars!" said Owen Tracey, elevating his voice.

"Not a cent less, at the most moderate calculation of success. It may be swelled to a much larger amount."

The merchant rubbed his hands briskly together.

"Explain yourself, Mr. Mortimer."

"The nature of my occupation," said the broker, with the most unpretending suavity of manner, "is such, that oftentimes I have the means of obtaining an intimate acquaintance with the position of a particular stock. The communication which I am about to make to you will be strictly confidential."

"Certainly, sir," replied Mr. Tracey, nervously. "Proceed, at once."

Mortimer glanced at the merchant with a keen, yet furtive, look of inquiry. Then taking a memorandum book from his pocket, he carelessly turned over the leaves until he arrived at the page which he sought.

"Ah! here it is. The main facts to which I ask your attention are these: The stock of the Eastern Transportation Company has been selling very low in the market on account of reported losses. On Friday last it was quoted at 29. I have ascertained from the most reliable sources that the whole stock of the company, with the exception of about fifty thousand dollars, has been recently transferred to a wealthy gentleman of this city. I do not know whether you are acquainted with the individual to whom I allude, Wilfred Montessor, Esq.?"

"Yes—yes—I have seen him."

"Well, my dear sir, this gentleman is immensely rich and somewhat eccentric withal. He has investigated the alleged losses of the Eastern Transportation Company, and is so well satisfied with the result of the examination that he has determined to retain his stock as a permanent investment. He is confident that it will become, in a few years, a good seven per cent stock."

"But I do not see the exact bearing of all this, Mr. Mortimer."

"No?" said the broker, with a tone of surprise. "Permit me to exhibit the foundation of a most beautiful, most striking, operation. By no possibility can there be over one thousand shares of this stock in the market. The original shares were fifty dollars. We will go into Wall-street on our joint account and buy all that is offered at market prices, and *on time*, my dear Mr. Tracey, *on time*, at thirty or sixty days, without limit. In a few days we shall hold *bona fide* the greater portion of the above named one thousand shares. At the end of the thirty or sixty days, where will the sellers *on time* be? Nicely cornered, my dear sir; in the trap, Mr. Tracey, to the snug sum of cent per cent."

"But are there no obstacles?"

"None of a serious character. Of course there will be a necessity for cash funds to a reasonable amount. Our daily operations will probably be attended with a daily rise in the stock, but holding the game in our own hands we can afford to play the cards boldly. We must not hesitate until we have rendered every thing positively certain."

"The scheme appears to be framed with your usual judgment," said the retired merchant, coolly, yet with a twinkle of satisfaction in his dull gray eyes.

"And you will participate in the hazard and success of the operation?"

"It is indeed very tempting: but the ready money. My funds on deposit won't exceed ten thousand dollars at the utmost."

"Modest—exceedingly modest—upon my word," said the broker, with a low silvery laugh. "You forget that I am a denizen of Wall-street, where the signature of Owen Tracey to any amount for which it can be obtained, is as good as that of the greatest operator on 'Change."

A feeling of pride involuntarily flushed the merchant's cheek. As was his custom when greatly pleased, he rubbed his hands briskly together, and observed: "It looks well, Mr. Mortimer; it looks well."

"Now is the time to strike, my dear sir. Will you consent to join me, and go at once into the field?"

"A little space for reflection," replied Mr. Tracey: "a few hours, only, and I will inform you of my determination."

"Be it so, then," rejoined the broker, rising. "Every thing depends upon you; for the operation not only requires more funds than

I have at my disposal, but the agency of two persons apparently unconnected with each other."

"Yes, yes,—I understand. You shall hear from me soon, Mr. Mortimer."

The broker, with a low bow and a mellifluous "good morning," took his departure.

The old merchant, absorbed in his reflections, did not hear the slight tap upon the door of his apartment, which preceded the entrance of another visiter. But the sound of approaching footsteps arrested his attention, and as he became sensible of the presence of Alfred Tracey, a frown, black as a thunder-cloud, gathered upon his countenance.

"Keep cool, brother," said the young man, with a smile; "keep cool, and hear me. I owe you an apology. I confess that I was a fool to interfere with your family discipline, this morning."

"Your insolence——"

"No hard words, Owen. They lead to quarrels, and I have no leisure for a quarrel at this moment. Beside, I come to ask a favor of you." He glanced at the bank notes, which were lying upon the merchant's writing desk, and continued: "I want the loan of a hundred dollars for a few days."

Owen Tracey clutched the bank notes in his grasp, and replied, in a coarse, husky voice:

"Your insolence and your extravagance are intolerable."

"As for my insolence, as you call it, I have made an ample apology, and there is nothing more to be said; but as for extravagance, I defy——"

"What have you done with the fifty dollars which I gave you, three days ago?"

"Loaned me, Owen; not gave me."

"Loaned you," said the merchant, with a sneer. "What security for repayment have I from a penniless vagabond, who squanders every dollar he can obtain in riot and debauchery?"

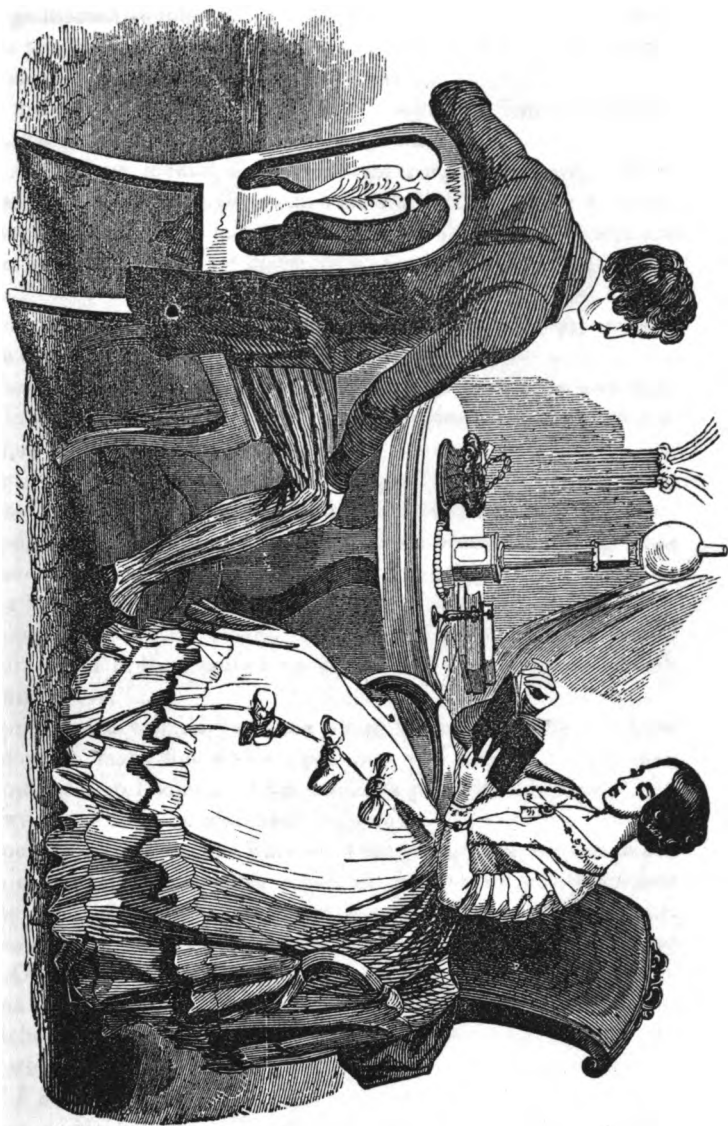
"Upon my word, you are complimentary," said Alfred Tracey, laughing; "you are the best judge of the security of your loans; but pray, what is fifty dollars to a young man in New York?"

"When I was at you time of life, my board and lodging, and fifty dollars, was the reward of a year's hard service."

"A merchant's clerk!"

"What are you?" demanded the elder brother, angrily.

THE SECRET ORDER OF THE SEVEN.



CAROLINE PERCY AND FREDERICK WILLOUGHBY—THE LESSON FROM SHAKESPEARE.—Page 86.

D.M. 56

"A gentleman," replied the younger Tracey, tapping the heel of his boot, repeatedly, with a small whalebone cane.

"A gentleman vagabond."

"Do you really intend to insult me?" said the young man, with a singular glance, half ironical, half in earnest.

"A man who has not pride enough to maintain himself independently, has not enough to feel or resent an insult."

"A sententious maxim, Owen; but not true, I assure you. However, an indispensable engagement hinders me from indulging in the luxury of a quarrel this morning. I am out of money entirely, and I have occasion for one of those bits of paper that you grasp so tightly."

"Not a cent—not a cent more, to uphold you in your present vicious courses."

"Nonsense; you don't mean it. With your hundreds and thousands in actual possession, you will not refuse me this trifling accommodation?"

"But I will, though!" exclaimed Owen Tracey. "Every dollar given to you is thrown away: yes, worse than thrown away. I am resolved that no more of my money shall be scattered among your vile associates."

"My associates are gentlemen."

"You may hoodwink others, Alfred; but I am too well informed of your habits to be deceived by you. You are a disgrace to my name and house."

"Complimentary again," said the young Tracey, laughing. "After expending so many fine words upon me, you cannot do less than grant me the loan I solicit. I am confident you will oblige me."

"I will not," said the merchant, doggedly.

"You will, Owen." The features of the young man were illumined by the cold, glittering, fiendish smile, we have attempted elsewhere to describe. "You are rich, my dear brother, and I am poor. Fortune plays strange freaks in this world. You were once as poor as I. On the other hand, I might have been as rich as you."

Owen Tracey turned inquiringly, toward the speaker.

"Richer, perhaps, if—if—"

"If what, Alfred?"

"If I had forged a will!"

These words fell upon the ears of the merchant with crushing power. He started from his seat convulsively, and glared wildly in the face of his brother. The cold, sneering smile which met his gaze

seemed to freeze his vitals, and he sank back upon the chair. His head rested languidly upon the table near him, and the bank notes which he had clutched so determinedly fell from his relaxed fingers.



“If I had forged a will!”

“Aha! my dear brother,” said Alfred Tracey, approaching the table and taking up one of the notes, which he folded carelessly and thrust into his vest pocket. “You have changed your mind, as I predicted. I understand your temper better than you do yourself. You are not, after all, the miserly old curmudgeon that people call you, and I am deeply grateful for this act of generosity. You have my free permission to scold or beat your wife as much as you please; only, if you love me, do it in my absence.”

A deep groan burst from the stunned and bewildered merchant.

There was a strange sense of relief to his oppressed faculties as he heard the door of the apartment, and the outer door of the mansion, open and close in rapid succession.

It was needful for him to be alone to reflect.

CHAPTER III.

THE AUCTIONEER AND THE PAWN-BROKER.



ALFRED TRACEY descended the steps of the entrance to his brother's residence, with a smile of triumph. As he reached the pavement, he was jostled by a man whose rapid movements and self-satisfied expression of countenance involuntarily excited his attention.

"Beg your pardon, sir; in a great hurry, sir!" exclaimed the stranger, turning abruptly toward Alfred Tracey. He did not delay, however, to ascertain the effect of his blunt apology, but hurried on at his usual rapid pace—now to the right, now to the left, now through the midst of the passers-by—on he went, with the practiced dexterity of a city pedestrian.

Leaving Alfred Tracey to pursue his amusements, or fulfil his engagements, we shall follow the movements of our new acquaintance.

He was a short slender man, of two or three-and-thirty years of age, with a fair complexion, sandy hair, and whiskers of the same color, extending to the angle of the lower jaw. His head was of a conical shape, the forehead narrow, retreating, yet lofty and regularly oval; the eyes quick, restless, and inquisitive. The other features of his countenance were by no means striking. He was dressed somewhat jauntily, in pantaloons of linen drilling, fancy vest, a green hunting coat, and a low crowned, broad brimmed, palmetto hat.

Frequently, as he made his way through the crowd, he recognized an acquaintance and a friend by a nod or a brief salutation. Frequently, upon reaching the grateful shade of a row of stately buildings, he placed his hat under his arm, and wiped the perspiration from his

heated brow with a red silk handkerchief which he drew from his bosom.

The sun shone brightly upon the paved thoroughfares, and the edifices of brick, and the shop windows, filled with articles of comfort, taste, and luxury. But these accustomed objects were hardly noticed by the pedestrian. He threaded street after street with the careless security of a man who knows every inch of his ground, until he arrived at the corner of Grand-street and the Bowery. There he paused for a moment, as if reflecting upon his future movements.

As he was on the point of turning down the Bowery, a young man came running toward him, and extending his hand exclaimed :

“ Ah ! Pettigrew, how are you ? It is a long time since I have seen you in these parts.”

The person who was thus familiarly accosted, glanced quickly at the spokesman, and replied, in a tone half of inquiry and half of recognition :

“ Tim Hardmann ?”

“ Yes, Billy Pettigrew ; I see you know me.”

“ As much as ever,” said Pettigrew, shaking hands with the young man. “ Why, Tim, you are as fat as an alderman, and your round fleshy cheeks would do for any porter-house keeper in the city.”

“ Fresh butcher’s meat and good porter have done it. I was as lean as a shad in March, when you and I were fellow-clerks together at Edsall and Brown’s.”

“ That was seven years ago, or more. Bless me, how time flies.”

“ Like a rocket, Billy. But you seem the same old customer yet. What are you at now ?”

“ I am an auctioneer.”

“ An auctioneer ? You are always at something new. Where is your establishment—your shop ?”

“ I have no auction store, Tim ; but I sell goods at auction whenever I am called upon by my patrons. I collect bills, rents, &c., for several pretty heavy concerns ; and my thorough knowledge of the city often throws a nice job into my hands.”

“ You have a sharp eye and a quick wit in managing an affair, as I have reason to know, Pettigrew ; I suppose you are getting rich ?”

“ Not a bit of it,” replied Pettigrew ; “ and it really seems strange to me, for I have dipped into almost every thing. Since I left Edsall and Brown’s, six years ago and upward, I have been a merchant, a newspaper editor, a speculator in lands and stocks, a hotel keeper, a play-writer and actor, a custom-house officer, a steamboat proprietor,

and an auctioneer. I have worked early and late, at all sorts of schemes and operations, and I am actually worse off to-day than when I abandoned my clerkship."

"You are like me, I fancy," said Tim Hardmann, with a laugh. "You belong to the much-make and spend-more school."

"No: I am as close as a cork-screw; but loss upon loss——"

"Ah! Pettigrew," said Tim Hardmann, with a knowing wink, "you were always a sly one."

"Excuse me, Tim," said the auctioneer, suddenly breaking off the conversation, "I am on a wild goose chase this morning, and I shall have to scour the whole city, perhaps, before I run down the game."

The auctioneer caught scarcely a word of the invitation which Tim Hardmann extended to him.

"Pettigrew," he bawled after him, "if you want to see some fun, come up to Bill Smith's porter-house this evening, and join Jack Highfyer's squad. Ah! the old fellow's off."

William Pettigrew had employed the moments consumed in the conversation with Tim Hardmann, in arranging the details of his future operations to his own satisfaction. His mind partook of the extraordinary activity of his body. He could pursue a regular train of thought upon any subject within the limit of his capacity, while apparently absorbed in the jollity or business of others.

At the distance of two or three squares from the spot where he had encountered his fellow-clerk of the olden time, he pounced suddenly through the open door of a jeweler's shop. He addressed a series of brief emphatic questions to a young man standing behind the counter. The replies were in the negative, and the auctioneer, with a quick, sharp glance at the cases of jewelry, left the premises. He resumed his walk along the Bowery, but the interruptions to his progress became frequent, and of varied duration. He visited the pawn-brokers' shops on his route, the stores of jewelry and fancy articles, the shops for the purchase and sale of second-hand clothing and articles of value. He dipped into cellars and other nondescript places, many of whose owners and occupants had obtained a degree of public notoriety by their criminal delinquencies. Nor did he confine his visits to the broad avenue of the Bowery. Upon arriving at the *embouchure* of a narrow, filthy street, whose buildings and gutters were alike unprepossessing, it was the custom of Pettigrew to traverse it with a rapid, jerking walk, stopping at two or three places to pursue his inquiries, and returning over to the point of departure from the wide street which seemed to be the center of his operations.

It was nearly two o'clock in the afternoon when the auctioneer, having approached the lower end of Chatham-street, entered a pawn-broker's shop in that region of the city. Half a dozen men and women were standing near the counter with bundles of clothing and other articles, waiting their turn to be served. In the stalls farther on, the doors partially closed, were several temporary occupants, whom pride, or the fear of observation, rendered desirous of concealment. Hardly noticing the customers or the clerks of the establishment, William Pettigrew hastened toward a small room in the rear of the building. A heavy, thick set man, with sharp features and a dark sallow complexion, stood before a mahogany desk writing in a large folio volume. The lower part of the writing-desk contained a number of drawers with locks and brass knobs.

"No time for ceremony this morning, Mr. Hoskens," said the auctioneer, interrupting the man of business.

Mr. Hoskens turned toward the speaker with a surly expression of countenance; but, on recognizing him, a grim smile stole over his visage.

"How is it to-day, Mr. Pettigrew?"

"Warm, warm, Benjamin; but I have business."

The pawn-broker became attentive immediately.

"Have you received any articles of jewelry in pledge since last Saturday morning?"

Hoskens looked inquiringly at the questioner.

"It is all right, Benjamin. The parties are rich and will indemnify you against loss."

Hoskens opened his desk and took therefrom a large blank book, in which the entries of pledged articles were made.

"Jewelry—what kind of jewelry?" he asked, addressing the auctioneer.

"A gold watch and some valuable trinkets," replied Pettigrew, fumbling in his vest pocket for a memorandum.

"Saturday—here it is," said the pawn-broker, opening the blank book; and then commenced running over the items in a half audible voice. "Clothing—clothing—sword cane—clothing—gold pencil—gold snuff-box—clothing—diamond cross—"

"What is that?" said Pettigrew, with a gesture of impatience—looking at the memorandum which had been furnished to him.

"A diamond cross."

"A gold cross, richly chased, set with brilliants," continued the auctioneer, reading from the paper.

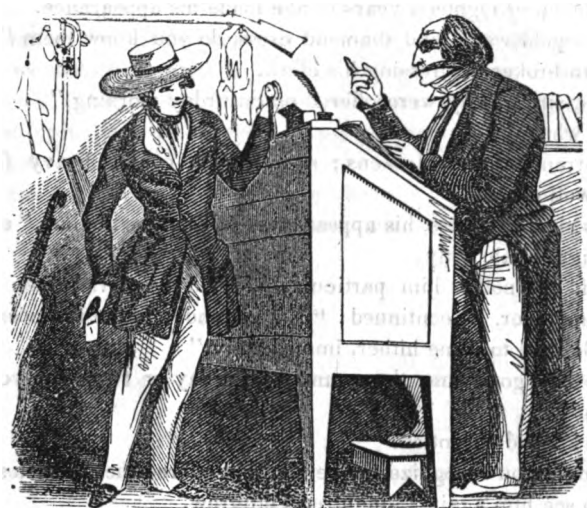
"The next item," said Hoskens, "is a gold Lepine watch."

"Produce it, Mr. Hoskens," said Pettigrew, quickly.

The pawn-broker unlocked one of the small drawers in the lower part of the writing-desk, and after a moment's search discovered the package which corresponded with the entry in the blank book.

"The name of the maker and the number?" asked Pettigrew.

Hoskens untied the package, and carefully removing the envelop, exhibited to his visiter a small diamond cross and a gold watch of exquisite workmanship.



The auctioneer snatched the watch from the hand of the pawn broker, opened the case and read hastily, "Bonnard, Paris, 6876;" then referring to the memorandum, he exclaimed:

"Right, Hoskens, by the powers! A gold Lepine watch No. 6876, Bonnard, maker."

"And the cross, Mr. Pettigrew," said the pawn-broker, placing it before him.

"These are the articles, Benjamin," said Pettigrew; "no doubt of it. There are other things enumerated in the memorandum—several rings."

"I see no item of that description among the entries," replied Benjamin Hoskens.

"Enough, enough," said the auctioneer, wiping the perspiration from his brow, and fixing his eyes stedfastly upon the pawn-broker.

"Now, Benjamin, by whom were these articles pledged? We want the man more than the trinkets, even."

"His name is on the label—Thomas Smith; resides 46 Crosby-street."

"An alias, of course. One question, Benjamin; is he an old customer?"

"I cannot say," replied Hoskens, with an embarrassed air; "but I will inquire of the boys. Aaron! Aaron!"

The second summons had scarcely passed his lips ere a young man of seventeen or eighteen years of age made his appearance.

"This gold watch and diamond cross, do you know them?" asked the pawn-broker, addressing his clerk.

"Yes, sir. They were offered on Saturday morning."

"By whom?"

"A stranger, Mr. Hoskens; a man with coarse, heavy features, pretty well dressed."

"His size, his dress, his appearance—all the particulars," exclaimed Pettigrew, abruptly.

"I did not notice him particularly," said the clerk; then turning to his employer, he continued: "Levi attended to the business, sir."

"Tell Levi to come hither, immediately."

"He has gone into the country for a day or two, with your permission."

"Ah! I had forgotten."

"Would you recognize the person that offered these articles, if you were to see him again?" inquired Pettigrew.

"Perhaps I could, perhaps not," said the young man: "I did not observe him closely."

The clerk retired.

"We have a clue, Mr. Hoskens," continued the auctioneer, "which must be followed up sharply. I will satisfy you hereafter that this is stolen property, and the owner will gladly indemnify you to the amount of your loan upon it."

The pawn-broker bowed and Pettigrew rose to depart.

He paused, as he reached the door of the apartment, and inquired:

"When will Levi return?"

"To-morrow evening."

"His information may be important—I will see him on his return."

William Pettigrew left the pawn-broker's shop and hurried down Chatham-street to the Park. As he strolled more leisurely along the graveled walks toward the lower end of the magnificent square, he

began to feel the cravings of a vigorous appetite. After a moment's reflection at the Park gate, he traversed Broadway and descended the steps of Sandy Welch's refectory. A dish of turtle soup, a beeksteak smothered in onions, with the *et ceteras*, a dessert of strawberry pudding, and a bottle of fine Scotch ale soon restored the physical equilibrium of the auctioneer. In less than half an hour he emerged from the refectory, and directed his course up Broadway. The success of his morning's exertions and a good dinner rendered his countenance the index of a mind on excellent terms with itself and the world in general.

He walked on, gazing continually about him, yet really absorbed in serious reflection, until he arrived at the corner of Prince-street. Then turning the corner he proceeded a short distance, perhaps two hundred yards, ere he stopped at the entrance of a brick house of respectable exterior.

He mounted the steps and rang the bell; an interval of a few seconds transpired, and the door was opened by a tidy chambermaid.

CHAPTER IV.

CAROLINE PERCY.



With the unceremonious ease of accustomed familiarity, William Pettigrew advanced through the hall to the door of the front parlor, opened it and entered the apartment. A lady rose to meet him, but upon glancing at the person of her visitor, a slight expression of disappointment flitted hastily over her countenance.

"Have you dropped down from the clouds so suddenly, William?" she inquired, a little pettishly.

"No, Caro; it would be a dangerous experiment without

wings, and I have not even the wings of a butterfly."

This allusion to her apparel did not seem to please the lady, for she drew up her slight fragile form to its utmost height, and tossing her head with an air of affected dignity, she exclaimed:

"A butterfly! Caroline Percy a butterfly!"

Then she smiled, and in that smile disclosed the dimples of her rosy cheeks, the fullness and glowing vermilion of her lips, and a set of small regular teeth, whiter than the purest ivory. There was a roguish twinkle in her dark hazel eyes which bespoke a love of mirth and gayety. Her hair was parted from her clear translucent brow, and gathered in braids on the back of her head.

Her dress was rich and elaborately tasteful; but the profusion of ornaments indicated a love of finery and display.

"Yes, Caro, a butterfly—a fashionable butterfly."

"You would gratify me, William, if you paid a little more atten-

tion to fashion. It is shameful, I protest, that you do not dress more like a gentleman."

"I am dressed for business," replied Pettigrew, not for pleasure."

"Why, then, have you called upon me," said Miss Percy, tartly; "for business?"

"Just for one kiss, Caro," said the auctioneer, approaching her.

"Bah! don't come near me," exclaimed the lady, starting suddenly from him; "you have been eating onions."

"One kiss," said Pettigrew, still advancing.

"No, I tell you—no!" said Miss Percy, stamping her little foot angrily on the floor, "you are perfectly odious."

"Good bye, then; I can't parley about it. I hope you will be in a better humor this evening."

His hand was upon the knob of the door—a gentle word recalled him.

"William?"

"Well, Caro?"

"I want a trifle of money this afternoon: twenty or thirty dollars."

"I have not got it."

"Nonsense."

"What has become——"

"All gone."

"You are an extravagant creature; but I can't talk to you now, for I have really very important business on my hands."

Miss Percy watched the retiring figure of the auctioneer with a slight curl of the lip.

"He is a mean, pitiful fellow," she said, half audibly; "and I am glad he has gone. Let me see——"

She remained standing in the center of the apartment, in an attitude of reflection, with the thumb and fore-finger of her right hand pressed lightly against her chin.

The bell rang; Miss Percy flew to the center table, took therefrom a volume of an elegant pocket edition of Shakspeare, and threw herself into a fauteuil.

A moment afterward the door opened and a young gentleman was ushered into the apartment by the servant. Miss Percy rose, with an appearance of languor, advanced one or two steps, and extended her hand. It was a small white hand, glittering with gems.

"Mr. Willoughby, I believe," said the lady, with some hesitation of manner.

"Yes, Miss Percy; I have taken the liberty of calling to inquire after your health."

"I thank you, sir, for your politeness. As to health," said Miss Percy, "my case is not peculiar. I have weak nerves and a good appetite."

"But your sudden illness on Saturday?"

"I do not know what affected me so strangely. Aunt Percy and I had been out shopping, and were returning home very leisurely. The heat of the weather, or—or—I am not skillful in assigning causes," said Miss Percy, smiling; "but I felt a very peculiar faintness and dizziness."

"You are still feeble, Miss Percy; pray, resume your seat."

The lady sank gracefully into the luxurious rocking chair, and remarked:

"Perhaps I should say that my nerves are excitable rather than weak; and that my nervous system is the exponent of my mental organization. I crave excitement perpetually—the excitement of strong feelings and stirring events."

"You, so fragile, so gentle——"

"So feminine," continued Miss Percy, in a slightly sarcastic tone. "It is man's destiny to follow the chase, brave the desert and the ocean, to wrangle in the Senate, to revel in the delights of battle—woman's to be the ornament of the domestic circle; in other words, to be, like me, a prisoner."

"A prisoner?" echoed Frederick Willoughby.

"Yes, a prisoner on the treadmill of common life; a prisoner shackled by the conventional rules of society; overborne by the dogmas of fools, and the cautious prudery of knaves."

"You are also a philosopher," said the young man, with a smile; "an advocate, I presume, of the equal rights of women?"

"On the contrary, I shun philosophy and politics as I do the offspring of dullness, the obsequious minions of that domineering tyrant, public opinion."

Frederick Willoughby listened with surprise to the speaker, as she proceeded with increasing animation.

"What else closes against us all the avenues to fame, to adventure, to pecuniary independence? What else depreciates our exertions and magnifies our failings? What else reduces us to the condition of drudges or dependents? What else, save public opinion?"

"You speak forcibly, Miss Percy."

"I reason not, sir, but I feel," continued the lady, leaning toward her visitor; "and the more so because I have resolved that, however

it may tyrannize over others, it shall never tyrannize over me. I despise it—I trample on it.”

“A dangerous experiment; at least, so it seems to me.”

“Must women of necessity be cowards?” exclaimed Miss Percy, scornfully; then subduing her impetuosity and abruptly changing the subject, she opened the volume which she had taken from the center-table and remarked: “One resource is still ours—the right to wander freely in the realm of poetry and romance.”

“Who is your favorite author?”

“Shakspeare, the prince of poets.”

“Your favorite is mine, also. With what truth and vigor does he delineate the scenes of human life and the varieties of human character?”

“And the passions, the emotions of the soul—he paints them with the skill of a master. For example, I have just opened to the garden scene between Romeo and Juliet in the play of that name.”

“Will you favor me by reading it aloud?” said Willoughby, persuasively.

Miss Percy hesitated an instant, then apologizing for the feebleness of her voice, she commenced with the line:

“Oh! Romeo, Romeo—wherefore art thou Romeo!”

The tones of her voice, so clear, so flexible, so richly modulated, fell like the witchery of music upon the ears of Frederick Willoughby. A sense of fascination stole over him. Caroline Percy continued to read, apparently unconscious of the effect she was producing, or of her own kindling enthusiasm. Her intonation increased in strength and compass, and the expression of her countenance responded wonderfully to the impassioned sentiments of the lovers.

She closed the volume, but several moments elapsed ere the young man collected himself sufficiently to say: “You read delightfully, Miss Percy. Those passages never seemed to me so surpassingly beautiful. I never understood them till I heard them from your lips.”

With an arch smile and a merry glance of the eyes Miss Percy replied:

“You are a flatterer, Mr. Willoughby, like all of your sex.”

“Indeed, you read extremely well—with inspiration, if I may so express myself.”

“The inspiration lies in the splendid diction and glowing sentiments of the poet. And yet I am disposed to take an exception to the entire scene.”

“In what respect?”

"Methinks Juliet is too frank, too confiding, too easily won. Men are not such angels that women can trust them at a glance."

"Do you not believe in love at first sight?" asked Frederick Willoughby, with emphasis.

Miss Percy blushed slightly, and stammered out, "I—there are cases perhaps—I——"

"You will not deny the possibility of such love," said the young man, with a degree of assurance.

"No, Mr. Willoughby: yet the pride of the sex revolts at the idea of being the first to acknowledge its existence. The female heart pants for sincere affection, but it desires to be won by words of tenderness and acts of devotion."

"As it ought to be," added Willoughby, gallantly.

"I remember some verses of a quaint old ballad," said Miss Percy, rising and advancing toward a piano which stood in one corner of the apartment, "which the Irish belles of the last century used to sing to their lovers, and which my grandmother, the wife of an Irish exile from Munster, taught me in the nursery."

"Sing it, I entreat you."

Miss Percy seated herself at the piano and ran over the keys with a light, delicate touch, which indicated great skill in execution. With a slight inclination of the head and a significant glance at Willoughby, she warbled, in bird-like tones to an old Irish melody, the following verses:

SONG.

"Young knight—Sir Dennis O'Brady:

Is it you would gain the prize?
You must plead with oaths and sighs,
And the language of the eyes,
All for the love of a lady.

"Young knight—Sir Dennis O'Brady:

You must dress in gold and lace,
Smile and bow with easy grace,
Boldly meet a rival's face,
All for the love of a lady.

"Young knight—Sir Dennis O'Brady:

You must learn to sing and dance—
Ride on horseback, gallop, prance—
Cut and thrust with sword and lance;
All for the love of a lady.

"Young knight—Sir Dennis O'Brady:

You must sue in word and deed,
Spare not time, nor gold, nor steed;
Life regard nor danger heed,
All for the love of a lady."

THE SECRET ORDER OF THE SEVEN.



THE FIGHT BETWEEN LUKE FORDHAM AND THE KENTUCKIAN.—Page 107.



"Quite apropos, Miss Percy," said Frederick Willoughby; and perceiving that she was about to rise from the piano, he added, earnestly: "but will you not favor me with another song?"

"Not to-day, Mr. Willoughby; I am not perfectly in voice."

"You will permit me to call upon you again," said the young man, inquiringly.

"Certainly, sir—with pleasure."

The conversation was continued during a few minutes, upon local and personal topics, and then Frederick Willoughby retired, highly charmed with his new acquaintance.



CHAPTER V.

A SCENE OF DISTRESS—THE TEMPTER.



IN this same delicious summer's afternoon, the sun streamed through broken panes of glass into the upper story of an old two story wooden building in Orange street.

A pallid, feeble woman, covered only by a patched cotton quilt, was stretched upon a coarse straw bed, in the helplessness of confirmed disease. A broken pitcher, half filled with water, stood upon a small wooden table by the side of the bed.

A young girl, sixteen or seventeen years of age, sat sewing upon a low stool near the window. Her face was pretty, though sorrowful, and her eyes were red, as if she had been weeping.

Two urchins, the eldest seven years old, the youngest perhaps five, were playing upon the floor. Yet their movements were languid, their tone spiritless. Each of them wore a coarse mus-

lin shirt and a pair of faded nankin trowsers—without shoes or stockings, or any upper garment. They were not decently clothed to go to the public school in the next block, or even to play in the street; and so they were confined all the day long in that chamber of sickness and of sorrow.

The articles which have been incidentally enumerated comprised the entire furniture of the apartment, with the exception of an old-fashioned mahogany sideboard that contained half-a-dozen plates, as many cups and saucers, and some necessary household utensils. The floor was uncarpeted, and there were no curtains to interrupt or

deadened the burning rays of the sun. Yet the aspect of the chamber was not without a redeeming feature. The walls had been newly white-washed, and the floor, rough, uneven, and partly decayed, was cleanly.

The young girl rose from the stool, laid down her work, and approached the bed-side of the invalid. She was arrayed in a cheap calico dress, and wore neither shoes nor stockings. But, however common her garments, she preserved a certain neatness of person and modesty of demeanor, which seemed natural to her.

"Mother," said the girl, "will you have some drink?"

"Yes, Jane," replied the invalid, in a tone slightly above a whisper.

The daughter placed her arm beneath the person of the sick woman, and assisted in raising her to a sitting posture. Then she took the pitcher from the table, and held it to her mother's lips.

The woman drank a little of the water and turned away her head, motioning to be laid upon the bed. She sank back apparently exhausted.

"Do you feel worse this afternoon?" inquired the young girl, anxiously.

"I am very feeble, Jane," replied the invalid.

"Perhaps the children disturb you, dear mother," said Jane, glancing at the boys.

"No—let them play while they can, poor things."

"Do you feel any pain, dear mother?"

"Nothing but weakness," a moment after she added, slowly, "Jane, I shall not be with you long."

"Say it not, mother," replied the girl, sobbing bitterly.

"I strive daily to prepare you for it, my child. You will weep for me when I am gone; but you have higher duties, Jane, which I desire to impress upon your mind. You must be the stay of these poor children—you must be the comfort of your father, who is now advancing in years."

The eldest of the urohins sprang to his feet at that moment, and spoke eagerly:

"Father is coming, Bub: now we shall have some dinner."

The girl left her mother's bed-side, and, brushing the tears from her eyes, quietly resumed her work.

Steps were heard ascending the stairs, and presently the door of the chamber opened. A middle-aged man, whose cheeks and forehead were furrowed with premature wrinkles, slowly entered.

One of the boys ran toward him, and clasping his hands around his knees, exclaimed:

"Father, what have you brought home for dinner? Bub and I are so hungry."

The man disengaged himself gently from the child, without replying, sat down on the bed near his wife, and burst into tears.

"George—Henry," said the young girl, addressing the children.

They ran toward her, and she added, in a low tone: "Go and play in the other room till I call you. Be good boys, and make as little noise as you can, and you shall have some dinner by and by."

The invalid wife fixed her eyes compassionately upon her husband. His spirit was sorely tried. After the children had left the chamber, he recovered himself, and said to her:

"I have begged for employment, Patty, as a man would beg for alms. But it has been, to-day, as it has been for weeks. I have not earned a shilling. Patty, we must starve. I do not mind it for myself, but for you and the children."

"Let us trust in God, my dear husband; he who feeds the sparrow, and provides food for the raven, will not desert us if we trust in him."

"I put no trust in any thing," said the man, despairingly; "I am utterly discouraged."

"Do not speak wickedly, Andrew. These sore afflictions which have come upon us, may be only a trial of our faith."

"I cannot bear——"

"Reflect, even in this extremity," continued the invalid, pointing to a Bible which was lying by her side, "reflect upon the consoling promise of this Holy Book, that all things shall work together for good to those who love the Lord."

"You are an angel, Patty, I really believe: but I cannot feel like you, when the children are crying for bread:" and again the man sobbed audibly.

The young girl approached her father, wound her arm tenderly about his neck, and kissed his care-worn cheek.

"Do not weep thus, father," she said, gently. "Perhaps you will do better to-morrow; and to-day we are not utterly destitute. I shall finish this pair of pantaloons in a few minutes, and you can take them to Mr. Graham's and get the money for the making. Twenty-five cents is poor wages for two days' hard work," continued the girl, with a sad smile, "but it is all he pays, and it is better than nothing."

The girl was interrupted by the noise of heavy footsteps approaching the chamber. At the sound of a slight rap she advanced to the door and opened it.

A stout, burly man, dressed in corduroy breeches, a plaid vest, and

a coat of gray-mixed woolen cloth, presented himself. Coarse shoes, a dirty silk neckcloth, and a hickory cane with a huge knotty head, completed his equipment. His features were large and irregular, his cheek bones prominent, his eye-brows thick and shaggy, and his eyes of a gray ashen hue, deeply set in the sockets. Large bushy whiskers, and a black unshaven beard, of two or three days' growth, did not tend to relieve the forbidding aspect of his harsh, ill-favored countenance.

"Good day, Jane. Williams, how are you?" said the man, as he entered the apartment.

Advancing toward the bed-side, he added, in a subdued tone of voice :

"How is your health, to-day, Mrs. Williams?"

"I am no better, Mr. Simonson."

"Sorry to hear it, ma'am," replied the man, bluntly; "I thought I would come up in a neighborly kind of way, and inquire about you."

"Thank you," replied the invalid.

"Nothing on hand yet, Williams?" said Hugh Simonson, turning to the husband.

Williams shook his head.

"Well, don't mope over it. Come down stairs and pay me a little visit. Perhaps I can help you to some sort of a job."

Hugh Simonson slapped Williams, jocosely, on the shoulder, then took him by the arm and led him unresistingly out of the room. As he went out, with a good-natured laugh :

"Good-bye, Mrs. Williams. I'll send your husband back to you, presently, in better spirits."

The men descended the stairs, and entered an apartment in the first story directly beneath the invalid's chamber. Simonson went to a small cupboard and brought forth a decanter of brandy, two tumblers, and a pitcher of water.

"Fill up a good horn, Williams, and down with it. Brandy is the best medicine in the world for low spirits."

"I don't think my wife would like me to take it."

"Nonsense; it is for medicine, and if you are afraid of it, I'll join you."

Simonson poured out nearly half a tumbler for himself, and as much for his neighbor Williams. He added a little water to his own glass, and took off the contents at a draught. With some slight compunctions of conscience, Williams followed his example.

"Capital stuff, my boy," said Sim

will bring some color into your cheeks—it will make a man of you. I have often told you that all you wanted was a little pluck to enable you to do something for yourself."

"I am ready to do any thing in my power to make an honest living."

"Why don't you listen to me, then?"

"Because, I fear—because——"

"Speak it out, man; you need not be afraid of affronting me. You fear that I wish you to pursue unlawful courses?"

"That is it."

"So I do, Andrew Williams."

The man started back, with evident dismay, from the tempter.

"You cannot be such a fool," said Simonson, with a sarcastic smile, "as to think that honesty and law are the same thing."

"I don't understand you."

"See, there, Williams," replied the other, pointing through the window into the street.

An elegant carriage, drawn by two spirited gray horses, was passing by, driven by a coachman in livery. In one corner of the carriage reposed a man of about forty years of age, dressed in the height of the prevailing fashion.

"That chap, yonder, took the benefit of the insolvent laws a few years since, and paid off debts amounting to half a million of dollars by compromising with his creditors at twenty cents on the dollar. Now, he owns a town house and a country house, does no work, and rides in his carriage. That is law for you. In the meantime, you have been plodding on, working hard when you could get work to do, and paying your way, as poor men must, till beggary and starvation are knocking at your door. There is honesty for you!"

"I lived very comfortably, Mr. Simonson, while my poor wife enjoyed her health."

"Ay, Williams; she was a managing woman, and she kept you up."

"You are right there, neighbor."

"But we were talking about the law, Williams. I should like you to tell me what honesty or justice there is in a system of laws which enables one man, who does nothing for a livelihood, to ride in a carriage and live on the fat of the land, while another is compelled to starve in a miserable garret?"

"It does seem to be unequal."

"Unequal!" responded Simonson, with a bitter laugh. "Why,

Andy Williams, there is a plentiful supply of food and clothing in this very city for all the people that reside in it. Unequal!—ha! ha! ha! Some waste while others starve—that is all.”

“How can it be helped?”

“You are a lily-livered fellow, Andy, as I have often told you, or you would not ask such a question.”

“What would you have me do?” inquired Williams, with a faltering voice.

“Do as I do,” said Hugh Simonson, fiercely. “Take the surplus wealth of these idle vagabonds, who call themselves gentlemen, and lord it over us so haughtily—take it by the strong arm, and spend or waste it as you please.”

“It frightens me to hear you talk in that way, Mr. Simonson.”

“What do you think of this argument, then?” replied the other, thrusting his right hand deeply into his breeches pocket and taking therefrom a handful of gold and silver coin.

Williams looked wistfully at the money.

“Nothing terrible in this, my boy,” continued Simonson; then placing his lips close to the ear of his companion, he lowered his voice almost to a whisper—“if you have the spirit of a man, Andrew, I can put you in the way of getting ten times as much of the real stuff. I have made up my mind to the venture, and I want a comrade to go snacks with me.”

“What venture, Hugh?”

“To rob the house of the chap who went rolling by in such state a few minutes ago. His money don’t belong to him honestly, at any rate.”

“Robbery!” exclaimed Williams, recoiling with horror. “Oh! Hugh, consider the disgrace, the punishment, if detection should follow your doings.”

“Disgrace!” said Simonson, after a prolonged burst of laughter; “disgrace—you bear the character of an honest man, Andrew?”

“I hope so.”

“Well, go to the house of the gentleman bankrupt and ask him for employment or relief. His supercilious stare and cold denial will convince you how much respect he has for an honest poor man. Or to the wealthy functionary, the friend of the people, and see how much better you will fare. In the eyes of the world there is no bitterer disgrace than poverty, and you would find yourself spurned in every quarter.”

“But I am conscious of the possession of a good character, and I respect myself.”

"You do, do you?" said Simonson, fixing his large gray eyes intently upon his companion. "You are a hale, hearty man, and yet you permit your children to go hungry and half naked, and your wife to perish for want of suitable nourishment. That poor girl, Jane, too, is killing herself with hard work. Much respect you must have for yourself."

"My wife—Jane," stammered the husband and father, his eyes linded with tears.

"Your wife, Williams. It will do well enough for you to pretend that she has got the consumption, or some such thing; but I tell you that she is dying for want of proper nourishment. She can't eat rye bread and potatoes, though of course she will not complain. She wants some nice lamb broth, oysters, eggs, good old Madeira wine, and such like. They would bring her up in a short time, I warrant you."

"Do you think so, Simonson?" exclaimed Williams, eagerly; "do you really think so?"

"Yes, I do," replied Simonson, bluntly.

Williams stood in a fixed attitude, gazing thoughtfully upon the floor.

"You need not take anything I have told you too seriously," continued the tempter; "I say it for your good, and I will prove myself to be your friend."

Williams made no reply.

"Cheer up, my boy. There's a dollar I will lend you till you are able to pay me. I am rich, at present, and won't miss it."

A flush of momentary delight passed over the care-worn countenance of Andrew Williams, and yet he hesitated to take the money.

"I don't know what Patty would say——"

"She will die before you get to the grocery and back again, if you are so slow about it," said Simonson, slipping the half dollars into the hand of his companion.

At this moment a loud rap was heard at the front door, and Hugh Simonson walked toward the window to reconnoiter.

"Jim Fogle, I declare."

As Simonson passed into the entry to admit his visiter, he was followed by Andrew Williams.

"Think of my advice, Andrew; think of it. I will see you again."

The front door was opened, and James Fogle entered. At the same instant Andrew Williams reached the top of the staircase and proceeded to his wife's chamber.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ROBBERS—THE POLICE OFFICER.



COME in, Fogle ; I am glad to see you."

Such was Hugh Simonson's salutation to his visiter. The new comer, James Fogle, was a thin, spare man, dressed in a coarse, slovenly garb. His features were commonplace, his complexion sallow, and his eyes almost perpetually downcast, gave a demure expression to his countenance. His step was stealthy and noiseless, and his manner of speech somewhat peculiar. He rarely looked directly at the person he was addressing, but, peering through his eye-lids, as if watching the effects of every syllable. He spoke in a low, monotonous voice, utterly destitute of passion or emotion.

Fogle passed through the entry into Simonson's apartment, and closed the door cautiously behind him ; then he approached his host and taking him by the hand calmly observed :

"You have two great faults, Hugh ; you talk too loudly, and you call names."

"Why, damn it, man, there is no spy in the house."

"You don't know that."

"If I thought so," said Simonson, grinding his teeth, "I would twist his neck for him as soon as I would a chicken's."

"There—there—don't go off in a passion. That is another fault of yours. The slightest thing excites you. Keep cool, Hugh."

"I am not like you, Jim—that's a fact. A don't believe that poverty or a dungeon, the cholera or the devil, would startle you out of your easy, quiet manner."

"No matter," replied Fogle, with a careless wave of the hand :
"what have you been doing lately?"

"Nothing."

"No?" said James Fogle, with a peculiar change of tone, at the same time raising his eye-lids till the glittering eye-balls were visible to his companion.

"I mean," stammered Simonson, confusedly, "that I have done nothing except—except a trifling adventure—a—"

"So you have secrets, Hugh?"

"Secrets, Jim—secrets?"

"No matter. I knew you had been out, for I heard at Pete Tompkins's that you were flush of money."

"A mere trifle, not worth an hour's talk. But I won't play a double game, Jim Fogle. I have money, and if you are in want of a few dollars, you shall have them with pleasure."

"No—I am never in want of a few dollars. I don't break my little bank once a fortnight, as you do yours."

"I spend and you hoard," replied Simonson, laughing; "but I have good backers to draw on, and cannot see the necessity of accumulating."

"Do as you like, Hugh."

"You are a good one, Jim, and so am I; but we are built after a different pattern, and can't pull the same way."

"No—Sing Sing lies up the river, and I am for giving it a wide birth."

"Damn it, man," said Simonson, fiercely, "don't prophecy anything about stone walls."

"You don't like them, Hugh," murmured Fogle, in his peculiar monotonous manner. "Gold is the key which unlocks their iron gates."

"And I mean to have it," retorted Simonson, "plenty of it; to bribe lawyers, and jurors, and jailors, if need be. I understand the game."

"Yes," said Fogle, opening his eye-lids widely and staring at the robber.

The monosyllables no and yes, from Fogle's lips, had a meaning which it is difficult to express, but to which Simonson had become in a measure accustomed.

"I told you that I was glad to see you this afternoon. With your cunning, Jim, and my daring, there are thousands to be had on a single venture. I obtained my information from the best authority."

"Well, well, Hugh?"

Simonson entered into the details of some intelligence he had re-

ceived respecting a valuable deposit of gold and silver plate in a private mansion in Bleeker-street. The two thieves, for the character of these men has disclosed itself fully in their converse with each other, held a long consultation upon a scheme for abstracting these valuables from their possessor. The result will appear hereafter.

It was nearly nightfall when James Fogle rose to take his departure.

"What say you to a frolic this evening, Jim?" said Simonson. "With all your pretended gravity, I know you like a bit of fun as well as any of the tip top flash men."

"To the point, Hugh."

"There is to be a regular break-down at Charley Swan's to-night, and I have made up my mind to patronize the sport. Will you come?"

"As it happens, Hugh. If I come you will see me; if I dont——"

"I shall see blacker devils, if not bigger ones," said Simonson, interrupting him, and accompanying this coarse sally with a burst of laughter.



"Fogle—a word with you."

James Fogle walked very slowly down Orange-street, ruminating seriously upon the subject of his recent conversation with Hugh Simonson. As he passed the corner of Leonard-street he was

accosted by a large, portly man, who gently tapped him on the shoulder, and said mildly, yet authoritatively :

“ Fogle—a word with you.”

The thief stopped instantly and peered through his eye-lids at the speaker.

“ A hundred, Mr. Masters, if you please.”

“ Follow me, then,” replied the other, proceeding at a rapid pace until he entered Cross-street.

The countenance of Masters was hardly discernible in the dusk of the evening. But his demeanor, his gait, his person, had an air of firmness and decision which was eminently characteristic of the man. He wore a suit of black or dark brown cloth, and sported a rattan cane, mounted with a leaden ball covered with twine.

He slackened his speed as he went on, and finally addressed his companion with some sternness :

“ This is the road to Bridewell, Fogle.”

The thief paused a moment, looked intently up and down the street, and replied :

“ So it is.”

“ Your calmness will not deceive me, Jim; I know you better. There is nothing you fear more than the handcuffs, and I assure you that you are in imminent danger of feeling the weight of them. I have proof sufficient in this Bradbury business to send you to Sing Sing for ten years.”

“ No ?”

“ I tell you, yes.”

“ You won't do it though.”

“ Don't trust too strongly to that belief, James Fogle,” said the police officer, dryly : “ you are daily becoming more and more useless to me.”

“ You forget——”

“ I forget nothing. A little more briskly—we are bound to Bridewell.”

“ Are you in earnest ?” inquired Fogle, with a change of tone that fell perceptibly on the acute ears of the police officer.

“ I am,” replied Masters. “ You are a consummate rogue, and you shall not go with impunity any longer on such cheap terms. How was it in the Bradbury affair? Three thousand dollars worth of watches and jewelry, stolen by the Hawkins' gang, and you in the secret all the while—a bribed accomplice.”

“ I knew nothing of it,” said Fogle, with a slight degree of sullenness.

"Don't lie, Jim. You ought to know from experience that it will not do with me."

"Hawkins is a regular pal; we used to do business together many years ago."

"A regular pal?—so much the worse. You might better have taken care of yourself than of him—not to say any thing of your debt of gratitude to me."

James Fogle stopped suddenly beneath a glimmering lamp, and looked stedfastly in the face of the police officer—then observed, with an air of the utmost composure:

"I know you, Mark Masters, as well as you know me. You are not in earnest in threatening to sacrifice a man who has served you so often."

"Partly in earnest, Jim—partly not. I have given you suitable rewards for information, and have overlooked many acts of desperate villainy on your part. But you have grown very offish of late."

"They began to suspect me all round, and I had to hold up."

"Suspect you?—a mere sham. You are hand in glove with the worst rogues in the city. I know precisely how many dollars you have fingered within the past fortnight. I tell you, sincerely, things shall not go on in this way."

"You need not threaten me, Mr. Masters. I was just coming to your office to blow the secrets of an old comrade of mine."

The police officer fixed his eyes intently upon Fogle, and as he uttered the last sentence, grasped his arm and hurrying him forward, remarked, somewhat sternly: "Another lie, Jim."

"What is a lie?" inquired the thief, sullenly.

"That you were coming to me of your own accord to blow any one, Tom, Dick, or Harry."

"Then you know more than I do," said Fogle, still speaking sullenly.

"The truth is, Jim, you have been practicing on my forbearance a long time, and I am determined to put a stopper on you. So, jog along."

"Not so fast, Mr. Masters, not so fast."

"A probation in Bridewell and a term in the State Prison will do you good, Fogle. You think perhaps that I have not sufficient evidence in the Bradbury affair to convict you. You cover your tracks as you go, but you can't cheat me. What have you to say for yourself?" continued the police officer, slowly and emphatically, "in regard to the horrible tragedy at Mother Green's?"

The thief paused abruptly.

"Hush! hush! for Heaven's sake!" Then sinking his voice almost to a whisper, Fogle added: "I did not suppose that any violence was meant to the girl."

"You hired yourself to a gang of cut-throats, and did not suppose—oh! you are a sweet one, Jim."

"Upon my honor."

"Your honor?—bah. And you did not suppose that I was looking for the scoundrels—you did not suppose that you were bound to put me on their track?"

"I durst not, Mr. Masters," replied Fogle, earnestly; "I durst not, and that's the truth. The business turned out so badly, so very badly, that I was afraid to mention it."

"I have the clue to the whole of it."

"Let me off, just this time, Mr. Masters," said the thief, imploringly, "and I will never try to hide any thing from you hereafter."

"I can't trust you, Jim."

Fogle peered cautiously about him, and bending his head toward the police officer, said in a low voice:

"You are anxious to get Hawkins. I can tell you of his whereabouts."

"You can? and yet you swore positively the other day that you knew nothing of him."

"He made me take oath upon oath that I would never expose his secrets. If I betray him, my soul is lost for ever."

"And your honor too," said the police officer, with a sarcastic laugh; then touching Fogle upon the shoulder and beckoning to him to follow him, he entered a low tippling-house near the corner of C—— street, and with a meaning nod to the proprietor passed through the bar-room to a small chamber in the rear. He closed the door of the chamber immediately after the entrance of the thief, and pushing a diminutive iron bolt rather to prevent intrusion than to secure Fogle, he seated himself near an old cherry table on which were lying a few books and the necessary materials for writing.

Mark Masters drew from his coat pocket a pair of handcuffs and placed them on the table.

"Now let us understand each other, Jim."

Fogle threw a sidelong glance at the irons as he advanced quite slowly toward the police officer.

"You have been trying to fool me," said Masters, sharply, "but my time has come at last. I have some questions to put to you."

"If I answer them," said the thief, inquiringly, yet with a troubled air, "shall I be free to go where I will?"

"For this time, Fogle, if you answer truly and without equivocation," replied the police officer, adding with a tone of decision: "but if I detect you in another lie, or even in an attempt to mislead me, as sure as my name is Mark Masters, I will drag you handcuffed to prison this very night. Ha! you seem as tame and harmless as a kitten. I know you better. You have the cunning of the serpent and the ferocity of the tiger. James Fogle, you are a desperate villain, and if you go to prison again, you will go in irons, and you will be chained to the floor of the dark dungeon. There will be no more escapes—do you understand me?"

A little sullenness was perceptible in the tones of Fogle's voice.

"Go on, Mr. Masters, I will answer your questions truly."

"Where is Hawkins, at present?"

"In Philadelphia."

"And his rendezvous?"

"You must go to the old Eagle Tavern, in the Northern Liberties, and inquire for Robert Grant, giving the pass-word, 'Manhattan,' previous to making the inquiry."

"And the rest of the gang—Wilson, Boyd, Marshall?"

"Gone into the Jerseys to try their luck."

"They are out of it, then," muttered the officer, indistinctly. With a keen glance at Fogle, he continued:

"And One-eyed Jo, what of him?"

"He is in the hospital."

"How long has he been there?"

"Three weeks, or more."

"Where is Dick Hinman?"

"In Boston, they tell me."

"Not in New York, Fogle?"

"Not here, Mr. Masters, unless he has taken a notion to come over to-day. If you will go with me to the Hole in the Wall, I can tell you all about him."

"Never mind; a daring burglary has been committed within the last three or four days. Have any of the old ones been at work?"

"Not to my knowledge, Mr. Masters: but I suspect——"

"What?—who?"

"I suspect that Hugh Simonson has been out. They say he has a pocketful of money."

"Hugh Simonson?—an ugly customer."

"He has been proposing a job to me ; a lot of gold and silver plate up town. And he tells me that he has a fresh hand in view—a neighbor of his, I believe."

"But the money, Jim : where did he get the money ?"

"At a pawn-broker's, I dare say ; that is his fashion of doing things. Yet it is a little strange ; he was mum about it, even to me."

"How can I see him ?"

"He was at home an hour ago ; but I don't think you will find him at present. He will be at a dance at Charley Swan's to-night."

"At Charley Swan's, in Leonard-street ?"

"I am to meet him there, Mr. Masters."

The police officer ruminated silently.

"And the new job which Simonson proposes ?"

"Let the business proceed to maturity, and keep me advised of everything. Above all, Fogle, remember what I have told you."

With these words Mark Masters and the thief separated.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PORTER-HOUSE—JACK HIGHFLYER.



At a later hour of the evening, the porter-house of Bill Smith, in the upper part of the Bowery, was filled with loungers, mostly young men from eighteen to three or four and twenty years of age. Several were leaning against the counter, smoking and talking; others were seated around a table, looking over the files of newspapers that lay upon it. At another table, on the opposite side of the room, were four persons playing dominoes, and a group of half a dozen spectators stood around them, silently observing the game.

The room itself presented few objects of attraction. The ceiling was low, and literally darkened with swarms of flies. The chairs, tables, and other furniture, were of cheap materials and inferior workmanship. Behind the counter stood a half score of casks supplied with wooden faucets. On the shelves, above these casks, were ranged a number of decanters filled with a variety of liquors, interspersed with empty tumblers and wine-glasses. Two large brass lamps, suspended from the ceiling, and several side lamps fixed to the walls, gave an abundance of light to the apartment. The doors which opened into the street were widely extended, but a large wooden screen of a dark blue color, newly painted, at the distance of four or five feet from the entrance, protected the visitors from the scrutiny of the passers by.

The proprietor of the establishment, Mr. William Smith, was indubitably a patron of the fine arts. The shades to the windows were curiosities in the way of drawing, perspective, and color. The walls were adorned with a melange of prints and caricatures, in black wooden frames, whose merits cannot be adequately described. In close proximity were to be seen "Napoleon crossing the Alps;"

"Mrs. Siddons as Lady Macbeth;" "Eclipse;" "John Bull and Brother Jonathan quarreling;" "The Lover's Return;" "Red Jacket in Indian costume;" "Edmund Kean as King Lear;" "The Battle of Bunker's Hill;" "One of the B'hoys driving on the Avenue;" "General Washington;" "Lord Nelson," et cetera.

The mantlepiece was decorated by a Chinese Mandarin and his wife, two porcelain figures, whose heads, delicately poised upon the shoulders by a mechanical contrivance, were bobbing up and down with restless activity. A backwoodsman from the Far West, who had strayed into the porter-house, was inspecting the movements of the figures with curious attention.

At length one of the smokers that stood leaning against the railing of the counter, tossed the remnant of a Havana cigar carelessly upon the floor, cocked his hat jauntily, and addressed his nearest companion with affected pomposity of manner:

"Tim, will you imbibe?"

The person to whom he spoke was no other than Tim Hardmann, the butcher. After puffing a volume of smoke from his mouth and nostrils, Tim replied, with a prolonged hissing sound upon the first syllable:

"C-e-r-tainly."

"What shall it be?"

"Bran' water."

"The same. Pete Fox, Harry Wilson, will you join us?" continued the first speaker.

"We won't do nothin' else," replied Harry Wilson, a young man of twenty-two years of age, dressed in corduroy breeches and a fustian roundabout, without vest or neckcloth. "A little mint, Bill."

"You can always depend upon me, Tom," said the other—the clerk of a tobacconist in the neighborhood—with a peculiar nasal drawl. "I'll measure my own liquor, Smith," he added, pouring out half a gill of old Cogniac into a tumbler; "this is what I call graduating at the bar."

"You have worn out that joke, Pete," replied Bill Smith, a middle aged, waddling, corpulent personage, with a double chin, fat fleshy cheeks, and merry twinkling eyes, that seemed perpetually laughing. He was dressed in buckskin slippers, cotton stockings, linen pantaloons, and a coarse muslin shirt, the sleeves of which were rolled up to the elbows. "It is unfair, my boy, to repeat it quite so often."

"You ought to bar it then, Smith; you keep the bar."

The young men nodded at each other unceremoniously and took off their bumpers at a draught.

"Where is Jack Highflyer to-night?" inquired Tim Hardmann, as he placed his empty tumbler upon the counter.

"The lad is missing yet," replied Smith.

"Perhaps his maternal parent will not permit him to leave his domicile," said the young man at whose expense the party had just drunk.

"No, Tom Gaffney; you are *out* now, whether your mother knows it or not. I saw Jack in the street fifteen minutes ago, talking with a stranger."

"We shall soon see his phiz, if that be the case," said Harry Wilson.

"His fists, Harry," interrupted Fox.

"I had rather see 'em than feel 'em," replied the other.

"Jack is a good fellow," said the butcher, "the life and soul of the squad."

At this moment a voice was heard at the other end of the room, exclaiming:

"Domino—the game is ours!"

The players rose immediately from the table, and the entire group moved confusedly toward the bar. A medley of strange voices calling for liquor, and the clatter of decanters and glasses, quickly followed.

"Who is the h-unfortunate h-individual?" inquired Peter Fox, the wag of the company.

"Your uncle, as usual," replied a young man with a downcast physiognomy.

"I am cock of the walk, Pete," said Luke Fordham, a journeyman tailor, flashily dressed in check trowsers, a vest and neck handkerchief of gaudy colors, and a blue coat with plated buttons. "I'll play any man in the room a draw game and bet liquors for the company."

"H-a h-extraordinary h-offer," drawled Peter Fox.

"Who killed Cock Robin?" hummed a voice in the crowd to a popular melody.

"I, said the Crow," chimed in another.

"I am a saucy nigger—yah! yah! yah!" said the tailor. "I runs with twenty-three."

"It is wonderful, then," said Hardmann, "to find you here alive and kicking. Twenty-three was most beautifully washed at the Grand-street fire the other night—fairly drowned out."

"You lie——"

The countenance of the butcher grew black as a thunder cloud.

"Under a mistake," continued Fordham, after a second's pause.

"Ned Clisby told me so."

"He lies—and no mistake."

"You seem to be electioneering for a fight this evening," said Tim Hardmann, advancing a step or two toward Luke Fordham.

"Don't try to bully me, Tim," replied the tailor; "bigger men than you have come off second best at the business. Last summer, when I was traveling west, I got into a dispute at Louisville with six tall, strapping Kentuckians. I stood up for my rights, and told them to go to hell, individually and collectively. They looked as savage as a meat-axe—no offense, Tim—just as if they were going to eat me up, without salt or pepper. Hard words passed between us, and finally one of them told me I must apologize or be whipped. 'Apologize hell!' said I, 'I am one of the b'hoys, and if you will agree to a fair fight, without gouging, I'll take you, one after another, till you or I get enough of it—but as for apologizing, I'll see you "away down below," and then I won't.' My blood was up a feet, and I was determined to stand to the rack, fodder or no fodder. They consented to my proposals, and I took my position. Big two-fisted fellows they were, and they came up to me, one after another, full of pluck and hot for fight. I gave them the fancy touches over the left ear, and laid them out as cold as iron. In less than ten minutes there were six of the most beautiful and lovely corpses that you can imagine, reposing upon the soil of Kentucky."

A loud explosion of laughter, in which Tim Hardmann joined heartily, followed the conclusion of Luke Fordham's tragical narrative.

The attention of the spectators was immediately drawn to the stranger who had been investigating the mysterious movements of the Chinese mandarin's head. He was a stout, athletic man, of a dark complexion, and a serious matter-of-fact expression of countenance—arrayed in a new suit of clothes recently purchased at an establishment in Chatham-street. He approached Luke Fordham with a deliberate step, and when he had arrived directly in front of him he remarked:

"I am a Kentuckian, young man; I have listened to your story, and I do not believe it to be true."

A roar of laughter ensued, and the Kentuckian began to exhibit a slight degree of irritation. Fordham squared off and said with a smile:

"I'll argue the point with you, stran-ger."

"Well, sir?"

"I lie, do I?" Quick as a flash after the utterance of these words Luke Fordham dealt a blow with his fist upon the left temple of the stranger. He fell heavily upon the sanded floor.

"A powerful argument, Luke," said Peter Fox; "that is what I call flooring an antagonist."

The Kentuckian soon recovered from the stunning blow. He leaped to his feet, glared fiercely at Luke Fordham, and pulling a large bowie knife from his bosom, rushed toward him.

"No fighting in my house, gentlemen," exclaimed Bill Smith, loudly.

At this critical instant, a slender stripling glided dexterously through the crowd between the combatants, and diverted the glittering point of the bowie knife from its intended aim with a small whalebone cane, which he held in his hand.

"Put up your knife, stranger," said the stripling, calmly: then turning toward Luke Fordham he added, inquiringly:

"A quarrel, Luke?"

The tone of calmness and even of authority in which these words were spoken, arrested momentarily the attention of the backwoodman.

The speaker was a young man not exceeding twenty-one years of age, with a fresh, open countenance, and a frank, easy demeanor. His voice charmed the ear even in its loudest notes by its fascinating sweetness of expression. His complexion was fair—the features small, regular, and as yet destitute of the lines which dissipation, care and time stamp upon the human face. The chin and the angle of the lower jaw were covered with a light downy beard, which had never been submitted to the edge of a razor. Still his high, arching forehead, his Grecian nose, and his dark blue eyes, glowing with the perpetual fire of a daring spirit, redeemed his countenance from effeminacy or boyishness.

His person was slender and graceful, about five feet seven inches in height, with a muscular development which betokened activity if not strength. His hands were small, white, and beautifully formed.

He wore a claret-colored frock coat, light blue pantaloons of French casimir, with silver stripes at the sides, a Marseilles vest, and a check shirt of blue and white, tied in the neck with a broad black ribbon. Upon his head was a white beaver hat with a broad brim turned up slightly, and a low crown, concave on its superior surface.

After a cursory inspection of his person the Kentuckian exclaimed, still highly excited: "Are you a police officer, sir?"

"Not exactly a police officer, my friend, but I hold some authority here. Put up your knife."

The Kentuckian hesitated.

"Show him your metal, boys," said the young man, turning to the group of spectators.

In an instant a score of sharp-pointed blades and daggers gleamed in the eyes of the stranger.

"One or a hundred!" said the Kentuckian, retreating a step or two; "it's all the same to me."

"If you had drawn a single drop of blood, you would have been out into mince meat in a minute."

"I drew my knife upon that chap yonder, who assaulted me without provocation."

"How is that, Luke?"

"It was all in joke."

"A rough joke—he knocked me down, sir, with a sledge hammer."

"Why you see, Jack Highflyer," said the journeyman tailor, "I had been telling the boys one of my western yarns and this stranger comes up to me and as much as doubts my word. Didn't he, boys?"

"Yes—yes—Luke."

"So I knocked him down once, to convince him of the truth of my story. And the only sledge hammer I used was this bunch of fingers doubled up tightly."

"If you will do it again," said the Kentuckian, replacing his bowie knife in his bosom, and advancing toward Fordham in an attitude of defense, "I will forgive you freely, and believe your story to boot."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth ere he fell like a log upon the floor.

"Here she goes and there she goes!" said Peter Fox, swinging his left hand backward and forward in imitation of a pendulum.

"Luke, you did it up brown, that time," said Tim Hardmann, the butcher.

The Kentuckian rose slowly, rubbed his eyes and looked around him. At length he said, good naturedly:

"When I get home to old Kaintuck, I shall keep dark about the boys in York. You have got a monstrous hard fist, my lad, and I believe that 'ere story of your'n. I bear no grudge for a little brush, and if you and your friends will drink with me, I'll stand the treat, by jingo."

"You are a devilish good fellow, stranger," said Jack Highflyer, slapping him familiarly on the shoulder. "You shall drink with us, my old boy, and if you have a fancy to see a little of the town to-night, we'll show you some things that will astonish you. Smith, a round of ammunition for the b'hoys."

"Yes, Jack."

"Charge, fire, and fall back," shouted Hardmann.

The shuffling of feet and the hubbub of voices and glasses lasted several minutes, during which Jack Highflyer and the Kentuckian engaged freely in conversation.

"Cigars, Smith."

"It is yet early," continued Jack Highflyer, addressing his comrades, "and before we start out on a cruise, I'll give you a new song of mine to an old tune."

"Silence! silence!"

SONG.

AN—*Crooskeen Lann.*

- "Let the sons of Neptune brave
 All the dangers of the wave,
 And the soldier bleed to win Fame's toy;
 Oh! give me the jolly life,
 Full of bustle, fun and strife,
 Of a gay and fearless Bowery b'hoy, b'hoy, b'hoy,
 Of a gay and fearless Bowery b'hoy.
- "Let the miser, wan and old,
 Count his silver and his gold,
 And the gallant seek his mistress, coy;
 Tell me, how can these compare,
 With the pleasures, rich and rare,
 Of a gay and fearless Bowery b'hoy, b'hoy, b'hoy,
 Of a gay and fearless Bowery b'hoy.
- "Here he goes and there he goes,
 Drinks with friends and fights with foes,
 Rollics, frolics, shouts and sings, with joy.
 Oh! give me the merry life,
 Full of bustle, fun and strife,
 Of a gay and fearless Bowery b'hoy, b'hoy, b'hoy,
 Of a gay and fearless Bowery b'hoy."

"Bravo! Jack—bravo! bravo!"

"Now, fellows," said Jack Highflyer, "I am going to take our friend here," pointing to the Kentuckian, "to see the monkeys. There is some rare sport down town to-night. We will separate at the door into little squads of two or three, and meet in fifteen minutes

on the corner of Orange and Leonard-streets. Be quiet out of doors or we may lose our chance. The watchword is 'Old Hickory.'"

Amid confused cries of "Old Hickory," "Hurrah for Jackson," "Down with the black cockades," the motley assemblage poured out of Bill Smith's porter-house into the Bowery, and dividing into small parties, pursued their way in different routes to the appointed place of rendezvous.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHARLEY SWAN'S—THE DISCOVERY.



"A good time, Tim," said Jack Highflyer, joining his comrades at the place of rendezvous. "The night is as black as Erebus."

"I have been all through the southern country," Luke Fordham remarked to one of his companions, "and I never heard that name for a

nigger."

"Jack is a scholar," replied the other, "and if he says H-erebus, H-erebus it is."

"Are all our fellows here?" inquired the leader of the squad.

"Take a census of the nasal protuberances, Jack," said Tom Gaffney.

"No nonsense, Tom. We must move cautiously and quietly, or we shall find it difficult to obtain admittance at Charley Swan's to-night, and I have particular reasons for wishing to avoid a row in the street."

"It's a pity, Jack," exclaimed Harry Wilson; "of all things on earth I love to see,

"Four-and-twenty Bowery boys all in a row."

"I'll go ahead," continued Jack Highflyer, "with Tim Hardmann and the stranger, and the rest of you will follow slowly."

At the distance of fifty yards from the place of rendezvous, Jack Highflyer stopped to reconnoiter an old tenement, whose front was dimly illuminated by a lamp on the opposite side of the street. The exterior presented no certain indications by which an observer could determine whether the building was a dwelling or workshop. There were two windows in the second story, and an entrance beneath, through large double doors, which opened directly upon the paved side-walk. The young man approached the entrance and tried the latch. The doors were bolted and barred.

He knocked gently.

Presently the sound of footsteps was distinctly heard. "Who's there?" inquired a coarse, guttural voice.

"Friends, Pompey."

The creaking of bolts and bars was followed immediately by the opening of one of the doors. Jack Highflyer gave a shrill, peculiar whistle, and entered with the Kentuckian. In less than a minute his comrades had gathered around him, and the doors were again securely fastened.

The apartment in which they were assembled was dimly lighted by a single lamp, and entirely destitute of other furniture. On the side toward the north a quantity of dried hickory wood, sawed and split, was piled against the wall.

Jack Highflyer and his companions proceeded along the wide passage-way until they arrived at a descending flight of steps, down which shone the flickering rays of the lamp.

"Amuse yourselves as you please until I give the signal for retreat," said Jack Highflyer, as he descended the steps. At the bottom of the stairs was a door which he threw widely open. A singular scene presented itself to the astonished vision of the stranger.

The first apartment was the refreshment saloon—perhaps twenty-five feet in width, and twice or thrice the distance in length. The bar was neatly fitted up, with plates of looking-glass behind the decanters and tumblers, and a pine counter with a turned cherry railing supported by iron projections, in front of the bar-tender. Two oyster stands, one on each side of the bar, and a heavy pine table, surrounded by benches, extended along the room. Spirituous liquors of various kinds, oysters, cakes, tarts, fruits, and cigars, were temptingly exposed for sale. The walls were yellow and smokey, and the floor uncarpeted. Two or three wooden settees, the worse for wear, and a dozen rush-bottomed chairs, were ranged against the walls for the convenience of the guests.

At the extremity of the saloon were two narrow doors, about fifteen feet asunder, leading into the ball-room. This apartment was forty by sixty feet in dimensions, and was ventilated tolerably by a single row of windows, opening into a walled area. Long pine benches, without cushions or backs, were placed against the walls on three sides of the room. Between the doors was raised a platform, provided with half-a-dozen cane-bottomed chairs, for the accommodation of the musicians. Both apartments were supplied by lamps of various patterns, suspended from the ceiling. Many of the shades were

covered with lamp-black, and the blazing ill-trimmed wicks threw up, above their darkened surfaces, sluggish columns of flame and smoke.

The ball-room was thronged with visitors of both sexes and of every variety of color. Negroes, mulattoes, and whites, walked and danced together, in total disregard of the prejudices of their respective castes. The women were thieves and prostitutes of the lowest description—some flaunting in tawdry finery, others dressed in ragged filthy garments, which outraged common decency. There were old hags with bloated faces and dull heavy eyes, and young girls already hopelessly depraved, leering shamelessly into the countenances of their male companions. The men were mostly thieves, pick-pockets, debauchees, and drunken rowdies—the dregs of the population of a great city. Others, however, of a better class, had been induced to visit these rooms by curiosity, or a love of adventure; or, perhaps, a disposition to participate in scenes of debasing profligacy.

Jack Highflyer's squad were not unused to the amusements and vices of low life, and they did not hesitate to join the besotted revelers in their wild reckless jollity. They drank as deeply, and laughed as loudly, and talked as obscenely, and blasphemed as fearlessly, as the most confirmed votaries of lewdness and intemperance. But their leader, although mingling freely with the motly throng, did not seem disposed to become an actor in the evening's entertainments. With a light careless step, and a keen observing glance, he moved through the crowd; pausing, occasionally, during the intervals of dancing, to exchange a few words with the Kentuckian.

Having passed nearly an hour in this manner, as the musicians commenced a prelude to a set of cotillons, he advanced toward a young, pretty looking girl, who was sitting alone near the end of one of the benches:

"Will you dance with me, beauty?" he inquired.

The girl threw back her head, shaking her brown ringlets a little coquettishly, and asked boldly:

"Who are you?"

"Dandy Jack."

"Well, Dandy Jack, I have a partner for this set."

"Is he handsomer than I?"

"No," replied the girl, with a loud laugh. "He's as ugly as sin, but he treats like a prince."

"The dancers are taking their places—stand up with me," said Jack Highflyer, tossing a half eagle into the girl's lap.

"A gold piece," said she, examining the coin. "I'll do it, Dandy Jack, partner or no partner. But he will give you a devil of a thrashing, and me too, perhaps."

"I'll protect you, beauty."

"You—you?" exclaimed the girl, laughing. "Tom Thumb against a giant."

The cotillon had just commenced, as a heavy, ill-favored personage presented himself. It was Hugh Simonson, the thief.

"You are too late," said the girl; "I am dancing with this gentleman."

The ruffian surveyed the young man with a furious expression of countenance, and then retired, muttering oaths and threats.

After the dancing, Jack Highflyer sauntered into the refreshment saloon, and called for a cigar. Half-a-dozen of his comrades gathered around him in the course of a few minutes. While he was engaged in conversation with them, Hugh Simonson entered the saloon and approached him closely, saying, in a harsh, angry voice:

"You stole my partner from me, villain."

Jack Highflyer took his cigar from his mouth, and puffed a volume of tobacco smoke full in the face of the speaker.

"Did I?" he inquired, superciliously.

"Yes."

"Then I am a thief, I suppose," he added, with a peculiar significant glance.

The countenance of Hugh Simonson became distorted with violent passion.

"You think yourself safe," he vociferated, "with your gang of rowdies and cut-throats about you; but I'll teach you and them not to interfere with me."

"Stand back, boys," said Jack Highflyer, addressing his comrades; "the fellow shows fight."

The young men fell back on either side, leaving a space of some eight or ten feet entirely clear.

"Now, Simonson," continued the leader of the squad, throwing away his cigar, and assuming the attitude of a boxer, "you are a regular bully at street rows and elections, and pretend to have science. I stand here alone, and defy you."

A savage grin of mingled hatred and contempt played upon the features of the ruffian, as he advanced toward the stripling. In his fury he pressed on with little attention to the rules of defense, and delivered blow after blow with vindictive energy of purpose. The young

man preserved the utmost coolness—he dexterously avoided some blows and parried others, retreating a step or two occasionally. At length Simonson began to exhibit tokens of exhaustion, and Jack Highflyer assumed the offensive. He made two or three rapid feints, which distracted the attention of his antagonist, and then succeeded in reaching his left temple with stunning effect. He pursued this advantage by a tremendous blow over the right eye, that sent the robber-reeling and staggering to the floor.

“It’s all in my eye,” hummed Tim Hardmann.

“Jack is one of ‘em, isn’t he?” said Tom Gaffney, taking a chew of tobacco.

The noise of scuffling and hard blows had attracted a number of spectators from the ball-room, among whom was the Kentuckian with a mulatto girl, tawdrily dressed, leaning upon his arm.

Hugh Simonson rose, foaming with rage; but by a strong effort he subdued the outward manifestation of his feelings.

“This devilish heavy coat hampered my arms,” he muttered audibly, at the same time stripping off both coat and vest by a quick jerking motion.

“Jim Fogle: where are you?” he asked aloud, looking toward the spectators.

“Here, Hugh,” said Fogle, approaching him.

“Hold my coat and vest a few minutes, till I fix this youngster’s flint for him.”

At the urgent solicitation of two or three of his comrades, Jack Highflyer had relieved himself of his frock coat, and now stood awaiting his opponent. The robber advanced more cautiously, seemingly aware that he must be on the alert. The sparring commenced and was continued for several minutes without any decisive result. It was truly a wonderful exhibition of skill, for both of the men were thoroughly trained boxers, and the preponderance of strength on the one side, and activity on the other, rendered the contest less unequal than the age of the parties might have indicated. The superior coolness of Jack Highflyer again triumphed. Hugh Simonson became irritated at the long resistance of a mere stripling, and endeavored to bear him down by a succession of vigorous blows. In so doing he exposed himself completely to a keen and watchful adversary. His advance was suddenly checked by a severe blow just beneath the angle of the jaw. This was rapidly followed by others, which he vainly attempted to parry, and at length a heavy hit between the eyes hurled him from his balance. As he fell his head struck violently against

the sharp projecting corner of an oyster stand. He remained on the floor, motionless, and insensible, the blood flowing profusely from a cut in the scalp.

"You have killed him," exclaimed a tall mulatto, rushing to the spot where Simonson was lying.

Jack Highflyer approached the fallen man, and shook him until he opened his eyes partially.

"He will do well enough with a little nursing, Charley Swan," the young man coolly remarked; "but the fight is over, I reckon—and now, fellows, we'll take a drink."

"Dang it," said the Kentuckian to his companion, "the boys in York beat snakes."

"The girls ain't slow, either, stranger," replied the mulatto, with a coquettish leer.

Jack Highflyer's comrades flocked around him with their congratulations. Charley Swan, with one of his assistants, dragged the wounded man across the room, and placing a bundle under his head, left him to recover his senses at his leisure. The throng of spectators returned to the ball room and resumed dancing.



During the progress of this scene, James Fogle slipped out of the crowd with Simonson's coat and vest hanging upon his arm, and passed through the entrance of the refreshment saloon into the wide

hall or passage-way which has been described. A man, muffled in a large cloth cloak, had preceded him, and was waiting for him.

“Well, Fogle?”

“Here are his coat and vest, Mr. Masters; you can examine them.”

The disguised police officer searched the pockets of the robber's garments carefully. In the breast pocket of the coat he found a large leathern pocket-book, containing some money and a number of papers. He scrutinized them, one by one, by the light of the dim lamp in the passage-way. Finally he discovered a piece of thick yellow paper folded up, which he opened and read.

“I have it,” he muttered in a low tone; “a pawn-broker's ticket—a gold lepine watch and a diamond cross. Simonson is the man!”

The ball at Charley Swan's continued until a late hour of the night, but we shall pursue its details no further.

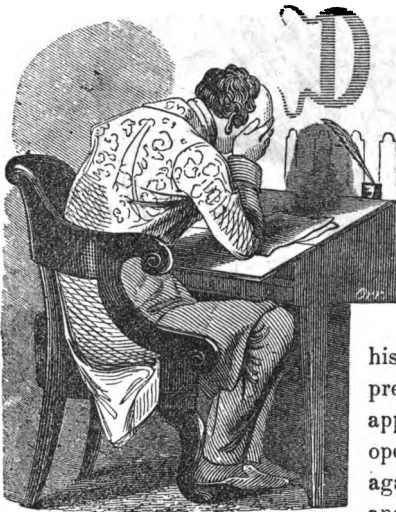


BOOK THIRD—THE ARREST



CHAPTER I.

OWEN TRACEY—THE JOURNAL.



URING the space of half an hour after the departure of Alfred Tracey, the retired merchant sat leaning upon his writing-desk, almost in a state of unconsciousness.

A bewildered fearful glance around the apartment, was the first symptom of the returning vigor of his faculties. Even in that glance it seemed as though his mind was tortured with the apprehension of the presence of some appalling vision. He pressed the open palms of his hands forcibly against his cheeks and his forehead, and surveyed more critically the

objects that surrounded him.

"Thank God—he has gone!" burst vehemently from his lips.

The old merchant gradually recovered from his stupor and regained his ordinary composure. His countenance, however, still bore traces of the mental torture which he had undergone. The emotions of a single hour had perceptibly increased the ravages of approaching age.

He rose from his chair and traversed the apartment with unequal strides. At intervals, his thoughts and feelings were audibly expressed in detached sentences.

"Alfred is a villain—a consummate villain. His profligate life, his detestable ingratitude to me, combine to prove it. But what am I?"

"By what chance has he discovered my fatal secret—the secret which has soured my temper, poisoned the springs of life, and rendered the very wealth I have hoarded positively distasteful to me? I would to God that I were a poor man. Every dollar that I possess is tainted with pollution.

"My crime is known, and to *him*! Surely the curse of the orphan is upon me. It will go down with me to the grave; it will sink me to perdition. But does she yet live—the child and legal heir of my deceased partner?"

"The restitution of her inheritance will require a sum of twenty-five thousand dollars. Twenty-five thousand dollars!—a total loss of so much of my private fortune. I have it: I will embark in Mortimer's stock speculation, and if successful, then we shall see.

"One—two—three—four hundred dollars," continued Owen Tracey, more composedly, resuming his seat, and counting the bank notes that Francis Mortimer, the stock broker, had placed in his hands. "There was another—ah! I have a faint recollection that Alfred—" the merchant started from his seat with an outbreak of temper. "Whatever may be the consequence, I will not submit to his insolent extortion."

The old merchant remained standing for several minutes in an attitude of reflection; then placing the notes in one of the drawers, he carefully locked the writing-desk, and concealed the key in a small recess partially filled with papers. He rang the bell violently, and upon the appearance of a domestic, gave a number of unimportant directions in regard to the affairs of the household.

As he passed through the hall he encountered Mrs. Tracey.

"Where are you going now?" the merchant gruffly demanded.

"I have some purchases to make," replied Mrs. Tracey; "and, besides——"

"The old song," said Owen Tracey, petulantly, interrupting his wife. "Laces and ribbons—ribbons and laces."

"Do I dress too fashionably, or too expensively, Mr. Tracey?" inquired the lady in a calm, assured tone of voice.

"Suppose I were to say yes," said the merchant, resting one hand on the carved scroll at the lower end of the bannister, and turning abruptly toward his wife.

"I should endeavor, sir, to please you."

"You would, would you? And you would not think me a mean, stingy old man?"

"You are discomposed this morning. I am not going out, Mr. Tracey, to purchase laces or ribbons, or any article of dress."

"What then?"

"Some articles of grocery for the family; some note paper, and, perhaps, a few books."

"Books—books—books," muttered Owen Tracey, slowly ascending the staircase, proceeding to his dressing-room.

Having exchanged his morning-gown and slippers for a frock-coat of snuff-colored broadcloth, and a pair of boots, the old merchant sallied forth into the street. The fresh air, the bright sunshine, and the bustle of Broadway, exercised an invigorating influence upon him. As he turned into Wall-street after a brisk walk of five or six minutes duration, his pace slackened, and at length, with an irresolute expression of countenance, he began to retrace his steps. He was not in the mood to listen even to the polished flatteries and golden schemes of Francis Mortimer, the stock-jobber. He sauntered slowly up Broadway until he arrived at the entrance of the Park. With an aspect of weariness he approached a wooden bench, at the distance of eight or ten yards from the lower Park gates. A cripple, with a wooden leg, two loafers in seedy apparel, and a nurse, or waiting-maid, with a child in her arms, occupied the greater portion of the bench.

Owen Tracey seated himself near the cripple and rested his chin upon the head of his walking-stick, in an attitude of reflection. The cripple hobbled away, and a blind man, led by a small boy, took his place, rested himself and departed; the loafers conversed on politics and the weather and the affairs of their acquaintances, until they became tired of each other and separated, to meet, perchance, an hour afterward in a ten-pin alley, or at a tipping house. Other loafers succeeded them, singly and in couples, lingered awhile, and went away. When the shadows of the trees began to extend themselves

over the graveled walks and the green luxurious grass, the nurse pressed the young babe to her bosom, and slowly disappeared. The merchant still remained, leaning upon his cane, with his eyes fixed upon the ground.

His attention was at length arrested by the approach of a stout, athletic man, whose countenance was familiar to him. He rose from the wooden bench, advanced a step or two, and accosted him :

“ You are a police officer, sir ? ”

“ I am, Mr. Tracey. ”

“ You know me, it seems. On my part, though I recognize your countenance, I cannot call you by name. ”

“ My name is Masters—Mark Masters, ” said the police officer.

“ Will you oblige me, Mr. Masters, ” inquired the merchant, “ by calling at my residence, in Chambers-street, this afternoon at four o'clock ? I wish to consult you.

“ It is now two o'clock, ” said Mark Masters, looking at his watch. After a moment's reflection he added : “ Four o'clock, sir ; it is an appointment. ”

“ At my residence in Chambers-street. ”

The police officer bowed and passed on. Owen Tracey proceeded homeward in a contrary direction.

Punctually at the appointed hour Mark Masters presented himself at the door of the old merchant, and was admitted to his private sitting-room.

“ You are punctual, sir, ” said the merchant, with unusual courtesy of manner ; “ I like punctuality. ”

“ None are successful without it. The policeman quickly discovers that his wisest plans are in more danger from careless agents than from cunning rogues. ”

Owen Tracey did not reply for an instant ; indeed he appeared to be in no slight degree confused and embarrassed. Finally, in a slow hesitating manner, he observed :

“ Twenty-six years ago William Martyn, my partner in business, died in this city, leaving a wife and daughter, the latter being a child of tender years. At the time of his decease Mrs. Martyn was on bad terms with her husband, and was residing in Norwich among her own relations. My partner's widow did not long survive, and on her death-bed she bequeathed her daughter to the protection and guardianship of her favorite brother. It is my desire to ascertain the particulars of the daughter's history ; and especially whether she is still living, and if living, where, and under what circumstances. ”

The police officer took a memorandum book from his coat-pocket, and, pencil in hand, commenced his inquiries :

“ The name of your deceased partner, Mr. Tracey ?”

“ William Martyn.”

“ And the maiden name of his wife ?”

“ Cleveland—Maria Cleveland. Her daughter’s name I do not recollect.”

“ Where did Mrs. Martyn reside during her last illness ?”

“ At Norwich, in the State of Connecticut, with her brother, Samuel Cleveland.”

“ And was Samuel Cleveland the guardian of the young orphan ?”

“ He was.”

“ Is he still living ?”

“ I do not know. It is more than eighteen years since I have, directly or indirectly, received any information whatever of the Clevelands.”

“ And the relatives of Martyn ?”

“ He emigrated from Scotland in the year 1786 ; none of his family have, within my knowledge, visited the United States.”

“ This will do, Mr. Tracey,” said the police officer, closing his memorandum book. “ I will send a trusty agent to Norwich tomorrow, and a few days, I doubt not, will be sufficient to enable me to furnish you with the information you seek to obtain.”

“ Accept this note to defray immediate charges,” said Owen Tracey, tendering the police officer a bank note. “ When the affair is concluded——”

“ Say no more, Mr. Tracey,” replied the other, taking the note. “ When the affair is concluded it will be time enough to speak of compensation for my services.”

“ As you will, Mr. Masters,” observed the merchant.

On the departure of the police officer, Owen Tracey seated himself at his writing desk and commenced a letter to his legal agent in Philadelphia. His progress was slow, for at the close of every sentence he paused in a fit of abstraction, or, perhaps, rose from the desk and traversed the apartment with careless and unmeasured steps.

It was nearly midnight—the letter still unfinished—when the merchant was startled by a gentle tap on the door.

“ Who is there ?” he demanded, loudly.

The door opened and Mrs. Tracey entered :

“ It is I, Mr. Tracey.”

"Well, what do you want?" asked the merchant, turning hastily on his chair.

"You dined so sparingly to-day, and have confined yourself so closely to your apartment, that I am concerned about your health."

"You are?" said Owen Tracey, with an angry scowl.

"Are you unwell?" inquired Mrs. Tracey, approaching her husband.

"Unwell or not—what do you care about it?"

The lady paused.

"What do you care for me, madam?" continued Owen Tracey, bitterly; "have you as much affection for me as you have for your cat or your dog?"

"It is idle to talk of affection," replied Mrs. Tracey, a faint blush overspreading her countenance, "but I endeavor to act from a higher principle."

"And what is that?"

"A sense of duty."

"Duty?"

"The obligations of a wife are resting upon me, and I must discharge them to the best of my ability. Can you, with truth, assert that I have greatly failed?"

This direct and forcible appeal roused the attention of the old merchant.

"Have I not," continued Mrs. Tracey, "invariably treated you with kindness and respect? have I not nursed you in sickness and obeyed you in all things? have I not submitted to your impatience, your censure, even your harshness? have I not managed the affairs of your household with prudence and fidelity? have I not preserved my reputation spotless as a woman and a wife?"

"You have, you have," murmured the merchant in softened tones.

"And what has sustained me but the consciousness of duty? By the grace of God I have striven to correct my faults, to endure my trials, to check my repinings, above all, to return good for evil. Believe me, my husband, it is better to walk humbly and to show mercy, than to yield to the dominion of pride and avarice and revenge."

The effect of these words was instantaneous and surprising. The old merchant covered his face with his hands and wept.

Mrs. Tracey advanced toward him and laid her hand gently upon his shoulder.

He started suddenly from his chair, dashed away the tears, and exclaimed angrily:

"Begone—you are playing tricks upon me—begone, I say, begone!"

Mrs. Tracey retired to her chamber, conscious that any further attempt to control her husband's temper would be futile. After a few minutes passed in solitary reflection, she sat down with apparent composure to make an entry in her diary.

The journal of Mrs. Tracey was a thick volume, of quarto size, neatly bound in dark purple morocco.

As she turned the leaves she paused occasionally to read the records of her past life. A few passages, principally selected from the first pages of the journal, will explain the mystery of her position.

"July, 1822.

"This evening, at Mrs. Bassett's, I was introduced to a Mr. Neville, an accomplished gentleman. I conversed with him on books, music and painting; or rather, I listened to him while he descanted, in the most brilliant and animated style, on the achievements of human genius in the realms of art. The evening passed very pleasantly.

"Where have I met Mr. Neville previously? On reflection, I think I have seen him at the rooms of the Academy of Design.

"August, 1822.

"Mr. Neville called this morning. He was courteous and even complimentary. He must have thought me childish, for I blushed exceedingly at his compliments, and was too much confused to reply intelligibly. And yet I have received compliments from others without exhibiting any foolish embarrassment. I must study to control my blushes.

"November, 1822.

"Do I understand the nature of my feelings? Henry Neville interests me deeply. His polished manners, the elegance of his person, and the intellectual expression of his features concur to heighten the effect of our social intercourse. The most trifling circumstances connected with him are interesting to me. I listen to him with unspeakable delight when he is present, and I think of him continually in his absence. What does it mean? Can it be that I love him? Oh! no, no, he has never spoken to me of love—never. Why should I love him?"

"January, 1823.

"He is a student. My dear mother has remonstrated against his attentions to me. She objects to the narrowness of his fortune, and to his manifest disregard of the importance of worldly position. She

still laments the splendor of the past, when my father was the culminating star among the princely merchants of Boston. Her ambition is now concentrated on me; and yet I do not think she would require me to sacrifice my affections to the desire of wealth or the pride of worldly station.

“February, 1823.

“To-night Henry avowed frankly and openly his ardent attachment to me. His words were endearing, his manner was a rare compound of gentleness and dignity. My heart fluttered strangely, but its flutterings, though embarrassing, were joyful. I was confused from an excess of feeling. I hardly know what reply I made to his protestations; but I fear that he took encouragement from the agitation which I manifested. Yet why should I fear, when he assures me that he loves me, and when I am conscious of my warm affection for him? He is so noble, so generous, so kind; how can I do otherwise than love him?

“April, 1823.

“We converse together, we read together, we confide to each other the hidden thoughts which have never found utterance before to mortal ears. Will the bright dream of my youth vanish in darkness and gloom? I know not. My mother, though she does not openly oppose my preference for Mr. Neville, sometimes shakes her head and asks me if he has revealed to me the history of his past life or the state of his worldly prospects. On these subjects he is silent. I have no doubt, no distrust, but I would that my mother's scruples were overcome.

“June, 1823.

“I know not why, but I feel a presentiment of evil in the presence of Owen Tracey. He is an acquaintance of my mother, but I have never seen him until within the past week. Strange and ridiculous as it is, he seems disposed to offer, in his blunt way, the most marked attentions to me. If it were not for the presentiment, to which I have adverted, I should laugh heartily at the absurdity of the idea, and yet I must tell Henry of the conquest I have made of a man old enough to be my father. How foolishly I am writing! In truth, I am sitting at my desk to while away the half hour between tea and the anticipated visit of him who is dearer to me than life. Why should I seek to conceal a sentiment which is the pride of my soul and joy of my heart? I have existed for months in the atmosphere of love, and have learned to esteem the worth, the generosity, the tenderness of Henry Neville as of greater value than all the treasures of earth.

"June, 1823.

"My presentiment of evil was correct.

"This morning my mother called me to her private apartment and informed me that she had a communication to make to me.

"I attended her accordingly, and after some preliminary remarks, the bearing of which I could not distinctly perceive, she informed me that Mr. Owen Tracey had been pleased with my person and manners, and had authorized her to make a proposal of marriage to me on his behalf.

"I laughed heartily; but imperceptibly a sense of terror stole over me as I perceived the serious expression of my mother's countenance.

"'Be reasonable, Mary,' said she, 'Mr. Tracey is a very respectable merchant, a man of property.'

"'But, dear mother,' I exclaimed in undisguised astonishment, 'are you really urging this proposal on me?'

"'I am,' said my mother decisively.

"'And Mr. Neville?'

"'A romantic affair, which ought to have been broken off long ago.'

"'I love him, however, my dear mother.'

"'Do not say too much, Mary,' said my mother. 'I have promised your hand to Mr. Tracey.'

"I was struck dumb with horror.

"'Yes,' continued my mother with energy, 'I have acted for you. I feel for your despair and agony, but I ask you to sacrifice yourself for me, for the mother who bore you and nursed you in your infancy, and has watched over you kindly and tenderly until now.'

"Her voice sank almost to a whisper, as she continued:

"'Mr. Owen Tracey has in his possession a secret which he threatens to expose unless you become his wife; a secret which will condemn me to the scorn and contempt of the world. My life is in your hands. Confirm the solemn promise I have made to him, or I will die in your presence.'

"I swooned.

"When I returned to consciousness, my mother was standing over me with a glass in her hand.

"'It is poison,' she murmured in a hoarse whisper. 'Shall I drink it, Mary?'

"I shook my head feebly.

"'You will marry Mr. Tracey?'

"'Yes, mother; do what you will with me.'

"She sank upon my bosom with a burst of inexpressible agony.

"I wept bitterly, but my fate was sealed, and it became necessary for me to act.

"Mr. Tracey soon afterward made his appearance. He was closeted a few minutes with my mother ere he was presented to me. I resolved to make an appeal to his generosity and his pride, even while yielding my assent to my mother's commands. I told him that I had neither respect nor affection for him; I besought him to release me from the promise which had been extorted from me.

"He refused bluntly and decidedly, but without any expression of anger or bitterness.

"A terrible task devolved upon me—that of writing to Henry Neville. I could not see him—I dared not.

"He will despise and hate me, but I cannot divulge the motives of my conduct, even to him.

"I dare not act otherwise. I have promised to become the wife of another; and I must sustain the purity and honor of my sex. —

"In the calmness of despair I write these details of the circumstances which have destroyed my hopes of earthly happiness. When I am dead, this volume may reach the hands of Henry Neville, and convince him that I have merited his pity rather than his censure.

"The day after to-morrow!

"June, 1823.

"My mother died in my arms.

* * * * *

"In her dying moments, she confessed that she had deceived me in stating that Owen Tracey possessed any secret in relation to her, or had threatened to expose her in any way. She confessed that her object in deceiving me was to break off the connection which existed between Henry Neville and myself, and to induce me to marry a man of reputed wealth.

* * * * *

"I forgave her. She was my mother, and dying.

"I am gratified since my doom is irrevocable, that the burden of atrocious wrong is removed from my husband. By the power of moral considerations, and not by physical force, have I been driven to this marriage. I know that I must suffer, but I will not complain weakly and cowardly. I must school my feelings to the performance of my duties.

We pass over the desultory record of the sentiments and emotions,

the experience and studies of Mrs. Tracey during a period of five years.

“June, 1828.

“Last night at Mrs. Willoughby’s assembly, I met Wilfred Montessor.

“I was surprised, almost overcome, for at a glance I perceived that Montessor, the traveler, a man of reputed learning and genius, and of enormous wealth, and Henry Neville, the student, were the same person.

“I rallied as quickly as possible and participated in the conversation which ensued, but I remember scarcely a word of what was spoken. Enough transpired, however, to convince me that he regarded me with indifference, if not with contempt.

“I have been entertained in past years in listening to the comments of Mrs. Willoughby on her absent favorite Wilfred Montessor. I comprehend clearly the motives which induced him to address me as a poor student rather than as a gentleman of education, family, and fortune.

“The deception, trifling as it was—but let me not forget that I am the wife of Owen Tracey.”

Is it wonderful that the countenance of Mrs. Tracey was sad, or that her cheeks were wet with tears when she closed the volume?

CHAPTER II.

THE INTERVIEW.



THE dial of Saint Paul's indicated a quarter past eleven, as Owen Tracey, in pursuance of his design of the preceding day, passed the corner of Ann-street and Broadway. The merchant had endured a restless night, and his features, especially about the eyes and temples, were haggard and contracted as if with pain. But his step was firm and vigorous, and his air was that of a man of reso-

lute and inflexible purpose.

His first visit was at the office of Francis Mortimer, in Wall-street. The broker was alone. He was seated near a circular table, which was literally covered with books and papers, and was busily engaged in the calculation of a perplexed stock account. Upon the entrance of his visiter, however, he pushed aside his balance sheet and rose to meet him, with his usual suavity of manner.

Owen Tracey immediately broached the subject of his proposed speculation in the stock of the Eastern Transportation Company. The position of the stock, and the details of the plan which he had projected to control its price in the market, were fully explained by Francis Mortimer. His statements were confirmed by written documents in his possession, and the arguments by which he sustained the feasibility of the scheme were at once ingenious and plausible. The merchant finally consented to embark in the speculation, and also to raise, upon his personal security, a large amount of specie funds. A long consultation ensued, in which the course of action to be adopted by each of the confederates was definitely arranged.

It was understood between the parties, that negotiations for the purchase of the floating stock of the Eastern Transportation Company should be commenced immediately by Mr. Tracey. The names of the holders, with the number of shares held by them, respectively, had been ascertained with tolerable accuracy, and were contained in a written schedule which the stock-broker delivered to his associate.

"You perceive," said the broker, with a slight wave of the hand, "that we are prepared for action. The truth is, my dear sir, I relied with confidence on your consent and co-operation."

"You are keen, Mr. Mortimer," said the merchant, with a chuckle; "a keen projector."

"I need not remind you," observed the broker, "that you must proceed very cautiously in this business. You have an old head on your shoulders, Mr. Tracey."

The merchant bowed.

"It won't do to play the game too openly, my dear sir—caution—caution. These fellows in Wall-street have keen eyes."

"I shall follow your directions implicitly."

"Ay, ay," said the broker, with a nod of the head and a genial smile. "I understand them. It is mining and countermining continually, as between hostile armies in a siege, to guard against surprise."

"But you think there is no real danger?"

"Danger, my dear sir," said Mortimer, interrupting his associate; "read this paragraph in the money article of one of the morning papers."

Owen Tracey read the extract pointed out by the broker with deep interest.

"The stock of the Eastern Transportation Company is declining daily. This is one of the companies chartered by the Legislature of an adjoining State during the steamboat mania which prevailed a few years ago. The competition on the Eastern route is so great that it is extremely doubtful whether the Transportation Company can be made to defray its ordinary expenses under the most favorable auspices. The administration of the present Board of Directors has been such, however, as to convince intelligent capitalists that the concern is fast approaching the period of total bankruptcy. A considerable portion of the money received during the past season has been lost through the imprudence of the Board, in making a temporary investment without adequate security. We see that attempts are making to force this stock upon the market at present prices. If it be only a contest be-

tweer. he bulls and the bears of Wall-street, we feel no sympathy for the parties ; but we trust no honest purchaser will embark his funds in the stock of this rickety company.

"It is now two years since the Eastern Transportation Company has paid a dividend to the stockholders, and it is safe to prophesy that not one per cent. will be paid out of the earnings of the company for five years to come."

The merchant looked anxiously at the broker after he had finished the paragraph.

"Are these statements correct?"

"They ought to be," remarked the stock-broker with a low silvery laugh, "I wrote them myself."

"You, Mr. Mortimer?"

"Certainly, certainly, my dear sir ; and I will tell you my object. It is our cue to depress the price of the stock to the lowest possible figure. We are buyers, Mr. Tracey."

"I understand."

"Your movements will soon be known to some of the sharp ones. I consider this article a good thing, Mr. Tracey. 'Give a dog a bad name,'—you remember the proverb, my dear sir : and so with stocks. Dealers are ticklish about meddling with securities which are publicly attacked in the newspapers. Few men, even stockholders, are intimately acquainted with the affairs of the private or public corporations, whose securities they buy or sell ; and fluctuations in the market are often caused by street rumors and newspaper articles."

"Your meaning is that such rumors and articles are the contrivances of operators and interested parties, to affect the prices of their securities," said Owen Tracey, with a glance of inquiry.

"Certainly, my dear sir, entirely. The success of a speculation often requires consummate skill and address in the management of these sources of public opinion. You and I, for example, come into the market as bona fide purchasers of the stock of the Eastern Transportation Company. The natural tendency of our operations is to raise the price of the stock. This is the natural tendency, Mr. Tracey, and we are obliged to counteract it. The lower the stock the better for us. Do you not see?"

"So long as we are purchasers, Mr. Mortimer," said the retired merchant. "But we are operating on time."

"Precisely," said the stockbroker, in a tone of suavity, striking the folded newspaper, gently, with the tips of his fingers. "I shall follow up this article with others of a similar description, until our plans have

ripened fully, and then we shall contrive to turn the tables upon our good friends and neighbors."

"Is there no danger, Mr. Mortimer, of seriously affecting the standing of the company?"

"Our plan is to get the control of the whole number of shares in the market, and it matters little to us what may be the standing of the Company, so that prices do not rise at present. All in good time, my dear Mr. Tracey. A fortnight or three weeks hence, we shall find it our interest, perhaps, to assure the public that the Eastern Transportation Company is under the management of a discreet and competent Board of Directors, and is rapidly recovering from its temporary embarrassments."

"But in what way," said Mr. Tracey, "are the columns of influential journals rendered subservient to such projects?"

"There are secrets in all professions," replied the broker, with a benevolent smile, "and ours is not without its mysteries."

"Money! money!" remarked the merchant, gruffly.

"Yes, money is the grand lever, Mr. Tracey. But it requires skilful handling to move, successfully, with a lever, a stone wall or a bubbling fountain. The coarseness of open bribery is no longer tolerated, except by harlots and policemen."

"The result is the same."

"We gain our ends," said Mortimer, gravely, "by skill and concerted action. Success embellishes the most splendid combination, and redeems the most desperate venture."

The old merchant placed the schedule in his pocket-book and left the broker to contemplate his calculations. The remainder of the day was consumed in the transaction of business.

It was nearly nightfall when Owen Tracey returned to his residence. He was fatigued and exhausted. After refreshing himself with two or three cups of black tea, he retired to his sitting apartment. The evening was passed in the examination of the contents of an old trunk, which he drew from a recess underneath his writing desk. There were numerous packages of letters and papers tied with red tape, and labeled on the outside wrapper with a general description of their contents. The merchant examined the packages, carefully sorted them, and replaced them in the trunk. At intervals he separated from the package under his inspection, a folded letter or other document and deposited it in his desk.

As the hour of ten was proclaimed by a brass clock that stood upon the mantle-piece, Owen Tracey closed the lid of the old leather

trunk, and discontinued the investigation of its contents. He left his writing-desk and flung himself, overcome with weariness, into a large arm-chair. There he sat in a sullen revery, the elbow of his right arm resting upon the back of the chair, and his cheek reposing on the open palm of his hand.

The clock struck eleven—twelve—one—two.

At a quarter past two o'clock, the turning of a key was distinctly heard, and, almost immediately, the opening of the outer door and the sound of footsteps in the hall. The merchant rose quickly—took a portable lamp from his writing-desk, advanced and opened the door of his apartment. The rays of the lamp shone brightly upon the flushed countenance of the younger Tracey.

"Come in, Alfred," said Owen Tracey. "I have been waiting for you."

The young man hesitated an instant, and then entered the apartment with an air of wonder and surprise.

"You are keeping late hours," said Alfred Tracey inquiringly.

The elder brother frowned.

"The devil, Owen; don't get in a passion at this time of night!"

The younger Tracey fumbled in his vest pocket and drew forth a small package of bank notes, out of which he selected one and extended it toward the merchant. "There is your hundred dollar note. I made a nest egg of it, and hatched a nice little brood of chickens. It was, I admit, a forced loan, but rather a good joke."

"And your language to me—was that a joke, too?" inquired Owen Tracey, coldly.

"Ha! I touched you there. You did not imagine that I was acquainted with that trifling peccadillo of yours."

"Scoundrel!" vociferated the elder brother, his assumed calmness and self-possession vanishing before the malignant sarcasm of the younger.

"Your vocabulary abounds to much in coarse, vulgar epithets, my dear brother."

"Alfred—hear me!" said Owen Tracey, with a terrific expression of countenance. "I have waited for you to night, because I could not, would not, sleep until I had informed you of my serious determination. Your conduct toward me has convicted you of the most despicable meanness, the most shameful ingratitude. No man, unless his soul had been sunk in the lowest depths of perdition, could have shown such malignity. I look upon you with utter loathing."

"This is Satan rebuking sin, with a vengeance," replied Alfred

Tracey, with assumed levity of manner; but he evidently winced beneath the stern, caustic language of his brother.

"I care not what you think, what you suspect, what you know," said the elder Tracey, with a steady, unflinching gaze. "You have been insolent and ungrateful—impudently so. For months have I fed you, and clothed you, and supplied you with the means of indulging your depraved tastes. I will do it no longer. You must leave my house."

"*Must?* Do you know whom you threaten?"

"Alfred, do not provoke me," said the old merchant, trembling with emotion. "I am not unmindful of the blood which runs in your veins, and I assure you that I do not desire your worldly ruin. This very day I have made an arrangement with Messrs. Barstow and Rodman, by which you may receive the appointment of supercargo to Canton, under my guaranty. The vessel will sail in ten days. If you choose to accept this appointment, you can remain here until the departure of the vessel, and I will provide you a suitable outfit."

"You wish to get rid of me—to get me out of the city," replied the young man suspiciously.

"I do."

A smile of malicious triumph was visible in Alfred Tracey's countenance.

"But not from fear, Alfred—from disgust and abhorrence."

"And suppose that I should refuse to go, knowing my advantage over you in the matter of the will—knowing further——"

Owen approached the young man, and said in a low hissing whisper: "If you refuse to go, I will ring for my servants, and order them to thrust you out of the house to-night—this night!"

"You dare not!" replied Alfred Tracey, with a glance of contemptuous defiance.

The merchant laid his hand upon the bell handle.

"Well, well, Owen," said the young man, with a laugh, "I perceive that you dare do any thing when your blood is up. Don't ring, my dear brother; I accept your liberal offer. In truth, you are playing unawares into my hands, for there are special reasons which render the prospect of a sea voyage at this time by no means disagreeable."

"I shall keep my promise, notwithstanding your unprincipled and heartless conduct."

"No preaching, for God's sake. We understand each other, at last. You attempted to tyrannize over me, as you do over others; you

employed bitter and insulting language, you refused me a trifling loan of money, coarsely, harshly, vituperatively. I resisted, and retorted upon you. The die is cast between us, Owen—we are foes!”

“Foes, Alfred?—true, true.”

“On second thoughts, I will keep this note,” said the younger Tracey, returning the bill to his vest pocket, and gazing intently upon the merchant’s countenance, “as a portion of the hush money I expect from you.”

Owen Tracey advanced a step or two with clenched fists, his teeth grating with violent passion. By a strong effort, however, he restrained himself, and said in a low tone:

“Leave me!”

“This interview is not of my seeking, and I have no wish to prolong it. Good night, and pleasant dreams.”

As the young man ascended the stairs toward his bed-chamber, he repeated several times:

“I will be even with him yet!”

CHAPTER III.

THE LIBRARY—THE DETECTED GAMBLERS.



WHEN Alfred Tracey entered the breakfast saloon, on the succeeding morning, he found only a domestic in attendance.

"Quite late, Margy, am I not?" he remarked.

"Breakfast is waiting for you, Mr. Alfred," replied Margaret, a stout, healthy country girl, employed as a cook in the family. "Mr. and Mrs. Tracey left the table half an hour ago; but I have kept a dish of hot coffee for you, and some nice buttered toast."

"Thank you, Margy."

The young man took a seat at the breakfast table. He ate, sparingly, an egg or two and a bit of toast, and leisurely sipped his coffee. He was

reserved and thoughtful. The expression of his features was indicative of mental uneasiness.

Notwithstanding the gloomy aspect of the weather out of doors, his toilet manifested the utmost care and attention.

From the breakfast saloon Alfred Tracey proceeded to the door of an apartment in the second story. He tapped lightly at the door and was instantly admitted. Mrs. Tracey was sitting near a small table, the surface of which was covered with books and portfolios of prints and engravings. The apartment was small, having two sides occupied with shelves and a choice collection of standard works in the modern languages, and containing, beside, a carpet, a table, several chairs, and a number of choice engravings, elegantly framed, hanging from the walls.

"Good morning, Mrs. Tracey," said the young man. "This damp, arizzling day must be my excuse for late rising, and for intruding upon you."

"You are welcome to my study, Alfred," replied Mrs. Tracey, with a serene expression of countenance. "As regards your late rising, you have, perhaps, a better excuse than the weather."

"My entrance disturbed you last night?" said Alfred Tracey inquiringly.

"I heard loud voices in Mr. Tracey's apartment at a late hour of the night," observed the lady, gravely. "Was there an altercation between your brother and yourself?"

"There *were* some sharp words, certainly."

"Do not quarrel with your brother, Alfred. He is hasty and violent in his temper, but you are the younger and should not retort with bitterness. I am deeply interested in ascertaining if the altercation was on my behalf?"

The young man hesitated to reply.

"It is as I feared," continued Mrs. Tracey, with increasing gravity. "The past cannot be recalled, whatever may be the extent of my pain and mortification. But if you really value my friendship, you will abstain hereafter from the indelicacy of any interference between my husband and myself. I act on fixed principles, in all my relations to others, which I cannot suffer to be infringed by mistaken zeal or kindness. Excuse me, Alfred, for this necessary freedom."

"You need not fear any repetition of my quarrel with Owen," said the younger Tracey, humbly—"especially as I am on the point of undertaking a perilous sea-voyage."

"A sea-voyage, Alfred?"

"Yes," replied the young man. "I am weary of idling about New York, and I have accepted the post of supercargo to Canton."

"It affords me sincere pleasure to hear that you have obtained active employment, even at a distance from your home and friends. At your time of life every man should be engaged in some useful and profitable occupation."

"I sail in ten days."

"So early!" exclaimed Mrs. Tracey, in a tone of surprise.

"My departure is indeed sudden and, in some respects, painful. —I leave behind me, home, friends, the pleasures of society, the enjoyments of a city life."

"You will soon overcome these feelings. Your nature is ardent

and enterprising, and will exert itself in a career of honorable exertion if you acquire the mastery over your inclinations and passions."

"A difficult task."

"Difficult, but not impossible. Self-control is the first requisite of greatness. To him who has conquered his own spirit, all other triumphs are easy."

"I perceive, my dear sister, from the tone of your remarks, that you have some distrust of me. This distrust is founded upon a just appreciation of my mental qualities. I am rash, impetuous, excitable."

"The knowledge of your faults will the better enable you to correct them."

"You puzzle me greatly," said Alfred Tracey, with a peculiar smile. "You are free from concealment and hypocrisy, and yet I am not deceived by your apparent coldness of manner. Sentiment—enthusiasm—passion—all are yours."

"They exist, perhaps, in every human soul," observed Mrs. Tracey, slightly confused.

"In mine," replied the young man, "they have inspired a restless craving for excitement, which has at times driven me into follies and vices."

"It is unwise, Alfred."

"My judgment does not yield implicitly to yours. The hope of happiness is the source of human exertion."

"The life of a true man, or a true woman, is a continued struggle between reason and passion. Happiness does not spring from indulgence."

"But there are natures whose impulses are irresistible. In mine, among other powerful desires, is an insatiable thirst for affection and tenderness. Will it condemn me in your eyes if I confess that the hope of quenching this thirst has tempted me even into the haunts of profligacy and vice?"

"It is not for me to condemn you," replied Mrs. Tracey, seriously; "but you will find it impossible to derive the gratification of such feelings from the society of unworthy objects."

"I know it," replied the young man, eagerly; "yet how can I hope to meet with a being whose sympathies will entirely correspond with mine?"

Mrs. Tracey remarked, with a pleasant smile, "You are yet young, Alfred."

"Ah! do not mock me," exclaimed Alfred Tracey, with a flushed

countenance, and a rapid, impressive articulation. "I have never found a human being to whom I dared confide the most sacred emotions of my heart. Such a being I should love, cherish, idolize. And yet my love would be controlling, exacting, merciless. I should demand every pulsation of the heart, every thought of the soul. I should be jealous of the beauty and majesty of nature, of the ceremony and kindly intercourse of society; for I should pant to exist perpetually in the atmosphere of love, and to revel in the sunshine of tenderness. This has been my dream of delight, even when I have seemed most wild and reckless."

"Why not seek to realize it?" said Mrs. Tracey, in reply.

"How? where?"

"There are thousands of persons in the world whose desires are as ardent, whose souls are as exacting as yours."

"You comprehend me, then?" said the young man, with a beaming countenance. "You have dreamed, like me, of a life which should be love. Ah! pardon me," he continued, as Mrs. Tracey withdrew her eyes from his fiery glance, and turned her face aside covered with blushes—"pardon me, if I have torn away the veil from your heart."

Mrs. Tracey recovered herself instantly, and replied with calmness: "The question is not of me, or of my feelings."

At that moment the door of the library was opened by a servant.

"Well, Thomas?"

"A gentleman wishes to see Mr. Alfred Tracey."

"Fred. Willoughby, I presume," said the young man, rising and addressing Mrs. Tracey. "Last evening I made a partial engagement to spend the morning with him, but I hardly expected him in such disagreeable weather."

Alfred Tracey bowed respectfully, and withdrew to join his visitor in the hall.

"So, Willoughby, after a night's sleep, you are still determined to seek revenge on our southern friends."

"You make shrewd guesses, Alfred," replied Frederick Willoughby.

"The announcement of your name recalled at once the challenge of Captain Harcourt. Though but little of a Yankee, I guessed, instantly, that you had armed yourself for the contest like a knight of true valor."

"You are right," said Willoughby, laughing; "and now to the field."

The young men left Owen Tracey's residence, arm in arm. The promenade was by no means agreeable. A chilly, north-east wind

had commenced blowing during the night, and the air was filled with a thick, drizzling mist, that defied the shelter of umbrellas. The pavements were wet and muddy. Every thing looked uncomfortable—the streets, the shops, the straggling pedestrians; the cabs and omnibuses with their lean, plodding horses and sulky drivers; even the gilt-lettered sign-boards, and the magnificent plate-glass windows, had a dull, heavy, unattractive appearance.

At the distance of eighty or ninety yards from the corner of Chambers-street and Broadway stood a handsome three story brick building, devoted to the mysterious rites of the sporting gentry. Alfred Tracey and his companion entered the club-house without ringing, and passed up stairs to a large room in the second story.

The apartment was richly furnished. The floor was covered with a three-ply Brussels carpet of an elegant pattern. Half a dozen large mirrors, with carved gilt frames, and as many fine oil paintings by celebrated masters, were suspended from the walls. The chairs and sofas were of mahogany, stuffed with mohair. Beneath a painting of the Graces, by an Italian master, stood a magnificent sideboard, nine or ten feet in length.

Upon this sideboard an excellent lunch was hospitably provided for morning visitors. There were several dishes of meat and poultry, pineapple cheese, Bologna sausages, soda crackers, fresh rolls, and two or three varieties of fruit. Decanters of brandy, gin and other liquors; bottles of Sherry and Madeira; pitchers of iced water and empty glasses, were ranged behind the more solid refreshments.

Tracey and his companion partook slightly of the lunch, and then advanced toward a small group at the upper end of the room. Eight or ten well-dressed persons, of gentlemanly appearance, were assembled round a faro table and were betting heavily against the bank. The table itself was constructed of mahogany, in a finished style of workmanship. All its appurtenances were elegant and costly. The counters were of ivory, beautifully colored and stamped with figures to determine their representative value.

Their appearance was greeted with a slight nod of recognition by several of the players. Chairs were offered them, but they remained standing in the vicinity of the table. While thus engaged in watching the events of the game a small spare man in the dress of a waiter approached them. He wore green goggles, and spoke with a peculiar, indescribable drawl:

“Captain Harcourt and Mr. Orme are playing at cribbage in the card-room.”

"We'll join them, at once," said Alfred Tracey, turning to his companion.

The young men left the apartment and proceeded up another flight of stairs to a room in the third story. Upon entering the door they beheld two persons seated on opposite sides of a mahogany card-table, with a cribbage board lying between them. The players threw down their cards as the young men appeared, and rose to exchange salutations.

"Upon my word, I am glad you have come," said one of the players, a tall, gentlemanly personage, with prepossessing features, black glossy whiskers, and a long curling mustach. "I am no match for Harry, this morning, at cribbage."

"Your favorite, fortune, has jilted you, captain," replied Henry Orme, with a low chuckle. The speaker was a short, thick-set man, with an ill-favored countenance and a decided squint of the eyes.

"Not a bit of it, Harry; only a little caprice of hers," rejoined the captain: "but I'll give up the game to you. What a deuced disagreeable day," he continued, addressing Alfred Tracey.

"Yes," said the young man, "a promenade in Broadway, at present, is as bad as a run of ill-luck."

"Do you think so?" remarked the captain, with a keen, searching glance; "we'll test your philosophy this morning. Waiter!"

The man who had accosted Tracey and Willoughby in the lower apartment presented himself.

"Ha! a new face," continued Captain Harcourt. "What is your name, waiter?"

"James, sir."

"Well, James; arrange the table properly, and bring new cards."

The waiter obeyed the orders of the captain promptly and quietly.

The gentlemen seated themselves around the table, and Henry Orme commenced shuffling the cards.

"Now, James—a thimbleful of brandy and water to stiffen my nerves," said Captain Harcourt. "Tracey—Willoughby—I would recommend it to you, as a specific against cold and rheumatism. Deal, Harry. They tell me the racing was splendid, yesterday, on the Island. I promised Colonel Johnson, positively, that I would be there; but I was obliged to disappoint him. He will lecture me with a vengeance, for he always keeps an engagement himself, and he expects it in others. He is a devilish good fellow, Harry."

"The best man south of Mason and Dixon's," replied Henry Orme.

Captain Harcourt's loquacity soon gave way before the interest ex-

cited by the events of the game. There was little conversation between the parties, except in the technical language of play. At regular intervals of about half an hour, the waiter entered the apartment to ascertain if his services were required. Although seeming to take no interest whatever in the game, he sometimes lingered near the players, fascinated, as it were, by the heaps of gold and bank notes lying before them.

During an hour or two the scales of fortune were almost evenly balanced; but, as the day advanced, Frederick Willoughby began to lose heavily. His prudence deserted him amid his reverses. As he continued to lose, he bet more and more freely.

It happened at length that a spirited contest arose between Captain Harcourt and Willoughby. The amount of money upon the table was already considerable when Willoughby threw down a bank note, remarking quietly:

“One hundred more.”

“Two hundred better,” was the response of Captain Harcourt.

The young man looked hastily at his cards, and laying them upon the table, with the pictures downward, drew a small wallet from his coat-pocket. He took out several bank notes and flung them carelessly upon the pile in the middle of the table.

“Five hundred more.”

“You bet largely upon three kings,” Mr. Willoughby, interposed the waiter, with his peculiar drawl.

The players turned their faces toward the speaker in wonder and astonishment, and Willoughby exclaimed, somewhat angrily:

“What does this mean?”

“It means, sir,” said the man, respectfully, “that you might lay your cards with the pictures up as properly as to spread them before you in that manner. You are playing with advantage cards.”

“Advantage cards?” said Willoughby, inquiringly.

“Certainly, sir,” replied the waiter, with a quick motion, seizing the pack of cards upon the table, and running them off rapidly, with the faces downward. “Turn them after me, Mr. Willoughby: six of hearts—queen of diamonds—four of clubs—nine of clubs—ace of spades.”

Thus he ran through the pack, Frederick Willoughby following his movements with awakened curiosity and kindling suspicions. The countenances of the other players revealed the most contradictory emotions.

“Why have you furnished a party of gentlemen with such cards as these?” demanded Willoughby, with dignity.

"I did not furnish them."

"Who then?"

"Perhaps Captain Harcourt can explain," said the man, with an emphatic drawl.

"Liar and puppy!" shouted Captain Harcourt, his eyes flashing angrily: "where is your master, fellow?"

The waiter quietly removed the green goggles from his eyes, and gazed upon the speaker with an expression of hatred and contempt.

"Jim Fogle!" muttered Captain Harcourt.

The man smiled, and turning to Frederick Willoughby and Alfred Tracey, remarked: "Young gentlemen, you have been deceived in your associates; permit me to introduce to you Captain Harcourt, alias John Harker, alias Black Jack, and Mr. Henry Orme, alias squint-eyed Harry—gentlemen well known to our fraternity."

Willoughby started to his feet, with a sense of inexpressible contempt and abhorrence. "Let us be gone, Tracey, we are among cheats."

The other players rose likewise from the table. The detected swindlers vainly strove to brave the exposure.

"The man is a liar," Captain Harcourt attempted to say.

"Captain—Harry—give it up," said Jim Fogle, quietly. "It's no go. Did I not promise you, last December, when you served me that shabby trick with Sam Stevens, that I would be even with you? Noise and bluster is useless, here. Don't I know that you are a couple of as arrant cowards as draw breath in the city! I have had my revenge, and am willing to say quits: quits shall it be?" inquired Fogle, with a sneer.

Either from policy or fear the men made no reply.

In the meantime, Frederick Willoughby was moving toward the door, followed by his companion, Tracey, who was earnestly remonstrating with him.

"I will go, Alfred," said Willoughby, with determination.

"Not till they have disgorged."

"They are cheats, common swindlers," said the other; "I will have nothing to do with them."

"Go, then," exclaimed Alfred Tracey, "and leave me to deal with them. They shall disgorge the money they have won from us, and account for their letters of introduction to me, or I will hand them over to the police."

"As you please, Tracey."

Frederick Willoughby left the house with a firm resolution never

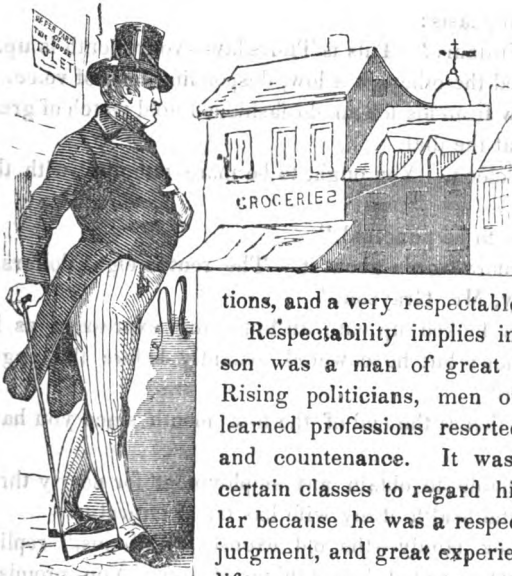
to expose himself a second time to so mortifying an adventure. His feelings toward Alfred Tracey were insensibly affected by the scene which had occurred. Through his agency, however innocent, he had consorted, during a portion of two days, with swindlers and cheats.

The drizzling rain had entirely ceased, though the sky was still dark and cloudy. The young man did not proceed directly homeward. In the course of a somewhat circuitous walk he turned into Orange-street and pursued his way toward Canal-street. Glancing at the stoop of an old wooden building, which he was approaching, he perceived in the doorway the person of Mr. Joshua Grayson, a respectable and wealthy resident of his own neighborhood.

Willoughby bowed, and passed on.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LANDLORD—DESPAIR.



R. Joshua Grayson was a very respectable man. He possessed gray hairs, an open, affable demeanor, a portly, imposing person, very numerous and respectable connections, and a very respectable fortune.

Respectability implies influence. Mr. Grayson was a man of great influence in society. Rising politicians, men of business, and the learned professions resorted to him for advice and countenance. It was fashionable among certain classes to regard his opinions as oracular because he was a respectable man, of sound judgment, and great experience in the affairs of life.

But Mr. Joshua Grayson was also a very charitable man. He was a life member of the American Bible Society—a director of the Public School Society—a trustee of the New York Dispensary—vice president of the Society for Ameliorating the condition of the Poor, and a contributor to many other charities. His name was associated in the public mind with works of liberality and benevolence. His contributions were recorded in the newspapers and religious periodicals of the day. He was indeed a charitable man.

Mr. Grayson maintained his position at the entrance of the old wooden building for several minutes after the disappearance of Frederick Willoughby in the direction of Canal-street. He looked repeatedly up and down the narrow street with a growing expression of impatience

on his benevolent features. At length he raised his ivory-headed cane from the stoop with a quick, nervous motion, and was apparently about to take his departure, when, upon turning to the right, he saw the figure of a man approaching with slow steps and a melancholy, dejected air. He beckoned to him with his cane, and the man advanced with more rapid strides, yet without any change in the despairing aspect of his countenance.

"This is Thursday, Williams," said Joshua Grayson, as the man came near him.

Williams did not make an immediate response, and Grayson observed, with more emphasis:

"Do you hear, Williams? This is Thursday—your month is up."

"Yes, sir," replied the other, in a low, desponding tone of voice.

The landlord drew from his fob an old-fashioned gold watch of great value, and glanced at the dial.

"It is past two o'clock. You ought to be more punctual with the rent."

"Yes, sir, I ought to be punctual."

"Well, well, no more words about it. The rent is eight dollars."

"I have no money, Mr. Grayson."

Andrew Williams looked up with an imploring expression as he made this declaration; but he cowered instantly before the angry glance of his landlord.

"No money, and this at the end of the first month since you have occupied my house."

"I have been unable to obtain any employment for nearly three weeks, and of late the health of my wife has failed entirely."

"No work—a sick family—the old excuses, Williams," replied Grayson, testily. "I expected better things of you. You promised to pay your rent punctually, and I let you in without security, because I judged from appearances that you were an honest, industrious man."

"Nobody has ever dared to say any thing to the contrary," said Williams, firmly.

"Appearances are now against you. You are out of work and have no money to pay your rent."

"I assure you that I have sought employment faithfully, with a determination to do any thing by which I might gain an honest livelihood."

"Fine words—fine words, but you can't bamboozle me with your nonsense. In such a busy hive as the city of New York, the man who is willing to work can get something to do. Within a month I have

obtained good situations, in respectable mercantile houses, for three young men—distant relations of mine from the country. Don't tell me that there is not abundance of employment for every man in the community."

"If you will furnish me with a job," said Williams, eagerly, "you shall see how willingly I will labor, and for the lowest wages."

"I am out of the turmoil of business," said Joshua Grayson, coldly, "and have no employment for you. In regard to the rent you owe me, I must do as well as I can. The laws are made in these times to favor all kinds of roguery, and landlords have no rights. Pay me five dollars, Williams, and I will wait for the balance until next month."

"I cannot do it, Mr. Grayson. I have not a cent."

"Your conduct is abominable," said the landlord, striking his cane heavily upon the wooden stoop.

"I tell you that I have not earned a shilling during more than two weeks, and that my family are absolutely in want of the necessaries of life. Surely," continued Williams, with the natural pathos of suffering, "you will exercise compassion toward a poor man."

"Williams, I am a friend of the poor," replied Grayson, pompously. "Every man that knows me will testify that I am a friend of the poor. But I am not a friend of idleness and knavery—not I. How can I extenuate your conduct? What have you done to render yourself an object of compassion? You knew that your rent was becoming due for the house that sheltered you and your family, and yet you are not prepared to meet it. I have no more respect for you than for a common swindler."

"Your reproofs are hard to bear."

"Hard to bear, indeed. Pay your rent, sir, and then you can talk and act independently. Look at your neighbor, Simonson. He is a coarse, blunt creature, and finds fault with the air of an alderman. I overlook these trifles in him, for he has lived in my house upward of two years and never disappointed me. He is an honest man."

"Ah! Mr. Grayson, if you knew what a dreadful business he pursues."

"Business? What have I to do with his business? I meddle with no man's business. Any thing is better than idleness."

"Do you really think so?" inquired Andrew Williams, glancing at his landlord.

"I have no time to give you advice," replied the other. "You have already detained me half an hour for nothing. You are in a bad

way, Williams—in a dishonest way. I have no opinion of that kind of honesty which does not pay one's debts."

"What I can't do, I can't," said Williams, sullenly. "I can't pay debts without money."

"No impudence, sir," said the portly landlord, bringing down his cane heavily. "My resolution is taken. You must pay your rent by to-morrow noon, or you must leave my house, bag and baggage. I will not harbor idle, worthless fellows like you."

"I know not where to go at such short notice."

"Is it not enough that I lose my rent?" exclaimed Joshua Grayson, angrily; "do you really object to leaving my premises?"

"My family," stammered the man.

"Your family? Yes; I went up stairs to look after you, and I saw the condition of your family. It is a burning disgrace to a strong, healthy man like you to be so careless about their welfare. Your children are not even decently dressed."

"True enough," murmured Williams, dejectedly.

"What will become of them if you bring them up in this way, without education or habits of industry?"

"Things did not go on so badly until my wife was taken down."

"Your wife is not so very ill: it would do her good to stir about a little, and attend to her domestic concerns. So far as I see, you are all suffering from incurable laziness."

Under the impulse of momentary excitement, Andrew Williams seized his landlord by the collar of the coat, as if to hurl him by main force from the stoop.

"How dare you?" exclaimed Grayson, elevating his cane.

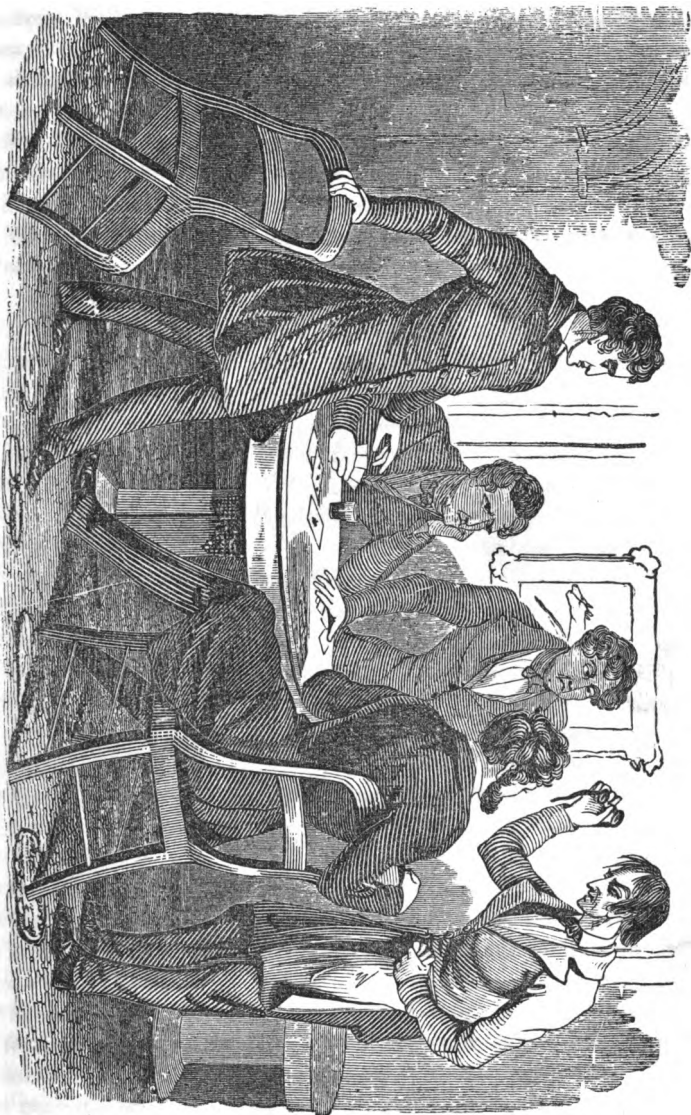
Williams relinquished his grasp, and said humbly: "I was hasty, Mr. Grayson. I don't mind what you say about me, but I cannot bear to hear you speak against my wife. She has been an angel to me."

"You are an impudent fellow, Williams, and richly deserve to be hauled up at the police office. I do not want revenge, however. I want nothing but my rights. Your conduct has been such as to deserve little forbearance, and I tell you once for all, that you must pay your rent by to-morrow morning, or I will clear the house of you. You may think yourself lucky, too, if you are not severely punished for this gross assault. Do you understand me?"

"I will do every thing in my power," replied Williams, "to obtain the rent for you: and I trust you will pardon my rudeness."

"We shall see," rejoined the landlord, as he descended from the

THE SECRET ORDER OF THE SEVEN.



JIM FOGLE'S REVENGE UPON CAPTAIN HARBOUT.—Page 143.



stoop and proceeded along the narrow street with an air of offended dignity.

Andrew Williams entered the front door and passed up stairs with a heavy heart. His wife received him with a pleasant smile. She was sitting upright on her miserable couch, supported by her daughter Jane.

"Mr. Grayson was here half an hour ago," said Mrs. Williams to her husband. "He inquired very kindly after you."

"I have seen him," replied the man, in a low voice.

"What is the matter, Andrew?" inquired the woman, with a look of alarm.



"Mr. Grayson came for his rent, Patty. It is due to-day."

"He will wait upon us, Andrew, till things take a better turn. He is a kind, charitable man, as I have heard—very friendly to poor folks. He will wait."

"Perhaps—he will," said Williams, hesitatingly. His regard for the feelings of his wife impelled him to conceal from her the details of the scene with his landlord. He sat down quietly upon the wooden stool near the window, and buried his face in his hands.

The invalid gazed at the drooping form of her husband, and inquired tenderly :

"Are you sick, Andrew?"

"Sick at heart, Patty," replied the man, with a burst of feeling. "Still no work—no means of support. Every thing goes wrong."

"Do not repine at the dispensations of Providence. This world is a world of trial and of sorrow to all. The Saviour of men had not where to lay his head."

"It is useless to disguise it from you," said Williams, bitterly, "life is becoming a curse to me."

"Andrew!"

"I have thought of it this morning with tears in my eyes," continued Williams. "You were very foolish to marry me, Patty, and to subject yourself to such a fate as this. You must have regretted it many, many times."

"Do not be unjust to yourself or to me," said Mrs. Williams. "You have regarded my wishes and my feelings above all worldly things, and some times I have feared," she continued, with a serious expression, "that you loved me, a frail creature, more than your heavenly Father and Redeemer. It is true that poverty and sickness and care have borne heavily upon us."

"Yes, upon you," exclaimed the man. "You whom I separated from rich friends and a comfortable home."

"I was a disinherited child, dependent upon the bounty of relatives, whose pride of family was the sole incentive to a cold and heartless support. I judge from experience, Andrew, when I assure you that the bitterness of poverty cannot compare with the anguish of a spirit bereft of kindness and sympathy. Since I became your wife, my heart has been a fountain of overflowing tenderness."

Andrew Williams rose from the low stool and folded his wife to his bosom with a depth of feeling which seemed foreign to the quiet, subdued nature of the man.

"And you do not blame me?"

"There are no reproaches on my lips or in my heart," said the woman, gently clasping the hand of her husband in hers. "I have sometimes wished for all our sakes that you possessed more boldness and determination in your struggles with the world; but no reproaches, Andrew."

"Could your health be restored, Patty, there would be some hope for me."

"Do not encourage false hopes, Andrew. I shall not be here long."

"There is yet a chance, Simonson says," replied Williams. "I must have a talk with him. The chance of your recovery is worth

any hazard, however presumptuous or daring. My spirit is rising, Patty, and I will make a stronger and bolder effort than ever."

The invalid raised her eyes with an expression of surprise toward the face of the speaker. A moment afterward Andrew Williams released himself from the gentle clasp of his wife and left the chamber. He sought the apartment of Hugh Simonson.

The robber was dosing on a common wooden settee, but the light rap of his neighbor Williams awoke him. Raising himself partially upon one elbow, he exclaimed, in a coarse voice, "Come in."

As Williams entered the room, he perceived that the integuments of Simonson's left eye were black and swollen, and that a dirty silk handkerchief was tied around his head.

"Is it you, Williams?" inquired the robber.

"Yes, Mr. Simonson," replied his visiter. "I have come to advise with you a little about matters and things. You seem to be hurt though?"

"I got a confounded fall a night or two ago," said Simonson, gruffly. "It is pretty much over now, except the black marks. How is your wife to-day, Williams?"

"A little stronger like."

"Keep her mind quiet and give her plenty of nice things, and she will soon get around again."

"That is what I want to talk about with you. I would do any thing in the world to raise Patty from her sick bed, but how am I to get nice things for her without money?"

"You can't, of course."

"And then as to keeping her mind quiet under the circumstances, it is out of the question. With all our troubles, landlord Grayson has been here to-day after his rent, and threatens to turn us out of house and home unless it is paid to-morrow. I have not told my wife of it; for though she is as patient as a lamb, I know it would worry her."

"There, Williams, you see a little of the sympathy of rich landlords for poor tenants. Old Grayson is a tight one. You have legal rights as a tenant, but if he thrusts you into the street, what redress can you obtain against a man of his wealth and influence? You must pay the rent."

"I have no money, Mr. Simonson."

"You must get it. It might be the death of your poor bed-ridden wife to move her at this time to another house. Besides, where would you take her?"

"I don't know," replied Williams, sadly.

"You must raise the money for old Grayson."

"But how?" demanded Andrew Williams, with a despairing glance at the robber. "I have no employment."

Hugh Simonson rose from the settee, approached his visiter, and laid his big brawny hand heavily upon his shoulder.

"Now look you, Williams," said the robber, "I won't be trifled with in this matter. If you are serious in asking my advice and possess the courage of a worried sheep, I can put you in the way of raising the money you need so badly, and a pocketful besides."

"Are you sure of that?"

"So sure of it, that if you will agree to submit to my guidance for one night, to follow only where I lead, Williams, I will lend you the money at once to pay your landlord."

"Where will you take me, Mr. Simonson?" asked Williams, with a despairing glance at the robber.

"Into the houses of some of the cursed aristocrats, who have more money than they really want. That is the plain English of it, if you dare."

"Will you, indeed, lend me the money for my rent—eight dollars?"

"At a minute's notice, Williams," said the robber, emptying one of his pockets upon a cherry table near him, and quickly separating a small heap of specie. "There you have it."

"I will go with you," replied Andrew Williams, with determination, "just for once, Mr. Simonson—just for the sake of my wife and children."

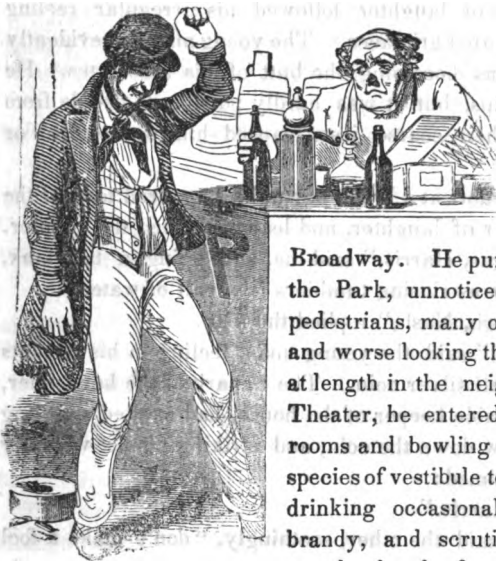
"Take the money, neighbor," said Simonson to his visiter, "and be ready to turn out to-night, if I call upon you."

With trembling hands Williams gathered up the money, and concealed it about his person.

Hugh Simonson removed the silk handkerchief from his head, and taking his hat and cane, accompanied his neighbor into the entry, adding, as they parted, "Mum's the word, Williams."

CHAPTER V.

THE DEVIL'S TRAP—TREACHERY.



ASSING through the front door into the street, Hugh Simonson proceeded at a moderate pace down Orange-street to the corner of White-street, and thence to

Broadway. He pursued his course toward the Park, unnoticed among the crowd of pedestrians, many of them worse dressed and worse looking than himself. Arriving at length in the neighborhood of the Park Theater, he entered successively the bar-rooms and bowling saloons which form a species of vestibule to that school of morals, drinking occasionally a glass of gin or brandy, and scrutinizing unobtrusively, yet closely, the features of their visitors.

The object of his search was James Fogle. Not finding him in any of the public resorts, he turned into Ann-street, and directed his steps toward a story and a half building on the south side of the street, at a distance of two hundred yards from Broadway. There was something in the external appearance of the building, mean, desolate, and uncomfortable, which gave unfavorable indications of the character of its inmates. The window-shutters were partially closed, but through the interstices were perceptible dirty panes of glass, and indistinctly the outlines of moving figures. Simonson approached the front door and opened it without knocking; he passed into a narrow entry, and thence through a side door standing half open, into a small apartment fragrant with the fumes of brandy and tobacco. The walls were dirty,

the floor absolutely covered with mud and tobacco spittle. A narrow wooden counter was placed in the south-east corner of the room, upon which, and behind which, were bottles filled with a variety of liquors, and a tray of common glass tumblers. Several coarse prints, in wooden frames, were suspended from the walls. The room was occupied by a group of persons, mostly young men of reckless, dissolute habits.

As Simonson entered, he perceived in the center of the circle of smokers, a youth of eighteen or nineteen years of age, attempting to dance a jig to the negro air of "Jim along Josey," whistled by one of the company. Shouts of laughter followed his irregular reeling movements, and his distorted grimaces. The young man had evidently drunk to excess, and was becoming the butt of his associates. He seemed conscious of this, but it was hardly possible to decide from his manner whether their coarse jests caused him amusement or uneasiness.

After an ineffectual effort at a break down, he staggered toward the bar, amid a general roar of laughter, and leaned against the counter.

"Some gin and sugar, Harris," said he, addressing a tall, lank, middle-aged man, who was rinsing tumblers in a pail of water.

"You have had enough, Nash," replied the man.

"I have got a'fip left," said the young man, feeling in his pockets until he extracted a small silver coin. The remark of the bar-tender, who was also the ostensible keeper of the house, had excited a feeling of irritation. He threw down the coin, and striking his fist violently upon the counter, exclaimed:

"I want some gin, Harris."

"Certainly, Jerry," said the other, soothingly, "don't make a fool of yourself."

Harris placed an empty tumbler before the youth, and commenced pouring the liquor from a long-necked, black bottle.

"Say when, Jerry."

Several of his comrades interposed at this moment, with the inquiry:

"Jerry, ain't you going to treat?"

"Treat; no. You are a set of common suckers. When——"

The young man gulped down the liquor at a single draught, and placed the tumbler on the counter; then steadying himself as well as he was able, he fastened his eyes, bloodshot and fiery, upon the countenance of Harris.

"Do you know what they call your cursed hole, about town?" inquired the intoxicated youth, with an attempt at a scornful sneer.

"No, Jerry."

"They call it the Devil's Trap."

"What's that?"

"Did you never read the Newgate Calendar?" stammered the young man.

"No."

"Well, the Devil's Trap, in London, is a low place where thieves and rowdies assemble to drink and skin each other; and this is the Devil's Trap of New York."

"What harm has it ever done you?"

"Harm enough," exclaimed Jerry Nash. "I came here with two dollars, this morning, and now I haven't got one red cent."

"If you don't like it, you needn't stay here."

The pale face of the youth grew red with anger at these words, and he actually seemed to grow sober on the instant.

"Need n't stay! I wish to God that I had never seen the inside of your doors. Need n't stay!"

An associate pulled him by the arm:

"Bob Harris was in fun, Jerry."

"Every shilling that I can earn, or borrow, is thrown away in this miserable hole; and then I am told, I need n't stay."

With a provoking smile, Harris remarked:

"You had better go home to your mother, Jerry."

"And if I do," fiercely replied the young man, "I shall hear her curses upon your head. You will sink yet, Bob Harris, under the bitter curses of heart-broken wives and mothers."

The reckless levity of the party was in a measure silenced by the strange bearing of Jeremiah Nash.

During the progress of this scene, Hugh Simonson remained standing near the entrance of the room. Careless, however, of the remorse or sufferings of others, the robber passed through the midst of the group of spectators, and descended a flight of three or four steps, which led to an adjoining apartment or basement, in the rear of the building. There were assembled a score—perhaps two dozen individuals, varying from eighteen to sixty years of age. The greater number were gathered around a faro table, some as players, others as lookers on. The stakes were generally small, often as low as a shilling or a quarter of a dollar, and rarely exceeding one or two dollars. A young man, well dressed, with dull eyes, and calm, passionless features, dealt the cards from a small tin box, pausing at every turn to gather in the winnings, or pay the losings of the bank. A few of

the players were seated at the table, but the greater portion were standing, and all were eagerly watching the rapid changes of the game. The attention of Simonson was almost instantly diverted from the group around the faro table, by the sound of a smooth, monotonous voice behind him. He turned about and beheld a party of four persons playing bluff at a small square table at the opposite side of the room. The voice belonged to a thin, spare man, sitting with his back toward the robber—and that man was James Fogle.”

Hugh Simonson approached his confederate, and touched him gently with the end of his cane. Fogle gave a nod of recognition, and soon afterward, leaving the card-table, followed the stout robber through the back door into a small yard in the rear of the building.

“I have found you, Jim Fogle, in the nick of time,” remarked Simonson.

“Silence, Hugh, till I look about us; will you never learn to guard against spies and eaves-droppers?”

Fogle examined the premises until he was satisfied that no listeners were in the vicinity.

“Now proceed, and do not talk loudly. Fences may have ears as well as walls.”

“Well, Jim, our work must be done to-night. The sky will be cloudy and dark—just the thing.”

“Are you strong enough, Hugh?” said Fogle, with a quiet, provoking smile, “you lost some blood the other evening.”

“You say this to chafe me,” replied the thief, bitterly. “If I meet that chap again, I will repay him with interest.”

“You will avoid Jack Highflyer, if you regard my counsel, and stick to some trade more profitable than fighting.”

“I don’t want your advice,” muttered Simonson, gruffly.

“Not now, Hugh; but you will, ere long. You are getting continually into scrapes.”

“All this palaver has nothing to do with our job in Bleecker-street,” continued the other, impatiently. “My apprentice, Williams, has just signed the indentures, and, though he has no great pluck, will make an excellent pack-horse. I have promised to break him in to-night.”

“But this is Thursday,” remarked Fogle, with a slight start.

“Thursday—who cares?”

“I cannot go out with you to-night,” said Fogle, in a grave, decided tone.

“Why not?”

“Because, Thursday is a black day with me. Something un-

lucky always turns up against me if I undertake an enterprise on Thursday."

"Ridiculous."

"I have in my memory example upon example, and I shall not tempt fortune to betray me."

"Who cares for fortune?" replied the ruffian, coarsely; "she is a slippery jade at the best, and I don't give her a thought. I have always heard that Friday is an unlucky day, because it is hangman's day; but I do not know why the other days of the week should be unlucky, unless it is because they are wedding days."

"You do not know, nor I either."

"Fogle, this looks like a get off. I did not think you had such a soft spot in your cunning head."

"Jest, or scold, or knock me down, as the boy served you on Tuesday night," replied Fogle, "you will not alter my determination. I have promised myself, with an oath, that I will never try a venture on Thursday."

"What shall be done?"

"Put it off until another evening, or proceed alone."

"I swear, I have a great notion to undertake it, with the assistance of Williams."

"Do it, Simonson. You will do better with him than with me."

"Don't you believe in the thing, Jim Fogle," said the other, with a suspicious glance. "You did not seem so indifferent the other day."

"Wait till I have done," replied Fogle, quietly, "before you start off in a pet. If the treasures of the Bank of England were in question, I would not go out to-night, for I have a presentiment against it. But your plan is a good one, and the night promises finely. I will do this, Hugh; you can go out with your man Williams, and make the trial; if you secure the stuff, bring it to my quarters in Laurens-street, as we agreed. You will find me there, with a good fire in the furnace, and the tools to run the pewter into solid, marketable ingots."

Hugh Simonson, during his speech, stood gazing upon the features of his companion; but the countenance of James Fogle rarely manifested more than his words, unless his object required it.

"Cool and calculating as you are," said the former, after a pause, "you are not in the habit of shirking danger."

"Danger always, Hugh; but not the risk of perilous circumstances. Are you not sharp enough to see the distinction?"

"Not I, and besides, is there any great difference in the luck of the thing, between taking the pewter and blowing the fire?"

"Look you, Simonson, I assure you that I will not lend the turn of a finger to this business till the clock strikes Friday morning. If you don't like my reasons, or if you suspect me of foul play, say so, and the game is up."

"No, Jim Fogle, I have trusted you always, and will now. Whatever others may say, I do not believe you are such a cursed rascal as to abandon or betray a comrade. You will see us, Williams and I, in Laurens-street, before cock crowing."

The ghost of a smile flitted across the demure visage of James Fogle, as he replied :

"Have a care, Hugh, you are apt to be too confident and daring."

The thieves returned to the smoky apartments of the Devil's Trap. James Fogle resumed his seat at the card-table, and Hugh Simonson, passing through the building into Ann-street, directed his footsteps toward the scene of the intended burglary, for the purpose of reconnoitering.

Two hours later, Mark Masters the police officer, and James Fogle, were closeted together in a private apartment at Cronly's Hotel.

"It was a capital thing, Mr. Masters," said Fogle, with a dry laugh, "a capital thing. I went to Colonel Winter and hired myself as a waiter, at fifteen dollars a month, and the moment I set my eyes on the chaps, I knew them like a book."

"Who were they?"

"Black Jack and squint-eyed Harry."

"What, regular jail birds?"

"They were playing a strong game, Mr. Masters. Jack Harker was dressed in tip-top style, and talked large—Harry Orme backing him up in everything. They were fleecing the youngsters, Mr. Tracey and Mr. Willoughby, most beautifully, with advantage cards. I was glad of a chance at them, to settle an old score."

"You caught them cheating?" inquired the police officer.

"It was as open as daylight. They changed the cards at the beginning of the game, and had it all their own way."

"Well, you exposed them?" observed Mark Masters, quietly.

"I did, Mr. Masters. Jack Harker was savage at first, but as soon as I unmasked myself, they knew it was all up with them."

"How did the young men behave?"

"Mr. Willoughby was off at a flash, as soon as he knew the real character of Captain Harcourt and his crony. He acted out and out

like a gentleman. But I tell you, sir, if I am any judge of human nature, there is something wrong about the other young fellow, Mr. Tracey. He staid behind to parley with the detected gamblers, and to make them poney up their winnings. There were high words about letters from the South, and some talk of the police. But it seemed to me that they were shamming it all the while. It is true that Mr. Tracey compelled them to hand over the money which they had won from Mr. Willoughby and himself."

"Nothing wrong in that, Fogle."

"I'll bet sixpence against a rotten apple that he knew the standing of his associates when he sat down to the card-table."

"Likely enough—there are rogues in all stations."

Fogle nodded approvingly.

"You have done well in this affair, Fogle, and are entitled to the reward I promised you, in behalf of my employers."

The police officer produced a large pocket-book from the breast pocket of his coat, and taking therefrom a bank note of the denomination of twenty dollars, presented it to Fogle.

"And now," continued the police officer, with a peculiar glance, "how stands the business with Hugh Simonson?"

"He goes out to-night, Mr. Masters."

"Alone?"

"No; he and one of his neighbors—a man by the name of Williams."

"What is their game?"

"A lot of gold and silver plate at No. 104 Bleecker-street. The plan is well laid, for I had a hand in it myself."

"You are an accomplice?"

"If Hugh Simonson gets off safely with his plunder," said James Fogle, with a significant chuckle, "I shall come in for a share of the proceeds."

"This is honest, Fogle," said the police officer, rising. "You have earned a respite from Sing Sing for a few months; but don't presume too much upon it."

An interval of a quarter of an hour elapsed between the of the police officer and James Fogle from Cronly's hotel

CHAPTER VI.

COQUETRY, OR SOMETHING WORSE.



“You are acting very imprudently, Caroline,” said an elderly woman to Miss Caroline Percy, in a tone of remonstrance.

This remark was made in the progress of a long chit-chat, after dinner, in the drawing-room of Miss Percy’s residence.

“Imprudently,” echoed Miss Percy, with a slight toss of the head.

“And very unwisely.”

“Why, Aunt Percy? I pride myself upon being a

model of prudence and wisdom.”

“Caroline, try to be serious.”

“I will, Aunt Percy,” said the young lady, with a mock effort at gravity, which was belied by the merry mischievous glance of her sparkling eyes.

“What object do you propose to attain by offending William?”

Miss Percy hesitated, while she turned a handsome topaz ring three times round her forefinger.

“I do not seek to offend him.”

“But you well know that he will be seriously offended if he discovers that you receive and encourage the visits of Mr. Frederick Willoughby.”

“He is a jealous fool. I know that,” replied Caroline Percy, quickly.

“You are unreasonable, Caroline,” said Mrs. Percy, adjusting her

neat cap, of Brussels lace. "Besides, if he is of a jealous disposition, there is so much the more probability that he will dislike the course you are pursuing. And for what?"

"Perhaps I shall please Mr. Willoughby, Aunt Percy," replied the young lady, with an arch expression of countenance.

"Please Mr. Willoughby?"

"And what is of infinitely greater importance, perhaps Mr. Willoughby will please me."

"Every word you utter, serves only to confirm me in the opinion that I ought to remonstrate with you. Since your engagement with Mr. Pettigrew, you are not at liberty to try these experiments, in liking and disliking."

"I will prove to the contrary."

"How?"

"By having my own way," said Miss Percy, with a laugh. "Your accomplished niece, Aunt Percy, was not born to be the slave of any man."

"I am sure that William is very attentive and devoted to you. He humors your caprices and defers to your wishes."

"Granted."

"He is good looking—intelligent."

"Granted, dear aunt. I have the catalogue of his good qualities at my fingers' ends; but," continued the speaker, gravely, "he is rather short in stature, has an undignified manner, does not dress in good taste, is always talking of business, has no abundant supply of cash, and does not belong to the circles of the ton."

"Do you mean to sacrifice him?" said Mrs. Percy. in a tone of inquiry.

"I don't know."

"But I protest."

"Don't, dear aunt," said the young lady, placing her hand over Mrs. Percy's mouth; "don't protest until I have had an opportunity of satisfying myself, and of developing my intention more fully to you. I shall not determine hastily, imprudent, unwise and unreasonable as I appear to you."

"There is no resisting you, Caroline, whatever may be your faults. The encouragement of the visits of Mr. Willoughby is not wise, in my estimation; but I understand less fully the cause of the protracted calls of Dr. Everard. You have entirely renewed your health and spirits, so far as I am able to judge."

Oh! that is the best joke in the world," said Miss Percy, with a

loud musical laugh. "Are you aware that I am extremely susceptible?"

"Yes, of nonsense."

"Do you know," continued the young lady, with animation, "that I possess a highly delicate nervous organization, an organization peculiarly subject to moral and mental influences?"

"Are you crazy, Caroline?"

"Doctor Everard assures me that my nervous system is remarkably sensitive, and has been so much interested in me that he has tried a great variety of experiments to develop the strength of my voluntary and involuntary sympathies."

"You are talking Greek to me."

"By no means. I have learned these big words from Doctor Everard, within the last three days."

"Explain."

"The grave, serious, sage old Doctor—how completely I have humbugged him! I read a paragraph in a newspaper sometime since, which intimated that the learned Doctor Everard was a believer in mesmerism. So when he called to see me the other day after my fainting fit, I entertained him with a succession of nervous twitches and spasms, which had no other origin than my desire to mystify him. I perceived him to be slyly engaged in making passes with his hands



—pausing occasionally to fix his dark, piercing eyes upon me. At length I became quiet, and by degrees fell into a calm, unconscious

slumber. The next day the Doctor began to converse with me on the subject, and by virtue of his hints and my native sagacity, I am making wonderful progress in the practical exemplification of the science of Animal Magnetism."

"How dare you practice such an imposition upon a man so eminent and learned?"

"What is his learning worth, if it will not enable him to detect the imposition of a weak unlearned woman? I have a notion that men of genius and talent are easily humbugged; they are so confident of their power, that they think it unnecessary to guard against deception."

"He will be very much displeased with you," said Mrs. Percy, "if he detects your artifices."

"Let me alone for that," replied Caroline Percy, gaily. "He is earnest, simple-minded, full of enthusiasm. I am just the reverse."

"You intend then to prolong this nonsense, under false pretenses of ill health?"

"Just so long, dear aunt, as there is any excitement in the thing. I find a degree of pleasure in playing with the weaknesses of men."

"Can you not live without constant excitement?"

Miss Percy did not make any direct reply to this question, but rising from the ottoman on which she had been seated, she walked several times across the apartment with a thoughtful expression of countenance; then she stopped by the side of the elderly woman, and exclaimed vehemently:

"I wish I was a man!"

"What now?" remarked Mrs. Percy, smiling. "Are you ambitious of wearing a frock-coat and striped breeches?"

"Not for dress, nor for pleasure; but for the excitement of action. I desire to do something, to accomplish something; were it only for the sake of notoriety. What opportunity do the laws of society and the usages of the world afford to a woman? She is expected to cook dinners, nurse babies, and chatter nonsense."

"And you would rather shoot rabbits, spout politics, or fight battles?"

"I would prefer to mingle in the stormy scenes of human life, and to know by experience the emotions which spring from the turmoil of an adventurous existence. Woman, though I be, I cannot, I will not, live and vegetate in idleness and obscurity!"

The conversation between Mrs. Percy and her niece was interrupted by the entrance of a visitor—Frederick Willoughby.

"You are looking quite well to-day, Mrs. Percy," said the young man, advancing toward the ladies.

"As usual, sir," replied the elderly woman, with a gracious smile.

Miss Percy rose from her seat and extended her hand to her visitor. He pressed it gently, and added in a subdued tone :

"And you too, Miss Percy."

"Caroline has lost the appearance of an invalid entirely," remarked Mrs. Percy, "but Doctor Everard still persists in his attentions."

"You know, aunt," said Miss Percy smiling, "that Doctor Everard considers me very nervous and excitable."

"Nervous! A young woman of my day was hardly conscious that she possessed nerves, unless she cut one of her fingers, or became the victim of the tooth-ache. Now, young ladies are almost universally troubled with weak nerves and imaginary languor. This comes of exchanging baking and spinning for poetry and music."

"Oh! Aunt Percy," exclaimed Caroline. "Do not speak contemptuously of my favorite recreations. I delight in music and poetry."

"I second your appeal to the mercy of your aunt," said Frederick Willoughby, bowing slightly. "Your tastes are too elegant to be censured or ridiculed."

"As recreations, I do not object to poetry or music; but a woman should have some occupation beside reading on a sofa, or strumming a guitar; something, anything to banish weak nerves and the blues. Do you not agree with me, Mr. Willoughby?"

"I am not a physician, Mrs. Percy."

"You have succeeded, however," remarked Mrs. Percy, interrupting him, "better than Dr. Everard, in bringing the color to Caroline's pale cheeks, by your advocacy of her cause."

"Aunt," remonstrated the young lady, "it is your absurd attack upon my favorite pursuits which excited me."

"Only nervousness," said Mrs. Percy, laughing. "I will not shock you any more to-day, especially as I have some household duties to perform, that require my immediate attention. Mr. Willoughby will excuse me."

Mrs. Percy left the apartment.

"And now," said Frederick Willoughby, addressing Miss Percy, "as a fitting termination of the argument, I entreat you to sing some of your favorite songs."

"On one condition," replied Caroline Percy, with an entreating glance of her dark eyes, as she moved toward the piano.

"I agree."

"That you will honestly tell me when I have wearied you."

Miss Percy seated herself at the piano and played a delightful French rondo, in brilliant style, after which she sang several airs from operas of Mozart and Rossini. Her voice was a soprano of good intonation, and of great compass and power. The deficiencies of an ordinary musical education were compensated in a remarkable degree by the nicety of her ear. There were no discords, no false cadences in her execution of the most difficult passages of the great masters.

At length she closed her music books, notwithstanding Willoughby's entreaties. She did not, however, rise from the piano. Sweeping the keys more slowly and expressively, she warbled in plaintive, tender strains, several Scotch and Irish ballads. At the conclusion of one of her favorite melodies, she turned toward the young man and encountered his eyes fixed admiringly upon her.

"So you are really fond of music?" inquired Miss Percy, smiling.

"Passionately fond of it."

"You have heard the best singers, of course, the principal singers I mean, at the opera and the theaters?"

"Yes, repeatedly."

"And yet you can listen to me?"

"With greater pleasure, Miss Percy, than I have ever listened to them."

"This you say by way of compliment," observed the lady, "while I have the most grave and serious reasons for ascertaining your real sentiments."

"I assure you that I speak seriously," said Frederick Willoughby.

"The professional singers whom I have heard, possess, many of them, great musical powers, and wonderful brilliancy of execution—the fruits of long study and practice. But I do not listen to them with *empressement*. They tickle the ear, but fail to reach the heart. I cannot banish the conviction that they are acting a part, rather than pouring out the intense emotions of their souls in language that rises far above the sweetest strains of poesy."

"How does this criticism affect me?"

"You are the very reverse of them; not so highly artistical, perhaps, but you sing naturally, with great excellence as regards execution, and decided power over the feelings."

"I will explain myself frankly," said Miss Percy, with a slight degree of embarrassment. "You have been so partial and so complimentary, as to commend in high tones my reading and singing."

By so doing you have involuntarily become an accomplice with my natural vanity in urging me to attempt a theatrical engagement."

"You, Miss Percy, a theatrical engagement!"

"Why are you surprised? Do you think I have no reasonable prospect of success?"

"Are you really in earnest?"

"Really."

"But your aunt. Are there no objections to your scheme except the danger of a failure?"

"I understand you, Mr. Willoughby," replied Miss Percy.

"There are objections on the score of delicacy, which a woman must be prepared to surmount before she can trust herself to the criticisms of a promiscuous audience. There are prejudices, too, against professional actresses and singers, which, however unjust, are unquestionably painful and annoying. Still I am compelled to repeat the question; do you think that I have no reasonable prospect of success?"

"By no means."

"Since I have opened the subject, I will state the principal reason which influences me. The income of my aunt is exceedingly limited, and I am wholly dependent upon her. If I do, therefore, possess talents which are available in the production of a reasonable income, I feel it incumbent on me to employ them to the best advantage."

"The motive is highly honorable to you, Miss Percy; and yet I venture to suggest that you ought to consider the subject carefully before you act upon it."

"Such is my intention."

The feelings which had been excited in the heart of Frederick Willoughby, by the frank communication of Caroline Percy, were of a singularly mixed description. The most predominant, however, was the flattering consciousness of having been selected by a lady, young, handsome and accomplished, as a confidential adviser and friend. It was probably under the influence of this sensation that he said emphatically:

"If I can assist you in any way, Miss Percy, command my services freely."

"You are very kind," replied Miss Percy, with a blush of grateful acknowledgment. "Aunt Percy and I are comparative strangers in this city. We have few friends and receive little company. In the pursuit of my theatrical studies, if I determine to embrace the stage as a profession, I shall desire to profit by judicious criticism."

"Unquestionably."

"If you will condescend to listen to me occasionally," said Caroline Percy, with a dazzling smile, "and will regard me not as a partial friend, but as a stern critic, you will confer a real service upon me."

"But I am no critic," replied Willoughby, in surprise.

"It is not so much the rules of art as the teachings of nature that I seek to master. However, I hear my aunt's footsteps, and as this project is still a secret from her, we will change the conversation."

Mrs. Percy re-entered the apartment, and shortly afterward Frederick Willoughby took his departure.

CHAPTER VII.

BROADWAY—THE CALL AT DOCTOR EVERARD'S.



FREDERICK WILLOUGHBY was walking slowly toward Broadway when he was startled from the reverie of a moment by the tones of a voice not unfamiliar to his ear.

"How now, Willoughby—a youth of twenty-one in profound meditation?"

The young man looked up and beheld the traveler, Wilfred Montessor.

"Ah! Mr. Montessor," said he, smiling, "there is a lady in the case."

Montessor took the young man's arm, and they moved on at a moderate pace.

"You have excited my curiosity, Frederick, by your admission. Who is the lady?"

"A comparative stranger—Miss Caroline Percy. She resides in this street, at the distance of a few doors from the spot where you overtook me."

"Caroline Percy," said Montessor, musing.

Frederick Willoughby continued: "Miss Percy was in Broadway with her aunt last Saturday, and was taken with a sort of fainting fit in the street. It was fortunately in my power to render her a slight service. I say fortunately, because I have gained thereby a very pleasant acquaintance. She is frank, sincere, intelligent, accomplished and beautiful."

"A list of truly desirable qualities, Mr. Willoughby. Did I understand you rightly in regard to the period of your introduction to this lady?"

"Last Saturday."

"And you have seen her perhaps two hours."

"Not longer."

"Beauty may be measured at a glance by the eye of a sculptor ;

but you have discovered frankness and sincerity with the same facility."

"Miss Percy seems to be what I have described her."

"You judge of human character then on first impressions. It is the fatal error of youth and inexperience to take the semblance of things for the reality."

"Is it more wise to be constantly suspicious of deceit in others?"

"The deceit is in ourselves," replied Montessor. "We are misled by our interests, our prejudices, and our passions, and when our mistakes are palpable, we endeavor to fasten them upon others. The man who complains of a false friend, condemns himself; for no man ought to give his friendship until he has read the heart as well as the face of his neighbor."

"Is that possible?"

"The lines of age are not more indelibly impressed on the features of a man, than are truth and honor on his words and actions. They require only to be calmly scrutinized and impartially weighed."

"But love?"

"Love is the fragrant, delicious flower, which passion engrafts on the evergreen Friendship."

"Yet oftentimes it springs up involuntarily at a glance."

"Yes. The love of the fool, the idiot, the madman, who would barter his soul for a kiss. The man of common sense will beware of such stupendous folly."

The buzz and tramp of the foot passengers, and the clatter of carts and omnibuses in Broadway, checked the conversation. The gentlemen pursued their promenade, interchanging, occasionally, a few words on the ordinary topics of the day. On arriving at the corner of Bond-street, Frederick Willoughby detained his companion.

"Come home with me," said the young man, looking at his watch. "We shall surprise my dear mother at the tea-table."

Montessor hesitated.

"Come with me," added Willoughby, earnestly. "She is alone, and will be pleased to see you."

"I accept your invitation," replied Montessor, "on condition that you will afterward accompany me on a visit to one of my friends."

"With pleasure."

"You are in the way of making new acquaintances," added the traveler, with a grave smile, "and you will not perhaps regret the introduction which I shall give you."

The prediction of Frederick Willoughby, in relation to his mother,

did not prove to be correct. She had been summoned to the bed-side of a dear friend and relative, Mrs. Isabella Hopkins—so Mrs. Weston, the housekeeper, informed the young man—and the period of her return was extremely uncertain.

The tea-table, however, was standing in the center of the tea-room, with its pleasant beverage, and palatable delicacies, and a presiding divinity, in the shape of Mrs. Weston, the housekeeper. An hour was passed in the quiet enjoyment of the evening meal, and a cursory glance at the newspapers.

The approach of darkness reminded Montessor of his engagement for the evening.

“Dr. Everard is a man of profound and curious learning,” observed Wilfred Montessor, apprizing his young friend of the nature of his engagement, “and besides, he has a daughter.”

“A hint, my dear sir,” said Willoughby, laughing, “that we should consult the mirror, in advance of the doctor. Come with me to my dressing room.”

Shortly afterward, as Frederick Willoughby opened the street door, a gentleman mounted the steps.

“Just going out, Willoughby?” The speaker was Alfred Tracey. “I am glad I have caught you.”

Hearing footsteps in the hall, the young man paused until the light of the hall lamp revealed the person of Wilfred Montessor. With a polite bow he continued, addressing Willoughby: “I come to report the sequel of our adventure this morning; but as you are engaged, I will defer it to another opportunity.”

“To-morrow, Tracey.”

“In the meantime,” said Alfred Tracey, presenting a sealed package, “examine at your leisure the contents of this envelop.”

Without a glance at the envelop, Frederick Willoughby carelessly thrust the package into his coat pocket.

Wilfred Montessor and the young men left the mansion of Mrs. Willoughby in company, and proceeded toward Broadway, conversing freely on general subjects. At the corner of Broadway and Bond-street, Alfred Tracey separated from the other gentlemen, with an assurance to Frederick Willoughby that he would call upon him in the morning.

The presence of Alfred Tracey had recalled the scene at the club-house to the mind of Willoughby, and upon his disappearance the young man related the details of the affair to his companion, with entire frankness.

Montessor listened with apparent interest to the narrative.

"The testimony of the waiter was conclusive against the *soi disant* captain and his friend?" said Willoughby, at last, in a tone of inquiry.

"Clearly so," said the traveler, gravely.

"The fellows were impostors and cheats."

"Both, unquestionably."

"It mortifies me excessively to discover that I have associated upon terms of familiarity, even during a few hours, with men so utterly destitute of principle, and degraded in character."

"And yet," said Montessor, gravely, "a gentleman who visits a public gambling house, must not be too sensitive in regard to his associates."

"In respect to these persons," rejoined Willoughby, "I had the assurance of my friend Tracey, that they were Southern gentlemen of the highest standing and respectability—but he was, undoubtedly, deceived by them, as well as I."

"You were introduced, then, by Alfred Tracey, to these adventurers?"

"I was."

"Have you met them at any time in the society of other gentlemen of your acquaintance?"

"I have known them but two or three days, and never saw them at any place except at the club-house."

"You are quite intimate with the younger Tracey, Frederick. Have you entire confidence in him?"

"I have known but little of the Traceys, until recently. The elder brother is reported to be rich; and Alfred is a gay young fellow, rather lax, perhaps, in his morals; yet amusing, versatile, gentlemanly in his manners, and strictly honorable."

"And his means?"

"He is dependent upon his brother," said Willoughby, "to whose fortune he is the presumptive heir. His expensive mode of life indicates a liberal allowance from his brother."

"It seems strange," said the traveler, after a moment's reflection, "that a man of narrow intellect, and niggardly habits, like Owen Tracey, should be so generous to another as to render him the object of a conspiracy for plunder."

The residence of Doctor Everard was a modest edifice of brick, two stories in height, in the vicinity of Washington Square.

While he was yet speaking, Montessor perceived in the dusk of

the evening that he was approaching the entrance of the doctor's residence. Upon ringing the bell, the door was speedily opened by a domestic.

The gentlemen were ushered into a saloon, or drawing-room, of moderate size, furnished with elegance and taste. A cheerful hickory fire was blazing on the hearth, an object which the chilly dampness of the weather rendered doubly agreeable to the visitors.

A young lady, the daughter of Doctor Everard, attired in an evening dress of white muslin, was playing at chess with her father.

Her features were beaming with a smile of triumph. The doctor was evidently puzzled by the state of the game, and the young lady was slightly enjoying his discomfiture. Yet the predominant expression of her countenance as she fixed her laughing blue eyes upon the silvered temples of her father, was an expression of respectful tenderness.

Her face was partially shaded by the curling ringlets of dark brown hair which covered her cheeks, and extended in luxuriance even to her neck and shoulders. The longest tresses were gathered into a thick braid on the back of the head, and adorned with a bouquet of natural flowers.

There was something at once striking and attractive in the simplicity of her dress, the grace of her attitude, and the tender, triumphant, yet intellectual expression of her countenance.

Upon the hearth, near her, lay a beautiful Italian dog, with long, white, curling hair.

The chess-table stood at the distance of three or four feet from a center-table, on which was burning a magnificent astral lamp.

"It is a check-mate, Helen," said Doctor Everard.

"Visitors, pa," said the young lady, in a subdued tone, as her glance rested upon the gentlemen who had just entered the apartment.

Doctor Everard rose from the chess-table and advanced to meet his visitors.

Montessor presented his friend, Mr. Frederick Willoughby, and after the ceremony of a formal introduction was over, remarked, with a grave smile :

"We have interrupted you, Doctor."

"No, Mr. Montessor. Your appearance is a seasonable relief in the moment of defeat. My little army of bishops, knights and pawns have just been compelled to surrender their king to the enemy."

The gentlemen approached the chess-table and surveyed the condition of the game.

"Your queen is lost, Doctor Everard," said Montessor, "and the king within one move of a check-mate. You have been surprised by a very ingenious and forcible attack."

"Chess is my only recreation. Other games are distasteful to me from their extreme simplicity of combination or their dependance on the playful vagaries of chance. Chess demands the constant exercise of the inventive and reasoning faculties—and yet it relieves the tension of mind arising from professional studies and pursuits. In the tactics of the game, however, I am no match for Helen."

"Pa is my teacher," said Helen Everard, with a pleasant smile, "and takes more pride in my proficiency as a pupil than in his reputation as a player."

"You have stolen the occult philosophy of the game from the tomes of Monsieur Alexandre. You will not pretend, Helen," said the Doctor, pointing to the chess-board, "that I taught you this system of concealed attack."

"No," replied Miss Everard, laughing, "it is a brilliant device—partly the Frenchman's, partly my own. You are guiltless of any responsibility, except that of falling into the snare." Then turning to Montessor, she asked, "Do you like chess, sir?"

"I do not play frequently," Montessor answered, "but it is truly a noble game, and has beguiled the hours of relaxation of some of the most celebrated philosophers and statesmen of ancient and modern times. Its origin is lost in the fabulous chronicles of the Eastern nations. The Asiatics to this day are passionately fond of chess, and heighten the intense interest which they feel in its eventful changes by the most extravagant wagers. Their chess-boards are elegant, and the pieces—the kings and queens, bishops and knights, elephants and foot soldiers—are miniature statues of pure ivory, exquisitely sculptured and richly colored."

"Are they fine players?" inquired Frederick Willoughby.

"The most extraordinary player I ever beheld was a Brahmin at the court of one of the petty Indian princes. His fertility of resource and boundless invention were manifested in the astonishing variety of his combinations. A mistake of his antagonist, however small and apparently inconsequential, was invariably fatal. After such an occurrence, the spectator was sometimes held breathlessly on the watch by the irresistible march of the senseless statuettes of ivory."

"And the player was as a man in communion with spirits?" interposed Miss Everard, rapidly.

"Grave, silent, absorbed."

"There is a mysterious influence in the combinations of the chess-board which is indescribable—though by no means inappreciable. I have sometimes felt myself impelled onward in my moves, less by an exercise of my reason than by an intuition derived seemingly from the inspired unity of purpose of the marshaled pieces themselves."

"The Brahmin of Hindostan startled me one day with a similar idea," observed Montessor. "'I play at the call of the pieces,' said he, gravely, in reply to one of my queries."

"The sensation is most vivid," continued Helen Everard, "when I am conscious that my position is in harmony with the fundamental laws of the game."

"There are delusions of the reflective faculties," said Montessor; "curious, recondite, inexplicable—this is probably one of them."

"On the other hand," replied Doctor Everard, "Helen's experience, perhaps, reveals the germ of a profound thought—that all the productions of nature and of art have a spiritual as well as a material existence."

"The ancient Greeks invested their mountains and valleys, their forests and rivers, with the charm of romance by peopling them with imaginary beings—Satyrs, Dryads, Nymphs and tutelary divinities of different orders. The wand of science has banished these spirits, whether good or evil, to the regions of poetry and fable. Can she replace them by true creations?" inquired Montessor.

"The soul of man," said Doctor Everard, "is an essence indestructible and immortal, endowed with rare transcendent faculties. As we descend in the scale of animal existence, we find a lower development of spiritual being, which, however, to a certain extent sympathises with ours. We love and hate, approve and disapprove. Is it unreasonable to believe that the tree which shelters or the rock which supports us has a yet lower grade of spiritual existence, whose manifestations are not cognizable by the senses? Do certain material objects obtain their influence over us entirely by the power of association or imagination? When I return to the hamlet where I spent my early youth, the trees by the sparkling brook, the brook itself, and the green hills beyond, seem to welcome me as I welcome them. Do they not know me with a dim, uncertain knowledge? If they do not speak to me by visible signs or audible sounds, as my dog and my mocking bird, are there not other modes of spiritual communication adapted to their powers?"

"The blending the theory of nature with the license of poetry," said Montessor.

"The construction of art," continued the doctor, "and even the combinations of a chess-board, may be supposed capable of a complex, yet appreciable, condition of spiritual being."

"Is there any proof, doctor?"

"Our daily experience, rightly considered, abounds with it. But the tendency of the human mind in this age is to a gross materialism. The spiritual agencies of the universe are overlooked in a search after the nature and condition of its material organization."

"I am a convert to my father's theory," said Helen Everard, with a degree of enthusiasm. "I perceive intelligence in the gentle glide of a river, and the rush of a waterfall—in the majesty of a forest, and the moaning of the plaintive night-breeze—in the smiling valley waving with corn, and the lofty mountain burdened with glaciers. And the flowers—does not the early violet shelter herself beneath the springing grass with a sense of real modesty? are not the moss-rose and the heliotrope conscious of their beauty and their fragrance? Surely the beneficent Creator has not formed such lovely objects and failed to endow them with a sense of enjoyment and self-appreciation!"

The maiden blushed at perceiving that her simple earnestness of manner had attracted the admiring glances of her hearers.

"I am preaching," said she, with a merry laugh, "and that is my father's vocation."

"As a punishment," remarked Doctor Everard, "I condemn you to a game of chess with Mr. Willoughby."

"It is no punishment to me, Doctor," said the young man, bowing to Miss Everard.

"Nor to me, unless you play badly," replied the lady, smiling.

Frederick Willoughby became deeply interested in the game, but not so deeply that he forgot to notice the tapering fingers of the small white hand that marshaled the opposing forces of the chess-board, or even the delicate foot, protected by a light morocco slipper, that peeped from underneath the folds of Helen Everard's dress.

Doctor Everard and the man of thirty-five paraded the room backward and forward, conversing in a subdued tone—at first on personal topics, but afterward on metaphysical and philosophical subjects.

The doctor dwelt with much earnestness upon the theory of the spiritual intercourse of human beings with each other, as indicated by the phenomena of Mesmerism.

"The absurdities and quackeries of many of the writers on Animal Magnetism," said Doctor Everard, "cannot be too severely denounced by the honest inquirer after truth; but it is impossible to refuse credence to a vast number of curious and successful experiments in this branch of modern science."

"Is your belief, doctor, of the existence of Mesmeric phenomena founded upon personal observation, or the testimony of others?"

"On both, Mr. Montessor. In a variety of cases of disease of the nervous system, I have seen the most wonderful results produced by the mere exercise of the will upon the patient."

"My skepticism has been deeply seated," said Montessor, "but I never refuse the conviction of my judgment to adequate testimony."

"I have recently prescribed for a young lady," said Doctor Everard, "whose nervous system is in a highly excitable condition. Her indisposition—a species of fainting fit—soon disappeared, leaving but little exhaustion, and no apprehensions of a second attack. Discovering, however, the extreme susceptibility of her nervous organization, I was induced to commence a series of experiments in Mesmerism. The result has been astonishing. She is an intelligent person, and is enabled, consequently, to describe her sensations and impressions with clearness and discrimination."

"Is she also a woman of integrity?"

"I have no reason to distrust her. Miss Caroline Percy is a lady of good education, and accomplished manners."

Montessor reflected in silence upon the information he had just received.

"It would gratify me," he remarked, at length, to Doctor Everard, "to see your experiments upon this person, and to judge for myself."

"I will consult the lady, Mr. Montessor, and with her consent, will gladly make an appointment to meet you."

The game of chess between Frederick Willoughby and Helen Everard, resulted in the defeat of the former, after a well contested struggle.

As he rose from the table, at an intimation from his friend Montessor, Willoughby remarked:

"On another occasion, Miss Everard, I shall hope for better success."

Soon afterward the gentlemen withdrew.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ARREST OF THE BURGLARS.



ON his return home, Hugh Simonson imparted his determination to break into the premises of Hubert Elston, No. 104 Bleecker-street, to his associate, Andrew Williams.

The countenance of Williams manifested the firmness and the sadness of despair.

"I have taken your money, Mr. Simonson," said the man, gloomily; "and have promised to go with you, though I fear it will

turn out badly."

"It can't, Williams," replied Simonson, hastily. "I have looked over the ground, and feel sure of success."

"My rent is paid; so they cannot turn my poor woman out of doors. They may do what they will with me."

"Cheer up, man," exclaimed Hugh Simonson. "It is natural, perhaps, that you should be a little nervous. I was, myself, the first time I went out: but you will soon get used to it."

"Mr. Simonson," said Williams, firmly, "I have taken a Bible oath, that I will never again violate the rights of others and the laws of my country. I am driven to it now by my own necessities."

"An oath!" replied the other, with a coarse laugh. "I shall not constrain you to keep it or break it. You are a free man."

"To-night, I will follow you."

"Come down to my room then, between eleven and twelve—you will find me there."

The remainder of the evening was passed by Andrew Williams in the apartment of his sick wife. He was kind and attentive—even

more so than usual—and yet there was an expression of settled melancholy on his features, which gave an air of listlessness to his movements. Once or twice, in the midst of her sufferings, this expression drew the attention of Mrs. Williams particularly to her husband; conscious, however, that many causes of weariness and distress were pressing upon him, she forebore any urgent inquiries.

When the children had retired, Williams sat down by the bedside of his wife, and at her request, read a chapter from the Bible. Afterward, she talked to him, long and earnestly, upon the prospects of the family after her decease. She invoked him to make the most strenuous exertions to provide a suitable education for the boys, and to train them up to useful and respectable occupations. She dwelt upon the good qualities of her daughter Jane, and her ability, young as she was, to superintend the affairs of the household. At length she became exhausted and gradually sank into a profound sleep.



During a full hour, Andrew Williams sat gazing upon the calm, placid, yet attenuated features of his wife. Then, with a deep sigh, he rose from the stool on which he had been seated, extinguished the candle, and cautiously withdrew from the chamber. He descended the stairs, on tiptoe, to prevent the creaking of his footsteps being heard, and stealthily advanced to the door of Hugh Simonson's apartment.

By the meager light of a japanned tin lamp, the robber was busily engaged in selecting from a chest, filled with mechanical tools and other implements, such articles as he deemed requisite in the prosecution of his scheme of plunder. He had, previous to the entrance of Williams, placed upon a table near him, a large bunch of skeleton keys, a dark lantern, a file, a screw-driver, a small hatchet, and two or three knives with blades of a peculiar description.

"These things look like hard work," said Hugh Simonson, as Williams approached and surveyed the formidable array of tools and keys, with an inquiring glance. "Ours is a trade as well as a profession, but it pays high wages."

"The wages of sin is death," muttered Williams, half unconsciously, in a low husky tone.

Simonson turned toward his neighbor, and said sneeringly :

"How now, Williams, are you crazy?"

"The sentence came into my mind, from a chapter in the Bible, which I have just been reading to my wife."

"The Bible!" exclaimed the robber, chuckling with suppressed laughter. "Your studies will help you along vastly in the profession. But seriously, Williams, I doubt whether you have the pluck of a man, after all."

"Don't fear me, Simonson."

"The Bible!" muttered Hugh Simonson, several times. Then crossing the apartment toward a small closet, he said to his associate :

"Come and take a horn, Williams, and quit this cursed nonsense ; we have got something to do."

The men pledged each other in silence, in a bumper of cogniac brandy, slightly diluted with water.

"It must be nearly midnight," observed Simonson, replacing the decanters and the empty tumblers in the closet, "and now for action."

The robber returned to his former position and employment. He took a couple of large canvass bags from the wooden chest, and handed them to Andrew Williams.

"Roll them into as small a compass as possible, and thrust them into your coat pockets."

Williams followed his directions.

"Here are two iron bars," continued Simonson—exposing them to the view of his companion—"which may come in play very usefully. You can carry them concealed in the sleeves of your coat, until we get out of the public streets."

Hugh Simonson then closed the lid of the chest, and pushed it with its remaining contents under the table. One by one he examined the implements which he had selected, and concealed them about his person. Finally, he took the dark lantern from the table, and beckning to Williams to follow him, the twain, without awakening any of the inmates of the building, passed into the street.

The night was intensely dark. The sky was covered with a pall of dense heavy clouds, through which not a single star emitted its twinkling rays. At the distance of six paces, the figure of a man was not discernible, in the open air, by the keenest vision, except within the narrow circles, partially illuminated by the street lamps. There was neither fog nor rain, but the senses were affected, unpleasantly, by the chilly dampness of the atmosphere.

Somewhat burdened by the implements of their unlawful trade, the robbers moved slowly onward by the most direct route to the corner of Broadway and Houston street. The darkness of the night, intense—almost palpable—while it was highly favorable to the success of their enterprise, insensibly retarded its prosecution. Although Hugh Simonson had made the most careful observation of the localities the preceding afternoon, a quarter of an hour elapsed between the arrival of his companion and himself at the corner aforesaid, and the discovery of a narrow wooden gate or entrance in Mercer street, between Houston and Bleecker streets, which he had chosen as the first point of attack.

"This is the spot, Williams," whispered Simonson, at length, to his associate. "Hand me one of the bars. The gate is bolted on the inside, but the bolt is an old shakly thing, which would yield to a child's strength. Keep a good look out for stragglers, Andrew, and we'll soon be out of harm's way."

The burglar took the iron bar which his comrade presented to him, and applied one end of it to a small crevice in the gateway. With a steady, yet moderate exercise of muscular power, he pried the edge of the gate toward him, until the fastenings of the bolt gave way, and the gate itself swung freely upon its hinges. He opened it cautiously, and seizing Williams by the arm, drew him quietly into the dark, narrow, passage-way. Closing it behind him with the same caution, he stood, for a minute or two, in a listening attitude by the side of his companion.

"This is a desperate dark place," murmured Williams, in low trembling tones.

"Black as pitch, neighbor," whispered the burglar; "but so much the better. Be quiet, and follow me."

"Had we not better give it up, Mr. Simonson?"

"Fool!" muttered the burglar, through his closed teeth.

Hugh Simonson took the lead through the narrow passage, feeling his way at every step. In a few moments, he had safely reached a small yard or garden, in the rear of the building to which the passage-way belonged. He directed the attention of his comrade to a partition fence on the right, as they advanced slowly across the yard. Assisted by an oblong wooden box, which they encountered accidentally, the men clambered over the fence and pursued their promenade in the adjoining garden.

"One more fence, Williams," said Hugh Simonson, in a whisper, to his neighbor, "and the way is open."

These words had barely escaped the lips of the burglar, when Andrew Williams clasped his arm, and murmured in a voice tremulous with terror:

"We are lost—somebody is coming."

"Silence, man."

A peculiar sound as of some person approaching them, was distinctly heard. Simonson laid his hand upon his comrade's shoulder and whispered:

"Crouch upon the ground, Andrew. There is no danger that we shall be seen in this darkness."

The pattering of footsteps upon the graveled walks of the garden grew more audible. The heart of Andrew Williams quaked with fear. He sank, motionless, upon the ground.

Presently, the low harsh growl of a mastiff fell upon the ears of the listeners.

"Bah! it is a dog," muttered Simonson, who had felt a slight degree of alarm at the previous sounds. "I am prepared for him."

The dog approached the burglars so nearly that his white teeth and glaring eyes were visible amid the intense darkness of the garden. His growl was gradually increasing in loudness and harshness. It was evident that he was conscious of the presence of the intruders, and that the least movement of retreat on their part, would be the signal of attack from the ferocious animal.

At that moment, Hugh Simonson thrust his hand into his outer coat pocket. The dog plunged toward him, barking loudly.

"Take that for your pains, and shut your ugly mouth," muttered the burglar, tossing a large slice of fresh butcher's meat in the face of

the mastiff. The bait was successful. The hungry animal growling over the delicious morsel, tore into pieces and devoured it with savage eagerness.

"This way, neighbor!" exclaimed Simonson, "we have gained time to scale the garden wall."

The hope of escape gave new vigor to Andrew Williams. He rose from the ground without assistance or a second bidding, and followed Hugh Simonson.

The burglars soon arrived at the bottom of the garden, and felt their way along a brick wall, six or seven feet high, to the partition fence on their right. This fence was considerably lower than the wall, and they were able, without serious difficulty, to climb the fence and to mount the garden wall with still greater ease. Holding to the top of the wall with their hands, they swung themselves safely to the ground, on the opposite side.

A moment afterward, they heard the low growl of the mastiff, still mumbling the remnant of his midnight meal. He was again upon the track of the burglars; as they stood leaning against the wall and listening earnestly, they perceived by the direction of the sounds, that he was slowly approaching the junction of the wall and the partition fence. They moved not—scarcely breathed, lest their proximity should be betrayed to the acute senses of the dog. But the sagacious animal, apparently satisfied by his examination, that the intruders had left the premises of his master, did not remain long in the immediate vicinity. His movements became inaudible; his growl died away, entirely, and a profound silence ensued, broken only by the hushed breathing of the watchers by the garden wall.

"Yonder is our game," at length whispered Hugh Simonson to his companion, shaking him gently by the shoulder.

The voice of Simonson roused Andrew Williams from a train of melancholy reflections. He was no longer sustained by the temporary firmness, which a combination of circumstances and feelings had imparted to his resolution. The dangers which had already beset him, convinced him that the path of crime was thorny and difficult to tread. He possessed little energy of character in the ordinary conflicts of the world, and was illy adapted to act as an accomplice in deeds of violence. Wistfully as he stood beneath the murky sky, near that garden wall, did he long to be at home—the home of his sick wife and his slumbering children.

He turned his eyes toward the pile of buildings, whose black outline was hardly distinguishable in the darkness of the night. In front,

every thing seemed to be buried in impenetrable obscurity. The faint glimmering of a lamp, from the upper story of the dwelling house, in a diagonal direction, was the only evidence which the eye could gather of the existence of the massive structures of brick and mortar which, on all sides, surrounded the burglars.

Suddenly, the dense clouds that veiled the earth in darkness parted, and a glimpse of starlight was visible for an instant. The next moment the eyes of the adventurers were dazzled by the brilliancy of a falling meteor, and then the clouds rolled sluggishly together, and the earth was clothed with tenfold gloom.

"It is a warning of Providence," said Andrew Williams. "Let us turn back, Mr. Simonson."

"You forget the dog," muttered Hugh Simonson, in reply.

Williams sighed heavily; but made no answer to this effective hint.

"If cowardice were catching," continued Simonson, "there would be no chance for us. What is there in the falling star? It shows us where we are, Andy, and I'll warrant it is a good omen."

"I have always heard to the contrary," said Williams, despondingly.

"Your sick wife, your starving children, Andy," whispered Hugh Simonson. "Courage for half an hour, and we shall be rich men."

With these words, by way of encouragement to his companion, Simonson left the shelter of the garden wall, and stole cautiously along the graveled footpath, which accident revealed to them. In a few minutes, he felt that he was treading upon a pavement of smooth flagging stones; and moving on still more warily, he discovered, at length, a descending flight of stone steps. One, two, three, four, five steps, and he stood upon a level surface, paved with brick.

"Hist! Andy," said Hugh Simonson, in tones scarcely louder than his ordinary breathing; "where are you?"

"Here," replied a low tremulous voice.

"Hold this lantern, till I can find a match. The house is still as death."

Williams took the lantern in silence. Simonson thrust one hand into his trousers pocket, and drew forth a box of lucifer matches—one of which he instantly lighted, by rubbing it gently against the end of the box. The flame was immediately communicated to the wick of a small lamp, in the dark lantern.

"Guard the opening of the lantern, thus," whispered the burglar to

his associate, "so that only a glimmer of light shall escape, and hold it constantly toward me."

Such was the extreme caution and considerate thoughtfulness of this man Simonson, accounted so rash and impetuous by James Fogle.

Hugh Simonson commenced the examination of the premises. The paved area extended along a portion of the rear of the house, until it was terminated on the left by the wall of a smaller building, projecting from the main edifice in the direction of the garden. Above the area was a plank roof—the floor probably of a terrace of a piazza, connected with the first story of the mansion.

The attention of the burglar was, however, principally directed to the means of ingress. In the rear of the basement, bounded by the paved area, there were two windows, closed by wooden shutters, and a door. Simonson first attempted the door. Its unyielding solidity led him to judge, that it was not only locked, but secured with bolts and bars. He next approached the windows. The shutters of the window nearest the door were firmly closed; but those of the second window yielded readily to a prying movement of his fingers. The window-sash proved to be securely fastened.

After a moment's reflection, Hugh Simonson returned to his comrade, took him by the arm and led him directly in front of the window. Then he drew from one of his pockets a sharp single-bladed knife.

"A little more light, Andy."

By means of the knife the burglar succeeded, in a short time, in loosening and removing a pane of glass from the window-sash. He passed one hand through the opening and unfastened the catch or spring attached to the upper surface. The sash glided, freely, upward.

The sill of the window was not higher than three feet from the pavement of the area. The burglars effected their entrance into the basement with little noise. The first act of Hugh Simonson, after the entrance of his comrade, Williams, was to close the window-shutters carefully.

"Open the door of the lantern widely," whispered Simonson. "There is no danger, any longer, from the light."

It was a room of moderate size; containing a handsome carpet, a mahogany table, and half a dozen rosewood chairs. On the side opposite to the windows, were folding doors; one of which was partially open. These doors butted, each of them, against a projection from the

main wall of the edifice, standing as it were, in the center of a broad passage-way, between the two rooms. The projections were of brick work, finished externally in the same style as the rest of the apartment, with hard walls and panel-doors, grained in oak. They were evidently constructed as chambers or closets for the safe keeping of valuable articles.

Hugh Simonson advanced toward a side door which, as he rightly conjectured, opened into the basement entry. He passed into the entry, followed by his associate, who, surrounded no longer by the imaginary terrors of darkness, had recovered his ordinary firmness.

"We will provide in time for our retreat," murmured Simonson, unlocking successively the doors of the entry in front and rear; the keys of which, fortunately for his purpose, had been left in the locks; and removing the iron bars, noiselessly, from their sockets. He glanced up the stairway leading to the main hall on the first floor of the mansion. The door, at the top, was closed. From the entry he went into the front apartment, unfastened and raised one of the window-sashes, and carefully slid back the bolts that secured the shutters.

He passed through the folding-doors into the other room, closing them after his companion.

"That is the closet where the metal is. The one to the right," said Simonson, in a louder voice than he had lately spoken.

"It is locked, isn't it?" eagerly inquired Andrew Williams.

"Locked!" muttered Simonson, with a coarse sneer.

Disburdening himself of his implements, except the bunch of keys and the small file which he had drawn from his pocket, and still retained in his hands, the burglar approached the door of the closet. He tried key after key, unsuccessfully. The necessity of using the most vigilant precautions against noise, delayed his operations. After a great number of trials, he discovered a key which seemed to be intercepted in its action by the narrowness of one of its wards. He attempted to remedy the imperfection by filing away a portion of the solid metal.

While he was thus engaged, Andrew Williams interrupted him with a tremulous whisper.

"Don't you hear a noise, Mr. Simonson?"

"Nothing but the file and the thumping of your heart," replied Simonson.

"I thought ——"

"Hush! this is no time for thinking. Now for the lock."

Hugh Simonson placed the key in the aperture of the lock, and turned it with a gentle twist of the wrist. The bolt of the lock flew back, with a loud snap. Instantly the burglar opened the door of the closet.

The interior of the closet presented a glittering appearance. Costly services of plate, of the most exquisite workmanship, were ranged upon the shelves: silver coffee-pots, tea-pots and sugar-dishes, cake-baskets of elegant patterns; silver trays, containing tea and table-spoons; richly chased goblets of gold and silver, and a variety of lesser articles in dazzling profusion.

"The bags, Williams," quickly muttered Simonson. "Set the lantern on the table and come hither."

Andrew Williams obeyed Simonson's directions, and took a position near the door of the closet, holding one of the canvass bags open at the top. Hugh Simonson entered the closet, and grasped a couple of golden goblets.

"Gold before silver, always," he murmured, thrusting the goblets into his own pockets.

At that moment, Andrew Williams heard a slight noise, as of the jarring of a door, and turning a little to the right, he saw the figure of a man standing in the door leading to the basement entry.

Uttering a cry of agony, he sank upon his knees, pressed his hands to his forehead, and exclaimed:

"Mercy! O my poor wife."

The shriek of his comrade excited the alarm of Hugh Simonson. Looking round he perceived beyond his kneeling and terrified associate, not one man only at the door of the basement entry, but two others hastily entering the apartment, through the folding doors.

"By G—! Fogle has betrayed me," shouted the ruffian.

The burglar, however, did not yield passively to the terror which had overcome his companion. Rushing from the closet, he flew toward the window by which he had entered the building.

"Surrender to the police!" exclaimed one of the strangers, intercepting him.

The ruffian replied with a blow, which sent the man reeling against the wall of the room. The delay of the moment, however, enabled the other policeman to seize the burglar. A violent scuffle ensued; in the progress of which, Hugh Simonson and his antagonists fell, together, upon the floor.

A deep groan suddenly burst from the lips of one of the struggling policemen, followed by the exclamation:

"The villain has stabbed me!"

With an effort almost superhuman, Hugh Simonson rose upon his feet, and flung his antagonists violently from him.

The wounded man who had clung to him, notwithstanding the severity of his pain, sank, bleeding, upon the carpet.

Simonson bounded through the folding-doors, toward the front window, threw back the window-shutters, and dashed through the open space with surprising velocity. He gained a paved area of less depth than in the rear of the building, which was protected in front by an iron fence. The burglar sprang upon the stone coping of the area, and resting his hands upon the upper rail, was in the act of swinging himself over the fence, into the street, when a stunning blow upon the head, from the round leaden ball of a loaded cane, struck him senseless. He fell on the stone pavement of the sidewalk—the impetus of his desperate effort to escape, enabling him to clear the fence entirely.

A squad of persons, bearing lanterns and torches, shouting and laughing, came up at the moment.

"What is the row, neighbor?" inquired one of them, addressing a large man who was leaning over the prostrate burglar.

"I am a police officer, and this man is a thief," said the person addressed, turning for an instant toward the first speaker.

He had hardly finished the sentence, when two of the policemen from the interior of the building, made their appearance with Andrew Williams in custody.

"Put the irons on this scoundrel, Roberts," said the officer who had struck down Hugh Simonson.

"Ay, ay, Mr. Masters, he is a desperate fellow. He has stabbed Holmes, badly."

As the policemen raised Simonson from the pavement, he moved his hand languidly toward his head.

"Jack Highflyer," muttered one of the squad, "it is the fellow you punished so severely on Tuesday night."

"The same, Tim. He is in better hands now."

Half a dozen watchmen made their appearance; and the inmates of the dwellings in the neighborhood, alarmed at the noise, were flocking around the officers.

"Move on, boys!" exclaimed Jack Highflyer, in a tone of command; "the fun is all over in this quarter."

Two hours afterward, when Hugh Simonson recovered his consciousness, he was lying on a straw-bed in one of the gloomy cells of the Watch-House—an arrested felon.

BOOK

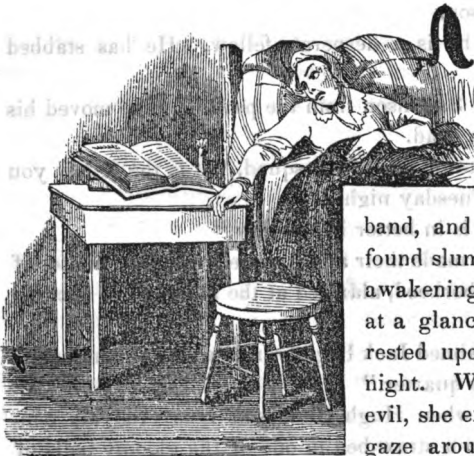
FOURTH



THE
CONFESSION

CHAPTER I.

THE BURGLAR'S FAMILY.



DARK, gloomy morning succeeded the night of the burglary.

Mrs. Williams had been entirely unconscious of the departure of her husband, and had continued in a profound slumber until day-break. On awakening, however, she perceived, at a glance, that his head had not rested upon the pillow during the night. With terrible forebodings of evil, she exerted herself to rise and gaze around the apartment. The

low stool was standing near the bed-side in the same position as on the

preceding evening, when her husband occupied it. The family Bible lay unclosed upon the wooden table. But Andrew Williams was not present.

She summoned her daughter Jane from the adjoining chamber and questioned her anxiously. Jane knew nothing—had heard nothing of her father's movements. The alarm of the invalid on discovering that her husband had not slept under his own roof, was excessive. Andrew Williams was a man of domestic habits, and this was the first time since his marriage that he had absented himself from home in a concealed or clandestine manner. The remembrance of his unavailing struggles for employment—his depression of spirits—his despairing language—fell like a dark shadow upon her soul. She knew that his affection for his family was too strong to admit of his protracted absence, unless some untoward event had occurred. The thought of suicide flashed upon her with torturing uncertainty. She beheld him in her imagination stabbing himself to the heart, or throwing himself into the dark turbid river, in the agony of despair. Overcome with her fears and emotions, she fell back, exhausted, upon her pillow.

The young girl flew to the bed-side, and with heroic fortitude suppressed her tears while she soothed the distress of her mother. She suggested the most plausible reasons to account for her father's absence. She strove, by soft and gentle words, to bring back the angel Hope to the forlorn and desolate chamber.

Bad news flies quickly. At eight o'clock in the morning, the gossips of the neighborhood were astonished by the report that Hugh Simonson and Andrew Williams had been arrested in the act of committing a burglary, and that they had killed a police officer in a desperate effort to escape. The nature of the report awakened the curiosity, if not the sympathy of the neighbors.

Mrs. Ramsbottom, the mistress of a boarding-house on the opposite side of the street, was the first person who volunteered to call upon Mrs. Williams, with the humane purpose of breaking the news to her. She was a fat, red-faced woman of forty-five years of age, of a prying, curious disposition, though by no means disobliging or unamiable.

Mrs. Ramsbottom gained admittance to the chamber of the invalid without serious difficulty.

Mrs. Williams had partially recovered from the fit of exhaustion, but her features were pale and very thin.

"Bless me, Mrs. Williams," said the visiter, "how poorly you look."

The sick woman gazed at the speaker with an unmeaning stare.

"Do you not know me, ma'am? My name is Ramsbottom. I live across the street, and hearing that something was the matter with you, I have come over in a neighborly kind of way. Dear old Ramsbottom, when he was alive, liked to see me attentive to the sick neighbors. Where is your husband, Mrs. Williams?"

The woman made no reply, but Jane answered quietly:

"Father is not at home."

"And Mr. Simonson? the man that keeps bachelor's hall below stairs?"

"I have just been to his room," replied the girl, "to inquire about my father, but the door is locked, and thinking he might be asleep this cloudy morning, I did not disturb him."

"Bless me, girl, don't you know that your father and Mr. Simonson went out together, last night?"

Mrs. Ramsbottom stopped abruptly; for turning again toward the bed, she saw the eyes of the sick woman fixed intently upon her.

"You have heard news of my husband?" she murmured, gasping for breath.

Mrs. Ramsbottom hesitated to reply; and the invalid raising herself on one elbow, inquired more vehemently:

"Is he dead?"

"Oh no, ma'am; don't fret yourself too much, and you a poor sick creature. They have taken him, that's all. I dare say Mr. Williams is as much alive as any one of us. It is the policeman as was killed, ma'am."

"What does it mean, Jane?" said Mrs. Williams to her daughter.

"Poor soul," said Mrs. Ramsbottom, in a whining tone of affected sympathy. "It will come out in time, so I suppose it is my duty to tell you, and set your mind at ease. Mr. Simonson and your husband went out last night, and a dark night it was, to break into some rich gentleman's house, which is agin the law, ma'am, as you know, and I know, though we poor folks don't think it a hanging matter. Well, they got into the house, and while they were ransacking the closets, the policemen came along and took them prisoners. I dare say, ma'am, somebody will get them out on bail, and then the lawyers will keep them from going to State prison. There is likely no truth in the story that they killed one of the policemen—that would be a bad business—but I don't believe it, ma'am, I do not. So keep up a good heart, Mrs. Williams."

As the thoughtless gossip repeated the rumors she had heard, the

face of the invalid grew very pale and became distorted with internal suffering.

"It is true, mother," sobbed her daughter Jane.

Mrs. Ramsbottom turned toward the young girl, somewhat angrily.

At that instant a terrific scream of horror and agony burst from the lips of the sick woman. Her eyes glared wildly in their sockets—her features grew more and more distorted, and her limbs were violently convulsed. The scream was not repeated, but was followed by a succession of deep heart-rending moans. The convulsions continued.

The boys in the adjoining chamber were startled from their slumbers by their mother's scream, and timidly approached the door of the apartment, which was standing ajar. On peeping through the crevice and beholding a strange woman near the bed-side, they retired from the door and began tremblingly to dress themselves.

"Run for a doctor, girl," said Mrs. Ramsbottom to the invalid's daughter. "Run for a doctor as quick as you can, and I will stay here with your mother. Bless me, who would have thought the poor creature would take it so hardly?"

Jane Williams had partly raised her mother's head from the pillow, and was striving, by words of tenderness, to restore her to consciousness. She was aroused, however, by the suggestion of Mrs. Ramsbottom. Leaving the bedside, the young girl flew to the opposite side of the room, and snatched a plaid bonnet from a nail, driven into the wall.

"Where shall I go for a doctor—to the Dispensary?"

"Any where, child, so you are quick about it. As I live, there goes Doctor Everard, afoot, on the other side of the street."

"The tall gentleman with a cane?"

"Yes; run after him and beg him to step in and see your mother. He is one of the best doctors in the city."

Mrs. Ramsbottom continued talking after the departure of the girl, partly to herself, partly to the unconscious invalid:

"He raised young Mrs. Bambury, the niece of my neighbor, Captain Thompson, from the point of death. It was almost a miracle. There, Mrs. Williams, don't go on so, don't. I am sure if I had thought she would be overcome in this way by the news, I would not have told her. Somebody else would, though, and the poor creature might as well know it first as last. There, there, ma'am, I dare say they won't hurt your husband. I am sorry they caught him."

In this manner the gossiping mistress of the boarding-house occupied the brief interval between the departure of Jane Williams and her return with Doctor Everard.

The young girl overtook the doctor at a short distance from the boarding-house of Mrs. Ramsbottom. Distinctly, though hurriedly, she related the particulars of her mother's attack, and implored him to visit her.

As Doctor Everard approached the moaning, struggling invalid, and took hold of her emaciated hand, Mrs. Ramsbottom commenced very respectfully:

"This poor woman, doctor, has been in a weakly way for a long time."

"Silence, madam," said the doctor, gravely; "you have done mischief enough already by your talking."

Mrs. Ramsbottom was instantly and completely silenced by the reply of Doctor Everard.

The doctor took a couple of vials from a pocket case of medicines, which he carried with him, and asked for a tea-cup. He poured out a tea-spoonful, or thereabouts, of laudanum, and the same quantity of tincture of castor. Adding a little water to the mixture, from the broken pitcher on the table, he presented it to the lips of the invalid.

The woman swallowed the draught without much difficulty, and the doctor stood quietly by the bed-side watching its effects. In a few minutes the spasms and contortions diminished sensibly in violence, and the moans became less frequent and prolonged. At the end of a quarter of an hour, the nervous excitement of the invalid disappeared almost entirely. Her eyes were closed, however, and she manifested no signs of conscious existence.

Doctor Everard consulted his watch, and was on the point of giving some directions to the young girl, Jane, in regard to her mother. The noise of footsteps on the staircase and the eager, joyful glance of the girl, sealed his lips for the moment.

"Father is coming," said she, in a whisper, to Doctor Everard, as she flew to the door and opened it.

Andrew Williams entered slowly, followed by a stranger. His eyes were red with weeping—his features wore a more settled aspect of despair than they had ever manifested previously—his form was bowed as if with age. He looked around the room without any manifestation of surprise at the presence of Doctor Everard and Mrs. Ramsbottom. His gaze was anxiously turned toward the miserable couch on

which his wife was lying, and became fixed upon her prostrate limbs and pallid countenance.

Clasping his hands together, he exclaimed :

“Great God, I have killed her!”

The sound of her husband’s voice seemed to awaken the consciousness of the woman, for she murmured, in low, audible tones :

“My husband.”

“No, she is not dead,” uttered Williams, vehemently, hastening to the bedside, and sinking upon his knees; “here, Patty, here I am.”

The invalid opened her eyes slowly, and beheld the face of her husband.

“You are alive, Andrew—not stabbed or drowned,” she said, rather languidly.

“No, Patty,” replied the kneeling man.

The recollection of Mrs. Williams returned with the gradual restoration of her faculties.

“Ah! I remember—it was more dreadful than that. Somebody told me that you were a burglar in the hands of the police.”

“It is true, Patty.”

The young girl, Jane, sobbed bitterly at her father’s admission; but the woman looked inquiringly at her husband, as if not wholly understanding him.

“It is true, Patty,” said the man, hurrying through his narrative, yet frequently interrupted by the strength of his feelings. “The officer has permitted me to come home and take leave of you and the children before I go to jail.”

A deep groan burst from the woman, but she evidently sought to restrain herself.

“It will break your heart, Patty, I fear,” continued Williams, “but I did it for the best. The children were crying for bread, and you were lying on a sick couch in want of every thing. I was persuaded into it by Mr. Simonson, but I did it for your sake and for that of the children. It was that I wanted a few dollars very much, and could get no work, and the gentleman whose house we went to rob was very rich, very rich indeed. This is the first time, Patty, that I ever attempted to steal the value of a dollar, and I never meant to do it again.”

In this terrible crisis of irretrievable ruin, the fortitude of the woman struggled for its usual ascendancy over bodily weakness and mental suffering.

“You have acted very wickedly, Andrew.”

"I know it, Patty," replied the man; "I have acted criminally and must endure the punishment of the law; but will you not pardon me, and love me still?"

"Ask pardon of your Maker, whom you have grievously offended."

"I have repented bitterly, sincerely. Whatever happens to me, I will never, never commit another crime."

"I will pray for you," said the invalid, with wonderful self-control. "I will strive to bear it, and to think of you as I have done. But to hear you branded as a thief," she continued, shuddering, "and to know that disgrace, as well as poverty, must henceforth rest upon us, and upon our children, is indeed a burden of grief and misery."

The man wept in silence.

"Come, Williams," said the officer, in a tone of impatience, "the five minutes are up—we must go."

The burglar rose from his kneeling posture, and pressing his wife's cold, trembling fingers to his lips, turned away.

During the progress of the scene, the younger children of Andrew Williams had crept softly into the room.

The eldest of the boys approached the police officer, clasped him around the knees, and said, imploringly:

"Don't take father to jail."

The man disengaged himself gently from the boy, and beckoning to Williams to follow him, left the apartment.

Andrew Williams cast one despairing look at his wife and children, and followed the officer. As he descended the stairs, the low, suppressed sobs of his daughter, and the cries of the terrified boys, fell upon his ears.

The agitation of Mrs. Williams produced an alarming degree of febleness. In a whisper, scarcely audible, she complained to Doctor Everard of a sensation of faintness in the region of the heart.

The doctor wrote a prescription on a slip of paper, and gave minute directions to Jane Williams for administering the medicine, apprising her also of the precarious condition of her mother's health, and the necessity of unrelaxing attention to her wants.

The police officer and the burglar left the house together, and proceeded at a moderate pace through Orange-street to Chatham-street, and thence to the Park. As they passed in front of the City Hall, an imposing structure near the center of the Park, Andrew Williams turned to the officer, and remarked with evident emotion:

"It was very kind in you, sir, to go home with me and let me see my wife and children. I thank you, indeed I do."

THE SECRET ORDER OF THE SEVEN.



"THE CHILDREN WERE CRYING FOR BREAD, AND YOU WERE LYING ON A SICK COUCH IN WANT OF EVERY THING."—Page 193.

"Well, well; no more words about it," said the policeman, gruffly.

On arriving at the western entrance to the basement of the City Hall, the officer took the prisoner by the arm and conducted him to an apartment on the right of the main passage, designated as the Police-Office. Advancing through a knot of ten or twelve persons, who stood near the door, he relinquished his grasp of the burglar, and with a gesture of command, directed him to a seat on a long wooden bench, occupied in part by other prisoners.

The attention of Andrew Williams was drawn immediately toward a stout, thick set man, wearing handcuffs on his wrists, and a soiled bloody handkerchief around his head. Signs of guilt were visible in his malignant scowl, and the sullen savage expression of his features.

Hugh Simonson, for it was he, changed his position slightly, to make room for his partner in crime—but Andrew Williams passed him with a dejected reproachful glance, and seated himself on the other end of the bench.

A handsome mahogany railing, commencing near the entrance, extended across the apartment and divided it into two unequal parts. Behind the railing, in a heavy bass-wood chair, with carved, projecting arms, and a thick leathern cushion, sat Justice Hopson—a man of acute intellect and unimpeachable integrity, verging toward the decline of life.

The clerk of the office was writing at a low table covered with green baize, in the immediate vicinity of the Police Justice.

At a desk, a little to the right, was stationed an assistant or supernumerary clerk. Five or six police officers, one of whom was Mark Masters, were lounging about the room, some within and some without the railing.

Among the spectators, at the distance of a few feet from the door, stood two persons; a small spare man, and a stripling nearly of a man's growth, with a dark swarthy complexion. They were conversing in whispers.

"The prisoners are seated on the bench yonder, Levi. Do you recognize among them the man who pawned the articles—a gold watch and a diamond cross—at your establishment on the morning of Saturday last?"

"The stout man in corduroy pants looks something like him," replied the youth, advancing a little, "but I cannot see his face distinctly."

"Lean this way—now."

"Yes, Mr. Pettigrew; the very man. I could pick him out of a thousand."

"You are confident, then?"

"As positive as I am of my own existence. He has got a bruise over the left eye that disguises him a little, but there is no mistaking him. What is he up for?"

"He and a man by the name of Williams, an accomplice of his, are arraigned before the Police Justice on two charges; one of burglary, the other of assault and battery with intent to kill."

"Burglary—so—so—the watch and diamond cross were part of the plunder."

"No—these men were arrested last night in the act of breaking into a house in Bleecker-street."

With a significant nod, Justice Hopson remarked to one of the officers:

"There is too much noise, Benson."

"Silence!" exclaimed the officer, glancing at the spectators.

The conversation ceased, and Justice Hopson demanded authoritatively:

"Is Williams in the room?"

"He is," replied the officer, pointing toward the prisoner.

Andrew Williams rose from the bench and approached the railing with a supplicating expression of countenance.

"We don't want to hear a word from you, Williams," said the justice, waving his hand, "the proof is clear against you."

"I am a guilty man, your Honor," replied the prisoner, humbly. "I don't deny any thing; but, your Honor—"

"What is it? be quick."

"Don't put me in the same cell with that man," said Andrew Williams, turning toward his confederate; "his persuasion has brought me to ruin, and I had rather be alone by myself, than with him."

"You must settle it with the jailer, Williams."

The prisoner bowed humbly.

"Mr. Masters," said the Police Justice, extending two slips of paper to the officer, "here are warrants of committal for Andrew Williams and Hugh Simonson. You will see them duly executed."

Hugh Simonson was still in some measure under the influence of the stunning blow he had received on the preceding night. As he walked from the police office to the prison door, his deportment was that of a man stupidly indifferent to his position or his prospects.

It was quite otherwise with Andrew Williams. He surveyed the

stone walls and iron barred windows of the prison with emotions of terror and shame. His eyes were blinded with tears—a shudder of inexpressible anguish passed over him—as he listened to the grating of the heavy doors, and, obedient to the stern command of the attending officer, passed the threshold of Bridewell.



CHAPTER II.

BILL SMITH'S—THE ASSESSMENT.



As the shadows of twilight gradually deepened into the darkness of night, groups of young men—clerks, apprentices, and others—the idlers and loafers of the neighborhood, assembled at the porter-house of Bill Smith. What with their loud, noisy conversation, their boisterous laughter, the clatter of glasses and decanters, and the shuffling tread of creaking foot-steps, the bar-room presented a scene of disorder and confusion not often

realized, even in the precincts of the Bowery.

In the midst of the hubbub, Jack Highflyer entered the porter-house.

"Here comes Jack!" shouted one of the company, vehemently, "he'll tell us all about it."

The noise ceased, instantly, and the eyes of the various groups composing the assemblage were turned upon their acknowledged leader.

Jack Highflyer looked around the bar-room, and muttered, audibly, though as if speaking to himself, "Tom Gaffney, Luke Fordham, Peter Fox, Harry Wilson—but where is Tim Hardmann?"

"Here I am, old fellow," said the butcher, advancing from one corner of the room; "give me your paw, Jack."

Jack Highflyer extended his hand, and whispered, at the same moment, "We have something on hand to-night, Tim."

"The boys are ripe for any thing," replied Tim Hardmann. "They were chafing over Job Dingle's business as you came in."

"Job's trial comes off to-morrow, and we must do all we can to help him. I went to see him this morning, and I have something to propose, on his behalf, to our fellows."

"Tom, Harry, keep still there," said the butcher, "Jack Highflyer

has seen Dingle, and will put us all on the right track to do him a service."

"Hold on, Jack," shouted Tom Gaffney, "are there any spies in the room?"

"Not a spy," replied Luke Fordham, examining the features of his companions almost at a glance.

"I have been inside of the four stone walls of the cell," said Jack Highflyer, "where the police have shut up Job Dingle—a better man than any one of them."

"And no mistake," added Tom Gaffney.

"No man ever knew Job Dingle to refuse a fair fight, to desert a friend in a scrape, to abuse an enemy behind his back, or to keep a shot in the locker when he was out with the boys."

"He was a good one, was Job," said Luke Fordham.

"H-a 'eart like h-a h-ox," drawled Peter Fox, with a lugubrious expression of countenance.

"And, I say, fellows," continued Jack Highflyer, "that we are bound, in honor, to stand by Dingle to the very last minute. They have got him pretty well cornered, in a damp, gloomy cell, and there are some people who would like to hang him, without judge or jury; but if you will stick to him, one and all, as I think you ought to do, and as I intend to do, not a hair of his head shall be injured."

"We will, Jack—we will—we will," exclaimed a number of voices.

"What harm has he done, boys?" said Tim Hardmann, the butcher; "why, he killed a Dutchman, in a row—a heels over head, rough and tumble sort of a fight! Does any one believe that Job was the first to draw a knife? Not he. He went to Hans Snyder's house for a bit of fun, and they undertook to put him out. He wouldn't go. Would you have gone out? the biggest coward among you? I ask you that."

A tall, gawky chap, with long arms and legs, and a small, slender body, interrupted the speaker by remarking, emphatically:

"I'll be blamed if I would!"

The young man was rather bewildered at the roar of laughter which ensued from the inmates of the porter-house.

"Let them laugh, Simon," said the butcher, nodding good-naturedly. "I have seen you in a tight place, afore now. Though some folks may be a little brighter perhaps, I'll be sworn that you are not the biggest coward in the company. But, as I was saying of Job Dingle, he wouldn't go, and they tried to put him out. Somebody drew a knife, and then Job drew his; and in the fight, a big Dutchman got killed.

There's the whole matter, boys, in a nutshell. Yet a great many people want to see Job Dingle strung up by the neck, as if he had turned pirate, or murdered a man for the sake of plunder."

"I wonder what they think he should have done?" said Harry Wilson. Hasn't a man a right to protect himself?"

"Yes sir-ee," replied Peter Fox.

"I rather guess they can't make a law to punish us for defending ourselves when we are attacked; though no one knows what they will do next. There seems to be a devilish conspiracy to put down the native-born spunk of the country. It used to bethought a credit to a man, if he gave a hearty thrashing to a person who insulted him; but now they call it by some big name or other."

"Assault and battery!" said Tom Gaffney, pompously.

"Yes, and they jug him for it."

"Jug or no jug," interposed Tim Hardmann, the butcher, showing his brawny arms and doubled fists, "if any man treads on my toes, purposely, I'll give him a touch of the blind staggers. For my part, I think we should be a great deal better off if we were entirely rid of the police justices, police officers, and the whole set of blood-suckers that hang around them."

"True enough, Tim," replied Harry Wilson; "here we pay hundreds and thousands of dollars to support these fellows, and what do they do? They just go snooping around, sticking their noses into other people's business and making a fuss about what is no concern of theirs or the public's. Are we free born Americans, or are we not?"

"The point will come up fairly some of these days," said Bill Smith, the proprietor of the porter-house, gravely, shaking his head. "There is a great deal of stuff in the newspapers about the evils of the license system, and the cold water folks threaten strongly to get up a law to stop the sale of spirituous liquors. That will bring up the question fairly," continued Smith, shaking his head still more gravely and ominously. "That will bring it up. If the American people stand that, they are ready to submit to any thing."

"We won't stand any such nonsense, Smith," exclaimed Harry Wilson.

"We won't, Smith," echoed fifteen or twenty voices.

In the meantime Jack Highflyer had been conversing privately with a large portion of the inmates of the porter-house. As the chorus of voices died away he tapped lightly on the counter, with a whalebone cane, and arrested the attention of his followers.

"The trial of Job Dingle will commence to-morrow," said Jack Highflyer. "The worst trouble in the way, at the present time, is the want of funds. Job is as poor as his namesake was after the devil had been permitted to tempt him."

"That is High Dutch to me," said the tall, gawky youth, in a whisper, to Luke Fordham.

"The lawyers won't stir a step in the business without money. They are a set of mean-spirited scamps to let a poor fellow suffer because he cannot pay their exorbitant charges; but their services must be had, or Dingle must be convicted. So boys, we must raise the money as quickly as possible."

"To-night, Jack?" inquired Tim Hardmann.

"Yes, Tim, to-night."

"How much is wanted?" demanded several.

"Two or three hundred dollars, at the lowest," said Jack Highflyer. "Besides the lawyers employed by Dingle, we must secure the assistance of Hugh Maxwell, whose ability as an advocate, and fidelity to his client, have been tested successfully in so many instances. As to the mode of raising the wind, I propose that each one of us contribute something to the fund, and that afterwards we proceed to lay and collect an assessment throughout the domain of Bowerydom."

The proposal of Jack Highflyer was received with acclamation by the assemblage.

"Tim Hardmann, take off your hat and pass it round."

The butcher performed the bidding of Jack Highflyer with alacrity. None of the company refused or neglected to contribute, save two or three miserable loafers, who, by a gesture, more expressive than elegant—that of thrusting the hand deeply into the trowsers pocket, and drawing the hand in a direction upward and outward, thus turning the pocket inside out—manifested their utter inability to add even a mite to the offering. Many gave small sums in specie, ranging from a shilling to a dollar, according to their ability. Three or four only, among whom were Bill Smith and Jack Highflyer, threw bank notes into the hat.

While the hat was passing round, Jack Highflyer related to a knot of listeners, the details of his visit to Job Dingle in the city prison.

"The old fellow is in good spirits," continued the leader, after Tim Hardmann had given him the wink that the collection was completed—"count the money, Tim—but it isn't in human nature to lie in a dismal cell with the blood-hounds of the law howling and barking

outside the walls, and feel perfectly at ease. At such a time, if ever, a man needs friends, and at such a time will true friends proffer their sympathy and assistance. I told Job to face his accusers without flinching a hair's breadth, and that nothing should be wanting on the day of trial to save him. He was very grateful to me, for, as I said a while ago, he is entirely out of money. A prison is a gloomy place, with neither friends nor money, though many a man has been driven to it by the want of them. In the cell next to Dingle's lies a prisoner by the name of Williams, who has always been esteemed an honest, hard-working man, and who undertook to commit a burglary because his family were in danger of starving, and his heartless landlord threatened to turn him out of doors unless he paid his rent."

"If law and justice went together," exclaimed Harry Wilson, "the landlord would be punished as well as the thief."

Jack Highflyer remarked, in a subdued voice:

"It was that canting hypocrite, Josh Grayson. I have owed him a grudge these three years, and I never forget to pay my debts, sooner or later. Well, Tim?" the speaker added, as he perceived Tim Hardmann, the butcher, approaching him, twisting a dirty silk handkerchief round the money that had been collected.

"Thirty dollars and fifty cents," replied the butcher.

"That's enough, boys, to show you are in earnest," said Jack Highflyer, with a smile of satisfaction. "A glass of grog all round, Smith, and then we'll start on a cruise through the neighborhood."

The young men pressed toward the counter, and partook freely of the contents of Bill Smith's decanters. In a minute or two the confusion partially subsided.

"Follow me, boys," said Jack Highflyer, "a dozen of you or so. Tim Hardmann will carry the purse. Come on, Tom, Harry, Pete—not more than a dozen of you, or they will accuse us of wanting to get up a row."

Jack Highflyer and his squad sallied forth from the porter-house, and proceeded up the Bowery until they arrived at the corner of the next street above Smith's. There was a grocery store on the corner, fitted up with a counter, at the farther end of the store, for the sale of spirituous liquors. Jack Highflyer entered, with two or three of his associates; the remainder stood, lounging on the side-walk, outside the building.

"Clisby, how are you?" said Jack Highflyer, in a good-natured tone of voice.

"Fat, Jack!"

"Fat!" whispered Pete Fox, to one of his companions, "there's more fat in a soap-ladle than in his whole body."

"Short stories to-night, Clisby," said Jack Highflyer. "We have turned out to raise the wind for Job Dingle, as good a fellow as ever thrashed a Corlear's Hook bully. The boys have assessed you five dollars."

"There's the cash, Jack," replied Clisby, opening the money-drawer, and taking therefrom a five-dollar note, which he laid upon the counter. "I would give five times the amount, without grumbling, to be certain of getting Job a verdict of 'Not Guilty.' Won't you drink, Jack, you and your friends?"

"No, Clisby. Good night to you."

Jack Highflyer and his followers traversed the upper portion of the Bowery, and many of the circumjacent streets in that region of the city, as rapidly as possible, visiting, with scarcely an exception, the oyster-cellars, bowling-saloons, groceries, porter-houses and taverns on their route. The acquaintance of the leader of the squad with the character and circumstances of the proprietors of the various establishments, enabled him to open his business with a show of diplomatic sagacity, and to regulate the assessments fairly and judiciously. In general, his requests, or rather his demands, were complied with promptly and willingly, and, in many cases, with a hearty expression of good will toward Job Dingle. Here and there an individual, under one pretext or another, excused himself from the payment of a portion of the assessment, but, during the first hour of Jack Highflyer's predatory expedition, not a single person had absolutely refused to contribute to the increasing treasury of Tim Hardmann.

"Stimers is a regular skinflint," said Jack Highflyer to his comrades, as the squad withdrew from an eating-house in Elizabeth-street, near Prince-street.

"How much did he give you, Tim?" inquired Luke Fordham.

"A Mexican dollar," replied the butcher, snapping his fingers contemptuously.

"Only a dollar, Jack," said the other; "I would not have taken it."

"Why, you see, boys," said Jack Highflyer, "Stimers is worth his twenty thousand dollars, and is doing a good business; but since he has become rich, he has got to be a contemptible whining miser. He will sigh and groan over the paltry dollar he bestowed so grudgingly

for eight-and-forty hours at least. But for that I would have had it thrown back into his teeth."

"You need not wonder at Stimers's meanness. He swore out a State's warrant against one of his waiters last winter, for stealing a pewter spoon, of the value of ten cents, and the Recorder sent the poor fellow to Bridewell for sixty days."

"What—on Stimers's testimony?" inquired Luke Fordham.

"Yes—to be sure."

"It was a shame, Tom. I would not believe him under oath."

In passing down Mott-street, Jack Highflyer and his followers stopped at the tavern of Sylvanus Westervelt. The tavern was a brick building, two stories in height, with dirty windows and unpainted walls, having a covered arch-way of brick on the south side, leading to the stables in the rear.

The bar-room, on the first floor, opened into the street, and was furnished in the ordinary style of a third or fourth-rate tavern. There were several tables in the room, covered with the newspapers of the last two or three days, a dozen chairs, two filthy spit-boxes, and several coarse prints, in mahogany frames, suspended from the walls. The bar was fitted up with a heavy oak counter, and shelves behind the counter, on which were ranged a number of decanters filled with brandy, gin, whiskey, and other intoxicating liquors. The spaces between the shelves were covered with panes of looking-glass, which, though by no means clearly, reflected the various objects in the bar-room with sufficient distinctness. Upon the counter were half a dozen decanters, two pitchers partly filled with water, and a number of empty tumblers.

Behind the bar stood the landlord, Sylvanus Westervelt, a tall, portly man, with piercing black eyes and an irascible expression of countenance.

"Come up, fellows," said Jack Highflyer; "come up and get a drink; we haven't taken a drop since we left Bill Smith's in the Bowery."

"It's a melancholy fact," muttered Harry Wilson, "and I am as dry as one of Pete Fox's jokes."

The young men quaffed their liquor, laughing heartily at the sally of Harry Wilson.

"Six shillings, 'Vanus," said Jack Highflyer, tossing the change upon the counter. "There's a small installment toward paying your assessment in the affair of the State versus Job Dingle. We want five dollars from you, Westervelt."

"Five dollars?"

"Five dollars. More if you please."

"For what?"

"To assist in defraying the expenses of Job Dingle, on his trial for the murder of the Dutchman, at Hans Snyder's."

"I won't give you a cent," said Sylvanus Westervelt, in a firm, decided tone of voice.

"You won't?"

"I won't. And more than that, I think Job Dingle ought to be hanged for murdering an innocent, unoffending man, and I hope he will be."

"Do you hear that, boys?" said Jack Highflyer, turning to his comrades. "His father was a Dutchman, and so Master Sylvanus is disposed to shirk his obligations as a citizen and a man. But you will think better of it," he continued, addressing the landlord. "You will pay the five dollars."

"I won't," replied Westervelt, peremptorily.

"Are you in earnest?" inquired Jack Highflyer.

"I am."

"You will gain nothing by the refusal," said Jack Highflyer, coolly. As he spoke, the young man raised the small whalebone cane, which he carried in his hand, to a level with his breast, and by a rapid movement, swept four or five decanters from the counter to the floor. An angry, vindictive glance blazed from the eye of Sylvanus Westervelt, as he heard the noise of the falling vessels, and the splash of the liquors on the sanded floor. He laid his right hand upon the counter as if to leap it at a single bound.

"Boys, show him your knives!"

The blades of half-a-dozen bowie knives gleamed in the face of the landlord.

"Attack us if you dare," said Jack Highflyer. "We will not be as niggardly with our cold steel as you have been with your money."

"I'll set the police after you," said the landlord, foaming with rage.

"You had better not, 'Vanus," replied Jack Highflyer, with a smile of contempt. "If you suffer the thing to drop here, you are punished, and we are satisfied. But I assure you that you will play the game of retaliation at fearful odds."

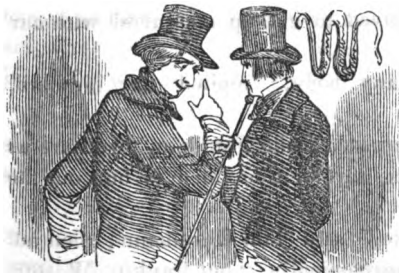
Jack Highflyer and his squad retired amid the muttered curses and imprecations of the landlord.

They pursued their route until they arrived in a region where the streets are lined with brothels and houses of assignation. To the inmates of these dens of infamy Job Dingle was not unknown; and even from them was received into the treasury of Tim Hardmann, a portion of the wages of harlotry.



CHAPTER III.

THE NEGOTIATION—THE SETTLEMENT.



WITH the early dawn the wind changed its direction, blowing from the south-west instead of from the north-east. The chill murky vapors gradually retired toward the regions of ice and snow, and the morning sun broke cloudlessly upon the churches and warehouses of

the Island City.

The temper of Sylvanus Westervelt defied the influence of a night's repose, and the genial mildness of the weather. At an early hour he threw open the door of his bar-room. The fumes of gin and tobacco still clung to the chairs and tables, and diffused a sickly poison through the atmosphere of the apartment. Fragments of broken tumblers and decanters strewed the sanded floor, mingled with scraps of paper, and the ends of half smoked cigars. There were large colored spots, also, resembling stains produced by evaporated liquors. As the rays of the sun streamed obliquely through the open doors and windows, the bar-room presented an aspect by no means cheerful or attractive.

Sylvanus Westervelt picked up the broken glass and tossed the fragments into a basket. Having done this, he seated himself near the counter with the basket before him, and in a kind of reverie, but with an angry revengful expression of countenance, surveyed its contents.

The result of his deliberate reflection was, that immediately after breakfast he repaired to the police office and entered a criminal complaint against Jack Highflyer. Having made an affidavit alleging the

facts and circumstances of the violence committed on his premises, a warrant, for the arrest of Jack Highflyer, was issued by Justice Hopson, and placed in the hands of an officer.

This proceeding was communicated to the leader of the Bowery boys by one of the gang who had been deputed to watch the movements of Sylvanus Westervelt. In the course of the morning, Tim Hardmann and Luke Fordham strolled leisurely into the bar-room in Mott-street. The landlord instantly recognized his visitors as a part of the squad who had accompanied Jack Highflyer on the preceding evening. Disguising his feelings he stepped behind the bar and stood there quietly with his hands resting upon the counter.

Tim Hardmann commenced the conversation, by remarking, bluntly :

“So, Westervelt, you are resolved to get up a quarrel with our fellows.”

“I get up no quarrels with any body,” replied the landlord, doggedly.

“Oh, no; of course not,” interposed Luke Fordham, “you are as peaceable as Toby Carbell’s black ram, that declined to butt out the brains of an elephant.”

“None of your nonsense, Luke,” said Tim Hardmann; then addressing the landlord, he added, sarcastically, “but frankly, Westervelt, do you want to get up a quarrel?”

“No, I tell you.”

“May be you think I am ignorant of the fact that you have sworn out a warrant against Jack Highflyer.”

“Is he caught already?” exclaimed Sylvanus Westervelt, his features brightening with an expression of joy.

“Jack Highflyer is a hard one to catch,” said Luke Fordham, hitching up his trowsers. “When you put your hand on him, he isn’t there.”

“And when you catch him,” said the butcher, with a threatening glance, “you had better look out for his sting.”

“But if Old Hays gets him, what then?”

“You own up to the warrant then, do you?” demanded Tim Hardmann.

“What is it to you?” asked the landlord angrily.

“A great deal, as you will discover, perhaps.”

“You and Luke Fordham, and half a dozen others whom I can name, ought to be thankful that I spared you and them. Every man of you were liable as an accomplice.”

"We are thankful, Sylvanus," said the butcher, calmly, "and you shall know it."

"I understand your threats, Tim Hardmann, and I defy you. Come when you will, I shall be ready to receive you."

"So I suppose."

"You shall not bully me, Tim," said Sylvanus Westervelt, confirming his assertion with a fearful imprecation. "Jack Highflyer and the gang of rowdies that follow him are the terror of this quarter of the city. Every night or two, the neighborhood is disturbed with a row; and now, forsooth, there are to be assessments and taxes without color of law or justice."

"Justice, do you say?"

"I won't submit to it," continued the landlord. "I have no animosity against you or any of your set; but I won't submit to it. I am determined to find out which is the strongest, the law or Jack Highflyer and his bullies."

"You talk bravely, Sylvanus," said the butcher, taking a quid of tobacco; "and yet, may be, you will get the worst of it in the end."

"If you attack me, I shall defend myself," replied Westervelt, opening a drawer behind the counter and displaying a pair of large cavalry pistols.

"Ha! ha! ha! Luke—he shows his pistols."

"A barking dog never bites, Tim."

"Take that to yourselves, both of you. What have you come here for this morning except to bark at me?"

"You are mistaken, Sylvanus—it is the friendly warning of the rattlesnake."

"I defy you," said the landlord with a vindictive expression of countenance, and a meaning glance at his weapons.

"Perhaps you are skilful in that sort of defense," said Tim Hardmann, winking at his companion, "and perhaps you think that the boys will attack you in your own house with rifles and bayonets."

"Or with bowie knives, as Job Dingle did one of my countrymen," said the landlord bitterly.

"We'll put you under the ban of the Bowery, Mr. Sylvanus Westervelt," said Luke Fordham.

"The ban? who cares?"

"You will care for it—the ban will be worse than the assessment."

"Yes, Sylvanus, you will care for it," said Tim Hardmann. "Not one of the boys from Grand-street to the Park will visit your house or hold any intercourse with your customers. Your time will hang heavy on your hands."

"Go ahead, as soon as you will."

"So Jonas Smart told us last winter, but he was glad to come to terms, after holding out a month."

"Have you any thing more to say?" inquired the landlord with an air of determination.

"If the ban fails, Sylvanus," said the butcher significantly, "we shall manage to reach you."

"You will set my house on fire, perhaps," said Westervelt, with sarcastic bitterness, "but I give you notice that I am fully insured."

"Are you trying to provoke us?" returned Tim Hardmann.

"It is you who are trying to provoke me," replied the landlord, leaning upon his elbows and gazing fiercely at his visitors. "What do you want?"

"That is coming to the point, Sylvanus," remarked the butcher, smiling complacently. "We want you to return immediately to the police office and withdraw your complaint against Jack Highflyer."

"If I do, may I be—"

"Don't swear," interrupted Luke Fordham. "You will eat hard words better than tough oaths."

"I shall eat neither words nor oaths, Luke. Have you an idea," continued the landlord, pointing toward the basket, half filled with fragments of glass, "that I will submit in silence to the wanton destruction of my property?"

"You make a great fuss about a little broken crockery. What was it worth, decanters, liquor and all?"

"Five dollars, at least."

"Your assessment was five dollars, Sylvanus. You have lost nothing after all, except the satisfaction of having contributed to the relief of an honest, worthy fellow. Take my advice—withdraw the complaint against Jack Highflyer, and let us quit even."

"I don't ask your advice. I made up my mind long ago, if you attempted any of your shindys with me, I would appeal to the law I have begun with your ringleader."

"If you get Jack Highflyer arrested, you won't hold him."

"He crows loudly on his own dunghill, and boasts that the law can't touch him. We shall see. If I can do nothing more, I will compel him to give bail for his appearance at court, and that will

mortify him beautifully, when it comes to the ears of a certain maiden in Hudson-street, who don't know him as well as I do."

"You bear malice, then," said Tim Hardmann, "and that, too, against a set of fellows who have spent scores of dollars in your house?"

"Till you found a better rendezvous at Bill Smith's porter-house."

"And since that, Sylvanus. But we will argue the point no longer. What is your final answer?"

"I'll do this, Tim, for old times," said the landlord, relaxing somewhat the stern severity of his countenance and assuming an air of friendliness; "if Jack Highflyer will come to my house, pay me the full amount of my damages, and ask my pardon for the outrage he has committed upon me, I will consent to let him off."

"Is the man crazy?" inquired Tim Hardmann, turning to his companion.

"Otherwise, the law must take its course."

"Pay your damages! ask your pardon! is the man crazy, Luke?"

A couple of laborers employed in digging a cellar on the opposite side of the street, left their work and approached the bar-room.

"Remember what I tell you, Sylvanus Westervelt," said the butcher, speaking rapidly in a tone of warning, "if you do not withdraw the complaint against Jack Highflyer before sun-down, it will be too late. When you open the bar-room to-morrow morning, you will perceive the figure of a cross drawn with red and white chalk upon the pavement, and you will know that the ban of the Bowery is upon you and yours."

The laborers entered the bar-room as Tim Hardmann and Luke Fordham left it. They seated themselves, wiping the perspiration from their faces with their soiled shirt-sleeves, and called for glasses of half-and-half. Other customers came in to quench their thirst, and chat with the landlord, or read the morning papers. Among the visitors was a tall imposing person dressed like a countryman. The landlord invited him behind the counter, and the twain held a brief consultation in whispers.

Once more alone, Sylvanus Westervelt walked up and down the bar-room twice or thrice, snapping his fingers triumphantly, and muttering to himself:

"Jack Highflyer and his gang may do their worst. I am glad to be rid of them, now that Edson Quarles is coming to board with me."

Ten minutes afterward, James Fogle glided into the bar-room. Quietly and observantly he made the circuit of the apartment before addressing the landlord.

"Is Stanton with you, at present?"

"No, Mr. Fogle—he left me last week to visit his mother in Connecticut."

Fogle raised his eyelids a little and glanced momentarily at the speaker's face.

"You were down town this morning?" he remarked drily.

"Yes, on business."

"I was hanging about the police office when you arrived, but you did not see me."

"No, Jim, I did not."

"Rufus Blake told me that you swore out a warrant against Jack Highflyer."

The tavern-keeper cast a hesitating glance at Fogle and replied:

"It's a fact, Fogle."

"Won't you get into trouble with Jack and his partisans by pursuing this course?"

"I neither know nor care. Tim Hardmann and Luke Fordham, two of the bell-wethers of the flock, have been here already—and what do you suppose they want me to do?"

The landlord paused, but Fogle merely nodded by way of intimation to him to proceed.

"Nothing less, Jim, than to withdraw the complaint against Jack Highflyer."

"Well?"

"You have heard of the provocation I received?"

"Blake related to me the substance of your affidavit before Justice Hopson."

"I ask you, Jim, if such treatment ought not to be resented?"

"They are wild boys, you know."

"Wild enough—a nuisance to every peaceable man in this quarter. I shall render a service to the public by consigning the ringleader of the gang to the punishment of the law."

"So you are turning patriot?" said James Fogle, with a peculiar quizzical look.

"How's that?"

"We shall have you in the field, Sylvanus, as a candidate for public office. We shall read of you in the newspapers as the defender of the rights of the people."

“Quizzing, Jim; I feel out of sorts to-day.”

“Well, what answer did you give to the request of Jack’s comrades?”

“At first, I refused flatly.”

“And then?”

“I told them, finally, that if Jack Highflyer would pay my damages, and ask pardon for the outrage committed in my house, I would do as they desired.”

“They went off angry, of course.”

“Yes—and threatening, the devil knows what, unless I go to the police office before sundown and withdraw the complaint.”

“I advise you to do it.”

“You?”

“Jack Highflyer has not done much harm, Sylvanus. Some friends of mine are friends of his, and I advise you—”

“I have laid down my course, Jim Fogle,” said the landlord, with an air of dogged determination. “I don’t want your advice, nor any man’s.”

“No?” said Fogle with a nasal drawl.

“That’s it, Jim.”

“By the by,” remarked Fogle, carelessly, “you have had a visit from Quarles this morning.”

The landlord cast an uneasy glance at James Fogle, and stammered out:

“What? who? Quarles, did you say?”

“I saw him, Sylvanus,” said Fogle, raising his eyelids, “and oddly dressed as he was, I knew him instantly.”

“You did?”

“He handles a pen curiously, but I thought that you had left off dealing with him since the blow up two years ago?”

“So I have Jim,” replied the tavern-keeper; “he dropped in to talk over old matters a little, that was all.”

“Yes,” said Fogle, in his peculiar manner.

Sylvanus Westervelt was manifestly uneasy. He strode across the bar-room several times, then stepped behind the counter and poured out half a gill of brandy, inviting James Fogle to drink with him.

After swallowing his potation, the landlord approached his visitor, and slapping him familiarly on the shoulder, remarked:

“I say, Jim, you are a clever fellow.”

Fogle opened his eyes widely, and with an innocent expression of countenance met the gaze of the tavern-keeper.

"Do you really take an interest in this business about Jack High-flyer?"

Fogle nodded.

"I won't budge an inch for the whole gang—but out of friendship for you—"

"Yes, out of friendship for me—"

"I will withdraw the complaint."

"You will—immediately?"

"Before night, Jim. You will testify that I have not shown the white feather. It is all on your account."

"Yes—it is all on my account, Sylvanus."

"And I say, Fogle, you are discreet and sly. You won't say a word to any body about the return of Quarles, or about seeing him at my house?"

"Indeed I won't," replied Fogle, "if you had rather not."

"I had a little rather not," said the landlord, with an appearance of returning good humor.

In the course of the day, Sylvanus Westervelt redeemed his promise to James Fogle.

CHAPTER IV.

MORE OF THE TRACEYS.



Do you believe in animal magnetism, Mrs. Tracey?"

Alfred Tracey was walking in the hall, after breakfast, with his brother's wife; and the inquiry was addressed rather abruptly to his companion.

The door of Owen Tracey's sitting apartment was standing open.

For a moment, the lady hesitated ere she replied, laconically:

"No, Alfred."

"The professors of mesmerism are obtaining great influence over the popular mind."

"In all ages, the masses of the people have been misled by those who pretend to possess mysterious or supernatural powers. Popular opinion once sanctioned the juggles of the ancient soothsayers, the absurdities of magic, astrology, alchemy and witchcraft."

"But the wonders of this new science are attested by men of learning and character. A distinguished clergyman, of this city, deeply versed in every branch of human knowledge, has openly written in favor of it. The medical journals of France and Germany are said to abound with reports of surgical operations performed, successfully,

without any appearance of suffering or pain, upon patients, who had been previously submitted to the influence of mesmerism."

"I have no means of controverting the truth of experiments and observations made by competent persons; but yet, I cannot repose implicit confidence in such statements. The Creator has rendered every human being morally accountable for his words and actions. It seems unreasonable to me, therefore, to believe that he would virtually destroy the free agency of his creatures, by conferring on a portion of mankind, such powers as are claimed by the adepts in animal magnetism."

"There are conditions of the human body, familiar to physicians, which are analogous to mesmeric sleep; for instance, somnambulism."

"Somnambulism is a strange malady; but a malady nevertheless."

"The tragedy of Macbeth evinces that, even in the time of Shakspeare, the curious phenomena of somnambulism were known. Lady Macbeth, in her sleep, is continually babbling of the horrible circumstances attending the murder of the Scottish king."

"Great crimes are followed by remorse, and remorse will find utterance."

"Not always, Mrs. Tracey," said the young man, with an inquisitive glance. "Remorse is the folly of weak minds, that commit crimes, yet fear consequences."

"It is better, Alfred," replied Mrs. Tracey, gravely, "to escape the penalty of its sting, by the absence of guilt, rather than by the strength of depravity."

The young man's lip quivered imperceptibly; but he banished the rising emotion, by an effort of the will, and calmly remarked:

"The undeniable facts connected with somnambulism have given rise to many legends and superstitions. I remember to have read a narrative, many years ago, illustrating a prevailing belief among the people of Hungary, that a man in a profound slumber will respond to the whisper of a familiar voice. The lady Ida, of Dietz, became the heiress of an immense estate in Hungary, through the death, by violence, of a beloved brother. She was wooed and won by an Austrian nobleman of distinction. She loved her husband tenderly, and was, therefore, much afflicted to perceive that he suffered extremely from melancholy. One night, when he was slumbering in a large easy chair, in the principal chamber of the castle of Dietz, she bethought herself of the notion of the country people. She approached the sleeping nobleman, and asked in a whisper, the cause of his dejection. In

low and trembling tones, the Count confessed that he had murdered the Baron Menzel, of Dietz, so that his estates might devolve upon the lady Ida."

"I can imagine the surprise, the horror of such a discovery—the destruction of her love for the Baron—"

"On the contrary, the lady Ida kept his secret—forgave him, and loved him as tenderly as ever."

"Impossible!" replied Mrs. Tracey, warmly. "Her husband a murderer—the murderer of her brother."

"So goes the legend," said Alfred Tracey, laughing. "I have never tried the experiment of the lady Ida with any of my acquaintances. In one instance, however, I obtained the clue to a heinous offense against the law, by listening to the indistinct mutterings of a man talking in his sleep. I did not denounce him to the authorities because he was, in some sort, a relative of mine."

"You were generous, Alfred."

These words were pronounced by Owen Tracey, in low guttural tones, that barely reached the ears of his brother. He was standing in the door of his sitting apartment, with an expression of sarcastic bitterness on his features. The events and reflections of the last few days, had not tended to mollify the harshness of his temper, or to change the forbidding aspect of his coarse physiognomy. Their influence had, indeed, led to contrary results. His physical vigor was diminished, and he seemed to have grown perceptibly older: but there were no signs of mental weakness or indecision of character.

The young man remarked, indifferently, without lowering his voice:

"Policy, Owen—nothing but policy."

This reply drew the attention of Mrs. Tracey to her husband. She perceived his angry, contemptuous glance, and turned, inquiringly, toward Alfred Tracey.

"The clouds are scattering," said he, coolly.

On approaching her husband, Mrs. Tracey paused, as if hesitating whether to make a request.

"The sun will be out in an hour," continued Alfred Tracey. "I am willing to stake my reputation as a prophet on the issue of the prediction."

"Will you accompany me in a call upon Mrs. Willoughby to-day?" said Mrs. Tracey, somewhat timidly, to her husband.

"No, madam, I have business of greater importance on my hands, than running about on calls of ceremony."

"To-morrow, then?"

"Not to-morrow, nor the next day. Where is the necessity of my going at all?"

"It is etiquette, Mr. Tracey. The rules of politeness are the basis of social intercourse."

"Who denies it, madam? I think very well of Mrs. Willoughby—very well indeed; and I don't wish to offer her any slight. If you have any tact whatever, you can excuse me for not being always tied to your apron-string."

"Do you wish me to call without you?"

"Just as you please. I do not know when I shall be able to spare the time. Time is money, Mrs. Tracey."

"A merchant out of business—"

"Who told you that I was out of business?" said Owen Tracey, interrupting his wife. "I have sold out my stock of merchandise, and retired from commercial business; but I cannot abandon myself to mere child's play."

"I did not intend to vex you. I will apologise to Mrs. Willoughby, as you desire, whenever I see her."

"I am not vexed, Mrs. Tracey. If I do not fall in with your views, you charge me with losing my temper. I never lose my temper without just provocation."

"Is the carriage at my disposal this morning?"

"What do you want of the carriage?"

"I have some calls to make, Mr. Tracey."

"And you must ride. I would rather walk than ride at any time."

"The distance—"

"Take the carriage, madam, but don't drive the poor horses to death."

Alfred Tracey caught a portion of this conversation as he continued to promenade the hall. He was passing his brother and Mrs. Tracey a third time, when the former addressed him:

"A word with you, Alfred. Your presence will be necessary at the counting-house of Messrs. Barstow and Rodman on Monday at two o'clock."

"Very well; on Monday, at two o'clock."

"Do not fail to meet me at the appointed time," said the merchant, gravely, retiring from the door of his apartment and resuming his seat at his writing desk.

The younger Tracey and the lady walked several times across the hall, in silence. At length the former remarked:

"I overheard you talking of a visit to Mrs. Willoughby. Are you going alone?"

"Mr. Tracey has business in the city, and I shall be deprived of his company."

"Will you permit me to escort you? I have an engagement to meet Frederick Willoughby at his mother's residence."

"Certainly, Alfred, if I resolve upon going."

The voice of Owen Tracey was distinctly heard, muttering in harsh tones:

"How can a man think or write with so much noise around him!" and almost instantly the door of his apartment was closed with a loud slam.

"You are accustomed, as well as myself, to the ebullitions of Owen's temper," said Alfred Tracey, with a laugh.

"I regret them," replied Mrs. Tracey, "sincerely—less on my account or yours, than on his."

"You excite my surprise and admiration," said the young man, "by the composure and dignity of your bearing. I have never seen you ruffled in the slightest degree, under any circumstances."

"My personal traits," said the lady, with a grave smile, "and the previous interruptions seem to have blotted from your mind the original subject of our conversation."

"It is always difficult to return through a winding path. I have a distinct recollection, however, of the feeling which you manifested in relation to the conduct of the lady Ida, of Dietz."

"The story which you related was fabulous, or the lady Ida was deficient in principle. No woman can love tenderly and truly unless she has confidence in the moral principle of her husband."

"Your assertion is startling."

"It conveys, in plain, simple terms, a truth of the highest import. If you seek hereafter in the marriage state to realize the felicity of your romantic dream of affection, beware how you forfeit, in the slightest degree, the respect of the woman of your choice."

"I desire to be loved as I am, independent of circumstances."

"Circumstances and character are very different things. Differences of opinion, peculiarities of manner, deformities of person, are by no means inconsistent with the deepest regard—the fondest affection. But how can either a man or a woman really love a liar, a thief, a murderer?"

"The love is not worth possessing," said the young man, bitterly, "which will not endure under all vicissitudes."

"Vicissitudes is a word inapplicable to moral delinquencies. The tenderness of real affection will not diminish in the changing storms and sunshine of external life. The loss of fortune, of health and personal beauty—the approach of age, even the querulousness of disappointed ambition, serves only to display the purity of its devotion. Love exhibits its true sublimity when it hovers unceasingly over the pillow of sickness, and scatters with its sweet smiles the shadows of melancholy. Crime alone, the offspring of selfishness and malice and depravity of heart, can deface the glory of its idol."

"Has experience taught you this?" inquired Alfred Tracey, pointedly.

"The moral instincts of the soul offer their teachings to all," replied Mrs. Tracey, evading a direct answer of the question.

"I appeal from your doctrines to yourself," said the young man, with an observing glance. "Would you cease to love and respect any person—your husband, for example—whom you detected in the commission of a great crime?"

"How could it be otherwise?" replied the lady, gravely.

"But in judging another, would you not regard the motives as well as the act?"

"Assuredly. The most infamous crimes are those which are perpetrated for the sake of gain. The excesses of the passions may awaken sympathy; but the guilt which springs from sordid avarice has no covering to shield it from contempt and abhorrence."

"Love itself is sometimes criminal in the eyes of the world," exclaimed Alfred Tracey, seriously.

Mrs. Tracey blushed slightly as she encountered the gaze of her companion.

"The feeling of the heart," said the lady, after a moment's hesitation, "as well as the actions of the life, ought to be under the control of the judgment."

The silence which followed this remark was broken by Alfred Tracey.

"Shall I order the carriage at eleven?"

Mrs. Tracey assented.

CHAPTER V.

BOND-STREET—THE LETTER.



MRS. WILLOUGHBY courteously received her visitors in a large and spacious drawing-room.

The visitors were Alfred Tracey and Mrs. Owen Tracey.

In the midst of a conversation between the ladies on the comparative merits of several patterns of plain and watered silks, Alfred Tracey inquired:

“Is Frederick at home, Mrs. Willoughby?”

“He was writing in the library half an hour ago, and is probably still employed at

his *escritoire*.”

“I will seek him there, madam. I have some important business,” continued the young man, with a smile, “and I desire to monopolize his society for a quarter of an hour.”

Mrs. Willoughby rang the bell. A servant entered almost instantly.

“Conduct Mr. Tracey to the library,” said the mistress of the house, “he wishes to see Frederick.”

The domestic bowed respectfully, and retired, followed by Alfred Tracey.

“You do not seem in your usual health, to-day,” said Mrs. Tracey, after the young man had disappeared.

"My health is good," replied Mrs. Willoughby, "but I am suffering a little from fatigue, and want of rest. I was summoned yesterday afternoon to the sick chamber of my cousin, Mrs. Isabella Hopkins. She is affected with a chronic disease of the lungs, and was apparently at the point of death when I arrived at her residence. I remained with her during the greater part of the night. Toward morning she rallied considerably, and I attempted to get a few hours sleep, but my slumbers were interrupted by frightful dreams. The fatigue and anxiety of such a night are no trifles at my age."

"How did you leave Mrs. Hopkins?"

"Better—decidedly better—although she is conscious that her disease will eventually prove fatal."

"You were absent from home the whole night?"

"Yes, my dear Mrs. Tracey. Frederick was quite concerned on my behalf, and sent the carriage for me early this morning."

"His anxiety was natural."

"And on my return he teased me with the information that an old friend had called to take tea with me yesterday, Wilfred Montessor, the traveler."

"Montessor?" echoed Mrs. Tracey, almost unconsciously.

"Do you know him?"

"I met him at your assembly, last week," said Mrs. Tracey, gravely.

"The mother of Wilfred Montessor and myself were warm friends. It is not surprising that a portion of the attachment I felt for her should be transferred to him. His own merits, however, are sufficient to inspire the highest esteem. His life has been erratic and apparently aimless, but he is a man of original intellect and powerful genius, profoundly versed in men and things. The acquirements of the scholar and the traveler are gracefully blended with the polished urbanity of the gentleman. Frederick has recently sought his society, and I flatter myself has obtained his confidence and regard."

"You are an excellent defender," said Mrs. Tracey, smiling.

"Defender—of whom?"

"Of Mr. Montessor."

"I do him only justice."

"His genius and acquirements may be as great and extensive as you have represented them," said Mrs. Tracey, seriously, "but can their lustre atone for lax principles and immoral conduct?"

"Immoral conduct and Wilfred Montessor! Ah! you allude to the absurd rumors afloat in regard to a beautiful Georgian mistress?"

“Absurd?” inquired Mrs. Tracey, with trembling hesitation.

“I will not deny that these rumors have had a more plausible foundation than usually supports the fabric of scandal. Mr. Montessor is eccentric and independent, and could never be generally popular, even if his lofty talents, brilliant acquirements and immense fortune, the whet-stones on which envy and malice sharpen their forked tongues, did not render him an object of detraction. He pursues his own course by means of his own seeking, and pays little regard to the tastes or opinions of others. This is the fault, if fault it be, of a cultivated masculine intellect, self-poised and self-sustained in its views of right and duty.”

“The critics of society are accustomed to admire in heroes what they condemn in ordinary men.”

“Wilfred Montessor is a man of heroic stamp. His career has been watched by me with the interest, not the blindness of a friend. If he has performed no great actions on the theater of the world to attract the shouts of the multitude, he has manifested clearly the inherent qualities of greatness. Since his return from the East, he has visited me rarely. There is nothing in which his eccentricity is more marked than in his personal intercourse. He is intimate with few—confides entirely in none—yet he exercises a surprising influence over all with whom he associates. I am forgetting, however, the moral delinquencies of my friend,” said Mrs. Willoughby, with a meaning smile, as she rose from the sofa. “Excuse me for a moment, Mrs. Tracey.”

Mrs. Willoughby returned to the drawing-room, after a brief absence, holding in her hand a package of moderate size. She removed the envelop, the seal of which was already broken, and presented the enclosure to her visitor.

“Read this letter, my dear Mrs. Tracey, while I order the servants to bring in some refreshments.”

Mrs. Tracey was alone.

The sight of the handwriting of Wilfred Montessor affected her strangely. Her hand trembled as she unfolded the letter, but she subdued her emotions, and slowly perused its contents:

“MRS. WILLOUGHBY:

“I write to you in the awful presence of death! Yesternight I beheld the merry groups of dancers in your gay saloons—now I am weeping by the corpse of Zorah! The lights and shadows of life strike the soul more vividly by the power of contrast.

“You knew not Zorah.

“Come hither to me, my friend, and gaze upon the casket which death has despoiled of the jewel of a tender, loving spirit! The sunlight has faded from her eyes, but her dimpled cheeks, her rosy lips, her pure triumphant brow, her golden ringlets, still reveal the dazzling perfection of her beauty.

“What has the world to do with Zorah and me?—the cold, heartless world—the laughing, sneering, mocking world—the buzzing, stinging, biting world! Zorah is dead, and I neither regard its sneers nor feel its stings.

“But, to you, my friend—to the wise and good who know me, and perchance regard me—I am justly responsible. To you I trust my defense, and the fame of Zorah.

“Is it pride, or manly independence of character, that seals my lips to all others?

“I cannot reveal the history of my connection with Zorah, without a preliminary confession. I have never imparted to you the real cause of my wanderings in the East.

“I loved, truly—unworthily!

“Yes—I, Wilfred Montessor—the man whom you imagine to be so deeply read in human nature, so acute in discrimination, so unerring in judgment—was basely deceived by a young girl. The youth, the beauty, the seeming artlessness of the maiden, disarmed suspicion and repelled precaution.

“Scared and blasted as my heart and life have been, I yet remember the brightness of the web of gossamer, woven in the airy chambers of fancy. I floated upon it, as do the angels upon the light fleecy clouds, fringed with gold and silver, that glide up to heaven at the going down of the sun on a summer’s day.

“The web of gossamer parted—the vision of splendor faded away.

“I fled from the land of my birth, determined never to return until the wound of my spirit was entirely healed. The wound is healed; only the cicatrice remains.

“In the course of my wanderings, I visited the mountainous country of Georgia. I was entertained, during several months, at the castle of one of the chiefs, or petty princes, of that country. He was the father of Zorah.

“One day, on returning from a solitary excursion to the mountains, I perceived great confusion in the castle. A predatory band of robbers had assailed the stronghold in the absence of the chief, plundered it of all its valuables, and carried away Zorah captive.

At the head of the chief's followers, I pursued the robbers, without delay, overtook them at the distance of a few leagues, and routed them. Zorah was rescued, and the plunder of the castle torn from the marauders.

"On my way to Jerusalem, I tarried a few days at Damascus. During my stay in that ancient city, I met with a strange adventure. I was writing in an apartment at the residence of an Armenian, whose guest I was, when the door was opened by my host. Two lads entered, richly dressed in Persian costumes. Their garments were soiled with dust, and they were almost exhausted with fatigue.

"My astonishment was great when the eldest of the lads threw off his velvet cap and flung himself at my feet, imploring, in broken English, to become my slave! As I raised him from the floor, I beheld the countenance of Zorah, the daughter of the Georgian Chief!

"I have not told you of the intimacy which sprang up between Zorah and myself, at her father's castle, after the scene of the rescue. Her gratitude was unbounded, and was manifested in a thousand acts of kindness. She became extremely fond of my society, and entreated me to teach her to express her thanks in my own language. Her quickness of apprehension, her docility of temper, and her radiant beauty, excited a friendly interest in her welfare. I thought not of love. The hope, the desire of passionate love, was quenched in my bosom for ever.

"The Armenian, at whose house I was staying, spoke fluently the dialect of Georgia. After procuring some refreshments for Zorah and the young lad who accompanied her, I requested her, through the interpreter, to tell me the object of her journey to Damascus.

"I learned that on my departure, she had left her father's castle, clandestinely, and persuading the young lad, Hamet, one of her kindred, to accompany her, had followed in the track of my circuitous wanderings, until she overtook me at the city of Damascus.

"'I will follow my lord whithersoever he goeth.' Thus the Armenian interpreted her words. 'I will wait upon him when he is weary. I will fan him while he sleeps. I will be his slave, in all things, for ever.'

"Gravely and seriously I rebuked the beautiful Georgian for leaving her father's protection. Her tears began to flow at the first signs of my displeasure; but when I informed her that it was my intention to send her back to him, without delay, her grief became excessive. She threw herself, again, at my feet; embraced

my knees, and besought me to kill her rather than cast her from me.

"Her tears, her agony, startled me. I began to waver in my resolution.

"The manners and customs of the East would have excused me in degrading her to the condition of a slave. It was evident that her love for me had completely triumphed over her pride of birth and her consciousness of beauty. She had risked her liberty and life to follow me. Her only desire was to remain with me. Could I doom her to disappointment, to misery, perhaps to death?

"I shut myself in my chamber during several hours to reflect. The beauty, the gentleness, the purity of Zorah, were known to me. And she loved me.

"The Past and the Future mingled their shadows together in the silent chamber of the Armenian, in the ancient city of Damascus.

"The shadow of the Past was dark, impenetrable.

"This was the shadow of the Future: The love of a true woman unreturned, pining beneath the scorn of the virtuous, the jest of the libertine.

"I submitted my scruples of conscience to the decision of the venerable Bishop of Damascus.

"In the name of God, Amen!

"I, Jean Swartz, Bishop of Damascus, do certify, that on the twentieth day of June, in the year one thousand eight hundred and twenty-six, Wilfred Montessor, of the United States of America, and Zorah, the daughter of Hassan El Barad, were united by me in the holy bands of matrimony.

"JEAN SWARTZ, Bishop of Damascus.

"Henri Marteau, of Bordeaux. }
 "Eben-amarch, of Damascus. } Witnesses."

"The above is the transcript of a paper now lying before me.

"Zorah became my wife.

"Never did I regret the decisive act which linked the fate of Zorah with mine. I gave her my presence and protection. In return, she idolized me. Hers was a rare loveliness and winning grace, an ineffable tenderness. Alas! that none of these could rekindle the flame of love in my heart of adamant.

"Was it not softening, reviving—else why these mournful lamentations, these bitter tears, as I kneel beside her corpse! Why do I press my lips to her cold marble brow! Why do I cling to the memory of every flattering word, every loving caress!

"I continued my tour through Syria, Arabia, and Egypt. I coasted along the shores of the Mediterranean, and visited the most renowned of its magnificent islands. Zorah and her kinsman, Hamet, accompanied me. We tarried month after month at a delicious retreat in one of the Ionian islands.

"I became interested in Zorah gradually, almost unconsciously. Her society was a relief to me in my hours of relaxation from travel or study, when dark and bitter thoughts came crowding upon me. She was ardent in her feelings, generous in her impulses, very beautiful, and of a quick, discerning, though not profound intellect. Both Zorah and Hamet were extremely desirous of acquiring my native language. I employed several hours every day in their instruction. Their progress was rapid. In less than two years they read and conversed in the English tongue with ease and fluency.

"At length I grew weary of a wandering, unsettled life. My thoughts turned homeward. I sounded the depths of my heart, and convinced myself that I could tread the streets of my native city with calmness and unconcern. My resolution was taken.

"A question arose in relation to Zorah, my beautiful Georgian bride. She had no practical acquaintance with the customs and usages of society in the polished circles of Europe and America. The mysteries of dress, and the arts and accomplishments of modern fashionable life, were unknown to her. I reflected seriously whether it was my duty, on my arrival in New York, to introduce her immediately into society, to subject her to the observation and ridicule of the curious and the envious—to expose her to the levity of fops, and the impertinence of libertines. Zorah was desirous of living in complete retirement, but this arose chiefly from her unbounded devotion to me. I hesitated in my judgment, and finally resolved to be guided by circumstances.

"Several months have passed since the termination of my wanderings. The phases of city life in their outward aspect were becoming familiar to Zorah. Her character also was daily rising toward the measure of that of a perfect woman. Her mind developed new powers. Respect and admiration mingled with the sentiments of regard and friendship, which I entertained for her. On the evening of Friday last, when present at your assembly, I compared, involuntarily, the accomplished belle of your room with her—the absent Georgian. I felt that I had done her injustice. Her beauty, her grace, her instinctive delicacy of thought and action, in spite of minor defi-

ciencies, were sufficient to attract them as friends or to eclipse them as rivals.

"Moreover, I reflected that I had married her to justify myself in receiving her devotion, and to uphold the purity of her character in the eyes of the world. Had not the voice of slander already whispered its malicious imaginings?"

"I determined to consult you, my dear Mrs. Willoughby, without delay, and to request you to become the chaperone of my Eastern bride.

"On the same evening Zorah was smitten by the arrow of the destroyer, Death! To-morrow she will rest in a cemetery on the banks of the Hudson, far from her native mountains, far from the grave of her mother and the princely castle of her father.

"To-night I watch by her corpse.

"I loved truly, and was betrayed. Zorah loved me tenderly, and is dead. The last link is shattered that bound me to the experience—nay, to the desire—of earthly affection.

"WILFRED MONTRESSOR."

The return of Mrs. Willoughby to the drawing-room, was unperceived by Mrs. Tracey, who was sitting upon an ottoman in a pensive, thoughtful attitude. The letter of Wilfred Montessor was lying by her side, on the cushion of the ottoman.

"You are very thoughtful," said Mrs. Willoughby, with a smile, addressing her visitor. "What is your opinion of the conduct and character of my friend Montessor?"

Mrs. Tracey started slightly at the sound of Mrs. Willoughby's voice, but recovered herself instantly.

"The writer of this letter," she replied, "is unquestionably a man of honor and integrity."

"I have submitted its contents to your perusal," said Mrs. Willoughby, "relying firmly upon your discretion, as he has relied upon mine. At suitable periods, and with suitable persons, I shall vindicate the reputation of Montessor and the Georgian from the surmises and inuendos of slanderers. I was greatly surprised, Mrs. Tracey, to learn that Wilfred Montessor was impelled on his Eastern travels by a disappointment in love."

"The motives which control the actions of others are rarely revealed to us."

"But who could have rewarded the passionate tenderness of a man so noble, so generous, so accomplished, as Wilfred Montessor, with coldness and treachery?"

"We will not condemn one of our own sex," said Mrs. Tracey, with a faint smile, "without a knowledge of all the circumstances."

A servant entered with refreshments, and, a moment after, Frederick Willoughby and Alfred Tracey made their appearance.

A general conversation ensued, on American Artists and their productions, which terminated in an engagement to visit the studio of the celebrated painter, Vanderlyn, early in the succeeding week.



CHAPTER VI.

MESMERISM.



PHYSICIAN is not the master of his time, Mr. Montessor," said Doctor Everard, on entering his library and discovering the traveler poring over a folio edition of the works of Paracelsus—"you will, I trust, excuse my absence at the appointed hour."

The return of the Doctor to his residence had been delayed by professional engagements, until a later period than usual.

"Your books have bewitched me, Doctor," replied Wilfred Montessor. "I have been dipping into the treasures of your library, from Hippocrates to Dr. Physic."

"The progress of the science of medicine is an interesting study," said the Doctor. "The mysterious laws of the human organism are gradually unveiling themselves to the ken of philosophers."

"You remind me of my appointment with you. What of Miss Percy, Doctor?"

"I called at her residence yesterday, and expressed my desire to put her into a magnetic sleep, in the presence of a scientific friend. She hesitated at first, but finally consented, as she politely remarked, from a sense of gratitude to me."

"Did she manifest much reluctance?"

"No, Mr. Montessor, and unless I am mistaken, the revelation of your name and standing in society exercised a potent influence in securing her consent."

"And the experiments—when? where?"

"This morning at her residence, if you are at leisure."

During the walk from the vicinity of Washington Square to Prince
200

street, Dr. Everard related to his companion the incidents of his recent visit to Mrs. Williams. He was surprised at the deep interest which the traveler manifested in the narrative.

On arriving at Miss Percy's residence, the gentlemen were ushered into a pleasant sitting room, or boudoir, communicating with the drawing room. Miss Percy, attired in an elegant morning dress, was reclining languidly upon an ottoman. As her visitors advanced toward her she rose gracefully, though with an apparent effort, to receive them.

"Be seated, Miss Percy," said Dr. Everard, kindly. "You are still feeble."

"It is nothing but languor, Doctor."

Doctor Everard introduced his companion to the lady, and a desultory conversation ensued, in the course of which Miss Percy artfully remarked :

"Appearances are deceitful, Mr. Montessor ; yet people judge by appearances. I have been, more or less, an invalid for years, but I fail oftentimes to receive the sympathy of my friends, because I do not grow thin, sallow and disagreeable."

"Neither of which qualities would be in any wise becoming or advantageous to you," rejoined Montessor.

Miss Percy glanced, inquiringly, at the speaker ; then turning to Doctor Everard, said with a smile :

"My general health is improving daily. The headache and vertigo which have troubled me so long, are yielding to the power of mesmerism. It is this conviction which sustains me in submitting to experiments which, however curious to you or delightful to me, manifest the weakness and subjection of my nature."

"The phenomena of mesmerism are curious, wonderful, almost supernatural," said Doctor Everard. "I perceive the results, but I cannot satisfactorily trace the causes."

"You allude to sensations under the magnetic influence," observed Montessor, addressing Miss Percy. "Are they, indeed, delightful?"

"The change from wakefulness to sleep, is attended with a vague, painful uneasiness, similar to that of certain dreams, in which the scenes are continually shifting. The bodily organs are gradually benumbed, and become insensible to external impressions. Then freed from earthly clogs, the soul is conscious of perfect freedom. It floats as it were in a celestial atmosphere surrounded with the perfumes of flowers and the sounds of angelic voices."

"This is magic, Doctor," said Montessor. "Let me behold the mystery, if I cannot solve it!"

Doctor Everard drew a chair near the ottoman and seated himself in front of Miss Percy. He directed her to assume an easy, comfortable posture, and to fix her eyes intently upon him. The Doctor then clasped her hands gently, and pressed the fleshy part of his thumbs to hers, at the same time looking steadily into her dark beaming eyes.

Several minutes elapsed ere the countenance of the lady underwent any change. She sat erect and motionless, save that her calm and regular breathing was manifested by the gentle heave of her bosom. At length, however, a slight flush diffused itself over her cheeks. She breathed more slowly, and her eyelids began to droop, perceptibly. These indications of approaching sleep were followed by a protracted yawn, and almost constant winking of the eyes.

Doctor Everard relinquished the clasp of her hands and placing his thumbs over her drooping eyelids, closed them perfectly. He held his thumbs in that position during thirty or forty seconds, and then pressing his fingers and the open palms of his hands gently upon her brow and temples, he commenced a series of downward motions or passes, extending, gradually, until his hands swept with a light pressure from the top of her head over her neck, shoulders and arms, to the tip of her fingers.

The Doctor continued these passes until the features of Miss Percy assumed the placid expression of profound slumber. His steady, piercing glance, was constantly fastened upon her closed lids. Even after the yawning and occasional twitches of the muscles of the face had entirely disappeared, he remained quietly before her during a considerable space of time.

"Come hither, Mr. Montessor," said Doctor Everard at length. "This is the magnetic sleep."

Montessor advanced. His curiosity was really excited by the extraordinary results of the Doctor's manipulations.

"It is either a surprising fact," he murmured inaudibly, "or a wonderful deception."

The flush had passed from Miss Percy's cheeks, her eyelids were closed and her head reclined not ungracefully upon her right shoulder. Her arms and hands were rigid and motionless. Montessor raised one of her hands a little, and suddenly relinquished his hold—it fell upon the ottoman as if it were palsied.

"The rigidity of the muscles, the coldness of the extremities, the diminution of the pulse and nervous insensibility, are the distinguishing marks of the magnetic sleep. All these are present," said Doctor Everard, feeling the pulse of the sleeper. "Not over sixty pulsations in the minute, Mr. Montessor. The physical symptoms are remarkable, but they are of trifling importance compared with the mental phenomena. I do not feel at liberty, in this case, to test the insensibility of the nervous system by any serious experiment. There is no visible evidence on pressing her hands or cheeks lightly, that she experiences the sense of touch."

"None whatever?"

"Speak to her, Mr. Montessor."

"Do you hear me, Miss Percy?" inquired the man of thirty-five.

"More loudly."

Montessor repeated the question twice, but there was no response from the unconscious sleeper.

"The mysterious agencies of soul upon soul are inexplicable," said Doctor Everard. "By the influence of my will—for I place little stress upon the passes, or even the intense gaze of the visual organs—I have subdued the mental and physical action of a fellow being into sympathy with mine. My perceptions are her perceptions, my thoughts are her thoughts, my desires and antipathies are hers. During the continuance of the magnetic state, her ideas and emotions will be manifested only through the concurrence of my will. Yet I cannot suggest a plausible explanation of these remarkable phenomena—the greatest puzzle of modern philosophy. However theories may differ, facts will not lie."

Doctor Everard took Miss Percy's hand in his, and continued, in a low voice:

"Do you know me, Miss Percy?"

The lips of the sleeper parted instantly, and she replied, audibly:

"Yes, perfectly."

"Who am I?"

"Doctor Everard."

"How do you feel at present, Miss Percy?"

"As free and joyous as a bird, Doctor," said Miss Percy, a smile illumining her features.

"Will you suffer me to put you in communication with her?" said Doctor Everard, addressing the man of thirty-five.

"No," replied Montessor; "I prefer to be simply a witness of

your curious experiments. Forget my presence, if you can, Doctor Everard, until you have gone through with them."

Wilfred Montessor seated himself in a low rocking-chair, at the distance of five feet from the ottoman, so that his position enabled him to scan the features of Miss Percy with great precision. With his cheek resting upon the palm of his hand, he watched closely the movements of the Doctor and his patient.

Doctor Everard thrust aside the chair which he had occupied during the process of magnetizing Miss Percy. He walked several times across the apartment, with slow, measured steps. He paused finally, within a foot of the traveler, and remained standing, several moments, in a reflecting attitude. Gazing upon the face of the sleeper, he slowly raised his right hand, in a horizontal direction. Almost at the instant when the upward motion of his hand commenced, the right hand of Miss Percy began also to move. Once or twice it fell back, with a sudden jerk, but at length it was elevated, with a steady equable motion, until it attained the exact position of Doctor Everard's.

The Doctor then raised his left hand—a similar movement was made by Miss Percy.

These experiments were pursued by Doctor Everard, with various, but, on the whole, with decided success. He elevated his right hand to the top of his head, then his left, then both hands; he clasped his hands together, doubled them into fists; he seized his right ear with his left hand, then his left ear with his right hand; he raised his hand to his mouth, as in the act of eating an apple; he placed his right hand supplicatingly upon his breast, he clasped his chin between the thumb and forefinger of his left hand. In every instance, save one, were the motions and gestures of Doctor Everard imitated, with great exactness.

"Can we suspect deception?" said the Doctor, in a whisper, to his friend. "It is evidently impossible that she can see through her closed and motionless eyelids. I will, however, destroy the least foundation of doubt, by blindfolding her."

"Will you permit me to tie a bandage over your eyes?" continued Doctor Everard.

"As you please."

"Very lightly, Miss Percy," said the Doctor, tying the bandage. "Does it hurt you?"

"No, sir."

"Is your position uncomfortable?"

"Quite easy."

"Your head droops heavily. There, it is better now."

The Doctor placed her right arm in such a position that her head was supported by her hand.

Doctor Everard retired a few steps, and reiterated many of the motions and gestures employed in his first experiments. There was as little hesitation as previously in the responses of Miss Percy.

"It is not visual perception and imitation," said the Doctor, that produces these results. My volitions virtually govern two physical organizations. The effects are strange, because opposed to the ordinary experience of mankind. But intrinsically, the power of my will is as mysterious and inexplicable when acting upon my proper organism, as when acting upon the organism of another."

The Doctor removed the bandage, while he was uttering these remarks.

"A few experiments, Mr. Montessor, to show the strength of physical sympathy in the magnetic state."

Doctor Everard stood within a few feet of his patient. He took from his vest pocket a bit of cinnamon, so small that Montessor did not recognize what it was, and put it in his mouth, chewing it slightly. The sleeper almost instantly began to move her lips and lower jaw, as if chewing.

"Do you taste any thing, Miss Percy?" inquired Doctor Everard.

"Yes, Doctor."

"What is it?"

"Something pleasant."

"Well, what is it?"

"Some kind of spice."

"Right, Miss Percy, right. But what kind of spice?"

"Cinnamon—it tastes like cinnamon."

"It is cinnamon, Mr. Montessor," said the Doctor, with a glance of satisfaction.

Doctor Everard next put some tobacco in his mouth, but Miss Percy exclaimed hastily:

"Take it away, Doctor, take it away."

"What is the matter?"

"Don't put tobacco in my mouth—I dislike tobacco of all things."

The Doctor then tasted a piece of orange peel, then two or three cloves, and afterward some refined liquorice. The first Miss Percy named rightly, the second she defined as causing a biting sensation, and the third as being sweet.

"The sympathy of distinct organisms under certain specic rela-

tions, is one of the most abstruse problems of philosophy. There are several cases on record," said Doctor Everard, "of twin brothers growing up to manhood together, and afterward dying at remote distances from each other, on the same day and hour. Were not those cases dependent on the same general law of sympathy that prevails in the magnetic state?"

"You are traveling beyond the sphere of my researches," replied Montressor with a smile. "One question, my dear Doctor: does clairvoyance belong to your theory of the human constitution?"

"Certainly, Mr. Montressor."

Doctor Everard held a gold pencil case between his thumb and finger.

"What do I hold before you, Miss Percy?" asked the Doctor.

The sleeper muttered a few words indistinctly, but finally replied:

"A gold pencil case."

A ring and a silk handkerchief were named correctly without hesitation. A lancet she described as a sharp cutting instrument.

The Doctor drew a handsome gold watch from his fob, and glancing at the dial, inquired:

"What is the time of day by my watch, Miss Percy?"

"Two o'clock."

"The time exactly," said Doctor Everard, handing the watch to the traveler.

Miss Percy pressed her hand firmly against her forehead.

"A long continuance in the magnetic state," said Doctor Everard, "universally causes a sense of uneasiness in the head. You are satisfied with the experiments, Mr. Montressor?"

"Perfectly, Doctor," replied Montressor with a grave smile; "relieve Miss Percy without delay."

"She is quiet again," remarked the Doctor. "The truth of clairvoyance is demonstrable by the clearest evidence. It seems to result from this, that the image of an object is transferred from the mind of the operator at his will, to that of the patient. The more vivid the first image, the more powerful the will, so much more distinct will be the apprehension of the clairvoyant. Some writers assert that persons in the magnetic state can see objects independently of the will of the magnetizer or his substitute for the time, but I have no confidence in the assertion. The mysteries of Animal Magnetism do not require the aid of false hypotheses to excite our surprise and admiration."

The Doctor approached Miss Percy and rubbed her eyelids lightly in the direction of her forehead. This was followed by a number of passes from the shoulders upward. After a brief interval, the features of the sleeper were agitated by a slight convulsive movement, and her eyes opened. She recognized Doctor Everard and his friend with a languid smile.

"Do not strive to talk, my dear Miss Percy," said Doctor Everard, "your system needs repose."

Two or three hours later, having dined with a friend at the City Hotel, Montessor was slowly promenading Broadway, when he was overtaken by two gentlemen, Frederick Willoughby and Alfred Tracey, in the vicinity of Canal-street.

"Tracey and I are on our way to Denman's pistol gallery," said Willoughby, addressing the traveler. "Will you join us, Mr. Montessor?"

"Is there a duel *sur le tapis*?" inquired Montessor.

"Only a trial of skill," replied Alfred Tracey. "A trifling wager of a bottle of Burgundy on the best in ten shots."

Montessor accompanied the young men to the pistol gallery near the corner of Canal and Elm streets. There were no visitors in the gallery at the moment of their arrival. A civil, obliging man was in attendance, whose occupation it was to arrange the cards and load the pistols for the customers who visited the gallery to practice pistol shooting.

"You are the challenger, Willoughby," said Alfred Tracey. "Take your shots first, and show me what I must do to win the wager."

"Very well. Dueling pistols, waiter. We fire at the word, Tracey without aim."

"Agreed."

"The pistols are loaded, sir," said the waiter, respectfully handing a pistol to Mr. Willoughby.

A small card, with a black spot in the center, surrounded by black circular stripes, was fastened upon a wooden frame at the distance of about forty feet.

Frederick Willoughby fired at the word, and the ball grazed the outer edge of the card.

"Try it again, Willoughby. That won't do," said Alfred Tracey.

"The first shot, Alfred. I thought to miss the card entirely. Wait till I get a little cooler, and I shall do better."

At the end of the twenty shots the cards were examined and Alfred

Tracey was declared the winner of the match, one of his balls having struck within a quarter of an inch of the margin of the central spot, while the nearest shot of Willoughby was three quarters of an inch from the same margin.

"So much for the Burgundy, Willoughby," exclaimed Alfred Tracey.

"Mine is second best, Alfred; I confess it," replied Willoughby; then turning toward the traveler, who had quietly watched the progress and termination of the match, he added: "Will you not fire a round or two, Mr. Montessor, and perchance lessen Tracey's triumph by excelling both of us?"

"A single shot, Frederick," said Montessor, advancing a few steps. "The time has been when I was fairly entitled to the reputation of a good shot. At Gottingen, during the prosecution of my studies at the university, I bore off the prize from hundreds of competitors. But a keen eye and a steady hand are nothing without practice."

"One—two—three—fire!"

"You have fired clear of the card," exclaimed Frederick Willoughby, somewhat hastily.

"I think not," replied Montessor, quietly.

"No; upon my word," said the young man, "the ball has pierced the black center."

"Either of the shots," remarked Alfred Tracey, pointing to the holes nearest the spots in the paper targets, used in the match between Willoughby and himself, "would have killed a man as effectually as that of Mr. Montessor."

"Pistol shooting is as harmless as any other trial of skill," said Frederick Willoughby. "We are none of us blood-thirsty."

"Not blood-thirsty, perhaps," replied Tracey, "but it is better to kill than be killed."

"The dilemma rarely occurs."

"Would you not fight a duel if insulted or challenged?" inquired Alfred Tracey.

"I cannot answer decidedly. My mother considers dueling as little better than murder, and has taught me to regard it with abhorrence. And yet the brand of cowardice is a fearful penalty to suffer even for principle."

"I am in favor of dueling on principle. In what other way can a gentleman redress his wrongs, or give satisfaction to one whose honor he has wounded?"

"In my opinion," said Willoughby, "a quarrel between gentlemen

is always capable of amicable adjustment. A frank and ample apology for a wrong is the true reparation of a gentleman."

"There are wrongs, however, which no apology, however frank or humble, can repair."

"As, for example—"

"A blow, Frederick—nothing but blood can atone for a blow."

"But if a gentleman offered an apology, and refused to fight?"

"I would brand him as a coward. I would shoot him down in the street like a dog."

"You are a regular fire-eater, Tracey," said Frederick Willoughby, with a laugh. "If you were in earnest, I should be displeased with you."

"Never was I more truly in earnest," replied the young man, sneeringly, "as my actions will prove if I am ever put to the test."

"What are your sentiments in regard to dueling, Mr. Montessor?" said Willoughby, inquiringly.

"It is a barbarous custom," replied the traveler, "yet perhaps defensible in extreme cases. The indignity of a blow does not appear to me so unpardonable as an insult to female purity and virtue."

Alfred Tracey scanned the features of Montessor with a scrutinizing glance, ere he replied carelessly and coolly:

"Women are fair game."

"No man of honor will insult a woman. The cowardly impertinence of libertines deserves condign punishment."

"So far as I have observed," said Alfred Tracey, "libertines are the favorites of the fair sex, and in these days, Mr. Montessor, more glances are shot at them than bullets. Few women regard a declaration of passionate love as an insult, and those who do will rarely complain if their daring lovers, in imitation of the celebrated Duc de Richelieu, storm their bed-chambers and subdue them by violence."

"Worse and worse, Tracey," said Frederick Willoughby, gravely. "You advocate dueling and excuse libertinism. What next?"

"Dine with me, at Delmonico's, on Tuesday," said the young man, laughing, "and quaff a bumper of champagne to my last and noblest conquest; or at least, Willoughby," continued Alfred Tracey, lowering his voice, "to a quick and successful voyage to China. Do not fail for auld lang syne."

Courteously, yet with evident coolness and formality, the young man proffered a similar invitation to Wilfred Montessor.

The trio left the pistol gallery and separated soon afterward.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SEVEN ASSEMBLE—BUT WHERE?

NOR in the Octagon Chamber with its splendid decorations, its significant emblems and curious implements, was held the second meeting of the Secret Order of the Seven.

Not in gorgeous vestments of ceremony were the Seven arrayed, nor were they conducted to massive chairs around the circular table.

In the midst of a garden, in the central part of the city, stood an antique summer-house, oddly constructed. The walls on three sides were of stone—and completely solid, except the wall on the eastern side, which was perforated by a narrow door. Toward the west the roof descended lower than on the other sides, the extremity of the roof or porch being supported by columns consisting of knotty trunks of fir-trees.

Through the narrow door on the eastern side, the Seven, one by one, guided by the boy Hamet, entered the summer-house. Without, the winding garden paths, the shrubbery, the trees were obscurely visible beneath the faint glimmer of the stars; but within, the darkness was total even in the direction of the open porch.

Groping blindly in the darkness and stumbling over the inequalities of the rude floor of the summer-house, the Seven encountered a medley of wooden stools and rush-bottomed chairs, whereon they seated themselves.

And a strange voice near the open porch was heard, saying:

“Thus, in darkness and uncertainty, the dwellers of the earth seek their way, groping and stumbling, and slothfully reposing in the bower of pleasure. Oh! weary seekers, the path is clear before you, and yet you know it not.”

The strange voice ceased, and immediately one of the Seven addressed the others, in disguised tones:

"Brethren, the Seventh is ever in the midst of you."

The strange voice was heard, saying:

"The Seventh holds the key to the mysteries of the Secret Order of the Seven."

Wilfred Montessor—the Seventh—continued:

"Brethren: the bane of society is deception and falsehood.

"Deceivers and liars stand in the tribunals of human justice; in the seats of parliaments and senates; in the palaces of kings; in the temples of God.

"Therefore dynasties perish, senates become corrupt, and nations decay and are forgotten.

"If there be false pretenders among us, to-night, in the place of true brethren, the key will detect them."

And the strange voice was heard, saying:

"Each one of you, according to your number, repeat audibly the watchword of the evening."

And the seven personages, commencing with the first, uttered successively these words:

"Mark—"

"Ye,—"

"Seek—"

"Truth—"

"Evermore—"

"Right—"

"Yeomanly—"

"Brethren," said Montessor, "the initials of the words is the key, and the key is Mystery.

"Ye are the true brethren of the Secret Order of the Seven.

"Mark ye, seek truth evermore right yeomanly."

As Montessor repeated the words slowly and distinctly, he perceived through the open porch a light resembling the light of a star. The distant rays pierced the thick darkness, but were too few and faint to illuminate the interior of the summer-house.

"Brethren, the night of ignorance surrounds us, and truth, like a star, casts a dim light upon our pathway.

"Are we not seekers after truth?"

And the strange voice was heard from without:

"Who is he that seeketh after truth?"

In silence sat the Seven—and again the strange voice said:

"Who is he that seeketh after truth?"

Still in silence sat the Seven—and a third time the strange voice repeated the question:

“Who is he that seeketh after truth?”

Then Montressor said to his companions:

“Answer ye, brethren.”

And the First of the Seven replied:

“The man of courage—for Truth is a queen dwelling in mountain fastnesses, and he that seeketh her must take her by storm.”

And the Second replied:

“The man of action—for Truth resembles the antelope of the desert fleeing from its pursuers, and he that seeketh her must be swift of foot and dextrous exceedingly.”

And the Third replied:

“The man of cunning—for Truth is a jewel of great price, and he that seeketh her must traffic skilfully in the great market of human experience.”

And the Fourth replied:

“The man of order—for Truth is law, and law is order, and he that seeketh Truth must pursue her through the paths of order to the temple of law.”

And the Fifth replied

“The man of refinement—for Truth is invisible to the vulgar and the corrupt, and he that seeketh her must be a gentleman.”

And the Sixth replied:

“The man of science—for Truth springs from the Eternal and is arrayed in the drapery of the Universe—wherefore he that seeketh her must revere the spiritual and interpret the material.”

“Ye have answered, brethren,” said Montressor, still speaking in disguised tones, “each according to his nature.”

“Courage, action, cunning, order, refinement, science—in the combination of these, unseen to others, save in their results, lies the power of the Secret Order of the Seven.”

“Who seeketh truth through courage?”

And strange voice replied:

“The First.”

“Who seeketh truth through action?”

The strange voice replied:

“The Second.”

And in like manner the Seventh proceeded until the question was asked:

“Who seeketh truth through science?”

The strange voice replied :

“The Sixth.”

“Brethren, are ye content ? The Seventh is ever in the midst of you. Are ye content to do his will ?

The six personages remained silent, and the speaker continued :

“Ye are curious, brethren. Listen to the doings of the Secret Order of the Seven.”

And the strange voice was heard saying :

“Listen.”

“Be ye not curious overmuch.

“Knowledge is power, but power does not always secure happiness.

“The myriads of human beings act continually from impulse, from hope, from the mere necessity of action.

“Alas ! for the farmer, if he knew, when sowing his seed, that the increase thereof would be parched by the sun and mildewed by the rain.

“Alas ! for the soldier, if he knew, when going forth in the pride of manhood to win glory on the tented field, that wasting fever or sudden pestilence would destroy him.

“Alas ! for the mother, if she knew that the babe which she fondles so tenderly, and cherishes so proudly, would grow up to manhood to be a hissing and a reproach among the people.”

The strange voice was heard saying :

“The future is wisely concealed from man, but the past is a mirror in which he may dimly behold it.”

Montessor continued :

“Listen to the doings of the Seven.

• • • • •
• • • • •

“Thus shall it be for ever.

“In the days that are coming, as in the days that are past, if any brother is pining in sickness or distress—the Seven will aid him.”

There came from without, the echo of a strange voice, saying :

“The Seven will aid him.”

“If any brother is in danger, of person or property, from the assaults or artifices of open or concealed enemies—the Seven will aid him.”

Again came the echo :

“The Seven will aid him.”

“If any brother is striving to obtain wealth and distinction among his fellow men—the Seven will aid him.”

“The Seven will aid him.”

"If any brother is deeply and irreparably wronged, if slanderers attack him or hypocrites betray him—the Seven will aid him."

"The Seven will aid him."

"Brethren, the light of Truth is before you, the darkness of error is behind you and on either side of you.

"Go ye forth, one by one, seeking the light."

"Fear not—doubt not—delay not."

When the six personages had departed, Montressor and Hamet, during a brief period, conversed together in the summer-house.

The doings of the Seven—the revelations of the Seventh—are they not written in the books of these chronicles?

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RESCUE—THE CONFESSION.

FROM the antique summer-house and the garden in which the Seven had assembled, Wilfred Montessor proceeded thoughtfully through a dark narrow street to Canal-street. As he approached Broadway, his attention was arrested by the shouts of men and boys, running hither and thither, in great confusion.

“Fire! fire! fire!”

An appalling event is this to the awakened sleeper, who listens, half suffocated with smoke, to the crackling of the flames and the wild roar of a hundred voices.

“Fire! fire! fire!”

The flames were bursting from the lower windows of a brick dwelling house in Broadway.

In warning tones, above the shouts of the gathering multitude, sounded the distant alarm-bell, followed after a short interval by the rattling noise of the fire-engines, drawn at full speed over the pavement by the hardy firemen.

The throng of spectators increased, until the street on either side of the burning mansion was blocked up with the assemblage.

A wild imposing spectacle. Lo! the broad avenue, with its magnificent structures, here brilliantly illuminated, there dimly visible—the crowds of people with their faces uplifted toward the conflagration—the bold adventurous firemen, distinguished by their leather caps and red flannel shirts; the engines glittering in the blaze of the burning house—the crimson flames, now darting through the doors and windows with impetuous fury, and now creeping along the wood-work, dazzling yet destructive—the scores of bewildered and excited men carrying rich, costly furniture out of the surrounding houses and heaping it in irregular piles in the street.

The firemen attacked the raging element—their ancient enemy—with gallantry and determination. But it was soon evident that the house in which the fire had broken out, could not be saved. The flames had reached the second story, and were rapidly extending to

the adjoining buildings. To save these buildings and thus arrest the conflagration, was the plan of action adopted by the engineers.

At this moment a loud shriek from a window in the upper story of the burning mansion startled the vast throng of spectators in the street. The form of a woman, arrayed in her night clothes, was seen distinctly, standing by the window.

"A ladder! a ladder!" shouted a hundred voices.

The firemen ceased playing for an instant, and a large ladder was raised, the upper end of which reached nearly to the roof of the building. Then a strong, active fireman mounted the ladder.

"Quick, quick," shouted the voices underneath, "or the woman will burn to death!"

The fireman pushed on, but ere he had mounted half the distance to the third story he was driven back, scorched by the flames and blackened by the smoke.

One of his comrades made a similar attempt, and persisted until his hands were blistered by the heated rounds of the ladder, and his hair and eye-brows singed by the fire; and he too was driven back.

Another shriek.

"She will perish!" murmured the voices of the people.

At this moment a man pushed through the excited throng, and rushed toward the ladder. He was attired in the dress of a citizen, his coat buttoned tightly around his waist, his hands protected by thick buckskin gloves, and his face by a species of mask. Up the ladder he went with a determination of bearing which seemed to defy the destroying element that raged in his path. The excited multitude shouted to him, "Go on, go on!"—and the firemen blunted the sharp forked tongues of fire by a sudden onset of their streaming pipes. For an instant he was lost to the view of the crowd, enveloped in flame and smoke, and the assembled thousands were hushed in breathless silence.

"There he goes!" was the universal exclamation, as his form was discovered upon the ladder above the cloud of dense smoke.

Amid the shouts of the multitude, the adventurer leaped through the open window into the chamber, and stood by the side of the woman.

Still louder rose the shouts below when the twain appeared on the roof of the mansion.

"There they are—there they are!"

Slowly and cautiously the adventurer conducted the woman over the roofs of the adjoining buildings to a place of safety.

Deserting the excited throng of spectators, Wilfred Montessor passed down Broadway until he gained the north-easterly corner of Chambers-street. On the opposite corner he perceived the figure of a man, leaning carelessly against a lamp post. With his face partially muffled in a black silk handkerchief, he approached the man, and said in a disguised tone of voice :

“ The stars are out, Mr. Masters.”

“ You have the word,” replied the police officer, “ but who are you ?”

“ I am the Seventh.”

“ Follow me.”

Mark Masters entered the Park, and proceeded toward the Bridewell. On reaching the prison, he did not seek the main entrance, but passing along the rear of the gloomy structure, he stopped at a side entrance frequently employed for the admission and discharge of prisoners. He jerked the bell-handle somewhat rudely, and the heavy door was opened by one of the turnkeys, a stout, puffy, bull-necked man, with long arms, broad shoulders, and a large head, covered with thick curly hair.

“ Donovan,” said the police officer, addressing the turnkey, with a significant gesture, “ this is the gentleman with regard to whom I consulted Justice Hopson in your presence, this afternoon. He desires an interview with Simonson, the burglar. Will you conduct him to the proper cell ?”

“ I will, Mr. Masters,” replied the turnkey.

“ Mike Donovan is a prudent man,” said the police officer to his companion. “ A safe man, and understands his business. I leave you in his hands.”

The police officer departed, and Wilfred Montessor, crossing the threshold of the prison, removed the handkerchief which had partially concealed his features.

“ It is chilly out of doors,” said the traveler, as if by way of apology for the use of a muffler, “ but the air within these walls is warm and close.”

“ Neither honest men nor rogues like to breathe it,” said the turnkey, chuckling. “ Sure I am there is no hurt in it, for I have breathed it many a day.”

The turnkey took a portable lamp from a pine table near the entrance, and conducted Wilfred Montessor through a long corridor or passage way, on either side of which, at regular distances, were small doors leading to as many cells for prisoners. At the distance of five or six yards from the commencement of the corridor, the attention of

the traveler was arrested by a low, moaning cry, issuing from a crevice in one of the cells.

"That chap takes on hardly," said Mike Donovan, in reply to an inquiring glance from Montessor. "He is a new hand at his trade, and was caught last night in company with your man Simonson."

"His name?" asked Montessor, abruptly.

"Williams—yes—Williams."

"Unlock the door of his cell for an instant. I will speak with him before I visit Simonson."

"My orders extend only to Hugh Simonson," said the turnkey. "I suppose everything will be right, sir?"

Montessor made no reply except by a trifling gesture, but the features of Donovan instantly brightened, and without any further remonstrance he unlocked the door of the cell and threw it open.

As Montessor and the jailer entered the cell, Andrew Williams sprang from the straw pallet on which he was lying, and clasping his hands together, eagerly demanded:

"Tell me—tell me! Am I accused of burglary or murder?"

"Murder?" said the turnkey, Donovan, in a tone of inquiry.

"Yes!" exclaimed the prisoner, shaking as with an ague. "Is the policeman dead?—the one who was stabbed by Simonson?"

"No more than you, or I," replied the turnkey. "Milman will be on duty again in a day or two; the stab was only a flesh wound in the breast."

"Thank God!" said Williams, joyfully; but relapsing almost instantly into his former condition, he murmured audibly, "Still I am a murderer; for I have killed my poor wife."

"Your wife is living," said Montessor, in a kindly tone.

"Have you seen her, sir?" asked the prisoner, tremblingly.

"No, Mr. Williams, I received my information from the physician who is in attendance upon her."

"Is she better, sir? tell me that, for mercy's sake."

"Doctor Everard speaks encouragingly."

"They have taken me from her sick bed," said Andrew Williams. "They have separated us for ever, but it is my fault. I have only myself to blame."

"Answer me this, Williams. How long have you been an accomplice of Hugh Simonson?"

"Never, until last night, sir; never before."

"Have you had no connection with his crimes previously—no knowledge of them?"

"Indeed, sir, I have not. Oh! it is dreadful to be torn for ever from my dying wife."

"If you could procure bail," remarked Montessor, "you might go at liberty until the day of trial."

"Who would stand bail for a poor man like me?" replied the despairing prisoner. "It was poverty, sir, that drove me to this—it was indeed. I was willing to work for a living. I didn't want any man's riches. It was the danger of starvation that urged me on to this false step; besides being over-persuaded. And yet, sir, I don't believe that I could have used the money gained by robbery if I had got off safely. I have been thinking of it to-day, as the folly and wickedness of my course rose up before me."

"If you will solemnly promise to abstain hereafter from dishonest courses, your temporary release from prison shall be effected."

Andrew Williams sank upon his knees, his eyes gushing with tears, and in a tremulous voice made the required promise.

"See to that poor fellow, Mr. Donovan," said Montessor, in a whisper to the turnkey. "Nature never intended him for a thief."

The cell of Hugh Simonson was the next but one to that tenanted by Andrew Williams.

"Hallo, Simonson," said the turnkey, as he entered the burglar's cell, "a gentleman wishes to see you."

The burglar was stretched, at full length, upon a narrow mattress, with his face buried in the scanty bed-clothes. His coat was hanging upon the back of a rickety wooden chair—otherwise he was in his ordinary dress.

"A gentleman!" muttered the thief. "If I had been born with a silver spoon in my mouth, I might have been a gentleman myself."

Hugh Simonson turned upon his couch, and partly raised himself upon one elbow. His coarse, matted hair—his bloodshot eyes—his swelled, disfigured features—and the savage, almost fiendish, expression of his countenance, were repulsive in the extreme. He eyed the jailer and Montessor with a malignant scowl, and demanded, in harsh, unmusical tones:

"What do you want of me?"

"I will leave you alone with him," whispered the turnkey addressing Montessor. "When you are ready to go, tap lightly against the door of the cell, and I will release you immediately."

Donovan placed the small lamp, which he carried, in the hands of Montessor and retired, closing and locking the door after him.

The sound of the closing door and the harsh grating of the key

roused Simonson more effectually from the stupor of his broken slumber. By an awkward, ungraceful movement, he brought his feet to the floor, and assumed a sitting posture on the rail of the bedstead.

"What do you want of me?" repeated the burglar, surveying Montressor with a stare, partly of mistrust, partly of defiance. "Are you a parson, or a lawyer?"

"Neither."

"I don't believe in the devil," said the ruffian, coarsely, "and I am destitute of money; so that I have no need of the services of the former, and cannot purchase those of the latter."

"Your career of villainy and crime has not thoroughly stifled the voice of conscience."

"Conscience!" exclaimed Hugh Simonson, fiercely. "Get me out of these stone walls, and I will laugh at conscience."

"Every hour of imprisonment will sharpen her stings," said Wilfred Montressor. "The events of the past will intrude upon you, by day and by night, in frightful memories and hideous dreams."

"What have I done, more than others?" said the burglar, boldly. "The world owed me a living, and I took it. The rest of mankind are pursuing the same end, save that they rely upon fraud and trickery, instead of violence."

"The casuistry of thieves and burglars may justify them, in their own eyes, in depredating on the property of others; but no man can sleep quietly with the guilt of murder resting upon him."

Simonson threw an anxious, uneasy glance at the speaker.

"Do you come here to frighten me?" said the robber, with an effort to appear calm and resolute.

"Not to frighten you, Hugh Simonson," replied Montressor, fixing his eyes upon the burglar, "but to tell you that your guilt is known to man as well as to God, and to bid you reflect perpetually upon the dying agonies of your innocent victim."

The countenance of Simonson changed perceptibly, as he listened to his visitor, and he answered, tremulously.

"I killed him in self-defense."

"Him!—who?"

"The policeman, last night."

"I speak not of him—the policeman is not dead; but of *her*—of Zorah!"

The thief rose from the bed, and gazed at Montressor with a look of undisguised astonishment.

"A woman!" he stammered, almost inaudibly.

"Yes—of her whom you murdered, in cold blood, in the dead hour of the night.

"It is a lie!" said Hugh Simonson, stamping violently on the floor of the cell. "I have plundered rich men, and bullied strong men, but I never misused a woman, or wronged a poor man out of a cent, during my life."

"You cannot deceive me," said Wilfred Montessor, scrutinizing the features of the ruffian: "the proofs are too strong."

"Proofs?"

"Have you ever seen this gold lepine watch? this diamond cross?" demanded Montessor, displaying before the eyes of Hugh Simonson the articles which had been pledged at the pawnbroker's establishment of Benjamin Hoskens.

The burglar's countenance grew dark and sullen as he silently inspected the articles.

"You are seeking to entrap me," said he, angrily. "No man is compelled to criminate himself."

"Fear not; I shall not appeal to the vengeance of the law. The doings of last night will consign you to the walls of a dungeon for twenty years."

"Twenty years! a life-time!" muttered the robber.

"In every hour of that weary space, the stings of conscience will grow sharper and sharper, haunted as you will be, day and night, by the ghost of your murdered victim."

"You will madden me!" exclaimed the burglar, furiously. "I am no murderer."

"You stole these articles from a dressing table in the bed-chamber of a house in Saint John's Square, on Friday night of last week."

Simonson was silent.

"On the same night, in that very apartment, a lovely woman, Zorah, was basely, cruelly murdered. You are her murderer."

"It is a lie!" shouted Hugh Simonson.

"Denial is useless; the cruel deed was committed during my absence, on the night of the robbery. These trinkets were taken from Zorah's bed-chamber, were in your possession, were pledged by you at a pawnbroker's shop in Chatham-street. You have been tracked successfully in your career of crime. The law will pronounce one penalty, conscience another. Ten years hence, you will be able to tell me whether bodily suffering, or mental torture, is the severest infliction."

As Wilfred Montessor uttered these words, the angry, sullen

expression disappeared from the countenance of Hugh Simonson, and a glance of intelligence beamed from his blood-shot eyes.

"It was your house, then?" he asked, bluntly.

"Yes."

"You were absent in the dead of night. At what hour did you return home?"

"About one o'clock."

"If a murder was committed in your house on that night, you are more probably the murderer than I!"

The traveler was surprised at the brazen audacity of the prisoner.

"I confess to you that I scaled the second story of a house in Varick-street, last Friday night, by climbing on the roof of a small rear building, and unclosing the blinds of a window, whose lower sash was raised. At the moment when I entered the apartment, which was dimly lighted by a small lamp, I was startled by the creaking of a door in the lower part of the house. I seized a gold watch and some trinkets, which were lying exposed on the top of a bureau, and hastily left the chamber as I had entered it. Having gained the roof of the rear building, I crouched behind a chimney until I could ascertain the cause of the noise which had disturbed me. After two or three minutes, the door of the apartment which I had left was opened, and I heard distinctly the sound of footsteps. I determined to retire as quietly as possible with the booty I had obtained. As I cautiously descended to the ground, my attention was excited by a quick, sharp cry, which died away in an instant, and was followed by low, protracted moanings. If murder was that night committed, the person who entered the apartment after me was the murderer."

"Can I rely upon your statement?" inquired Montessor, with a mixture of surprise and incredulity.

"I have told you the truth, for there seems to be a dreadful mystery connected with the affair; and I do not care to be thought worse than I am."

"You confess the robbery."

"I do," said the ruffian sullenly, "enter a complaint against me as soon as you please."

"Convince me that you had no agency in the murder, and I will befriend you."

"I know nothing more than I have told you," said Simonson angrily.

At the appointed signal, the turnkey presented himself at the door of the cell, and releasing Montessor from durance, conducted him to the entrance through which he had been admitted.

Wilfred Montessor departed from the prison, in a state of perplexing uncertainty. The narrative of Hugh Simonson was connected and plausible, and his manner, bold, insolent, and even ruffianly, added to the internal evidence of its truth. But Montessor reflected that his confession was the confession of a villain—a hardened offender against the laws of God and man, to whom falsehood, and violence, and crime, were habitual—one to whom the selfish interests of life were everything, and honor, justice, and the sanctity of oaths, nothing.

“Besides, if Hugh Simonson be innocent,” he asked himself, “who is the murderer of Zorah?”

Suddenly, in the midst of these reflections, the allusion of Alfred Tracey to the exploits of the Duc de Richelieu, in his career of gallantry, was recalled to his mind.

Hugh Simonson was forgotten.

A wild, terrible suspicion fastened itself irrevocably upon the soul of Wilfred Montessor.

BOOK FIFTH



CHAPTER I.

THE SICK CHAMBER—THE SECRET.



IN the desolate home of the burglar, the previous sabbath day passed slowly and sadly. The invalid wife and mother was still suffering from the violent shock which had followed the news of her husband's arrest. But feeble as was her bodily health, and intense as was her tribulation of mind, she did not falter in her religious convictions. Hope in life she had none; all was sorrow and pain. With the eye of faith she beheld, through the gloomy portals of the grave, the glorious abode of the children of grace; and she longed to depart and be at rest.

At the approach of evening, Mrs. Williams rallied considerably. She watched, unperceived, the movements of her daughter, as she performed her household duties, silently but industriously.

The prudent management, the untiring affection of the young girl, in the trying emergency of her position, were remarkable.

"Come hither, Jane," said the invalid feebly.

The girl approached the bed-side.

"Sit by me, daughter, and read again to me the beautiful passage from the fifteenth chapter of the Epistle to the Corinthians."

Jane Williams opened the family Bible and read :

"Behold, I show you a mystery ; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.

"In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump : for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

"For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

"So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

"O death, where is thy sting ? O grave, where is thy victory ?"

As these words were pronounced, a beautiful smile stole over the wan features of the invalid. She rested with her eyes closed, though not asleep, during a space of almost an hour.

At length she spoke.

"Jane, I have somewhat to say to you."

"Dear mother," replied the girl, "Doctor Everard says that you must abstain from talking until you get more strength.

"My strength will never return, my daughter. This shock is irrecoverable."

"Let us hope otherwise, dear mother. Doctor Everard says—"

"We will change the subject, Jane," said Mrs. Williams, interrupting her daughter. "I have been lying here for half an hour thinking seriously about the wants of the family."

"Do not worry yourself," remarked the girl, "the neighbors have been very kind to us."

"God bless them ! but their kindness is no permanent reliance for you and the boys. I am only a burden, and your father — there is no longer any hope of assistance from him."

The young girl brushed from her eyes the starting tear, and kissed her mother's pale cheeks.

"Much depends upon you, my daughter, young and destitute as you are; but I warn you, as you value the blessing of a dying mother, whatever may befall you, to commit no immoral or dishonest act."

"I will not, dear mother," said the girl. "I will not, as God is my helper."

"He will help you, Jaue. It is our duty, however, to appeal to the justice and benevolence of our fellow beings, in times of great need. We have relatives in Norwich, in good circumstances; but they cast me off, entirely, when I married your father. I advise you to go to them only in the last extremity. When I am dead, perhaps they will listen to you."

"I will submit to every privation before I will sue to those who have treated you so cruelly," said the young girl, with a burst of tears.

"Forget the past, Jane, and act prudently and wisely."

"I shall not forget your counsel, dear mother."

Changing her posture slightly, Mrs. Williams remarked:

"There resides in this city a wealthy merchant, on whose generosity we have strong claims, if not upon his sense of justice. You will understand me better if I relate to you an important circumstance connected with my early history."

"Do not tire yourself with talking, dear mother; remember the doctor's orders."

"The story will soon be told. At the period of my earliest recollection, I lived with my mother, in the family of her maternal uncle. As I subsequently learned, she had separated from my father, in consequence of a domestic quarrel, shortly after my birth. During her lifetime, my mother received a yearly allowance for the support of her child and herself. The decease of my father, in my ninth year, was followed in a few months by that of my mother; and it was then discovered that my father had bequeathed the bulk of his property to his partner, Mr. Owen Tracey. I was left almost entirely to the charity of my relatives."

The young girl listened intently to this narrative.

"Mr. Tracey has become very wealthy, and has retired from business. He is said to be a harsh, miserly man; but surely he will not refuse some measure of relief to the family of the only daughter of William Martyn."

"Do you know him?"

"No, my daughter, I have never seen him to my knowledge. But the idea occurred to me a while ago, that it might be of great advantage to you if I could see him before I die."

"Mother!" exclaimed the young girl melting into tears.

"Something whispers to me that I ought to send for him immediately and lay before him the wants of my family. So put on your hat, my daughter, and go to Mr. Tracey with a message from me. His residence is in Chambers-street, near Hudson-street. This I know from having often seen his name on the door-plate of a handsome brick house in that vicinity. Go now, Jane, and bring Mr. Tracey with you."

"You will be alone, dear mother."

"Never mind; the children are playing in the next room. If I need anything, I will call George."

The daughter rose to comply with her mother's request. As she was adjusting her hat and shawl, the sound of footsteps coming up the stairs announced the approach of a visitor.

"I have just run over to inquire after your health," said Mrs. Ramsbottom, as she entered the apartment of Mrs. Williams, "and I thought it might be you would like something palatable and strengthening for the stomach, so I have brought you a nice custard of my own baking."

"You are kind, ma'am," replied the invalid, slowly and feebly, "but I have no appetite for food of any kind."

"Try a little of it, Mrs. Williams," rejoined the visitor. "Jane, get a saucer and spoon for your mother, and I will persuade her to eat a part of the custard. Try and force it down. You can't live if you don't eat."

"My race is nearly run."

"Don't say that, Mrs. Williams—the doctor don't give you up. I dare say you will get along very well yet if you don't fret yourself to death about your husband."

Jane Williams turned an imploring look upon the garrulous mistress of the boarding-house, but in vain.

"For my part," continued Mrs. Ramsbottom, "whenever anything goes wrong, I remember the old proverb, 'what can't be cured must be endured,' and you may depend upon it there is a great deal of comfort in that proverb. When dear old Ramsbottom died, I thought it was all over with me. He was taken away suddenly with a fit of apoplexy you know. I went on dreadfully, till it nigh upon made me sick; and where was the use of it, Mrs. Williams? It could not bring him back again to this vale of tears, as parson Thornton calls the city of New-York. So, as I was saying about your husband, don't fret yourself; it's his first offense, they say, and the courts never punish a man very severely for his first offense."

"Jane," said Mrs. Williams addressing her daughter, "Mrs. Ramsbottom will stay with me during your absence."

"Yes, ma'am, that I will, and try to cheer you up a little; for says I to myself this blessed afternoon, says I, there's poor Mrs. Williams moping away her life, with nobody about her but a young girl just in her teens, and it isn't neighborly in me to stay away so long from her. So after tea I thought I would run over and see how you were getting along."

It was nearly dark when Jane Williams returned to the sick chamber, followed by a young man, who surveyed the apartment and its occupants with an expression of surprise.

"It is Mr. Tracey, mother," said the invalid's daughter.

Mrs. Williams glanced quickly toward the new comer.

"There is some mistake, Jane," muttered the woman, feebly.

Alfred Tracey advanced toward the bed-side, and said, in a kindly manner:

"You sent for me this evening, Mrs. Williams."

"There is some mistake," the invalid repeated, more distinctly. "Is your name Tracey?"

"It is—Alfred Tracey."

"Owen Tracey?"

"No, madam. Owen Tracey is my brother."

"You reside with him, perhaps?"

"I do."

"Your appearance convinced me that you are not the gentleman to whom I sent my child. You are a young man, and he, Mr. Owen Tracey, must be pretty well advanced in years."

"Over fifty years of age, ma'am," interposed Alfred Tracey; "a gray-headed man."

"I wish to see him," murmured the invalid.

"My brother," said the younger Tracey, "is not at home this evening, and on week days has little leisure for visiting. If you are desirous of making any communication to him, I will be the bearer of it. You appear to be very ill, Mrs. Williams, and in distressed circumstances?"

"Yes, Mr. Tracey," replied the sick woman, gasping for breath, "and a dreadful misfortune—"

The tears flowed freely from the sunken eyes of the invalid.

"Her husband, poor thing," said Mrs. Ramsbottom, "was taken to jail last week on a charge of burglary. He always maintained the character of an honest man, till he got out of work and money; and

for my part, I believe there are hundreds of well-dressed gentlemen in Broadway a great deal worse than him. It isn't always the biggest rogues who are sent to prison."

"The arrest of my husband," said Mrs. Williams, with a slight shudder, "has rendered it necessary for me to devise some mode of supplying the necessities of my family. In better days, when poverty was deprived of its bitterness by the absence of want and crime, I have frequently heard of the wealth of your brother, Mr. Owen Tracey. I never envied him, although a large portion of his estate was bequeathed to him by my father's will."

"Your father?" exclaimed Alfred Tracey.

"Yes. I am the only daughter of William Martyn, of the ancient firm of Martyn and Tracey. At his death, my father left nearly all his property to his junior partner, Mr. Tracey, and cut me off with a mere pittance."

"I have it," muttered the younger Tracey, inaudibly; "the mystery of the forged will is revealed."

"The pittance which my father bequeathed me," continued the invalid, "was soon exhausted. I incurred the serious displeasure of my relatives by my marriage with Mr. Williams, and have had no intercourse with them during many years. I have never complained, nor do I complain now, of my father's determination or the good fortune of your brother. But in this hour of poverty and distress, I resolved to apply to Mr. Tracey for relief in preference to the distant relatives of my own family, who have treated me so harshly. Will you inform your brother that the daughter of William Martyn is nigh unto death, and that her children are suffering for the common necessaries of life?"

"I will, madam, without fail," replied Alfred Tracey. "In the meantime, suffer me, on my brother's behalf, to tender you a small sum for the relief of your pressing wants."

The young man placed a bank note on the wooden table near the bed-side of the emaciated invalid.

Alfred Tracey passed slowly along the crowded streets, absorbed in reflection. The interview with Mrs. Williams had excited no real sympathy or true benevolence of feeling. His predominant emotions were those of exultation at the discovery of a trace of the secret guilt of Owen Tracey. And his mind was chiefly occupied in devising the best means of rendering the information which he had obtained subservient to his malice and selfishness.

CHAPTER II.

STOCK JOBBING—THE WILL.



VEN the gate of Owen Tracey, as he passed along Broadway, displayed the workings of a mind ill at ease. He walked sometimes at a rapid pace, remarking with hurried glances the persons whom he encountered, or the objects by which he was surrounded. At other times he fell into a slower, shuffling gait, resembling that of a man in a state of convalescence after a severe attack of disease. His features at such intervals, indicated the abstract or bewildered condition of his mind.

Near the corner of Maiden Lane, the old merchant stopped abruptly, and leaning against an awning post, examined the contents of his pocket-book. Apparently satisfied with the result of the examination, he thrust the pocket-book into his breast pocket and moved on.

The morning was occupied by Owen Tracey in the transaction of business, principally in making purchases of the stock of the Eastern Transportation Company, from *bona fide* holders.

Toward noon, he proceeded to the office of Francis Mortimer. The stock-broker met him with an insinuating smile.

"Sit down, my dear sir, sit down. You look fatigued, Mr. Tracey. The sun has come out bright and warm. Anything new stirring?"

"I have heard nothing."

The news from England keeps everything flat in the money market. Just now, perhaps, it is so much the better for us. Have you done anything yet, in our business?"

"I have secured nearly five hundred shares of the floating stock of the Eastern Transportation Company, at a shade above 29."

"Five hundred shares, my dear sir?"

"Here is the memorandum," said Owen Tracey, taking his tablets from his breast pocket. "Edward A. Clason, 57 shares; Samuel Pitt, 34 do; Goddard and Young, 123 do; Abraham Welch, 49 do; Black & Co., 95 do; Williams and Zieber, 70 do."

The merchant slowly read off the names and the number of shares purchased by him. "The terms," he added in conclusion, "are cash upon the delivery of the certificates of transfer on the books of the company."

"The operation goes on finely," said Francis Mortimer. "I bought three hundred shares on time at the Broker's Board to-day at 28 1-8, 30 days, seller's option. I am doing something in the street, also. The thing is not quite ripe yet. Get the command of the rest of the stock on your schedule with as little delay as possible."

"I shall secure the whole number of shares within a day or so," replied the merchant.

"The money articles of several of the city papers," said the broker, with a significant smile, "will, during the week, present some important considerations in respect to the condition and prospects of the Eastern Transportation Company."

"From what quarter?"

"From what quarter do you suppose, my dear sir?" inquired Mortimer, with an air of mystery.

"I cannot guess."

"The considerations are ours, Mr. Tracey, and will remain ours until we suffer them to become public for the public good."

"Thus far, Mr. Mortimer," said the merchant, glancing at the broker from his shaggy eyebrows, "you augur well of the success of our operations."

"Everything goes on swimmingly, as far as I can perceive," replied the broker. "Secure the balance of the floating stock as quickly as you can. To-morrow I shall be openly in the field as a purchaser of the Eastern Transportation stock, at thirty and sixty days. It will be better that no apparent connection exist between us, and indeed, to obviate suspicion, I suggest to you the employment of another broker than myself, Tillotson for example, to purchase stock on time on your individual account. We can arrange matters equitably upon the division of the proceeds, at the close of the speculation."

The stock-broker's suggestions received the hearty concurrence of the merchant.

"Nothing escapes you, Mr. Mortimer," said he, rising to depart,

"and you may depend upon it that I will be guided by your advice in all my movements."

At the distance of fifteen or twenty yards from the office of Francis Mortimer, the old merchant encountered his brother, Alfred Tracey.

"Well, Alfred, I have seen Messrs. Barstow and Rodman this morning," said the merchant, arresting the progress of the young man by a gesture.

"Messrs. Barstow and Rodman—who are they?"

Owen Tracey replied angrily,

"No trifling, Alfred; your duties as supercargo of the Ontario—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Surprise as well as anger was visible in the merchant's countenance.

"Is that maggot still working in your brain?" said Alfred Tracey with a sneer.

"What do you mean? Don't you intend to accept the appointment I have been at so much pains to procure for you?"

"And abandon you and this gay city? No, Owen."

"Villain!"

"Don't pick a quarrel in the public street," said the young man, "if you have anything particularly severe, step over with me to Willet's and say it in private."

Speaking thus, Alfred Tracey turned on his heel and walked rapidly toward Willet's coffee-house in Broad-street, near Wall. The merchant grasped his cane firmly in his right hand and strode after him.

The young man sought a private room in behind the bar-room.

"Now, Owen, whatever you have to say—ah! here is the waiter—what will you take?"

"Nothing."

"Take something cooling this hot morning. Bring a couple o. Madeira punches, waiter, and a sandwich or two."

The waiter retired.

"Now, Owen."

But it was not until after the waiter had returned with the refreshments ordered by Alfred Tracey, that the old merchant uttered a word.

The young man commenced sipping his punch, and pointing to the second glass, remarked:

"You will find it capital, Owen."

The old merchant strode toward his brother with glaring eyes, and said in a husky voice:

"Why do you seek to irritate me?"

"I seek no such thing; you work yourself into a passion and then blame me."

"And you have not refused to fulfil your engagement to leave New York?"

"Aha, that is quite another matter."

Trembling with passion, the merchant exclaimed:

"Do you persist, Alfred?"

"I do, Owen; I cannot go to Botany Bay—I mean to China—even to accommodate you."

"To accommodate me!"

"Certainly, I am not aware that any person except yourself will derive any benefit from my absence."

"You mistake your position."

The young man glanced at the speaker with a slight manifestation of surprise.

"If you have chosen to pursue your downward career, I have no power to restrain you; but you must quit my roof! you must never again darken my doors!"

"In the course of a day or two," said Alfred Tracey, "I shall remove my baggage, and withdraw from your hospitable mansion."

"I wished to save you from ruin and disgrace," said the merchant, "notwithstanding your ingratitude, but I will not be tormented by your presence."

"I appreciate your motives," replied the young man with a sneer.

"You are a heartless profligate. The career of a man who, at so early an age, has lost all regard for principle, and the feelings of others, can have but one termination. Insulted as I have been, and protect myself as I must, I tremble for you."

"Tremble rather for yourself!" exclaimed Alfred Tracey, springing to his feet, the demoniac smile glittering on his features.

"Villain! do you threaten me?"

"You have severed all ties between us, Owen, by your meanness and cupidity."

"Meanness, toward you, who have squandered hundreds of my money?"

"I can stand everything from you but your preaching; for God's sake spare me that, or I shall be tempted to tell you something about the daughter of William Martyn and her poor starving children!"

"The daughter of William Martyn?"

Mary, in lieu of her right of dower, and the remaining half to my brother, Alfred Tracey."

"Such is my recollection of the contents of the will."

"The instrument was drawn by you?"

"Yes—yes."



"I desire to execute a codicil to my will, revoking the grant of a moiety of my real and personal estate to Alfred Tracey, and devising the same in equal parts to the surviving children and grand-children of William Martyn, my former partner in business."

"You propose to cut off your brother entirely?"

"Entirely, Mr. Barton. I will state to you in confidence, that his habits of life, and his conduct toward me, have been such as to destroy all claims upon my generosity."

The lawyer wrote a memorandum of the directions of Owen Tracey, and read it over to him.

"It is right, Mr. Barton."

"To-morrow the draught of the codicil will be ready for execution."

"The sooner the better. I will call again to-morrow."

CHAPTER III.

THE COUNSELOR—THE BURGLAR'S RECEPTION.



N the same morning, at a few minutes past ten o'clock, James Fogle slowly mounted the broad steps leading to the main entrance of the City Hall. Near the top of the steps, in a lounging attitude, stood a person of medium stature, and thin, sharp, contracted features. His small gray eyes—his retreating forehead

—his nose, sharp pointed and slightly hooked—his large mouth, filled with white projecting teeth—as well as his general bearing, were outward indications of the impudence, cunning, and selfishness of his character. He wore a black seedy coat, white linen pantaloons, buckskin shoes, and a beaver hat, rather the worse from age and bad usage.

"Anything stirring to-day, Counselor Tiffen?" inquired James Fogle, as he approached the lounge, and was greeted by a slight nod of recognition.

"Only a single habeas corpus this morning," replied Counselor Tiffen, rubbing the palms of his hands gently together.

"You are at leisure, then?"

"As idle and lazy, Fogle, as a black snake on a summer's morning."

"I have a client for you."

The gray eyes of Counselor Tiffen grew brighter, as James Fogle uttered these words; and when, in token of his sincerity, he thrust a bank note of the denomination of ten dollars, into the hands of the counselor, the entire features of the lawyer sparkled with animation.

"Mr. Fogle," said the counselor, in smooth, liquid tones, "I shall be extremely happy to serve you, or any friend of yours."

"It is not a personal affair," replied Fogle. "The fee which I

have given you is on behalf of a man named Williams, who was arrested a day or two since, in the act of committing a burglary."

"Is he yonder?" inquired Counselor Tiffen, pointing the fore-finger of his right hand toward the Bridewell.

"He is," replied Fogle, dryly.

"Has he plenty of rags?" continued the counselor, with a peculiar flutter of the bank note he had received from James Fogle.

"A green hand," said the other, in a slightly contemptuous tone, "as I have heard, compelled, by his necessities, to choose between a desperate venture and the alms-house?"

"His name, Fogle?"

"Andrew Williams."

"Poor!" exclaimed the counselor, glancing from the bank-note toward James Fogle; "poor, and taken in the act. I am afraid there is but little chance for him."

"The man has friends who are willing to assist him, but do not want to be known in the business."

"This money comes from them?"

"Exactly."

"That puts another face on the matter," said the counselor, winking at Fogle. "A great deal can be done with money in this region."

"As I——"

"As *you* happen to know," interposed the counselor. "It is pleasant to be employed by a client, Mr. Fogle, who has the means of success at his command. There is a scope for invention, for maneuvering, for an ingenious display of tactics."

"Money will not be wanting in this case," remarked Fogle; "but I have not alluded, as yet, to the services expected of you."

"Deficient in testimony, eh?"

"Williams was arrested by the policeman in the very act, and nothing can save him on the day of trial. The poor devil has a sick wife and two or three starving brats at home, and is continually in the dumps about them. Can't you get him out on bail? that's the question."

"Easy enough. Let one of his friends come forward; the bail won't be more than a thousand dollars."

"I tell you, Tiffen, that you are to manage the whole business. Your acquaintance with people of property is extensive. Can't you find some responsible person to give the bail required by the justice, for a trifling consideration?"

"You are a sly fellow," replied the counselor, punching Fogle once

or twice in the ribs; "there is no use in attempting to mystify you. I know precisely what you are after, and I can accomplish it; but ten dollars won't do."

"A retaining fee, counselor. As for the rest, 'no cure no pay.' Procure the bail for Williams, and I have twenty-five dollars in my wallet, which shall be yours."

"If any man in the city can do it, I can," replied Counselor Tiffen. "I will see the prisoner, this morning, and make the necessary arrangements. Before three o'clock he shall be at liberty."

"If you want me," said James Fogle, "call at Marvin's toward evening, and you will hear of me."

"I say, Fogle," exclaimed the counselor, as the thief descended the marble steps.

"Well."

"Twenty-five dollars?"

Fogle nodded significantly.

The counselor hummed his favorite air, "Molly put the kettle on," and followed, with his eyes, the unattractive figure of James Fogle, until he disappeared on turning the eastern corner of the City Hall.

At two o'clock of the afternoon, Counselor Tiffen entered the police office. Justice Hopson was engaged in the investigation of a complaint for assault and battery. On the termination of the investigation, which occupied a quarter part of an hour, Counselor Tiffen presented himself, and demanded a hearing.

"I appear before your Honor," said the counselor, gravely, "in behalf of my client, Andrew Williams, detained in Bridewell prison by virtue of a warrant issued from this office. The prisoner applies, through his counsel, for admission to bail."

At the request of Tiffen, an officer was dispatched to conduct the prisoner from jail into the presence of the magistrate.

The countenance of Andrew Williams, as he entered the room in the custody of the officer, was downcast and anxious. His eyes turned with a momentary gleam of hope toward Counselor Tiffen, but his imploring glance received no encouraging response, and his aspect became as despairing and hopeless as before.

"This man, Williams, is committed for burglary, and for aiding and abetting in an atrocious assault upon an officer in the discharge of his duty. Serious offenses these, Mr. Tiffen."

"Policeman Masters will satisfy your Honor that Holmes is but slightly wounded," said the counselor. "The fact is, that this unfortunate criminal, under the pressure of absolute want, was induced, by

the notorious burglar, Hugh Simonson, to engage in the dangerous enterprise of breaking into and robbing a private mansion. He has been hitherto esteemed an honest, industrious man, and has supported himself and his family by the labor of his hands. His wife is now lying dangerously sick, and he is naturally very anxious to return to his home, if only for a few days. I trust that your Honor will view his application favorably, and admit him to bail in a moderate amount—such as may reasonably be demanded from a poor and almost friendless man."

"Have you any property, Williams, any real property?" asked the magistrate, in a loud, authoritative manner.

The prisoner stared wildly at the justice, as if he scarcely comprehended the question.

"He has none," said Counselor Tiffen; "the man is exceedingly poor."

The magistrate reflected a few moments, and said, in a tone of decision, addressing Tiffen:

"The prisoner is admitted to bail, on his personal recognizance, in the sum of five hundred dollars, and on the recognizance of a good and respectable freeholder, a citizen of this State, in the like amount."

The counselor bowed respectfully to the magistrate, and turning upon his chair, winked significantly at a plainly dressed man who sat behind him on a bench, in company with half a dozen spectators.

"Is your bail present, Williams?" inquired the justice.

Counselor Tiffen conversed with Andrew Williams, in a low voice, for a second or two, and then said, aloud:

"John Hickley!"

"Here," said the man on the spectator's bench, to whom the glance of Counselor Tiffen had been previously directed. As he spoke he rose from his seat, and advanced several steps toward the justice.

"What is his name, Mr. Tiffen?"

"John Hickley."

"Are you a freeholder, Mr. Hickley?"

"I am."

"Where is your property situated?"

"In Ulster county. I have a deed for sixty acres of good farming land in that County."

"What is its value, Mr. Hickley?"

"I have refused a thousand dollars for it this morning," replied the man, glancing at Counselor Tiffen.

"Have you no property in the city of New York?"

"None, your Honor, except my household furniture."

"I have no knowledge of this man," said the magistrate, addressing the lawyer. "His answers are prompt and his appearance is respectable, but there are great complaints in regard to bailing prisoners, and I prefer that you should offer another person as bail."

"Your Honor will recollect that the prisoner is, as I have stated, a poor and almost friendless man. It has not been without extreme difficulty that Mr. Hickley has been induced to come forward, and I know not to whom beside we can apply. I am ready to vouch personally for the respectable standing of Mr. Hickley."

"Do you know anything of his circumstances?"

"Nothing except what he has related to your Honor."

"Mr. Hickley, are you willing to swear to the truth of the answers you have given to the questions heretofore propounded by me?"

The man hesitated an instant, and looked inquiringly toward Counselor Tiffen.

"Of course he will," said Tiffen, with total unconcern. "It can do no harm to swear to the truth."

The oath was administered—the recognizances were filled up and duly executed.

"You can go about your business, Williams," said the magistrate; "your bail is taken."

"Merciful God!" exclaimed the prisoner, starting to his feet, "am I free to go home?"

"Whenever you choose," said Counselor Tiffen, taking Andrew Williams aside. "Only remember this, that you must appear before the Court of Sessions at the time named in your recognisance, or Mr. Hickley will be mulcted in the sum of five hundred dollars."

"I shall forget nothing, Mr. Tiffen. A thousand, thousand thanks."

"Don't make a fuss, Williams," said the counselor, with a slight curl of the lip. "Go away quietly, and mind what I tell you."

His temporary relief from prison removed a load of misery from the heart of Andrew Williams. As he reached the open street and beheld the dingy buildings, the crowd of passers-by, he could not refrain from an exclamation of joy. But his thoughts reverted instantly to the humble abode of his wife and children. He hastened homeward, running sometimes at full speed.

On arriving at the entrance of his residence, he cautiously opened the front door, and stole softly up stairs. The door of his wife's apartment was ajar, she was speaking in a low, feeble voice. He listened.

"I am anxious about your father, Jane," were the first words he heard distinctly. "He will suffer severely from anxiety and remorse. You must go to the prison and see him. They will not refuse you admission to him if you claim the privileges of a daughter. Do not reproach him, Jane, either by word or look. Speak kindly to him, comfort him, relieve him of all needless fears on my account; tell him that I love him yet, and remember him continually in my prayers."

Overcome by his feelings, Andrew Williams rushed into the chamber, sobbing like a child.

The invalid turned toward the door, half raised herself in the bed, and extending her emaciated hands, shrieked, joyfully:

"My husband!"

Andrew Williams caught his wife in his arms and pressed her to his heart, with a tender, agonizing embrace.

His head drooped on his bosom.

Many hours of her life had passed in sadness and bitterness of spirit, but her last moment was a moment of joy.

CHAPTER IV.

MONTRESSOR AND MISS PERCY.



Miss Caroline Percy was standing before a mirror adjusting her ringlets, when the door of the apartment opened suddenly. She turned and beheld Wilfred Montressor. A faint exclamation of surprise burst from her lips.

The traveler advanced a step or two, and extended his hand.

"An unexpected visitor, Miss Percy," he remarked smiling.

"I confess—I—I—looked for Doctor Everard," stammered Miss Percy.

"In his absence, have you sufficient confidence in my ability as a physician to take my advice and to follow it?"

The lady remained standing in the center of the apartment, with her eyes fixed inquiringly upon the traveler.

"Frankly, Miss Percy," said Montressor, bowing, "I do not come hither to pique your curiosity. I have another object—to converse with you freely and alone."

"Doctor Everard's injunction was, that I must forbear talking—a most difficult prescription, I admit," remarked Miss Percy, with a singular mixture of hesitation and vivacity.

"The doctor is an enthusiast."

"In his profession he is attentive and skillful."

"Both—and yet his knowledge of books is more accurate and profound than his knowledge of human nature. Enthusiasm often closes the eyes as completely as the processes of animal magnetism."

There was a lurking meaning in these words which did not escape the notice of Miss Percy, for she replied quickly :

"Are you a skeptic in mesmerism?"

"I could not remain one," rejoined Montressor, "if I were accus-

omed to judge from appearances; but as you remarked to Doctor Everard, at our first interview, appearances are often deceitful."

"I do not understand you," said Miss Percy, her cheeks flushing slightly.

"It is unfortunate," observed Montessor, with a grave smile. "I will explain myself more clearly. Your performances on that occasion were highly creditable to your powers as an actress, and prove conclusively, whether animal magnetism be true or false, that the unsuspecting Doctor Everard is no match for the artful Caroline Percy."

Miss Percy's dark eyes flashed angrily, and she drew up her slight form with an air of offended dignity as she replied:

"You are presuming, sir."

"Truth is never a just cause of offense, when uttered from honorable motives," said the traveler, calmly. "It is important to the objects of this interview, that I convince you of my appreciation of your real character. Something I have learned from others previously to my introduction to your personal acquaintance, and the circumstances connected with Doctor Everard's experiments have fully satisfied me that you are skillful in deception, ambitious of notoriety, regardful of your own interests, and fond of amusing yourself with the weakness of others. It is surely unnecessary for me to expose minutely the imposture which you have practiced on Doctor Everard. You will not, dare not, deny it."

"I will not, sir," said Miss Percy, angrily. "I deny your right to interrogate me."

"Nay, madam, I assert no right," replied Wilfred Montessor, with a searching glance. "Nor will I pursue this subject on the present occasion. You perceive that I understand you."

There was an undefinable consciousness of power in the tone and bearing of the traveler, which insensibly over-awed Miss Caroline Percy. She rose, however, under the influence of the most contradictory emotions, and said, confusedly:

"Your conduct is extraordinary, Mr. Montessor. I shall request the presence of my aunt during the remainder of our interview."

"Do not be alarmed, Miss Percy," remarked Montessor, "I have no intention to wound your feelings, or to trespass very long upon your time. Before proceeding further, I claim the privileges of a friend."

"A friend?" echoed Caroline Percy, with a glance of incredulity.

"Yes, Miss Percy."

"You have exhibited singular proofs of friendship."

"Our acquaintance is of recent date," said the man of thirty-five,

with a peculiar smile; "but I am prepared to vindicate my pretensions by my actions. Money, in the judgment of the world, is an unerring test of real friendship. I am rich, Miss Percy. I seek not to pry, indelicately, into your pecuniary affairs—only to assure you that my purse is freely at your disposal in case a loan of money should at any time hereafter be convenient or desirable to you."

Miss Percy cast a troubled, inquiring glance at the speaker—offended pride and over-mastering selfishness were contending unequally in her bosom.

"I comprehend the meaning of your glance," said Montessor, smiling. "You are not credulous enough to believe in disinterested friendship, and you wish to hear my proposals."

"You have criticised me with merciless severity," said Miss Percy, coldly. "It seems that you imagine me capable of receiving pecuniary assistance from a comparative stranger."

"Why not?" replied Montessor, "unless you distrust my assurances. I shall deal frankly with you, Miss Percy. I am thoroughly informed of your engagements and obligations to Mr. William Pettigrew."

The assumed indifference of Caroline Percy vanished at this revelation—a deep crimson flush mantled her cheeks, extending to her brow and temples.

After a moment's pause, Miss Percy recovered herself, and turned to her visitor with a serious expression of countenance.

"Have you an object of sufficient importance, Mr. Montessor, to justify you in prolonging an interview which is both painful and embarrassing?"

"I have, Miss Percy," said Montessor, gravely. "What has been said by me heretofore is merely an introduction to the real purpose of my visit. I seek, measurably, to control your actions, and I deem it essential to the establishment of a permanent influence over you to satisfy you that your aims, your tastes, and your position are fully known to me. In my criticism of your character, I intend no severity, nor any insult in my offer of pecuniary assistance."

The features of Miss Percy, as Montessor proceeded, manifested signs of wonder and astonishment.

"I have an object, Miss Percy," continued the traveler. "It relates to the future welfare of Frederick Willoughby and the just claims of William Pettigrew."

"By what right, Mr. Montessor, do you seek to control my actions or to interfere in my private affairs?"

Montessor had almost instinctively fathomed the character of Miss Caroline Percy. Instead of replying directly to her question, he remarked :

“ Mrs. Willoughby, the mother of Frederick Willoughby, is a person whom I greatly admire and esteem, and to whom I am under many obligations. She is a lady of high principle and virtuous conduct, proud of her social position, her family descent, proud of her son and deeply interested in his prosperity and happiness. Frederick Willoughby himself is a young man of education and fortune ; of a frank, honorable, yet impetuous disposition, just commencing an active, independent career. The hopes of a doating mother, and the expectations of troops of friends, depend on his preservation from vicious pursuits or wily entanglements. Now, Miss Percy, I question you seriously as to your intentions in forming the acquaintance or encouraging the visits of Frederick Willoughby ?”

“ My acquaintance with Mr. Willoughby was commenced accidentally.” As Miss Percy uttered these words, her eyes fell beneath the steady, piercing glance of Wilfred Montessor. “ And he has visited me but twice or thrice.”

“ Your intentions, Miss Percy ?”

“ Mr. Willoughby is the master of his own actions,” said Caroline Percy, somewhat haughtily. “ If he seeks my society, the crime is not to be imputed to me.”

There was a continual struggle in the mind of Miss Percy, between the involuntary deference she felt toward her visitor and the natural pride and independence of her character. Yet probably the appeal which had been made to her selfishness, was the most powerful agent in restraining her from a contemptuous rebellion against the assumed authority of the traveler. Her manner exhibited, to a greater or less degree, the phases of this mental struggle. At times it was subdued and timid ; then, by turns, it was sullen, irritable, and even haughty.

“ It will become a crime,” said Montessor, thus gravely rebuking the sarcasm of the lady, “ if you persist in encouraging his visits after the warning I have given you. You have a pleasing exterior—a lively fancy—you have talent and tact. Possessed of these, you may reasonably hope to inspire a passionate attachment in the bosom of a young man of warm impulses and generous feelings. You are cool, artful, and designing. Are you desirous of becoming the wife or the mistress of Mr. Willoughby ?”

Again Miss Percy’s cheeks flushed, but she remained silent.

“ You cannot be so heartless as to think of entrapping this young

man into marriage. Your position in relation to William Pettigrew utterly forbids the supposition. By flattering and deceiving him, you may, however, secure his affection and command his purse; but the result would be highly prejudicial to his future prospects. As his friend, I interfere at the outset, to warn you and save him. I appeal to you rather than to him, because I do not wish to alarm his pride, by any open interference with his movements. Besides, I am aware that you are more capable of saving him than he is of saving himself."

"Your anxiety in relation to Mr. Willoughby is unfounded, I think," said Caroline Percy, with a smile. "I like him, certainly, from what little I have seen of him; but I have had no reason to imagine that he is disposed to fall in love with me. Your charges against me are so severe—your demands so extraordinary—"

"Well, Miss Percy—"

"You have not spared my feelings. Why should I respect your entreaties, or rather your commands?"

"If I have not spared your feelings, it has been with the ulterior motive of benefit to yourself as well as to others."

Miss Percy hesitated to reply, and Montessor continued:

"Your present position annoys you."

"And if it does"—almost petulently retorted Miss Percy.

"Change it."

"How?"

"Under the circumstances," replied Montessor gravely, "I am inclined to think that you will be justified in employing your influence over Mr. William Pettigrew to induce him—"

An arch smile beamed for an instant on Miss Percy's countenance.

"The thought is not original with me," said the traveler emphatically. "For good or for evil you must decide, and that quickly."

"I—indeed, you puzzle me."

"The course which I desire you to pursue hereafter," said Wilfred Montessor, interrupting her, "is clearly obvious to your penetration and sagacity. If you pursue it, unhesitatingly, you can rely with confidence on the promise which I voluntarily made to you at an early period of our interview. The contrary course will assuredly be followed by the defeat of your plans and the exposure of your real character. I address you as a sensible, intelligent woman, who prefers her interests to her caprices or her feelings."

"I ought to be offended with you," said Miss Percy, as her visitor rose to withdraw, "on account both of the manner and matter of your communication, but you have obtained an unwonted ascendancy over

me ; and I must reflect before I decide whether to prefer you as a friend or an enemy."

"It is prudent oftentimes," said Wilfred Montessor, "to follow the advice even of an enemy."



CHAPTER V.

THE ART OF CAROLINE PERCY.



ou seem in a brown study, Caroline."

"I am ignorant of the philosophy of colors," replied Caroline Percy, "but in a study I am, whether brown or blue."

"Do I guess rightly," asked Mrs. Percy, "when I attribute your silence this morning, and apparent perplexity, to the recent visit of the strange gentleman?"

"Wilfred Montessor, aunt Percy?" interposed Miss Percy.

"The strange gentleman whom Dr. Everard brought hither the other day to see your funny antics."

"You guess rightly. The gentleman of whom you speak, has exposed me to myself, and lectured me roundly for my faults; yet I confess to you freely, that he has already established a wonderful influence over me."

"By exposing and lecturing you!" exclaimed Mrs. Percy, raising both hands in well-feigned astonishment.

"Yes, dear aunt."

"When so many have utterly failed, after employing the most delicate arts of praise and flattery?"

"Delicate! I have never known a gentleman, except Mr. Montessor, who did not administer his complimentary potions in nauseating doses."

"Never?"

"Never."

"Mr. Willoughby or Mr. Pettigrew?"

"Don't name Pettigrew in the same breath with Mr. Willoughby, said Caroline Percy, in a tone of impatience.

After a pause of a few moments the young lady continued:

"But still Billy Pettigrew is a good creature."

"I am glad to hear you say that."

"Did I ever say otherwise?" inquired Miss Percy sharply. "We are good friends, Billy and I, and so I suppose we shall remain."

"He is jealous of you, Caroline. He does not comprehend——"

"How should he comprehend? He has no brains."

"I don't agree with you, by any means. Mr. Pettigrew, for any thing I see to the contrary, knows as much as other people."

"Yes, aunt Percy," said the lady, carelessly adjusting her ringlets, "perhaps he does in some branches of learning—he knows the streets of New York, from Whitehall to Bloomingdale—he knows all the merchants and traders dealing in the city, one half by sight, the other half by reputation. He knows the market price of goods and chattels, from bobbinet lace to gold watches. He is an adept in human nature, in the debtor and creditor line. He can tell an honest man from a rogue at a glance. All this I am bound to believe, for he says it boldly in his own behalf. Whatever may be his proficiency in building steamboats or in selling wares, he evidently knows nothing of the sex."

"And so he has no brains?"

"What is it to me that his skull is filled with a pulpy substance, organized in such form as to enable him to traffic and speculate with the acuteness of a Yankee peddler, unless he can also understand and appreciate my good and bad qualities?"

"I don't wonder, Caroline, that he is unable to comprehend you, for you puzzle me exceedingly, although I have known you from childhood."

"This stranger, Mr. Montessor, after an hour's interview, understood me thoroughly, and revealed to me the prominent feelings and motives which govern my designs and actions."

"Is he a suitor?"

"No and yes."

"Always in riddles, Caroline."

"If you are desirous of learning whether he is a suitor or not for the remnant of this weak heart," said Caroline Percy, placing her hand jestingly upon her bosom, "I say no—but he is in some things a suitor."

"Well, Caroline?" said Mrs. Percy, inquiringly, perceiving that the young lady hesitated to proceed.

"He has made several requests, perhaps I should rather call them commands."

"Commands, to you?"

"To me, Caroline Percy!" said the lady tossing back her ringlets with the palm of her right hand. "These requests or commands indicate a complete knowledge of my position, my character and my prospects. I assure you that I have become very humble and very obedient. At this moment I am unable to decide whether I have yielded to his will from self interest, or from a sense of reverence for a superior intellect."

"What are you to do?"

"Several things, aunt Percy, which you shall find out in due time, unless you are so unfortunate as to lose the trifling modicum of curiosity with which you are endowed."

"But, really?"

"Really, then, the last request of Mr. Montessor is strange and mysterious."

"What is it?"

"He read me like a book, last week, when I was convincing Dr. Everard, by practical experiments, of the indubitable truth of mesmerism—and I have already told you, he mortified me by disclosing the stupidity of my contrivances. Yet this morning, he persuaded me to rehearse a new part in the wonderful science of animal magnetism, with the design of performing it in the presence of two or three spectators. The objections which I urged on the score of delicacy, modesty and inability, were vanquished without the necessity of argument by his quiet incredulous smile. Dr. Everard will visit me after dinner, and put me in a state of magnetic sleep. I have been reflecting seriously, aunt Percy, and have resolved that these experiments shall not be repeated after to-day."

"I am glad to hear it, Caroline," said Mrs. Percy, rising. "Hark! it is William's step in the entry."

As Mrs. Percy left the saloon through one door, William Pettigrew entered through another.

The countenance of the auctioneer was clouded with a shade of sullenness.

Caroline Percy advanced to meet him with a gracious smile, and laid her hand gently upon the sleeve of his coat.

"When did you return from Long Island, Pet?"

Pettigrew regarded Miss Percy with a slightly puzzled expression. He replied coldly:

"This morning—just now, Caroline."

"Caroline!" said Miss Percy, pouting her rosy lips, and turning her head aside; "and why not Caro?"

"I don't suppose it makes any difference to you whether I call you Caroline or Caro?"

"Now, you are unkind, William," replied the lady; "am I not aware of the fact, that you are well pleased with me? Perhaps you think I am indifferent about pleasing you?"

"I fear it."

"Why do you say such things, Pat?" said Miss Percy, with an imploring glance—"do you wish to render me unhappy, and at this moment too, when you have been absent so long?"

The shadow still darkened the features of William Pettigrew, and he answered, though not without hesitation:

"I imagine that you have not suffered from the deprivation of my society. The list of your friends seem to be increasing almost daily; and I dare say that some of your accomplished visitors will prove more acceptable than myself."

Miss Percy placed her hand on the speaker's mouth and said:

"I won't have you talk in such a strain, William;" then smiling archly, she continued: "So you are really jealous of me?"

"Not jealous, exactly."

"Well, you can't trust me—there is no material difference between jealousy and distrust."

"You do not deny," said William Pettigrew, with a glance of inquiry, "that you have received attentions from gentlemen who are strangers to me?"

"I shall be positively angry with you, William," replied Miss Percy, pouting. "Who has excited this feeling, I wonder?" Assuming an attitude of deep reflection, she continued, speaking to herself rather than to the auctioneer; "There is Dr. Everard, a gentlemanly person, somewhat gray and bald, and old enough to be my father. There is Dr. Everard's friend, Wilfred Montessor, who came here with the doctor to see me in the mesmeric state, during my fit of periodical indisposition. There is Frederick Willoughby, a mere boy, with blue eyes and light brown hair, to whom, however, I am under serious obligations for attentions, under painful and embarrassing circumstances. Which of these, Pet, has your excited jealousy conjured up as a rival?"

"I have fancied, Caroline——"

"Say Caro!" exclaimed Miss Percy, pettishly.

"Caro, then," said the auctioneer, his face brightening a little; "I have fancied of late, that you do not care for me as much as you did formerly."

"A pretty fancy, indeed, to get into your wise noddle."

"But do you truly care for me?"

"Do I?" asked Miss Percy, with a sideling glance from her bright sparkling eyes.

"Yes—do you?"

"If I did not, why should I trouble myself about your foolish jealousy? And yet I am rather pleased on the whole; for the jealousy which you display is an evidence of the state of your feelings toward me."

"Have you ever doubted my affection for you?" inquired William Pettigrew, with surprise.

"Often."

"Tell me when."

"When you eat onions—when you refuse me money—when you are careless about your health or dress—when you go over to Long Island, and to other places, one, two and three days at a time, merely to sell old trumpery."

"You are a capricious, volatile creature, Caro," said the auctioneer. "I don't know what to make of you."

"I will tell you, William," said Miss Percy, seriously, her black eyes dilating widely.

"Well, Caro."

"Make me your wife!"

William Pettigrew gazed with wonder at the sudden transformation of the gay, coquettish Caroline Percy, into a serious, earnest woman. Her manner, her request, startled him.

"This is strange, Caro!"

"If you love me," said Miss Percy, in a low, quivering voice, "make me your wife."

"What has caused this freak of yours, Caro?"

"It is no sudden freak, William. Beneath the wild gayety and adventurous daring of my untamed spirit, you might have beheld the annoyance and suffering to which my position exposed me—only that I am a strange being—impulsive, wayward, perpetually changing. My distress was a vague, undefined feeling, which sometimes in my brightest hours gave rise to melancholy and bitter thoughts. But yesterday an incident occurred which deepened the impression upon my soul, until it is strong, perchance immovable. I allude to a conversation with a gentleman, who, intending me no injury, doing me no wrong, with good motives, held me up, as a mirror, and compelled me to behold the reflection of my past life and my present position."

Miss Percy covered her face with her hands, and sobbed bitterly during several minutes. Then removing her hands, she added, her dark eyes flashing through her tears:

“Oh! William, it is horrible!”

The feelings of surprise and wonder which had been previously excited in the breast of William Pettigrew, were rapidly giving way to emotions of sympathy.

“Do I not love you, William?” murmured Caroline Percy, dashing the tears from her eyes as she approached the auctioneer, and imprinted a kiss on his lips.

Then she knelt before him, caressing his hands, and said a third time, in low, tremulous tones,

“Make me your wife.”

“Rise, Caro—dear Caro,” said William Pettigrew, struggling to suppress his feelings.

“Never, until you answer me.”

“I will think of it.”

“Answer me quickly—now.”

The brain of the auctioneer was reeling—he strove to reflect, to determine; but the current of thought was checked by the excitement of overmastering emotion.

“Will you be faithful to me in word and deed?” exclaimed William Pettigrew. “Will you sustain your position as the wife of a man of true feeling and honorable pride?”

“Yes—answer me.”

“I consent, Caro. You shall become my wife.”

Miss Percy, in a paroxysm of feeling, rose from her kneeling posture, and reclined her head upon Pettigrew’s shoulder. The next instant, however, she burst from his embrace, and exclaimed, with intense energy,

“If you had refused me, William, I should have perished at your feet.”

The auctioneer led Miss Percy to an ottoman, and at length succeeded in soothing her powerful, her ungovernable feelings.

“Where are you going?” inquired Miss Percy, in a subdued tone, as Mr. Pettigrew rose to leave her.

“Adieu, Caro! business—business. I must report the result of the sale on Long Island, to Mr. Wilson, my principal. The rights and interests of others are involved in the faithful execution of the trust reposed in me. Excuse me, therefore, until evening.”

As the door closed on the retiring auctioneer, a triumphant smile illuminated the countenance of Miss Caroline Percy.

Half an hour afterwards, the profound revery into which Miss Percy had fallen, was interrupted by the announcement of a visitor.

Frederick Willoughby entered the apartment.

"The roses have returned to your cheeks, Miss Percy," said the young man admiringly.

"I claim no longer the privileges of an invalid, Mr. Willoughby."

"Are you advancing in your studies?" inquired Frederick Willoughby, glancing at the books which lay upon the center-table.

"My industry and my ambition have recently received a severe check. At your last visit I consulted you upon the chances of my success in a theatrical career. Relying upon your friendly feeling toward me, I ventured to request the aid of your judgment and taste in criticising my private rehearsals. The stage has been the object of my ambition for a long time, and notwithstanding your discouraging advice, I was desirous of achieving its mimic greatness; but on broaching the subject to aunt Percy and Mr. Pettigrew, I was overwhelmed with objections and remonstrances."

Miss Percy watched the countenance of her visitor, and at the mention of the name of Pettigrew, she perceived an expression of surprise.

"The opinion of Mr. Pettigrew—by-the-by," she remarked, suddenly breaking off the thread of the narration, "unless my memory fails, you have not met Mr. Pettigrew during any of your visits."

"No, Miss Percy."

He is an old, a very particular friend of mine, and one whom I am in a measure bound to consult with regard to my plans."

"As a guardian?" inquired Frederick Willoughby, adding with some hesitation, "or, perhaps, as a suitor?"

Miss Percy blushed, slightly, and her eyes were seemingly employed for an instant, in scanning the irregular figures of the Brussels carpet beneath her feet.

With a timid glance at Frederick Willoughby, she remarked,

"As I was saying, the opinion of Mr. Pettigrew was so decided and peremptory, to pass over the scruples of my aunt, that I surrendered my hopes of acquiring fame and fortune by my own exertions, with the best grace in the world."

"I approve your decision, Miss Percy," said Frederick Willoughby, with a glance slightly troubled and confused, "whatever be the nature of the influence to which you have yielded."

"My decision, resulting as it does from deference to my friends and superiors, will at least relieve you from the task of hearing and criticising my performances."

"No, Miss Percy, it has deprived me of much pleasure," replied the young man seriously.

"You are polite, Mr. Willoughby," said the lady smiling graciously, "but you are honorably relieved from the service I proposed to you. Notwithstanding this, I trust that you will not entirely forget me, nor cease to visit me occasionally. I should be pleased to introduce you to Mr. Pettigrew."

Willoughby bowed.

"My impulses govern me," said Caroline Percy, rising and advancing toward a piano on the opposite side of the room, "will you permit me to inflict a song upon you?"

"A dozen, if you will."

Miss Percy seated herself at the piano, and ran over the keys, apparently hesitating in the selection of a song.

At length she played a charming symphony, and sang, in rich, ious tones, the following verses:

SONG.

Dost thou yet remember
 Love's first vow?
 Tearful were thine eyes, love,
 Crimson thy brow.
 Gently, I embraced thee,
 Tenderly, I placed thee
 By my side—and yet,
 Say, canst thou forget?

Dost thou yet remember
 Love's first kiss?
 Thrilling was the touch, love,
 Wondrous the bliss,
 Fondly, I caressed thee,
 Lovingly, I pressed thee
 To my heart—and yet,
 Say, canst thou forget?

"Am I not a strange creature?" said Miss Percy, turning partly round and addressing Frederick Willoughby.

"Why, Miss Percy?"

"To sing a song like this, just at this time."

"I can account for your singing it," said Willoughby, approaching her.

Miss Percy shook her head, smilingly.

"You wish me to know that the vow has been spoken—the kiss of love given?" said the young man with an inquisitive glance.

The next moment, Miss Percy, without replying, commenced playing the "Duke of Reichstadt's March."

Mrs. Percy entered the apartment during the performance. The conversation turned upon different topics, and Frederick Willoughby soon afterward retired.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DISCLOSURE—THE STUDIO.

As Alfred Tracey walked hastily toward his brother's residence, after a brief interview with a stranger to whom he had been introduced on the preceding evening, his countenance manifested an unwonted seriousness of expression. He entered the hall and proceeded immediately to the library. Mrs. Tracey was engaged in writing a letter to a friend, but she received him with a gracious smile, and put aside her writing materials.

"What now, Alfred?" said the lady, with a look of wonder. "You are grave and thoughtful this morning."

"Does it appear strange to you?" inquired the young man, earnestly. "Am I usually gay and frivolous, or if I am, are you insensible that beneath the surface lie intense feelings, strong passions, wild, perhaps unavailing, desires; and that mirth and nonsense are the outside garments which I wear to disguise myself from the eyes of the world?"

"And wherefore?"

"Because," replied Alfred Tracey, with a fervid glance, "I am haughty and contemptuous toward the mass, and have no wish to be understood and appreciated, except by those whom I esteem and love."

"You astonish me more and more by your sentiments and actions. Of late, you seem to be a different being from your former self, nor do I possess the key to your apparent change of character."

"And yet ——" The young man suddenly checked himself. After a moment's pause, he continued, in an altered tone: "My present seriousness will not excite your surprise, when I assure you that I have recently beheld a scene of extreme poverty and destitution. One, too, in which all of us—I refer to Owen, you and myself—are directly or indirectly concerned."

"Speak plainly, Alfred."

Taking a seat near the table, Alfred Tracey remained silent and thoughtful during several minutes. At length he said, with some feeling:

"You will excuse my hesitation, Mrs. Tracey, when you learn its

cause. The nature of the secret in my possession, the manner in which I acquired the knowledge of it, the conversation which occurred between us yesterday, combine to render uncertain the course which I ought to pursue. But you desire me to speak plainly, and I will obey you.

“On a stormy day, in the month of January last, I entered my brother Owen’s sitting apartment to obtain a few sheets of writing paper. He was in his arm-chair, asleep, with his arms resting upon the top of the writing desk, and his head reposing quietly on his folded arms. As I approached the desk, he was muttering, indistinctly, in his sleep. I stood motionless a few seconds, and was startled at hearing him repeat, several times, ‘I forged the will—I forged the will.’ These words made a profound impression on my mind; but I have never obtained a clue to them until my adventure of yesterday. I was passing an old wooden house, in Orange-street, when a young girl implored me to visit her mother. Yielding to a sudden impulse of sympathy, I followed the girl up stairs, and was ushered into a small chamber, meanly furnished, yet neat and cleanly in its appearance. A middle aged woman, emaciated by disease, was lying upon a coarse bed, attended only by one of her neighbors. Weak and feeble as she was, I entered into conversation with her. She told me that her maiden name was Martyn; that her father, long since deceased, was William Martyn, the head of the old firm of Martyn and Tracey; that she was disinherited by his will, and that the bulk of his estate was bequeathed to his partner, Owen Tracey; that she had incurred the displeasure of her relatives, by marrying a poor man of the name of Williams; that of late years her husband’s affairs had become more and more desperate, until he had been driven to the commission of crime; that he was now in the hands of the officers of the law, and that her family was in danger of starvation; that in her extremity she had applied to Owen Tracey for assistance, on the ground of her relationship to William Martyn, but without success; and that the only resource for herself and her family, was in the charity of strangers. At the conclusion of her narrative, I gave her a small sum of money, and promised to see her again. The woman is not an impostor, Mrs. Tracey; and her disclosures have made a deep impression upon me. As often as I think of the large bequest which my brother, Owen, received on the death of his partner, William Martyn, the words, ‘I forged the will,’ sound in my ears.”

“Did my husband,” inquired Mrs. Tracey, “did Mr. Tracey really inherit the property of William Martyn?”

"He did. He succeeded to the business of Martyn and Tracey, and inherited, by will, the entire stock in trade, ships, merchandise—everything belonging to the firm. Has he never told you this?"

"Never."

"The fact is indisputable. Now did Mr. Martyn really disinherit his innocent and helpless daughter from an unaccountable dislike to her, or the desire of doubling my brother Owen's wealth? Have I not unraveled a dreadful mystery? I reveal my suspicions to you because, in my judgment, they approach to certainty, and because you are deeply interested in palliating the terrible consequences of Owen's guilt."

Mrs. Tracey listened to the young man with a calm, serene countenance, which manifested neither her convictions nor her emotions. As he concluded, she looked stedfastly at him, and gravely inquired:

"Are these your only motives, Alfred?"

"No," exclaimed Alfred Tracey, impetuously. "I seek also to fathom the state of your feelings toward my brother, and the cause of your mysterious connection with him. You are neither cold, nor selfish, nor thoughtless, whatever gossips and slanderers may insinuate or assert; and yet Owen and you are so opposite in character, in sentiment, in tastes and pursuits, that I am unable to account for your marriage. Of this, however, I am fully convinced: you cannot, do not, love him."

Mrs. Tracey burst into tears.

"Pardon me, my sister," said Alfred Tracey, kneeling; "my sympathy for you has betrayed me into an indiscretion which I deeply regret."

"Rise, Alfred," said the lady, assuming her usual composure of manner. "You have transgressed my commands and broken your promises."

"Pardon me," repeated the young man, penitently.

"You are pursuing a very improper course—under the pretense of friendship for me, you persist in remarks and inquiries which are unpleasant if not insulting to me."

"It is only my rash inconsiderate manner of speaking. You cannot suppose that I intend to wound your feelings."

"I do not, Alfred."

"And will you forgive me?"

"In case I overlook this transgression of your sacred promise, what security have I that you will not repeat the offense?"

"Can you not trust me?"

"You desire my forgiveness," said Mrs. Tracey evading the question, "and I freely forgive you; do not presume upon my forbearance. If you value my friendship—"

"I do—I do," murmured Alfred Tracey.

"You will be more prudent in future."

"In a few days," said the young man in a tone of melancholy, "I shall cease to be an inmate of your house—but I cannot relinquish the hope of being kindly remembered by you."

"It will be your own fault if our intercourse terminates unpleasantly—for I have none but the most kindly feelings toward you."

The conversation languished. Both remained silent and thoughtful during a considerable space of time.

At length Mrs. Tracey remarked in a tone of decision:

"Whatever may be the reasons which induced Mr. Tracey to withhold his assistance from Mrs. Williams, I cannot overlook her implied claims and her great necessities."

"Her wants are indeed pressing—but what do you propose?"

"To visit her myself."

The countenance of Alfred Tracey brightened at this announcement, and he exclaimed eagerly:

"Will you, Mrs. Tracey? You are truly generous."

"It is my duty to supply the wants of this unprotected family," said the lady; "and yet to avoid the reproaches of my husband and to spare his feelings, if your conjectures are true, I will perform the duty secretly. Give me the address, Alfred."

"I cannot at present," replied the young man. "The house is in Orange-street. I will ascertain the number, or if agreeable to you I will accompany you thither whenever you are ready to go."

"To-day, then—after dinner."

"I shall be engaged from noon until nightfall, Mrs. Tracey. But the evening will be deliciously warm and pleasant, and the time suitable for your purpose."

"This evening, Alfred."

A servant opened the door of the library and presented a card to Mrs. Tracey.

"Mrs. Willoughby," said Mrs. Tracey glancing at the card.

Then turning to Alfred Tracey, she remarked:

"Mrs. Willoughby awaits us in her carriage."

A quarter of an hour afterwards Mrs. Willoughby and Mrs. Tracey, attended by Frederick Willoughby and Alfred Tracey, entered the studio of Vanderlyn in the Rotunda. The painter was employed at his easel,

and the party without an effort to interrupt his labors passed on to the gallery of paintings in the rear of the artist's studio. The circular walls of the gallery were adorned with a fine collection of paintings, embracing a few rare and valuable productions of the old masters and the chief d'œuvres of Vanderlyn himself.

Mrs. Willoughby and her friends were discussing the merits of a magnificent picture, Marius in the ruins of Carthage, as a party of visitors—among whom were Doctor Everard, his daughter Helen, and Willfred Montessor—entered the saloon.

"Yonder is a beautiful creature," said Mrs. Willoughby, in a low voice to her son. "She is evidently bewitching our friend Montessor. Do you recognize her, Frederick?"

Frederick Willoughby turned toward the advancing group and a flush of pleasurable emotion spread over his handsome features as he beheld the maiden. "It is Helen Everard, dear mother," replied the young man, "and the grave, dignified gentleman on her left is her father, Doctor Everard. Did I not tell you of the pleasant evening I passed at his house last week, and of the game of chess I played with Miss Everard?"

The sudden, involuntary emotion of Frederick Willoughby had not escaped the watchful eyes of his mother.

"Be careful, Frederick," said Mrs. Willoughby, with a smile; "chess is a dangerous game to play with a young and beautiful woman."

This remark, spoken in a more elevated tone of voice, reached the ears of Mrs. Tracey.

"The warning is useless," said Mrs. Tracey approaching. "The ardent and the aspiring play fearlessly on the brink of the precipice."

As Mrs. Tracey uttered these words, she encountered suddenly the stern, unwavering glance of the traveler, Wilfred Montessor.

The groups of visitors mingled together, and salutations were interchanged between such of them as were known to each other.

In the midst of the temporary confusion arising from this cause, Alfred Tracey whispered to Mrs. Tracey:

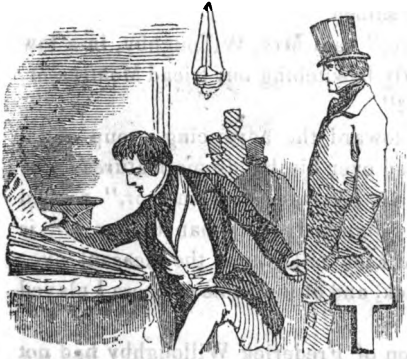
"An engagement with Owen compels me to leave you to the matronly care of Mrs. Willoughby. Do not forget your appointment with me for this evening."

Within a foot of Alfred Tracey stood Wilfred Montessor, reclining against one of the columns which supported the ceiling of the large saloon.

The significant whisper of the young man was overheard by the traveler.

CHAPTER VII.

THE EXPERIMENT—CONSCIENCE.



HE shadows of the buildings were stretching across Broadway, and gradually mounting brick after brick along the walls of houses and stores on the eastern side of the street.

Frederick Willoughby sauntered into the reading-room of the American Hotel, and approached a young man who was turning over a file of

newspapers.

"Well met, Alfred," he exclaimed. "I have been seeking you."

"Ah! Willoughby!" replied Alfred Tracey, extending one hand, while he continued to turn over the newspapers with the other. "Have a moment's patience, and I will be at your service. I am trying to ascertain the date of an arrival at this port. Here it is—May sixteenth."

The young man inserted a memorandum of the date in the tablets of a small morocco pocket-book, which he drew from his pocket; and then turning to Willoughby, said, cheerfully:

"Now, Fred, I am yours."

"Take my arm," said Frederick Willoughby, "and I will give you an inkling of our destination, as we pass up Broadway."

"To the club-house, Fred?" inquired Alfred Tracey, as the twain reached the broad paved sidewalk.

"No, Alfred; I have not wavered an instant in the determination to which I came, after the scrape with those swindlers, Harcourt and Orme. I shall never visit a public gambling house. And I advise you to adopt a similar resolution."

"I see no necessity for it," replied Tracey, with a sneer. "I can take care of myself."

"Well, well—as you please. This has nothing to do with our present business."

"Business! I was pestered with business, this afternoon, till I came near losing my dinner; and I muttered, two or three times, a good hearty wish that the devil might be converted into the business agent of the universe. Business! I hate the word."

"I employ it, Tracey," said the young man, laughing, "in its most acceptable meaning."

"Proceed, then. But previously a single question: will you dine with me on Thursday?"

"On Thursday?—yes."

"Four o'clock; at the City Hotel."

"With pleasure, Tracey."

"The occurrence of unforeseen events compelled me to postpone my former invitation, as stated in my note this morning. And now to your business."

"You remember, I presume, what you related to me, the other day, of a conversation, between Mrs. Owen Tracey and yourself, on the subject of Animal Magnetism?"

"Very well."

"From the general tenor of the conversation, and your remarks at the time, I obtained the impression that you were anxious to secure a favorable opportunity of beholding a series of experiments in the science of mesmerism."

"You are right, Willoughby. I have not only a strong desire to behold the experiments, but also to be convinced of the truth of the science."

"Why so? Have you turned your attention to the intricate mazes of philosophy?"

"My study of philosophy is confined entirely to those branches which are capable of being reduced to practice in the affairs of life."

"By yourself, or others?"

"Myself, principally."

"And of what practical advantage would the science of mesmerism be to you, even if conclusively proved?"

"I should become an adept."

"And stroll through the country, with one or two susceptible subjects, on whom to perform the experiments, delivering lectures to the populace, at a shilling per head?"

"Not I."

"To what purpose, then, would you apply your knowledge?"

"To the conquest of the sex!" said Alfred Tracey, coolly. "Women are endowed with strong sympathies, and excitable nerves. The truth of animal magnetism places them entirely at the mercy of cool, calculating, determined men, thoroughly versed in its deep mysteries."

"Would you really pervert such astonishing powers to such base ends?" inquired Frederick Willoughby, with a slight degree of warmth in his manner.

"All is fair in love, as in politics!" replied Alfred Tracey.

"An atrocious sentiment, Alfred; but I will not quarrel with you on account of your doctrines, until you reduce them to practice."

Tracey laughed heartily, and turned toward his companion, with a glance of playful mockery.

"You are growing squeamish, Willoughby. A week ago, my nonsense passed current with you."

"A week ago I was only a boy," said Frederick Willoughby, thoughtfully. Pausing a moment after these words, he added: "I am digressing, sadly, from the explanation I promised you. Doctor Everard, a skillful physician, residing near the University, has at this time, under his medical charge, a young lady of nervous temperament, laboring under a species of chronic hysteria. In the treatment of her case, the doctor has resorted to the curative influence of animal magnetism, and, it seems, successfully. Mr. Montessor has already seen some of the experiments of Dr. Everard on this patient, and he assures me that the phenomena apparently produced by the doctor's manipulations, are truly startling. This afternoon the experiments will be repeated, at the lady's residence; and Mr. Montessor has been authorized by Doctor Everard, to be present during the performance, and to bring with him one or two friends. Would you like to go?"

"Very much," replied Tracey, consulting his watch.

"What is the hour, Tracey?"

"Five o'clock."

"Mr. Montessor will meet us at the rooms of the New York Lyceum within ten minutes."

"How much time will be occupied in the experiments? I have an engagement this evening."

"An hour, probably."

"Are you acquainted with the lady, Doctor Everard's patient?"

"No. Mr. Montessor informs me that she is young, handsome, and intelligent. He will accompany us to her residence."

"Well: we shall see for ourselves."

The young men walked more rapidly, speaking to each other only in detached sentences or words. In a few minutes they arrived at the entrance of a building in the rear of the City Hall, occupied in part by the New York Lyceum. Wilfred Montessor was awaiting them.

As Montessor and his companions were turning the corner of Prince street, Frederick Willoughby addressed the younger Tracey.

"By the by, Alfred, a thought occurs to me at this moment: where were you last Friday night?"

"Last Friday night!" said Tracey, thoughtfully, his cheeks becoming slightly pale.

"Last Friday night, a week ago?—The night of my mother's assembly."

"Where was I? Did you not see me?"

"Yes, I was conversing with you in the early part of the evening. At the termination of a waltz with Miss Lehman, I sought you through all the apartments without success."

"I don't remember. An assignation, perhaps."

"It was after midnight, between twelve and one o'clock that I missed you."

"I don't remember," he stammered confusedly.

The soul of Alfred Tracey quailed before the inquisitive glance of Wilfred Montessor.

"Your absence was very provoking, for I had something particular to say to you. But no matter. I yield the point of curiosity, since you are not disposed to gratify me."

Montessor paused in front of the residence of Miss Caroline Percy, and, to the great surprise of Frederick Willoughby, ascended the steps and rang the bell. His surprise was vastly increased when, on being ushered into the sitting apartment which he had left a few hours previously, he perceived Miss Percy arrayed in a morning dress, reclining languidly on an ottoman, and Dr. Everard seated by her side, carefully examining her pulse.

Miss Percy glanced toward the door. Her countenance changed perceptibly as she met the astonished, wondering look of her morning visitor.

She attempted to rise, but Dr. Everard, laying his hand upon her shoulder, gently detained her.

"Be seated, gentlemen," said Dr. Everard, with grave dignity. "Miss Percy must remain quiet. The excitement of her pulse is too great already. Nay," added the doctor, placing his fingers again upon the wrist of his patient, "the pulsations have perceptibly quickened within a minute. Compose yourself, my dear Miss Percy."

"You recollect Mr. Montessor?" continued Doctor Everard, after a moment's pause; "the gentlemen who accompany him, are Mr. Tracey and Mr. Willoughby. Do not be alarmed; they are friends of mine, admitted with your free consent. Is it not so, Miss Percy?"

"Certainly, doctor."

"They are animated by a laudable desire to behold the manifestation, the gradual unfolding, as it were, of the inward spiritual life, which it is the province of the science of animal magnetism to accomplish. What steam is in the natural world, the magnetic influence is in the spiritual world, as nearly as comparison can be instituted between physical and moral agencies. Steam almost annihilates the distance between natural objects, and the magnetic influence between spiritual existences. The impetuous, irresistible steam-car seems the proper antetype of a potent, controlling will."

The doctor had risen from his seat during the process of these remarks, and slowly traversed the apartment with his arms folded across his bosom.

At length Dr. Everard approached Miss Percy, and seated himself before her.

As on the previous occasion in the presence of Wilfred Montessor alone, there were exhibited the same processes for inducing a state of magnetic sleep. The concentrated will, the steady prolonged gaze, the manipulations of the operator, the same physical condition of the system, after it had yielded to the magnetic influence; slowness of pulse, rigidity of fiber, insensibility to pain, and coldness of the extremities; the same, or similar experiments to test the unity of thought, desire, feeling, and the wonderful sympathies existing between the magnetized person and the magnetizer.

Frederick Willoughby and Alfred Tracey regarded the diversified experiments of Doctor Everard with intense interest.

"Doctor," interposed Wilfred Montessor, in a grave voice, after the experiments had been continued nearly an hour.

Doctor Everard turned toward the man of thirty-five, and inclined his head slightly, in token that he was listening.

"Miss Percy is blindfolded, and at this moment perfectly calm. Will you extend the sphere of your experiments a little, and test the

power of sympathetic clairvoyance, through the medium of the thought or will of a third person ?”

“I will attempt it, Mr. Montessor,” replied the Doctor. “Come forward, one of you.”

The gentlemen consulted together in low whispers, and after a moment’s hesitation, Alfred Tracey advanced to the side of Doctor Everard.

The Doctor took the left hand of Miss Percy in one of his hands, and the left hand of Alfred Tracey in the other. He asked in a moderate tone :

“Miss Percy, do you hear me ?”

“Yes, doctor.”

“Do you see this gentleman, whose hand I hold in mine ?”

“Yes, doctor.”

“Are you willing to be put in communication with him, and to travel with him wherever he goes ?”

“If you desire it, doctor.”

Doctor Everard placed the hand of Miss Percy in that of Alfred Tracey, and pressed them gently together.

The doctor then retired a few steps, and said, gravely :

“By a powerful exercise of my will, Mr. Tracey, the influence which I possess over the thoughts and actions of the sleeper, is transferred to you. You stand in my place. In proportion to the strength of your will, in proportion to the vividness of your ideas, will be the degree of her obedience, and the force of her impressions. Speak gently to her, and persuade her to travel with you to any locality which is strongly impressed on your memory and imagination. The more vivid and real the picture is in your own mind, the more accurately will she portray it. Command her to describe it audibly.”

“Miss Percy,” said the young man.

“I hear you, Mr. Tracey,” murmured the sleeper, in low tones.

“I wish you to go home with me, and to tell me what you see.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Remember my injunction,” said Doctor Everard, addressing the young man. “Give full play to your memory and to your imagination.”

“What do you see, Miss Percy ?” inquired Alfred Tracey.

The sleeper tossed her head uneasily, during several minutes, and mumbled indistinctly some incoherent words and phrases. At length, however, the restlessness vanished, and she spoke, in a low, monotonous whisper :

"I see, I see, a very wide hall, a very wide hall, with a strange looking lamp. But—but, how dark it looks to me. I see—I see something or someboby, crawling up the stairs softly—crawling up softly. I see the door of a chamber open very slowly—very slowly—very slowly, and a man, quite a young man, enter the chamber. I see it—I see it. There is a small night lamp on the mantel-piece—there are a dressing bureau and a looking glass; there is an open window, there is a great sedan chair, there is a couch—a couch, with fine drapery. Oh! what beautiful colors. I see the man—the young man—going on tip-toe, stretching himself up on tip-toe, going toward the bed, on tip-toe, very softly and slowly. I see a woman in her night-clothes, lying on the bed; she starts up from the pillow; she looks fearfully around; she opens her mouth as if she were screaming with fright—as if she were screaming; the man, the young man, seizes her by the throat and holds her down on the bed; holds her tightly; very—very—very tightly; the blood! the red blood gushes from her mouth!"

Not the slightest variation occurred in the monotonous whisper of the sleeper; during this strange recital Montressor, Willoughby, Dr. Everard, listened motionless and silent.

The effect upon Alfred Tracey was surprising. At the end of the first sentence uttered by Miss Percy, his lips quivered, his hand trembled perceptibly. As she proceeded, his agitation increased more and more. He made a violent effort to subdue the tremor of his limbs, and to calm the convulsive beating of his heart. But the final allusion to the gushing forth of red blood from the mouth of a strangled woman, entirely overcame him. He tossed the hand of the sleeper violently from him, struck the open palms of his hands forcibly against his forehead, uttered an exclamation of horror, and staggered to and fro, like a drunken man. Frederick Willoughby caught him in his arms, and placed him on a vacant ottoman. He lay, for several minutes, foaming at the mouth, and gnashing his teeth like a madman.

The sleeper neither moved nor spoke farther.

While Dr. Everard was preparing a composing draught for Alfred Tracey, the paroxysm suddenly passed away. He opened his eyes, and exclaimed, with a slight shudder:

"My God! a terrible dream!"

"What is the matter, Tracey?" inquired Willoughby.

"It is nothing, Fred—only one of my nervous fits."

"Is there any connection between the words of the sleeper and this violent attack?"

"Don't question me," replied the young man, "it is passing away. I shall soon be myself."

"Are you subject to these paroxysms?"

"I have them quite frequently," murmured Alfred Tracey, relapsing into a state of insensibility.

No exclamation, no inquiry, no word of comment on the scene which had just transpired, escaped the lips of Wilfred Montessor.

The restoration of Miss Percy was immediately effected, by the manipulations of Doctor Everard.

CHAPTER VIII.

MONTRESSOR AND HAMET.



It was evening.

Wilfred Montessor was sitting in the apartment which had been consecrated by the presence, by the death of Zorah.

Hamet entered, holding a letter in his right hand.

The man of thirty-five took the letter and opened it, and perused its contents.

"It is well, Hamet," said Montessor, folding the letter and laying it upon the table near him.

The youth bowed and retired. But ere he reached the door he was recalled by a single word :

"Hamet."

He approached the traveler, and with folded arms silently awaited his commands.

"You have accomplished wonders, Hamet, by your zeal, your intelligence, your activity. Nothing has failed which you have been entrusted to perform—nothing. At noon-day and at midnight, with equal alacrity, you have obeyed my orders. You have surmounted the most serious obstacles ; you have fearlessly exposed yourself to danger ; you have disregarded the weariness of mind and body, springing from continual labor, which even in men, deadens courage, and debilitates action. Your reward is at hand. I have discovered the murderer of Zorah."

Hamet started ; clasped his hands violently together, and exclaimed .

"The murderer of the lady Zorah, my mistress ?"

"Yes, Hamet."

The eyes of the youth flashed fire.

"Let him die the death of a dog !"

The words of Hamet kindled a train of reflection in the mind of Wilfred Montessor.

In the midst of his reverie, he turned to the excited youth :

“Leave me, Hamet. I will tell you my decision hereafter.”

Hamet retired.

The man of thirty-five reasoned thus with himself :

“Blood for blood—it is the law of justice.

“ ‘Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed.’ It is the law of God, written in his Holy Word, written in the heart of man.

“The blood—the innocent blood of Zorah has been shed. Her life has been taken by violence, and her slayer, regardless of the displeasure of God, walks the streets of the city.

“Alfred Tracey is her murderer.

“The laxness of his principles, the immorality of his daily life, justify the conclusion that he is capable of the most atrocious crimes.

“He was absent two hours from the assembly of Mrs. Willoughby—he visited none of his usual haunts during his absence—he has evaded the inquiries of his most intimate associates; and then the scene at Caroline Percy’s.

“Pallid cheeks and glaring eye-balls, convulsed muscles, agonizing cries—what evidence from the lips of human witnesses can be more conclusive than such fearful tokens, the confessions of a soul racked and tortured by the harrowing remembrance of damning guilt ?

“Alfred Tracey is the criminal.

“Murder, in this, as in many other cases, cannot be legally charged—cannot be legally proved. The many loopholes of the law are quite wide enough to permit the escape of shoals of murderers.

“The task is mine. I must become the avenger of blood.

Sad—terrible was the fate of Zorah, and yet a mournful consolation is not wanting—death triumphed over dishonor !

“Dishonor !

“From the broken promises of the maiden to the broken vows of the wife—from falsehood to crime—there is but one step.

“That woman—I loved her.

“Zorah, Zorah, yours was the glorious presence that came to me last night and whispered of love and hope. Yours, not hers. My soul was transported with ecstasy. I awoke and wept that it was a dream.”

Montessor rose and paced the chamber hastily to and fro.

“Yes; I must avenge the death of Zorah—but how ?”

BOOK SIXTH



THE INSULT.

CHAPTER I.

THE VISIT—THE ESCAPE.



IN the early part of the evening a hackney coach drove up in front of the residence of Owen Tracey, and a young man alighted.

It was Alfred Tracey.

He entered the front door of the mansion, and proceeded directly to the library.

I "The carriage is waiting at the door, Mrs. Tracey," said the young man, bowing. "I am ready to accompany you to the residence of Mrs. Williams."

"I will detain you but a moment," said Mrs. Tracey, retiring to her drawing room.

Alfred Tracey descended the stairs, and traversed the hall of his brother's residence. His cheeks were flushed; his eyes glanced restlessly from the floor to the ceiling; his mind was evidently disturbed.

"Am I really suspected by Wilfred Montessor?" muttered the young man, inaudibly; "and have I fallen into a snare, or have I been suffering from a nervous phantasy? It cannot be—Montessor said nothing, and seemed to take no interest in the occurrence beyond my simple explanation. I must not lose my coolness—my self-possession. I will not. And to-night! Am I a fool or a coward? Shall I not take advantage of the circumstances which have arisen so opportunely to favor my designs—to hasten my triumph? Away with hesitation and doubt, and the fear of consequences."

His reverie was interrupted by the approach of Mrs. Tracey. He led her to the carriage, and entered after her, remarking in a subdued tone to the coachman who awaited his orders:

"Drive to No. 89 Orange-street."

In somewhat less than a quarter of an hour, the carriage stopped.

"Is this the house?" inquired Mrs. Tracey, as, with her companion, she ascended the steps of a three story brick edifice, which, notwithstanding the darkness of the evening, loomed up perceptibly above the humble dwellings in its vicinity. "Unless I mistake, you told me that Mrs. Williams resided in an old wooden building in Orange-street.

"She has been removed to more comfortable quarters," remarked the young man.

"By your orders, Alfred?"

Alfred Tracey rang the bell, murmuring an indistinct reply to the question of Mrs. Tracey.

The bell had scarcely ceased ringing, when the face of a woman was seen peering through the movable blinds of the outer door, as if with the design of reconnoitering the persons of the visitors. After a moment's examination, she opened the door, apparently satisfied.

She was a large fleshy woman, with bloated features and dark hazel eyes, beaming with an expression of malignant cunning. Her garments were of costly materials, made in fashionable style; but her appearance was, notwithstanding, slovenly and repulsive. Mrs. Tracey felt an involuntary shudder stealing over her, as she met the scrutinizing glance of the stranger upon entering the hall.

"How is the invalid, Mrs. Williams?" inquired Alfred Tracey.

"Poorly—poorly."

"We have called to see her—Mrs. Tracey and I," said the young man.

"Walk up stairs, sir—up stairs. Her room is in the third story—the first door on the left side after reaching the head of the stairs. Shall I show you up, sir?"

"It is unnecessary, madam. You are Mrs. Waters, I presume, the mistress of the boarding-house."

"Yes, sir; the servants have all gone out this evening, and left me entirely alone."

"In the third story, Mrs Waters?"

"The third story, sir—the first door to the left."

The hall and stairway were well lighted by a lamp suspended from the ceiling in the first story. The stairs were handsomely carpeted. Mrs. Tracey experienced an inexplicable misgiving as she mounted the stair-case, arm in arm with Alfred Tracey.

The young man opened the door which had been indicated by the mistress of the house, and ushered Mrs. Tracey into the apartment. It was a parlor or sitting-room, neatly, and even elegantly furnished. Toward the right, at the distance of eight or ten feet from the entrance just described, was another door leading to a small inner room, apparently a bed-chamber.

A handsome lamp, with a ground shade, was burning upon a small mahogany work-stand. Alfred Tracey closed the door, and requested Mrs. Tracey to be seated.

"Where is Mrs. Williams, Alfred?" said the lady, surveying the apartment.

There was an expression of deep humility on the features of Alfred Tracey, as he replied with downcast eyes:

"I have deceived you, Madam—Mrs. Williams does not reside here!"

"Does not reside here?" exclaimed Mrs. Tracey starting from the seat she had taken at Alfred Tracey's request.

"No, my sister. Yet do not imagine that my deceit has extended further. All that I have told you in regard to the history and present distress of Mrs. Williams, is literally true; but——"

"What does this mean?" inquired Mrs. Tracey. "Where am I?"

"With a man who loves you!" exclaimed Alfred Tracey, earnestly. "In a place where there is no danger of intrusion, no risk of discovery."

"Where am I? in a house of assignation, of infamy? Have you dared, Alfred——"

"Do not, in mercy, do not condemn me too severely," said the young man, melting into tears, and falling upon his knees before the indignant lady. "The mask is torn from my face by my own hand, and I implore you to have compassion on me. I love you with a wild, burning, terrific passion, which scorns and defies all obstacles. You are my brother's wife. I know it. I have lived for months in your presence, striving, scarcely with success, to veil the secret of my bosom. I have seen you moving like an angel of light through your narrow household circle. I have beheld your kindness, your gentleness, your charity toward others, your control over yourself. I have seen you return good for evil continually, and endure, in silence and submission, the unfeeling harshness and unmerited reproaches of a tyrannical husband. I pitied you at first—then admired—then loved you. But I did not dare to reveal my love, for I knew the strictness of your principles, and I feared that you would banish me from your presence. And that presence, how dear to me. I lived in the sound of your footsteps; the glance of your eyes; the tones of your voice. You were a spell upon me. When I retired to my couch at night, I thought of you; I dreamed of you in my hours of slumber; I awoke with your name upon my lips. Day by day my love for you increased, until it has become a raging, torturing passion, which inflames my soul and consumes my heart with blazing fires of hope and desire. Is it wonderful that I have plotted for an hour like this, when I might strive, with agonizing sighs and burning words, live coals as it were, from the altar of the heart, to kindle the flames of passionate love in your bosom? You do not love my brother Owen. You do not—you cannot. And yet you are not cold, heartless, passionless. Oh, have you felt like me, the secret, restrained affection, which lives, unseen by others, in the depths of the soul? Have you felt the delicious hope of mingling the sentiments and sympathies of your imaginative nature with those of a congenial spirit? Have you felt your heart's blood rushing, like streams of molten lava, through your veins? For me, for me, have you felt this?"

Mrs. Tracey stood in the center of the apartment, at the distance of two or three paces from the speaker. She was, as it were, transfixed by the audacity of Alfred Tracey. Her face, though extremely pale, did not betray the feelings which agitated her.

"Have you finished?" she interposed, in a low tone of voice.

"Speak not so coldly to me," said Alfred Tracey, impetuously.

"Is it nothing that I have loved you so long, so devotedly, so passionately? Say that you return my affection with the same ardor, the same intensity, the same fearlessness of consequences, and I will be your slave; your humble, yet adoring slave. All that I have, my life, my being, my soul, shall be yours, and yours only. Why do you fear to speak? Are we not here alone, sheltered from the intrusion of impertinent menials; concealed from the argus eyes of friends and foes? Here we may taste the bliss of mutual love; here may our souls exhale in perpetual kisses."

The young man paused, trembling with emotion. His eyes, though tearful, beamed with fiery, passionate glances.

"Have you finished?" repeated Mrs. Tracey with forced calmness; "or do you seek, by prolonged insult, to drive me to madness?"

"Insult!" shouted Alfred Tracey, rising to his feet; "have I insulted you?"

"Grossly, unpardonably."

"Is my love an insult? My love, ardent, powerful, unchangeable, an insult? Avenge yourself!" continued the young man, sinking again upon his knees, and unsheathing a dirk knife, which he carried in his bosom, the handle of which he extended toward his companion. "Plunge this weapon into my heart, and avenge yourself upon one whose life, without you, would be valueless."

Mrs. Tracey took the dirk from the hand of the young man, and glanced at the keen, glittering point.

"You deserve to die, Alfred," said she slowly and emphatically; "but I am no executioner. You are the first being who has dared to breathe in my ears the language of insult and infamy. You have abused my friendship and confidence. You, my husband's brother, have dared to talk to me of love! I leave you to your own reflections on the baseness and hypocrisy of your conduct," continued Mrs. Tracey, advancing toward the door of the apartment, with a look of unutterable contempt.

Alfred Tracey sprang to the door, turned the key, and extracted it from the lock.

"Unlock the door!" said Mrs. Tracey in a tone of command.

"Never, until you consent to be mine."

"Yours!" exclaimed the lady, pausing within a few feet of Alfred Tracey. The tone of her voice, her attitude, the expression of her countenance, displayed the uncontrollable disgust and contemptuous defiance of an insulted woman. "Yours!"

"Yes, mine!" replied the young man with a sneering, demonic

smile. You have scorned the imploring slave. Perhaps it will please your pride to be compelled to submit to a merciless tyrant. We are alone. Do you understand me? Alone! You shall be mine—to-right."

The speaker advanced a step or two, apparently with the design of clasping the person of his intended victim.

Mrs. Tracey did not recoil from her position, but she clenched firmly the handle of the poniard, and said, with superb haughtiness of manner:

"Touch me with your polluted hands if you dare!"

The young man paused a moment, and threw himself carelessly upon a sofa near him.

"Nay, I will argue the point with you," remarked Alfred Tracey, coolly. "You fear, perhaps, that your reputation is at stake. So it is. You are in a house of assignation. You are known to Mrs. Waters, its accommodating mistress. To-morrow your name will be linked with irretrievable infamy. Be wise to-night, and purchase my silence."

"Unlock the door; I command you!"

The countenance of Alfred Tracey grew livid with anger. He started from the sofa, exclaiming fiercely:

"I swear——"

He paused suddenly and listened. Up the stair-case, and through the closed door, came a loud reverberating crash, as of a heavy door burst open by main strength. Then were heard the sounds of angry voices, mingled with peals of laughter, and the confused shuffling and stamping of human footsteps. It was evident to both the listeners, that the lower part of the house had been stormed by a band of rioters, and that an irruption in the third story was by no means unlikely.

"We are not alone," said Mrs. Tracey, with decision. "Another word, Alfred, and I will call for help, and denounce you and your villainy in the presence of these men, be they desperadoes and thieves. They cannot, they will not refuse to protect a woman from murderous violence. Give me the key."

Alfred Tracey reeled back a step or two, and sank listlessly upon the sofa. The words of Mrs. Tracey vividly recalled the scene at Caroline Percy's. The key of the apartment fell upon the carpet with a peculiar clink.

Mrs. Tracey took the key, unlocked the door, and left the room without opposition.

As she descended the stairs she perceived two or three young men,

coarsely dressed, leaning idly upon the banisters. Others were walking backward and forward in the hall.

"Here comes a lady," said one of the idlers on the stair-case, with a significant wink at his companions.

"All alone, miss?" said another; "won't you have a beau?"

"Do you think she wants you, Smike?" shouted Tom Gaffney, from the hall door. "She wants a man, not a boy."

As the door of an apartment in the first story opened, the angry tones of the shrill feminine voice of Mrs. Waters mingled with the laughter of Tom Gaffney's companions.

Jack Highflyer appeared at the door, and said, authoritatively:

"Are my orders forgotten, the moment my back is turned? Let the woman pass, boys, without any muss."

The young men opened a passage for the lady, and indemnified themselves for the silence imposed on them by their leader, by indulging in glances, and nods, and grimaces.

"Are you there, Luke?" inquired Jack Highflyer, raising his voice.

"I ain't no where else, Jack," replied a stripling near the hall door.

"Let the woman pass, Luke."

"I warrant you, my boy," muttered the tailor, "if you say it, the devil and all his imps may pass. Good night, miss, and a pleasant walk by starlight."

Dark as was the night, and lonely as seemed the narrow street, the sense of relief experienced by Mrs. Tracey, on reaching the open air, was great, beyond description. Not that she had cowered or quailed in the presence of Alfred Tracey, or the followers of Jack Highflyer. But her pride and delicacy had been deeply wounded. She had been decoyed into a house of vile repute. She had been compelled to listen to unmanly threats and infamous proposals. She had been exposed to the coarse taunts and buffoonery of a gang of rowdies. The atmosphere she had breathed within doors had appeared to her heavy, oppressive, pestiferous.

Mrs. Tracey paused a moment on the paved sidewalk, uncertain what course to pursue. A man, who had been concealed in the angle formed by the front wall of the building and the massive stone steps, approached her, and whispered rapidly, yet distinctly:

"Yonder is a carriage in waiting for you. The gentleman who escorted you hither is perhaps detained by the rioters, but the cab-driver will convey you safe to your residence. Do not hesitate to avail your

self of his services. As for me, madam, I shall never betray your secret."

Strangely, fearfully, sounded the whisperings of that well-remembered voice, the voice of Wilfred Montessor.

No word or gesture of recognition escaped her. She ventured no reply, offered no explanation. She moved silently toward the carriage.

As she seated herself in the carriage, she glanced almost instinctively toward the house of assignation.

The figure of Wilfred Montessor was blended inseparably with the shadow of the imposing edifice. He stood motionless on the spot where Mrs. Tracey had left him, but she saw him not.

The coachman mounted the box and drove rapidly away.

The premises of Mrs. Waters was still the scene of clamorous disorder. The violent intrusion of Jack Highflyer's squad had kindled the anger of the mistress of the house, and her stormy objurgations were as frequently repeated as the gusts of a terrific north-easter.

"A nice parlor, mother Waters," said Jack Highflyer, as the woman terminated one of her harangues from utter exhaustion.

"Why the devil don't you get out of my house, Jack; you and your gang of rowdies? A set of hang-dog rascals and State's prison birds running round and breaking into honest people's houses. Why don't you go; all of you? You want to impose on me because I am a lone woman, do you? I wish I was a man for half an hour, and I'd thrash your mean, sneaking, cowardly souls out of your bodies."

"There is no use in talking to the boys in that style, mother Waters," said Jack Highflyer, tapping his whalebone cane on the heel of his boot. "When you lived in Elm-street, you were glad enough to see them; now you have taken possession of this big house, you want to cut your old friends. They won't stand it, mother."

"Pretty friends; you broke in my door to-night."

"Because you wouldn't open it, old lady," said Tim Hardman, the butcher. "The b'hoys don't stop for a brass catch."

"H-excellent, Tim," exclaimed Peter Fox.

"What do you want here?" inquired Mrs. Waters, angrily.

"A contribution of a few dollars for Job Dingle," said Jack Highflyer. "You used to know Job, mother Waters, and won't begrudge a trifle to get him out of a bad scrape."

"There is a half eagle, Jack," said the woman, taking a gold piece from a handsome bead purse. "Now, begone will you?"

"Not yet," said Jack Highflyer, handing the money to Tim Hardman; "the boys are in for a frolic."

"Here, in my house?"

"Do the handsome thing for once, mother Waters; we don't come to see you often in these days. Bring out your champagne."

"Champagne, Jack?" said the woman with a scornful laugh. "I have some sour cider in the cellar."

"Champagne!"

"I'll sell you as much as you wan't for three dollars a bottle."

"It is your treat, mother," said Jack Highflyer. "Fellows, sit down; we won't stir a step from the house, till mother Waters brings out her champagne."

"Not we," said Tim Hardman, taking a seat on an ottoman.

"Not a stir," said Peter Fox.

Mrs. Waters surveyed her unwelcome visitors with the glance of a tigress.

"You villains! you blackguards! Ill have you up for this! I'll see Mr. Grayson!"

"Josh Grayson?" inquired Jack Highflyer, earnestly.

"My landlord."

"Stop, mother," exclaimed the leader, rising and approaching Mrs. Waters. "Is Mr. Joshua Grayson, residing in Bond-street, your landlord?"

"Yes, Jack."

"He owns all this splendid furniture then, mother Waters? those mirrors, tables, sofas, carpets? It must be so," continued the young man, "for you were sold out as clean as a whistle in Elm-street."

"What if he does?" said Mrs. Waters, angrily.

"The old chap comes here once in a while to look after his rent; don't he?" asked Harry Wilson, with a knowing wink.

"What if he does?" repeated the woman, still more furiously.

"Be quiet for a minute," said Jack Highflyer seriously. "You hire this house, completely furnished, of old Josh Grayson, at a round rate per month, don't you?"

"To be sure I do. What of it?"

"Nothing," replied Jack Highflyer, whistling; "nothing at all. Bring on your champagne."

"One bottle, Jack?"

"One bottle for this crowd?" said Harry Wilson, with a loud laugh. "A hamper, old lady."

"Two or three bottles, mother Waters," said Jack Highflyer. "Enough for one round among the boys, and then we'll clear out."

"Will you, Jack, positively?"

"As sure as my name is Jack Highflyer," said the leader of the squad, glancing carelessly at his comrades.

Mrs. Waters took a lamp from the mantel-piece, and remarking sulkily: "The wine is in the cellar," left the apartment.

"Now, fellows," exclaimed Jack Highflyer, "we'll have a bit of sport at the expense of old Josh Grayson, before the old woman gets back. Open the folding doors."

"Beautiful carpets these," continued the leader. "Out with your knives, boys, and do as I do."

Jack Highflyer strode up to the wall of the front parlor, followed by his comrades, and leaning forward, placed the point of his bowie knife upon the carpet.

"Steady, steady," he remarked, walking slowly backward, and pressing the point of the knife continually to the floor.

When he and his companions had reached the lower end of the back parlor, there were a dozen narrow strips of carpeting lying irregularly upon the parlor floor.

"This is pleasant cutting, Jack," said Harry Wilson, burying his knife in the cushions of an elegant sofa.

"One hack in the sofas, boys, for the sake of poor Williams."

The work of destruction was soon completed.

"Who has any pebbles in his pocket?" inquired Jack Highflyer.

"If you mean rocks," said Harry Wilson, showing a handful of stones about the size of a small black walnut, "look here."

"Pass them round, Harry. Take your stations, boys, as I point them out to you."

"Now then," said Peter Fox, with an intonation which caused a general shout of laughter.

"Make ready."

At this moment the door of the apartment opened, and Mrs. Waters appeared with several bottles in a basket of common wicker-work.

"Take aim—fire!"

The glasses of four large and costly mirrors were instantly shattered to atoms.

"You'll pay dearly for this, Jack," said Mrs. Waters, surveying the ruins of her splendid apartments with mingled dismay and anger. "You'll go to Sing-Sing for this, villains."

"The champagne, mother Waters," said Jack Highflyer, approaching the woman and taking the basket from her hand. "We will pledge your health in this at our leisure."

"Here's a health," Harry Wilson commenced humming.

"No singing, Harry," said Jack Highflyer; then turning to the mistress of the house, he added: "Seriously, mother Waters, the b'hoys bear no grudge against you. This is old Grayson's loss, not yours, and you must not make a fuss about it. Let him scold and grumble as much as he pleases."

"I shall tell him."

"Tell him as little as you can," said Jack Highflyer, in a peculiar tone. "You know me, mother Waters—none better than you. I advise you not to mention names."

Half an hour after the departure of Jack Highflyer and his comrades, Alfred Tracey left the premises of Mrs. Waters.

He passed the night at a Club House in Broadway.

CHAPTER II.

A MORNING WITH OWEN TRACEY.



OWEN TRACEY was seated at his writing desk, scanning, apparently with deep interest, the contents of a brief note which lay before him. The straggling sunbeams which here and there penetrated the interstices of the closed window blinds, shone with no pleasing effect on the coarse haggard features of the retired merchant. His forehead was deeply corrugated, and his keen gray eyes were fixed intently on the written characters.

At length, as if dissatisfied with a silent inspection of the note, he took it from the desk, and read its contents audibly :

“MY DEAR BROTHER :

By a strange accident I have become acquainted with the provisions of the codicil to your will, recently drawn by Mr. Barton, and executed by yourself. It would be selfish in me to complain of an arrangement which enables you to repair the mistakes of the past at my expense. I venture, however, to suggest the expediency of a visit to Mrs. Williams, the daughter of William Martyn, previous to final action on your part. I am happy to be able to inform you that you will find her at No. — Orange-street. I advise you, also, to consult freely with Mrs. Tracey, and to abide by her judgment in the difficult and embarrassing circumstances which surround you.

“Yours truly, ALFRED TRACEY.”

“The infamous scoundrel,” muttered Owen Tracey between his closed teeth ; “but the meaning, the meaning.”

At this moment, a light tap on the door of his apartment disturbed the reflections of the merchant.

“Come in,” he exclaimed gruffly, “the door isn’t locked.”

Mrs. Tracey entered with a grave, melancholy expression of countenance.

The merchant turned toward his wife, and contracting his thick shaggy eye-brows, inquired, with some vehemence :

“ What do you want, madam ? ”

“ However painful it may be, a sense of duty to you and to myself, renders it indispensable that I should inform you of the conduct of your brother, Alfred Tracey.”

The merchant pushed back his chair from the writing desk, and turning round, remarked in a surly tone :

“ I have observed your recent intimacy with him, madam—perhaps you have something to say in his favor ? ”

Mrs. Tracey hesitated.

“ Well, proceed. It will please me, I assure you, to be informed of a single instance of good conduct on the part of Alfred Tracey ; but I don't wish to be detained home the whole morning.”

With an earnestness of manner, which at once arrested the attention of her husband, Mrs. Tracey unfolded the deception by which Alfred Tracey had decoyed her on the preceding night to the house of Mrs. Waters, and related all the incidents of the insulting interview which she had been compelled to encounter. Her language—clear, succinct, forcible—was that of a woman conscious of rectitude, yet deeply sensible of the grossness of the indignity to which she had been exposed.

During the progress of the narrative, Owen Tracey sat quietly in his arm chair, resting his cheek on the palm of his right hand, and without uttering a word, gazed steadfastly on the countenance of the speaker. Only once, on hearing the name of Mrs. Williams, he turned aside for an instant and glanced at the open note lying upon the writing desk. Only for an instant, and then the merchant, impatient, irascible as he was, listened calmly and silently until the narrative was concluded.

He rose from his seat, approached Mrs. Tracey, and laying his hand upon her arm, asked, in a hoarse whisper :

“ Is this true, all of it ? ”

“ It is,” replied Mrs. Tracey, surprised at the strange bearing of her husband.

“ And you never gave him, Alfred, I mean,” continued the merchant with a stern inquiring glance, “ the slightest encouragement, you have never compromised yourself in such a way as to justify or palliate his infamous conduct ? ”

The first impulse of Mrs. Tracey was to treat this question with silent contempt ; but the earnest gaze of her husband, and the tremulous

quivering of his hand as it rested upon her arm, manifested such intensity of emotion, that from a feeling of compassion toward him, rather than a desire of justifying herself, she replied :

“Never.”

“Enough, Mary. Your assurance is truth itself,” said Owen Tracey, sinking into his arm-chair and covering his face with his hands.

After a moment’s reflection, he turned toward the writing desk, and taking the note of Alfred Tracey, presented it to his wife.

“Read it,” he added languidly.

Mrs. Tracey read the note without comprehending its true import.

“Alfred desires me to consult you,” said the merchant, evidently struggling with his feelings. “Do you know anything of the condition of the family of Mrs. Williams?”

“Nothing except what he has told me.”

“Repeat to me every word,” exclaimed Owen Tracey.

“I have already stated the substance of his information—that Mrs. Williams is the daughter of William Martyn, your former partner in business—that she is suffering in a miserable garret from disease and poverty.”

“What more?—every word.”

“That you have refused to relieve her necessities, although—although you inherited the bulk of her father’s estate.”

“What more?” inquired the merchant, partially rising from his seat, and sustaining himself by firmly grasping the top of the arm chair.

“He spoke of—he said something about a forged will.”

The temporary languor which had fallen upon Owen Tracey disappeared before the whirlwind of passion that raged in his bosom. He started to his feet, and stamped violently upon the floor, vociferating :

“He lies—he lies—the ungrateful villain—the infamous scoundrel—he lies—he lies!” The merchant ground his teeth convulsively, as he added, glaring wildly in his wife’s countenance : “Mary, he is a liar!”

“Give no heed,” said Mrs. Tracey, soothingly, “to the accusations of a liar.”

“He has striven to injure and degrade me in your eyes. He has dared to offer an unpardonable insult to you. He will drive me to madness. He—my brother—never again shall his presence darken

my doors—never again will I look upon his face. I curse him! From my inmost soul I curse him!"

"In this you are wrong," interposed Mrs. Tracey. "Curse him not."

The old merchant replied hastily, as if displeased at the interruption:

"What are you staying for in my room? I must go out, madam. I don't want to be bothered any longer."

"You are ill," said Mrs. Tracey, approaching her husband, and placing her hand upon his forehead. The skin was hot and burning.

"I shall be well enough if you let me alone," said the merchant thrusting aside her hand.

Mrs. Tracey withdrew; and the merchant, after several minutes of reflection, and as many of preparation, started to fulfill his business engagements. In a quarter of an hour from the time of his leaving his residence, Owen Tracey stood on the corner of Orange and White streets. He passed slowly along the narrow sidewalk, seeking the number of the house mentioned in his brother's note.

He mounted the steps of the old wooden building occupied by the family of Andrew Williams, and knocked at the door.

A small boy opened the door, and looked timidly at the visitor.

"Does Mrs. Williams live here?" inquired Owen Tracey, with less harshness than usual.

"Mrs. Williams—that's my mother," replied the boy.

"She lives here then?"

"My mother is up stairs," said the boy, weeping; "but she is dead."

"Dead!" muttered Owen Tracey several times, as under the influence of a powerful impulse he ascended the narrow staircase.

He entered the bed-chamber in which the wife of Andrew Williams had suffered and died.

A coffin of stained cherry was placed upon a table near the front windows. The lid of the coffin was unclosed, and Andrew Williams and his daughter Jane were silently, yet tearfully gazing upon the features of the corpse.

"My name is Tracey," said the merchant, advancing toward the center of the apartment, and glancing alternately at Williams and the young girl.

"Owen Tracey, sir?" inquired the girl, with an expression of deep interest.

"Yes, Owen Tracey."

"My mother desired to see you previous to her death," said Jane Williams, "and sent me to your house to request you to visit her, but I gave the message to the wrong person. A young man—your brother he said he was—came here once or twice, and had a talk with mother; and so the mistake was corrected, and he said he would tell you about it."

"Is that your father?" asked the merchant, pointing to Andrew Williams, whose attention seemed entirely absorbed in the contemplation of the pale and sunken features of the dead.

"Yes, sir," replied the girl, then addressing her father, she added: "Father, this is Mr. Owen Tracey; you have heard dear mother speak of him in times past."

The man turned his face gloomily toward the merchant.

"Nobody can save her now. Nothing can save her now. Not the wealth of the Indies," said Andrew Williams, in hopeless despondency. Yet there was an expression of bitterness in the tones of his voice, as he continued: "Poverty has destroyed, but wealth cannot restore her. It is not your fault, sir, that you inherited the fortune which ought to have been hers. She never blamed you, nor thought unkindly of her father. Yet it is sad to reflect that one tenth part of her father's estate would have preserved her life, saved me from prison, and our children from disgrace and ruin."

With a troubled expression of countenance, Owen Tracey pursued his inquiries.

"Of whom are you speaking?" inquired the merchant, slightly agitated.

"Of my wife," replied Andrew Williams, pointing at the coffin.

"And her maiden name was——"

"Martyn—Martha Martyn."

"The daughter of William Martyn?" demanded Owen Tracey, in a voice that startled the younger children of Andrew Williams, and sent them crouching at their sister's feet.

"The same."

"Dead, dead," murmured the merchant, approaching the coffin and gazing at the remains of his partner's daughter.

After a few moments, turning to Andrew Williams, he remarked in subdued tones:

"You have done wrong; you should have applied to me earlier."

"My wife was a proud-spirited woman," said Williams, firmly,

"and would not be beholden to her relations; much less to strangers. It was my conduct that broke her heart at last."

"Don't say so, father," said the young girl, sobbing.

"I don't care, now, who knows what I have done," said the man seriously. "You see, sir, my family was in deep distress, my children crying for bread, and I attempted to better my fortune by stealing. It turned out badly, sir; they shut me up in prison, and my wife being weakly, the disgrace and the worryment of mind were too much for her. I got out on bail, and came home, but only to see her die."

"She died of joy at your return, father," sobbed Jane Williams.

"They will send me to State's prison, I suppose," continued the man, addressing Owen Tracey, "when my trial takes place; and then what is to become of my children!"

"Take this money," said the merchant, in tremulous accents, thrusting a pocket-book into the hands of Williams, "and purchase whatever is needful for yourself and family."

Owen Tracey restrained any audible expression of thanks from Andrew Williams, by a significant gesture.

"After the funeral is over," said the merchant, casting a fugitive glance at the coffin, "come to me, and tell me the real state of your affairs; "I will see if anything can be done for you."

The mental faculties of Owen Tracey were impaired, or, at least, temporarily confused and disordered by the intensity of his feelings and the violence of his passions. His mind, originally vigorous and intelligent, had never been thoroughly trained or prudently governed, and was by no means adapted by its inherent qualities to undergo the fiery ordeal of terror and remorse. Owen Tracey was a coarse, selfish, and tyrannical man; not a mean, treacherous, cold-blooded villain.

Upon quitting the abode of Andrew Williams, the merchant hastened toward Wall street, to fulfill his business engagements. Even on the route thitherward, he stopped repeatedly, to assure himself of the correctness of the course he was pursuing, and to recall the object of his journey. Nor were his transactions conducted with his usual acuteness or with the methodical precision of a thorough man of business.

Toward one o'clock, he entered the office of Francis Mortimer, the stock-broker.

"I am glad to see you this morning, my dear Mr. Tracey," said the broker, handing a chair to his visitor.

The merchant sat down heavily, as if greatly fatigued.

"Bless me," exclaimed the broker, scanning the features of the merchant, "you are unwell, Mr. Tracey."

"Never was better in my life," said the merchant, impatiently; "a little fatigued, Mr. Mortimer, only a little fatigued. How goes the Eastern Transportation stock, my boy?" he inquired, leaning forward and punching the broker familiarly in the ribs.

Mortimer gazed at his associate, in astonishment at the strangeness of his manner, and at length replied:

"Bravely, my dear sir, bravely. My purchases on time have already reached a snug total."

"How much, Mr. Mortimer; a million of dollars?"

"Not quite a million. You are facetious this morning, Mr. Tracey. But inform me, have you secured all the floating stock in your schedule?"

"I have. I made the last purchase of Messrs. Treadwell & Baker, within the past hour, sixty shares."

"At what rate?"

"I—really I forget."

"Forget, my dear sir?"

"I have a memorandum," said the merchant, fumbling in his pocket; "30 1-8 or 30 1-4. Yes, yes, here it is—30 1-4, Mr. Mortimer."

"The contracts of a bona fide purchaser tell upon the market, directly or indirectly, and the stock is rising, notwithstanding my articles in the newspapers. You have read them, Mr. Tracey?"

The merchant nodded familiarly.

"I fancy they are well got up; but I say, notwithstanding my articles, the Eastern Transportation stock has been rising—is still rising."

"The stock is—the stock is—dead."

"Dead; my dear sir, the stock is rising daily."

"Yes, yes; the stock; I understand."

"And what is equally true, the rise at this time is a trifle against us. Another circumstance has occurred, which seems rather odd, but we must meet it, Mr. Tracey. Wardwell & Co. tell me they have three hundred and twenty shares of the Eastern Transportation stock, which they are willing to sell at current prices. How it happens I cannot imagine, for there ought to be no such stock in the market. We must secure their stock, Mr. Tracey."

"Certainly, certainly, Mr. Mortimer."

"Will you attend to it, my dear sir, to-day or to-morrow?"

"I will."

"To-day or to-morrow without fail?"

"The funeral will take place to-morrow," said Owen Tracey in low tones.

"What did you say, Mr. Tracey?"

"Good morning, sir," said the merchant, rising from his seat and abruptly leaving the office.

"The old gentleman acts strangely to-day," muttered the stock-broker. "Never better in his life, indeed."

CHAPTER III.

WILLIAM PETTIGREW—THE DIARY.

With a brisk and somewhat hurried gait, William Pettigrew approached the door of a two-story brick house in Walker-street. He rang the bell and was admitted by a little girl of nine or ten years of age. Patting the child affectionately on the head he passed on, and after a moment's delay entered a neatly furnished apartment in the second story.

Reclining in an easy chair near the window, sat a woman not yet advanced to the fulness of middle age, with pale irregular features, tidy and cleanly in her appearance. Her countenance beamed with an expression of joy on the entrance of her visitor.

"Upon my word, Mrs. Morse, you are improving," said Pettigrew, addressing the woman in a cheerful tone.

"Yes, thanks to you, and——"

"No thanks to me, Mrs. Morse," said Pettigrew, interrupting the woman quickly. "I am the agent of the gentleman who rescued you from the flames, and in all that I have done for your comfort, have only obeyed his commands.

"He has been very kind to me," replied Mrs. Morse. "Not content with saving my life at the risk of his own, he inquired into my circumstances; and on discovering that I was entirely destitute, owing to the fire, and absence of the gentleman whose house was burned, and in whose family I was employed as housekeeper, has given me a home in this quiet boarding-house, and generously supplied all my necessities."

"Just so, ma'am."

"When shall I see him, Mr. Pettigrew, to thank him in person for his kindness?"

"Indeed, I cannot answer you."

"Give me his address then, and as soon as I have recovered sufficiently, I will seek him."

"I do not know his address."

"Are you not deceiving me?" said the woman with an inquisitive glance. "Are you not, in truth, my real benefactor?"

"No, Mrs. Morse; nor, though acting as his agent, do I know him personally or by name. He is an eccentric gentleman, who, in this age of ostentation, does good by stealth, and conceals himself even from the agents of his benevolence."

"But you have intercourse with him?"

"Yes, indirectly."

"Can I do anything to evince my gratitude for his generosity?"

"You can."

The features of the woman brightened, and she exclaimed eagerly:

"Tell me how, quickly."

"Are you really grateful to this gentleman, Mrs. Morse?" inquired Pettigrew, calmly.

"Can you doubt it?" she retorted, with a gesture of impatience.

"Then listen to me," continued the auctioneer seriously. "You have a sister named Margaret Dillon?"

"Yes, sir."

"Residing as a domestic in the family of Mr. Owen Tracey, in Chambers street?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you intimate with her?"

"With my sister?—it would be very odd if I were not."

"You see her very frequently?"

"Since I have been here, she has visited me daily. Margy is a good girl, indeed she is."

"And warmly attached to you?"

"To be sure she is."

"And you can, through her sisterly affection, exercise a powerful influence over her?"

"I presume so, in case of necessity. But why do you ask these questions?" inquired Mrs. Morse, with some anxiety of manner. "I trust that Margy has not given way to evil practices."

"Not at all, Mrs. Morse, not at all," replied Pettigrew smiling, "or if she has, I know nothing of them. But it is through her that you can render an important service to your benefactor."

"Proceed, sir."

"It is a delicate business, and will require great caution in its management."

"Whatever you may ask of me on his behalf that is not clearly wrong, I will perform with pleasure."

"I will explain as briefly as possible. It is the custom with some persons to record the passing events of their lives, their sentiments and emotions, in journals and diaries. Does Mrs. Owen Tracey keep a journal or diary? This is the first point to be gained, and this you will ascertain from your sister, if you question her adroitly. For, although neither curiosity nor imprudence may have caused her to act the part of the spy, she can hardly have failed to perceive whether Mrs. Tracey is in the habit of writing periodically in a journal. If you should obtain the evidence of the existence of such a volume, you will exert all your influence to induce your sister to get possession of it, and to place it temporarily in your hands. I assure you that an hour's inspection of the journal of Mrs. Owen Tracey, is most anxiously desired by the gentleman who has served you so freely. And I assure you further, that however strange this request may appear, however improper or indelicate, your compliance with it will inflict no injury upon others."

The countenance of Mrs. Morse assumed a grave and thoughtful expression as the auctioneer unfolded the purposes of his visit; and when he had concluded, she remained for some minutes in a silent revery.

Then looking Pettigrew calmly in the face, she asked:

"And this is his request—his, Mr. Pettigrew?"

"It is, ma'am."

"Well, however embarrassing it may be to me, I will endeavor to fulfill his wishes."

"Of course you will, of course you will; the thing is a little awkward, I admit, but——"

"Enough, sir," said Mrs. Morse, with a certain dignity of manner, "you have assured me that no injury to any person will result from this service."

"None whatever."

"And I have consented."

"At our next interview, then," said Pettigrew, as he rose to depart, "I hope to see the evidence of your success."

Mrs. Morse replied by a slight inclination of the head, but her countenance retained its grave and serious expression.

Dusk was darkening into night as Margaret Dillon passed into Walker-street, after a visit of an hour's duration to her sister. She

had hardly touched the pavement ere she was accosted somewhat familiarly by a young man of athletic proportions :

" Good evening to you, Maggy," said the young man, cocking his nutria a little more jauntily on his head, and holding the stump of a principe cigar between the forefinger and middle finger of his left hand. " I have been waiting a dog's age for you."

The girl replied rather tartly :

" When you speak to me in the street, Mr. Hardman, I would thank you to address me more respectfully.

" Oh, indeed !" said the stout youth, with a peculiar whistle and a comical leer at the young woman by whose side he was walking.

" And besides," retorted the other, more offended at the manner than the words of her companion, " who told you to wait for me ?"

" Yourself," replied Tim Hardman, a little pompously.

" I, Mr. Hardman ? did you say it was I ?"

" Yourself, Miss Margaret Dillon."

" You ought to be ashamed of yourself," said Margaret with a faltering voice.

" What ought I to be ashamed of myself for, what have I done ?"

" You ought to be ashamed of yourself to tease me in this unkind way," replied the young girl striving to conceal her tears by lowering a green veil attached to her bonnet, " and just after I have been so dreadfully teased by my sister."

" There, don't be foolish, Margaret. Place your dear little arm in mine and stop your crying. You were rather cross when I met you after pacing up and down the street half an hour, hoping every minute to see your pretty face, and so I thought to quiz you a little."

The young woman took Tim Hardman's arm, and after a moment's silence, remarked more composedly :

" I was in such a flurry, Tim, that I hardly knew you."

" A flurry—about what ?"

" Oh ! I can't tell you."

" Don't try to blind me, Margaret. You said just now that your sister had been teasing you."

" Yes, I remember."

" What was it ?"

" Indeed I cannot tell."

" Was it about me ?"

" No, Tim, not about you."

" Who then ?" said the butcher sharply. " Bless me, if I ever catch any feller hanging about you, and trying to whistle himself in."

your good graces, I'll give him such a licking that he won't look at a pretty girl for a fortnight."

"Tim Hardman," said Margaret Dillon, inquiringly, "you don't mean it. You don't think that I deceive you and keep company with any person but you."

"How do I know what to think when you conceal everything from me?"

"Everything, Tim!" replied the young woman in accents of reproachful sorrow.

"Just now I asked you what your sister has been teasing you about, and you refused to tell me.

"Refused?—not exactly that——"

"Well, then?"

"Do you really wish to know, very much?" inquired the young woman.

"I don't care much about it," replied the butcher, tossing the end of his cigar into the street. "If I possessed your confidence, I should not be compelled to ask you twice to tell me anything."

"Now you are wrong, Tim. You know that I confide entirely in you."

"Certainly."

"If you will promise to quit talking to me as you do to your comrades in the market, I will do anything or say anything to please you."

"You will, Margaret; well, I promise you, and so out with your sister's teasing."

"Now, whatever I tell you, Tim, must be kept entirely secret. You must know that soon after I entered my sister's apartment this evening, she asked me if Mrs. Tracey, (that's my mistress, Mrs. Owen Tracey,) I say, she asked me if Mrs. Tracey kept a diary, and said I, what's that? and said she, 'A diary is a book in which people that take a fancy for that sort of thing, write down every day what happens to them, where they go, and what they do;' and said I, then Mrs. Tracey keeps a diary, for she has a book almost as big as a bible in which she writes very frequently, almost every day, and sometimes I have seen her examine it to find out what had happened a long time ago. And after I had told her about the diary, my sister set to work to persuade me to take the book, unbeknown to Mrs. Tracey, and bring it away and put in her hands, promising that she would return it to me in twenty-four hours. She seemed really bent on it, and would not take no for an answer."

"So you refused her?"

"What else could I do? I never was so much surprised in my life as when she proposed such a thing, for to me it seems like stealing, and she is generally very particular in her notions."

"There is no stealing about it, Margaret."

"I am certain, however, that if Mrs. Tracey should discover that I had done it, she would send me away in disgrace, and she is a real lady if there ever was one."

"Was your sister in earnest, think you?"

"Very much in earnest. I could hardly get away from her without promising to get the book for her."

"And you did not promise?"

"No."

"And you do not intend to get it?"

"What a strange question—certainly not."

"But you love your sister, do you not?"

"Indeed I do."

"And notwithstanding our quarrel this evening, you love me a little, my pretty Margaret, do you not?"

"A little," timidly repeated the young woman, with an affectionate glance at her robust protector.

"A little or a great deal," said the butcher, gazing at her features, "that is the question."

Margaret Dillon made no reply, but her arm that reposed in the butcher's trembled, and she leaned more heavily upon him than before.

"Now, Margaret, I am going to try you, just to make up my mind how much you think of me."

"Tim, you know——"

"This is the trial, once for all. I care nothing myself for Mrs. Tracey's diary, but one thing is as good as another to convince me of my influence over you. What you have refused to do for your sister, do for me."

"What do you mean, Tim?"

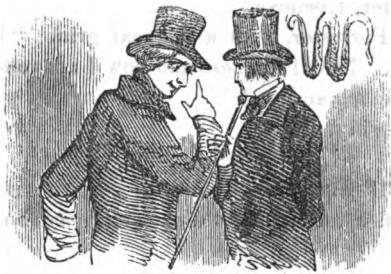
"Get the book for me, this night, if possible. At ten o'clock I will be at the gate in the area to receive it, and at day-break I will return it."

As Tim Hardman concluded, the twain approached the door of Owen Tracey's mansion, and fearful, perhaps, of remonstrance from his companion, the butcher turned away, merely adding, in significant tones:

"If you love me, Margaret."

CHAPTER IV.

THE DINNER—THE INSULT.



“We are in good time, Forrester,” said Alfred Tracey, consulting his watch. “It wants a quarter to four.”

These words were uttered as Tracey mounted the steps leading to the principal entrance of the City Hotel. The person to whom they were ad-

ressed was a man of thirty-two or three years of age, good looking, if not handsome, and with an easy, unceremonious carriage and a gay, jovial expression, eminently calculated to win the favor of his associates.

“‘All’s well that ends well,’” replied Forrester laughing. “I saw that you were in such a deuced hurry to get away; but Julia is such a charming creature!”

“I told you the reason why, didn’t I?”

“Yes, yes, you are the host, and I say it fearlessly, you are a host in yourself.”

“Jokes, like nuts, should be cracked after dinner,” said Alfred Tracey, passing from the hall into a room designated as the office. A brief interview ensued with the proprietor of the hotel, after which Tracey and his friend were ushered into a large airy apartment in the second story by one of the servants in attendance.”

“When will dinner be served?” inquired the young man.

“In half an hour, sir.”

“Bring up the morning papers.”

“Yes, sir.”

Ten minutes afterward Frederick Willoughby entered the room with a mutual associate of Tracey and himself—a young man of genteel appearance, by the name of Horace Travis. They were followed almost immediately by two others. The first was Silas Seabury, a law stu-

dent in the office of David Barton, counselor-at-law, and the other was Henry Winter, a nephew of Colonel Winter, proprietor of the Club House in Broadway.

Alfred Tracey introduced Mr. Forrester to his guests, and carelessly remarked :

"Mr. Forrester is a stranger among us." Then addressing his companion, he asked, "How long is it, Bob, since you and I used to sky-lark about the city?"

"Some four years or more."

"You have been a great traveler, I believe."

"Yes, I have traveled," said Forrester, with a comical grin. "I am a bird of passage, gentlemen. Now I am here and now I am yonder, as the grasshopper said to the ten-acre lot."

"Do you intend to remain long in the city?"

"No—I am off to-morrow."

"North, South, East or West?" interposed Tracey.

"Where birds fly and the fish swim," said Forrester, good humoredly.

"Travis," said Alfred Tracey, "I wish you and Forrester could have a bout at shooting English snipe. Snipe shooting is Forrester's great passion."

"Indeed!"

"I might have said greatest, but that would have been doing him injustice."

"Ha, ha; some black-eyed or blue-eyed lass."

"Nonsense, Seabury."

"What then?"

"Fishing—and for what, do you suppose?"

"Salmon?"

"Out, my boy."

"Pickerel?"

"Trout, probably," said Horace Travis. "Trout fishing is capital sport."

"You are wide of the mark," replied Alfred Tracey, shaking his head. "Forrester's greatest passion is fishing for autographs."

"For what?"

"Autographs."

A hearty laugh followed the repetition of the concluding word.

"Where is your big book, Forrester?" asked Alfred Tracey, with a smile.

"My big book?"

"Your album of great names."

"Yonder, Tracey," replied Forrester, pointing to a volume on the mantel-piece.

"I assure you, gentlemen," said Alfred Tracey, taking down the volume, "that this is Forrester's hobby. He allows no one to escape him. I have seen him maneuver and argue half an hour to carry off the autograph of a timid girl."

Opening the volume, the young man displayed a vast number of signatures, among which were those of many distinguished persons.

At length Mr. Forrester remarked :

"What Tracey calls a hobby is simply a matter of curious speculation. I have adopted a theory, more and more confirmed by observation, that the distinguished qualities of individuals are perceptible in their hand-writing. Here is the signature of a bold man," continued Forrester turning over a leaf of the volume, "here of a timid man, here of a treacherous man, here of a prudent man of business."

These remarks indicated a higher degree of intelligence and cultivation than was obvious from the general bearing of the speaker.

"Wherefore, gentlemen, if you like the sermon, pay the fee. In other words, give me your autographs."

"A nibble, a nibble," said Alfred Tracey laughing.

"We are none of us great men," replied Frederick Willoughby drawing back affectedly.

"Or great fish," said Harry Winter.

"It is not utterly impossible that you may become one or the other," said Forrester, drily.

"Oh for pen and ink after such a compliment."

"I have them with me," replied Forrester, producing a small pocket case containing writing materials.

"Did I not forewarn you?" said Alfred Tracey, smiling.

The signatures were given, and the young men chatted together or glanced at the newspapers till dinner was announced.

"Mr. Montessor has not arrived yet," said Alfred Tracey in a low whisper to Frederick Willoughby. "Have you seen him to-day?"

"No, Tracey."

"I care little about it—he is no favorite of mine."

"You do not know him intimately, Tracey."

"Gentlemen," said Alfred Tracey, speaking aloud, "dinner is ready in the adjoining apartment."

The gentlemen adjourned to the dinner table and zealously dis-

charged their duties, as guests and gourmands. It is needless to describe the substantial dishes and minor delicacies of the several courses. The soups were excellent; the fish capital; the viands and game tender and racy, and cooked in the best style; the entremets delicious, and the desert profuse and tempting.

Dinner was over, and the dinner party, the cloth being removed, were beginning to develop the genial influence of the glass in enlivening conversation and promoting hilarity, when the door of the apartment opened, and the traveler, Wilfred Montessor, entered. His countenance was grave and thoughtful. Almost at a glance, he surveyed the features, slightly flushed with wine and good humor, of the guests at the table.

"You are late, Mr. Montessor," said Alfred Tracey, rising.

After introducing the traveler to such of the company as were unacquainted with him, Mr. Tracey continued:

"Shall I order something for you, Mr. Montessor?"

"By no means," replied the man of thirty-five; "I did not come hither to dine."

"Seat yourself at the table, sir, and take a glass of wine with us," remarked the young man.

The waiter placed a chair at the table nearly in front of Alfred Tracey, and Montessor seated himself.

"Fill as you prefer, Mr. Montessor. Here are Madeira, Hock, Champagne, Burgundy," said Tracey.

"A glass of Burgundy," said Montessor, calmly, turning to the waiter.

"Fill up, gentlemen, to my toast," remarked Alfred Tracey, as he continued, his manner betrayed clearly that he was excited with wine. "You must drink freely to keep up with us, Mr. Montessor. We were talking of women as you appeared. Women and wine is the toast divine, and I propose, as we are all gay fellows who have seen life, that we should in turn toast the last of our loves among the fair sex, with sparkling bumpers of the rich juice of the grape.

"Yours, Alfred," said Henry Winter, wistfully eyeing a glass of sparkling hock.

"Will you follow?" exclaimed Alfred Tracey, glancing round the table.

"Yes, yes," replied Henry Winter, impatiently, "we are all filled."

"My sister-in-law is, in the eyes of connoisseurs, a beautiful woman."

"Mrs. Tracey—so she is, by Heaven!" exclaimed Silas Seabury.

"But you don't say——" commenced Willoughby.

"I know what I know," interposed the young man, in a jesting tone.

"The toast, Tracey."

"I give you, gentlemen, Mrs. Owen Tracey and the meeting at Mrs. Waters's."

The young man raised his glass to his lips, but ere he had tasted a drop of its contents, his attention, and that of the company, was arrested by the voice of Montessor.

"If what you have insinuated, Mr. Tracey, be true, you are a villain; if be false, you are a liar."

These words were uttered in a slow, measured voice, which indicated the determined spirit of the traveler. The flush faded instantly from the cheeks of Alfred Tracey, and a deadly paleness succeeded—the paleness of sudden, vindictive anger.

"Do you mean to insult me, sir?" exclaimed the young man, glaring fiercely across the table.

"Lest there should be the slightest room to doubt my intention," said Montessor, rising with his glass of Burgundy in his hand, "take this as the punishment of a wretch who, in the presence of gentlemen, has assailed a defenseless woman."

With a quick, rapid motion, Montessor dashed the contents of his wine-glass full in the face of Alfred Tracey.

The young man started to his feet with a vehement oath, and seized a champagne bottle, designing, apparently, to hurl it at the traveler. His arm was caught, however, in the powerful grasp of Robert Forrester, who was next him at the table.

"Be a man," whispered Forrester, "and control yourself. This is a poor method of avenging an insult."

The remainder of the company had risen likewise, and were gazing with surprise at the parties to this sudden quarrel.

The features of Alfred Tracey were still pale, his lips contracted and bloodless, and his eyes glaring with intense hatred. He wiped the wine from his face with a linen pocket handkerchief, and said to Montessor, in low, quivering tones:

"You will hear from me, sir."

The traveler moved slowly toward the door, but ere he opened it, he turned to the company and said, with dignified composure:

"Gentlemen, it is my request that you will abstain from repeating publicly the cause of the merited reproof which Alfred Tracey has received at my hands. The name of a lady should not be exposed lightly to the aspersions of the ourious and the malignant."

After the departure of Montessor, Alfred Tracey desired his guests to resume their seats, and an attempt was made to restore the broken hilarity of the party. The attempt proved abortive. Alfred Tracey, in spite of his efforts to appear gay and witty, was, for the most part, moody and dull. No allusion was made to the insult which had been given by Montessor; but the memory of the scene was continually obtruding itself in the minds of the company. Dull jokes were followed by forced laughter; the wine exercised no cheering influence; even the clink of the glasses sounded harsh and unmusical. And so, at the end of a weary half hour, the guests rose from the table, and without remonstrance on the part of Alfred Tracey.

"Willoughby," whispered Tracey, "remain with me, I have something to say to you." And he added, in a louder voice, as his guests offered their parting salutations: "Good day, gentlemen. Mr. Forrester, I will meet you at Sylvester's in half an hour."

The gentlemen retired—Forrester assenting to the appointment of Tracey by a slight gesture.

"What did I tell you, Willoughby?" said Alfred Tracey, bitterly, as soon as the others had departed. "Was I not justified in my instinctive dislike to the proud millionaire who has insulted me so grossly?"

"I confess," replied the young man thoughtfully, "that I am surprised at the conduct of Wilfred Montessor. I do not understand it."

"He is a cursed, conceited puppy," said Tracey, impetuously, "but I will have my revenge. Willoughby, I ask your services as a friend in this business."

"If you desire it, Alfred, I will call upon Mr. Montessor and request an explanation of his conduct toward you. He is a man of principle, and having acted from a hasty impulse, he will, perhaps, regret his violence toward you, and tender an apology."

"An apology?"

"Yes, Alfred."

"An apology for a blow?" said Alfred Tracey, significantly, wiping his face with his handkerchief.

"Why not?"

"Have you forgotten the conversation which occurred the other day at Denman's pistol gallery? I do not say a thing at one time and unsay it at another. There is but one species of redress which will satisfy my honor and restore my self-respect."

"If you contemplate a resort to violence," said Frederik Wil-

loughby, "you must obtain the advice of a friend less scrupulous than myself. I am utterly opposed to dueling, and know nothing of its refined punctilio."

"What other course can I pursue," said Alfred Tracey with a contemptuous curl of the lip, "than to obey the laws which govern men of honor all over the world?"

"And avenge insult by murder?"

"Call it what you will," replied Alfred Tracey, with a burst of vindictive feeling. "I care not. I pant for revenge. For every drop of the accursed wine which you have seen trickling down my face, I demand a portion of his hearts's blood."

"In your present state of mind I can be of no service to you, Alfred," said Frederick Willoughby, rising to depart.

"When an insult as gross and unpardonable as mine shall be inflicted on you, I predict that your scruples will be less powerful than they seem."

"Tracey, do not be unjust."

"At least, I will not complain; but let me understand. Are you in earnest in refusing to bear a hostile message, on my behalf, to Mr. Montessor?"

"I am, Alfred. Besides other reasons, I am in friendly relation to both parties, and am unwilling to act in any other capacity than as a mediator between you. I condemn the act of Montessor freely and without hesitation. Your toast, a piece of foolish braggadocio, could hardly be construed into a provocation personal to himself; though I believe that he was acquainted with the lady in her younger days, and he may be more deeply interested in her welfare."

"I have had suspicions from the moment I saw Montessor at your mother's residence, that love passages had previously occurred between him and my brother's wife."

"Are you quite sure that there are no other grounds of hostility toward you, on the part of Montessor, than the unfortunate toast which he resented, as it appears to me, with unnecessary harshness?"

Alfred Tracey glanced suspiciously at the young man, as he replied:

"None that I know of. Why do you ask such a question?"

"Only, Tracey, because the whole procedure seems unaccountable to me."

"And insufferable to me," remarked Alfred Tracey.

As the young men were about to separate, Frederick Willoughby said to his companion:

"Reflect calmly, Alfred, before you adopt a course that you may repent hereafter."

The reply was cold and sneering.

"I thank you for your advice, Willoughby, and the more so since I am convinced that prudent advice is the highest evidence of friendship."

The young men parted. Alfred Tracey proceeded immediately to the Club House, and encountered Henry Winter in the saloon. After a few minutes conversation, they retired to a private apartment, ordered a bottle of wine and cigars, and a long conversation ensued between them.

CHAPTER V.

AN EVENING WITH WILFRED MONTRESSOR.



SOON after the conclusion of an interview with Henry Winter, Montessor left his residence and proceeded toward the upper part of the city.

The evening was clear and calm, and the traveler pursued his walk until he arrived at the entrance of a mansion in La Fayette Place.

On ringing the bell, a domestic speedily opened the door, and in answer to the inquiry, "Is Mr. Wilson Gardiner at home?" replied in the affirmative.

Following the servant, Montessor was ushered into a small apartment on the left of the hall, which, from the books, engravings and paintings which adorned the book-cases of carved oak, and the hard polished walls, was evidently the library room or study of the occupant of the building. A man about thirty years of age, with regular features and dark curling hair, arrayed in a dressing gown and velvet embroidered slippers, was writing at a table. He turned hastily toward the door as Montessor entered the apartment.

"By Jove, Montessor, I am delighted to see you."

"Your delight will vanish, perhaps," said the traveler, shaking hands with the first speaker, "when you have learned the object of my visit."

"I'll risk it, Montessor; for, by Jove, it is as good as a shot at a buck, to get a sight of you in these times."

"You exaggerate your feelings," replied Montessor with a grave expression of countenance.

"Sarcastic as usual, but I won't be put down. Next to the sight of an old friend, is a fair shot at a deer in the green woods."

"Excuse me for interrupting you," said Montessor, smiling, "in the midst of your enthusiasm, but I have a question to propound to you. Are you particularly engaged for a few days to come?"

Mr. Gardiner looked inquiringly at the traveler ere he consulted the ivory tablets which were lying on the table before him.

"Let me see: Dine with George Whitemarsh on Thursday of next week—on Friday a match for a hundred with Ned Quackenbush to walk from Dry Dock to Harlem—Saturday, fishing excursion with Baker Reed and Wemyss to Long Island. Nothing between this and Thursday next, Mr. Montessor," said Wilson Gardiner, after running through his tablets with a glance.

"And you have withdrawn yourself from the world of fashion to complete one of your dashing *critiques* for the North American?"

"Who has revealed my incognito?" asked the gentleman slightly confused. "By Jove, Montessor, my confidence has been betrayed."

"In the deserts of Asia, the lion and the jackall are tracked by their footprints in the sand. The stately steppings of a strong intellect in the fields of learning, are as the footprints of the lion in the desert."

"As I told you," said the other, apparently desirous of changing the subject, "I am disengaged until next Thursday."

"In that case," said Montessor, gravely, "I feel no hesitation in requesting you to assume the responsibilities of a friend in a personal quarrel."

"A duel?" said Mr. Gardiner, with an inquiring glance; "and who is your antagonist?"

"Mr. Tracey."

"Tracey—which of the Traceys?"

"Alfred Tracey."

The countenance of the questioner fell at the mention of the name of Alfred Tracey.

"There are ugly things reported of that young man," observed Gardiner. "In my opinion, you would be justified in refusing to meet him until they are expressly disproved. He is charged, I am told, in respectable quarters——"

"I am aware of the allegations against him, and I have no doubt of his baseness and depravity. Yet knowing him, as I do, I have been provoked to offer him a direct personal insult."

Montessor related briefly and succinctly the circumstances which had occurred at the City Hotel.

"The case is altered," said Gardiner, rubbing his hands briskly together, after Montessor had concluded. "By Jove, you must have intended to fight him."

"Mr. Henry Winter has called upon me as the friend of Alfred Tracey."

"Send him to me, Montessor. Weapons, pistols; and the ground, have you any choice?"

"None, Gardiner."

"It will be desirable to escape the jurisdiction of the State of New York. I propose the vicinity of Montreal."

"I place myself entirely in your hands."

"You can rely upon me, Montessor. There are some unimportant matters which will occupy me part of the morning, then I am yours without reserve."

"Thanks, Gardiner. As we proceed on our journey, I will give you a further explanation of my position toward Mr. Alfred Tracey, which will lessen your surprise at this quarrel."

"As you like, my dear sir. I perceive there is a secret. A man of education and a millionaire would not meet a chevalier like Monsieur Alfred, without a powerful motive."

Some further conversation ensued, which was finally interrupted by the entrance of two or three gentlemen belonging to the circle of Mr. Gardiner. In a few moments, Montessor rose and departed.

As he passed through Fourth-street in the direction of Dr. Everard's residence, he overtook a young man walking slowly and thoughtfully in the same direction.

"Is it you, Willoughby?" inquired the traveler, slackening his pace and addressing the young man; "and reflecting to?"

Frederick Willoughby started on hearing the voice of Montessor, but recovering himself immediately, and placing his arm in that of the traveler, he replied:

"My thoughts were principally on you, Mr. Montessor."

"You are puzzled, Frederick. It is natural that you should be. The motives of human actions are often as imperceptible to the mind as the causes of physical phenomena are to the senses."

"Of two things I am certain: that Alfred Tracey is a villain, and that he has deeply wronged you."

"You are right, Frederick, and it is neither false delicacy nor a morbid sensibility that seals my lips in relation to his conduct. As

you have said, Mr. Tracey is a great villain, and has injured me irreparably."

"I felt it instinctively, when you confounded him with an insult at once glaring and painful. He is fearfully incensed against you, and as his principles do not forbid it, will probably challenge you to the field. Indeed he made a formal request to me, after your departure, to act as his friend."

"And you refused?"

"I did. I should have refused Mr. Tracey under the present circumstances, if no obstacle existed to my action; but I have pledged myself to my mother, by solemn promise, never to engage in a duel. Her sense of honor is so acute—her spirit is so proud, even approaching to haughtiness—her regard for true manliness is so open and undisguised, that I can safely repose in her judgment and defer to her wishes. If I were to degrade myself so far as to commit a mean or cowardly act, I should not dare to meet again my mother's face, tender and affectionate as she has always been to me."

"You are justly proud of your mother, Frederick," said Montessor, "and will suffer no dishonor by listening to her counsel. But let me understand you; are you seeking to dissuade me from meeting Mr. Tracey, in case he ventures to challenge me?"

"Your judgment and experience are superior to mine," replied Frederick Willoughby; "yet even as a question of expediency, it seems to be wrong that a life as valuable as yours, should be matched against the existence of Alfred Tracey. The more I reflect upon the incidents connected with my association with Mr. Tracey during the past few weeks, the more I am convinced that I have been grossly deceived in him. His habits of gambling, and his contempt of female virtue, have developed themselves so rapidly and so strongly as to inspire me with distrust of his general integrity. I have more than once had reason to repent the intimacy which has grown up between us."

"I am aware of it."

"By an association of ideas, I am led to speak of another person, who, at the outset of my acquaintance with her, created a most favorable impression on my mind. I allude to Miss Caroline Percy. Her beauty, her intelligence, her accomplishments, her apparent frankness and candor, deeply interested me. There was wanting only the assurance that she was in reality what she appeared to be, to enchant me completely. But I have been mortified in discovering either that she duped me in the beginning of our acquaintance, and for some per-

sonal reason was driven to change her tactics, or that I duped myself blindly and thoughtlessly. At least I have so changed my opinion of Caroline Percy that I believe that she is an artful, scheming woman, with more talent than principle."

"Again you are right," said Montessor, calmly.

"Must it not happen," said the young man earnestly, "as the result of such experience, that suspicion and distrust of others will usurp the place of generous confidence and unhesitating faith?"

"At twenty-one," said Montessor gravely, "the change is premature—at thirty-five it may be irresistible."

The tone of the speaker was not altogether devoid of melancholy, but changing his manner, he remarked:

"Our routes lie together. Are you going to Dr. Eeverard's?"

"I am."

"It is my destination, likewise. I have occasion to consult the doctor himself; but to you, I imagine that Helen Everard is the principal attraction."

"Miss Everard and I have had a partial engagement at chess, which resulted in my defeat. I do not relinquish a contest so important after one struggle."

"If you cannot conquer Miss Everard at chess, Frederick's courage and perseverance may reward you with the conquest of her heart."

The young man turned with surprise—perhaps in a measure assumed—toward the traveler.

"The science of human nature is, at the best, dim and uncertain," said Montessor; "to judge correctly, we must judge without the bias of personal interest or personal feeling. Thus judging, I have never beheld a person whose qualities of mind and heart were superior to those of Helen Everard. She is handsome without vanity; accomplished without affectation; enthusiastic without weakness, and modest without subservience. Her reading is sound, her judgment acute and vigorous, her manners those of a lady of birth and breeding."

"But these qualities are the attributes of an exalted character."

"Such is Miss Everard, or at least, such will she become, with more enlarged experience of the world."

"Really, I shall fall in love with her."

"If you do not, said the traveler, with a grave smile, imperceptible in the darkness, to his companion; "I shall be tempted to fall in love with her myself. But here we are, at the doctor's residence. Ring, Frederick."

The gentlemen were received by Doctor Everard and his daughter with a courteous politeness, which implied something more than deference to the ordinary laws of social intercourse.

After some general conversation, Frederick challenged Miss Everard to a game of chess. The parties seated themselves at the chess table, and Willoughby slowly arranged the pieces, while Helen Everard chatted about a visit to the theater on the preceding evening, with a charming ease and gayety which amused and interested the listener. They had seen each other only twice or thrice, but persons of congenial tastes and feelings soon learn to know and to confide in each other.

"And now for a check-mate, Miss Everard," said Willoughby, with an admiring glance at his fair opponent, as he completed the marshaling of the pieces.

"Better, perhaps, that you should put a check upon my tongue," said Miss Everard, laughing.

In the mean time, Wilfred Montessoro whispered to Doctor Everard that he wished to see him privately. The gentlemen accordingly retired to the library, leaving the chess-players at liberty to pursue their game without interruption or embarrassment.

Doctor Everard invited the traveler to a seat upon an old fashioned sofa, which, having done its duty in the parlor, had long since been consigned to the office, and carefully closing the apartment, stood in a listening attitude before his visitor.

"Doctor, I have a question to ask. Are your professional engagements of such a nature as to permit you to leave the city for a few days without detriment to your patients, or serious inconvenience to yourself?"

The doctor reflected a moment, looking first at Montessoro and then at a slate which hung upon a nail driven into the wall near the door.

"My patients are doing well, except a few chronic cases, which the art of medicine may chance to palliate, but will fail to cure. Acute inflammation and protracted fevers seldom prevail in this latitude in the month of June. In replying to your question, it may interest you to learn that my last experiments in animal magnetism, on Miss Caroline Percy, seem to have operated a complete change in her physical and mental condition. I visited her to-day, and have noticed the strange metamorphosis; I was surprised to find that the extreme nervous sensibility of her system had entirely vanished."

"Indeed?"

"And what is still more astonishing, she seems to have lost in a great measure her susceptibility to the magnetic influence."

"Astonishing, truly, judging by the previous success of your experiments—but permit me to return to the subject of my interrogatory. You have no cases of extreme urgency on your present list of patients?"

"I have none such at present."

"Will you arrange your business, doctor, so as to accompany me on a journey of two or three hundred miles—to Montreal, perhaps?"

"To Montreal?" exclaimed Doctor Everard, with a slight manifestation of surprise.

"In your capacity as a surgeon—or it may be as a friend and adviser."

"Are you implicated in an affair of honor?" inquired Doctor Everard, with astonishment. "You, Mr. Montessor?"

"I am," replied Montessor, gravely.

The doctor walked two or three times across the library, then pausing and taking Montessor by the hand, he said:

"I am your friend, I will accompany you."

The traveler returned homeward alone.

CHAPTER VI.

THE EVENING CLOSES.



LOWLY Wilfred Montessor again paced the floor of his solitary chamber.

An hour passed in silent reflection. Then he approached a window, threw open the blinds, and gazed at the dark shadows of the trees and buildings, dimly visible in the presence of the stars. The dark fantastic shadows, and the mournful sighing of the night breeze, enchained him for a moment. But the stars, the stars!

"Those twinkling luminaries," said the traveler, turning at length from the window, and traversing the apartment; "those orbs gliding in the boundless ocean of ether, fixed to us, but wanderers like us and our earth, through the same trackless waves, brilliant as diamonds, pure as crystal, serene as the sunny valley of Khasreman, majestic as the heights of Olympus, are the symbols of power—symbols at once magnificent and sublimely mysterious.

"But the human heart craves sympathy rather than power—tenderness rather than beauty—truth rather than mystery.

"Not crystal, nor the diamond, nor the vale of Khasreman, nor the heights of Olympus; not all the forms of physical beauty and grandeur, not the stars themselves, not the fairies who dance playfully around us in our walks by moonlight through flowery groves and forests carpeted with moss, nor the genii who watch over us from our birth, and allure us unconsciously from the paths of evil; not even the angels can awaken the profoundest emotions of the soul of man.

"It is the smile of a human face, sparkling with the glances of love: it is the clasp of a human hand, thrilling with the pulses of tenderness, that illumines the innermost corners of the heart, that stirs up the waters of sympathy in the depths of its fountains.

"The face that smiled upon me, the hand that clasped mine—where are they ?

"I remain to lament the dead, and mete out justice to the living.

"Why then do I hesitate ? Why am I determined as to the end—unsatisfied as to the means ?

"Is there any doubt of that man's guilt ? None. The death of Zorah is not more certain than the guilt of Alfred Tracey.

"And yet there is something within me which repeats continually, 'Let him live—resign him to the judgment of God.'

"And methought, as but now I gazed upward at the stars, the face of Zorah—not as I last beheld it, pale and encircled in funereal raiment, but rather saint-like and adorned with celestial glory—appeared unto me, and a whispering sound, low and sweet, and soft as the harp of Eolus, fell upon my ears :

"Let him live—resign him to the judgment of God.'

"Was it an illusion of the senses—a spell of the imagination—or wert thou, Zorah, truly before me, and was it thy voice which filled the air with its melodious breathings ?

"Why do I hesitate at the thought of a duel ?

"A duel !

"By the law of Moses, given directly of God, the avenger of blood was authorized to take the life of a murderer wherever he found him, save in a city or place of refuge.

"The duel affords a chance of escape to the wrong doer—it has neither the sternness of merciless revenge nor the cowardice of concealed assassination.

"Since the chivalry of the early ages of Christendom girded the loins of men with swords, to defend their rights and their honor, and threw poison and the dagger to bravos and pirates, the duel has prevailed in all civilized communities.

"The law condemns it.

"But are there no penalties for injuries which the law cannot reach ; for deadly crimes, perpetrated in darkness, and surrounded with mystery ; for slanderous lies which eat into the heart and undermine the life, as by slow hidden poison ; for base wrongs, the viper-like returns for confidence, generosity, friendship, love : for those more foul and terrible insults which blanch the cheek and break the spirit of the boldest and the proudest ?

'I, Wilfred Montessor ; how atrociously have I been wronged !

"The wife of my bosom, Zorah, in fear and shame, and horror, and

despair, struggling against beastly violence, till death, in mercy, interposed between the demon and his prey.

"Wherever I go—wherever I remain—in this chamber, in the street, in the houses of my friends, in the public resorts of the multitude, the dreadful scene rises before me in the hideousness of its possible enormity.

"Yonder, Zorah was lying, thinking, perchance dreaming of me—yonder the remorseless villain assaulted her with violence—yonder the stains of her blood are visible on the carpet—the bloodhound might yet track the footsteps of the murderer.

"Let him live—resign him to the judgment of God!"

"Again—it is ominous.

"Is dueling then wrong? is it unjustifiable revenge? is it murder in the eye of God as in the eye of the law?"

"But I am committed to this man. I am pledged to his friend and mine. I have not acted thoughtlessly or irrationally. I will meet him.

"Only this, I will not slay him.

"My aim is unerring—I will cripple him for life—I will thunder in his ears a terrible denunciation of his guilt, and leave him to his conscience and the God of Justice.

"But should I fall by his hand?"

"Life! death!"

"Have I not seen the sun rise and set many, many days? Have I not traveled to the utmost corners of the earth? have I not read books? have I not eaten and drunken, and felt the torments of hunger and disease?"

"Has not the temple of my heart been fired and consumed? and have not the ashes been scattered to the winds?"

"Death! to rest by the side of Zorah beneath a grassy mound, crowned with oaks and cypresses, and flowering shrubs; to rest there and almost hear the caroling of birds and the murmuring of waters; to rest there and almost behold the splendor of the sun, and the moon struggling through the overshadowing trees.

"The soul flieth upward or downward—but oh! do not the corpses of the dead, who have in this world loved each other truly and tenderly and faithfully, sleep sweetly and lovingly together in the beautiful resting places of the earth, until the resurrection?"

Wilfred Montessor retired to his couch, and his waking thoughts unfolded themselves during the night watches, in the imagery of

dreams. Wild and fearful were his dreams. One, above all, was passing strange. He dreamed that he stood by the grave of Zorah, and wept, and a lovely maiden, leaning gently upon his arm, mingled her tears freely with his—a lovely maiden, and her features were those of Mary Cameron.

CHAPTER VII.

QUARLES—THE BOWLING SALOON.

FROM the Club House, Alfred Tracey proceeded to the tavern of Sylvester Westervelt, in Mott-street.

With a familiar nod to the landlord, he passed through the bar-room into a hall or entry, thence up a narrow stair-case to the second story of the building. Approaching a door at the distance of three or four yards from the top of the stair-case, he gave four distinct raps, inaudibly yet deliberately counting ten between the raps.

A voice from within demanded imperatively :

“ Who’s there ? ”

“ One of a pair,” was the visitor’s reply.

The door was instantly unlocked, and the voice from within exclaimed :

“ Come in ”

Alfred Tracey raised the latch and entered the apartment. Near the center of the room was a table, on which were half sheets of letter paper, a pewter inkstand, half a dozen pens, and as many books. A person was seated at the table scribbling carelessly on a bit of writing paper.

“ How are you by this time, Quarles ? ” inquired Alfred Tracey after shutting the door cautiously.

“ Hearty, my boy,” replied the man, “ but what in Heaven’s name detained you so long ? ”

“ Revenge ! Bob, revenge ! ” said the young man, with a diabolical sneer.

“ Oh, ah—it’s coming off then ? ” said the other, extending his right hand, as if in the act of presenting a pistol.

“ I’ll have a crack at him, Bob, unless he refuses to fight.”

“ And what then ? ”

“ There are different ways of attaining the same end. I hate him,” said Alfred Tracey, angrily shaking his clenched fist. “ Do you understand me, Quarles, I hate him ! ”

"And with good reason?"

"I have hated him since I first beheld him with instinctive and increasing hatred. Did you never come across a man whose presence alone inspired the most profound dislike?"

"Why did you invite him to dine with you?"

"Because he is rich—a millionaire."

"The deuce he is."

"A man of immense fortune, Quarles, and therefore a shining mark for the ingenuity of Mr. Robert Forrester."

"Did I not sustain myself creditably?" asked Quarles, laughing heartily.

"Like a gentleman."

"And the album of autographs, Tracey; it was managed admirably."

"They seemed to have no suspicion of an ulterior design in obtaining their signatures."

"None at all. They swallowed the broth piping hot, as you ladled it out to them."

"Spiced with truth, Quarles; your name, for instance, was correctly given."

"Two-thirds of it, I confess. In the gay circles of Saratoga and Washington, I have figured with reasonable success as R. Forrester Quarles, but in the way of business, I am plain Bob Quarles, at your service."

"And you have traveled?"

"Some," replied Quarles, with a knowing wink.

"And you are very curious in the matter of procuring other men's signatures?"

"Particularly if they are men of note," said Quarles, laughing. "I am a politician in these matters, and believe in a system of checks and balances."

"The theory is safer than the practice," remarked Alfred Tracey.

"I have been amusing myself for the last half hour," replied the other, directing the attention of the young man to the sheets of paper scattered over the table, "in imitating the signature of one of your young friends. The original is a bold, dashing sign manual, which indicates a noble and generous disposition."

"Imitations! Do you call those signatures imitations?" inquired Alfred Tracey after closely scrutinizing the sheets.

"Why not?"

"They were written by Fred Willoughby himself. I have a score of notes in my possession penned by him, and I know his signature as well as my own."

With a free careless stroke of the pen, Quarles wrote a name on a slip of paper, then pointing to it with the feather end of the quill, remarked quietly :

"And this?"

"It is wonderful, Bob."

"The young man has something, you tell me."

"Oh yes."

"In ready money?"

"He is just of age, Bob, and has on deposit in several of the city banks considerable sums which have been paid over to him by his guardians."

"Well, perhaps we may do a little in that quarter, but I regret that we did not get the name of the other."

"What other?"

"The millionaire—Wilfred Montessor."

"Curse him!" exclaimed Alfred Tracey. "I would rather have his heart's blood."

"You are savage, Tracey," said Quarles, in a slightly contemptuous tone. "I would rather have his money."

"But what if you had been insulted by him in the presence of others with whom you desired, for important reasons, to maintain friendly relations?"

"Now you talk sensibly. I agree to it, Tracey. There is sometimes policy in war. As to Mr. Frederick Willoughby, you will continue your inquiries in that quarter?"

"Certainly, Quarles, but you must not be impatient at a little delay."

"Impatient," replied Quarles, with an expression of impenetrable good humor. "When you are ready, I am ready. There are other fishing grounds besides Snake Hill."

"Yes, yes, Bob—and that reminds me of a message to you from John Harker—Jack wishes to see you."

"Jack Harker," muttered Quarles, musing. Then glancing at Alfred Tracey, he inquired: "How goes it with Jack in these times?"

"Now up and now down," replied Tracey.

"The gambler's fate—but what does he want of me?"

"He says that he knows half a dozen sharp active fellows who will peddle out a thousand a week amongst them."

"Bring him with you, Tracey, when you come again. It will do no harm to talk with Jack Harker, I know him of old; he is as close as a steel-trap."

"And as sharp."

"I don't gamble, Tracey, and for the rest, I have cut my eye-teeth. But where are you going?"

"Down town."

"But where?"

"To the Park Theater—Cooper plays Zanga; a capital performance, they say. Besides, I shall meet Winter."

Alfred Tracey quitted the tavern, and a few minutes afterward was strolling listlessly down Broadway toward the Park.

The lamp-lighters were lighting the street-lamps, the gas burners glared already in the plate-glass windows of the magnificent shops. Broadway shone as at noon-day. The steeple of St. Paul's loomed up boldly and distinctly against the sky, whose fleecy clouds reflected still the fading colors of a summer sunset.

In front of the Park Theater were four large lamps, lighted with gas. The doors of the pit were not yet opened, and a crowd of men and boys, waiting for that event, obstructed the side-walks. Alfred Tracey pushed through them and mounted the steps leading to the main entrance.

The boxes were empty, with the exception of here and there an early play-goer. He selected a pleasant seat, near the center of the second tier, and reclining his head upon the railing which separated the box occupied by him from the adjoining one, he gave little attention to the concourse of people who flocked into the theater.

At the close of the second act of the tragedy, Henry Winter made his appearance in the lobby, and Tracy left his seat to converse with him. The young man communicated the result of his visit to Wilfred Montessor, adding, after he had finished the details of his brief interview:

"I have an engagement with a friend which I cannot forego, so you must excuse me for the remainder of the evening. To-morrow I will see you again."

"In the morning, at Colonel Winter's?"

"Yes, yes."

"And you will attend to——"

"The pistols, et cetera? All is right on that head. I have spoken to Barrett. Good-night, Tracey."

Henry Winter departed immediately, and Alfred Tracey returned to his seat in the theater.

As soon as the tragedy was concluded, the young man strolled across the Park to Willet's oyster saloon, and drank freely at the bar. The intemperate use of alcoholic drinks had not been a vice of his past career; but his indulgence at dinner, and his repeated libations during the evening, had deranged his faculties and visibly affected his person. There was a wildness in his glance and an unsteadiness in his gait which indicated a condition of incipient intoxication.

As he passed the door of a basement in the vicinity of Canal-street, over which was painted in large letters, "Bowling Saloon," he felt again the raging thirst for strong drink, which is the cause of unlimited indulgence. He hesitated an instant, and then descended the steps of the saloon. The first apartment was a room about twenty feet square, occupied as a bar-room.

Alfred Tracey drank a glass of brandy and water, and seated himself at a small circular table covered with newspapers. After a momentary inspection of the journals, he arose and walked through a narrow passage-way leading to an apartment in the rear, some sixty feet long, in which were two bowling alleys. Two persons were playing on one of the alleys—the other was unemployed. In front of the alleys were a dozen arm-chairs, conveniently arranged for spectators and players; but turning aside, he reclined against one of the columns which supported the floor of the apartment overhead. While he was thus observing the game of the bowlers, two or three of the spectators glanced toward him, and finally arose from their seats and carelessly approached him. They were genteelly dressed, but their features manifested that they had also been paying their attentions to Bacchus.

"Will you play a game of ten-pins, sir?" said one of them, addressing Alfred Tracey respectfully.

"No, sir; I never play," replied the young man with some thickness of articulation.

"It is easy to learn," said the other speaker, he and his companions pressing, as if by inadvertence more and more closely around Alfred Tracey. "Any one can play at ten-pins."

"I do not feel inclined to play," said Tracey, with an effort to sustain himself erect.

"I hope you are not offended," rejoined the first speaker. "I have just been playing with my friends till they are fatigued, and as I saw you were alone, I thought you might like to play a game."

"You are leaning upon me," said Alfred Tracey, turning to another of the trio.

"Beg pardon, sir," replied the person, coolly, at the same time moving toward the passage-way.

"Come along, Vesey," said the third stranger, taking the man who had addressed the first inquiry to Alfred Tracey by the arm. "He don't wish to play. You won't be able to get another match to-night. Come along, let us have a lark."

After a slight show of opposition, the man yielded to the entreaties of his companion, and, preceded by his associates, left the bowling saloon, not without respectfully bowing, however, to Alfred Tracey, which, half unconsciously, he returned. The young man stood looking at the players until the game was finished. On returning to the bar-room, he perceived that it was nearly deserted by its customers, only one person being seated at the table. He approached the bar, and poured out nearly a gill of brandy, to which he added a little water. He swallowed the draught, and replacing the tumbler on the counter, turned on his heel, and walked with a reeling motion toward the door.

"One shilling, sir," said the bar-keeper, a youth of nineteen, in a slightly elevated voice. "You did not pay for the other drink."

"The devil I didn't!" said Tracey, turning angrily toward the speaker; then, as if recollecting himself, he added: "Oh! I forgot," and commenced fumbling in his pockets.

Finding no change in his vest pockets, he sought for his wallet, which he usually carried in his pantaloons pocket, but it was missing. Half sobered by an apprehension of its loss, he renewed the search with more deliberation.

"Somebody has robbed me!" he exclaimed earnestly.

"Robbed you?" said the bar-keeper.

"Yes—in this very place."

"Impossible."

"I felt my wallet safe in my pocket a minute or two before I came hither, and now it is gone—gone with two hundred and forty dollars."

"It won't do, my cove," replied the lad. "I have had to deal with such fellows as you before to-night. Robbed, indeed! Fork up that shilling and go about your business."

"You' young rascal!" said Alfred Tracey, "how dare you talk to a gentleman in such a way?"

"A gentleman!" said the boy, scornfully.

At this moment, however, the person who was reading at the table, rose and advanced toward the bar-keeper—whispering in his ear:

"It may be as the gentleman says, Nelson; did you see those three chaps who passed through the bar-room, ten minutes ago? One of them is a regular pickpocket, and has been two or three times before the police, but has always managed to get off for want of evidence."

"Are you certain that you had your wallet in your pocket previous to your coming in the saloon?" said the bar-keeper, glancing suspiciously at his customer.

"Quite certain."

"Has any one been very near you?"

"The men in the back room who wanted me to play at ten-pins," rejoined Alfred Tracey gloomily. "They crowded against me. I see it now. The rascals have picked my pocket."

The individual who had just left the table, nodded at the bar-keeper, and winked knowingly, as much as to say, "I told you so."

Leaving the bar, the young man approached Alfred Tracey, and said deferentially:

"If you are a gentleman as has lost his money on the sly, I ask your pardon for thinking that you might be trying the sucker game." Then taking a lamp from the counter, he added: "Come and let us look about the room, perhaps the pocket-book has dropped on the floor."

The search proved useless; the pickpockets had escaped with their booty.

"Don't trouble yourself about the brandy," said the bar-keeper, as he returned to the bar-room and deposited the lamp again upon the counter.

"D—n the brandy!" exclaimed Alfred Tracey abruptly; but hesitating to expose his feelings in the presence of strangers, he moved toward the door.

With cursing in his heart, he left the bowling saloon of Isaac Barnaby, at midnight, entirely penniless. On reaching the sidewalk, he muttered in half audible tones, the most frightful execrations. Stung with the loss of his available funds, and foreseeing at a glance the difficulties to which he might be exposed under his present circumstances, he acted like a madman. He shook his fist at the skies, and cursed the Fate of Destiny, which was his only God.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BUBBLE BURSTS

At an early hour of the same evening a servant entered the sitting apartment of Owen Tracey, and placed in the hands of the merchant a package of letters, which had just been delivered by the letter-carrier.

Owen Tracey abandoned his occupation—he was inspecting one of his old ledgers—and commenced the perusal of the letters.

The countenance and bearing of the merchant had changed but little since his interview with the stock-broker. There were the same hollowness of the cheeks, and falling of the lower jaw; the same evidence of mental disquiet; but his eyes were less wild and glaring, and his movements were torpid and slow, rather than abrupt and impulsive.

He read the letters singly, and methodically folded each one after he had finished its perusal, and endorsed upon the back the name of its writer, and the date of its reception. Ere he had in this manner disposed of one half the letters on his table, he perceived a note addressed to him in the familiar hand-writing of Francis Mortimer, the stock-broker. He clutched it eagerly, broke the seal, and read as follows:

“MY DEAR MR. TRACEY: I have made diligent inquiries this afternoon in relation to the stock of the Eastern Transportation Company, offered by Parkinson and Robert Boyd & Co. They have a large number of shares which they are anxious to dispose of at current rates. But the rates are high, my dear sir; and besides, I am clearly of opinion that these shares, as well as those you purchased yesterday, form a portion of the stock belonging to Wilfred Montessor, which, in our projected operation, we imagined, upon grounds apparently satisfactory, to be entirely out of market. My opinion is based upon the general current of events, within the last two days, and upon private information, which I cannot prudently question. I will see you as soon as practicable; but I tell you, frankly and honestly, that

your enterprise has failed ; and that, in my opinion, the sooner we abandon it, the better it will be for our reputation and our pockets. Of course, there must be heavy losses—it is the fortune of war. Deeply regretting the information which I am compelled to communicate, on your account as well as my own,

“I remain your obedient servant, FRANCIS MORTIMER.”

“Heavy losses—heavy losses—thousands upon thousands!” exclaimed the merchant, angrily.

He started from his seat, crumpled the note in his hands, and threw it upon the floor, stamping it violently beneath his feet.

“Heavy losses, indeed ; all my ready money invested in worthless stock—I dare say it will turn out to be worthless—my notes, too, floating around Wall-street—and there is the death of Martyn’s daughter, and Alfred ——”

The merchant sank into his arm-chair, and pressed his hands firmly against his temples, as if he were suffering from a severe headache.

At that moment the door of the apartment opened, and Mrs. Tracey presented herself.

“What do you want ?” he demanded harshly, turning suddenly toward the door.

“I heard a noise, and I thought you might perhaps require some attention.”

“Some attention ?”

“You have been ill, Mr. Tracey, for several days, and I really begin to be alarmed about you.”

“Don’t trouble yourself on my account,” said Owen Tracey, impatiently. “There is nothing the matter with me—nothing at all—and you know that I hate to be pestered. If you are a doctor,” continued he, with a sardonic laugh, extending his hand toward her, “feel of my pulse.”

Mrs. Tracey took the hand of her husband, and laid her fingers upon his wrist.

“I am no doctor, Mr. Tracey, but your skin is dry and feverish ; your pulse irregular, sometimes very rapid, and then slow and scarcely perceptible. You need medical advice. Will you not allow me to send for Doctor Jones ?”

“No, madam, I will not,” replied the merchant decidedly, but with less impatience and irritability of manner. “My health was never better than it has been during the past week. I have had many things however, to vex and distract me ; and now I have business on hand

which must not be neglected. The only request I have to make, Mrs. Tracey, is that you will leave me alone during the remainder of the evening."

Mrs. Tracey retired, not wholly satisfied with the representations of her husband, but she did not think it best to chafe his temper by opposing his wishes. She remarked, however, as she left the apartment :

"Do not apply yourself too closely to your musty books and papers."

As soon as Mrs. Tracey had retired, the merchant rose and strode across the floor with irregular steps.

"What do women know about business?" he said, chuckling. "Yet the more ignorance the more presumption. I am able, thank God, to manage my own affairs."

The merchant seated himself at his desk, and after perusing a second time, the note of Francis Mortimer, leaned his head upon the desk with a sense of drowsiness. Then he roused himself, and running hastily over the remaining letters, he resumed the inspection of the old ledger, which lay still open before him.

Hour after hour passed in this tedious, monotonous employment.

At length it became necessary to refer to some old papers for the purpose of elucidating the entries in the ledger. Owen Tracey, taking a lamp in his hand, proceeded to a small room about ten feet square, without windows or any other means of access to air and light, except the door leading from his private apartment.

On entering the small chamber—closet it might be called—the merchant closed the door carefully. The room contained an iron safe, a large pine box, and several coats, vests, and other articles of dress, hanging on pegs, fastened to the wall. He raised the lid of the box, and stood gazing listlessly at its contents. The box was nearly filled with loose papers, huddled together as of no real value.

As the merchant bent down to examine the papers, he felt a peculiar sensation of dizziness in his head, attended with acute pain.

A twitching, convulsive motion of the lips, vertigo and blindness quickly succeeded. He staggered against the wall, and strove, instinctively, but vainly to sustain himself.

As he sank insensible, seemingly lifeless upon the floor, the lighted lamp fell from his hand and fired the combustible contents of the pine box.

Wo! wo! to Owen Tracey. He has rudely driven away his guardian angel; he has kindled with his own hand the funeral pyre—if assistance come not quickly, he is lost!

But a wife's duty is superior to a husband's cruelty. With instinctive precaution, Mrs. Tracey watches and listens through the tedious hours.

And thus it happens, that Owen Tracey is rescued at midnight, from the impending horrors of death by fire.



BOOK SEVENTH



THE DENOUEMENT.

CHAPTER I.

OWEN TRACEY AND HIS VISITORS.



IMMEDIATELY after breakfast, on the succeeding morning, Owen Tracey withdrew to his private apartment. Upon opening the door of the adjoining closet, the peculiar odor of recently burned or charred paper diffused itself through the room. Somewhat hastily the old merchant drew the pine box toward him, and removed the lid, which had been replaced by Mrs. Tracey on entering the apartment after her husband's fall. By this

means, the fire had been extinguished without any alarm, not even the domestics having been roused from their slumbers.

The merchant stood gazing at the burned and blackened papers with a mixture of surprise and anger in his haggard countenance, as Mrs. Tracey approached him, having followed him from the breakfast table.

"What is the meaning of all this?" demanded Owen Tracey, accosting his wife, and pointing at the contents of the box.

Mrs. Tracey did not reply instantly, and the merchant reiterated with increased vehemence:

"Speak, woman! what is the meaning of all this?"

"Have you forgotten that you were overcome last night by a vertigo, or fainting fit? Your lamp fell among the papers and set them on fire."

"Yes, yes, yes, I remember," muttered the merchant gazing fixedly at the box and its contents.

Then stooping down he clutched a handful of charred papers, which crumbled in pieces between his fingers. Suddenly he turned toward his wife and grasped her arm with such violence that she could with difficulty restrain an exclamation of pain.

"Do you know," he said, glaring wildly and even fiercely in her face, "that I think you purposely destroyed my papers?"

Mrs. Tracey released herself from his grasp, and replied calmly,

"Why should I destroy your papers?"

"I will tell you why. You think yourself too good for me; you hate me, and everything that belongs to me."

"Why then am I here?"

"Sure enough, why are you here? Haven't I told you a hundred times not to intrude upon me in this apartment?"

"I am here," replied Mrs. Tracey with dignity, "because your health is suffering, and I do not consider it right or safe to leave you alone."

"Nonsense. Am I getting crazy?" said the old merchant, in a tone of fury, "that you try to palm such stuff off upon me?"

Mrs. Tracey was silent.

"Oh! I am getting crazy, am I?" he continued, with a malignant leer. "But that don't answer my question—what do you want here?"

With the object of diverting his mind from the train of thought which had excited him, Mrs. Tracey remarked,

"I have business with you."

"Now you talk sensibly, madam," said the merchant, his demeanor becoming suddenly placid. "I am always ready to attend to business."

"The baker's bill and the butcher's bill for the last month, will come in this morning," remarked Mrs. Tracey, attentively watching her husband's countenance.

"Yes, yes," said the merchant, rubbing his hands.

"And the monthly wages are due to Francis and Margaret, and the cook."

"Yes, yes," chuckled the merchant, still rubbing his hands together.

"I have kept the expenses of housekeeping within the usual monthly allowance. Will you draw a check for the amount, Mr. Tracey?"

"What's that!" vociferated Owen Tracey.

"Not now, then, Mr. Tracey," said the other, perceiving that her auditor was again becoming excited. "Another time will do just as well."

"You want money, do you!" exclaimed the merchant, rushing to his writing desk, and taking therefrom the note of Mortimer the stock-broker.

"Read that, madam," he continued, "and then ask me for money if you dare!"

Mrs. Tracey read the note quietly, and laid it aside.

"I told you, Mr. Tracey, that it was of no consequence."

"No consequence—no consequence! Woman, I am a beggar!"

The old merchant sank upon a chair and buried his face in his hands.

Mrs. Tracey endeavored to sooth him by words of kindness and encouragement, but he started up suddenly and exclaimed:

"What will they say of me in Pearl-street and on 'Change—of me, Owen Tracey, who have written my name for thousands, and never asked favors of any man? That I am a bankrupt, a beggar, a pauper, in my old age!"

How much of truth or of falsehood there might be in these ravings of a disordered intellect, Mrs. Tracey could not decide. It was equally difficult to soothe the irritability of her husband.

"The rats always run from a sinking ship," said the merchant, after a brief pause. "Since you know that I am a beggar, why don't you leave me?"

"If you are indeed stricken at the same time with poverty and impaired health, I shall feel the greater obligation to minister to your wants and comfort."

“What a jewel you are, my love!” said the incipient maniac, with a cunning leer. “But if you think so much of me, why the devil did you burn my papers?”

“I did not burn them, Mr. Tracey.”

“There was a fortune in those papers—a snug fortune—not less than twenty-five thousand dollars—but not mine,” he continued with a loud laugh, “ha! ha! ha! not mine. Do you hear that? Ha! ha! ha! not mine. Twenty-five thousand dollars with interest for twenty years, or thereabouts—shall we say simple interest or compound interest? There is a difference between simple interest and compound interest—every merchant knows that—a great difference. Ha! ha! ha!”

At that moment the door was opened, and Margaret announced a visitor.

“Tell him to call again,” said Mrs. Tracey hastily. “Mr. Tracey is unwell this morning.”

“Tell him no such thing,” shouted Owen Tracey to the astonished chambermaid. “Tell him to come hither, and go about your business, both of you.”

Mrs. Tracey hesitated a moment, and then withdrew, judging it best to watch the progress of her husband’s malady without openly opposing him.

The visitor was Francis Mortimer, the stock-broker.

He was evidently startled at the change which a few days had made in the personal appearance of the old merchant. But he advanced with his hand extended, and with an affable smile playing upon his features.

“My dear sir ——”

“Wait a moment, Mr. Mortimer,” said the merchant, going to the door and closing it carefully, and then returning on tip-toe, he whispered to the broker, “I have enemies in this house, and I don’t choose to permit them to overhear what passes between us.”

A grave expression darkened the countenance of the stock-broker for a moment as he replied,

“It is your own house, my dear sir. But I will not speak loudly, we need not be overheard.”

“I know what you are going to tell me,” said the merchant, with a husky articulation. “We are ruined!”

“Ruined?”

“Yes, yes, ruined!”

“Oh, no; my dear sir ——”

"I say we are ruined, and all by your cursed contrivances. You are a fool, Mr. Mortimer, you are a villain!"

"This is hasty, my dear Mr. Tracey. You are greatly excited."

"Excited! And why don't you get excited when I call you a fool and a villain! You can't wheedle me out of my senses."

"My dear sir——"

"You had nothing," interrupted the merchant angrily, "but I had money and credit. Both are lost by your infernal contrivances, and I am a pauper as well as you."

"My dear Mr. Tracey, you will regret what you have said when you hear the good news which I bring you. Even if things had come to the worst, you overrate the business. The total loss under a complete failure of the speculation, would not exceed forty thousand dollars, and every body knows," continued the stock-broker, assuming one of his blindest smiles and most silvery articulation, "that forty thousand dollars is a sum too trifling to shake the credit, or greatly impair the resources of Mr. Owen Tracey."

The old merchant shook his head moodily, and with downcast eyes surveyed the lower extremities of the person of his visitor."

"But, as I remarked," continued the broker, "I bring you good news this morning. The unpleasant note I sent you yesterday alarmed you unnecessarily. Two hours after writing it, I had an interview with Parkinson and Boyd, which entirely changed the aspect of things. Sharp ones are Parkinson and Boyd; sharp ones, my dear Mr. Tracey."

"You conceal it very well, very well indeed," said the merchant suddenly peering at the stock-broker beneath his shaggy eyebrows.

"Conceal what, my dear sir?"

"The cloven hoof."

"The cloven hoof?"

"Yes, yes, the devil has a cloven hoof, and you are the devil, seeking to entrap me with your coaxing, wheedling voice."

"He, he, he! you are facetious this morning, Mr. Tracey. But, my dear sir, you will not refuse to listen to me?"

The merchant made no reply, and the stock-broker continued:

"As I was saying, my dear sir, when you interrupted me, Parkinson and Boyd are sharp ones. They perceived that a movement was in progress in the stock of the Eastern Transportation Company, and being the confidential agents of Wilfred Montessor, they resolved to have a finger in the business. So they gained the consent of their principal, and began to operate. But I rejoice to say, after a full and

free conversation with them, that an arrangement can be made which will be greatly to the advantage of the parties concerned in the negotiation. Instead of losing, my dear Mr. Tracey, instead of losing, as I predicted yesterday, we shall realize a profit of thousands of dollars."

"Are you serious, Mr. Mortimer?"

"Perfectly serious, my dear sir."

"Then you are the man for me," said the merchant, slapping the stock-broker familiarly on the shoulder.

"Ah," said Mr. Mortimer, taking the merchant by the hand. "You have been excited by the turn things were taking, but all will come right, sir, all will come right."

"I have been excited, Mr. Mortimer, I confess it," said the merchant, lowering his voice to a whisper, "but not on this affair. I have enemies in this house, malignant enemies. See what they have done," he continued, striking the box furiously with his foot, "they have burned my papers."

The stock-broker caught the expression of the old merchant's eye as these words were uttered, and the placid smile faded from his countenance.

"Mr. Tracey!"

"A few moments ago I thought myself a beggar; but you say there will be profits?"

"Certainly, Mr. Tracey."

"Do you know, Mr. Cloven-foot, ha! ha! ha! Mr. Mortimer, they call me an old miser—an old miser. But I'll show them. A man may do a great deal with forty million dollars."

"Forty million?"

"My estate, Mr. Mortimer, counting the profits of our stock speculation, is worth forty million dollars. Hist, hist, I'll tell you what I intend to do. I intend to buy the Park, and as I have no children to inherit my property, I will build an asylum for beggars in the center of the Park, twenty miles long by ten miles broad, and invite all the beggars in the world to come and live with me. I'll be a king among beggars, and wear a straw hat on Sundays. Ha! ha! ha! what do you think of that?"

The incoherent and extravagant rhapsody of the old merchant, the increasing wildness of his sunken eyes, and the hysterical laugh with which he concluded, alarmed the stock-broker.

"Be quiet, my dear Mr. Tracey, for God's sake, be quiet," said the broker, leading his companion toward an arm-chair and seating him.

Owen Tracey made no resistance, but muttering a few unintelligible words, reclined his head drowsily upon the back of his chair.

Francis Mortimer cast a stealthy glance at the merchant, as he left the apartment. Perceiving Mrs. Tracey in the hall, he approached her and whispered :

“ You had better send for a doctor, madam.”

“ I have already dispatched a messenger to Doctor Jones,” said Mrs. Tracey.

“ Something is wrong, I fear,” said the broker, tapping his finger on his forehead, “ but he is quiet at present. Good morning, madam.”

As the stock-broker opened the front door and passed into Chambers street, a young man glided adroitly by him, and entered the hall. He advanced toward the private apartment of Owen Tracey.

Mrs. Tracey was standing near the door, with her hand upon the knob.

On seeing his brother's wife, the young man was slightly confused, but he advanced, and said in a tone somewhat apologetic :

“ I must see Owen a moment.”

“ You can't see him,” replied Mrs. Tracey. “ He is ill, and you will irritate him to madness.”

“ Think what you will of me,” said Alfred Tracey, “ I must see him, and I will see him!”

At his approach, Mrs. Tracey shrunk back involuntarily, and the young man entered his brother's apartment. He hastened toward him, and laid his hand lightly upon his shoulder.

“ Owen.”

The old merchant raised his head and gazed unconsciously at the speaker.”

“ Owen !”

“ Well, Mr. Mortimer.”

“ Don't you know me, Owen ?” said the young man, speaking to the other, somewhat rudely.

The merchant started to his feet and surveyed the countenance of his visitor with a scowl which grew more fierce and malignant every instant.

“ I want some money, Owen.”

“ How dare you come hither, Alfred,” demanded the merchant, foaming with rage, “ how dare you ?”

“ Because I am desperate.”

“ Ha ! ha ! ha ! I like desperate people. Give me your hand, my boy. You are desperate and so am I. Ha ! ha ! ha ! we'll have

rare sport, my boy. We'll sing anthems on the pinnacle of St. John's Church—we'll cut each other's throats! Alfy, my boy!"

"Are you crazy, Owen?"

"Crazy?" said the merchant, assuming a stolid expression of countenance. "If I am crazy, whose fault is it but yours, with your base lies and thieving tricks? I know you, Alfred Tracey—what are you doing here?"

"I want some money—one or two hundred dollars."

"After all you have said and done to injure and degrade me, are you such a mean, contemptible puppy as to come to my house and ask me for money?"

"Don't provoke me, Owen. You had better give me the money."

"I'll tell you a secret, Alfred," said the merchant, approaching the young man, and hissing the words spitefully through his teeth. "I am worth this moment, forty millions of dollars, but I would not give you a cent to save you from starving. No, not a cent to save you from perdition!"

"Don't provoke me too far, Owen," replied the young man coolly. "There are arrows in my quiver!"

"Shoot away, then, Alfy. Arrows won't hurt me. Three thousand men fired bullets into my brain last night, and the only harm they have done me is to make my head feel a little heavy." And the merchant pressed his hand firmly to his temples.

"Are you ill, Owen?" inquired Alfred Tracey, "or is this a mere pretext to put me off. I am willing to come to terms. Give me two or three hundred dollars, and I will leave the city for a long time, perhaps for ever."

"I don't want you to leave the city."

"You don't? You told me the contrary a few days ago."

"I have changed my mind since."

"And why?"

"Because I think you will be hanged sooner in this city than elsewhere."

"Nonsense."

"Why are you in such haste to run away, Alfred? You are so importunate that I suspect you have committed a murder already."

The young man started, and his countenance became extremely pale.

"Ha! ha! ha! I have got your secret!" shouted the merchant. Then, lowering his voice to a whisper barely audible, he added: "I have seen her."

"Seen who?"

"The woman you murdered."

The features of Alfred Tracey grew more and more pallid, and he trembled.

"I have seen her in her coffin. I have seen her in my dreams—dead! dead! dead! You murdered her to spite me."

With a violent effort, the young man recovered himself, and stammered forth:

"You do not know what you are saying."

"You lie! Alfred, you lie! You are a murderer, and you will be hanged for it!" vociferated the merchant, with increasing vehemence. "Hanged by the neck till you are dead, and the devil gets your wicked soul. Ha! ha! ha!"

Clapping his hands repeatedly and laughing loudly, Owen Tracey commenced dancing around the room.

Mrs. Tracey suddenly appeared.

"Begone!" said she, addressing the young man. "Did I not tell you that your presence would irritate him to madness?"

As he hesitated to obey, Mrs. Tracey repeated in more commanding tones:

"Begone!"

And Alfred Tracey left his brother's house.

CHAPTER II.

RAISING THE WIND.



ow deuced provoking!" muttered Alfred Tracey, as he proceeded along Chambers-street, "that Owen should have got a kink in his brains at this particular moment. If he had been in his sober senses, I think I could have drawn a few hundreds from him, either by threatening or coaxing; but there is no doing any thing with a madman. Somehow or other, I must raise the wind before I see Henry Winter. Ah! there goes Seabury. Perhaps I can get a loan from him."

The young man hastened his steps, and soon overtook the young law student.

"I am glad I happened to come across you, Seabury. Can you accommodate me with a hundred dollars or so, for a few days?"

"Not a copper, Tracey," replied the student, "I am so hard up this morning, that I have just left my barber whistling for his dime."

"Tit for tat, Seabury," said Tracey. "He shaved you and you shaved him."

"Exactly. The fact is, the old man keeps me on such short allowance now-a-days, that I am two thirds of the time a walking advertisement,—pockets to let."

Tracey laughed.

"If you want money," continued the student, "why don't you apply to that lucky dog, Fred. Willoughby?"

"I haven't time to hunt him up, this morning. There is a piece of business on the tapis, which ———"

"Whew! I understand."

"You will hear something in a few days—but about Willoughby. Has he come into possession of his property?"

"Yes."

"What is he reputed to be worth?"

"A hundred thousand dollars, in lands and houses, besides a large amount in stocks and no trifle in ready money. Old Barton is the law agent of the executors, and the whole business of drawing and executing papers has gone through our office."

"And how much ready money, do you suppose, Willoughby received from the executors?"

"I can't say precisely how much. No longer ago than yesterday some seven or eight thousand dollars were transferred from the executor's account, in the Merchant's Bank, to his private account."

"Very handsome, Seabury. Are you sure that he keeps a private account in the Merchant's Bank?"

"Quite sure, but why do you ask?"

"Oh! for mere curiosity," said Alfred Tracey with a laugh. "However, I must not waste the whole morning in this kind of chit-chat with you."

"Well, good luck, to you Tracey," replied the student. "I am sorry I haven't got that hundred dollars; and if I had it," he soliloquized as the other crossed Broadway in the direction of the Park, "I would see you in a hotter place than Colonel Winter's hell, before I would lend it to you."

The thought had occurred to Alfred Tracey, toward the conclusion of the preceding conversation, that he might, perhaps, obtain assistance from Quarles, and, at last, the information which he had gained in relation to the funds of Frederick Willoughby afforded him a pretext for calling upon his associate. Without delay therefore he repaired to the quarters of the accomplished forger.

"You are surprised at seeing me, Quarles," said the young man with a certain hesitation of manner, "but the fact is, as Seabury says, I have two good reasons for my visit—the first is that I have already obtained some important information about Fred. Willoughby; and the second is, that I wish to borrow some money."

And thereupon he related to Robert Quarles the particulars of his loss in the bowling saloon.

"I must see Winter at twelve o'clock," he continued, "to complete

the arrangements for our jaunt. Of course, I must pay the bills out and in. I cannot stir a peg without money."

"How much did you lose last night?"

"About two hundred and forty dollars."

"There is a moral in your story, Tracey, take it as you will—don't carry money in your pocket, or don't get drunk."

"But the mischief is done, and the question is, will you advance me a trifle?"

"You are entirely cleaned out?"

"Without a dollar."

"I never lend money, Tracey, I tell you frankly. But I am always ready to share with my friends while I have a shot in the locker."

And so saying, Robert Quarles thrust his hand into his pantaloons pocket and drew forth a handful of silver and copper coin which he laid upon the table and divided carefully into two equal piles. Then taking up one of the piles and counting the coins audibly he placed the money in the hands of Alfred Tracey.

"One dollar and sixty cents, Tracey—there you have one-half of the available capital in my possession."

"And of what use will this trifling sum be to me?" inquired the young man, gazing first at Quarles and then at the coin, with a mixture of vexation and astonishment.

"I'll lay you a wager of the balance of my capital," said Quarles, "that you may take a position at any point in Broadway for one hour, and four persons out of every five that pass you, will have less than one dollar and sixty cents in their pockets. I was in a line of business a few years ago that gave me an insight into these matters, and I assure you from observation and experience that few men have money, and those who have it, don't carry it in their wallets for the accommodation of pick-pockets."

"All this has nothing to do with my case," replied Alfred Tracey pettishly.

"Nothing?"

"I tell you, Quarles, I must raise a hundred dollars somewhere. Can't you put me in the way of getting it?"

"Perhaps."

"I'll pay any reasonable shave."

"And the principal?"

"When I return, of course—when I return."

"An excellent chance for capitalists to make an investment. I wish I had the money, but there is my pile—I advise you, Tracey, to send

your second to Mr. Montessor, who, by your account, is a second Cræsus, to explain to him your position,—that you are ready and anxious to fight him, but that you are too poor to get on the ground; I'll bet my pile that he sends the money."

"By heavens, Quarles, you are jesting with me!" exclaimed Alfred Tracey, biting his lips.

"If you are getting angry, there is an end of it," said the forger, banishing from his voice and demeanor the subtle irony which had puzzled and irritated his visitor. "So you are really determined to fight this man Montessor?"

Quarles scanned the features of his companion, and continued gravely:

"Enough—I see you have fallen into the trap."

"What do you mean?"

"I was at the City Hotel yesterday, you remember, when—when—"

"Yes, yes, I remember," replied Tracey, impatiently.

"As I read this affair, Montessor came to the dinner purposely to insult you."

"So much the worse, d—n him!"

"He wants a shot at you, Tracey, depend upon it—though why he should risk a million against a borrowed capital of one dollar and sixty cents is not entirely dear. But I conjecture—"

"Well?"

"That he has greater cause of hatred to you than you to him."

The young man started, cast a keen suspicious glance at the forger, and replied angrily:

"You are interfering, Quarles, in what is none of your business,—and as for this paltry sum," he continued, flinging the coin violently on the floor, "you may give it to the porter or the boot-black."

Robert Quarles threw himself carelessly on a lounge and laughed heartily.

"Why, Tracey, when a man wants to borrow money, he must submit to all sorts of impertinence." Suddenly checking his merriment he added gravely: "And now, what about Frederick Willoughby?"

"A matter of moonshine, I suppose," replied Alfred Tracey sullenly; "I have learned that Willougeby has a considerable amount, some thousands of dollars, on deposit in the Merchant's Bank."

"From a reliable source?"

"Yes, indeed, perfectly reliable."

"Then," said Quarles rising with an aspect of complacency. "I will undertake to recruit your finances."

"How, Bob, in heaven's name?"

"I will fill up a check on the Merchant's Bank, say for eight hundred and thirty nine dollars and seventy six cents, with the signature of Frederick Willoughby, and you shall present it for payment."

The young man reflected an instant, and shook his head doubtfully.

"We'll divide the plunder, Tracey, and do as we list afterward."

"It won't answer, Bob," said the other speaking slowly; "I am too well known to undertake the game so daringly. We must get Anderson or Henshaw to fly the kite."

"And then there will be another man in our secret, and another to divide the money."

"True, true."

"Besides, if you want this money to-day—"

"Well, what then?"

"You must draw it yourself. The check shall be ready in half an hour—but we can't bring Anderson or Henshaw to the scratch without a long palaver."

After walking five or six times up and down the apartment, in a thoughtful mood, Alfred Tracey remarked to the forger:

"I'll tell you what, Quarles. I am going out to make one more effort to raise the wind. If I don't succeed, and I confess the chance is a desperate one, I will come back and talk the matter over with you."

"Very well. You will find me here until eleven o'clock."

"And the check?"

"You shall see," replied Robert Quarles, opening a portfolio that was lying upon the table and placing the necessary writing materials before him.

Then he commenced picking up the coin which Alfred Tracey had scattered over the floor.

CHAPTER III.

THE DOOM OF ALFRED TRACEY.



DESCENDING the stairs cautiously Alfred Tracey left the hotel of Sylvanus Westervelt, and after a brisk walk of two or three minutes duration, reached the gate of a narrow alley or court, opening between two brick dwell-

ings in Beekman-street. Entering the gate he proceeded along the paved alley until at the distance of twenty yards from the street he discovered a two-story building, constructed originally with the design of converting its apartments exclusively into law offices. At the end of the building, toward Beekman-street, there were two chambers on the lower floor, whose doors were adorned with many tin signs, on which the words Attorney and Counselor at Law might be plainly deciphered. At the other extremity, the lower story consisted of a single room extending the whole depth of the building, reated and occupied as a billiard-room.

As Alfred Tracey passed through the wide entry into which the law offices of Bartimeus Jones and Patrick Donnelly, respectively, opened, the peculiar clink of the billiard balls sounded in his ears. He mounted a flight of stairs leading to a corridor of six or eight feet in width, on each side of which, at regular distances, were doors of ordinary dimensions. He proceeded along the corridor until he arrived at the third door on the left, when he stopped, and rapped gently at the door.

"Enter," said the voice of a person from within.

The young man opened the door and entered an apartment of moderate size, whose furniture consisted of a cherry table, half a dozen chairs, a wash-stand, basin and towel, and a couple of settees, with green cushions, ranged against the wall, the cushions being coarse cotton twilling of a faded green color, stuffed with moss. There was, besides, hanging against the wall a looking-glass with a coarse picture of a Swiss cottage in the upper division, and a cracked mirror, one corner of which was entirely wanting, in the lower.

A well-dressed man was seated at the table with a portion of a pack of cards in his left hand. The remainder of the pack was spread upon the table before him. As the door opened, he looked up, and recognizing his visitor, he simply said,

"Good morning, Tracey," and resumed the dealing of the cards.

"At your studies, Harker?" said Alfred Tracey with a forced smile which had the expression of a sneer.

The person at the table was indeed no other than Captain Harcourt, alias John Harker, the alias being, however, his real name, whose swindling propensities were exposed by James Fogle at the Club House in Broadway.

"I have just got the clue to one of Sam. Percy's tricks," replied Harker; "so just sit down for a minute, till I run off the pack."

Hardly a minute elapsed, ere Harker continued with a smile of triumph:

"That's it; Sam. Percy won't come it over me again on that tack. What say you, Tracey?" he added, gathering up the cards, "a quiet game this morning?"

"No, Harker," replied Alfred Tracey, "my call is one of business."
"Business?"

"The world has treated me badly in money matters within a day or two, and I want to get a hundred dollars or so from you."

A slight cloud passed over the features of John Harker, but it vanished instantly, and he replied,

"I told you, Tracey, when you insisted on restoring the money to that Willoughby—a fellow as rich as Astor—that we wanted it more than he, and that it would be much more sensible to divide it fairly between us—that is, you, Harry Orme, and myself. He, Willoughby, would never have made a fuss about it; I read his character at a glance; he would rather have lost five times the amount than suffer it to be known publicly that he had associated, even by accident, with the fraternity."

"It would not have done, Harker. You know I am not squeamish about trifles; but it would not have done. You were introduced by me, and had I pursued a different course, notwithstanding his disregard of money, he would have suspected me."

"Well—and so you sacrificed hundreds for his opinion—much good may it do you. I see," continued Harker with some bitterness, "that you have taken a great notion to the big-bugs, lately."

"I am a free man," rejoined Alfred Tracey with a slight manifestation of hauteur—very slight, yet sufficient to nettle the gambler—"and I presume have the privilege of choosing my associates."

"Yes, yes; cut us all," replied Jack Harker in a tone of irritation.

"Who talks of cutting you?" said Tracey quickly; "but this is nothing to do with my business here."

"I have no money to lend you," said the other doggedly. "I pay my way in these deuced hard times, and that is the best I can do."

"Bah! Jack; you are always in funds, and as you talk of paying your way, you must be conscious that I do not ask this money of you as a loan."

"How then?"

"As a debt."

"Very good, Tracey, very good," replied Harker laughing, "and pray, how much am I indebted to you?"

"Here is my memorandum," said Alfred Tracey, producing a small blank book, many of whose leaves were filled with names and figures in pencil. "Here is the page."

John Harker took the book from the hands of his visitor and scanned the page, item by item, with a supercilious smile, humming at the same time an air from Norma.

"So—balance against Jack Harker, one hundred and thirty dollars. Always pay my gambling debts, Tracey, you know that; but let me compare, let me compare."

Harker produced his pocket-book, and searching the loose papers, found a memorandum of his own, which he compared with that presented by Alfred Tracey.

"All right, Tracey," continued the gambler, "except one item. I don't understand the debt, May 29, of one hundred and fifty dollars."

"A hundred and fifty to a hundred, in the match between George Harvey and the Frenchman."

"Have you got that down? that was a sham bet."

"A sham bet?"

"Yes; as you know very well; made to blind the stranger who was betting with Harry Orme."

"I know no such thing."

"So, my good fellow," continued Jack Harker, "you perceive by your own account, that you are the debtor instead of the creditor."

"That's a mistake, Harker. Do you deny this debt of one hundred and fifty dollars?"

"I do."

"And you won't pay it?"

"No."

"On what ground?"

"That it was a sham bet," replied Harker contemptuously, "and you know it."

"You are a liar and a swindler!" said Alfred Tracey, with the most provoking coolness.

The countenance of John Harker changed in a moment, from an expression of contemptuous indifference to that of savage ferocity. The blood rushed impetuously to his face, till every vein became turgid and swollen, and his features assumed a dark livid hue. It was this peculiarity of his occasional fits of anger, which had given him the soubriquet of Black Jack. He started from his seat, approached within one or two paces of his visitor, and said, in a guttural voice, with a kind of jerking expression on every syllable:

"Take back those words, Tracey. I have borne insults from my victims, but," he added, with a horrible oath, "I will not bear them from an accomplice like you."

"Will you pay me?" demanded Alfred Tracey, coolly, pointing to the balance in his memorandum book.

"Not a cent."

"Then I repeat," said the other, with a sneering, fiendish smile, "you are a liar and a swindler!"

A small hatchet, such as are employed by carpenters and other handicraftsmen, with a keen, polished edge, and a hammer head, was lying upon a chair near John Harker. Under the impulse of violent passion he seized the handle of the hatchet and struck Alfred Tracey a violent blow upon the head.

An instant afterward the gambler, though destitute of acute sensibilities or strong principles, would have given worlds, had he possessed them, to recall the fatal blow. With a sickening emotion of horror he had felt the head of the hatchet sink deeply into the skull of his visitor.

Alfred Tracey fell heavily upon the floor, and for several seconds remained completely insensible. Then, with a succession of low, feeble groans, he raised himself on his knees, and pawed the air with his hands. His eye-balls rolled wildly in their sockets, and his features twitched convulsively. He articulated indistinctly, but audibly :

“Mercy, mercy, mercy, Mr. Montessor! I did not intend to murder her.”

The thoughts of John Harker turned instinctively upon the importance of escaping the terrible consequences of his crime. The blood, the brains of his victim were oozing from the fearful wound he had inflicted. Nothing could save the life of Alfred Tracey. But who could predict that his mutterings and groanings might not turn into shrieks and execrations in the death struggle which was rapidly approaching!

Again the gambler raised the hatchet and dealt a crushing blow upon the skull of the wounded man. Another, and yet another. The rolling of the eye-balls—the convulsive motions of the arms and muscles of the face ceased—the suppressed groans died utterly away—the disfigured corpse of Alfred Tracey, ghastly and bleeding, was stretched upon the floor.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MURDERER AND HIS VICTIM.



HE deed was done.

During several minutes John Harker stood, gazing at the lifeless remains of Alfred Tracey. Then, as if suddenly recollecting himself, he sprang to the door of his apartment and turned the key in the lock.

He left the door and cautiously approached his victim. A vague fear seized him. Tracey might not yet be dead. He feared every instant to hear a faint groan or a gur-

gling inspiration—to see him toss his arms irregularly—perhaps turn toward him with his glaring eye-balls, and curse him with the withering glance of a dying man.

Vain fears!

And yet, with what a sensation of pure, unmingled joy would the murderer at that moment have beheld the corpse of Alfred Tracey rise up and stand before him, a living man, with the faculty of speech, and the power of motion! How gladly now would he endure insult after insult, rather than the burden of overwhelming guilt! A venial crime which dexterously transferred the contents of a stranger's purse to his, might have caused him perhaps, a smile of triumph; but the taking of life, the penalty of murder, he shrank alike from the contemplation of the deed, and the exaction of the penalty. He was as it were, stunned and bewildered by the suddenness and enormity of the crime into which his passion had led him. The provocation was great; but the retaliation so far transcended his desires or intentions, that he could not account for the impulse which had nerved him to the fatal blow.

Had he really killed his victim? Was it not a horrible dream, an illusion of the fancy?

He knelt by the side of the corpse, and, laying his hand upon the shoulder of the murdered man, shook him repeatedly.

"Get up, Tracey! I bear no malice against you for your bitter words. Get up; I hit you harder than I meant—but you will live yet, my good fellow; you will live yet! Get up!"

The lips of the corpse were stiffening already—and as the gambler gazed fearfully at his victim, he perceived that the jaws were firmly set, and the hair in the vicinity of the wound was matted with gory clots. Upon the floor, near the head of the murdered man, was a puddle of dark venous blood.

John Harker rose from his kneeling posture with a shudder, threw himself upon one of the settees, and covered his face with his hands. But he could not shut out from his vision the spectacle of horror which he had conjured up by his deadly violence. The fiendish smile of Alfred Tracey—the murderous blow—the ghastly wounds—the imploring gestures—the contortions of the death agony—the blood, the mangled remains—singly or in combination, were constantly before his eyes. He turned his face downward, and pressed closely to the coarse cushion of the settee, but uselessly, if his object in doing so was to escape the appalling spectacle.

All the while the summer sun darted his golden rays through the windows of the apartment; and they danced with the moats and glistened upon the smooth floor, and played, as it were, with the ghastliness of the dead. Out of doors the air was filled with the buzz and hum of insects, beasts and men, some near and some remote, blending their indistinct noises into the murmur of a great city. Yet the trill of a Canary bird, in a cage suspended in the rear of a dwelling-house in Beekman-street, at times sounded clearly and melodiously; and from the precincts of a garden in the vicinity came the shouts and laughter of children at play. And momentarily, also, was heard the light click of the billiard balls in the room beneath, and the tread of the players as they passed around the tables.

At length the agitation, the terror of the murderer began to subside—the conjurings of the imagination became less powerful, if not less hideous. His mind grew capable of reflection—the necessity of determination and action forced itself upon his judgment. The body of a man bearing the incontestible marks of deadly violence, was in his apartment. What course was it incumbent upon him to pursue? Should he voluntarily go before the chief of police, and avow to the

officers of the law that he had taken the life of Alfred Tracey in self-defense? Would his story in all its details be believed—would it save him from a verdict of manslaughter and a long, weary imprisonment in the State Prison? Then, on the other hand, what mercy could he expect if he attempted to conceal his crime, and failed in the attempt? His memory recalled the fate of numerous criminals who had, in this manner, subjected themselves to the extremest penalty of the law; and if he were disposed to make the attempt, how could he hope to remove the corpse of his victim from his apartment without awakening the curiosity or exciting the suspicions of his neighbors?

It is not strange, perhaps, that John Harker hesitated in making a decision. The taint of suspicion had already fallen upon his character. Even in its most favorable aspect, the killing of Alfred Tracey would render him a marked man. His present associates, as guilty as himself of minor offenses against the law, would abandon him under the odium of an accusation of murder. The more he reflected upon the subject, the more he felt inclined to hazard the attempt to conceal his crime from human eyes. As yet, no person was cognizant to the death of Alfred Tracey, much less of his agency in producing it.

The air of the apartment became sultry and oppressive, and the murderer bethought himself of going forth into the city, for the purpose of seeking to restore, by fresh air and active exercise, the equilibrium of his mental faculties. He rose, and averting his face from the corpse, moved toward the door. He unlocked the door, and entering the corridor, carefully locked it on the outside, and put the key in his pocket.

As he stepped from the porch to the paved alley, he perceived the marker of the billiard room near the door, at the other extremity of the building, sitting upon the head of an empty beer-barrel, whistling "Rory O'More," and keeping time by drumming with his fists, and thumping with his heels upon the head and sides of the barrel.

"Fine day, Mr. Harker," exclaimed the marker, with a shrill, wry voice.

"Yes, very fine, Abel," said Harker, turning toward Beekman-street.

"I say, Harker, there was a devil of a noise up stairs, half an hour ago. It was in your room, wasn't it?"

The gambler paused on hearing these words, turned about and approached within a few steps of the marker.

"You heard it, Abel? Yes, yes, it was in my room. I was trying

to put a pine box, filled with truck of one kind or another, on the upper shelf of the closet, and it slipped out of my hands upon the floor."

"It sounded more like a sack of wheat, or a man knocked down in a fight than a box, and I was going to run up stairs and inquire about it, but I was busy just then."

"It was nothing but a box, Abel," said John Harker; "so you would have had your labor for your pains."

"What is the matter with you, Harker? You look strangely."

"Do I?"

"Pale and lantern-jawed, and bad out of the eyes."

"No wonder," said Harker, "I was up nearly all night."

"You don't say?" replied the young man with an affected drawl.

Harker was turning away, when a thought suddenly occurred to him.

"Whose barrel is that, Abel—is it Marvin's?"

"Yes, sir."

"Won't he sell it? I want it for a particular purpose."

"Going to kill a hog, and salt him down, eh?"

"No, no, Abel; but I am in earnest about the barrel; what is it worth?"

"A dollar, I reckon."

"Tell Marvin that I want it, when he comes in, will you?"

The young man, by way of reply, gave an affirmative nod, and Harker left him, proceeding along the paved alley to Beekman-street.

Unnatural, unearthly, phantom-like, appeared the street and the buildings on either side, and the carts loaded with merchandise, and the pedestrians hurrying over the sidewalks. The distraction of his mind modified the action of the senses. The familiar objects which surrounded him presented a new picture to his imagination. It seemed to him as if he were dreaming of a strange city in some far distant land; or, as if he were wandering among specters in a realm of shadows and illusions. He paused in wonderment to look at a man in a common working dress, with a spade in his hand, who walked before him. The minute details of common things attracted his notice. He remarked the changing shadows which the moving wheels of the carts, continually passing, threw upon the pavement—the trifling eddies of dust and rubbish which the light summer breeze whirled through the air near the surface of the earth—the inequalities of the stones in the paved streets—the names and devices upon the signs which were stuck over the doors and windows of many of the build-

ings. The glare of the sun upon the pavements, and the stoops, and the brick walls, and roofs, was bright and dazzling; but he saw, or fancied that he saw, dark blood-red spots here and there upon them, continually moving, in singular contrast with the surrounding brightness.

He sauntered into the Park and seated himself on a wooden bench, in the shade of a young linden. He gazed listlessly upon the green grass, and the music of the rustling leaves of the shade trees fell upon unheeding ears. Only he bared his burning forehead to the summer breeze.

There came strolling along the graveled walk a group of merry children, and they stopped to behold the dreamer, laughing and talking, as merry children always do.

Back to the days of his early youth, flew the thoughts of John Harker. He recalled the memory of his mother, and bethought him of the hours when she rocked him to sleep, singing to him the songs of the nursery, and when she taught him to repeat after her, the words of prayer, and when she exhorted him to avoid wicked children and wicked practices. He thought of his school days, when with a score of playful boys and girls he went to school in the old stone school-house in the chestnut-grove, where his father and mother had gone to school before him. The blackberry frolics, the boyish games on moonlight summer evenings, the chestnut pickings, the slidings down Clover Hill upon the snow; all these scenes rose vividly before him. He remembered how, as he grew up, he had toiled in the fields and forests, that surrounded his native village; how he had hunted and shot woodcock and quail; how he had gone to spinning-visits and quilting-frolics and singing schools with the prettiest girls in the neighborhood; how he had dressed himself in his best attire on the Sabbath, and walked by the path along the brook, with his sisters and cousins and sweethearts, to the village church. Then he recalled the growth of his discontent and ambition, his adventurous visit to New York, the gradual inroads upon his early principles, which the strength of his passions and the evil example of others had produced. And now what report of him would go back to his native village, where his parents still resided, where his sisters, comfortably settled in homes of their own, were bringing up their children in the practice of industry and virtue, where the playfellows of his boyish days were planting and reaping the harvest of their fertile fields in honest independence?

These thoughts were depressing, painful. Harker rose from the bench and left the Park, to mingle with the great tide of human exist-

ence which rises and surges in Broadway. Every where he retained his individuality, not vaguely, but fully, perfectly, amid the crowd, he was alone.

He felt no interest in the aims, the excitements, the pursuits of others. The guilt resting on his soul, the dangers impending over him, were in turn, the subjects of his contemplation.

Occasionally, as he wandered through the lower part of the city, he stopped at one of the hotels or drinking houses on his route, and slaked his thirst temporarily with potations of gin, or brandy and water. He felt no hunger, craved no food. Nor did he experience any intoxication from the liquor he drank so freely.

About the middle of the afternoon, the murderer, restless, and as yet doubtful and irresolute, approached the Hoboken Ferry. The steamboat bell was ringing, and seemed to warn him to fly, at least for a time, from the narrow bustling streets, and the searching eyes of his fellow men. He passed on board the ferry-boat, and was rapidly borne across the river to Hoboken. He looked toward the city. It loomed up before him like a slaughter-house, reeking with the blood of human victims. He leaned upon the railing of the steamboat, and watched the rising and falling waters as they broke into foam and spray. At length, shuddering, he withdrew his gaze, for, amid the glittering foam and dashing spray, he perceived the pale countenance, the struggling form of Alfred Tracey.

He touched the shore, and as he walked by the ferry-house, the thought flashed across his mind that his wisest course would be to escape without delay to the interior of the country, and leave the evidences of his guilt behind him. And then, trembling at the hazard of the thought, he hastened back to the ferry-boat, and returned to the city.

He strolled along the wharves to Canal-street, and thence down Greenwich-street and up Barclay-street and up Broadway.

As he passed Masonic Hall, two young men were standing on the side-walk, in front of the building, conversing together. A question of one of them arrested his attention.

“Have you seen any thing of Alfred Tracey to-day?”

Harker paused suddenly and glanced toward the speaker; but perceiving it was not addressed to him, he turned a step or two aside, as if to examine the architecture of the building; and listening, he overheard distinctly the conversation which ensued between the young men.

“No, Winter,” was the reply to the query.

"He has placed me in a very awkward fix about his quarrel with Mr. Montessor."

"Ah! how is that?"

"Why, you see, Travis, he put me forward to act as his friend, promising to meet me this morning, and has actually left me in the lurch."

"Indeed?"

"Devilish bad treatment—eh, Travis?"

"Yes, bad enough."

"I am hunting for him in every direction. If he don't explain his conduct satisfactorily, I'll cow-hide him."

And the speakers moved on.

The murderer continued his stroll up Broadway. The door of a Church was open, and he entered. On the fluted columns that rose to the ceiling, and on the painted wall, the sun's rays, reflected through windows of stained glass, shone in variegated colors. He seated himself in one of the pews, and curiously began to turn over the leaves of a Bible which he discovered on the cushion beside him. Near the altar was a bridal group. There was a sound of voices—the names of William Pettigrew and Caroline Percy, and some half familiar phrases of the marriage service were heard by him, and then the priest and the bridegroom, and the bride, and the small party of friends, passed out through the broad aisle and went away. Harker gazed at the bride as she swept proudly by him, leaning on her husband's arm, but when he saw that her white bridal dress was covered with stains of fresh blood, he rested his forehead upon the top of the pew and looked no more. Nor did he move until the sexton came to him and shook him gently, and told him that the hour had arrived to close the Church.

And again he walked hither and thither through the city, perplexed in the extreme with the difficulties and dangers of his position.

At sunset, John Harker bethought him of returning to his chamber. It was necessary to determine and to act. He recalled the conversation of the young men in Broadway. On reflection, there was nothing in that conversation to excite alarm. They knew that Alfred Tracey had failed to keep an appointment, but it was evident that no suspicion existed of the cause of his absence. Nor any clue by which to trace him to the building in the rear of Beekman-street. The idea of confessing his guilt or attempting to palliate it by an ingenious plea of self-defense, had by this time entirely vanished from the mind of the murderer.

It was nearly dark when he arrived in Beekman-street, and crept slyly and cautiously along the alley toward the building in which lay the corpse of his victim. He entered the front door unobserved, and stole, on tip-toe, through the lower entry. The doors of the lawyers' offices were closed, but the voices of at least two persons could be heard distinctly from the office in the rear. Harker listened.

"You were in the Circuit, to-day?"

"Yes, a few minutes."

"Have they got through Dingle's case yet?"

"Not they. The State is hardly through the examination of witnesses."

"It will go hard with him. The judge is against the prisoner, I hear."

"Emmet is doing his best. I should not wonder if he got Dingle off with a verdict of manslaughter. There is no dispute about the killing; but from the cross-examination it is evident that the defense intend to insist that the Dutchman pushed Dingle before the latter struck him."

"Manslaughter—ten years in the State prison, perhaps—it is almost as bad as hanging."

"So it is."

John Harker slunk up stairs with the caution of a thief, the words of the speaker ringing in his ears. "Ten years in the State prison—almost as bad as hanging." He unlocked the door of his apartment and stole warily into the presence of the dead. There it was, near the center of the room, the corpse of Alfred Tracey—a dark, motionless object, invisible to the human eye. But the murderer felt that it was there—the testimony of the senses was as nothing to the moral instinct, if such a phrase may be permitted, which recognized the presence of the lifeless victim of ungovernable passion.

He grouped his way across the apartment to one of the settees, and seating himself thereon, waited—waited patiently and silently, hour after hour. In the course of the evening some person came to the door and knocked, but he uttered no invitation to enter, and the visitor went away. He looked out of the window—there were lights in the neighboring dwelling—he listened—there were players in the billiard room underneath—and so he waited till the lights should be extinguished and the players should go forth—perhaps at midnight or later. What words can describe the feelings of that man, immoral and vicious though he had been, during his weary watch with the dead, in that solitary apartment?—the pangs of remorse—the shudders of fear—

the apparitions of horror which assailed and tormented him? Oh! let him who stands in the vestibule of crime, and is dazzled by the false glare of honors gained by hypocrisy, and wealth procured by fraud, remember that within are the caverns of shame and terror and despair.

At length the lights were extinguished, and the players went forth. All was silent. The murderer rose, lit a lamp with a lucifer match, and carefully closed the window shutters of the apartment. He had nerved his mind by dint of extraordinary efforts to the fulfillment of the dreadful task which he had imposed upon himself—and thenceforth there was no flinching—no hesitation—no external signs of fear. He descended the stairs and opened the door leading into the paved alley. No human eye met his. No human ear heard his footsteps. He hastened toward the further extremity of the building, took up the beer barrel he had purchased of the marker, and carried it up stairs to his apartment. By the aid of the hatchet with which Alfred Tracey had been killed, one of the barrel heads was speedily removed.

Two hours—hours of ceaseless, fearful toil, and the work was done.

The corpse of the murdered man, horribly mangled—his clothes, even his watch—so cautious was the murderer in concealing the evidence of his guilt—were stowed in the barrel—the barrel head was replaced, and the bung driven in tightly. The stains of blood were carefully washed from the floor, and from the hatchet, and a few hairs, stiffened with gore, were gathered and burned in the flame of the dim flickering lamp.

It was bravely and cunningly done.

But will no circumstance unforeseen—improbable perhaps—reveal to the eyes of man, the crushed and mangled body, though hemmed around with thick staves of oak, and hooped with hoops of iron?

The judgment of God has overtaken Alfred Tracey.

Will his murderer escape?

A brave and a cunning man is John Harker, but neither bravery nor cunning gives immunity to crime.

CHAPTER V.

THE SCENE CHANGES.



DOCTOR Everard was walking slowly across the drawing-room, with his hands clasped behind him. Near a small work-table stood Helen Everard, arranging a bouquet of roses, carnations and geraniums, in a porcelain flower vase. By her side was Frederick Willoughby, watching every movement of her delicate fingers, and occasionally whispering a compliment to her, at the expense of the fragrant and beautiful flowers.

While engaged thus quietly and thus pleasantly, the ringing of the door bell was heard, and shortly afterward Wilfred Montessor entered the apartment. He exchanged a few words with the young man and the maiden, and then joining the doctor in his promenade, began to converse with him in low tones, on the subject of the projected duel.

In the course of a few minutes, Miss Everard approached her father and remarked :

“ Mr. Willoughby has asked my consent—”

“ Indeed,” interposed Montessor, smiling.

Miss Everard blushed slightly, but continued ;

“ To accompany him this evening to the concert, at the Odeon.”

“ Go, Helen,” replied the doctor, “ if it is agreeable to you, unless Mr. Montessor ——”

“ No, my dear doctor, you must not interpose me as an obstacle to

the amusement of my young friends. The sooner I complete the explanation which I have come hither to render you, the sooner I shall be able to discharge other important and pressing engagements."

"Then, Mr. Willoughby," said Miss Everard gaily, "the sooner we take our departure, the greater will be the favor we shall confer upon these gentlemen." And she hastened from the apartment, to complete her toilet for the concert room.

"My loss is your gain," said the traveler, "addressing Willoughby, with a significant glance."

When the young people had departed, Montessor resumed the conversation with Doctor Everard.

"As I was telling you, doctor, I have just had an interview with my friend Gardiner. My quarrel with Alfred Tracey resulted in a challenge from him, which I accepted promptly. But as Gardiner informs me, the young man has not only failed to meet his friend according to appointment, but has been missing during the whole day, from his accustomed haunts of dissipation, and his second, Winter, avows the belief that he has absconded from the city."

"Strange! is it not?"

"My surprise is so much the less, since I know him to be a consummate villain—and a villain is almost invariably a coward."

"A consummate villain! and yet you were willing to meet him?"

"Willing, nay, anxious to meet him," replied Montessor, gravely.

Doctor Everard paused, and placing his arm within that of the traveler, remarked, in a tone of inquiry:

"You have a powerful motive, then, to impel you to action?"

"I have. This young man Tracey has committed a base, an atrocious crime, under circumstances which shield him from the condemnation of the legal tribunals. I have ascertained his guilt clearly—and by a withering insult, not undeserved on other grounds, I have sought to provoke him to a personal contest in the field. In this proceeding, I have regarded myself, not as a duelist, but as a minister of justice."

The doctor was absorbed in thought; after a brief pause, Montessor continued:

"And now Gardiner insists, as a matter of etiquette, that the affair is at an end; and that, even if Alfred Tracey presents himself, I must not fight him."

"So much the better."

"You would say otherwise, if you knew the atrocity of his crime, and how nearly his guilt concerns me."

"I have my suspicions," said Doctor Everard, thoughtfully.

"How then," exclaimed Wilfred Montessor, with deep and powerful emotion, "how then shall I punish him?"

"Let him live—resign him to the judgment of God."

These words were uttered by Doctor Everard in grave melodious accents. Involuntarily the traveler looked upward, clasped his hands together and murmured:

"Again—again."

The doctor beheld the emotion of the calm, the stately Montessor, with surprise.

"Did you speak those words, doctor?" inquired Montessor, earnestly.

"Certainly."

"It is wonderful."

"Explain, Mr. Montessor."

"Last night, in the solitude of my chamber, methought, as I gazed upward at the stars, I beheld the face of Zorah adorned with heavenly beauty—and a voice like unto the voice of angels said to me: 'Let him live—resign him to the judgment of God!' And so, you repeat the warning—word for word."

"Were you awake last night, as now?"

"As now."

"Above us, and beneath us, and around us," said Doctor Everard, "in marvelous contiguity, lies the spiritual world. Through the journey of life, angels of light protect and warn us—demons of darkness discourage and tempt us. When we are ready to sink in the mire of sloth, or to perish in the pit-falls of vice, the loving kindness of a venerated father, of a sainted mother, bears us up; and the radiant faces of cherubs, the brothers and sisters of our youth, beckon us onward. When fever heats the brow, they fan us with genial breezes; when sadness fills the soul, they delight us with heavenly music."

"Can such things be known?"

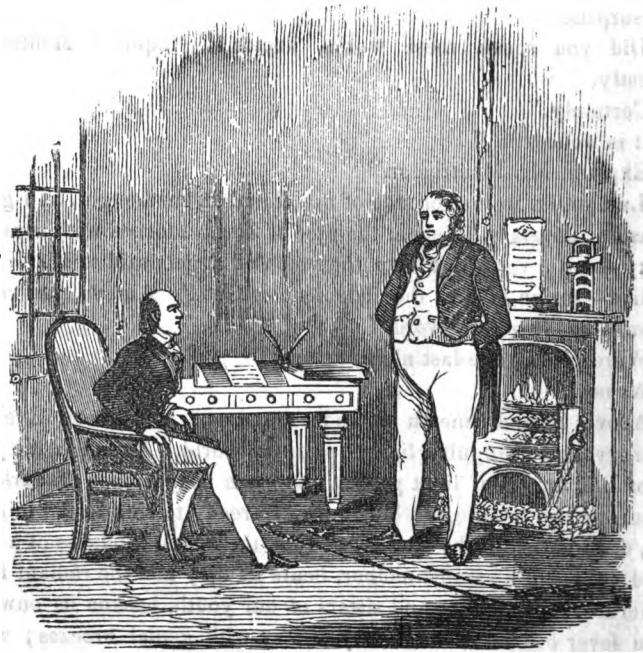
"Man is half angel, half brute. If he leads a life of action and of passion, if he exhausts his energies in the pursuit of pleasure and power, of wealth and fame, he shuns the immaterial and lives in the material. But if he cultivates the qualities of his intellectual and moral being, if he spurns the earth with his feet and strives to unfold his angel wings, he will not grope continually in utter darkness."

"And do you think then, doctor," inquired Wilfred Montessor, "that the spirit of Zorah truly appeared unto me?"

"It is a mystery," replied Doctor Everard, folding his arms and

gazing steadfastly in the face of the traveler. "Yet a wise and a prudent man will not lightly question the warnings of the spiritual world."

The friends parted.



CHAPTER VI.

THE SPY—THE FALSE ALARM.



ENEATH one of the arches at the entrance of the City Hall stood James Fogle, with his hands thrust into his trowsers pockets, and his hat slouched over his eyes. He leaned against a pilaster of hewn marble, peering through his half-closed eye-lids at the passers-by. At length he perceived in the darkening twilight, the figure of Mark Masters, the police officer. The latter was approaching the City Hall in an easterly direction, and Fogle has-

ened to meet him.

"I have found you all in good time, Mr. Masters," said the thief, in a low voice.

"What now, Fogle?" inquired the police officer, walking slowly onward.

"Why, you see there was an old grudge between Jack Harker and me, about an affair that happened last December; so when I blowed him at Colonel Winter's, says I, 'Jack, I have had my turn—quits shall it be?'"

"Well?"

"He is a bigger fool than I took him to be, for, instead of saying

quits on his side, and letting me alone, he watched his chance, and tried to fling me last week, in a trade I was making with Tom Phipps."

"Buying stolen goods, eh, Fogle?" said the police officer dryly.

Fogle raised his left hand as if deprecating the interruption, and continued.

"I lost fifty dollars by Jack Harker's malice; but, says I, to myself, 'two can play at this game; let him laugh that wins.' So, at odd times since last Thursday, I have kept a look out for my man. Jack has a den over a billiard room in Beekman-street, where he keeps his traps, and sometimes fleeces a green one. I walk along that way now and then, just to see what I can see, and I happen to think of it, yesterday morning ——"

"Talk fast, Mr. Fogle."

"Hist, Mr. Masters," said Fogle lowering his voice. "There goes Jack on the opposite side of the walk, sneaking along like a whipped cur."

The police officer glanced in the direction pointed out by Fogle, and at the same instant remarked:

"Well—yesterday morning?"

"Didn't I tell you, Mr. Masters," whispered Fogle, crouching behind the officer until John Harker had passed, "didn't I tell you from what I saw at Col. Winter's, that there was an understanding between the legs and Alfred Tracey?"

Mark Masters stopped abruptly, and with both hands poised on the head of his cane, impatiently rejoined,

"Alfred Tracey—what of him?"

"Yesterday morning, as I was strolling through Beekman-street, I saw young Tracey in the alley that leads to Marvin's billiard room, and following on, I saw him enter the door toward Beekman-street, and go up stairs."

"Are you sure of this, Fogle?"

"Can I see?" replied the thief, opening his eyelids a little wider than usual. "I tell you I saw him, and my notion is that he went up stairs to see Jack Harker, but whether to play with him, or to bait a hook to catch a flat, that is the question."

"What more, Fogle?"

"I kept on the watch to see if Harker and Tracey would not come out together, but neither of them appeared, and at last I got tired of waiting, and went away. Now, Mr. Masters, I am coming to the matter in hand."

Fogle perceived that the police officer was listening attentively, and he proceeded.

"As I was walking down Barclay-street about two hours ago, I saw Jack Harker come out of Willard's livery-stable and beckon to a carman who was passing with an empty cart. I stepped into a grog-shop hard by, and kept my eye on him. He talked with the carman five or ten minutes more or less, then left him and proceeded toward the river. The carman drove on toward Broadway, and as he came opposite to me, I perceived that it was Jake Ferris, one of my old cronies. So I hailed him, and he pulled up, apparently very glad to see me. 'Jake,' said I, 'how is trade with you to-day?' 'Dull enough,' said he. 'Then,' said I, 'go and put up your nag, and we'll spend the evening together, and have a talk about old times.' 'I can't do that,' said he. 'Why not?' said I. 'Oh,' said he, 'I have just picked up a customer, and who do you think it is?' 'How should I know?' said I. 'Sure enough,' said he; 'you would not guess in a week, and yet you are acquainted with him. My customer is John Harker.' 'What does Jack want with you?' said I. 'You must keep dark if I tell you,' said he. 'Of course,' said I. 'Then said he, 'he has hired me to come to his lodgings at nine o'clock this evening, and carry a box or barrel, or something of the sort, filled with very valuable goods, up town, as far as Tenth-street. The goods belong to a friend of his, who has got into trouble with his creditors, and he says further that he will meet me at the corner of Tenth-street and the Second avenue with a covered wagon, and relieve me of my load, and that his friend will be there to drive the wagon to the Jerseys and deposit the goods in a secure hiding-place.'"

"Why, your man Harker is getting sharp," interposed the police officer.

"Yes," said Fogle, winking expressively.

"To the Jerseys!"

"With that," continued Fogle, "I left Jake Ferris and went down to the livery-stable. A couple of men were greasing the wheels of a light wagon with a round leather top, and a single seat inside near the front of the wagon. 'This is just the thing I want,' said I, examining the wagon. 'You are too late this time,' replied one of the men, 'the wagon is hired out till to-morrow noon.' 'Are you sure?' said I. 'The gentleman that hired it was here not ten minutes ago. He is going to Long Island, isn't he, Isaiah?' said he, speaking to the hostler. 'It is none of my business where he is going, nor your's either,' said the other gruffly. 'If the wagon is hired that is enough,'

said I. As I was coming out of the stable, I met the proprietor. 'I was just looking at that wagon yonder,' said I, 'but the hostler tells me it is engaged.' 'Yes,' he replied, 'Mr. Harker came to me a quarter of an hour ago to get a horse and wagon to go into the country, and he picked out that wagon on account of some baggage or merchandize that he intends to take with him. Plenty of other vehicles, sir, one seat, two seat wagons.' 'Call again soon,' said I, and toddled out. Since then I have been looking for you to put you on Harker's track. I know the man, Mr. Masters. He loves his ease too well to turn out on a dark night, unless he has something at stake besides his tobacco box."

The police officer looked at Fogle, then commenced pacing backward and forward, beside the Park fence.

"If you could only contrive," said James Fogle, sidling up toward the officer, "to find out what sort of merchandize Harker is trading in, and who it belongs to, I am thinking you might make a good thing of it."

"I have it," exclaimed Mark Masters, tapping his forehead with the fore-finger of his right hand.

"Won't you do me a little favor, now, Mr. Masters.?" asked the thief.

The police officer turned toward Fogle with a look of surprise, and said gravely,

"What is it, Fogle?"

"If you have occasion to arrest Jack Harker, let me stand beside you?"

"Oh, that is it."

"I will point him out to you in the darkest night at ten paces distance."

"Well then, as a spy?"

"Yes, as a spy."

Masters reflected an instant, consulted his watch, and then said to Fogle, as he retraced his steps toward the police office:

"Meet me in forty minutes at the south-east corner of Houston-street and the Bowery."

Fogle nodded and passed on in front of the City Hall. He increased his speed after leaving the Park, and pursued his way steadily through Chatham-street and along the Bowery. As he approached the termination of his walk he felt thirsty and stopped at the porter-house of Bill Smith to refresh himself.

The bar-keeper stood in the center of the room, clasping the front

round of a rush chair in his right hand, and holding the chair at arms length. Around him were half a score of young men looking on. Perceiving Fogle at the bar, the bar-keeper put down the chair and stepped behind the counter.

"A glass of ale."

While the bar-keeper was drawing the ale, one and another of the young men tried unsuccessfully to perform the feat of raising and supporting the chair.

"It is no easy thing to do, Gaffney," said one of them after a fruitless effort.

"Pooh!" said Tom. Gaffney, coming forward, "I'll bet you drinks for the company that I can do it with my left hand."

"Done."

"It goes."

Gaffney drew a handkerchief from his pocket, and wiped the perspiration from his hands and stooping down, raised the chair with ease, assumed an erect posture, and held it out at arms length for the space of a minute or longer.

"Isn't that surprising?" said the young man who had taken the bet.

"Oh! very," said Luke Fordham, with a comical grimace that excited a laugh from the by-standers.

"I don't see any wit in your 'Oh! very,'" said the other.

"And it would have been still more surprising," said Luke, grinning, if he had done it with his right hand."

"How so?"

"Because he is left-handed."

"Left-handed, is he?" said the young man in a tone of vexation.

"Tom. Gaffney is a Benjaminite, of course he is, Ned," replied Harry Wilson.

"Nobody says nothing about them drinks," remarked Tom. Gaffney, moving toward the bar.

"I say," retorted the young man, "you have won them by a scurvy trick."

"What?" exclaimed Gaffney, turning quickly round.

"Don't get up a quarrel, Ned," said Harry Wilson, interposing, "treat out, and make the best of it."

"Keep your heyes hopen when you heat heggs," drawled Peter Fox.

In the midst of the laughter that followed, the voice of the bar-keeper was heard:

"Come up, boys, come up—Ned Clisby pays."

At that moment Bill Smith entered the porter-house, followed by Tim. Hardman and Jack Highflyer.

Just in time, fellows," said Smith, jocosely, placing one hand on his paunch.

The young men, with their glasses in their hands, gathered around Jack Highflyer.

"How are you, Jack?" "Any news, Jack?" "What's in the wind, Jack?" were the confused interrogations that saluted his ears.

"Have you heard the report of Dingle's trial?" inquired Jack Highflyer.

"No." "No."

"Guilty of manslaughter in the fourth degree, and sentenced to two years in the State prison."

"Pretty well for our side," exclaimed Harry Wilson.

"We have worked hard for Job," said Jack Highflyer, "and to some purpose. But our work is not done yet; we must get him out of prison."

"How can that be done, Jack?"

"How was it in the case of burglary the other day—the Bleeker-street burglary—Simonson was sentenced to the State prison for five years, and Williams three. A representation was made to the Governor on behalf of poor Williams, with the sanction of the court and the public prosecutor, and yesterday he received a full pardon, and was discharged. Now, we must get up a petition for the pardon of Job Dingle, and circulate it from one end of the city to the other. We can get thousands upon thousands of signatures; thousands upon thousands. Boys, we will show the Governor that the thing is right, and that the people are with us."

In the mean time Tim. Hardman had drawn aside several of the younger members of the company, and after whispering a few words to them, had conducted them out of the porter-house.

James Fogle swallowed a second glass of ale, and departed to keep his appointment with Mark Masters. On arriving at the corner of Houston-street and the Bowery, he seated himself on an empty sugar box that cumbered the side-walk in front of the corner grocery, and patiently waited the coming of the police officer.

Presently he heard, in a northerly direction, the cry of "Fire!" "Fire!" "Fire!"

He started to his feet and gazed in the direction whence the alarm proceeded. He could perceive no glare in the sky, no sparks scattered

by the winds. But the sounds increased, boys came running by, and shouting at the top of their voices—men and women appeared at the doors and windows of the houses, looking up and down the street with curious countenances. A minute afterward, Fogle discovered the flickering of torches in the distance, and heard the rumbling of wheels and the shouts of the firemen, and saw the boys tugging at the drag-rope. As the firemen dashed by with the engine, he recognized by the torch-light the faces of several of the recent inmates of Bill Smith's porter-house.

Just then Mark Masters approached him and whispered :

"This way, Fogle."

The police officer walked rapidly down Houston-street, followed by James Fogle.

Up the Bowery went the firemen, their numbers and their speed increasing as they advanced up the Bowery, and to the right down Fourth-street, on a full run, dragging the fire engine after them. At the corner of Fourth-street and the Second avenue, they stopped suddenly, arrested by the grating tones of a speaking trumpet in the hands of the foreman.

"Avast, nineteen."

The cries of fire had ceased.

"A false alarm, boys," said the foreman.

"So I am thinking," replied Tim. Hardman, shrugging his shoulders.

"Man the ropes, and take the machine down the avenue. Quietly, boys, quietly."

They proceeded down the avenue on a walk, talking and jesting together. Near the corner of Houston and Christie-streets, the foreman, Caleb Glover, was hailed by name by a person on the side-walk.

"Avast, boys, a moment," said the foreman.

"How did the muss begin last night, Tim.?" inquired Harry Wilson, holding the drag-rope loosely in his hand.

"It was this way, Harry," replied Tim. Hardman, speaking loud enough to be heard by his comrades. "We fell in with twenty-seven at the corner of Bond-street, raced with her to the fire and beat her. As she came up to us, George Mackey brushed against me. 'Cowards are always good at running,' says he to me. 'Cowards!' says I, 'we'll whip you and wash you,' says I. 'Wash us first and whip us afterwards,' says he. 'As you like it,' says I. Well, it happened when the line was formed, that twenty-three was on the fire, and twenty-seven into twenty-three, and we into twenty-seven. Tom.

and Martin there, had the butt, and when we began playing, we gave them a stroke to send over twenty-seven in three minutes. The night was dark, and I was afeared of foul play. So I goes along the line, and sure enough, about half way down, there stands George Mackey. 'What are you doing to our hose?' says I. 'I ain't doing nothing to your hose,' says he. 'Then why don't you stay with your machine?' says I. 'Why don't you stay with yours?' says he. 'Because I am watching for just such pukes as you,' says I. 'Do you want to make a muss?' says he, coming toward me. Then I sees a big knife in his hand. 'You have got a knife, have you?' says I. 'Touch me if you dare,' says he, 'and you will find out.' Then I goes a few steps ahead and I sees the water spirting out of nineteen's hose in a stream about as big as my two fingers. I turns round and sees George Mackey sneaking off. I runs up to him, 'That's your work,' says I. 'You lie,' says he, squaring off and brandishing his knife. With that I hit him between the eyes and sent him down, hollering. Then twenty-seven's fellows mixed in, and our boys hurried up, and there was a muss, I tell you."

As Tim. finished his narrative, the foreman drew near.

"Boys," said he, "take the machine home the nearest way. I am going round by the Bowery, but will be home as soon as you are. Ahead with you."

The firemen had passed Stanton-street, and were still talking and jesting, when a cart was heard approaching.

"Spread yourselves, men," shouted Tim Hardman in a mock tone of military command. "Spread yourselves, and cut off the enemy."

With a laugh, the men and boys, retaining their hold of the drag-rope, spread themselves across the entire width of the street.

"Take one side of the street or the other, and let me pass," said the driver of the cart, as he came within a few yards of the opposing group.

"Give the countersign," said the butcher, dropping the rope and advancing two or three steps.

"Get out of the way," shouted the driver, striving to urge his horse onward.

"I say, captain, what is your cargo—Yankee rum, or New Orleans melasses?"

"None of your business."

"It isn't, eh?" retorted Tim. Hardman, as he sprang upon the cart beside the barrel, the sight of which had excited Tim's inquiry. In an instant, before the driver anticipated his purpose or could offer any

resistance, the butcher hauled the barrel into the street, and jumped from the cart.

"Now I'll find out, captain," said Tim., placing the barrel on end. "Give me the axe."

"Whatever you do," said the the driver angrily, "you do at your peril."

"C-e-r-tainly."

With one powerful blow, the butcher drove in the head of the barrel.

"You little rascal," said he, addressing a boy of ten or eleven years of age, "bring me the torch, quickly."

Tim. Hardman seized the torch, and raised a portion of the head of the barrel.

"Great God!" he exclaimed, starting back with horror.

"What is it, Tim.?" shouted half a dozen voices.

At that moment a stout portly man tapped the butcher on the shoulder, and said in a low voice :

"This is my affair, Mr. Hardman—I am Mark Masters the police officer. Get your men off as quick as possible, and let me deal with this business."

Tim. Hardman hastened to his comrades, and whispered :

"A police officer! Let's be off."

The drag-rope was seized with alacrity, and the engine moved rapidly down Christie-street.

"Come hither, driver," said the police officer in a tone of authority, as Tim. Hardman and his comrades disappeared.

The driver sprang from the cart, and threw the reins over the horse's back.

"Was this barrel taken from your cart?" demanded the police officer.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know its contents?"

"No, sir."

"Then you do not know that this barrel contains a dead body, in all probability the corpse of a murdered man?"

"Indeed, I do not," said the carman, trembling with fright. "I was employed by John Harker to transport this barrel from his lodgings to the corner of Tenth-street and the Second avenue. Do you say it contains a dead body?"

"Look here," said the police officer, tipping the barrel till a gory face was visible by the street lamp.

The carman shuddered.

"If your story is true, well; if not, you are in a bad scrape, Mr. Ferris. I am a police officer."

"Every word I have spoken is the truth. Mr. Harker told me the barrel contained valuable goods belonging to a friend of his. He is waiting for me this moment at the corner of Tenth-street and the Second avenue.

"Then I will tell you what you must do. Put this barrel upon your cart and drive on to your place of destination as if nothing had happened. If Mr. Harker appears, you are free—if not, not."

Confused and terrified, the carman complied with the suggestion, or rather the command of Mark Masters. He magnified the danger of his position, and shuddered at the thought of the mangled corpse beside him. As he approached the place of rendezvous, he gazed anxiously toward the right hand and the left. The police officer was invisible, and as yet there were no indications of the presence of John Harker.

He halted—he perceived the figure of a man cautiously advancing toward him—he heard the voice of Harker in a hoarse whisper :

"Is that you, Ferris?"

The carman mustered courage to reply.

"Yes, Mr. Harker."

"With the barrel?"

As John Harker uttered these words in a louder tone, his arms were grasped behind him, and he heard the stunning announcement :

"You are my prisoner!"

He sank in a swoon upon the ground. When he returned to consciousness, two men assisted him to rise. One was Mark Masters the police officer, the other was James Fogle.

"I don't owe you anything, Jack, do I?" said Fogle, sneeringly.

Again the murderer swooned.

During the night, John Harker committed suicide in Bridewell.

CHAPTER VII.

MONTRESSOR AND MRS. TRACEY.



On the succeeding morning, Wilfred Montessor, having dispatched Hamet with a parcel and note to Mrs. Tracey, applied himself to the perusal of some important law papers, which had been transmitted to him by his attorney. The employment was distasteful, for he soon threw the papers aside, and with restless and impatient glances toward the door of the apartment, awaited the return of his messenger.

On the entrance of Hamet, he rose quickly and advanced to meet him, and said inquiringly :

“ Well, Hamet ? ”

“ I delivered the parcel and letter to Mrs. Tracey herself, as the master directed,” replied Hamet.

“ And the answer ? ”

The boy placed a note in the hands of Montessor. With deep emotion the traveler beheld the familiar hand-writing, and the contents, though brief and formal, were apparently satisfactory :

“ MRS. OWEN TRACEY accedes to the request of Mr. Montessor, and will receive him this morning, at any hour which may be convenient to him.”

Half an hour after the return of Hamet, and the reception of the note, Wilfred Montessor presented himself at Owen Tracey's resi-

dence in Chambers-street. He was ushered into the presence of Mrs. Tracey. With external composure of manner, but with a palpitating heart, he advanced toward her. Mrs. Tracey was standing near a center-table covered with books, and prints. As Montessor approached, she extended her hand frankly, and an expressive glance, a glance of esteem and confidence, was exchanged between them.

The silence which prevailed for an instant, was broken by Montessor:

"I will not forget, madam," said he earnestly, "what is due to you, what is becoming in me. I returned to you this morning, a manuscript volume, which I abstracted from your possession, by the secret artifices of my agents. And I have sought this interview, since I have learned the true motives of your conduct, to declare my renewed confidence in you—and—and—to ask your forgiveness."

"To ask my forgiveness," said Mrs. Tracey in faltering tones: "and for what?"

"During many years," replied Montessor, "I have suspected your motives, I have condemned your conduct, and yet, I now perceive, that the first, perhaps the greatest fault, was mine. I deceived you, wilfully deceived you."

"The deception was unwise, though not without an object."

"My wealth rendered me an egotist. I was vain, exacting, confident in myself, distrustful of others."

"From the moment when your name and position were revealed to me, I had a clear perception of your purpose in concealing them. It is the besetting weakness of rich men, to imagine that money will purchase the semblance of affection, if not the reality, from those who surround them. They confound men of honor, and women of purity, with the parasites and flatterers, who bask in the sunshine of wealth, to whom friendship is a name, and love an idle dream."

"Mine was that besetting weakness. In the beginning of our acquaintance, I feared to reveal myself to you, lest you should be dazzled by my fortune, rather than attracted by my merits. Then came a period of intimate and friendly intercourse, which banished evil thoughts and evil passions. But your marriage with Mr. Tracey aroused my distrust, and confirmed my suspicions. I regarded you as an unjust, mercenary, and heartless woman—"

"And so I desired you to regard me," said Mrs. Tracey gravely. "Why?"

"Because I imagined, under the circumstances, that an unfavorable opinion of me would conduce to the future welfare of your existence."

Montessor shook his head.

"Even now, you have rashly gained a secret which ought to have remained unknown to you. I do not accuse you of wrong toward me, but of unkindness toward yourself."

"On meeting you after my return from abroad, I felt a curious interest in your position and habits of life. I despised you, and yet I watched you. I suspected you of the deepest guilt; and yet there was a still small voice in my bosom that spoke for you. I resolved to satisfy myself."

"For what purpose?"

"I constituted myself a judge. I surrounded myself with active and powerful agents. I persuaded myself that I had banished passion from my soul, tenderness from my heart—that I had become a stoic. I meditated revenge."

"Revenge upon me?"

"Madame, I have suffered greatly."

"And I—"

"Yours was the irrevocable act."

"I was constrained by the force of circumstances that could not be overcome or set aside."

"But why did you not see me? Why did you act so hastily?"

"I did not dare to see you. Was it not enough that my resolution was shaken by my own scruples of conscience, and bursts of ungovernable emotion, that I must also resist your pleadings, and your tears? Besides," added Mrs. Tracey, with inexpressible dignity, "I did not think it delicate or right, that even you should know that I had promised myself in marriage to one man and that I loved another."

"Have you ceased to love me?" burst almost unconsciously from the lips of Montessor.

A shade of displeasure passed over the countenance of Mrs. Tracey. It vanished instantly, and she replied in tones of winning kindness:

"Daily, on my bended knees, I pray for your happiness and prosperity, to that great and good Being who governs us by his providence, and saves us by his grace."

"Do you forgive me my folly in distrusting you, and also, my last offense, the invasion of the privacy of your thoughts?"

"If you have, in any respect, wronged me, I forgive you freely."

"And will you not permit me to see you hereafter, though ever so rarely?"

"It is better otherwise. Our paths lie in different directions, our

duties and our feelings cannot harmonize. If we meet, it will be embarrassing to speak of the past, and difficult to avoid it. Besides, at the present time, my husband is suffering under a species of mental alienation which renders him unmanageable in other hands than mine. Whether this affliction, will yield to medical treatment, or will continue for months and years to come, is extremely uncertain. But while it remains, my duties are those of a patient and attentive nurse."

"What duties have I to perform?" said Montessor, half musingly, half inquiringly.

"You have duties to yourself, to society, and your Creator. The trials of this life, its disappointments and its perplexities, ought not to paralyze our faculties or harden our hearts. You are in the prime of manhood. You have talents, education, wealth. You can do much to relieve the sufferings of the destitute and the oppressed, to encourage honest industry, and foster rising genius. And I need not say to you," continued Mrs. Tracey, with profound emotion, "that it will be a source of consolation in my obscure and uneventful existence, to hear that you are pursuing a career, honorable to yourself, and beneficial to your fellow-men."

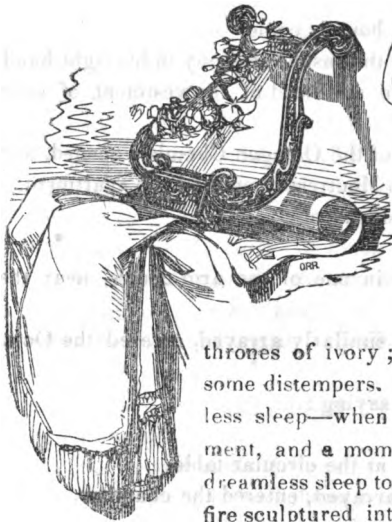
"And if I sometimes falter in my course, if I need the advice and the encouragement of a true friend, may I not come to you?"

Mrs. Tracey surveyed the countenance of Montessor with a serene, searching glance, and replied:

"Come to me."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRIENNIAL MEETING.



CURIOUS and fantastical are the dreams of the dreamer. He digs in the ground, like a mole; he roams over the earth, like a deer; he flies through the air, like an eagle. He laughs with the daughters of mirth—he weeps with the children of sorrow. Coffers of gold and precious stones are his, and a kingly crown and

thrones of ivory; also rags, and muck, and noisome distempers. He flies from dreams to dreamless sleep—when a thousand years are as a moment, and a moment as a thousand years—from dreamless sleep to waking. Like sparks of golden fire sculptured into the likenesses of angels, are

the dreams of the dreamer at the moment of waking.

* * * * *

“Weeks, months, years passed.”

It was the night of the triennial meeting of the Secret Order of the Seven.

The Octagon Chamber was ready.

The rays of colored light from the shades of the bronze chandelier, shone with a curious effect upon the circular table, covered with implements, the arm-chairs, the rich tapestry and carpeting, of the chamber.

Near the circular table sat Wilfred Montessor, robed in the vest-

ment of ceremony of the Secret Order of the Seven; the silk hood flung back upon his shoulders.

By the side of Montressor stood Hamet, the Georgian, in the garb of his native land.

"Your skill is remarkable," said Montressor, after examining circumspectly a collection of long narrow slips of painted glass, contained in an ebony box in small compartments lined with velvet. "The designs are exquisite, the execution masterly."

The countenance of Hamet, flushed with emotions of delight.

"Are all things prepared, as I commanded you?" inquired Montressor.

The youth bowed.

"Retire to your station. The hour is come.

The Georgian retired, bearing the casket of ebony in his right hand.

Then Montressor adjusted the silk hood of the vestment of ceremony.

Almost immediately, the door of the Octagon Chamber opened, and a personage, arrayed similarly to Montressor, entered the apartment.

And a strange voice was heard, saying:

"Behold! the First."

The personage took his seat in one of the arm-chairs, near the circular table.

Presently, another personage, similarly arrayed, entered the Octagon Chamber.

The strange voice was heard, saying:

"Behold! the Second."

The personage seated himself at the circular table.

Another personage, similarly arrayed, entered the chamber.

The strange voice was heard, saying:

"Behold! the Third."

The personage seated himself at the circular table.

Another personage entered.

The strange voice was heard, saying:

"Behold! the Fourth."

The personage seated himself.

Another personage entered.

The strange voice was heard, saying:

"Behold! the Fifth."

The personage seated himself.

Another personage entered.

The strange voice was heard, saying:

“Behold! the Sixth.”

The personage seated himself.

Wilfred Montessor, in a slow measured voice, addressed his companions :

“Brethren! the Seventh is even in the midst of you.”

The seven chairs were occupied.

The sitters in them were silent.

The strange voice was heard, saying :

“Lo! the Seven are here.”

Wilfred Montessor spoke slowly :

“Brethren! we dwell in mystery.

“Three are the years of the eras of the Secret Order of the Seven.

“Our number is mysterious—the number three.

“Trinities are the scorn of the skeptic in religion and morals; the sage admits them.

“Three is God—the Creator, the Saviour, the Purifier.

“Three is man—body, soul, life.

“Three is nature—animal, vegetable, mineral.

“Three is time—the past, the present, the future.

“Three is the Universe—heaven, earth, hell.

“Three are the years of the eras of the Secret Order of the Seven.”

The strange voice was heard, saying :

“The first era has ended. Speak ye.”

And the First said :

“I am the First; and through the First, the Seventh hath command in three cycles.”

And the Second said :

“I am the Second; and through the Second, the Seventh hath command in five cycles.”

And the Third said :

“I am the Third; and through the Third, the Seventh hath command in seven cycles.”

And the Fourth said :

“I am the Fourth; and through the Fourth, the Seventh hath command in six cycles.”

And the Fifth said :

“I am the Fifth; and through the Fifth, the Seventh hath command in four cycles.”

And the Sixth said :

“I am the Sixth; and through the Sixth, the Seventh hath command in three cycles.”

Wilfred Montessor, the Seventh, said :

“Brethren ! ye are masters, ye are high priests—ye command the brethren, and ye minister unto them.

“Lo ! we are Seven—and I am the Seventh.”

And the strange voice was heard again, saying :

“The Seventh holds the key to the mysteries of the Secret Order of the Seven.”

Montessor continued :

“Brethren : the golden key is the token of the wisdom of the Seventh.”

And extending his right hand, he took a golden key from the circular table. He inserted the key in a small orifice near the edge and turning it quickly, exclaimed :

“Behold !”

Suddenly the lights of the bronze chandelier decayed to a feeble glimmer, the Octagon Chamber was darkened, the tapestry parted, and in the distance upon the wall appeared huge letters of fire .

M. W. M. M. E. H. P.

Montessor continued :

“These are the initials of the titles of the Seven :

“Most Worthy Master, Most Excellent High Priest.

“These also, are the initials of the names of the Seven.”

And the strange voice was heard, saying :

“To each it is given to know himself.

“No man knoweth his brother save the Seventh.”

Again Wilfred Montessor turned the golden key in the circular table. The tapestry closed, and brilliantly shone the lights of the bronze chandelier.

The strange voice was heard again, saying :

“The Seventh holds the scepter of the Secret Order of the Seven.”

Wilfred Montessor said :

“Brethren, the ivory scepter is the token of the power of the Seventh.”

And extending his right hand, he took a scepter of ivory, inlaid with pearls and rubies and emeralds from the circular table.

He waved the scepter slowly from right to left, and from left to right, and exclaimed :

“Obey !”

The sitters in the seven chairs, save the seventh, arose, and each placing the palm of his hand upon his head, and extending his left hand toward the scepter, said :

“ We obey.”

And the strange voice was heard, saying :

“ The man that obeyeth the voice of authority, is worthy to rule over his brethren.”

The Seventh placed the ivory scepter on the circular table, and the six personages seated themselves as before.

The strange voice was heard again, saying :

“ The Seventh holds the enchanted wand of the Secret Order of the Seven.”

Montessor said :

“ Brethren, the enchanted wand is the token of the wisdom and power of the Seven.

And extending his right hand, he took from the circular table a rod curiously fashioned in the likeness of a serpent ; with the enchanted wand he touched the ivory scepter and the golden key.

Suddenly the lights of the bronze chandelier were extinguished, and the voice of the Seventh was heard saying :

“ Behold the phantoms of the things that have been, and which are.”

Then the tapestry parted on one side of the Octagon Chamber, and from the distant walls beyond came the reflection of strange unnatural light. Suddenly there appeared the phantoms of persons and the images of things.

The phantoms moved hither and thither—departed and returned—the images appeared, vanished, and appeared again—phantoms and images mingling, shifting, changing perpetually.

It was like unto the mysterious drama of human life.

It was like unto the truthful romance of the Secret Order of the Seven.

The phantoms were the phantoms of the persons, the images were the images of things, the events were the events of the romance of the Secret Order of the Seven.

And in that strange, unnatural light, amid the increasing phantasmagoria of a great city and a powerful order, the denouement revealed itself as in a dream.

There was the image of a church with spacious aisles, sculptured columns and vaulted roof. And the phantom of a man and the phantom of a woman stood before the image of the altar—and the right hands of the phantoms were clasped together. And another phantom stood before the two phantoms, with his hands uplifted toward the vaulted roof.

The phantoms and the images disappeared—the strange unnatural light faded away.

All was darkness.

And the strange voice was heard, saying :

“ The future is wisely concealed from man, but the past is a mirror in which he may daily behold it.”

Then the doors were opened, and the Seven, one by one, departed from the Octagon chamber.

THE END.



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