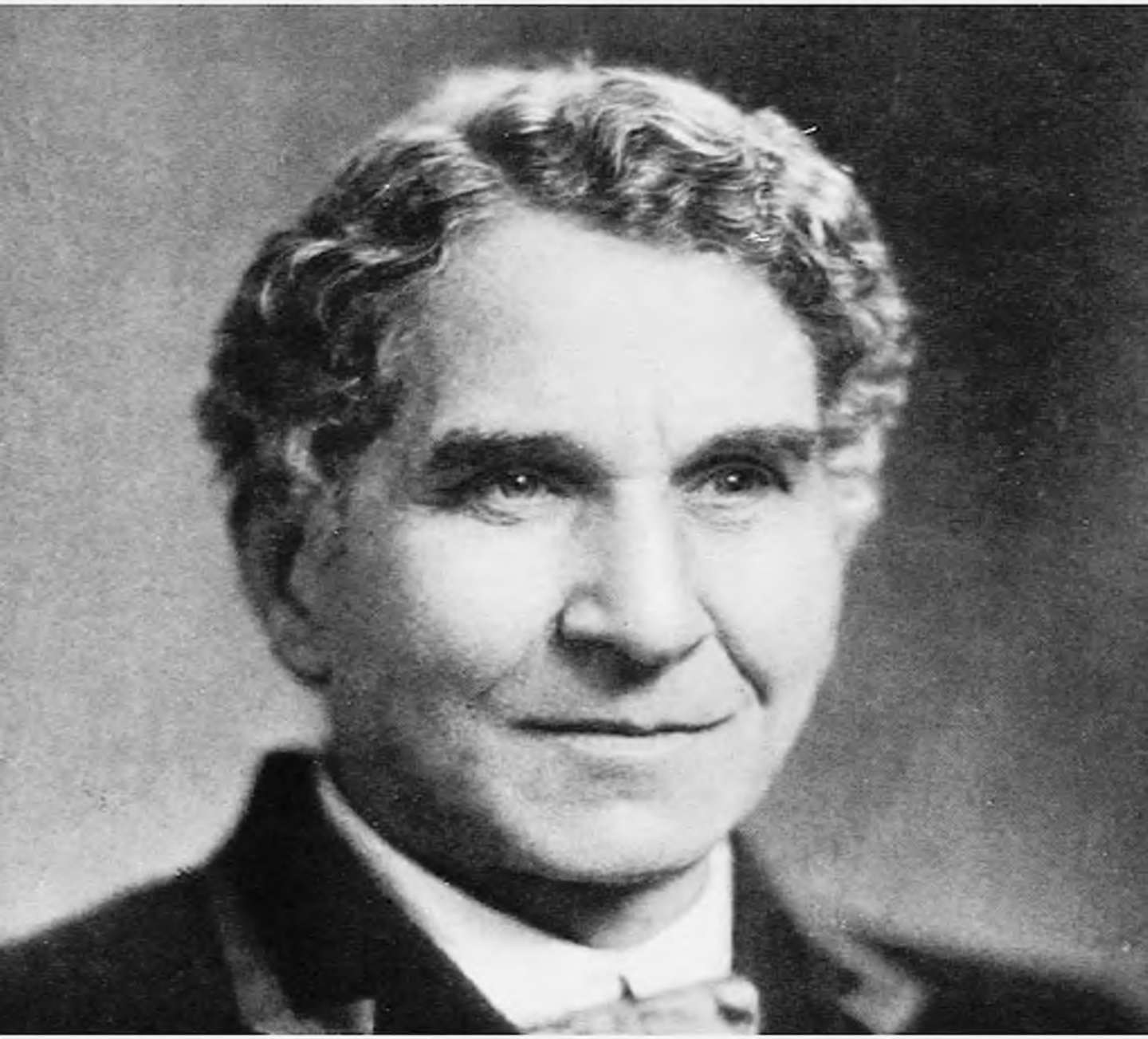
M. P. Shiel

Collected Works



THE BEST SHORT STORIES OF M. P. SHIEL

Opinions on M. P. Shiel's work :

"Colossal . . . . brilliant."

—H. G. WELLS

"A flaming genius. At his best he is not to be touched."

—HUGH WALPOLE

"If by genius we mean amazing ideas, flashes of real imagination, wild originality, then we must grant it him."

—J. B. PRIESTLEY

"He tells of a wilder wonderland than Poe dreamed of."

—ARTHUR MACHEN

"Sensible people ought to have a complete set of Shiel."

—REBECCA WEST

Stories by M. P. Shiel

A Torture by Hope - The Strand Magazine, June 1891 [translation of Villiers de l'isle-Adam]
Guy Harkaway's Substitute - The Strand Magazine, October 1893
The Eagle's Crag (The Rock Day) - The Strand Magazine, September 1894
Huguenin's Wife - The Pall Mall Magazine, April 1895
The Case of Euphemia Raphash - Chapman's Magazine, December 1895
Orazio Calvo - The Belgravia Annual, Christmas 1895
Wayward Love (probably A Bundle of Letters) - Cassell's Family Magazine, April 1896
The Spectre-Ship - Cassell's Family Magazine, September 1896
The Secret Panel (The Panel Day) - The Strand Magazine, December 1896
A Night in Venice (The Venetian Day) - The Cornhill Magazine, October 1897
What Happened Behind the Locked Door? (The Tale of Henry and Rowena) - The Tatler 1901-12
The Battle of Waterloo - Cassell's Magazine, April 1902
The Bride - The English Illustrated Magazine, May 1902
Many a Tear - Pearson's Magazine, September 1908
The Bell of St. Sepulcre - The Red Magazine, November 1, 1911
The Pale Ape - The Pale Ape and Other Pulses, 1911
Dark Lot of One Saul - The Grand Magazine, February 1, 1912
The Place of Pain - The Red Magazine, May 1, 1914
The Primate of the Rose - Here Comes the Lady 1928
A Case for Deduction (with John Gawsworth) - Thrills, 1936

[The following stories have not been found]
Ben - The English Illustrated Magazine, January 1902
A Shot at the Sun - The Pictorial Magazine, October 24 1903
A Good Thing - The Red Magazine, May 1, 1911
To Arms! - The Red Magazine, January 1, 1913, etc.
The Whirligig - The Weekly Tale-Teller #258, April 11 1914
The Waif - The Red Magazine, June 15, 1914
The Flying Cat - Strange Assembly (ed. John Gawsworth), 1932
The Globe of Gold-Fish - New Tales of Horror, 1934
How Life Climbs - New Tales of Horror, 1934
The Death Dance - Thrills, Crimes and Mysteries, 1935
Dr. Todor Karadja (with John Gawsworth) - Masterpieces of Thrills, 1936
The Falls Scandal (with John Gawsworth) - Crimes, Creeps and Thrills, 1936
The Hanging of Ernest Clark (with John Gawsworth) - Masterpieces of Thrills, 1936
The "Master" (with John Gawsworth) - Crimes, Creeps and Thrills, 1936
The Mystery of the Red Road (with John Gawsworth) - Masterpieces of Thrills, 1936

Shiel's Story Collections (* indicates story is in this volume)

The Pale Ape and Other Pulses 1911
*A Bundle of Letters (Wayward Love)
Cummings King Monk
*Huguenin's Wife
*Many a Tear
*The Bride
*The Case of Euphemia Raphash
The Great King
The House of Sounds
*The Spectre-Ship
*The Pale Ape

Here Comes the Lady 1928
*The Primate of the Rose
*The Tale of Henry and Rowena
The Tale of Hugh and Agatha
The Tale of Gaston and Mathilde
No. 16 Brooke Street
The Tale of One in Two
The Tale of Charley and Barbara
*The Bell of St. Sepulchre
The Corner in Cotton
*Dark Lot of One Saul
The Tale of Adam and Hannah

The Invisible Voices 1935
*The Panel Day (The Secret Panel)
The Adore Day (At the Eleventh Hour)
*The Rock Day (The Eagle's Crag)
The Diary Day (The Purchester Incident)
The Cat Day
The Lion Day (Miche)
*The Place of Pain Day (The Place of Pain)
The Vengeance Day
*The Venetian Day (A Night in Venice)
The Future Day (In 2073 A.D.)
The Goat Day

"MY SON, BE OF GOOD CHEER!"

(*A Torture by Hope.*)

A Torture by Hope.

FROM THE FRENCH OF VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM.

[COUNT VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM, who lives at Paris, where he edits the *Revue des Lettres et des Arts*, is one of several living French writers who have made a special study of short stories. He is a highly original writer, and, although as yet quite unknown to English readers, an extremely powerful one. Many of his stories are such as could have been written by no one but himself; but probably he approaches more nearly to Edgar Allan Poe than to any other English author.]

BELOW the vaults of the *Official* of Saragossa one nightfall long ago, the venerable Pedro Arbuez d'Espila, sixth Prior of the Dominicans of Segovia, third Grand Inquisitor of Spain—followed by a *fra redemptor* (master-torturer), and preceded by two familiars of the Holy Office holding lanterns—descended towards a secret dungeon. The lock of a massive door creaked; they entered a stifling *in pace*, where the little light that came from above revealed an instrument of torture blackened with blood, a chafing-dish, and a pitcher. Fastened to the wall by heavy iron rings, on a mass of filthy straw, secured by fetters, an iron circlet about his neck, sat a man in rags: it was impossible to guess at his age.

This prisoner was no other than Rabbi Aser Abarbanel, a Jew of Aragon, who, on an accusation of usury and pitiless contempt of the poor, had for more than a year undergone daily torture. In spite of all, "his blind obstinacy being as tough as his skin," he had refused to abjure.

Proud of his descent and his ancestors—for all Jews worthy of the name are jealous of their race—he was descended, according to the Talmud, from Othoniel, and consequently from Ipsiboe, wife of this last Judge of Israel, a circumstance which had sustained his courage under the severest of the incessant tortures.

It was, then, with tears in his eyes at the thought that so stedfast a soul was excluded from salvation, that the venerable Pedro Arbuez d'Espila, approaching the quivering Rabbi, pronounced the following words:—

"My son, be of good cheer; your trials here below are about to cease. If, in presence of such obstinacy, I have had to permit, though with sighs, the employment of severe measures, my task of paternal correction has its limits. You are the barren fig-tree, that, found so oft without fruit, incurs the danger of being dried up by the roots . . . but it is for God alone to decree concerning your soul. Perhaps the Infinite Mercy will shine upon you at the last moment! Let us hope so. There *are* instances. May it be so! Sleep, then, this evening in peace. To-morrow you will take part in the *auto da fé*, that is to say, you will be exposed to the *quemadero*, the brazier premonitory of the eternal flame. It burns, you are aware, at a certain distance, my son; and death takes, in coming, two hours at least, often three, thanks to the moistened and frozen clothes with which we take care to preserve the forehead and the heart of the holocausts. You will be only forty-three. Consider, then, that, placed in the last rank, you will have the time needful to invoke God, to offer unto Him that baptism of fire which is of the Holy Spirit: Hope, then, in the Light, and sleep."

As he ended this discourse, Dom Arbuez—who had motioned the wretched man's fetters to be removed—embraced him tenderly. Then came the turn of the *fra redemptor*, who, in a low voice, prayed the Jew to pardon what he had made him endure in the effort to redeem him; then the two familiars clasped him in their arms: their kiss, through their cowls, was unheard. The ceremony at an end, the captive was left alone in the darkness.

Rabbi Aser Abarbanel, his lips parched, his face stupefied by suffering, stared, without any particular attention, at the closed door. Closed? The word, half unknown to himself, awoke a strange delusion in his confused thoughts. He fancied he had seen, for one second, the light of the lanterns through the fissure between the sides of this door. A morbid idea of hope, due to the enfeeblement of his brain, took hold on him. He dragged himself towards this strange thing he had seen; and, slowly inserting a finger, with infinite precautions, into the crack, he pulled the door towards him. Wonder of wonders! By some extraordinary chance the familiar who had closed it had turned the great key a little before it had closed upon its jambs of stone. So, the rusty bolt not having entered its socket, the door rolled back into the cell.

The Rabbi ventured to look out.

By means of a sort of livid obscurity he distinguished, first of all, a half-circle of earthy walls, pierced by spiral stairways, and, opposite to him, five or six stone steps, dominated by a sort o black porch, giving access to a vast corridor, of which he could only see, from below, the nearest arches.

Stretching himself along, he crawled to the level of this threshold. Yes, it was indeed a corridor, but of boundless length. A faint light—a sort of dream-light—was cast over it; lamps suspended to the arched roof, turned, by intervals, the wan air blue; the far distance was lost in hadow. Not a door visible along all this length! On one side only, to the left, small holes, covered with a network of bars, let a feeble twilight through the depths of the wall—the light of sunset apparently, for red gleams fell at long intervals on the flag-stones. And how fearful a silence! . . . Yet there—there in the depths of the dim distance—the way might lead to liberty! The wavering hope of the Jew was dogged, for it was the last.

"IT WAS A FAMILIAR HURRYING ALONG."

Without hesitation he ventured forth, keeping close to the side of the light-holes, hoping to render himself indistinguishable from the darksome colour of the long walls. He advanced slowly, dragging himself along the ground, forcing himself not to cry out when one of his wounds, recently opened, sent a sharp pang through him.

All of a sudden the beat of a sandal, coming in his direction, echoed along the stone passage. A trembling fit seized him, he choked with anguish, his sight grew dim. So this, no doubt, was to be the end! He squeezed himself, doubled up on his hands and knees, into a recess, and, half dead with terror, waited.

It was a familiar hurrying along. He passed rapidly, carrying an instrument for tearing out the muscles, his cowl lowered; he disappeared. The violent shock which the Rabbi had received had half suspended the functions of life; he remained for nearly an hour unable to make a single movement. In the fear of an increase of torments if he were caught, the idea came to him of returning to his cell. But the old hope chirped in his soul—the divine "Perhaps," the comforter in the worst of distresses. A miracle had taken place! There was no more room for doubt. He began again to crawl towards the possible escape. Worn out with suffering and with hunger, trembling with anguish, he advanced. The sepulchral corridor seemed to lengthen out mysteriously. And he, never ceasing his slow advance, gazed forward through the darkness, on, on, where there *must* be an outlet that should save him.

But, oh! steps sounding again; steps, this time, slower, more sombre. The forms of

two Inquisitors, robed in black and white, and wearing their large hats with rounded brims, emerged into the faint light. They talked in low voices, and seemed to be in controversy on some important point, for their hands gesticulated.

At this sight Rabbi Aser Abarbanel closed his eyes, his heart beat as if it would kill him, his rags were drenched with the cold sweat of agony; motionless, gasping, he lay stretched along the wall, under the light of one of the lamps—motionless, imploring the God of David.

As they came opposite to him the two Inquisitors stopped under the light of the lamp, through a mere chance, no doubt, in their discussion. One of them, listening to his interlocutor, looked straight at the Rabbi. Under this gaze — of which he did not at first notice the vacant expression — the wretched man seemed to feel the hot pincers biting into his poor flesh; so he was again to become a living wound, a living woe! Fainting, scarce able to breathe, his eyelids quivering, he shuddered as the robe grazed him. But—strange at once and natural—the eyes of the Inquisitor were evidently the eyes of a man profoundly preoccupied with what he was going to say in reply, absorbed by what he was listening to; they were fixed, and seemed to look at the Jew *without seeing him*.

"THEY HAD NOT SEEN HIM!"

And indeed, in a few minutes, the two sinister talkers went on their way, slowly, still speaking in low voices, in the direction from which the prisoner had come. They had not seen him! And it was so, that, in the horrible disarray of his sensations, his brain was traversed by this thought: "Am I already dead, so that no one sees me?" A hideous impression drew him from his lethargy. On gazing at the wall, exactly opposite to his face, he fancied he saw, over against his, two ferocious eyes observing him! He flung back his head in a blind and sudden terror; the hair started upright upon his head. But no, no. He put out his hand, and felt along the stones. What he saw was the *reflection* of the eyes of the Inquisitor still left upon his pupils, and which he had refracted upon two spots of the wall.

Forward! He must hasten towards that end that he imagined (fondly, no doubt) to mean deliverance; towards those shadows from which he was no more than thirty paces, or so, distant. He started once more —crawling on hands and knees and stomach —upon his dolorous way, and he was soon within the dark part of the fearful corridor.

All at once the wretched man felt the sensation of cold *upon* his hands that he placed on the flag-stones; it was a strong current which came from under a little door at the end of the passage. O God, if this door opened on the outer world! The whole being of the poor prisoner was overcome by a sort of vertigo of hope. He examined the door from top to bottom without being able to distinguish it completely on account of the dimness around him. He felt over it. No lock, not a bolt! A latch! He rose to his feet: the latch

yielded beneath his finger ; the silent door opened before him.

"Hallelujah!" murmured the Rabbi, in an immense sigh, as he gazed at what stood revealed to him from the threshold.

The door opened upon gardens, under a night of stars—upon spring, liberty, life! The gardens gave access to the neighbouring country that stretched away to the sierras, whose sinuous white lines stood out in profile on the horizon. There lay liberty! Oh, to fly! He would run all night under those woods of citrons, whose perfume intoxicated him. Once among the mountains, he would be saved. He breathed the dear, holy air ; the wind re-animated him, his lungs found free play. He heard, in his expanding heart, the "Lazarus, come forth!" And, to give thanks to God who had granted him this mercy, he stretched forth his arms before him, lifting his eyes to the firmament in an ecstasy.

And then he seemed to see the shadow of his arms returning upon himself ; he seemed to feel those shadow - arms surround, enlace him, and himself pressed tenderly against some breast. A tall figure, indeed, was opposite to him. Confidently he lowered his eyes upon this figure, and remained gasping, stupefied, with staring eyes and mouth drivelling with fright.

Horror! He was in the arms of the Grand Inquisitor himself, the venerable Pedro Arbuez d'Espila, who gazed at him with eyes full of tears, like a good shepherd who has found the lost sheep.

The sombre priest clasped the wretched Jew against his heart with so fervent a transport of charity that the points of the monacal hair-cloth rasped against the chest of the Dominican. And, while the Rabbi Aser Abarbanel, his eyes convulsed beneath his eyelids, choked with anguish between the arms of the ascetic Dom Arbuez, realising confusedly *that all the phases of the fatal evening had been only a calculated torture, that of Hope!* the Grand Inquisitor, with a look of distress, an accent of poignant reproach, murmured in his ear, with the burning breath of much fasting:—"What! my child! on the eve, perhaps, of salvation . . . . you would then leave us?"

Guy Harkaway's Substitute.

By M. P. Shiel.

THE congregation at Ebenezer were not so thoroughly satisfied with their pastor as they had once been. They liked him still—more perhaps than they thought—but their enthusiasm about him had subsided a little; somehow he did not seem to them to have the same baptism of unction, the same "liberty of utterance"—and he was by no means in such good health; substitutes—mostly laymen—had frequently to be found to fill his place, a thing that greatly tried the patience of the little flock.

Dr. Johnson somewhere speaks of the "complicated misery" of pedagogy. It is an excellent phrase to apply to the trials of a poor Dissenting minister in a prim, self-supporting little conventicle like Ebenezer—and Guy Harkaway found that he required all the harmlessness of a dove, the wisdom of a serpent, and the tact and *finesse* of an ant-eater to live altogether "free of offence."

He sat one Saturday afternoon in the little room he called his "study," thinking out the final flourishes he was to give to-morrow's "discourse." He always spoke extempore, perhaps not so much from choice, as that the leaders at Ebenezer had a strong conviction that, under no circumstances, could reading be called preaching; that it savoured of "Rome," and was, consequently, more or less sinful.

He was frowning vigorously at the opposite wall, arranging his thoughts—a tallish man with a red, honest face. He was only about thirty, but already several of his teeth had disappeared from the front of his mouth; in his eyes was a somewhat worn and weary look, as if a month's rest from the constant effort to please he was called upon to make would have done him the world of good.

"Come in, dear," he cried, in answer to a well-known tap at the door, his whole face lighting up with pleasure at the sound.

"Look, Guy; a letter from Atherstone!"

He opened the letter and read it, and then his face looked troubled again. His wife glanced over his shoulder as he read, and when they were finished they looked blankly at each other for a minute.

"What's to be done?" he asked, waiting for her to decide for him.

"You must go, Guy," she said with emphasis.

"How can I? Who is to take my place to-morrow?"

"One of the lay——"

"Yes, but a lay brother preached for me last Sunday, when I was too ill to do it myself. You know these people here won't

"A LETTER FROM ATHERSTONE."

stand too much of that sort of thing—they must have the white tie and a special cut of black coat. Besides, are you quite sure that I *ought* to go?"

She sighed, and began to think, knitting her brows in the prettiest way, and taking a seat beside him. She did not look much over eighteen, this young wife, with her broad, low forehead, and short crop of curly brown hair, cut rather close round the shapely head—a head that had acquired the habit in their short married life of doing a large proportion of the thinking, and solving most of the little commonplace problems that accompanied and punctuated their cramped, but not unpicturesque, life.

"Certainly," she said at last, "it seems to me that your duty to yourself demands that you should go. It is so unfortunate that the letter did not come earlier in the week; still, I think it will be choosing the least of two evils if you go."

"My duty to myself isn't my whole duty."

"Well, no, I suppose not."

"Can you suggest any——"

"Yes—let me go myself to Mr. Delvin, and ask him to take your place. He can hardly refuse, and then I will go the round of the congregation, and make excuses for you. I can soothe most of them, you know. And you can start to-night. An additional £100 a year under present circumstances, my poor boy——" and she sighed again.

"THE OLD LADY!"

The matter was this. Guy was one of the two nephews of a maiden lady in Warwickshire, who was extremely old and capricious, being, besides, fairly well off. The other nephew had long been the favourite; but a year before this he had been heard to comment facetiously on the longevity of "the old lady." The remark had reached her ears, and Guy had straightway been summoned and informed that he might for the future consider himself as sole heir of her property. He had just married, and the event had been hailed in the little household with all the gladness it deserved. And now had come another summons—a final one as it seemed, for the letter announced that Miss Grant was dangerously ill—dying—and required the immediate presence by her bedside of the recipient of all her favours. Both Grace and Guy instinctively understood from the wording of the letter that it was not too late for the will to be altered, and that its ultimate form would depend in a great measure on the prompt obedience of the nephew.

There was no help for it—he must go; and Grace, with her practical helpfulness, soon had him ready for departure. Consulting a time-table, she saw that there were still a couple of hours before he need leave the house, and armed with a note from Guy to Mr. Delvin, she put on her broad straw hat and plain dark cloak, and set out on her mission.

Mr. Delvin had just returned from business, and was leaning back wearily in an armchair, a massive, well-to-do man, with an air of the City about him.

"Oh, Mr. Delvin," cried Grace, as she entered the room, "I have come to ask yet another favour of you; poor Guy——"

"What! ill again, Mrs. Harkaway?"

"No, not that quite, this time, but an aunt of his——"

"Oh, it's his aunt, now, is it?"

Mr. Delvin was not in his best humour, and his voice was hard and unsympathetic; but Grace was a parson's daughter, and a parson's wife, and she had acquired the art of smiling while her heart was aching.

She told him the story candidly, and as the consideration was one of money, it

appealed to Mr. Delvin's only impressionable side. He was softened.

"And he wants me to preach for him to-morrow, eh?"

"Yes, that is it—you will, now, will you not?"

"The notice is a short one."

"One of your old sermons——"

"No, Mrs. Harkaway—no old sermons for the congregation at Ebenezer, *please*. I wish you would remember and just give your husband that hint; he and you really must realize fully that you have to deal with an exceptionally thoughtful, enlightened, and advanced communion here. Old sermons, eh! However, I'll try. To-morrow is not Sacrament Sunday, is it? No—well, tell Mr. Harkaway it is all right, I'll preach to-morrow on condition that he doesn't let that money slip through his fingers."

And so Guy went away with a lightened heart, feeling that the world was not wholly empty of sympathy and goodwill; while Grace went the rounds of the principal members of the congregation—the "pillars of the Church" they called one another—and told them how her husband had been called away, and how Mr Delvin was to take his place. The news was received with marked coldness, but they had all more or less felt the influence of her grace and beauty. Starting with a fixed determination the other way when Guy had married her, they had yet fallen into the habit of liking her, and often, for her sake, repressed their natural inclination to *growl*, without even knowing that it was for her sake.

But when, at half-past ten on the Sunday morning, a strange preacher, whose very name was unknown to them, ascended the pulpit, their patience was put to a test more severe than ever. Every eye looked cynically askance, brows were puckered into momentary frowns; and Mr. Potter, the builder, in the front-middle pew, was heard to whisper audibly into his wife's ear that "this kind of Jack-in-the-box business would have to be put a stop to, and he was the man who would see it done!"

What could it mean? Where was Mr. Delvin? And who was this youngster with the red hair, the boyish face, and the broad, flowing black silk gown recalling the days of Wesley and Whitfield? They did not like black silk gowns; they did not want them; they would not have tolerated it in a preacher of their own. They were plain folk, living not in the eighteenth but the nineteenth century—a practical, radical age, doing its level best to taboo humbug in all its manifestations and forms. And they did not appreciate unannounced, unknown strangers, coming they knew not whence, preaching they knew not what new-fangled "doctrine of lies"; they wished to know—they were resolved on knowing—what they were having for their money.

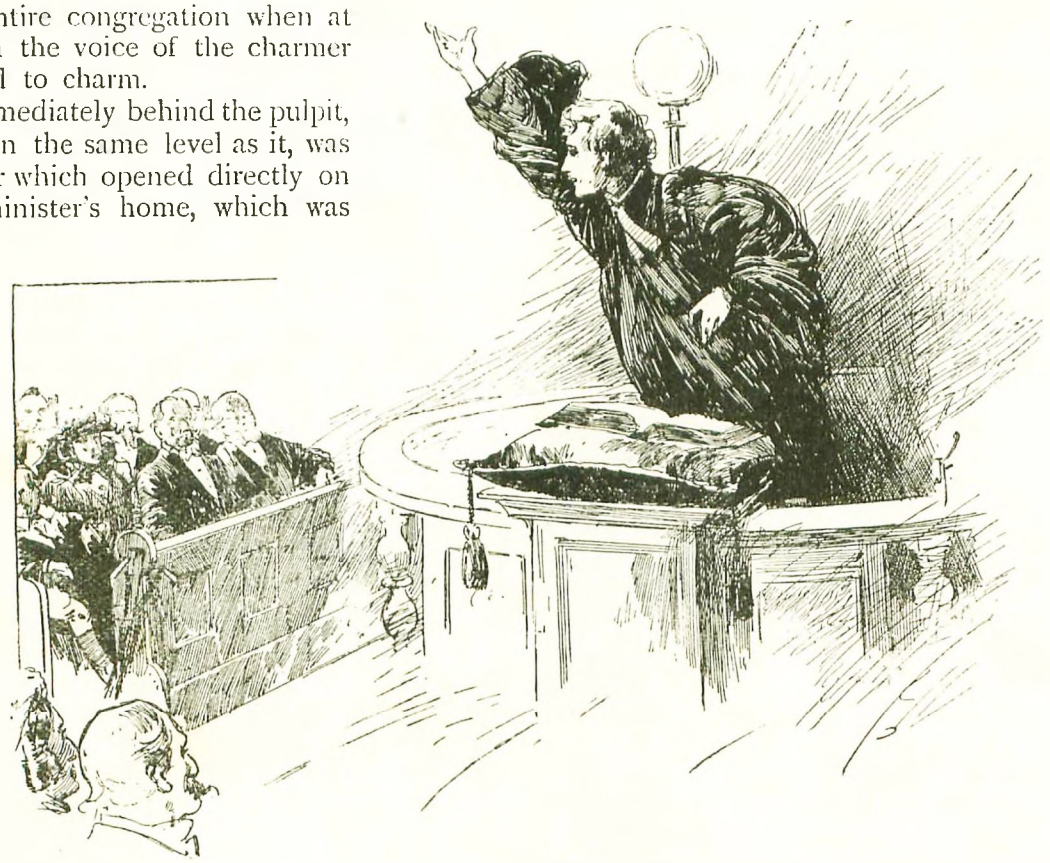
The preacher too was nervous, oppressively nervous at first; his hands trembled, his features were pallid, and it was necessary for him to clear his throat with every fresh effort he made to speak; once he gave out the wrong number of a hymn, and had to correct himself at the last moment; he made mistakes in reading the "lessons." He seemed woefully conscious of the unsympathetic attitude of his audience, and when one of the most influential of the trustees got up to leave the chapel, walking down the whole length of the aisle with loudly-creaking boots, the minister turned green and scarlet, and seemed for the moment to lose his head.

Then came the sermon. Everybody wriggled on a seat, blew a nose, coughed, and prepared to listen with critical severity. "But the Lord was with me," said the preacher, giving out the text, and making a great and triumphant effort to be calm—"and comforted me by the coming of Silas."

His voice was certainly in his favour. He had a low-toned, resonant, "carrying" voice, which filled the square little building like an actual, all-pervading presence. It seemed as if he only needed to become accustomed to its sound in order to cast off his painful self-consciousness, for he soon became natural, then interesting, then eloquent. Grown used to a round of well-worn commonplaces, the people leaned forward in their seats to drink in this new thought, to catch this fresh contagion of fervour. The preacher's eye began to flash with a more ardent and a more intelligent enthusiasm than that which they had grown old in witnessing; he surprised them with burst on burst of transcendental grandiloquence; he led them from climax to climax; vivid pictures; startling allegories; keen glances into things; high ideals; subtlest gleams of humour and practical admonitions fell in rapid succession like the scenes of a phantasmagory on the senses of the Ebenezerites. Here, truly, was something novel in the experience of the easy-going, self-satisfied little flock; and a great sigh almost of relief was heaved by

the entire congregation when at length the voice of the charmer ceased to charm.

Immediately behind the pulpit, and on the same level as it, was a door which opened directly on the minister's home, which was



"THE VOICE OF THE CHARMER."

really part of the same building as the chapel. The preacher could therefore leave the chapel without having to pass through any part of it. Guy usually descended the stairs of the pulpit after each service, and came round to the communion-rail, where the ceremony of hand-shaking with the chief officers was religiously gone through; some of them were expecting the strange preacher to do the same, and even went up to the rail for the purpose of self-introduction; but he had already left the chapel through the door behind the pulpit.

They felt aggrieved at not knowing more about the arrangements made for supplying the needs of the chapel. Here was a strange preacher—an excellent one, it is true—suddenly appearing in, and disappearing from, their own pulpit, without a word of explanation from anyone.

Mr. Delvin's daughter, who had come in late, certainly volunteered the information that her father, when coming down stairs, had fallen and sprained his ankle, with the result that it became impossible for him to keep his appointment. A messenger had at once been dispatched to acquaint Mrs. Harkaway with the state of affairs; but what had been her subsequent course and how she had secured the services of the brilliant substitute, who had so entranced them, no one knew.

They went away, pleased and angry at the same time—a thrill of satisfaction at the glowing words they had listened to being their chief feeling. Supposing, instead of poor, well-meaning, but comparatively dreary Guy Harkaway, they had *that other* for their pastor! Why, all the other churches in the neighbourhood would be deserted; visions of an enlarged and thronged Ebenezer floated before their imagination; they saw themselves the deacons, "leaders," lay preachers, of one of the most popular religious centres in the metropolis; at a score of steaming dinner-tables that day the mere possibility of such a thing was discussed, as men discuss the uses to which they would apply a great fortune if they suddenly became possessed of one.

In the evening the chapel was crowded, and again there arose fresh cause for discontent — for instead of the fiery young preacher, whom ailing mammas and lackadaisical daughters who never went out o' nights had come to hear, there stood before them in the pulpit old Mr. James, whose nasal drawl had never been known to fail to lull his entire audience into a complex state

which was half despondency and half sleepiness.

Guy Harkaway returned from Atherstone on the Wednesday following. Grace, who was out at the time, found him seated, when she came in, in the little drawing-room, his head leaning on his hand. She ran up to him with a cry of joy, and put her arms about his neck. She had never been parted from him so long before.

"I am so glad you have come!" she said. "But you are not looking well—not well."

"It's the nerves, my aunt's doctor told me. He says I want rest, *which*, of course, is out of the question."

Grace turned her head away and sighed.

"But tell me, Guy, is she—dead?"

"She is almost as well as you are, my dear. To die, and to have an absurd fancy that you are dying, are two different things."

"Oh!" said Grace.

"And now tell me all the news—how did you get on on Sunday? What sort of sermons did Mr. Delvin give you?"

"We got on very fairly; but Mr. Delvin did not preach, after all. He sprained his ankle and couldn't; was it not strange?"

"Strange?"

"Yes; it seemed to me as if it was a kind of judgment on your leaving your work for the sake of no matter how many pounds, and by my advice, too. Never again, Guy, dear, never again must you do that. Oh, I have been so wretched and scared!"

"But," said he, opening his eyes in alarm, "you found someone—you did not leave the pulpit empty, Grace? The people will never forgive——"

"Yes; I found someone."

"Whom, then?"

"Mr.—Mr. James."

"Oh, that will do," he said, with relief. "Did the people seem to like it?"

"Yes, pretty well. But, Guy, dear, do not refer to Sunday and Sunday's work in speaking to anyone. It can only have the effect of reminding them of your absences; and, should anyone speak to you about it, discourage the subject as much as possible. Will you, now?"

Without quite understanding her eagerness on the matter, he acquiesced mildly, and asked for something to eat.

It soon became apparent that the doctor's diagnosis of Guy's malady was only too accurate: his nerves were sadly unstrung, he was beginning to see things in a distorted light, to find insupportable the daily crosses of his life which, as a healthy man, he had been able to accept as inevitable. That very evening, as he sat by the cosy hearth of one of his "flock"—an elderly lady who was the leading spirit in the Clothes and Soup Distribution Committee—he evinced decided proof of this break-up of his constitution.

"THE LEADING SPIRIT IN THE CLOTHES AND SOUP DISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE."

"And now about the sermon on Sunday, Mr. Harkaway," she said, taking her seat on the other side of the fire, and smoothing down the folds of her mauve-coloured silk gown.

"I hope you liked it," said Guy.

"Liked it! Oh, Mr. Harkaway, do you doubt my powers of appreciation? How can one not like perfection?"—and the aureole of small spiral curls that clustered round her head shook at the recollection.

"Dear me!" said Guy, surprised, "I never thought Mr. James possessed such powers——"

"Mr. James!"

"You mean him, do you not—he preached on Sunday?"

"Now, Mr. Harkaway, do you really suppose I *could* mean anyone so ridiculous as dear old Mr. James? Of course, I don't;

I mean the morning preacher; the stranger. And now I want you to tell me *all* about him—where he lives and preaches; how Mrs. Harkaway got him to preach for you, and whether we are to have him again, soon!"

Guy looked about him in confusion. What stranger could she mean? Mrs. Acton must be dreaming.

"I think," he stammered, "you will find that Mr. James preached both morning and evening. My wife told me——"

"But *I* tell you that he did nothing of the kind; and if your wife told you differently, it is extremely strange of her, that's all."

There was some mistake somewhere; it almost seemed as if Grace stood convicted before this stranger of some inexplicable falsehood, and he felt a cold shiver run through him at the consciousness.

"And, by the way, what became of dear Mrs. Harkaway on Sunday—was she not well?"

"Certainly—she was at chapel."

"Oh, excuse *me*, she was not; it was the talk of everyone that she was not."

"Are you quite sure? She told me——"

"But *I* tell you, Mr. Harkaway," said Mrs. Acton for the second time, with a gentle firmness and a curious smile—"*I* tell you that she was not. Now, then!"

There was no explaining it. Trying to hide the confusion in his face he took his hat to go, and his hand trembled visibly as he extended it in farewell.

"And so you can't tell me anything about the young preacher?" said Mrs. Acton as he was going. "How very, very strange! You must question Mrs. Harkaway very closely—we are all dying to hear about him—we are all in love with him—he will be just the man to take your place when you are moved up higher."

It was the same everywhere—he had a round of visits to pay—at every house the same two questions about the new preacher and his wife's absence, the same humiliating confession of ignorance on his part, and the same enthusiastic praises of his mysterious substitute, who seemed to have more than taken his place in the esteem of his people.

Before he had finished his visits he began to hate and dread the least reference to this unknown man, whom he came to regard with morbid abhorrence in the light of a successful rival. The coarser members of the church—*nouveaux riches*, who, without meaning any harm, thought him a kind of privileged servant of theirs—made invidious comparisons between him and his substitute, and spoke of what "*he* might do with Ebenezer Chapel if he would consent to take charge of it." In his really shockingly nervous state every such vulgarity was like the thrust of a sharp instrument in his flesh, causing acute physical pain.

He reflected, too, that it was Grace who had introduced this rival, whoever he might be; and then he thought with a shudder of her silence with regard to him—a silence that seemed akin to a direct falsehood; and a direct falsehood it certainly was to describe to him, as she had done, the effect of a sermon which so many witnesses declared she had not heard. And with the thought that for some strange reason she had *lied* to him, it seemed as if the very foundations of his life were being swept from under him, as if some black cloud had gathered around him—and her—shutting out with its shadow all light and hope. "Into what snare of the devil," he said, looking up into the darkening sky, "we are being drawn, God alone knoweth!"

He walked aimlessly about the streets for some time, and returned home late. He scarcely looked at Grace, who had been waiting long for him, but supported his head on his hand, staring vacantly into the fire. She went and knelt by his side, leaning her head on his arm.

"Something is the matter," she said, softly; "come, tell me all about it."

But he only glanced down at her with something of repugnance, and said nothing.

She waited, looking with him into the fire, drawing still closer to him. Then she said again:—

"Come, tell me now; let us bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of——"

"Why were you not in chapel on Sunday morning?" he asked.

She turned pale, and then flushed red.

"Those interminable gossips——"

"Those interminable gossips speak the truth—you do not!"

Then she darted up from his side with the swift grace of a fawn, and the one exclamation: "Guy!"

"A nice position for me, is it not, to keep up the pretence of being a preacher of Truth, when my own wife——"

"Oh, I cannot bear it!" she wailed out, burying her hot face in her hands.

"You led me, wilfully led me, to believe that you were in chapel on Sunday morning:

the fact is, you were not there. Is it the thought of that you cannot bear?—if so, I can well understand you."

He was trying his best to be calm, but the words came hissing from his lips, and every nerve in his body was trembling. But she was sobbing in her hands, and made no answer.

"I refuse," he continued, "to hear anything further about the religious tramp you had here to preach in my pulpit. As you were false enough to try, for your own reasons, to conceal his presence here from me, I do not now wish to know who he was, whence he came, or anything about him. But if this be any consolation to you, let me tell you that that man has ruined me—yes, ruined me! He has contrived by a single sermon to make the people here utterly discontented with me and my work. His flashy style, his clap-trap cleverness, have had the effect of showing up my dulness. My ministry here for all practical purposes is at an end—and through you. Oh, I can't stand this house!"

He seized his hat and rushed to the door.

"HE SEIZED HIS HAT AND RUSHED TO THE DOOR."

"Come back!" she cried, recovering herself; "let me tell you——"

But she was too late, he had gone out into the darkness. Grace passed a night of complete misery, and many more such nights and days after that. Guy, it is true, so far conquered himself as to go about his work as usual—but he was suffering under a fit of acute self-depreciation, and he endured all the agonies of a self-tormentor. He took it into his head that the people were considering him unfit for the place he filled, and having this fancy, he really, in some measure, became unfit for it. He grew more and more gloomy, possessed with the fixed idea of his own unworthiness and Grace's lapse from truth. He scarcely spoke to her, and resolutely repulsed her slightest advance. His simple and honest nature found itself incapable of forgiving even one dishonesty.

Now, just in proportion as Guy's infatuation of morbid humility deepened, so the infatuation of his congregation for the unknown preacher rose higher. Every day Guy was pestered with questions about the only man he did not care to discuss; he could not give the desired details, but they thought that he would not, and began to suspect him first of jealousy and then of an unworthy secretiveness closely allied to positive prevarication.

It seemed absolutely incredible to the Ebenezerites that he should know nothing of the stranger, and his aversion to the subject was put down to the dread of being supplanted. Clearly, such strained relations between the minister of Ebenezer and his flock could not last long.

So one afternoon Grace was told to prepare the parlour for a meeting of a few of the dignitaries of the chapel, to take place that night.

"A mysterious meeting, surely," she thought, her heart misgiving her. "What can be its object? And why in the house instead of the chapel?"

They came one by one, with solemn faces, and took their seats round the table, at the head of which sat Guy. Poor Grace was shut out, but she hovered near the door hoping to catch stray words.

She heard Guy speaking in slow, mechanical tones, stopping short at intervals, as if

making an effort to command his voice. Gradually the truth dawned on her, and her heart stood still. Standing near to the door she heard him say, after a long peroration, with raised voice :—

"This, then, my dear friends, is the purpose for which I have called you together. The Lord's Word must flow from pure sources, through pure channels; the priest and his household must be 'without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing,' speaking the truth unfeignedly from the heart. I tell you, candidly, that up to the present, I have no definite views as to the direction in which I shall turn my energies; but while the least shadow of blame rests on me and mine, I cannot pursue the work of the ministry—nor do I doubt that, thus doing my duty, some door will be opened to me." (Here he gulped down a sob, and ceased for a moment to speak.) "I therefore formally tender you my resignation as minister of Ebenezer Chapel."

"Oh! no, no, no, gentlemen!" cried Grace, rushing into the room—"do not listen to him: he is distraught! He would not hear what I had to say to him, and I, in my foolish pride, would not force him to hear."

They looked up, relieved at the interruption; they had just been realizing fully for the first time all the sterling worth and goodness they were about to lose, and they had been feeling heavy at heart. There is always a certain sense of loss in parting from moral gold.

"It is all a ridiculous mistake, I assure you, gentlemen, not worthy of your serious notice. He has taken it into his head that I have swerved from the truth, because I said I was in the chapel on the Sunday morning he was in Warwickshire."

"But you were *not* there," said a member of the committee in a not unkindly voice.

"You may believe me that I was."

"Not in the minister's pew—come, now!"

"No, not in the minister's pew."

"Where, then?"

She hung her head and blushed.

"No one saw you, that's quite certain."

"On the contrary, everyone saw me."

They looked blankly at one another.

"Tell us where you were, then."

"I was—oh! please, gentlemen—I was in the—the—pulpit!"

It was as if a shell full of dynamite had fallen among them.

"I do not know," she continued, "whether I have committed a very terrible sin in your eyes or not—I half suspect I have. But you probably do not know all the circumstances, gentlemen. My husband had left his duties here for pecuniary reasons, and no sooner had he left than my mind began to misgive me as to whether he had taken the very best course. It was by my advice that he had gone, and I spent a wretched night in conjuring up all sorts of misfortunes that might follow from the doubtful step. I had a kind of presentiment that somehow Mr. Delvin

"OH! NO, NO, NO, GENTLEMEN!"

would be unable to keep the appointment—and so it really turned out. At the very last minute before service-time a messenger came to tell me of his accident. What was to be done? I could not then get a substitute, and I dared not let the Sunday service be turned into a prayer-meeting. I was afraid of something higher than mere human anger and resentment."

"Very right and proper!" said the chairman of committee, looking over his spectacles at his neighbour, and nodding decisively.

"And such a rattling sermon!" said a portly draper, with a tendency to slang.

"But how did you do it, mum?" asked another.

"It was very simple: I had an old red wig, which I had used in some charades years ago. I disguised my face in the best way I could—I am clever at that sort of thing—trusting to Guy's old gown and the pulpit to hide my dress and figure. I succeeded, you see."

"It strikes me you generally do succeed, Mrs. Harkaway," said an old member with infinite verve; "and now, I need not conceal from you that there has been some little talk among the more flighty part of the congregation of offering the living to the brilliant young preacher who took your husband's place. Mind you, there was nothing serious at the bottom of it—it was only talk, and foolish talk, too. However, as Mr. Harkaway thinks the place isn't good enough for him, and wants to resign, why, we offer it to the young preacher, of course. We will also vote you a month's holiday in the country to begin with, and you can take your husband with you. Do you accept now? I dare say these gentlemen will be agreeable."

And they were excessively agreeable in another sense, and shook Guy's hand till it hurt; then, having made a compact to keep the little meeting secret, and the occasion of it, they went off, leaving the two alone.

And as he bent fondly over her, praying for the forgiveness she so sweetly gave, he murmured low in her ear the old words whose deep meaning he was feeling with a quite new significance to-night: "And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him."

The Eagle's Crag.

By M. P. Shiel.

THE village of Arli is, I should think, quite the smallest community of human beings extant with a baker's shop and a *cabaret* in it. The primitive folk who inhabit it would strike you as more than merely old-fashioned —they are antique, prehistoric, suggesting "the old eternities."

They are amphibious too, like seals. Living high up on a spur of the Apennines, you would call them mountaineers, but they are fishermen as well—water-rats, if you like —and from their high eminence they can almost see the little sweep of dark grey sand on which they draw up their boats o' nights. All round the valley, which reaches down to the sea, hang tiny villages at dizzy heights on the bare crags. They look like nothing so much as nests. Till you go near them, the imagination refuses to see why they do not topple over all of a heap. A telescope would reveal to you the fact that everywhere there is a small square church tower; it is as if the eagles had set to work and built baby temples to the Infinite.

In Arli, wonderful to tell, there lived a great man, a rich man, and a wise. What if he could not read? He had seen the world, and all its wonders. The house he lived in had not peat or thatch on the roof like the houses of the rest of men, but real shingles that had come from Genoa, hard by. This was old Francesco Testi, bent down now with age, his long locks all white like the driven snow; but with eyes still wild and bright as ever. What fate was ever like this fate? He, like others, had started life as a goat-herd and deep-sea fisher, and see what he had grown to now, after fourscore years of living—rich and honoured, a king in Arli! Nothing is incomprehensible but the infinitely simple, and that was why these poor people never could understand how this miracle had been brought about for Francesco; and yet the whole secret lay in the fact that he had had the pluck and the invention to go off to Genoa to be a sailor, and had dared to cross the great sea in a great ship.

FRANCESCO TESTI.

It was darkly whispered that Signor Francesco had a thousand napoleoni, which people were keeping for him in a bank in some far-off city. And this all was to fall to Simonetta, his grand-daughter, when he died —to her, and the husband she should choose. Simonetta, mark you, was only seventeen, and many a time, as she wandered lonely in the chestnut woods, she felt hardly grateful for her thousand napoleoni. She was a beam of sunlight, and felt herself to some extent forbidden to shine, and glance, and dart. By a beam of sunlight, of course, I mean a flirt. She was the queen of the village, and was dying to be its plaything. The lads worshipped her, but at a distance that was dreadful to her.

Now, it happened that one fine day old Francesco took himself up and went away somewhither. It must have been to that same far-off city where all his wealth lay stored, for when he returned he had all his worldly goods about him in the shape of a pile of notes. Day by day the hunger to see them, to fondle them, had grown on him, till the longing became a greed, a lust. So he had gone, and on the very night of his return he showed them in his wicked glee to

Simonetta before locking them up in a frail wooden cabinet; and Simonetta, in a flutter, went and told Marina, who fluttered for company, and so the flutter spread and spread, till the very crows in the trees caught the contagion, and croaked the great news in concert.

But on the morning of the third day after Francesco's return, the notes were gone—gone!—and every one of those brown faces turned to white, and a great hush fell on all that mountain-side.

From far and near they came, assembling in front of the shingled house, speaking little and in whispers. They waited long as the slow hours rolled round, hoping for a sight of the old man's scared face. All this time they relieved one another like sentinels. At last, at dusk, Simonetta came to the door, a woful sight, her eyes all red with weeping.

"My grandfather thanks you, good people, for your kind feeling," she said, and then broke down, sobbing straightaway. "He—would come — and thank you — himself, but——"

"Who stole the money, Simonetta; tell us that? What does Francesco think?" cried a voice.

"He—doesn't know—but it must be one of you."

A murmur, half of anger, rose from the crowd. They were honest folk, you see, and a theft like this had never been known among them.

"What about that Pippo?" shrieked a woman's voice.

Simonetta started and looked up. This was an idea that seemed to appeal to her quick woman's wit. But she shook her head after a moment, and said:—

"No, it is impossible. Grandfather saw Pippo at Milan, where he got the notes. Pippo is far from here."

There was a sharp exclamation of surprise at this point from a man in the crowd. It came from Nicolo, the boatman, the fruit-carrier to the Eagle's Crag. Every eye turned to him. Here, surely, would be light and insight, if anywhere. But Nicolo, who was not prone to speech, and shyer than a chamois kid, hung his head, and said nothing.

"It boots nothing to stand there making guesses," continued Simonetta. "It would be better if you all went home and tried to forget us. But, oh! I beg of you, whoever has stolen the money, for the Madonna's sake, to return it! Nothing will be said. You would not kill an old man?—and this has nearly killed him already. And besides, he bids me say to you all, that whoever—mark that—whoever brings back those pieces of paper shall—shall—have me for his—— You know what I would say, perhaps. I am a maiden, and would speak maidenly. And I would consent, too—indeed, indeed, I would—if only to save him from dying of his despair!"

She ceased her simple speech and closed the door, whereupon the crowd formed itself into a series of select committees to discuss the situation. For the present, only one of their number withdrew from the conclave of loosened tongues—it was Nicolo, the silent.

He descended the mountain-side for a while, then turned into a lonely piece of level land shut in by crags. The short grass was covered in places by patches of crisp snow, which had fallen only the evening before. All the time he kept his eye fixed on the ground, as if searching for something. That something he had seen there the previous night, and he now wanted to see it again. Fresh snow had fallen since, but it must have been very little, for he soon gave a grunt of satisfaction, and bent low down to examine his find: it was an enormous footprint in the snow.

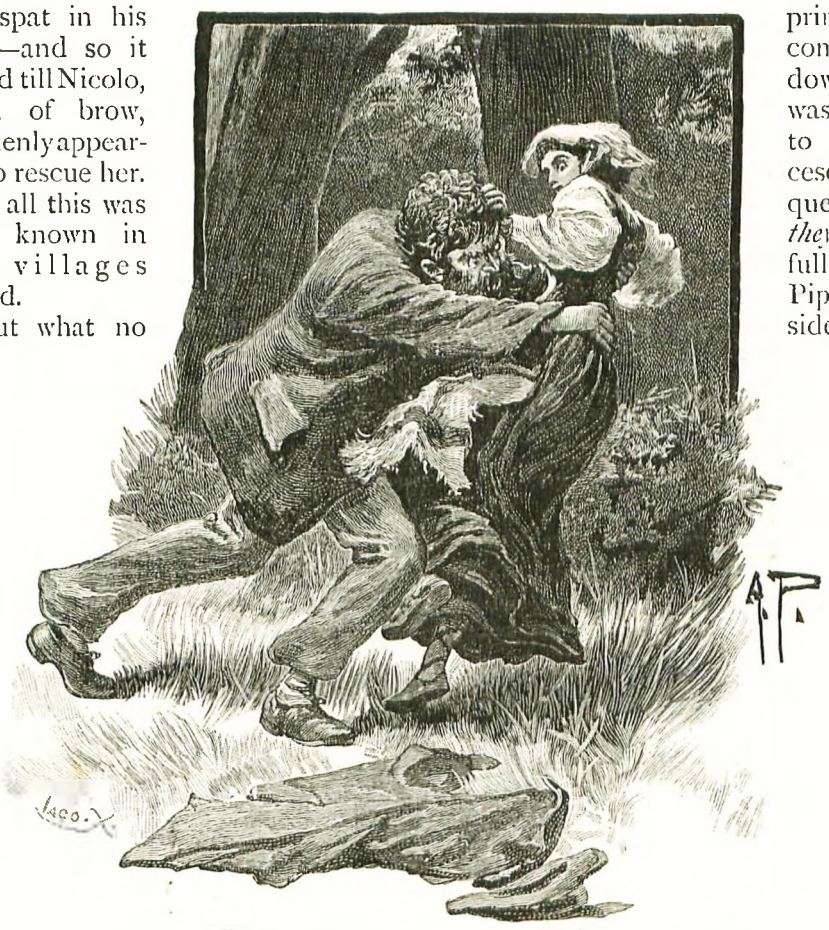
Nicolo knew that there were only two feet in all Italy that could make such a track as that—the feet of Pippo, the hunchback. And yet Pippo was supposed to be far away in Milan!

Pippo, I must tell you, was a stranger in those parts. No true mountain-climber he, but a Roman from the flat lands of the Campagna. Some three years before he had suddenly appeared in the midst of these solitudes, and had settled down amongst them. No one knew who or what he was, save this: that he was a learned man, a chemist, a reader of books. It was clear, too, that he must be rich; and people whispered that he must be one of the *far niente* ones of the big outside world, who, for some crime, had come to this lonely, quiet place to hide securely from justice; for he did not labour like other men, but spent his time in awful bouts of drunken madness, or—during lucid intervals—in wandering over the mountains, and, in his monstrous, misshapen head, dreaming vain dreams of Simonetta.

At first she had only laughed at him, and witched him only the more with her laughter, till one day, meeting her alone in a wood, he seized on her like a falcon on a dove, and in wild words swore she should be his. Then did Simonetta all at once become a tragic queen. Her little nails were sharp, and she used them to tear

steaks from Pippo's cheeks; her tongue was shrill and shrewish, and she used it in shrieking out invocations on all the saints. Between whiles she spat in his face—and so it lasted till Nicolo, stern of brow, suddenly appeared to rescue her. And all this was well known in the villages round.

But what no one knew save himself was a little romance—the only one he had ever had—which Nicolo had been for some time hiding and hugging in his own bosom. He was thirty years, if he was a day, and a swarthy, black-bearded man—lean, athletic; but there was tingling in his heart in these very days of the theft, all the visionary, rapturous, clandestine joy of a schoolboy's first love.



"HE SEIZED ON HER LIKE A FALCON."

It had come about in this way. One day, with the burning sun right overhead, Nicolo had sat him under a pine-tree far up the mountains; in the lassitude of the hour he had taken out a knife and carved his name, "Nicolo," on the trunk. A week later, when he came to that tree again, he stood face to face with a miracle. Someone had scraped out three words in the bark right beneath his name, and the words were: "I LOVE YOU."

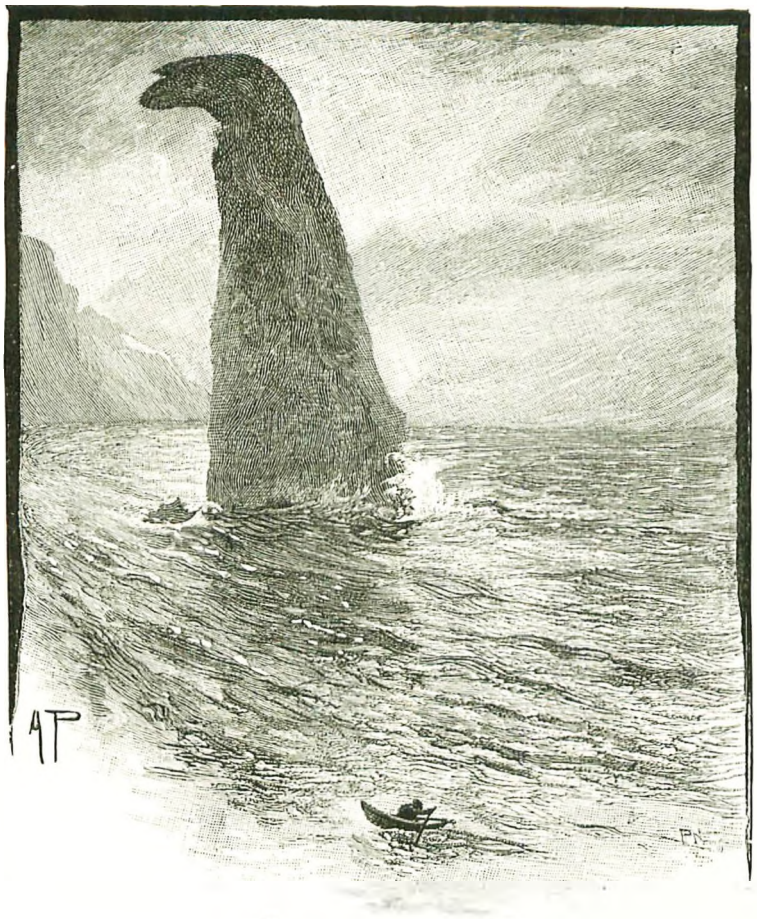
Who was it had done this thing? Nicolo, without daring to whisper it to himself, believed in his heart of hearts, with that belief, perhaps, which is the offspring of one's wishes, that it was Simonetta. And he was a shrewd fellow to hit a nail on its head, too!

After finding the foot-prints in the snow, he continued his way listlessly down the mountain. He was no longer in doubt as to who had stolen Francesco's notes — the only question was, *where were they now?* The world is full of hiding-places, and Pippo, he knew, was considerably more cunning than the devil. He sat on a ledge of rock from which the sea was visible, letting his eye rest on a tiny speck far out on the water.

It was already dusk, but he had the vision of a sparrow-hawk, and presently this speck began to interest him. When it came nearer he could see that it was a small boat, and that it contained only one occupant; and that one, he soon decided, was no fisherman. He ran quickly down the path and concealed himself behind a clump of myrtles that grew near the shore. He could have laughed aloud for joy when he recognised the huge, doubled-up form of the hunchback as he jumped from the boat, and applied his great strength to draw it up. Surely Nicolo was in luck's way—he had discovered, and without an effort, the great secret. The notes were at the Eagle's Crag!

This rock stands some miles from the mainland. The old fishermen of Liguria and Etruria in the palmy days of the Roman Republic called it *Rupes Aquilina*, because of the curious configuration of the summit, which resembles an eagle's head and beak. And the old name still clings to it.

It rises in awful solitude sheer out of the sea to a height of near two thousand feet. It is shaped somewhat like one half of a cone slit down the middle—quite flat on one side, the other forming a convex surface. On the convex side, the south, not only is life possible, but a few poor men and



"IT WAS A SMALL BOAT."

women actually exist there. This south side has a regular steep incline upward to the very summit, and a bold and skilful climber may even reach the top; but once there, the brain grows dizzy to look down, on the *north* side, on a smooth wall of rock, falling away from the feet, not perpendicularly, but with a marked *inward* slant. Those who have so climbed and looked down, by stretching far out over the flat eagle's beak, will tell you that it is a sight full of terror, making the heart sick. In all this wall of rock there is one break, and only one—a horizontal ledge, three feet broad, which runs right across it at a height of rather more than three-quarters of the rock's height from the bottom. Quite near the end of the beak on that side a few shrubs grow.

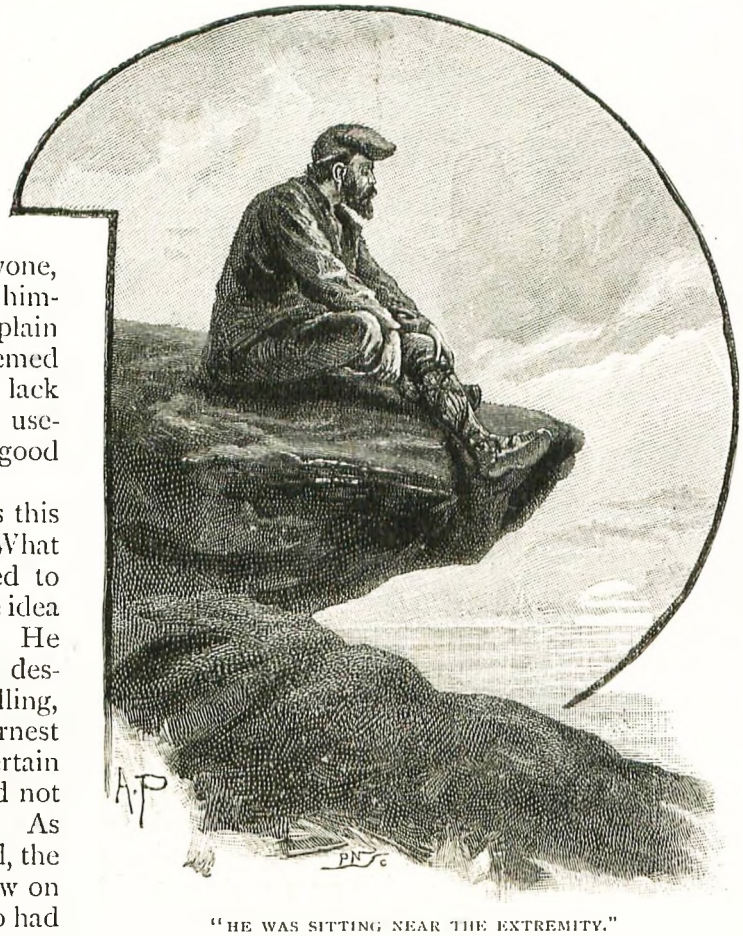
Before the sun rose on the morning following his lucky discovery, Nicolo was far out to sea. He had laboured all night furnishing his boat with a supply of "tasso" (dried strips of deer-meat), with water, fruit, a great hunk of goat's-milk cheese, fishing-tackle, and a pot-bellied bottle of gentian brandy. He had an idea that Pippo was too cunning to hide his treasure on the rock itself. What was simpler than to cram the notes in, say, a hollow ball of lead, and sink them away out in the deep? The sea is an excellent confidant, but it has this disadvantage, that you must mark the spot where your hidden object lies by some visible floating substance. It was for this substance that Nicolo went in search. In doing so, all his movements were regulated by the most scrupulous method. He never passed over the same spot twice. At night, the sea being at that season as smooth as a lake's surface, he hung two lanterns over his boat's side, making himself the centre of a little circle of light. In this way he spent two weeks, searching for miles round the Eagle's Crag. Then he decided definitely that he was on the wrong track.

The next week or two he spent on the rock itself, examining every square inch of its only accessible side—the south. One of the men who lived there *remembered to have seen Pippo* coming down the side of the hill on a certain night. On calculating, he discovered that that was the very night after the notes were stolen—the night he had seen Pippo come to land in the boat. That evidence was conclusive, for with what other object could the hunchback have ascended the rock (which hardly anyone ever visited) but to hide his treasure? The notes were there, then, hidden somewhere near the summit. There was hardly any soft soil in which they could be buried, and that made his task easier, for he must look for them on the surface. With the most scientific precision, with the patience of Sisyphus, he scrutinized —to the wonder of the few natives, who could not imagine what Nicolo was searching for—every spot from base to vertex; but the weeks rolled round, and he found nothing.

At the end of this great search Nicolo was sitting one evening near the extremity of the eagle's beak just as the rim of the sun was dipping, away in the red west, into the sea. Vaguely he began to ply himself with the question—what next?—what next? Suddenly a pebble fell away from his feet, and following it, his eyes rested mechanically on the narrow ledge of the receding north side.

He started as if slapped on the back by a hand. What if the notes were there?

But he soon dismissed the idea as improbable. If they were on that ledge, he argued, they must have been *flung* there, and would be past recovery by anyone, even by Pippo himself. Being a plain man, there seemed to him to be a lack of motive in so useless a waste of good money.



"HE WAS SITTING NEAR THE EXTREMITY."

Still, ever as this question of "What next?" recurred to him, so did the idea of the ledge. He was unwilling, desperately unwilling, after all his earnest quest, to entertain it, but it would not be shut out. As the days passed, the conviction grew on him that Pippo had wantonly thrown away the notes; and he began, too, to discover something like a motive for such an act. Despairing of Simonetta rich, Pippo had resolved to make her poor, and that—and not the love of gain—must have been his reason for stealing the notes; and so he had practically destroyed them. But, for some reason or other which Nicolo could not imagine, he had not thrown them into the sea, or torn them up, or burned them—for if so, *why had he climbed the rock?* And he had not hidden them on the south side; of that Nicolo's exhaustive search made him sure. There was only one alternative left: he had flung them on to the ledge—flung them in his fiendish malignity, in his fantastic cunning, where it would be impossible for any human being to regain them, unless—unless—the rock were scaled!

To *descend* was, of course, impossible; for anyone attempting this, even with the aid of a rope, would swing out into air from the far-projecting beak. But to scale it? One must be both a genius and a giant, and he must be agile and patient, as he was daring and muscular. Imagine an animal made up of the hippo, the goat, the eagle, and the ant, and possessing withal the intelligence and the inventiveness of a man.

The ledge was partly visible from the summit, but parts of it were hidden from view by patches of foliage. Nicolo passed hours in examining the parts he could see, leaning his body far over the edge; but though he could perceive nothing except a few pebbles, he abated no whit of the resolve he had formed to attempt the great feat. He passed several days in brooding over elaborate plans, carefully separating in his thoughts what was possible from what was not. Then late at night, when he knew all prying eyes were closed, he returned to the mainland, pulled up his boat, and started off on foot over the mountain passes to the nearest large town. He came back as secretly as he went, staggering under a heavy load. This consisted of his tools and a large stock of provisions.

When he reached the Eagle's Crag, he anchored his boat close under the steep north wall, mooring it in addition to a great spike which he drove into a crevice. There was no beach, and the water was deep. He rigged up a tarpaulin into a coffin-shaped tent in his boat: this was to be his sleeping-place. After that night, for four long months he never saw a human face or sign of human life, except a fishing-boat or two from the other side of the island.

He began by driving spikes into the rock, alternating these by holes which he chipped out for his feet. To the spikes he attached ropes. He was provided with means to sharpen his tools when they wore down, but

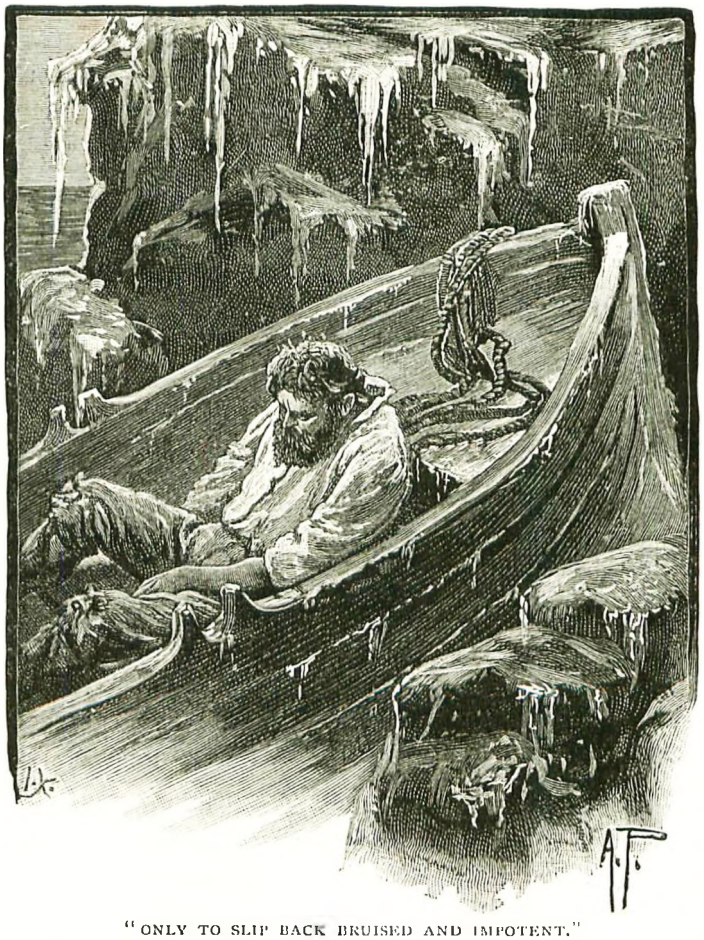
the granitic mass he worked on was almost as hard as the metal he worked with. The splinters and the sparks flew into his face and blinded and cut him; sometimes as soon as he had driven in a spike, after half a day's labour, he found it loose in the hole it had made; then it was necessary to begin all over again, for it was from these that his life hung. Like Dante, his labour made him lean many days.

He depended in a great measure for his food on the fish he could catch, and this very often did not come up to his expectations. Once he hungered for three days together, and all this time it was necessary to quench his thirst with minute draughts of water, for his stock of this, too, showed signs of failure. To return for these things among men would be to delay his work and betray himself, and he would have died first. So long as he remained where he was he felt fairly secure from observation, for the three or four fishermen on the other side never came round to the dreadful north side, and believing it the haunt of the terrible storm-spirit, sighed at the very mention of it. To the great ships, of course, passing in the distance he was invisible; as, also, to the folk on the mainland, who, generally speaking, had little or no intercourse with those on the rock. Nicolo therefore, so long as he kept close, was as good as buried from the sight of man. Only God's eye perceived him.

After a time he found that he had miscalculated the length of rope he would require, and his supply of this began to fall short: he cut his tarred canvas tent into strips, and twisted them firmly together; thenceforward he slept with the starlight in his eyes, wet, like the old Babylonish king, with the dew of Heaven. But he prospered, if slowly, and every day found him at least a foot or two higher.

It was when he had nearly reached the middle point of his upward pilgrimage that, as he was striking one final blow before descending for the night, his great hammer slipped from his wearied fingers and fell into the sea. To work without it was impossible, and he knew that it had fallen into some eight fathoms of water. All that night and the next day he was dredging the bottom with his weighted net. The net seemed to gather to itself all the *débris* of ocean with which to taunt and jeer at him—all but his hammer. At last, with an angry exclamation, he stripped himself, and began to dive. Paler and paler showed the resolute face of the man under the grey moonlight every time he emerged to the surface. When at last he appeared, grasping the lost prize, two thin crimson streams were trickling from both his ears.

There was something sinful in his persistency—it was like hurling a challenge at the Invincible. In the cold days of winter the frost fixed and riveted his numbed limbs, like the limbs of some naked, crucified Prometheus, to the cruel rock. There came a morning when he awoke, shivering from his nightmare sleep, to see his ropes, the gunwale of his boat, and the face of the rock covered over with icicles. To climb at all now was deadly dangerous, but he made more than one attempt, only to slip back bruised and impotent to the bottom. During the week the hard frost lasted, Nicolo became that worst of all self-tormentors—a wild beast



"ONLY TO SLIP BACK BRUISED AND IMPOTENT."

chained. But when it was over he began sullenly again, not even pausing to feel grateful.

His scanty garments were always wet, and soon hung in rags from him. The elements, wandering through the world in search of a plaything, saw him, and made him their target. The hail, the sun, the sirocco, the snow took turns in shying at him, in pinching and torturing him. Gradually his eye lost lustre, his ribs stood out, and a feverish palsy seized on him. He became the ruin of a man. And with all this, the spirit, too, that had borne him up began to droop. Genius, you see, has its limits. The very worst element of his malady was the terrible temptation that seized him in the last days of his toil, voluntarily—defiantly—to hurl his failing limbs into the deeps beneath him.

At last, one day when only a week's labour remained to be done, Nicolo, absorbed in his work, suddenly felt a shiver run through him. He glanced up; the sky was inky in its blackness; underneath, the sea was white with foam, and the breakers were whishing and thundering against the base of the rock. He looked for his boat, and he saw it—but miles away, a black dot on the seething waters. To swim after it in such a sea, in such a current, was a task too great for any man, and he was already very weak. He was a real Prometheus now—chained irrevocably to the rock he had set out to conquer.

He worked night and day, foodless, parched, sleepless, bowing his head before the relentless storm that tugged and tore at him, swinging him viciously from side to side, or battering him against the rock. Had he been a good man, a humble man, he would inevitably have failed; but a demon was in him—and on the morning of the third day he reached out his bony arm, drew himself on to the ledge, and with a deep gasp, fell prone on the object of all his effort, to die.

He lay there without sign of life all that day and another, the storm raging over him; but when it cleared, Nicolo stirred in his long sleep, and awoke to new hope and motion. After all, pain is only pain, and when it is past, seems bearable enough; and was it not for Simonetta—she who, he hoped, had written the sweet hieroglyph, "I love you"—that he had suffered so? And now at last—at last—he had triumphed, and had only to stretch out his hand to take the notes. He never for a moment doubted the correctness of his theory that they had been thrown there attached to some weight, and if so, it was clear they could not have rolled off, for the inside edge of the ledge was at a lower level than the outside.

He rose to his feet and walked backward and forward several times over the narrow platform. Merciful God! *But there were no notes there!* With his head fallen forward on his breast he sank down again on the rock, moaning piteously, for the first time giving way to utter despair.

Presently it struck him that he was dying of thirst, and he decided to descend, intending to swim round to the other side if his strength sufficed—he hoped that it would not. As he was about to step over the edge, a piece of metal at the very end of the ledge caught his eye. He wondered vaguely what it was doing there, and picked it up. It was a large, heavy nail.

To his surprise, two bits of thin white thread were tied around it. The first of these led up from the piece of metal along the side of the rock above him: he could not follow it far with his eye, but he concluded that it must be fastened to one of the shrubs at the summit. He tugged at it, and it snapped mid-way. Then he looked at the other thread. He was endlessly mystified to see it lead straight up, not along the side of the rock this time, but up into the air, away from the slanting edge of the rock, where this narrowed in to form the peaked summit—straight up and up—till he lost sight of it in the azure, as if, forsooth, this, and no other, were the slight connecting link that binds Heaven to earth. He pulled at it, and it yielded easily to his touch; he commenced to draw it in, as he used to draw in his fishing-line when a "bite" was on, hand over hand. The length seemed endless, but gradually a diminutive round object came into sight above his head. At this object the thread ended.

When the whole length had been thus taken in, Nicolo held in his hand a small balloon, a couple of feet in length, made of a double fold of gold-beater's skin, and filled with hydrogen gas. He tore it open; the notes were within it. With these firmly grasped in his right hand, with both his arms stretched out to Heaven, he dropped sobbing on his knees, uttering agonized thanks to God.

And at that moment his uplifted eyes met a face peering at him over the summit of the rock; far off as it was, he recognised it as the face of Pippo. He guessed at once that Pippo had missed him from the mainland, and, his suspicions being aroused, had come to see how the notes were faring.

In the next moment a pistol shot entered Nicolo's back, and, turning over and over in one horrid, stupendous somersault, he fell into the abyss below.

Before Nicolo struck the sea he was suffocated, but he was not dead. By the strange providence of Heaven, the eye of a bewildered fisherman, being caught from afar by the flash of a white form in human likeness tumbling down the face of the Eagle's Crag, the man rowed up to him and saved him. The wet notes were still in his hand. He was taken to the other side and coaxed back to life by the old fisherwives, who possess a skill all their own, both in surgery and medicine. One fine day, after some weeks, he stole out of his hut when his old nurse's back was turned: it was his first new attempt at walking. On missing him she hurried after him in alarm, and discovered him at the water's edge eagerly looking towards the coast. Nicolo was humming the air of a gay Highland madrigal.

"HE FELL INTO THE ABYSS BELOW."

All the birds were singing and shouting on the bright morning that he returned to the mainland, and began to climb the mountains; as for him, his heart was a whole nest of larks.

At a turn of the path he met a woman coming down with a basket of oranges on her head; she glanced curiously at him, and said, as she passed him:—

"Walk fast, Nicolo—or you will be late to see the wedding."

A few yards farther up a boy, tending a herd of goats, called merrily out to him:—

"Walk fast, Nicolo—or you will miss the wedding. Signor Pippo, you know, is to be married this morning. Poor Simonetta! It is old Francesco's doing, all of it. It was Pippo found his notes, you see, and the old man had sworn that whoever found them should——"

Nicolo answered nothing. He did not even mend his pace; but he looked upwards into the pale sky, as if appealing *there* for justice.

The little church at Arli was crowded that morning. The priest at the altar looked glum, as though conscious that he was helping forward the action of a tragedy. He had already begun, when a strange figure in ragged clothes, with long hair and wild eyes, walked unsteadily up the aisle. So long had he disappeared that many believed him dead, and his coming back was like the uprising of a ghost in their midst. Every eye in the building turned on him in amazement. With bent head he moved slowly up to the altar and stood by the side of the sad-faced bride.

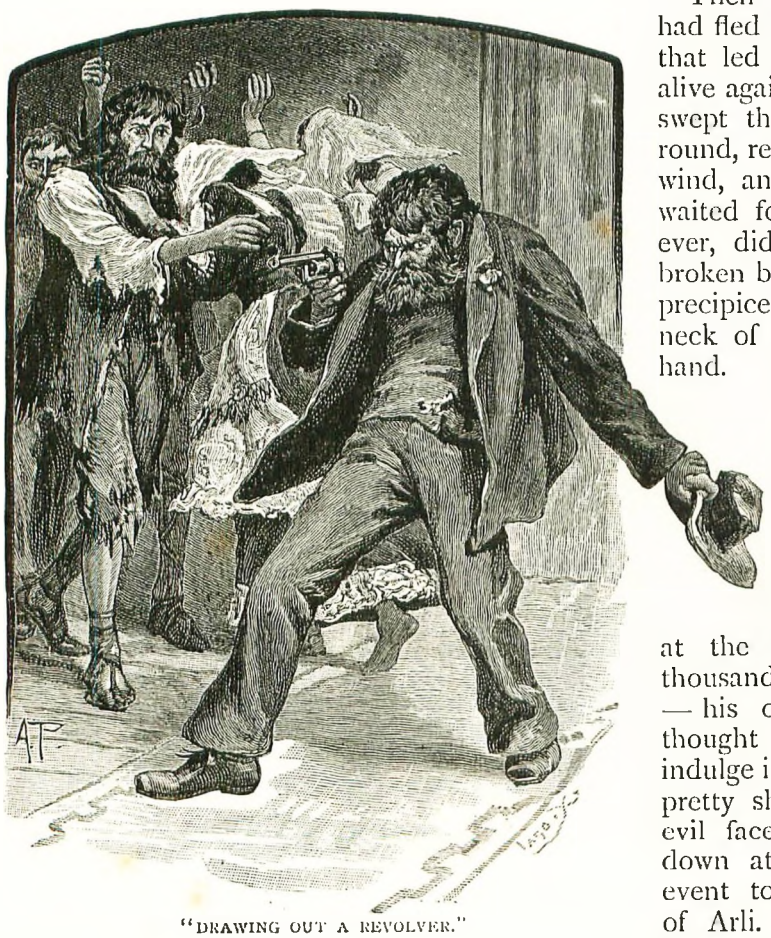
"Do you take this woman for your wife?" asked the priest, ignoring the new presence.

"I do," replied Pippo, defiantly.

"I do," repeated Nicolo, humbly.

This was an embarrassment of riches. Clearly, something must be done, and the *padre* at once referred the question of conjugal rights to Simonetta's better judgment. Before she could answer, Nicolo, with masterly diplomacy, had whipped out the notes from his pocket, and held them up before the crowd; a word or two sufficed to show that the notes Pippo pretended to have found must have been his own, and not *the* notes at all. With this explanation, popular sentiment turned wildly in Nicolo's favour. Dark, honest faces all round the central figures began to glow sullenly with vindictive rage

at the deed that had been done in their midst, and a vague threatening rumble began to make itself heard. In one hand Francesco grasped a sailor's bowie-knife, while with the other he pressed that of Nicolo. The dainty little bride, pale and trembling, glanced thankfully up at her deliverer. Meantime, the ominous murmur had swelled into a howl of indignation; the hot blood of the peasants was lashing itself into a fury, and several of the wildest of the lads had already risen from their seats and huddled nearer to the altar. Suddenly a loud voice cried out, "Seize the thief!" followed by a rush that would certainly have borne down Pippo, had he not quickly retreated backward, at the same time drawing out a revolver, and



"DRAWING OUT A REVOLVER."

pointing it at his aggressors. His face was livid, and had in it a something that warned the boldest to beware. At the sight of the cold barrel there was a slight hesitation among the peasants, and Pippo, taking quick advantage of it, turned on his heels and made a dash for an open door. As he did so, one of the men ran rapidly up to him, and by a deft movement snatched the weapon from his hand, but before it could be used against him, Pippo had disappeared through the door, which he slammed behind him.

The keeper of the little *osteria* of Arli told afterwards how, all ghastly and panting, he had then rushed into her shop, shrieking "Brandy, brandy!" She had handed him a bottle, which he half drained before her eyes. "They have my pistol," he exclaimed, "but let them beware of sudden death when Pippo returns with arms. Tell them I go where they may be had in plenty!"

Then with the bottle under his arm he had fled from the shop, taking the road that led to Genoa. He was never seen alive again. All that night a black storm swept the hills, but in many a village round, resolute men, defying thunder and wind, and armed with deadly weapons, waited for his appearing. Pippo, however, did not come. A week later his broken body was found at the foot of a precipice far up the mountains, with the neck of his bottle still grasped in his hand. It was never certain whether he died a suicide's or a drunkard's death, or, as legal people say, "by the act of God."

Old Francesco, with a certain rough sense of the fitness of things, was for having Nicolo married to Simonetta at the Eagle's Crag. He had two thousand napoleoni now instead of one — his own and rich Pippo's — and thought perhaps he could afford to indulge in whims. But Simonetta, with a pretty shudder, said she would see the evil face of Pippo grinning spitefully down at them from the top. So the event took place in the little church of Arli. For many a long year after, it was noticed that Nicolo never went near that stupendous Strength from which, by much wrestling, he had drawn Sweetness; and even when by chance he cast a glance at the great rock, he was observed to sigh an "Ave," and devoutly and humbly to cross himself.

HU-GUE-NIN'S WIFE

HUGUENIN, my friend—the man of Art and thrills and impulses,—the finished *boulevardier*, the *persifleur*—must, I concluded with certainty, be frenzied. So, at least, I reasoned when, after long years of silence, I received from him this letter:—

"'*Sdili*,' my friend; that is the name by which they now call this ancient Delos. Wherefore has it been written, 'so passeth the glory of the world.'

"Ah! but to me it is—as to *her* it was—still Delos, the Sacred Island, the birthplace of Apollo, son of Leto! On the summit of Cynthus I look from my dwelling, and within the wide reach of the Cyclades perceive even yet the fruity offerings arriving from Syria, from Sicily, from Egypt; I see the barks that bring the sacred envoys of Pan-Ionium to festival—I note the flutter of their hallowed garments—on the breeze once more floats to me their 'Songs of Deliverance.'

"The island now belongs almost entirely to me. I am, too, almost its sole inhabitant. It is, you know, only four miles long, and half as broad, and I have purchased every available foot of its surface. On the flat top of the granite Cynthus I live, and here, my friend, shall I die. Chains more inexorable and horrible than any which the limbs of Prometheus ever knew bind me to this crag.

"A friend! a friend! That is the thing after which my sick spirit pants. A *living man*: of the dead I have enough; of living monsters, ah, too much! An aged servant or two, who seem persistently to shun me—this is all I possess of human fellowship. Would that I dared to ask you, an old companion, to come to the solace of a sinking man in this place of desolation!"

The letter continued long in this strain of mingled rhapsody and despair, containing, moreover, a lengthy disquisition on the Pythagorean doctrine of the metempsychosis of the soul. Three times did the words "living monsters" occur. Such a communication, coming from *him*, did not fail to excite my utmost curiosity and pity.

From London to Delos is no inconsiderable journey; yet, conquered during the course of a long vacation by an irresistible impulse, and the fond memories of other

days, I actually found myself, on a starry night, disembarking on the sands that bound the once famous harbour of the tiny Greek island. My arrival may be dated by the fact that it fell out just two months before the very extraordinary natural phenomena of which Delos was the scene during the night of August 13th, 1880. I crossed the ring of flat land which nearly encircles the islet, and began the ascent of the central mountain. The slumberous air languished with the wild breath of rose and jessamine and almond; the pipe of the cicala and the gleam of the firefly were not wanting to add to the narcotic charms of this land of dreams. In less than an hour I walked into a tangled garden, and placed my hand on the shoulder of a tall, stooping man, dressed in Attic attire, who walked solitary under the trees.

With a fearful start he turned and faced me.

"Oh," he said, panting, and placing both his hands upon his chest, "I was greatly surprised! My heart——"

He could utter no more. It was Huguenin, and yet not he. The heavy beard rolling down his white woollen garments was, I could see, still black as ever; but the masses of unkempt hair which floated with every zephyr about his face and neck were bleached to the whiteness of snow. He stared at me through the dull and cavernous eyes of a man long dead.

We walked into the house together. The mere sight of the building was enough to convince me that in some mysterious way, to some morbid degree, the Past had fettered and darkened the intellect of my friend. The mansion was of the purely Hellenic type, but nothing less than inconceivable in extent—a wilderness rather than a habitation. I found myself in an ancient Greek house—only, a Greek house multiplied many times over into an endless, continuous congeries of Greek houses. It consisted of a single story, though here and there on the vast flat roof there rose a second layer of apartments. These latter were reached by ladders. We walked through a door—opening inwards—into a passage, which in turn led us to an oblong marble court-yard; this was the *aule*, surrounded by Corinthian pillars, and having in the centre an altar of stone to *Zeus Herkeios*. Around this court on every hand was ranged a series of halls, chambers, *thalamoi*, hung with rich velvets; and the whole mighty house—made up of a hundred and a hundred reproductions of such court-yards with their surrounding chambers—formed a trackless desert of rooms, through whose uniform labyrinths the most cunning would assuredly fail to find his way.

"This building," said Huguenin to me, some days after my arrival, "this building—every stone, plank, drapery of it—was the creation of my wife's wild and restless fancy."

I stared at him.

"You doubt that I have, or had, a wife? Come, then, with me; you shall—you shall—see her face."

He led the way through the dark and windowless house, lighted throughout the day and night by the dim purple radiance shed from many small, open lamps of earthenware filled with the fragrant *nardinum*, an oil pressed from the flower of the Arabian grass *nardus*.

I followed the emaciated figure of Huguenin through a great number of the gloomy chambers. As he moved slowly forward, visibly panting, I noticed that he kept his form bent downward, seeming to seek for something; and this something I soon found to be a scarlet thread, laid down to afford guidance for the feet through the mazes of the house, and running along the black floor. Suddenly he stopped before the door of one of the apartments called *amphithalamoi*, and, himself remaining without, motioned to me to enter.

I am not a man of what might be called "a tremulous diathesis," yet not without

a tremor did I glance round the room. For a time I could discern nothing under the sombre glimmer radiated from a single *lampas* pendent from wrought brazen chains. But at length a great painting in oils, unframed, occupying nearly one whole side of the chamber, grew upon my sight. It was the picture of a woman. My heart throbbed with a most strange, deep excitement as I gazed upon her lineaments.

She stood erect, robed in a flowing, crimson, embroidered *peplos*, with head slightly thrown back, and one hand and arm pointing stiffly outward and upward. The countenance was not merely Grecian—ancient Grecian, as distinct from modern—but it was so in a highly exaggerated and unlifelike degree. Was the woman, I asked myself, more lovely than ever mortal was before—or more hideous? She was the one or the other, or both; but the riddle baffled me. The Lamia of Keats arose before me—that "shape of gorgeous hue, vermilion-spotted, golden, green and blue." A hardly-breathing surprise of eyes held me fixed as the image slowly took possession of my vision. Here, then, I muttered, was the Gorgon's head, whose hair was serpents and her eye a basilisk's; and as I so thought, I reflected, too, on the myth of how from the dripping blood of Medusa's head strange creatures sprang to life; and then, with a shuddering abhorrence, I remembered Huguenin's childish ravings about "monsters." I drew nearer, in order to analyse the impression almost of dread wrought upon me, and I quickly found—or thought I found—the key. It lay, surely, in the woman's eyes. They were the very eyes of the tiger: circular, green, large, with glittering yellow radii. I hurried from the room.

"You have seen her?" asked Huguenin, with a cunning, eager distortion of his ashen face.

"Yes, Huguenin, I have seen her. She is very beautiful."

"She painted it herself," he said in a whisper.

"Really!"

"She considered herself—she *was*—the greatest painter who has lived since Apelles."

"But now—where is she now?"

He brought his lips quite close to my ear.

"She is dead. You, at any rate, would call her so."

This ambiguity appeared to me only the more singular when I discovered that it was his habit, at stated intervals, to make regular and stealthy visits to distant parts of the dwelling. Our bed-chambers being contiguous, I could not fail, as time passed, to notice that he would rise in the dead of night, when he supposed me asleep, and gathering together the fragments of our last meal, depart rapidly and silently with them through the dim and vast house, led always in one particular direction by the scarlet thread of silk which ran along the floor.

I now set myself strenuously to the study of Huguenin. The nature of his physical malady, at least, was clear. He laboured under the singular affection to which physicians have given the name of Cheyne Stoke's Respiration, the disease manifesting itself at intervals by compelling him to lie back in a perfect agony of inhalation, and groan for air; the bones of his cheeks seemed on the point of appearing through their sere wrapping of mummy-skin; the *alæ* of his nose never rested from an extravagance of expansion and retraction. But even this ruin of a body might, I considered, be made partially whole, were it not that to lull the rage and fever of such a *mind* the world contained no anodyne. For one thing, a most curious belief in some unnamed fate hanging over the island on which he lived haunted him. Again and again he recalled to me all that in the long past had been written about Delos: the strange notion contained both in the Homeric and the Alexandrian hymns to the Delian Apollo that the island was *floating*; or that

it was merely secured by chains; or that it had only been thrown up from the deeps as a temporary resting-place for Ortygia in her travail; or that it might *sink* before the spurning foot of the new-born god. He was never tired, through long hours, of pursuing, as if in soliloquy, a kind of somnolent, mystical exegesis of such passages as we read together. "Do you know," he said, "that the ancients really supposed the streams of Delos to rise and fall with the rise and fall of the Nile? Could anything point more clearly to a belief in the extraordinary nature of the island, its far-reaching volcanic affinities, occult geologic eccentricities?" Often would he repeat the punning hexameter line of the very ancient Sibylline prophecy—

ἔσται καὶ Σάμος ἄμμος ἐσεῖται Δῆλος ἄδηλος; *

often, too, having repeated it, he would strike from the repining chords of an Æolian lyre the air of a threnody which, as he told me, his wife had composed to suit the verse; and when to the funeral wail of this dirge—so wild, so mournful, that I could never hear it without a shudder—Huguenin added the melancholy note of his now hollow and plaintive voice, the intensity of effect produced on me reached the intolerable degree, and I was glad of the dubious and pallid and purple gloaming of the mansion, which partially hid my face from him.

"Observe, however," he added one day, "the meaning of the implied epithet 'far-seen' as applied to Delos: it means 'glorious,' 'illustrious'—far-seen to the spiritual rather than to the bodily eye, for the island is not very mountainous. The words 'sink from sight' must therefore be supposed to have the corresponding significance of an extinction of this glory. And now judge whether or no this prophecy has not been already fulfilled, when I tell you that this sacrosanct land, which no dog's foot was once allowed to touch, on which no man was permitted to be born or to die, bears at this moment on its bosom a monster fouler than the brain of demon ever conceived. A fearful literal and physical fulfilment of the prophecy cannot, I consider, be far distant."

That all this esotericism was not native to Huguenin I was certain. His mind, I was convinced, had been ploughed into by some tremendous energy, before ever this rank growth had choked it. I drew him on, little by little, to speak of his wife.

She was, he told me, of a very antique Athenian family, which by constant effort had conserved its purity of blood. It was while passing southward through Greece in a world-weary mood, some years before my visit, that he came one night to the village of Castri; and there, on the site of the ancient Delphi, in the centre of an angry crowd of Greeks and Turks, who threatened to rend her to pieces, he first saw Andromeda, his wife. "This incredible courage," he said, "this vast originality was hers, to take upon herself the part of a modern Hypatia—to venture on the task of the bringing back of the gods, in the midst of a fanatical people, at the latter end of a century like the present. The furious mob from which I rescued her was standing around her in front of the vestibule of a just completed temple to Apollo, whose worship she was then and there attempting to restore."

The love of the woman fastened on her preserver with passionate intensity. Huguenin felt himself constrained by the impulse of an irresistible Will. They were united, and came at her bidding to live in the grey abode of her creation at Delos. In this solitude, under this shadow, the man and the woman faced each other. As the months passed the husband found that he had married a seer of visions and a dreamer of dreams. And visions of what hue! and dreams of what madness! He confessed to me that he was greatly awed by her, and with this awe was blended a feeling which, if it was not fear, was akin to fear. That he loved her

* "And Samos shall be sand, and Delos (the far-seen) sink from sight."

"Like a rapt, delirious Pythoness."

not at all he now knew, while the excess of her passion for him he grew to regard with the hate which men feel for the distilled elixir of the hemlock. Yet his mind inevitably took on the lurid hue of hers. He drank in unfailingly all her creeds. He followed her in the same way that a satellite follows a world. When for days together she hid herself from him and disappeared, he would wander desolate and full of search over the pathless house. Finding that she habitually yielded her body to the lotus delights of certain opiate seeds produced on the island, he found the courage to frown and warn, and ended by himself becoming a bond-slave to the drowsy *ganja* of India. So too with the most strange fascination she exercised over the animal world: he disliked it—he dreaded it; regarded it as excessive and unnatural; but he looked on only with the furtive, pale eye of suspicion, and said nothing. When she walked she was accompanied by a long magnetised *queue* of living things, felines in particular, and birds of large size. Dogs, on the contrary, shunned her, bristling. She had brought with her from the mainland a collection of these followers, of which Huguenin had never seen the half; they were imprisoned in unknown nooks of the building; ever and anon she would vanish from the house, to reappear with new companions. Her kindness to these dumb creatures should, I presume, have been amply sufficient to account for her power over them; but Huguenin's mind, already grown morbid, probed darkly after some other explanation. The primary *motif* of this unquietness doubtless lay in his wife's fanaticism on the subject of the Pythagorean theory of the transmigration of souls. On this theme Andromeda, it was clear, was violently deranged. She would stand, he declared, with outstretched arm, with eye wild-staring, with rigid body, and in a rapid, guttural recitative—like a rapt, delirious Pythoness—would prophesy of the eternal mutations prepared for the spirit of man. She would dwell, above all, with a kind of contempt, on the limitations of animal forms in the actual world, and would indignantly insist that the spirit of an extraordinary and original man, disembodied, *should and must* re-embody itself in a correspondingly extraordinary and original form. "And," she would often add, "such forms do really exist on the earth, but the God, willing to save the race from frenzy, hides them from the eyes of common men."

It was long, however, before I could induce Huguenin to speak of the final catastrophe of his singular wedded life. He related it in these words:—

"You now know that Andromeda was among the great painters of the world—you have seen her picture of herself. One day, after dilating, as was her wont, on the narrow limitation of forms, she said suddenly, 'But you, too, shall be of the initiated: come, come, you shall see *something*.' She went swiftly forward, beckoning, looking back repeatedly to smile on me a loving patronage, with the condescension of a priestess to a neophyte; I followed, till before a lately finished painting she stopped, pointing. I will not attempt—the attempt would be folly—to tell you what thing of horror and madness I saw before me on the canvas; nor can I explain in words the tempest of anger, of loathing and disgust, that stirred within me at the sight. Kindled by the blasphemy of her fancy, I raised my hand to strike her head; and to this hour I know not if I struck her. My hand, it is true, felt the sensation of contact with something soft and yielding; but the blow, if blow there were, was surely too slight to harm the frame of a creature far feebler than the human. Yet she fell; the film of coming death grew over her dull, upbraiding eyes; one last word only she spoke, pointing to the Uncleanness: 'In the flesh you may yet behold it!' and so, still pointing, pointing, she passed away.

"I bore her body, embalmed in the Greek manner by an expert of Corinth, to one of the smaller apartments on the roof of the house. I saw, as I turned to leave her in the gloom of the strait and lonely chamber, the mortal smile on her

waxen face within the open coffin. Two weeks later I went again to visit her. My friend, she had vanished utterly—save that the bones remained; and from the vacant coffin, above the now fleshless skull, two eyes—living—the very eyes of Andromeda's soul, but full of a new-born, intenser light—the eyes, too, of the pictured horror whose whole form I now discerned in the darkness—gleamed out upon me. I slammed to the door, and fainted on the floor."

"The suggestion," I said, "which you seem to wish to convey is that of a transition of forms from the human to the animal; but, surely, the explanation that the monster, brought secretly by your wife into the house, imprisoned unawares by you with the dead, and maddened by hunger, fed on the uncovered body, is, if not less horrible, at least less improbable."

He looked doubtingly at me for a moment, and then replied: "There was no monster imprisoned with the dead. Be not rash with 'explanations.' You do not require me to tell you, what you must know, that there are many more things in earth—to say nothing of heaven—than were ever dreamt of in your philosophy."

But at least, I urged, he would see the necessity of flying from that place. He answered with the extraordinary avowal that it was no longer doubtful to him, from the effect which any neglect to minister to the creature's wants produced on his own bodily health, that his life was intimately bound up with the life of the being he stayed to maintain; that with the *second* murder of which he should be guilty—nay, with the very attempt to commit it, as, for example, by flight from the house—his own life would inevitably be forfeited.

I accordingly formed the resolution to work the deliverance of my friend in spite of himself. Two months had now passed; the end of my visit was drawing near; yet his maladies of brain and body were not alleviated. It tortured me to think of leaving him once more alone, a prey to the manias which distracted him.

That very day, while he slept his damp, unquiet, opiate slumbers, I started out on the track indicated by the scarlet thread. So far it led—and the rooms through which it passed were of such uniformity, and the path so serpentine, and the sameness of construction on every hand so unbroken—that I could not doubt but that, the clue once snapped at any point, the journey to the desired end could be accomplished only by the most improbable good fortune. I followed the thread to its termination: it stopped at the foot of a ladder-like stair, which I ascended. At the top of the stair, and close to it, I was faced by a narrow wall, in which was a closed wooden door; in the door a hole large enough to admit the hand. As I placed my foot on the topmost step, a long, low, plaintive whine, with a sickening likeness to a human wail, broke upon my ear.

I hurriedly descended the steps. Some little distance from them I broke the silken thread, and, gathering it up in my hand as I went, again broke it near the region of the house which we occupied.

"Hereby," I said, as I held the gathered portion to the flame of a lamp, "shall a soul be saved alive."

I watched him later on through half-closed lids, as he departed, haggard and shivering, on his nightly errand. My heart throbbed under an agony of disquiet while I awaited his long-delayed return.

He came swiftly and softly into my room, and shook me by the shoulder. On his face was a look of unusual calmness, of dignity and mystery.

"Wake up," he said. "I wish you—I am a sorry host, am I not?—I wish you to leave me to-night, at once; to leave the island—*now*."

"But tell me——" I gasped.

"Nay, nay; I will take no refusal. Trust me this once, and go. There is a

danger here. Destiny is against me—an impudent destiny, careless even to conceal its hand. Go. One or two of the fisher-folk of the harbour will convey you over to Rhenea before the morning light, and you will be saved."

"But saved from what?"

"From what? I cannot tell you: from the destiny, whatever it be, which awaits me. Do you know—can you dream—that the thread on which my life depends is *snapped*?"

"But suppose I tell you——"

"You can tell me nothing. Ah . . . . . you hear that?"

He held up his hand and listened. It was a sudden shriek of the wind around the house.

"It is but the rising wind," I muttered, starting up.

"Ah, but that—that which followed. Did you not *feel* it?"

"Huguenin, I felt nothing."

He had clasped with both arms a marble pillar, against which his forehead rested, while with one foot he gently and mechanically patted the floor. In this posture, now utterly demoralised and craven, he remained for some minutes. The wail of the wind was heard at intervals. Suddenly he turned towards me, with a ghastly face and the scream of a frightened woman.

"Now—now at least—*you feel it!*"

I could no longer deny. It was as if the whole island had gently rocked to and fro on a pivot.

Thoroughly unnerved myself, trembling more with awe than with terror, I seized Huguenin's arm, and sought to draw him from the pillar, which, muttering low, he still embraced. He sullenly refused to stir; and I, resolved in any event to stay by him, sat near. The seismic agitation increased. But he seemed to take no further note of anything,—only, with the regularity of a clock's oscillations, the tripudiary automatic motion of his foot persisted. In this way an hour, two hours, passed. At the end of that time the rocking movement of the earth had become intense, rapid and continuous.

There came a moment when, overwhelmed by a new panic, I sprang to my feet and shook him.

"Headstrong man!" I cried, "have you then parted with every sense? Do you not smell—can you not feel—that the house is in flames?"

His eyes, which had grown dark and dull, blazed up instantly with a new madness.

"Then," he shouted, with the roar of a clarion,—"then she shall—I say she *shall* be saved! The cheetah—*the feathered cheetah!*"

Before I could lay hold of the now foaming maniac, he had dashed past me into a corridor. I followed behind in hottest pursuit. The carpets and hangings, as yet but dully glowing, filled the passages with the smoke of Tophet. I hoped that Huguenin, weak of lung, would fall choked and exhausted. Some power seemed to lend him strength—he rushed onward like the wind; some sure, mysterious instinct seemed to guide him—not once did he falter or hesitate.

The long chase through the cracking house, burning now on every side, was over. The just intuitions of insanity had not failed the madman—he reached the goal for which he panted. I saw him hasten up the half-consumed ladder, whose foot was already in a lake of flame. He rushed to the smouldering wooden door of the tomb of Andromeda, and tore it wide open. And now from out the vault there burst—above the roaring of the fire, and the whistle of the tempest, and the thousandfold rattle of the earthquake—a shrill and raucous shriek, which turned my blood to ice;

and I saw proceeding from the darkness a creature whose native loathsomeness human language has no vocabulary to describe. For if I say that it was a cheetah —of very large size—its eyes a yellow liquid conflagration—its fat and boneless body swathed in a thick panoply of dark grey feathers, vermilion-tipped—with a similitude of miniature wings on its back—with a wide, vast, downward-sweeping tail like the tail of a bird of paradise,—how by such words can I image forth all the retching nausea, all the bottomless hate and fear, with which I looked? The fire, it was evident, had already reached the body of the beast; already it flamed. I saw it fly, rather than spring, at Huguenin's head; the burial of its fangs in his flesh, the meeting of its teeth about his windpipe, I saw. He tottered—gurgling—tearing at the feathery horror—backward over the spot where a moment before the stair had stood; together they fell into the sea of flame beneath.

I ran in headlong haste from the house, discovering by good chance an egress. The night was clear, yet all the winds seemed to tumble in disenchained ecstacy about the islet. As I descended I noted the scathed and scorched aspect of the trees and of certain of the rocks; at one spot a multitude of deep, smooth, conical openings, edged with grey, glowing scoriæ, riveted my attention. Still lower, I stood on a bluff promontory and looked sheer into the sea. The sight was sublime and appalling. The deep—without billow or foam or ripple—luminous far down with phosphorescences—rushed, like some lambent lamina yoked to the fiery steeds of Diomedes, with a steady, intense, almost dazzling impetuosity towards the island. Delos, indeed, seemed to *float*—to swim, painfully struggling, like a little doomed bird, against the all-engulfing element. I passed with the earliest light from this mystic shrine of ancient piety. Among the last sights that greeted my gaze was the still ascending reek of the blighted and accursed dwelling of Huguenin.

M. P. SHIEL.

The Case of Euphemia Raphash.

By M. P. Shiel,

Author of "Prince Zaleski."

"Man's goings are of God; how can a man then understand his own way?"
—*Proverbs.*

"Oh, Mr. Parker, he is coming at last, sir!"

"Good heavens! you mean the Doctor?"

"The Doctor, sir—saw him with my own eyes—he is on foot—must have passed through the north park gates, and is at this moment coming up the drive!"

I ran to the lawn; saw him slowly coming in the old frock-coat of thin stuff, his eyes studying the ground.

"Ah, Parker"—he glanced up and held out a limp hand—"that you? Well, I hope?"

"*I* am well enough, thank you, Doctor."

"And why the accented *I*? My sister, Parker?"

I was simply astounded.

"You have not then heard?"

"Heard? I have heard nothing."

"Merciful heavens! in what land have you then wandered?"

"Parker, in a land far away."

I said nothing more, nor he. For the first time in his life he felt fear—fear to ask the question which I felt fear to answer.

We passed into the gloomy half-ruined pile, an ancient place, the home of a race most ancient. In the little room we called "study," he seated himself on the divan, and with perfect composure said:

"Now, Parker—my sister."

"Miss Euphemia, Doctor, is no more."

His face was stone; but he sallowed. After a time I distinctly heard him mutter:

"I thought as much—so it happened once before."

What? I was all wonder; but only added:

"Three weeks ago, Doctor."

"Of what?"

"She was——"

"Go on."

"Doctor, she was——"

"Say it, man—she was murdered."

"She was murdered, Doctor."

I see him now; spare and small, mighty in forehead, which at the top was thinly covered with a cropped iron-grey scrub: thick, tight lips; sallow, shaven face; and those eyes, grey, so unquiet, never for an instant of life ceasing the internal inquisition in which they wandered fro and to, down, and up, and round.

A name high in the view of the world was his—as an apostle of science, as hierophant among the arch-priests of learning. During the fifteen years I had acted as his secretary, we had produced nine books, each monumental in its way. His activities in the domain of thought were, in fact, immeasurable—though I will not say that they were continuous; or, at least, not continuous so far as *I* was concerned; for the doctor would ever and anon leave me, perhaps in the midst of some work, and without warning snatch himself wholly for long weeks from Raphash Towers; nor could I then determine whether sarcophagi of old Egyptian dynasties had lured him over seas, or excavations at Mycenæ, or the enticements of Khorsabad and Balbec. I knew only that he had quietly and mysteriously disappeared; that he as quietly returned in due course to his labours; and that his taciturnity was so inveterate as to seem brutish.

An old housekeeper and myself, beside the Doctor and Miss Euphemia, were the only inmates of the old mansion. We occupied an insignificant portion of the ground floor of one of the immense wings. Never visitor broke our solitude, except a gentleman whose calls always corresponded with the Doctor's absences. The lengthy *tête-à-têtes* of this personage with Miss Euphemia led me to suspect an old flame, to which the Doctor had had known objections.

Miss Euphemia was a lady of forty-five years, taller than her brother, but remarkably like him. She, too, had become learned

by dint of reading the Doctor's books. For the life of me I cannot now say how it was, for they hardly ever exchanged a word, but I had gradually arrived at the conviction that each of these two lives was as necessary to the other as the air it breathed.

Yet for three weeks the newspapers had been discussing her singular disappearance, and he, of all others, knew not one word of the matter! He looked at me through half-closed lids, and said, with that utter dryness of tone which was his:

"Tell me the circumstances."

I answered: "I was away in London on business connected with your Shropshire seat, and can only repeat the depositions of old Mrs. Grant. Miss Raphash had, strange to say, been persuaded to attend the funeral of a lady, known to her in youth, at Ringlethorpe; and, staying afterwards with the mourning friends, did not return till midnight. She wore, it seems, some old family jewels. By one, however, the house was in darkness; and it was an hour later that a scream shrilled through the night. Mrs. Grant was able to light a candle, and had opened her door, when she dimly saw a man rushing towards her with some singular weapon in his hand which flashed vividly in the half-dark—a small, wiry man, she thinks. She had but time to slam her door, when he dashed himself frantically against it, whereupon she fancies she heard the angry remonstrance of another voice. Here, however, her evidence is vague; hours later when she woke to consciousness, she rushed to her mistress' room, and found it empty."

"Of the jewels?"

"Of Miss Raphash herself."

"And the jewels?"

"They lay on the dressing-table where they had been placed, untouched."

"Clearly the murderer was not a burglar."

"Clearly he was. He, or they, took other things, valuables from your room and mine to the amount of four hundred pounds."

"But some of these have been traced?"

"Not one. Some have been found—none 'traced.'"

"Where found?"

"In a clump of bushes immediately beneath the balcony of the south wing."

"They were singular burglars. And my sister's body was found——"

"Nowhere."

"It was buried in the park."

"Quite certainly not. The park has been subjected to too minute a scrutiny for that."

"It was burned."

"Not in the house, and again not in the grounds. It was for some ghastly reason conveyed away."

"It is not *now* in the house, for instance?"

"No—if the most recondite search in the darkest recesses of the mansion are of any value."

"There were blood-stains?"

"A few on the bed."

"No clue?"

"One. It would seem that the assassin, or one of them, before gaining entrance, drew off his boots, and on running away left them, for some undreamable reason, behind him."

"It is very simple. He went in a pair of yours or mine."

"No. Had his foot, as measured by his boot, been one-third as small, it could never have been urged into a boot of yours or mine."

"And yet Mrs. Grant says he was a small man; it is peculiar he should have so immense a foot."

"It is clear then that there were more than one."

"Yet I incline to the one-man theory; for through some failure of courage or memory, one might leave the jewels, but hardly two. Mrs. Grant, distracted, may have mistaken his stature; and in the course of my anthropological experience, I have even come across that very discrepancy between man and foot—an occasional survival of simian traits in human beings."

"There is another point," I said, "the boots were found to be odd."

"But that is a clue!" he said. "I have the man in my grasp. Have you now told me everything?"

"Except that a gentleman had called to see Miss Raphash that afternoon."

"Ah—what sort of man?"

"Tall, black-dressed, middle-aged, with side-whiskers. I have seen him here when you have been away. Mrs. Grant says that

Miss Raphash spoke to him with some show of anger, though no words could be made out."

"Ah!" said the Doctor, and resumed a restless walk.

"It is not impossible," he continued after a while, "that deeps, black to the eye of a policeman, may lighten to the eye of a thinker. Let us go over the house."

Science had taught the Doctor to labour without the stimulus of expectancy. On this hopeless search we spent several hours in the mouldy vastnesses of the house; in the solemn silence of old Tudor wings which perhaps no foot had set a-barking with echoes for centuries; deep down in the nitre-crusted vaults. We came at length to an old room on the second floor of the south wing overlooking a patch of garden, rank now with shrubs. The chamber was very damp and gloomy; its tapestries of Arras had mouldered to grey shreds. The Doctor had partly used it as a depository: here were stacked bones of mammoths, embrya in flasks, fossils, spongiadæ, implements of stone, iron, and bronze. Along one side was a vast oaken chest, carved, black with centuries of age. It, as well as a secret recess behind a panel in the wall, contained piles of bones methodically labelled.

The lock of the door was of peculiar construction, and the Doctor had the key always about him. I could not therefore but smile, when on entering, I said to him:

"Here, at least, our search is fantastic."

He glanced at me, and passed in doggedly. Through the grime of the window light hardly entered. Here a piece of old armour, there a cinerary urn of Etruria showed in the gloom its grey freckles of fungus; a dank dust was over all.

"Some one has been here," said the Doctor.

"Doctor!"

"The catch of the window seems awry: notice the dust on the floor; does it not look——"

"But if it is impossible, it is impossible, and there an end," I answered.

He opened the window. Below was the stone balcony of the first floor of the wing; and from it to a point near the window a tin rain-spout ran up. It was among the bushes of the garden beneath the balcony that the stolen valuables had been found.

"He climbed up, you see, by the spout," said the Doctor.

"The feat seems superhuman: but there is the spout, and here is the turned window-catch. We must confront phenomena as we find them."

"But at least, Doctor, he did not climb up with a dead body in his arms?"

"No; you are right."

"And he did not enter by the door."

"No."

"Then our search here is absurd."

"Doubtless. You might look behind the panelling."

I looked and saw only the dust-grown bones of old monsters.

"She is not in *here*, now?" he said, and tapped the oaken chest with his knuckles.

I smiled.

"No, Doctor, she is not in there. The man does not live who could force the century-old secret of *that* riveted lid."

"Come then, Parker. Come—we shall find her."

We went out, and he locked the old silences and solitudes within the room once more.

* * * * *

Men of great minds undertake tasks which, from their very vastness, seem nothing less than silly to men of smaller gauge. The region of the impossible, indeed, is the true sphere-of-action of genius. But, on the other hand, the crowd may be excused if, observing this, they become sometimes incredulous, resentful, and even cachinatory.

And, I confess, it was not without resentment that I listened to Doctor Raphash as he said to me:

"Let us find *him*, Parker—the murderer of my sister—the secreter of her body. This is a task we must not leave to the crude intellects of the recognised authorities. Let us hunt *him* down—and, *after* that, we shall resume our consideration of the science of Comparative Mythology."

But his method, at least, was singular. To acquire personal intimacy with the whole criminal class of London is an undertaking, if possible, at all events far from light. Yet this was his notion. In a few months we had learned a new language, become acclimatised denizens of a new world—the language and the world of the East of London. Our dress was the dress of the "navvy;" our habits those of the ne'er-do-well.

And now most wondrously were revealed to me ineffable deeps in Doctor Raphash's character. The intensity of this hatred of an unknown man to me seemed hellish. "Let us hunt *him* down." His life became the incarnation of that sentence. It was the man of science turned beast of prey, but retaining the perfect scientific calm; an intensity bordering on lunacy shrouding itself behind the serenity of ocean-depths; the avenging angel *without* the flashing eye and flaming sword.

Days and nights we spent in public-houses, gambling-hells, cells of pawnbrokers, with roughs at slum-corners, stormy crowds at music-hall doors. We were boon companions of men who related to one another without secrecy or shame-blush their achievements in every species of crime. In the morning we parted; to compare late at night notes of the day's haps. Then far into the morning hours I would hear the slow soft tread of that divine patience to and fro in his room near mine. This, and a heightened glare in his eyes, were all the indication of the mania fretting at his heart.

One day I heard something.

In a gin-palace two women, dissolute of face, stood at the bar.

"And how about your old man, then?" I heard.

"Oh, he must fish for hisself, he must. I took his boots, the last thing I've got, to the pawn this morning, and they wouldn't take them."

"Ain't they no good, then?"

"They're sound enough, but they're odd."

"Go on!"

"S'help me. I nearly tore his eyes out over them same boots. I buys my lord a seven-and-eleven pair in the summer and sends him hop-picking in them; two months ago he turns up with his own boot on the right foot and somebody else's on the other."

"And what accounts did he give of hisself?"

"There's where the provoking part of it comes in. Every time I asks him about it, it's 'Drop it, mate,' and 'Drop it, I tell you, mate.' He was on the job, you may bet, got into some scrape, and now dursn't say nothink about it."

I need not mention the steps by which, in half-an-hour, I had become the bosom friend of these two women. The time, place, and circumstances of the boots profoundly impressed me, and

when I parted from them I felt assured that the name and address I had obtained were those of the man we sought. When Doctor Raphash returned, haggard and pallid, to our little garret that night, I pressed his hand.

"You have news for me, Parker."

"I have heard something that may have some bearing on the case." I told him the incident.

"Undoubtedly—it has some bearing. Let us go."

"You look tired to-night, to-morrow perhaps——"

"Not at all! To-night, man—now—*now*—is the time to find what we seek"—and he stamped on the floor.

I glanced, startled, at him. The action seemed like a sign of the break-up of that supernal serenity which characterised him.

We passed out, I taking the precaution to bring with me a Colt's revolver. When, by the way of endless labyrinths, we reached the address the Doctor at last spoke:

"There is no light, you see; he is, probably, still out. Suppose you wait till he comes; then speak, take him under the lamp there, see the boots, and ask him to drink with you. I, waiting at yonder corner, will then join you."

Flakes of snow drifted downwards. I walked sentinel-wise; the Doctor crouched still at his post. From a Swedish chapel I heard the strokes of twelve, and at the same moment a working-man approached me.

"Cold to-night, mate," I said, carelessly.

"Ah, that it is," he answered.

His teeth chattered—his face wore a blue hue. Turned-up coat-collar, and buried hands, and forward pose, spoke of his shivering agonies.

"You look frozen. Come and have a drink along with me."

"I could do with one, mate. I haven't tasted grub this day."

"What,—broke?"

"Dead broke!"

"Come along then—the 'Brown Bear.'"

He followed me. Under the lamp I stopped.

"Do you like the 'Brown Bear'? If not——"

The light fell upon him. A sense of contempt and disappointment overcame me at the sight of his weak face, sheepish blue eyes. But there, at any rate, were the counterparts of the odd boots I had handed over to the authorities.

The Doctor had slowly approached us, and was in the middle of the road when Hardy, glancing, saw him.

The change in the man's face was sudden and wonderful.

His eyes glared; he tottered, livid, against a railing; then, suddenly taking to his heels, fled, as for dear life, down a turning.

The Doctor followed, and then I. And now powers of physique, as unexpected as previously depths of soul in my old friend, stood visible to me. He distanced me. His feet grew winged. Hardy, indeed, had an advantage in his knowledge of the intricate grimy courts down which he dodged. Sometimes for a moment he disappeared. But the Doctor slowly gained upon him, "hunting him down." The streets were all but deserted.

Suddenly Hardy dashed into a *cul-de-sac*. The house at the end was empty, every window broken. If the fugitive, then, could gain an entrance his escape by the back was safe. I judged that this was the house for which he had all along been making. On reaching it, Hardy dashed down the area steps to a basement below the street-level.

"Shoot!" cried the Doctor, looking back. "Shoot with the revolver—shoot!"

This I was far from willing to do, but it was already too late; for Hardy had disappeared. A minute afterwards we, too, had rushed down the steps, and through a gate-like door passed into a low, wide, damp cellar of which the ground was a soft, powdery earth covering our ankles. There was no other visible means of egress, and I was looking about for Hardy, when the gate-door banged suddenly behind us, and a bar clanged down into a staple in the outer wall.

So that we were prisoners. That the man had entered the cellar was certain, and also that he had found some means of leaving it other than the door. But here our knowledge ended. The darkness was Erebus itself; whole clouds rose with every step and choked us; and the intensity of damp cold, after our run, hardly made speech possible. I groped round the walls, fired my revolver; but the flash revealed nothing but a portion of unhewn wall and low ceiling; I shouted at the door; but the neighbouring houses were ruins—an echo answered me.

Towards the early morning I received, I confess, a thrilling

shock of horror from Doctor Raphash. That he was not himself, that he suffered far more than I, became apparent. Once or twice only had he spoken through the night, sitting crouched in the dust of a corner, his knees bent up, his head buried in his arms. By palpation I knew him in this position.

Once I said in alarm:

"Doctor, do not sleep! This cold——"

The doctor laughed aloud.

"No, no," he said bitterly; "I won't sleep; small fear of that—to-night."

I walked for warmth to and fro, treading warily on the dust. A deep groan drew me to him: my cold fingers touched his forehead with the sensation of contact with a heated plate.

"You are suffering greatly," I said.

"Leave me alone, Parker! Go from me!"

An hour, and I knew that he was stalking swiftly up and down the whole length of the cellar; swiftly! filling it with a continuous convolute reek of the brown incense of the dust. Long I stood, noting his faint sounds as he came near, losing them, following in fancy his cloudy progress, determining that now he was here, now there, now yonder. His disjointed mutterings guided me. He seemed oblivious of my presence.

When the air had finally become unbreatheable, I moved to go to him. My head came into contact with something, which on seizing I found to be a rope pendant from the ceiling. Unable to guess its purpose, I succeeded after many efforts in climbing it. My head struck the ceiling. Groping round with my hand, I encountered what seemed like the inner panels of a trap-door. The means of Hardy's escape flashed upon me. I pushed with my knuckles, and a thin stream of light entered. In another minute I was free on the other side—it was already day.

A strange, pallid face looked up at me, rolling wild eyes. I drew him up, and together we passed out to the street.

Here he suddenly seized my hand.

"Parker!"—his breath came in gasps—"be a leech in your tenacity—as you love me, man! Hunt him down! Good-bye. . . . Madman! do not follow! Good-bye. . . ."

And before I could surge from the depths of maze and stupor

into which the hissed words had plunged me, he had rushed furiously down the street, and vanished into a passing cab.

* * * * *

After Dr. Raphash's mysterious desertion of our quest when success seemed near, I simply returned to the Towers, and waited. I now, in fact, considered my duty done when I had described to the police the fellow with the odd boots, who at this time was in hiding.

It was a month later that I observed one evening, as I walked about the grounds, that a man, hearing my approaching footsteps, had ducked his head from my sight in a clump of bushes—the very bushes, by the way, in which the stolen articles had been discovered.

I was accompanied by a large mastiff. Coming closer to the spot, I said aloud:

"Do not run, simply rise, and hold your hands over your head. I happen to be armed—and you see the dog."

The crack of a pistol would have much less surprised me than the hang-dog air with which he rose before me. I recognised at once the insipid face of Hardy.

"No offence, master," he said, touching his hat, trembling like an aspen.

"Ah, we have met before, Hardy."

He scrutinised my face, but shook his head.

"You know me better 'n I know you, sir."

"Well, Charles, you must come with me," I said. I led him by the arm into a room of the house, instructing Mrs. Grant at the entrance to send for a couple of the rather distant local police. I then closed the door, and proceeded to examine my prisoner. The creature wept!

"Now, Hardy," I said, "dry your tears, and tell me how came you in those bushes to-night."

"I was looking for the rings and things. It was hunger drove me—they've been hunting me like an animal for the last month, and I give myself up."

"What rings?"

"The rings I dropped in those bushes. I thought that, anyway, one of them might by chance be left there still."

"You admit the burglary, then?"

"Yes, master, I admit it. It was my first, and it will be my

last. I haven't had a moment's peace since. I even put up a rope in an old cellar to hang myself, only I'm a coward——"

"And you admit the murder?"

"Murder, master?" he cried with scared face—"murder! Why, it wasn't *me* who did the murder, it was one of the other two, and didn't I nearly drop dead with fright when I see it done?"

"There were, then, two others?"

"Yes, sir, a working man such as myself, and an old gent."

"Tell me about it."

"I and a mate of mine, sir, came down hop-picking. He was a wild chap, and hops was too slow for him; so he says to me as how some of these country houses was mere child's play, with plenty to be got, and not much danger, besides. He was one of those chaps it's no use saying 'no' to, so one night here we stood behind the old shed on the other side, waiting till the old lady was well asleep, when all of a sudden, as if he'd sprung from the ground, this old gent stood between us. I started running; he looked like a spirit to me; but Jim, who was more bolder like than me, he stands his ground; soon he whistles to me, and when I come up, he ses, 'Ere's a lark, Charlie,' ses he, 'the old chap's on the job hisself!' 'Partnership's a leaky ship, Jim,' ses I; but he only ses, 'Oh, bother, live and let live.' Well, pretty soon I and Jim take our boots off, and we all get inside. No sooner inside, than the old man takes the lead, showing the way, telling us what to do, and me and Jim does everything he tells us, quite nat'ral like. He knew every crick of the place; and first he takes us into a room, and ses he, quite wild like, 'Plunder now! raven and harry! to your souls' content!' And then he reaches down a case from a shelf, and takes out a strange, shiny knife, locks the case again—I believe he had keys to every lock in the place—and rushes out of the room into the one opposite. 'Queer chap, that,' ses Jim, looking queer hisself, 'makes me feel shivery all over,' and before I could tell him I felt sure the man was a devil or a ghost, we hear a struggle in the opposite room—a gasping for breath—and then a long shriek which I ain't ever going to forget while I live. Immediately after, out he flies with blazing eyes, and dashes hisself against the other old woman's door yonder. Jim, sweating cold, plucks up courage to reason with him a bit, and

at last he runs back to the murdered lady, and dashes out again with her in his arms, light as a feather, a gash showing right across her chest, her grey hair trailing on the ground. And now he comes up to us, and quite lofty like ses he, 'Marshal yourselves before me—march! march! and I will lead you where trophies and treasures lie thick-heaped for yer 'arvesting!' His words is branded into my brain. And then he makes us walk before him right across the building into the other wing and up two flights of stairs, till we come to a dusty room with a lot of bones of dead people—and there, oh great God! hide me! there—there—*there he is!* He will kill me, as he killed my mate—he will kill you, too——"

He stared wildly about, rushed behind my chair, and crouched down there. The man's shriek of panic horror thrilled me through, and as the ponderous door swung slowly wide on its hinges, and Dr. Raphash calmly entered the room, I clung paralysed to my seat.

"Well, Parker," he said in the old callous dry voice, "here I am again, you see. But whom have we...the murderer caught at last, surely!" and triumph lighted his eyes as they rested on Hardy, who, pale and panting, now leaned against the tapestries.

"Yes, the murderer!" gasped Hardy, "but that's not me! Oh, there's plenty of proofs if it comes to that! That long coat is the very one you wore—have you washed out the blood-splash on the sleeve yet?"

Dr. Raphash sat, barely smiling, examining the face of Hardy. Presently he looked at his arm.

"It is a remarkable thing," he said, speaking to himself: "I *have* noticed a stain here on my sleeve; it cannot be blood; Parker, see, it looks not like blood, man—eh?"

But, as for me, a red mist hung thick before my eyes; I could see nothing.

"It *is* blood," continued Hardy, gaining courage from the Doctor's calm—"you know it is, or perhaps you were too mad that night to know anything. Who but a madman would have carried the lady's body all the distance to that old chest; and there, didn't you chase Jim round and round the room and stab him like a dog, because you said one body wasn't enough to fill the chest? And if I hadn't slipped down to the balcony by a-

spout, wouldn't you have killed me, too; and didn't you look out of the window and tell me to prepare myself because you was coming, and didn't I have to jump from the balcony to the ground, rolling over, and dropping all the things I had; and didn't I just have time to draw on two of the boots when you came down and started after me?"

I was looking at Dr. Raphash; during this categorical charge, no sound had issued from his lips; gradually a yellow pallor as of death had overspread his features, and the muscles of his face became tense and fixed; his head drooped forward, and his arms and legs stretched stiffly from his body; the cold stony glare in his eyes lent to his face a look of rhadamanthine sternness awful to see.

I ran and seized the clammy fingers in mine; but he did not recognise me. So he remained for several minutes, no sound breaking the silence of the room.

Then, still rigid in all his limbs, he raised his head, and let it drop heavily over the back of the chair; and, with the action, there burst from his blanched lips—higher and higher, peal on peal, in horrid articulation, in shrillest staccato—a carillon of maniac laughter. When this had passed, his whole face slowly settled into the vacant smile of idiotcy.

With creeping flesh, I seized Hardy by the arm, rushed—faint—from the room, and locked the door upon the ruin within.

* * * * *

In this way Dr. Arnot Raphash hunted down the murderer of his sister; and so, with him, fell the Jewish House of Raphash in the county of Kent.

Some days later I received a letter, of which the following are a few extracts:—

". . . . When I tell you that I am the proprietor of the private asylum from which this letter is dated, and a cousin of Dr. Raphash, you will at once conjecture that his (to you) unaccountable absences from home always corresponded with his voluntary sojourns in my establishment. He well knew the warning symptoms—head-pains, a high temperature, etc.—and he usually had two or three days grace before the definite onset of the malady. Sometimes, again, the attack was more sudden, especially when preceded by any excitement; thus, when he reached my establishment a month ago he was already mad, and I at

once guessed some previous violent agitation. . . . . His first paroxysm occurred at the age of thirty, when he destroyed a just-married wife by locking her in a room filled by him with a poisonous gas. In the sane state he had no recollection of his insane acts, which were distinguished by their cunning and a strongly-marked homicidal mania, directed chiefly against those for whom he most cared. He never knew of his wife's fate, for he was at once placed under my care, and on returning home found her buried. . . . . When he was leaving me, 'cured,' after the death of his sister, I deemed it prudent to say nothing to him of the tragedy, preferring that the journey to the Towers should intervene before the shock of the news fell on his newly-restored powers; hence his ignorance of the matter. . . . . You have probably seen me on my visits to Miss Raphash when the Doctor was away from home; their object was to give that minute report of her brother which alone could satisfy her. On the very day of the tragedy I had a somewhat angry dispute with her respecting the expediency of putting her brother into irons, she deprecating, I insisting. Unfortunately, I allowed her to influence me, and her death was the result. . . . . It is now beyond all doubt that the Doctor escaped from my establishment on that night, though how he contrived to pass out of the house and grounds and into them again without detection is yet unexplained; but to his cunning, as I have hinted, there were positively no bounds. . . . . I need only add that I shall soon have—I may almost say the pleasure—of announcing to you the death of Dr. Raphash. He may still, indeed, linger for a few weeks; but the end, in any case, cannot be distant."

Orazio Calvo.

By M. P. SHIEL.

Author of "PRINCE ZALESKI."

Le leggi son fatti pei coglione.
Laws are made for dullards.

—*Corsican Proverb.*

AT a considerable height above the sea level, in the middle of a chaos of mountains, and not very far from Monte Cinto, the culminating point of the chain which traverses Corsica, stands the Villa Calvo. It is a great pile, half castle, half palace—half northern Italian Gothic, half southern Italian Byzantine—rising sheer from the brink of one of those stupendous ravines which are the commonplaces of the island. The ever-growing tale of tourists who sip absinthe and black coffee in the Hôtel Continental or *al fresco* in the *piazza* at Ajaccio during the early spring, have not seen it. Its solitude, in fact, could not be more complete. In some of its aspects it conveys the impression of a natural outgrowth of the landscape. Around it stretch those primal forests of ilex and laricio pines, which from of old

caused the island to be described as "thick, and, as it were, *savage* with wood;"* and towering above it—nearly always clad in snow—great crags of gneiss, of granite, of porphyry, and of mica-slate. Four miles away, seated lower down on a ridge, and swept in season by the frigid Tramontana wind, dozes the squalid village of Spello, with its white-washed box-houses, gutter tiles, scavenger-army of wild dogs, and windows paned with paper smeared in oil of olives.

The Villa Calvo itself is now the most forbidding of desolate places. The flags of the courtyard are seamed with wild lavender, and cistus, and the rich grasses of the heights; the two gardens are jungles of lentisk and walnut, the scarlet berries of sarsaparilla, and every kind of sub-tropical bindweed; shutters left open by the retainers as they fled from the house still groan to the highland Levante, or rot in the sun; buzzards and ravens, the deadly spider *malmignata*, and the black bat know it well; roofs buried in mosses show a tendency to fall in. The place is the very sanctuary of gloom. It is situated, too, on the more deserted side of the island, called by the Corsicans the "near," *i.e.*, the east or Italian side.

The noble house of the Calvi, Venetian in origin, had established themselves as great territorial *signori* (technical for our "nobleman," and so quite different to the Italian word) in Corsica by means of some one or other of their sons at a very early date. The original stock indeed, after playing a turbulent part in the history of the Republic, extirpated itself by the very exuberance of its own passions, the last of their number perishing by the poisoned dagger of his jealous wife in 1605. The off-shoot, however, found in the still greater insanity of Corsican political warfare a congenial life-element, and grew fat. The fortress-town of Calvi still bears their name in the north-west. Corsica passed under the suzerainty of Pope, Marquis of Tuscany, Pisa, Genoa, France; and with each change the house of Calvi knew how, by its adroitness, to find a stepping-stone to still greater power. From their sinister activities sprang the factions of Red and Black (Banda Rossa and Banda Nera), and taking the Black side, they became the mysterious centre of those intrigues and massacres which for centuries turned the province into a little hell. Considering the proverbial poverty

* Δασεῖα καὶ ὥσπερ ἠγριομένη τῇ ὕλῃ.—THEOPHRASTUS.

of Corsica, the revenues of this violent race became enormous; their influence boundless; till at last they grew to be regarded by the peasants with a profoundly superstitious awe. Their power indeed received a check when, joining the popular party in the insurrection of Paoli in '55, they suffered some loss of territories, but most of these were regained under the more favourable *régime* of the earlier period of the Convention. They were till lately regarded in Corsica as the last surviving of the great feudal signori, who migrated from the mainland between the tenth and sixteenth centuries.

It is, however, of the very latest scion of all of this volcanic family that I wish to speak. I first met Count Orazio Calvo in the midst of a bewildering Maelström of light and music and colour at a *masque* in his own Hôtel in the Rue de Rome. All the world was there, and I could not for the life of me imagine why he singled *me* out for the patronage of his talk; I remember, however, that it was his whim to profess a deep admiration for the English, whose language, indeed, he spoke perfectly. I at once set myself to the study of a man whom I saw to be not only remarkable, but unique. To find such a person—a rude Corsican grandee—profoundly *learned*, of course astonished me, though years of Paris failed to add an atom of real polish to his manners; and though his hardly-concealed contempt for all men and things included a contempt for his own acquirements also. Of the license of the Paris of his day he was the high priest, acknowledged and consecrated. He was known to be an atheist, yet he had his religion—the religion of excess; only, the possible excess of a Mephistopheles, not the excess of a Heliogabalus. It was easy to see that he despised what he did, and did it only because he despised it somewhat less than anything else. Yet he was the opposite of *blasé;* for an altogether abnormal energy was written on every feature of his body. His prodigality was in all cases distinguished by a certain *furore* of daring and originality; but the feeling he inspired was not so much admiration as *fear*. His rage was the very rage of the tiger; and though I feel sure he cherished a secret bitterness at the interval which divided him from the rest of men, yet a wise instinct warned the gayest of his satellites in the midst of the wildest Bacchanal never to address him with familiarity. He had a leonine habit of roaming far and wide

through the slums of Paris in the small morning hours; and stories of mad munificences performed by him at such times were circulated; but his charities, I thought, if they existed, could only be the stony, if prodigal, charity of the gargoyle which vomits for the thirsty. Of lovers' love he knew, of course, nothing; and the possibility of little Cupid coming to shoot baby arrows at such a heart, would have been a notion so exquisitely comic, that, had it occurred to anyone it must have set the entire Calvo Olympus in a flare of quenchless laughter. Round such a man, the *décadents*, the artist-class, the flâneurs and *étoiles*, and all the unfathomable *demi-monde* of Paris flocked—he was too volcanic a rough *Naturkind* to tolerate the *monde*—calling him king. He received in addition the *sobriquet* of *la petite comète*. None of his friends, I was given to understand, had ever seen on the lips of *la petite comète*—a smile.

In personal appearance he strongly resembled several other Italo-Corsicans whom I have met, and was not unlike that specimen of his singular countrymen who happened to become world-famous. He was below the middle height, and not too stout; yet he gave an impression of extraordinary *weightiness*, as though molten of lead. His face was of perfect classical beauty; black hair streaked with grey; skin hairless, and of the dirty olive of waxen effigies not yet painted pink. His brow was puckered into a perpetual frown; eyes cold as moonlight, glancing a downward and sideward contempt; forehead *bastionné*, columnar; jaws ribbed, a hew of graven brass; lips definite and welded; the whole face, the whole man, one, knit, integral—an indivisible sculpture.

Four or five times I met Orazio Calvo in Paris, and always he evinced the same disposition to take me, as it were, by the hand; while I, imagining a distinct element of doubt and even danger in his friendship, rather avoided *la 'tite comète*. I shortly afterwards returned to England, and though rumours of the excessive splendour of his revels sometimes reached me, the count, in the course of some three years had pretty well passed out of my active memories.

Suddenly, one morning, he stood before me in my chambers in London.

He seemed unconscious of my amazement, and informed me with the old air of sultan majesty that he had travelled in his

yacht *incognito* and alone to England, and a friend being, for certain reasons, indispensable to him, he had sought me out. *Health* was the jewel which he sought; and, in truth, he looked haggard enough. "The bracing country air of Britain"—could I assure him that under conditions of perfect quiet and seclusion?

Noting in him a tendency to puff and corpulence, I suggested vigorous exercise. Something that I took to be a laugh rattled in his throat. But why not?—I insisted. If he would not walk, had he never heard of such a thing as the bicycle? I myself took an annual tour through parts of England by that means, and should be delighted to accompany him now.

With this suggestion he finally fell in, and we started. It was the beginning of the red-ripe Autumn time. The count, it is true, took somewhat unkindly to his machine, once flying into a hurricane of passion and making it the object of a rain of kicks from his rather short legs. But he quickly began to show signs of the connection between this method of locomotion and bodily well-being. The journey became more and more pleasant, till we reached a delightful retreat in Dorsetshire—a little farm belonging to a widow lady, whom I had long numbered among my friends.

This lady, of comparatively humble social position, was also of that entirely lovable type of English woman characterised by a profound natural piety—sedately gay, puritan, perennially fresh—whose qualities unite to remind one of the wholesomeness and sweetness of home-made bread. The two extremely lovely young ladies, her daughters—Miss Ethel and Miss Grace—added to her odorous home something of the colour and the charm of Paradise.

I may mention incidentally that the two girls were twins, though they possessed none of the resemblances so often accompanying this condition. Grace, with a complexion of dawn-tinted snow, was dark, rather tall, with a superb neck; Ethel was the sweetest flower in the world, fair and winsome.

Into this shadeful and quiet home I, with my friend Orazio Calvo, intruded. I had previously put up for considerable periods at the farm; but our present stay was only timed to last three days. When these had passed, however, others followed, a week, two. My companion showed no disposition to depart. It was the golden season of harvest, and with remarkable gal-

lantry for *him*, the count daily escorted the ladies on their walks in the lanes and fields, entering with them into the life of the country, and watching by their side in the evening the Pan-ic levities of the reapers. His tongue was loosed, and he spoke to them of the world, and its glory. I know not what of misgiving, foreboding, gradually took possession of my mind.

As he sat under the porch by moonlight listening to the pure and simple songs of the ladies, I could see how the cynical man of the world—whose notions of Woman had been derived from the peasant-girls of Corsican villages, and the *étoiles* of the Ambigu and Variétiés—how he, now first in his life's course, realized that an earthly creature may yet be of heaven. I could see him revelling in the transport of an entirely new, a divine impression.

I proposed departure. He refused. I strongly insisted.

"I shall go," I said.

"In which case," he replied, "nothing is so certain as that you go alone."

Then, after a while, a new discovery filled me with new alarm. I believed I could detect in the virgin eyes of both the girls the very abandonment of love for Orazio Calvo.

And one night, after I had retired to sleep, he walked into my room and stood at the foot of the bed, leaning over the rail. The glimmer of a lamp showed me his extreme pallor, the fire that swelled and inflamed his stern eyes. I dreaded to break the long silence between us.

"I *love* them!" he suddenly exclaimed, paroxysmal in passion.

Love *them!* Every nerve in my body rose shuddering in revolt against him. Love *them!* Yet the trill of his voice, the trembling bed-rail, left no doubt of the genuineness, the intensity of his meaning.

"But *which* of them, in God's name?" I asked.

"Which? Miss—Grace—I think."

I *think!*

The enigma utterly confounded me.

But my vague presentiments were laid to rest when, two months later, the dark-haired Grace was led by him to the altar of the village-church hard by. The young wife was immediately carried off to the Continent. From widely divergent points of the earth's surface—from Delhi—from Memphis—her mother heard from her. Finally she took up her residence in the

mountain home of her husband's race. Her constant promise to revisit England she never fulfilled.

During the space of two years I received several illegible letters from Count Calvo (the vehemence of his temperament hardly permitted his writing to be read; for a steel nib immediately broke to splinters under his hand; and his attempt to write many a word with the quill resulted in nothing but a thick dash)—and two from his wife, in both of which latter I fancied—though I do not say it was more than fancy—that I could detect a note of deep, and even weird, melancholy.

And once again, at the end of these two years, Count Orazio Calvo stood unexpectedly before me in my house. A glance told me that he was a changed man. Some disease surely—I thought. The hungry eyes, no longer cold, shifted incessantly. His fingers clutched continually at some phantom thing in the palm of his hand. My lips formed the word, "Orestes."

"But the countess?" I enquired.

"Is dead."

"*Dead!*"

"I say it. Dead!"

I shuddered as he uttered the word.

The same hour he proceeded to the farm, I with him. The news of Grace's death had shortly preceded him by letter. He had sent, too, a lock of her hair, several little mementoes. The little home, when we reached it a second time, was a house of woe.

I soon returned to London, leaving the Count behind me. Five months later, I received a letter begging me to go back to the farm on a matter of some delicacy.

Now, I may as well say at once that I am by no means what would be called a *squeamish* person; that in general I regard the notions of Clapham with so much, and only so much, attention as the superstitions of ancient Egypt. Yet, for some reason or other, I now felt impelled to protest with the most heart-felt ardour against the projected marriage of Count Calvo with the fair-haired Ethel. An instinct—illogical, perhaps, but deep—told me of something uncanny, awesome, in the union. Earnestly did I implore the dear mother, now heart-broken and bereft, to interpose her will. She, too, felt all I felt; but dared not, she said, coerce the overmastering inclinations of the girl.

I accordingly accompanied Miss Ethel to Paris, and on a dark

December day, in the gloomy church of St. Sulpice, saw her united to the object of her ecstatic love.

From her, as from a nature more affectionate and sunny than that of her sister, the letters I received came more regularly. They were dated from the various capitals of Europe, and then for some time from Venice; and in them, too, I found—or thought I found—a tone of heart-sickness, of disappointment. But this feeling, if it existed at all, must have been short-lived; for on taking up her residence at the Villa Calvo, her letters became suddenly voluminous and frequent. Ethel, it was now clear, was happy. In one epistle, I received a long and very comical history of the only visit which ever disturbed her solitude, paid by the podestà and staff-general of Bastia; in another, a gay account of the eccentricities of a haughty old Corsican peasant who did duty as butler. Every trifle seemed to make her joyful; and every sentence began or ended with "her dear lord"; his condescending love for her; her worship of him. Quite suddenly the letters ceased altogether.

It may have been a year and a half after the second marriage that I found myself at Marseilles *en route* for Southern Italy. That I felt a certain relief when I entered the station to see my train steaming away is certain; but so secret are sometimes the workings of the Will, that I was only half-conscious of the feeling, nor could I explain it. Half an hour later, however, as I sauntered in la Canabière, I was able to read myself. From this point the harbour is fully visible, and looking westward, I caught sight of a little steamer making her way out from Port la Joliette. I was too salted a *Marseillais* not to know *her*—it was *La Mite*, a boat of the old Valéry line not yet grown into the Compagnie Transatlantique: in eighteen hours she would be lying at anchor in the harbour of Ajaccio. I hastened to the *quai* region; the vessel was then puffing under the guns of St. Nicolas. I accosted a group of propped watermen:

"Tell me—is it at all possible to catch her now?"

They looked lazily at her.

"She's off," said one, "*le bon diable même ne saurait*——"

My desire must have been *very* great, if it was at all equal to my disappointment.

I continued my way eastward; again and again finding it necessary to prove to myself that it was absurd to go out of one's way to visit forgetful friends. Fréjus, Genoa, Pisa—

keeping always to the coast—I reached at last the central point between Pisa and Rome. Here, at Follonica, I stopped short —over-mastered—and travelling by horse, reached the coast village of Piombino, opposite the singular island, tombstone-shaped, called by the Romans Œthalia, and now Ile d'Elbe; there made terms with the padrone of a small *speronare*, and in twelve hours landed at Bastia. I was bent upon visiting Count Orazio Calvo in his fortress home.

Mounted on a small Corsican pony, and accompanied by a guide on a mule, I turned southward, and began the ascent. The fever-mists of the low-lying east coast hung heavy, and under this pall, interminable stretches of *makis* (thick copse) flamed with arbutus leaves, and the purple of maple fruit, and were aromatic with the myrrh of cisti. Here and there on the dizzy edge of a ravine, a solitary hut; or in the depths of the wood, the dole of a shepherd's bagpipe; now the tinkle of goat-bells from afar, now the flap of a raven's wing, or the momentary phantom of a brown wild sheep *(mufri)*. My guttural companion spoke continually on the subject of the brigands. Twice only we passed through mountain villages, and in the afternoon of the second day reached Spello. The short remainder of my upward way I continued in accordance with verbal directions. Before long the Villa Calvo rose sternly before me.

I crossed a dry flat moat, and made fast my animal to a staple in one of the granite pillars of the gateway. Silence pervaded the place. I noticed a decided rankness in the garden on each side of the forecourt. Ascending a flight of marble steps, I rang an iron bell hanging beneath one of the two front porticoes. Its clanging made a sharp break in the stillness. But to my repeated summonses there came no answer. At last I boldly pushed back the unfastened portal, and entered the house.

So long I wandered about, that at last, in a complexity of long velveted corridors and dim chambers, I lost my bearings. The impression wrought on me by the deserted bigness of the mansion was intense. Even my own footfall was inaudible. The evening was now darkening toward night. From where I stood I heard the chirping of a cicada. By an effort I raised my voice and called, but only echoes answered me. In an elliptical apartment, I found a table spread—the white cloth, wines, all

the *restes* of a meal, gold and silver plate, faded grapes ; a clock on a pedestal of ebony, it had ceased to tick ; in another chamber I came on a lady's garden-hat on a divan. And over all the dreariness of Gethsemane. Trembling hesitancy to proceed further possessed me.

In a remote wing I came at length to a passage, in the wall of which was a nail-studded Gothic door. It occasioned my surprise, for though it now stood ajar, it was provided *on the outside* with shot- bolts, and from this side a large key still projected. I entered the suite to which it admitted. The rooms were furnished with exceptional splendour, and here a piece of music, there an article of jewellery, seemed to betoken the habitual presence of a lady. Then in the middle of a carpet something chanced to meet my careful outlook which fully confirmed me in this supposition—two very long hairs. At this sight I found it necessary to call up all my courage. With the daring of despair I picked up one of the filaments, and held it to the just dying violet light filtered through the stained glass of the casement. I expected—I must, I think, have *expected*—to find it of the blonde *nuance* of the Countess Ethel's hair. A sob of horror burst from me when I saw it lie on my palm dark as the brown of Vandyke.

Yet another long, heart-torturing search, and in a loftier part of the building I faced a draperied door. On attempting to push it back, I discovered it to be locked. Yet *this* door I determined to open, if I could ; and again I bent all my strength to the effort. It remained closed, hiding its mystery. It was only when on the point of moving away that I noticed, just projecting from under the bottom, a white substance. I stooped and drew it out. It was now dark, but I could see that it was a large envelope, and, peering close, detected my name in the writing of the count. With this in my hand I hurried from the spot—through the vast house of desolation—beyond the bounds of the whole gloomy and terror-haunted domain.

" My friend," thus ran, in the somewhat explosive, Æschylian style so characteristic of him, the all but indecipherable MS. of Count Orazio Calvo—" this document which I address to you will in all probability never reach you. I write it, however, rather by way of monument to my own integrity, than with the hope that it will be read by other eyes.

"My friend, that foul and hellish monster, Pope Clement VII., pronounced in 1525 a curse against the sons of my race. It has been a secret tradition with my uncultured fathers to believe all-unwillingly in its ultimate fulfilment. Perhaps even I myself, in spite of a life of search into the make and meaning of the universe, have been unable wholly to expel some lingering half-credence in this ancient superstition.

"That the malediction has at last overtaken us is now a certainty. With me my race expires. I write this as a protest —and a defiance—against a fate wholly unmerited.

"You cannot doubt that I loved—you could not be so lunatic. And you know, too, that I never withheld my hand from any joy. To desire, with me and the stock of which I come, has always been to possess.

"But soon after realizing my passion, I was confronted by a stupendous problem. In order to solve it I made a leap into the dark, and married—the Countess Grace. I expected happiness. Happiness was far from me. The poor lady, seeing my bitter disappointment, pined. The splendour of her beauty dimmed. After a time I refused to look upon her; to see her face increased my fever. A fire scorched my chest. I traversed the continents, seeking rest; I consulted the greatest physicians; I puzzled them; they pronounced me mad—rabid with the bite of the tarantula. My mysterious malady took only deeper root. I was devoured by the longings of Tantalus—a passion more fervid, *and more pure*, than the holy rage of the seraphim consumed me.

"When my agonies had reached the intolerable degree, I extorted from my wife, who greatly loved and also feared me, a vow to hold no communication with any of her former friends during the space of ten years. On her knees she implored me to pity her mother, her sister, who would suppose her dead. But in her eyes my bare will had by this time acquired the dignity and force of law, and I moreover soothed her with invented reasons which partially satisfied her intellect. Leaving her among the mountains, with desperate resolve I announced her death, and returned to England. I wedded—the Countess Ethel.

"The gross word 'bigamy' perhaps rises to your mind. My friend, it is immaterial. I, too, at the time, was slightly troubled by some such thought. This second marriage I now know to

have been the most sacred, just, and essential that was ever consummated.

"And now at least, my friend, I looked for peace; and again —*again*—the mawkish after-taste of the new-awakened glutton filled my mouth. I felt, it is true, some sensible alleviation of my disorder. But my Ethel, observing me still cold, unrestful, grew sad. I found her often in tears. We passed together from city to city, till for a time, we settled in my palazzo on the Canal Grande in Venice.

"The great problem, you perceive, was still unsolved. I loved—with a love of which ordinary men can never dream. But whom?—what? Not Grace, that had been proved. Not Ethel, that was being proved. Then whom? The discovery that waited for me was doubtless accelerated by the wild, brief joy that filled me whenever I left Venice to visit Corsica, or Corsica to visit Venice. Faint glimpses of the truth must have lighted me then; but many months passed before, on a starry night, as a gondola floated me slowly over the Canalazzo, I started up with a shout, my soul flooded with the whole supernal secret of the mystery.

"The very next day I returned to Corsica. My friend, attached to the Villa Calvo is a wing wholly cut off from communication with the rest of the house, save by a single door. It was used in former centuries by some of the women of my race —for periods sometimes of several years—as a place of penitential retreat. These erring souls were careful, however, that their hermitage should be wide and luxurious; the high-walled little garden at the end afforded them a place of exercise; a separate kitchen and staff of attendants compensated for a too rigorous devotion to their rosaries, their *prie-dieu*, and their breviaries; a door bolted on the wrong side guarded them from contact with a world they had too much loved. Into this wing I now introduced the Countess Grace. Her love was thereby tested to the utmost; not, I tell you, without a struggle did my will subdue her high soul. 'Am I then—a free Englishwoman—a prisoner in a Corsican castle?' she asked. 'Aye—a prisoner,' I replied, 'but a prisoner to her prisoner.' Seeing me foam and grovel at her feet, she had pity and yielded. An aged servant of my father, sworn to secrecy, a captive with her, supplied her wants. The other menials, save two, I dismissed. Then I set out for the mainland, and returned to Corsica—with Ethel.

"It was a step bold, but necessary to my sanity. For of the full nature of my passion I was now aware. I did not, as I have said, love the two countesses severally, but——and here was the tremendous secret of my destiny—I loved them conjointly. I write, you think, the drivel of a maniac? If you think so, be sure that the reason is your own shallowness, your own folly. Can it be that you have investigated the nature of things to so little purpose as to imagine that you *know?* Strange births, multiple births; the mystery of chemical combination; of all welding processes, from the welding of metals, to the adhesion of flesh to bone, to the welding of spirits; what is a unity, what a duality; the mystery of the thing named soul—have you then probed these matters? There is none, my friend, wholly dark but him who dreams that he knows! Tell me only this: which of the halves would you love were your wife bisected by a thunderbolt? Neither much, I think? Yet the two together——? So I, too, loved an entity, not either of the parts which composed it. The woman I adored was the woman who would have been born, had the birth of which Grace and Ethel were the product been single and not double. It happened indeed to be double; but do not imagine that that in any way affects the original aggregation either of spirit or of matter. It became clear to me that when the two countesses stood shoulder to shoulder the woman I loved *was there.* They, in respect of me, completed each other. Upon such secrets does the daily sun shine. One—a mystic one, a dual one, if you will—but not two—was my bride. To my soul, now made *clairvoyant* by its passion, they formed, though divided in the flesh, a single being.

"And as the copper and the zinc, kept asunder, remain ineffectual, but put into approximation, evolve the most potent motive in the universe—so they. The effect of rapture which nature had rendered them capable of producing upon me depended, it was clear, upon their physical juxtaposition. So it was in the first instance at the farm, where the impression wrought upon me was an impression not effected by either, but by *both;* and it was this impression which had caused me to *love.* It was therefore essential to my happiness that they should dwell within the same walls—house beneath the same roof—that I should pass straight from the goddess grandeur of the one to the laughter and the love of the other.

"This I accordingly accomplished. And now began a life—for me, for them—of such exceeding bliss as earth contained not beside. No longer could either doubt the genuineness of my passion. My fever vanished. Each revelled in my new-born tenderness. Ah! they loved. Some of the letters written by the Countess Ethel to you at this time I saw; did they not speak of an existence crowned with joy? Grace, too, forgot her repinings, the gloom of her seclusion, in the wealth of the affection I lavished upon her. A shade of anger might cross me if Ethel would revert to the forbidden subject of the decease of Grace, urging me to describe her death-bed. Otherwise all was halcyon. I spent by the side of my Grace those hours of the day during which Ethel supposed me engaged in study; and though my beauteous captive still gently chid me for concealing the secret reasons which moved me to debar her from the rest of the house, she seemed little by little to grow reconciled to my whim, and in her dark eye shone only the light of love and peace.

"My friend, one day in this azure sky the blackness of hell arose.

"I beheld my Ethel stand by night—in the part, too, of the house most remote from her apartments—before the bolted door, and *listen*. Observing my eye upon her, she moved stealthily, guiltily away. I stood rooted—struck by a thunderbolt—to the spot. So then, she knew—*she knew*—that there was something—something hidden, forbidden—behind those bolts and bars!

"This incident unloosed once more in me the demon of gloom. I grew acutely suspicious. Suppose, I whispered to my heart, suppose—— The thought dimmed my eyes. I turned myself into a lynx's eye to watch.

"My moodiness fell straightway upon them both. Grace grew silent, once again resentful, carping; Ethel dreamy, pensive. She ceased to write to you. The laughter was quenched. Weeks passed. I tracked shadows in the dark; I probed to the bottom the creak of a plank at midnight. That vague suspicions, presentiments filled the mind of Grace, I could no longer doubt. One day, throwing off her fear of my anger, weeping on my shoulder, the gentle Ethel boldly questioned me as to what dreadful secret I hid from her '*in the western wing*.' Great God! I silenced her with a reproof.

"But that the catastrophe to happen was inevitable, I should have known. The situation was all too tempting for the forbearance of the Parcæ. Here were all the elements of a disaster, needing but the touch of Fate, the match to the mine, to blow our lives into annihilation. And when the tragedy came, it came with an all-destroying suddenness.

"For as I sat and read in the dead of the night, I knew that a gentle tread went swiftly past my door. I arose and, crouching cat-like, followed. I could discern a bent form in the gloom of the unlighted corridor. God! and now the moonlight streamed in from a window, and beamed athwart a female figure draped in loose attire. I was convulsed with earthquake shocks of rage. Ethel, I hissed to the floor on which I crawled—Ethel again—spying by night! She took the way to her own bedchamber, of old occupied by her sister. And now she reached it—drew open the door—the light from within gushed out upon her: I saw—by the powers of blackest hell!—the arrogant throat, the ponderous cataracts of dark-brown hair—*Grace!* And in that room was Ethel! I rushed forward. For one insensate moment only they stared crazily, crazily into each other's eyes—then from their two throats a shriek so shrill that it must have pierced even to distant Spello—and they flew like maniacs to each other's straining arms.

"It is curious that at this supreme instant, my first unconquerable instinct—the instinct of the Corsican vendetta blood-hound—was to plunge a sword into the bosom of the ancient servant through whose betrayal this woe had befallen us. I crept away in the darkness, and ran towards the western wing, pausing only to take a loaded blunderbuss from the armoury. The bolted door I found secured as usual, and indeed, I alone kept the key; the countess had escaped then through the gate in the wall of the garden, and of this the old man was the guardian. He had thus been either false or careless. As I passed inward, there was light. I noticed lying on an escritoire a scrap of paper. I took it, and read: 'I have chanced to hear a soft sound of singing at nightfall. Whoever you are, try, if you are sorrowful, to escape—to see me. Help, if my help can save, shall not be wanting.' It was unsigned, and the writer, dreading the chance of my eyes, had carefully disguised her hand—yet I knew. With redoubled fury I ran from room to room to find my faithless servant; he presently sighted me, and

darted with the alacrity of youth down the steps into the garden, screaming his innocence. He hid among the trees, till marking him well, I fired. Loudly bellowing, he fell. I found later that the others too, hearing the screams and turmoil, and fearing my frenzy, had fled the house.

"I returned to the chamber of the fatal meeting. The two ladies, hand in hand, rose and confronted me. In the gentle eye and the bold eye alike I read my doom—resistance active, resistance passive to my will, even to the death. I know their mother—her quiet but adamantine resolution in matters where the religious *motif* intervenes. And as she, so they. I did not at all doubt that I could sooner turn the sun to ice than move them from their purpose of rebellion.

"'We have no avenger,' said the stately countess Grace, 'but with our own hands we shall protect ourselves from outrage,' and she raised a jewelled dagger as if to strike my breast.

"'Oh, no, no, Grace,' cried Ethel interposing, 'not *him*, my love —strike me.' Then turning to me with tears—'Oh, why, why did you wrong us, who love you, thus?"

"'To your own apartments, madam,' I said to Grace.

"Not yet had my voice lost its intonation of command. Struggling to disobey, with face of ashen hue, she slowly relinquished the hand of her sister—and obeyed.

"And so ended for ever our dream of joy. What further life was now possible for any of us? An hour later, in pity, I waited upon my first-wedded with a goblet of wine. Knowing my meaning, she refused—not angrily, lovingly rather—to drink from my hand; but sweetly yielded up her glorious form when with forceful tenderness I seized it. Alas! the crack, and her sigh, ring like a lunacy in my brain. Ethel, on the other hand, drank without a murmur of the cup I offered, from beneath her lids gazing steadily upon my face with her most blue reproachful eye. She drooped dead upon my breast, smiling, lisping the words: 'Orazio—*husband!*' No *Voceradori* of my land shall wail strange *alalas* over their silence. They lie together on the couch to which I bore them. The first cold grey of the dawning day steals in upon me as I write. The half-emptied goblet is by my side. My friend, their bed is wide! I go—to pass with them—with *Her*—into the Kingdom of Forgetfulness. Farewell!"

So ended the count's narrative.

WAYWARD LOVE.

BY M. P. SHIEL, AUTHOR OF "PRINCE ZALESKI."

AMONG the less understood tricks of the will, few are more curious than that implied in the old distich:

> "Forgiveness to the injured doth belong,
> But he ne'er pardons who hath done the wrong."

That it is *true*, no one can doubt who even reads the newspapers. The Nero of the slums first really hates the wife of his early fancy when he has once seen the trickle of her blood, and the diviner her patience, the more unappeasable his greed to watch her sufferings. And the proposition suggests its converse: if we hate what we have cursed, we inevitably love what we have saved. This is especially true of women, in whom the instinct to *protect*—to hide *hen*-like under the wing—seems to be more deeply-seated than in men. With them, especially, vicarious suffering does not merely imply, it creates, affection—a truth which may be an index to the only correct analysis of "the maternal instinct." The nature of men—and, above all, of women—longs for the caress, not of the hand which has blessed it, but of the hand which *it* has blessed: as the hart after the water-brooks, so it pants for fusion with the life it has suffered to save.

The telling of an incident, the details of which lie in certain letters now in the possession of a very ancient family in the south of France, may very well illustrate this tendency.

A howling Paris mob, one evening late in 1788, had gathered round the bronze statue of Henri IV. on the Pont Neuf. Lamoignon, the hated "Keeper of the Seals," had that day been dismissed from office—hence the jubilation of the people. The full terror of the Revolution was not yet, but the populace already felt the stir of its young energies, and all day in various parts of Paris a roar of *petards*, firelocks, and *fusees*, had mingled with the roll of drums and the peal of the tocsin. The City Guard everywhere fled before the playful roughness of the rabble. A large number of wicker figures of Lamoignon were burnt; and on the Pont Neuf all passers-by were forced to stop and exclaim: "Long live Henri Quatre! To perdition with Lamoignon!"

This revelry was at its height when a young member of the *noblesse*, Camille de Mounier, passed that way, returning earlier than usual to his dingy garret from a wild scene of tavern licence at the Cafe du Foy; his rich coat, still showing its frogs and laces, was old, squalid, ragged; his wig looked like a dish-clout; he wore no mantle. Camille had long been the despair of his friends. He had lately run through a patrimony as the result of a night's play. As he walked towards the Pont Neuf now, his foot stumbled, lagged; in his uncertain eyes swam the rheum of intoxication.

The mob, watchful as a cat, pounced upon him, insisting upon a repetition of its formula.

"To perdition with Henri Quatre!" he shouted, laughing loud, waving an arm; "*vive* Lamoignon!"

This drunken daring was terrible. A sea of lank faces closed round him, their cruel grins giving place to a look of still grimmer meaning. An Aristocrat—who cursed the people's king! In a moment he was seized, and in the same moment almost sobered. A hundred talons reached out to tear him. A gathering roar, wonderfully like the lion's, dinned menace to his inmost brain.

"Let me go!" he gasped, pallid under the lamp-post. "I will say as you will!"

They ungripped, and stood about him. He cast his eyes round, hesitated for half a minute, and then with the same loud, mocking, staccato laughter, shouted—

"To perdition with Henri Quatre! Ha! ha! ha! *A bas le peuple! Vive* Lamoignon!"

And before the crowd could seize him, to their complete stupefaction, he had leapt on to the parapet of the bridge and plunged into the river, leaving his coat in the hands of the few who attempted to stop him.

The mob sent up a shout—half applause, half rage. They crowded to the parapet: saw him rise; saw him making toward the bank. A detachment ran yelling round to intercept him at the Quai.

But Camille, a stout swimmer, reached the water's edge before them. He shook himself like a water-dog, yelled out a jeer, and dashed up a narrow court. And now began a race for very life. Asahel himself was hardly swifter of foot than the young noble, but he was handicapped by his saturated clothes and broken shoes; while, on the other hand, he was befriended by the dark passages which he chose. Sometimes, for moments, he thought himself victorious, till, emerging into a more

open space, the shout rose close behind him, swelled by ever new volunteers to the hunt. Camille, originally of iron frame, had long been spoiled in wind by his life of riot; there was a stage of the chase at which he began to heave ominously; many of his pursuers, too, stopped jaded like spent steeds; but a straggling line of runners, still shouting, gained surely upon him. The effort to live intensified the love of life; the humour of devilry was clean gone now, and he ran as if Asahel himself was upon him. His lower jaw dropped wide, and his eyes grew glassy as with the power of a new sort of wine from whose stupor is no awaking.

All at once a shout of triumph rose from the heated *canaille*. Camille had dashed into a *cul-de-sac!* He stopped desperate, and the crowd rushed forward to clutch him. Drawing his rusty rapier, he ran to place his back against the dead wall; but, on coming to it, he discovered it to be only the high, rough back of a garden—not of a house—not therefore unscaleable. With a last great effort he climbed to the coping. As he reached it, a missile, tearing his temple, covered his face with blood. He leaped down on the opposite side, and found himself in a tangled jungle of trees, half park, half garden, at the back of a great mansion.

As he passed onward—in mad panic now—half dead, but lusting for life—a low sound of singing fell upon his ears, and all in a moment he found himself face to face under the moonlight with a lady, who had just issued from a summer-house among the bushes. Seeing him wet, ragged, blood-stained, with the wild eye of a hunted creature, she shrank back with a scream.

It was the daughter of the Comte d'Arrien, a *dame* of the Court of Versailles, but just then spending a week with her parents in Paris. Camille in the old days, when he had not yet sunk into the abyss, had met her twice or thrice, and, it was whispered, thrown fond eyes upon her too—but "as they that have no hope." Her father and his had been close friends. He recognised her at once.

"Oh, Adeline—mademoiselle—for the love of heaven, hide me!"

"What *you*, Monsieur le Comte de Mounier! And *another* escapade? Ah, wild, wild!"

She smiled, but at this moment the cry of his pursuers sounded from the top of the wall.

"Hide me, for pity's sake!"

Trembling from head to foot, now thoroughly demoralised, he forgot *her* danger—everything but the dastard love of life. She looked at him with pity, contempt. The thud of feet falling into the garden reached them.

"Save me!"

The instinct to protect rose strongly within her.

"Go into the summer-house," she said, now pale as he. "On the opposite side there is another door. I will wait here to meet them, and while they are on this side speaking to me, do you escape through the other door to the end of the garden where is a gate. You will be unseen."

With a sudden gesture he bent and dipped his lips to her forehead. She looked after him while he dived into the house, her heart flutteringly anxious for his safety. As she shut the door upon him, the first few of the crowd, running forward, saw the action. The cry was raised: "We have him at last—he is in there!" and they gathered round Adeline.

She, voiceless with terror, held her arm outstretched before the door.

"Does the lady then shield from the people a man who curses the People's King?" asked a huge butcher.

They tore her with a roughness not all unkind from the doorway, and rushed into the summer-house. A shout of baffled rage followed their discovery of the means by which the fugitive had escaped. Only a few continued the now useless chase.

The others crowded round Adeline, handling her with sinister roughness.

"Let *her* be hanged, then!"

"Why not? She, too, is an enemy of the——"

"To the *lanterne!*"

The butcher at this point went up to two of the others, and whispered into their ears. Then, smiling all the time, he hustled back the crowd, and with his two companions—all the three being armed with firelocks, snatched that day from the City Guard—stood facing the girl a few paces from her.

"Mademoiselle has been judged by the people, and must be shot."

She cast her eyes in the direction of the mansion, and recognising her distance from help or hope, turned them in mute appeal to the heavens.

There was a count of one, and two, and three, and the weapons cracked out. Adeline fell; the mob laughed and departed.

The *canaille* of Paris during the Revolution were, of course, characterised by all the playful cruelty of the lion's whelp; but the element of human reasonableness at no time altogether failed to distinguish them from the brutes. Men, like lions, will shed blood, but they stand in absolute need of some sort of *excuse;* and the excuse, however poor in itself, must be sufficient to satisfy *their* reason. Thus, in the present instance, the butcher, lacking a motive strong enough, had seen to it,

as the others well knew, that the cartridges of the weapons were blank. The only missile which had pierced Adeline was the shaft of the terror of death. Her attendants found her later and bore her to her bed, where for a long time a fever of the brain confined her. But a morning came when, with the gladness of new intelligence, she opened her eyes. Her mother stood by the bedside. Adeline sat up and looked toward the window and its flowers; then, with a strange quick intensity, up toward the ceiling—around—down at the bed. And now, a low and piteous moan escaped her, and she cried out in her pain—

"Oh, maman—God help me—*I am blind!*"

The château of the Comte d'Arrien stood—in the midst of vineyards, and groves of orange, almond, and olive—a short distance outside Avignon, in the pastoral land of Provence. To this, the Arcadia of France, with its melodious *patois* and Southern *joie de vie*, the family came when the fury of the Revolution began seriously to manifest itself in Paris, little dreaming that here, of all places, the Terror was to rage at its worst.

The Count, being old, and struck by an attack of partial paralysis on hearing the news of his daughter's blindness, had not followed the Emigration of the Nobles, and thus saved his estate from confiscation. At Avignon, the Countess, by a tactful diplomacy, contrived to keep the heads of the family on their shoulders, and to this feat the loveliness of the blind girl was highly contributory. The *bourgeois* members of the Municipality, the Mayor and his wife, and the most powerful of the patriot middle-class of Avignon, proud of the honour, walked on three nights every week up the lane of olives and the low marble steps, to take a hand at whist or *reversi* in the seigneurial *salon* of the stately old Comte d'Arrien.

A certain Philippe Duval, one of the Municipals of Avignon, was the most constant of these guests. Though not a Provençal, he had distinguished himself by his zeal in the revolutionary cause in the neighbourhood, and had grown to be greatly feared. It was quickly seen that he was violently in love with Adeline, nor did the father and mother check him in this presumption as rigorously as was expected of them. He was, of course, acquiring vast powers over life in the Commune, and, as everyone said, the complaisance of the great folk must be due to motives of prudence. But to his insinuations the blind beauty turned a smile as cold and dead as her own sightless eyes.

Late in '91 the fire which had been smouldering in Avignon broke into flame. One Sunday morning Madame d'Arrien led Adeline through the vineyard paths, through the town gates, and so to the Church of the Cordeliers within the town. Madame d'Arrien, a rather stout old lady—with piquant smile and gentle blue eyes—held a breviary; they were going to church. It would have been well for them, however, had they shunned the house of prayer that day. The curé was in the midst of his orisons, the heads of the congregation were bowed, when a Patriot entered

"VIVE LAMOIGNON!" (*p.* 355).

the church and walked up the aisle. In bantering words he began to address the worshippers, mostly women: there was a pause of horror—a shriek of execration—a rush forward. He was hurled to the ground, trampled, pricked by a thousand points, and left a flaccid mass on the steps of the chancel.

Madame d'Arrien, sitting near the end of the church, fled with Adeline at the beginning of the *émeute*. She reached the château, but fainted on entering it.

Three hours had not passed, when a young man rushed panting into the chamber where the family sat.

"Oh!" he cried, "for heaven's sake——"

He could not go on. His face was distorted with affright. It was Philippe Duval.

The Count, a tall old man, with wide masses of white hair and beard, said gravely—

"Tell me, Citoyen Duval, why this hurried intrusion?"

"Fly!" cried Duval; "hide yourselves! The Brigands are on the road; they follow behind me to arrest you. Your life—mine——"

"But we are guiltless of any——"

"You were seen in the church. Ah, Mademoiselle Adeline, speak to your parents!"

But there was a tread of feet in the hall; and immediately two soldiers, wearing the blue national uniform, stood in the doorway. Half an hour later the whole family was *en route* for the Castle of Avignon, Philippe himself ordering forward the troop which escorted the prisoners.

At this time, the self-styled "Brave Brigands of Avignon," under the command of "Jourdan the Headsman," were the sovereign lords of the district. Even the power of the Patriot municipality had dwindled to a shadow; the town walls had been adorned with gibbets for "the Suspect"; the fields laid waste. Hence it was, that after the body of the desecrator of the morning's mass had been borne through the streets, his head crowned with laurel, the emissaries of Jourdan scoured the vicinity, making arrests to avenge the *manes* of the murdered "patriot." These all were thrown into the subterranean dungeons of the castle.

And now began "the butchery of Avignon." In a small room in the Glacière Tower of the castle, which rose sheer from the languid Rhone, sat Jourdan. His judgment-bar was a little deal table, covered with brandy-bottles and tobacco-pipes; and around stood his impromptu court-martial of Patriots clad in the brown *carmagnole*. A tin lamp, without glass, flickered luridly on the visages of this tribunal of all the demons.

A name was called from the list, some hurried words spoken, judgment pronounced; a Brigand at the door shouted the name, and others waiting outside with drawn swords set out to execute the sentence.

One only of the Municipals was present at these orgies. It was "the good patriot," Philippe Duval. He stood leaning against the rough wall of the cell in the shade of a corner with folded arms, lithe and muscular as a Greek Hermes, and as coldly silent.

"Citoyen d'Arrien, his wife, and daughter!"

There was not even the usual parley on the reading out of these names. The guilt of these people was too evident. Jourdan, with a nod to the door-keeper, drank from a bottle. Philippe Duval stole quickly from the room.

The Count and his family had been thrown into one of the deepest of the Glacière dungeons, where the moan of the Rhone far above their heads never came, nor any light of the sun, nor the hope that comes to all. They lay numbed in the mire, quite dazed, bereft even of the feeling of pity for themselves.

Two executioners descended the narrow stone steps. Duval crept behind them till, arriving at the door of an empty circular cell, he suddenly walked up to them, and said—

"Come in here."

They followed him into the room, two burly giants, one swinging a lantern. He turned and faced them.

"Now, look you, Jean and Pierre," he said, "you know that I am a Municipal of Avignon?"

"Well, and what of that, citoyen?" answered Pierre.

"This much: the three citizens of the Republic you come to kill have not had fair trial."

"Bah! trial enough. They are aristocrat traitors. Come on, Jean."

"Well, my friends, but in order to reach them, it will be necessary for you to pass over my body."

He had placed his back against the closed door. Their two throats rattled a laugh; their brows darkened.

"Here is another of them!" cried Jean. "Pin him!"

"Very well," said Philippe, "but you perceive this sword?"

"*Bon Dieu!* have we then no swords?"

A sudden lunge was made at his head, which he blocked. They closed upon him—there was parry and thrust—flashing interchange of tierce and quarte—on the one side stout thews, fierceness; on the other perfect coolness, unfailing *head*, exquisite science.

The first blood flowing from Philippe's cheek stirred the Brigands to imprudence, and in the next instant a terrible sweep of the blade passed through Jean's thigh. Pierre, fighting now for dear life, heaved high his sword for a desperate blow at the scalp; it fell slashing through Philippe's shoulder; but at the same time the man's own weasand ripped upward like a bag, and he fell dead across his mate.

Duval, writhing with pain, and weak, hurried to the cell of the d'Arriens. They had been there four days. The key shrieked in the lock; they looked up, thinking him their executioner come at last.

There was no time to lose. He led the blind girl, and supported the Count on the other arm. The Countess, weeping, followed.

"Have no fear," Philippe whispered to Adeline; "everything is in readiness. You will all——"

"But you?"

He pressed her hand, and forgot danger and the sting of his wounds when she falteringly returned this slight caress. They passed through a multitude of torture-chambers, black corridors. Philippe had made himself master of every mystery of the vast structure. At last he opened a small gate, and they stood on a step washed by the Rhone, under the open sky of night.

A boat waited by the postern. Philippe whispered to the Count the name of the friends who, living by the river, had arranged to receive and hide them. The Countess kissed and called him "son." The Count called blessings upon his head. Adeline was silent. He stood, and guided by the whishing of the oars, peered after them as they vanished into the gloom.

The "treachery" of Duval did not long escape the keen patriotic scent of the brave Brigands of Avignon. Jean still lived to tell his tale; and Philippe had hardly reascended to the trial-chamber when he was accused; then tried, condemned, and flung into a cell, all in the same hour. That he was not instantly killed, was due to the shrewdness of Jourdan who knew of his popularity, and had, moreover, just heard rumours of the advance of an army under Choisi. To butcher any number of aristocrats was felt to be one thing; to kill a patriot Municipal another. Philippe therefore languished in his cell for sixteen days, till the army appeared, when Jourdan was seized, and his still-living prisoners were released. In the Glacière Tower, over a hundred dead bodies were discovered by Choisi.

The Comte d'Arrien emerging now from his hiding-place resumed possession of his estates. The receptions of the Countess became more crowded than ever. Duval was always there, silent, wrapped in himself. He would have seemed a statue, but for the fact that he took advantage of Adeline's blindness to follow with his eyes every lissom movement, the shadow of every thought on her face. Hidden from her, he imagined himself hidden from all, and could never have guessed that his passion was the talk of all the town.

The Revolution rapidly developed itself, and Duval, who had something of the faculty of the ruler of men, rose on the rising waves. When the implacable tribunals called the "Comités Revolutionnaires" were established, and he was made a judge of this court, his powers over life and death became as absolute as that of any Sultan who ever went mad with pride.

Hence every consideration, not only of gratitude, but of policy, must have seemed to the Count and Countess to combine in his favour. One morning the Countess called Adeline into her boudoir, and stroking her brown hair, said fondly—

"Ah, Adeline, I see by your pallor and blushes that you know what I am going to say. I am commanded by your father to speak to you on the subject that is so near to all our hearts. Don't cry—kiss me! Least of all good children, I know, will *you* disobey your father's will. Tell me, isn't it so?"

"Yes, maman," said Adeline, choking with sobs.

"And Duval is quite a noble fellow; we owe him all; I wish you could see how handsome and finished he is; and he is so powerful! and he worships you, you know!"

"But I do not love——"

"Hush, my child! Time—time—does these things. If he were to withdraw his protection from us in these awful days——"

"But is it noble of this man to have me flung to him as the reward of his uncertain protection? Oh, why could he not leave me to die in the Glacière!"

"Ungrateful girl! But silence—here comes your father—not a word before him!"

But the limits of Philippe's generosity had not been reached. He divined exactly the girl's mind, and with a patience really heroic waited, hoping to conquer her by ever-repeated proofs of his devotion; while she, surprised at not being at once made to acknowledge his rights over her, for the first time felt a poignant sense of gratitude towards him. Even for his inveterate silence she was thankful—for the sound of his voice was seldom heard. In her heart she grew to admire him. Those hardly-perceptible pressures of the hand after the *soirée*, upturned

appeals of the darkened eyes, spoke volumes to Philippe. They at least understood each other.

So passed the greater part of the terrible year '93. Between such people as the d'Arriens and the scaffold there was now hardly a step; to be rich was to be "suspect," and to be suspect was to die. On the advice of Duval the Count had yielded, in the shape of a "patriotic gift," the greater part of his estates, but the "Revolutionary Courts" were seldom to be baulked of their prey by such devices. Philippe Duval found all his cunning and activity called into play. As President of the *Comité* he could show no lack of zeal—upon this his own life depended. One after the other the few nobles of the neighbourhood who had not emigrated mounted the scaffold. Three several times had the Public Prosecutor mentioned the name of the Comte d'Arrien, and three times had the adroitness of Philippe defrauded the guillotine. But in the performance of these feats of cleverness lay a frightful danger. Already there was the faintest whisper that the *Citoyen* Duval might not, after all, be sound to the very heart of him. And this additional question arose: what was the secret of his evidently close connection with the *doctors* of Avignon? At such a time, to act in any way out of the common course was to be suspect. His housekeeper revealed the fact that he would sit up all the night poring over books and charts. What, then, was the meaning of these vigils?

One morning he sat at the table in the great library of the Château d'Arrien with a Commissioner just arrived from Paris. These Commissioners were sent out singly or in pairs over France with absolute power to "take in requisition" the whole property of any citizen whatever. Before the two men lay a map of the estates of the Count.

"The château," said the Commissioner, "shall be used as a magazine; the rest of the estate, corn being scarce, may be planted in wheat."

"You take the whole in requisition, then?" asked Philippe.

"Certainly."

"There is this strip of woodland in the corner here."

"Let it be sold."

"But it is almost useless. It contains the forester's old cottage——"

"That at least may be sold."

"I recommend that it be left to the family as a residence."

The envoy glanced sharply at him.

"Are they not aristocrats of the old type?"

"Aristocrats, yes—but good patriots."

"Popular in Avignon?"

"Very."

"And your own good friends, no doubt?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, be it so. They may have the cottage."

The next day the family took up their abode in this new home—a two-storied *cabane* in the depths of the forest. Philippe's *finesse* had thus snatched them a shelter from the wreck of their fortunes; but the infirm old count not being able, like many of the nobles, to take his place at the blacksmith's forge or carpenter's bench, they were now without income. Henceforth they were completely at the mercy of Duval, and ate daily of the bread of his bounty.

Through the woods, capped in his *bonnet rouge* and wearing the *carmagnole*, he came as usual in the evening, full of good hope, to sit with them at their poor hearth. The elders would retire early, leaving him with the blind girl. They were the best of friends now. She trusted in him, and revered him above all men.

"Adeline," he said late one night, taking her hand, "tell me this truly: have you—have you ever loved?"

A wave of scarlet blushed to her face.

"And you love still?"

In a whisper, with bowed head, she answered, "yes."

"Ah! and for me, then, there is no hope?"

"But I love you, Philippe. How you pain me by speaking so! But not—oh, no, no—you do not know!"

For a long time he was silent, then looked up suddenly and said—

"Ah, but I have it in my power to bring you a blessing so great and precious that you may yet——but with it may come to you the consciousness that I am not what I seem, and it may then be too late—too late."

"You speak strangely! What blessing?"

"Look toward the fire. Can you not *see* anything?"

"I dimly—yes, I am conscious of a reddish glow."

"Just so—then you are not what can be truly called blind at all. And now, shall I tell you a secret? For nearly five years I have been studying for your sake the medicine and surgery of the eye, and if you will let me, I am certain I can make you see again. I firmly believe that a thickening of the crystalline lens, due to a shock of sudden fright, is the only obstacle between you and vision. A week ago, in the presence of three physicians of Avignon, I operated on just such a case in the hospital, and they are all saying I have acquired a skill quite exceptional, and performed a wonder."

In a paroxysm of emotion, Adeline turned her face toward him, felt for his hand, and covered it with kisses.

And so there came a day when she sat facing an open window, and the doctors stood around her, and the cruel-kind knife of Philippe quivered in her eye. The Countess, all tears and tremors, knelt by a bedside; the Count, dumb with pity and wonder, glided from room to room.

The light, the heavenly iris, came! She saw. One dull afternoon, in her impatience, she lifted the bandage, and as trees walking, saw men move before her. Philippe was there; he had come to make his *adieux* before starting for Paris with, as he said, a Report to the Convention. Holding her hand to say good-bye, he bent and kissed her cheek, and in her reception of this caress was all the charm of acquiescence, consent; the Count and Countess saw the action, and they, too, in confirmation of the tacit compact, came and kissed her. Duval put a hand over his eyes, and went away hurriedly, trembling with agitation.

"CAMILLE DE MOUNIER! IT WAS HE!

Adeline rapidly recovered sight. Crazy with the ecstasy of a new sense, she walked out every day along the paths of the wood, frolicsome, laughing, the deep winter turned in her fantasy to leafiest summer.

The sun had set one evening when, in a narrow road between hedges, she saw a man coming toward her. Overcome with surprise, she launched that species of shrill cry into which women can crowd the expression of whole paradises. Then she stood in marble, pallid to the lips. Camille de Mounier! it was he!—the scapegrace young nobleman whom, more than five years before, she had saved from the Paris mob. He still wore the same aristocratic dress of the wild Café du Foy days, the old coat, frogged and laced, ragged and soiled. With the old *négligé* repose, airy courtliness, he stepped forward, and took her hand.

"Camille! oh, Camille," she cried, the light of love beaming from her face, "it is long since we met!"

"You thought me eaten by le Père Guillotine, of course?"

"Eaten? I? No—I knew you were alive."

"How?"

"I should have *felt*, Camille," she said quite simply. "Sometimes I knew you *so* near me that I could hear your very voice. But you did not write to me!"

"Yes, twice, after the—the mob affair."

Her fingers touched her bosom; the two letters were there, heaving over her heart.

"*Only* twice," she said, "and the rhapsodies and vows were not taken to be oversincere——"

"They *were* sincere, however; and the vows have been kept."

"So?" She trilled a laugh. "But they might have been longer—there might have been more of them! My maid, who read them to me, was little winded by the effort!"

"Yes, I heard of the blindness. It made me—can I say it now?—fonder of you than ever."

"Camille!" her burning face went hiding on his shoulder.

Again and again they met in this way, secretly, under cover of night, the cicala chirping mournful to the intense whisperings of their secret. The time approached, came, passed, when Philippe Duval was expected to return and claim his bride.

And so it happened that one morning the distracted Count and Countess d'Arrien searched in vain through the house, and through the woods for Adeline. Adeline could not be found. It was only toward mid-day that, half mad with terror, they found this note on an escritoire:

"My Darling Maman,—I am going from you full of pity for you! but I know that however insane I seem, my dear maman will never, never believe me undutiful of heart! The power of a love far stronger than a thousand wills—ah, you will pity me still, and forgive! You know him well, maman; my father knows him; before long you shall hear his name. He has powerful friends across the border, whom he says we may hope to reach. As for you, Philippe Duval will not desert you now; I know him altogether noble and generous. Only for a time, farewell, farewell."

The Comte d'Arrien, on reading this tear-stained message, lifted his arm, about to utter a curse.

At that moment a messenger broke into the room with a sealed packet. The Count tore it open. It was from Philippe Duval.

"My Dear Comte d'Arrien," it said, "it is now five years since I declared to you my love for your daughter; it is four since, when you came to Avignon, I followed you. Forgive me if I remind you why—to protect her and you. How I have done this you know: I won office, wealth; many times, often by ways unknown to you, I saved your lives. And you can never dream what all this year-long hypocrisy in a cause I detested cost me. But like Jacob serving seven years, and yet seven, for his Rachel, I counted it nothing if I might win the cold heart of your Adeline.

"Three months ago, after all this labour of love, she confessed to me that her woman's affections were given to another. I abandoned hope, and resolving to sacrifice myself, I brought back the light to her eyes, never intending that she should see my face. Had I not every reason to believe that, on looking at me, her feelings of friendship for me would at once turn to abhorrence?

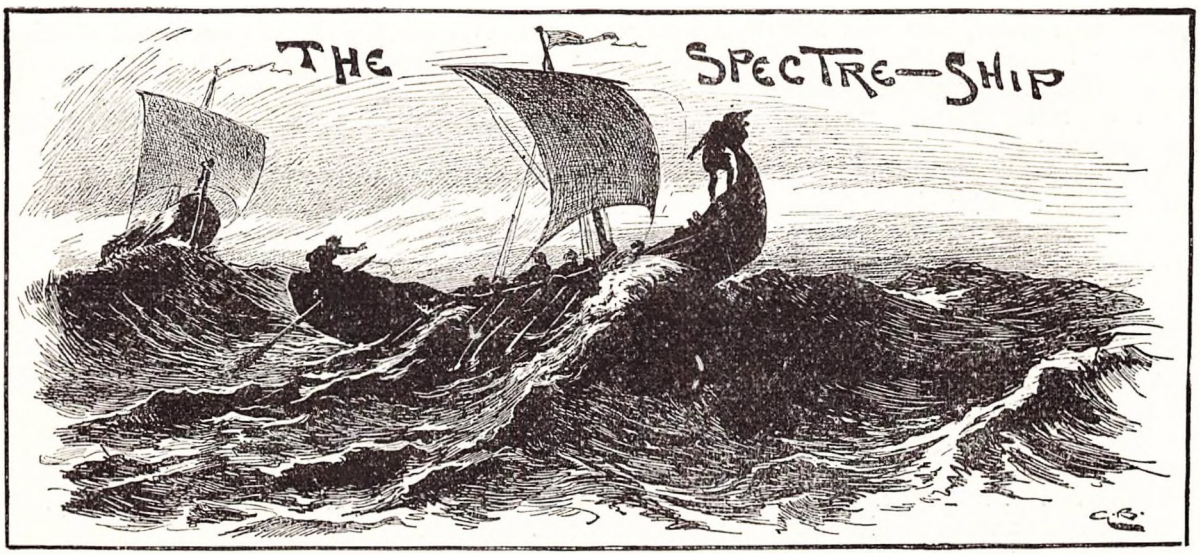
"Soon after the operation I therefore pretended to start for Paris. In reality, I lingered hiding in the neighbourhood, watching her window by night, hoping for a last sight of her dress among the trees. I had cast off with loathing the trappings of the Revolution, and resumed the old apparel of my order.

"My last evening had come, when Adeline, at a turn of the path through the glen, came suddenly upon me, and with her new eyes saw my face. Ah! I noticed the involuntary opening of her arms, the scream of joy, and glance of peace after long years of pain! In an instant my heart knew all. I was loved! loved! loved!

"And yet not I, Philippe Duval, but I—Camille de Mounier! Five years ago, when I vowed to you to deserve her by the annihilation of my old self, when even the old name was doffed with the rest of the old life, you consented to the innocent deception, believing that in this complete burying of my former self lay my only hope of winning her. But could either of us imagine that all this time her wayward heart would be wearing itself with sighs, not for the honest man who crowned her life, but for the profligate and losel whose cowardice had robbed her of sight? So near akin, it seems, is pity to love; and so disconnected with love is the feeling of gratitude.

"But you may imagine my anxiety to keep my two personalities apart, for the present at least, in the mind of my Adeline. You will not refuse to pardon us our flight, for this you will see to have been my wisest alternative, and our separation from you will not be long. I return to resume the mummery of *bonnet rouge* and tricolour, and to live with you till the evil days are over."

This letter, with others bearing upon this narrative, lies now in an old buhl cabinet of the Château d'Arrien; for under the *régime* of the Directory the estates of the Count were restored to him, and here the family, with Camille de Mounier and Adeline his wife, continued to reside. It is a great-grandson of Adeline who is the present lord of the old pile, the greatest of the ancient feudal castles round Avignon.



BY M. P. SHIEL.

I.

"ODIN sends out his Valkyrs to choose the slain," said the Viking Sigurd to his nephew, Gurth; "I go, and may not return; you know my will—see, Gurth, that you do it."

His hands were on the heads of two children of nine. He kissed them, and leapt to his *volle*, in which two champions rowed him to his dragon-ship lying near. As the lug-sail bulged hugely to the breeze, and the long galley stepped, gay with gilt spar and purple flag, down the *fjord*, Sigurd, on the poop, turned from his steering-oar and waved a hand. The setting sun glittered on his rich war-gear. He stood looming big, a towering bulk, with the long tile-beard of old Assyrian kings, a silver wire showing here and there in the russet flow. He waved his hand—his eighty rovers commenced the chaunt of a sea-song—and a bluff hid them from the bay.

The bay was at the inner end of the long, winding *fjord*. A greensward sloped gently up from the beach, crowned at the top with an edge of forest; and midway stood the low, widespread burg, or manor-house, of the Viking's domain. To this turned Gurth, holding a hand of each of the children. So fast he walked that he dragged them; his grasp hurt them. Exultation was dancing in his heart and gloomy eye. He was master at last—perhaps for good—for Odin sends out his Valkyrs, and Sigurd the Viking was but mortal man.

Gurth, at a time when most men were warriors, was not a warrior; one saw that in his face—a puffy face, dark as a Norman's, seamed with deep lines, and hairless; with shifty dark eyes, and a broken nose. His back stooped deeply. Standing by Sigurd, his head just reached the Viking's shoulder.

He sat late that night in the low, wide hall; around, on benches, lolled the residue of Sigurd's retainers, drinking mead from horns. From the long hearths by the table sprang the fire-smoke to the open louvres in the roof. Gurth, brooding, sat at the table-head, fingering his embossed cup. Presently he sprang up, somewhat fuddled, and there was silence. "Men," he said, "I am your overman now; if there be thrall, or churl, or champion here disputes that, let him say it. By the belt of Thor——"; he glared cunningly round, but no one stirred. "Sigurd," he continued, "is gone a-Viking in Britland. *When* he may return, who knows? Meanwhile we have scarcity of much—of corn, fabrics, gold. Sigurd was a free-hand, a feaster, winking at sloth, so it were brave and bloody. I am for gathering together and husbanding. No idleness on the lands while I lord it here! Let every thrall do his sweating: everyone bring his share from land or sea. He who fails will know me better. I call a cheer!"

Silence reigned. Malignity and a painful anxiousness contorted the face of Gurth. But, slowly, the men stood up and drank.

When a snore or two began to sound, he rose and glided across the courtyard. Frigga's

lamp, westering low, burned dim in the heavens. After passing three corridors, he tapped at a door, and was admitted into a chamber by old Gunhild, the *vala* of the burg. He sat near, peering into her face.

"Well, now," he said, "have you wrought the spells for me?"

The old dame nodded meaningly far within her wimple. She was dressed in white. From its cloudy pomp the setting moon shone through the window upon them.

"And is the good hap of Frey, *vala*, or the mischief of Loki to rule this life of mine?"

Gurth's soft hands were writhing clammily together. An agony of interest gazed from his eyes upon the wrinkled, grave old face.

"Loki or Frey?" she said, looking far away; "both, if you must know."

"Ah . . . ! tell me."

"You will conquer the living."

His eyes glowed.

"But beware of the dead."

"How! the *dead* you say?"

The *vala* pointed a bent finger. In a corner, on two beds, lay the children. The hair of the girl, Gerda, spread rich over the coverlet like a mat of gold. The arm of young Hrolf, the son of Sigurd, lay under his head, the fist clenched.

"If harm come to *them*," said Gunhild, "All-father will see to it, I tell you."

Little Gerda was an orphan, the daughter of a neighbouring Jarl, a close comrade of Sigurd. The Jarl, dying, had committed her to Sigurd, together with his lands and burg. The last injunction of the Viking to Gurth had reference to the marriage of the children, as soon as they attained something like maturity. It was a project near to his heart, and a foreboding that this his expedition might be one of those unending voyages that brave men take at the call of Odin had lent stern emphasis to his command.

"If harm come to *them* . . ." said Gunhild.

"But look here, *vala*," coaxed Gurth, spreading his hands, "I *mean* no harm to them! Harm, do you think? As for the boy, if his father comes not back, in a few Yules we send him Viking, where let him bide the chances of the sea-fight; and glorious, we all say, is death in the fight. As for the girl, seven, eight, passing summers will find her fit and marriageable. Harm, *vala?* Why should not I, myself——"

"What?"

"Well—*vala*—marry her."

Gunhild looked calmly sidelong at the cunning, oily face.

"And so make quite sure of the wealth of the dead Jarl, Gurth?"

He chuckled low. "A wish to get, and increase in store, is but natural to us all."

"Yet do *you*, Gurth," she answered, shaking a warning finger, "curb well your lust for wealth! for if I read right the signs . . . but fie! Gerda is for none of your marrying. There is whiteness already in your hair."

"When—when will Sigurd return?"

"You mean to ask," she said bitingly, "whether he will return at all."

"Well, put it so."

"But I may not tell you. All, even to the *vala*, is not revealed. But I know this, that he is of those high and great warriors who *do* return, though the world oppose them. And I say to you, Gurth, do your will and prosper; but beware of wrong to *those*."

Gurth rose. A greyness of morning mingled now with the dark. He bent his knee, and walked away.

II.

In nine years no one any longer expected Sigurd. The cruises of the Vikings were annual; and the bones of a hero absent nine years were well known to whiten on some shore, or roll with the tides of the ocean-flood.

Gurth, meanwhile, had "conquered the living." The rovers disliked him, but the trophies of their excursions they laid at his feet. That slight, dark man acquired an iron power over them. They feared him. Ditlew, the Berserk, the jötun-furious, and least erect of all the spirits of the burg-guard, returning from a voyage on the Throndheim coast, and deeming himself ill-rewarded with his share of booty, deserted at dead of night, and sped fugitive, his horse burdened with stolen things. Ditlew, a huge body ending in a tiny, broad-bearded head, had reached a point where fear of pursuit no longer troubled him; and at this point, springing from the dark of the forest, stood before him—Gurth. Ditlew did not suspect that Gurth was trembling with even chillier fears than he himself, although six thralls lurked near to protect him. The sword-arm of the brutish Berserk hung limp in the presence of this alert eye and all-divining brain. He returned submissively with Gurth, and from that night was a mere cringing cur, waiting upon the glance of his master. So, one by one, by force, by fraud, Gurth "conquered" them.

One, however, no device could tame. Young Hrolf, at seventeen, had been ordered to sail a-Viking. Dying to go, he had refused. Ditlew, at a glance from Gurth, dragged him to the bay. Not till the Norway coast was low on the horizon did they release him. At once Hrolf sprang from the poop. His return

he announced by firing a shed on the crags, which was the watch-tower for the signal-men placed to flash approach of enemies by means of beacons on the heights. Gurth believed himself invaded, while Hrolf dried his scarlet-and-yellow Viking-clothes at the burning shed.

At eighteen no love of opposition could longer keep him from the sea-joy. Gerda, sprung gracious now like a young larch from the hill-side, did the clasp of his ring mail-coat, and with a little mock curtsey put "Tyrfing," his grandfather's falchion, into his hand. Hrolf stooped, and brushed with his lips the full pink bloom of her cheek. She hardly noticed the caress; but three days later, folding his clothes, he being then far away, she remembered, and faintly blushed.

So Hrolf had drunk delight of battle, and returned brown; and the brine had whipped him out a short, reddish beard. Gerda, at the signal, went fluttering down the *fjord*, and he, seeing her white dress, put off from his "schip," and met her without the usual kiss; and they walked to the burg together.

Gurth, seeing them come, said: "Not too hasty, my young birds! You make a handsome pairing, and your wings grow fast, but I have a grave thought to clip them—and the time seems come."

Half a mile off, in the forest-depth, spread a lakelet, on which swam a high-prowed shallop. Through many an autumn afternoon Gerda had drifted here among the sedge of the shallows, noting the cry of kittiwakes or the poise of tern, or gull, or osprey. And here, from behind a tree, two days after his coming back, Hrolf stood watching her. *Why* from behind a tree, he could not for the world have said. The lake was flooded with the after-*gluth* of the set sun, and in the midst Gerda, all glorified, unreal, her head sunk, her chest now and then heaving the ghost of a sigh, in the sort of gentle trouble with which the ducks heaved on the soft swell of the lake. Presently, by a glance almost intuitive, she saw the red sleeve peep, and turned pale—starting so, that the paddle slipped into the red water. Hrolf, as if something momentous had happened, said to his tree: "Odin! she's dropped her oar!"

He ran out then, shouting, to the shore.

"Wait a bit, I am coming."

"No, no," she cried from far.

"BUT BEWARE OF THE DEAD."

"What do you say?"
"Do not trouble."
"But what will you do?"
"It is all right."
"What is?"
"You will wet yourself."
"I? Not a bit."
"You will. Oh why——"
"I am coming."
He plunged into the reedy slime, frighting routs of scarts and whimbrels to shrill synods in the air. Swimming, he reached the oar, then, like a water-dog, towed it to the shallop. With strange commotion, apprehension, she saw him come, and half stood, turning red and pale.

"There, I said you would!"
"Would what?"
"Wet yourself."
"Well, of course——"
"You said you wouldn't."
"Ha! ha! but I am quite used to all that now."
"You are such a very old—Viking."
"I have killed my man."
"And you have a beard."
"And *you* are not the same, either."
"Who, I? why not?"
"I can't make out. You seem so different since I have come back."
"I am very sorry for that, Hrolf. We were always such friends. Why different?"
"You look to me so much taller, and your eyes—how wonderfully blue your eyes are, Gerda!"
She cast them down, muttering something, looking upon the ebb and flow of her own travailing bosom. For the keen pang at her heart she could have cried aloud with joy.

"STARTING SO THAT THE PADDLE SLIPPED INTO THE RED WATER" (*p.* 757).

"And, look here"—he was close to her, his hand on the gunwale—"you did not—you know—kiss me—when I came back."
"Who didn't?"
"You didn't."
"Why, Hrolf, are you sure? I thought——"
"No, you didn't, really. Don't you suppose I would be certain to remember?"
"You never asked, Hrolf."
"Well—but can I come in?"
"No—don't! Hrolf, don't! you will upset——"

"Let me!"

"But you couldn't, don't you see——"

"If you sit heavily over yonder, perhaps I could."

She went. He made an effort, but his long-legged mass was ponderous. The skiff cranked steeply. He gave it up.

"Stupid shell!" he said; "you will find yourself in the water in no time, if I bear upon her."

Gerda leant more heavily upon the other side.

"Now, once more—try," she said.

He tried again, and the next moment Gerda was in his arm in the water, his other hand clinging to the shallop's keel.

"Well, now——!" was all he could gasp.

Her hair, wrapped thick about her head in the very manner of Eve, was hardly wet. She could swim like a fish. But her eyes were closed. The woman in her was, or pretended to be, a-faint.

"Darling! Gerda!"—he was kissing her on her lifted lips—"What a clumsy bear—you will be ill, Gerda——"

She tightened her arms about him. Her eyes opened and smiled, and closed shudderingly again at the renewed storm of his lips. It was the great moment of her life, for which she had unconsciously lived, backward to which she would not cease to look.

Gurth, at the burg-door, seeing them approach bedraggled, walked to meet them. He noticed their faces, the new meaning in their eyes, the sweet complicity, and joy.

"How now?" he cried.

"Oh, nothing—go away," said Hrolf; "fell into the water."

Gurth said to himself: "To-night."

Then, close by Gerda, he whispered:—

"To-night I want to speak to you—privately. You must come to the water-butt outside the burg, about nine—you hear?"

The world swam in vague dream to her. She hardly heard, but answered—

"Yes."

At the burg she snatched her hand free, and ran to change. Then, in headlong haste, rushed into the sanctum of Gunhild, and fell prone at the *vala's* knees, burying away her burning face, trembling, trembling. Gunhild, rich-gifted in heart-insight understood, and stroked the gold, and bent her cheek to the hot ear, droning the rhythm:—

> "Now may All-father,
> Odin, the work-skilled,
> Tunefulest song-smith,
> Joyous sea-rover,
> Faultless true-guesser,
> Cunning entangler,
> Odin wind-whispering,
> Grant that it end well!"

III.

"*Marry* me?" said Gerda.

"Ay, that," said Gurth.

It was nine, near the water-butt.

She meant to laugh, and a sob burst from her lips. Oh, where was Hrolf? She longed to whisper it all to him, and watch the flush of his contempt.

Gurth held her wrist, his dark eyes alight.

"No tremblings! no faintings and flutterings! You are mine. I have nurtured you for this. Not a word! If you rebel—if you tremble—I will cut off your hair, I will pinch and nip your pretty graces, and grind you to my will like corn beneath the quern—you hear?"

"But who are you that you dare——"

"Silence! and him, too, remember—your young strutting cockerel—I'll grind him if you resist me——"

"*Him!*" flushing up into noble scorn; "why, he can protect himself and me from a thousand such as you, Gurth Hermodsson!"

"Go!" he flung her from him; "say a month from now, a whole month to ready yourself within. And, meanwhile, you will be watched, be sure. Now run and tell your *vala*, if you will, that it is I who swear it by the thunder of Thor!"

And to the *vala* Gerda did run, and sobbed the tale into the sibyl's ears. At midnight Gunhild stood alone, mumbling spells over a fire in a platter, and before morning a plan had matured in the world-wise old brain.

She had Hrolf into her room. At the news "Tyrfing" leapt out, and Hrolf was all for open war. But the *vala*, threatening and entreating, won him to a calmer mood.

"The will of Loki is set strongly against your ever having Gerda at all," she said; "everything is against you. Unless you have the manhood to curb that hot blood, you may give up hope and be done."

He sat and listened. Her plan was flight. It seemed to her the only way of warding tragedy from the house of the Sigurdssons. The craft of Gurth she knew, his luck and knack of gaining an end; and she roused all her old dormant acuteness to a combat of wits with him. She was very feeble now—it would be her last fight, and she would fight it well.

So Hrolf and Gerda should be seen no more together, and on the third day Hrolf should pretend a journey to a neighbouring burg, and in the night the two should wait at appointed spots on the crags, Hrolf having secretly returned. She knew that Gurth's spies watched them; but that night she would summon Gurth, and while they talked, Frid, one of her women, would bolt the door

outside, so that Gurth would be her prisoner. Frid would then run and light a peat fire at the back of the burg wall, a signal for the children to meet and ride away; for his spies not finding Gurth, would not dare or care to follow. Without danger the two could then fare away to Jarl Svegdir's burg on the Ivan Fjord, who would not be slow to grant them asylum. Once wedded, their battle was more than half fought and won.

On that third night, then—a chilly wind blustering through the drizzly darkness—Gerda stood muffled, but wet, on the crags north of the *fjord*, while Hrolf watched from the southern cliffs. The hour appointed was about nine. But at ten no fire had shot up.

Gurth was walking up and down the hall, his hands behind his back. Every time he came to the door, he opened it slightly and looked out into the squall. Men lolled silent about the room. The long fires burned bright. The eye of Ditlew, the Berserk, with the sleepy fidelity of a watch-dog, followed every step of Gurth in his ceaseless, feline walk.

Toward eleven Hrolf said to himself: "Beard of Thor! but will it never come?" and Gerda, shivering, all haggard with fright, wept aloud: "Oh, some dreadful chance must surely have happened!"

Gurth, stopping before Ditlew, said—

"You are sure young Hrolf is back?"

"Yes," answered Ditlew, "I saw him."

"And the girl?"

"Hæng, the house-churl, has had an eye upon her to-day."

"And where is Hæng?"

"I thought the lout was here."

"No—you see; he is not," Gurth said, with a fiend's smile. "Get up now, and have the six horses I spoke of this morning ready at the door. And just take red brand from the fire, and kindle me a flame at the back of the burg-wall yonder."

Ditlew stared.

"Do it," said Gurth, and continued his walk.

The hand-woman, Frid, knew nothing of the scheme by which she was to imprison Gurth, and now sat weaving in the woman's-quarter, amid a crowd of chat.

Hrolf was saying: "Has Gunhild, then, played us false—ah, no—and yet . . ." when he saw the flare at the appointed spot, and crying, "good!—at last," galloped through the forest to the other side. Near the cliff-edge, he leapt off, and found Gerda.

"Quick now," he panted—"ah, but how cold, my love!—the way through the forest——"

"Dear Hrolf," she whispered, "I have such a strange fear—why was the signal so late?—if harm should come to you . . ."

She began to weep. He took her in his arms to the horse, lifted her to the pillion, sprang up, and cantered down the hill-side.

A man, meanwhile, had crept from a cleft behind them and run to the burg. It was the house-churl Hæng. He rushed in, and whispered to Gurth: "They are off—through the forest!"

"To horse! to horse, you six!" cried Gurth, stamping, his eye flashing—"young Hrolf and my ward, Gerda—the way through the forest!"

Six fellows ran to the waiting horses, a couple snatching flambeaux from the sconces. As they entered the wood, they heard the tramp of Hrolf's horse before them. But it was doubly-weighted, and not the fleetest of the burg; nor was the chase long. Presently Hrolf was lying on his back in the foot-way, bound. But "Tyrfing" had passed through Hæng, the house-churl, and had chasmed deep the shoulder of Ditlew, the Berserk.

The thought that rankled bitter as the gangrene of a knife-wound in the heart of Hrolf was this: "The *vala* has betrayed us—us, her own—her children!" Gerda stood near, guarded, numb as marble.

Gurth, as soon as the men had galloped from the door, sped across the courtyard. His manner of going was singular; he ran, then for a moment stopped, hesitating, full of doubts; and ran, and stopped, and ran again. At last, when near the *vala's* chamber, he drew off his soft *rivlins* from his feet, and crept, on tip-toe, to her door. The door was fastened on the outside. With utter stealthiness Gurth undid the bolts. Fright and the triumph of his cunning fought for mastery in his working face. But fright was uppermost; he had dared to do an awful thing! The *vala* had thought to imprison him, and he had imprisoned her. But she was the holy of the gods, and the weight of the act he had taken upon himself was tremendous. Having noiselessly undone the bolt, he crept backward, took his slippers, and pelted across the courtyard.

At the door, listening, he had heard the *vala* detail her whole scheme to Hrolf. Several plans had then passed through his brain; he might arrest the children at once; he might have men posted at the appointed spots to seize them separately. But the lust to emphasise his triumph, and make it striking, overmastered him. The lad, moreover, must be caught in the act of snatching his ward from his control, in order that the subsequent cruelties which he intended might find full justification in the eyes of the burg-men.

His delay of hours in kindling the fire for their meeting had been prompted by the mere wantonness of the tiger toying with its prey.

In the morning a woman, entering the *vala's* chamber, found her sitting, both hands stiffly clenched, a look of awful surprise and pride in her staring eyes. She, the long-honoured, the venerable, in her extreme old age, had been slain by an indignity. And Gurth had walked on tip-toe lest ears already dead should mark him—as the wicked flee when no man pursueth.

IV.

Success made of Gurth Hermodsson something very like a fiend—success and the death of the *vala* Gunhild. He had never dreamed of such a thing, and the incident upset and perverted him. A man believing himself under the curse of heaven, as Gurth now, tends to become deeply *wicked*, no longer sticking at trifles. For three weeks Gerda and Hrolf, each wondering where the other was, were prisoners near each other in rooms of the burg. Ditlew, nursing his cleft arm, watched the ceaseless pacings and grinding teeth of Hrolf. Gerda, dishevelled, woe-begone, sat staring before her, refusing food. Twice, since the *vala's* burial, Gurth had visited her. She had sprung to a corner, a young roe at bay, hopeless, but ready to tear, if touched. To his talk of marriage, threats of force, the slight downward curve of her upper lip gave silent answer.

"If the boy were dead!" thought Gurth. But he did not see his way, as yet, to cold murder. The exigency was not pressing enough for that; and the burg-men, though subdued, were yet men, brave, some of them generous, and might find murder intolerable. But the thought put into his head a triumphant idea, and the next day Ditlew, by instruction, slipped into Gerda's room.

"HIS HAND RESTED ON GURTH'S SHOULDER" (*p.* 762).

He spoke kindly; told of Hrolf; that he was close to her, confined like her. She drew near to him, drinking in his words. He was close to her, then!

"But I come as a friend to warn you," said Ditlew; "I come secretly—no one knows. There's near danger a-hanging over the youth's head."

"Danger!"

"Well, you know Gurth Hermodsson. He is a man must have his way. He does not *say* anything, but I know well enough what he will *do*, if you hold out against him."

"Do?—to *Hrolf*, you mean?"

"Ay. If the lad's in the way, he will be removed, I tell you. Every moment the danger is near him. Perhaps this very night—in his sleep——"

"Oh!" she leapt to him, caught him by his two sleeves, fell to her knees—"Ditlew! you are a man! save him for me! Have you a tiger's heart, good Ditlew? Have I ever done you harm? He is all I have, Ditlew—my life—save him, Ditlew——"

"Ah, now you rave," he said, "what can *I* do?"

He undid her grasp and went away, leaving her faint on the floor.

In an hour she sent a message to Gurth, saying that she was prepared to marry him on the morrow.

* * * * *

And on the morrow an altar on the green-sward ran red with oxen blood, and the new *vala* chanted before it, and Gurth at last was master, beyond the tricks of chance, of the old Jarl's lands.

As if half-ashamed of the mummery, he had performed his part stammeringly, shyly awkward, but afterwards walked blithely to

the burg, shrilling high a summoning horn. For Gerda he had taken a silken robe from the storehouse, which she wore. To everything she had acquiesced with spiritless abandonment, stipulating only that Hrolf should not be released that day, and on the next that she should be conveyed away to her father's burg, and be set free, unharmed.

And beside Gurth, at the table-head, she sat through the afternoon. And freer and freer flowed the mead, and higher swelled the tumult of good cheer and forgetfulness of sorrow, till Gurth, mollified by his cup, turned for the first time to his marble bride, and said—

"Take heart, fair face! No mischief is meant you. There breathes no more harmless a rascal than thy old Gurth to them who let him go his way in quietness."

And, as if in answer, a faint cheer came wafted from the bay. In a momentary lull of the festal noise it came, and everyone seemed to hear. A silence fell. Gurth looked, questioning, round.

At the moment a churl came running to him, and whispered—

"Sigurd Sigurdsson is come back, and half his champions with him. He is but now landed on the bay."

The drinking-horn dropped, and Gurth fell, collapsed, head-prone upon the table, shot in the breast by fate. It might be said that he swooned—the solid world rushed from him. But only for a minute. Then his subtle nature regained itself. This wound was not mortal.

He sprang, straight, sober. He beckoned to Ditlew. He whispered to Gerda, his eyes rolling round the room: "Go now with Ditlew; later I will come to you." He whispered to Ditlew: "Lock her fast in the same place, and look well to the lad, too, and keep the keys. Sigurd is come. Later, keep close to me. I may want you." Then, the Berserk and his charge having passed out, he lifted his voice: "Men! good news for you. Sigurd Sigurdsson is *here*. Let us bid him hearty welcome, say I. But as to this marriage of mine, I would myself first tell of it to Sigurd. See, then, that *ye* say nothing. Remember!"

He turned, followed by the men. Halfway on the sward he met Sigurd. The Viking in ten years had grown old. His beard was white, his hair was white. But that heroic frame stood still erect. His eye was calm, and the majesty of the world-warrior victorious over chance, and life, and death, crowned the man, and ennobled the glance of his brow to something akin with god-likeness.

"Ah, Gurth Hermodsson!" he said, blithely calm; "good sight to see."

His hand rested on Gurth's shoulder.

"And good sight, you, to see," said Gurth—"and strange."

"Well, Gurth, the world is the field of battle for us poor godsons, and a man must even fight his best in it, and die. I have been away in Britland, joined to a host of Saxon men, fighting with Scot, fighting with Pict, fighting here, fighting there. I saw the work was worth doing, and in the gods' name I went and did it. But, man, the children!"

"The children?" said Gurth.

"Ay, man."

For thirty long seconds Gurth hesitated. When his lips next moved, he was a lost soul.

"The children? They are but lately married. Are gone away together to the old Jarl's burg."

He knew that in a day, at most, that lie must be detected—if Sigurd lived a day.

"Well said!" cried Sigurd, and patted the shoulder beneath his hand. They entered the burg. The other men, interchanging greetings, trooped in. Sigurd and Gurth sat apart, deep in colloquy.

"But this is a merry day with you," said Sigurd, nodding at the table.

"Yes; a holiday for the cullions here. But as to treasure, now. Have you come back full?"

"Full, Gurth, and over-full. And a cargo, over and above, is in keeping for me at Lerwick in Hjaltland, where I last year left it."

Gurth's eyes kindled.

"Who keeps it?"

"Old Ragnar, who Jarls it now at Lerwick."

"But it should be sent for."

"Let it lie, man. I am weary, Gurth, of spoil and treasure, of sea-flash and sword-flash. Let it lie."

"*I* will go and get it."

"As you will."

"This very day."

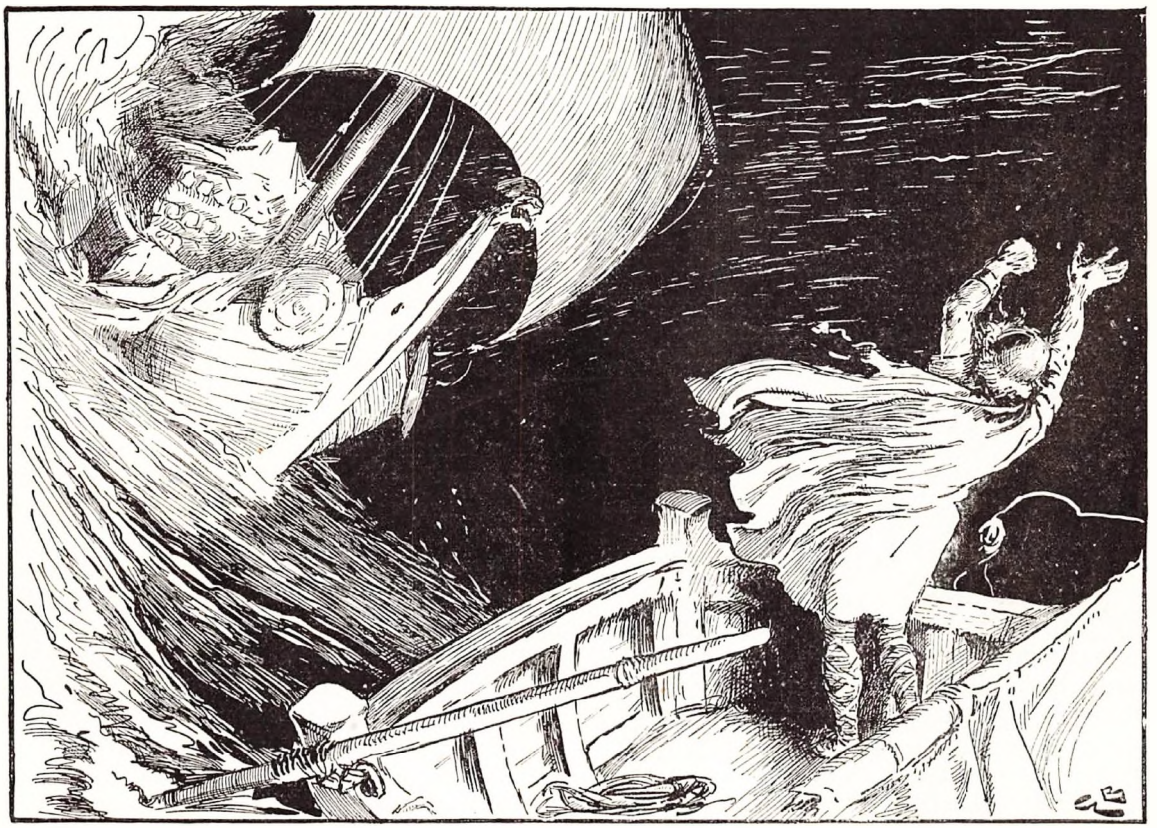
"As you will, man."

Sigurd's eyes were looking far away, as men, after a long night of storm, watch for morning. The goad which was urging Gurth was the necessity to be far—at once—far from the burg! and to be known by all men to be far.

Before nightfall he had forty of the men on board the *Skidbledmir*, a swift dragon. Below decks, alone with Ditlew, he smuggled a phial containing a green liquid in the Berserk's hand.

"There is enough for two," he said; "if you fail, you had better drink the rest."

Ditlew and others rowed to shore, and the *Skidbledmir* moved down the *fjord*.



"HERMODSSON SENT UP TO HEAVEN A SHRIEK DISTINCT ABOVE THE ROARING OF THE GULF" (*p.* 764).

Sigurd, at supper that night, felt a stomach-gripe, and broke into the sweat of death. He was supported to his old chamber. Through the hours, from those lips which never uttered groan, burst groan on groan. Toward morning a shriek went piercing through the burg, like the strong hinny of a horse in pain. But the dawn brought mercy.

Men knew not what to think. It was so sudden. None dreamed of foul play. Gurth, who might have had motive, was away. His chosen champions lingered round the bed, full of low-spoken anecdotes of his worth, his kingly rage, and social heart. He was the greatest of the Vikings, they said; the type of a good man.

On the third morning, Hrolf and Gerda stood with the rest over him, for the new-returned champions had insisted upon their release. On a bier they bore him, and laid him out on a pyre of wood raised high on the poop of his long old dragon-ship, placing beside him his gold helmet, shield, and sword. His great bulk, thus lifted up, lay conspicuous in its tunic of purple silk. The grey morning dribbled a cold rain, which trickled steadily from the closed eyes and long beard, and flowed in streams from the vast lug-sail. Down the length of the *fjord* they towed her, and moored her to a pile on the beach of an open bay near by. Here, all day, the long, shallow surfs came crowding it, roaring monotonous dirges; and with every heave of the bow to meet their frothy swarming, the dragon with her stern-end struck the sand, and gently shook her freight. Toward night-fall the shore was thronged with rovers; and just as the sun's vanishing rim burst, in a final glory, through the dun day and set the whole sea-breadth ablaze, some applied torches to the under-curve of the stern; others undid the moorings; others, pushing, launched her forth. Her red sail bellied to the wind, and she went flaming down the sunset track. From the shore, with spiritless hand-wave, they called him, in chorus, a last farewell.

Such, as we know, was the manner in which the Norsemen were accustomed to commit to the sea the bodies of their kings.

But, in the flurry of the moment, the dragon had somehow been pushed off before the hold of the flames was complete. She had hardly burst into the region of rough green swell, when the wash of the billows began to tell upon the fire. It burned low, smoulderingly. Farther out she butted into

a surging wave, and came out of it scorched, but seaworthy, and without a spark. The body was unsinged. The rovers, hardly now observing, could not perceive from the distance that the sunset flames which wrapped her were not the flames which destroy.

Old Gunhild, by some lucky stroke of divination, had said to Gurth: "You will conquer the living—*but beware of the dead.*"

From that part of the Norway coast to the Hjaltland Isles, there and back, was a run of six or seven days. On the morning of the fifth day out Gurth was returning loaded, the centre of a horizon of sea. The morning came darkly, convulsed with squalls, the wind blowing somewhat from the W. of S.; the *Skidbledner*, close-hauled, was steering E., and labouring heavily. At seven a man rushed below and woke Gurth, with the news that a ship, larger than the *Skidbledner*, perhaps some hostile pirate keel, bearing upon them straight before the wind, had been sighted. Gurth was a poltroon, and, had his ship been empty, he would have shunned any possibility in the nature of blows; loaded as she was, he sprang from the couch, apprehension widening his eyes, crying—

"Quick! Tell them to put out every oar, and run before the wind."

In three minutes the *Skidbledner* was flying N.E. from the foam of her own wide wake. In an hour the other ship, from which no oars were put out, had disappeared, and Gurth consented to resume his course. They breathed from the oars, and drew her again to the wind. But they had somewhat lost count of their position.

At noon, through the murk of the sunless day, they sighted that ship again, bearing down upon them.

Away, then! northward, northward. Once more let the oars march regimental over the broad sea-room, and the blast load the loosened lug! With every swoop of the thirty blades, Gurth poised his body forward, as if to help her flight. His heart whispered to the knave strange fears. His hands were as cold as the hands of Sigurd.

At three they breathed afresh. But a terrific storm was then raging. No one on the *Skidbledner* had now any notion where they were, whither they went. A half-darkness, bleak as doom, encompassed them. But at about the time when the sun, had it been visible, would have been seen to set, the gloom lifted a little just south of them, and beneath the raised curtain they dimly beheld—the ship!

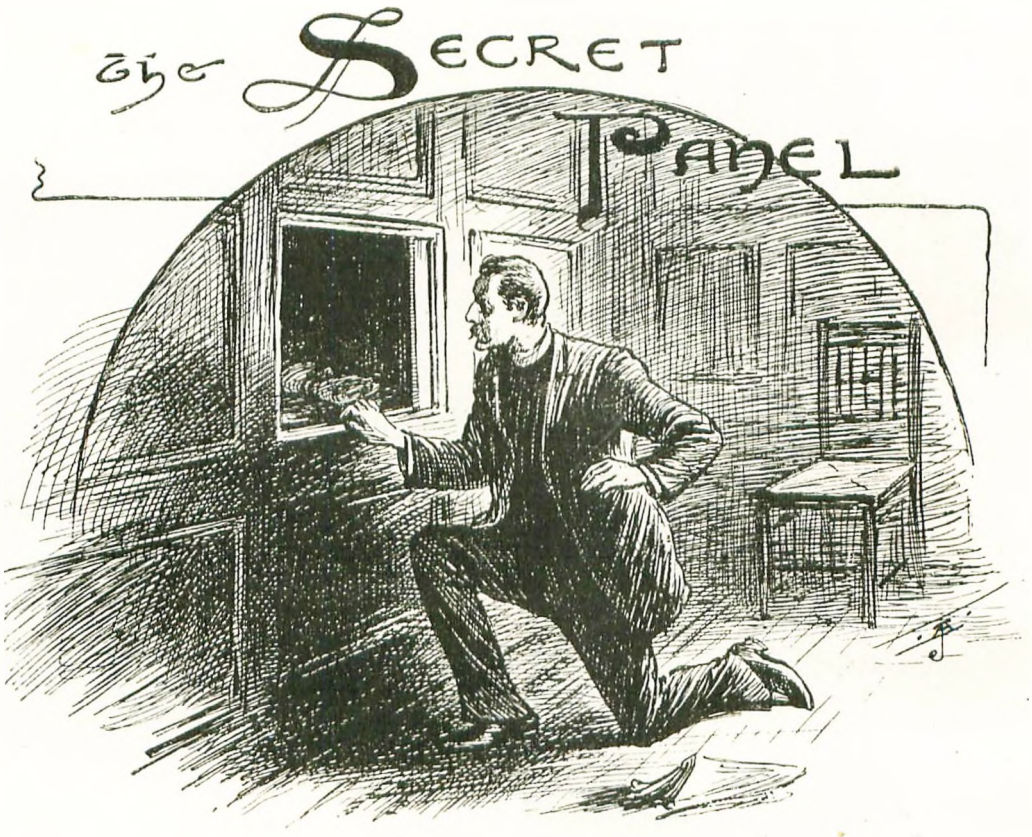
Away, then! They needed not now the exhortings of Gurth to row for life. In every bosom thrilled a fear never felt before, nameless, vague. And now, down rushed suddenly upon them the raven draperies of blackest night. The last sight that met their gaze was the spectre-ship.

They were near the Norway sea-board, and did not know it. They drove straight upon one of the huge whirlpools which swirl in frothy frenzy along that coast. A deafening roar grew upon them, and a few minutes later the *Skidbledner* twisted suddenly from the control of her oars, and shot like an arrow into a vastly-wide circular flight. Some were at once tossed like feathers into the reeling water; most, hurled to the deck, clung to whatever they could grasp. Racing, two cable lengths behind them, was the ship which had hunted them to their doom, invisible in the perfect darkness, till a lamp, shattered in the fore-hold of the *Skidbledner* by her mad flight, sent forth a vomit of red reek and flame. The light revealed high above them a twisting and reeling horizon; below a monstrous pit, toward which, in ever-narrowing whorls, they were flying round and round a vast inclined plane of boiling surge. And now, masses of flying flame streaming aft from the *Skidbledner* having settled upon the other ship, she, too, bloomed up into red blossom; and to Gurth Hermodsson, looking abroad half-raised on his poop, was revealed the form of Sigurd lying grand and calm on his pyre. At this sight, Hermodsson sent up to heaven a shriek distinct above the roaring of the gulf—and dropped. When the *Skidbledner* rushed bow downward in the abyss he was already a corpse.

"But," said Hrolf, a year afterwards, "what if Gurth Hermodsson some day turn up. He *may* be alive all the time, you know. Then I should no longer be your husband."

"That is true," answered Gerda demurely; "we must talk the matter over together—when he comes."

The Secret Panel



By M. P. Shiel.

THE one thing that Walter Gilbert could not do was to preach — and he was a preacher. He had been at St. Jerome for months, and the people were still wondering at the things which the parson offered them for sermons. It was a Devonshire parish, paying the incumbent £75—a sum for which not much was to be expected of the lungs beyond breathing. But the little congregation persisted in hoping for better things, since, in other respects, the new man had so crept into their hearts. Rumour breathed of charities eked out of those £75 stipends, of sick-bed tendernesses, long tramps over-country to see a paralytic. It was noticed that as he went with his long swing along lanes, smiting his thick stick smartly upon the ground, he was fond of glancing at the sky, always with a sort of simple half-laugh. If he met anyone, the same half-laugh, as he flung out on his hand his "How-d'ye-do?" He seemed very attached to children, and would carry a small boy on his shoulder quite a long way. He was very big, with a light-coloured moustache, and wore a short morning-coat, instead of the parson's frock. It was impossible not to be caught and won by him. But he certainly could not preach. And Farmer Brian's daughters, who had attended boarding-school at Bath, said that he was not a "gentleman"; which, in a sense, was true.

One Saturday night he sat writing the morrow's sermon. The parsonage was an old house in a mass of trees. The week had been so full that he had found excuse to put off that dreaded task till now—those two harangues, that labour of Hercules. If he had only been content to utter simply the limpid good that was in him!—but, no, he must be ornate, he must do better than his poor best. "*Anything* will not do," he said constantly, spurring himself. It was his sense of duty, really, which was to blame. But either his wits were not over-bright, or preaching was the one thing above all for which he was not made. When all was said and done, he was conscious that the simple congregation regarded his outpouring with a half-smile of mere tolerance. Sometimes he was near to despair; would thump his forehead, and say: "Dunce! Thick-head!"

This night he wrote till one, and then the Sunday morning task was over. He read the sermon, and seemed not dissatisfied. For the present, he rose and went to bed.

At breakfast he once more read the sheets, and this time with loathing. How little of the human heart with its yearnings and out-

goings was here! He did not know that even sublime works of art seem to their creators, after repeated readings, like stalest dulness. Yet at ten he was at the fatal scrawl again, reading from beginning to end. The thing would not do—this stiff, leaden thing. It seemed to him monstrous, so high and fine was his inner sense, that the word spoken to living and hungry creatures should be other than inspired—and he fell to his knees, agonized. He was alone in his chamber; his forehead struck against the wall. He began to pray . . . for some miracle to help him . . . if not, then for some work in the world which he could better do. Suddenly something moved, gave—at his forehead, where it rested heavily upon the wall. Astonished, he put up his hand. At his pressure a panel flew sharply back, and there was revealed to him an oblong opening in the thickness of the wall. He sprang to his feet, realizing that his head had touched a secret spring. In a corner of the opening, tied with a ribbon, he saw a packet of old papers.

Flushed, he hurried to a table, and untied the ribbon. The first wrapping was a blank sheet of foolscap; then came another, of parchment, covered with writing: "This is the last will and testament of me, James Anthony Pritchard . . . £170,000 . . . to the sole power and disposition of the said Alice Jane Woodhouse . . . ."

A duly-signed will, thirty years old? So it seemed. And now, tied by themselves, a good-sized packet . . . of letters? Hardly! He sat reading the uppermost: sat, till at eleven, the bell ceased tolling for service; then rose, tingling, flurried, frightened, in his hand the sere old sheets. They were scribbled in a woman's running writing.

He stammered no leaden things that day. When he sat down, pale, at the sermon-end, St. Jerome was a little electric ganglion of thrills.

He remained there a year, continuing without fail the series of glowing sermons, full of humour, brilliant wisdom. But it was noticed that something of his simple-hearted jollity had passed from him. As to James Anthony Pritchard, as to Alice Jane Woodhouse, he made furtive inquiries, but heard nothing.

At the end of this time he was called to a living in Wales, where he remained two years; and here again occurred the same poor beginning, bursting suddenly into the same fine surprise. He received then an invitation to a substantial curacy in Derbyshire, which he felt an inner call to accept; and thither he accordingly went.

The church was in a valley, somewhat remote from Lyston, the straggling town; and near the church the parsonage, an old-time, low structure, half wooden, where Gilbert lived alone. By a lane at the back you ascended a hill, wound down into a wooded dell, and so reached the manor-house, the dwelling of the Doctor—a shaded place, a stately home. Gilbert, strolling here in the park one day, came upon a Miss Rosey swinging in a hammock, bowered all in brown shades. She lay asleep, half-sideways, the delicate undulations of her girlhood revealed to him. As he looked, her flush deepened, and she sprang up, laughing. He, too, laughed.

"I am only a bungler," he said, "not a thief. I was strolling, quite innocently, waiting for the Doctor."

His laugh was too loud, and his hands hopelessly large. She noticed them with a little mental pout, as he stood.

"It is of no consequence," she said; "I fell asleep over the book you set me reading. On these hot days Morpheus becomes a god to be obeyed, instead of a servant to be summoned."

"'Sesame and Lilies'? Do you like it?"

"It seems goodish. And *you* approve it. I rather pin my faith to your literary tastes, do you know?"

Her head perked saucily. Sometimes he had a terrible dread in his heart that she was laughing at him.

They walked among the trees, she swinging her stringed hat. Its straw and pink roses reproduced the colours of her hair and cheeks.

"What I wanted to know," he said, "was whether the Doctor will be able to preach to-morrow."

Dr. Grandford, a fine orator, always took the morning sermon, Gilbert preaching at night. But the Doctor had lately been showing signs of break-up.

"I'm *afraid* he won't be able," she said. "Do you know, he took yesterday to a *stick*?—making him look *so* quaint, my poor papa!"

"That, then, is *two* sermons for someone between now and to-morrow. Can't you write one for me, Miss Rosey?"

"I can at least give you all the sympathy I have to spare."

"Is that much?"

"All I have to spare, sir." Then, after a short silence: "But, tell me—do you find it, in truth, a very great—bore?"

"It is far from easy, you know."

"And I wanted to ask you—do you, as one somehow suspects, imagine that you do not preach—nicely?"

"My heart knows that, Miss Rosey."

Her manner became perfectly earnest.

"But you *do*! Will you believe me? And more and more you do. Your sermons are becoming 'freer'—that is papa's word, and approbation from him is something, you know! If crude people think differently, why should you trouble? I, at least, like——"

She stopped. He was looking down upon the path, deeply sensitive to the gentle, womanly purpose of her words.

"You are kind to me," he murmured, "kinder than anyone I ever knew."

A footman just then came announcing the arrival of the Doctor.

An hour after, Gilbert was still alone with Dr. Grandford in the library. The Doctor stood, one forefinger smoothing down the strip of silver whisker on his pale, shaven face. He was large, white-haired, conveying a suggestion of immaculate cleanness and dignity. His suave and cultured voice uttered deliberate, nicely-poised phrases. Gilbert sat before him.

"You surprise me," the Doctor said. "You cannot mean that you have been so—incautious, as to let yourself, ah, fall in love with Rosey?"

Dr. Grandford was a younger son of noble old blood, an aristocrat of aristocrats. Gilbert looked upon the ground, fingering his shovel hat.

"I am afraid, sir, that something like that has happened, and I thought it right to mention it to you in the first place. Of course, I know——"

He stopped. The Doctor smoothed his strip of whisker.

"But have you grounds for imagining that such a notion would be received by my daughter with, ah, acquiescence?"

"No, sir; no grounds. That is, I have thought it not impossible. I may be presumptuous. Miss Rosey is very good and gracious to me, sir."

"There is no question of presumption," said the Doctor; "but you must see that there are—reasons. You are not, ah, firmly established: and my daughter has been richly nurtured. I may mention, too, that a calamity just befallen me would prevent any inequality between you from being remedied on *her* side——"

"A calamity, sir? I am sorry to hear of that."

"It has made me quite *ill*, you see," the Doctor said, with a pale smile. "I tell you in confidence. My child is aware of nothing. The extent of the disaster, one does not yet know. But the concern in which my whole personalty has been involved has, ah, failed. You guess the consequences—debt, mortgages on my realty here, general impecuniosity. If the worst be true, I may have to depend upon the moneys accruing from tithes, and the income of the little church—and you see me daily grow feebler. In fact, I now largely depend upon your efforts, Mr. Gilbert, and have been comforted by the knowledge that my trust is well placed. I have observed you, and, ah, like you. But as to this matter of my daughter——"

"Do not let that be an added trouble to you, sir!" cried Gilbert, brimming with sudden pity. "I, for my part, will—at any rate, it can wait."

"Well—but that is not what I wanted to say. I do not feel the impulse to thwart your inclination to that extent. Having gone so far, I should, if I were you, ah, speak to her. You will find your mind freer in consequence. But I do not conceal from you my anticipation that you will find your suit—unsuccessful."

Gilbert grasped his hand, and walked home to the parsonage.

In the grey old church, with its effigies of centuries and melancholy half-lights, the congregation the next morning was thin. Dr. Grandford, sitting in hood and surplice at the choir-end behind the pulpit, listened to Gilbert with sideward head, smoothing his whisker. Anyone looking would have noticed a slight twitching of his brows, a look of surprise on his placid face. And the surprise was general. The people leant forward, intent upon this new utterance. Rosey, in her curtained pew, contemplated her lap, slightly flushed, frowning. There were, then, unsuspected powers in him? Yet something troubled her—a little jarring on the nerves. Dr. Johnson, the winey old practitioner of Lyston, swore in his pew a full-blooded, mental oath, muttering: "That's not his own sermon, by Heaven!" The thought occurred to others. Yet, if not his, then whose? He would hardly dare to preach a published discourse, which any of his hearers might have read. Nor was he, as they all in their hearts knew, the kind of man to shirk his burthens by the cheapness of plagiarism. As for Gilbert, the words which were filling his whole mind were these: "I now depend largely upon your efforts, Mr. Gilbert,"

They had been a nightmare upon his consciousness, and a goad at his will.

Lady Wixley, who, with her brood of young girls, had accompanied Rosey home after church, said, in the drawing-room :—

"Did anyone notice anything extwaudnerwy in our sermon to-day?"

The Doctor was silent. There was still on his face that look of puzzlement — those twitching brows.

"Did *you*, Miss Grandford?"

Rosey was somewhat restless, peevish.

"It was a little—unusual, I think," she said shortly, half turning her neck.

In the evening Dr. Grandford, contrary to his wont of late, again drove to the church. It was full, and the sermon was even more brilliant than the morning's. In the midst of it a slight "Oh!" broke involuntarily from Dr. Grandford. Three choir-boys distinctly heard it, and reported it far. Gilbert, in a flight of eloquence, had uttered the words :—

"You cannot bind a zephyr in an embrace: it will escape you: it will away to the mountain-top and elude you: it will dance with wings to the uttermost sea to mock you!"

And the same night, the Doctor summoned Miss Rosey into his presence in the library. His brow was adamant in its stern calm. His hand rested upon the dry and rumply head, she sitting on a foot-stool by his chair, rather pale.

"Rosey, I have to tell you—something. I shall not detain you from your music. But it is as well that you hear this without delay. I know it to be possible that words may shortly be spoken to you by Mr., ah, Gilbert, which may set up a new relation between you. And in order that there may be no kind of doubt as to your course in such an event, I have to tell you my impression that Mr. Gilbert is not a man of, ah, honour."

She turned sharply, with face all inflamed, upon him.

"Oh, *papa*——"

"You are moved, Rosey."

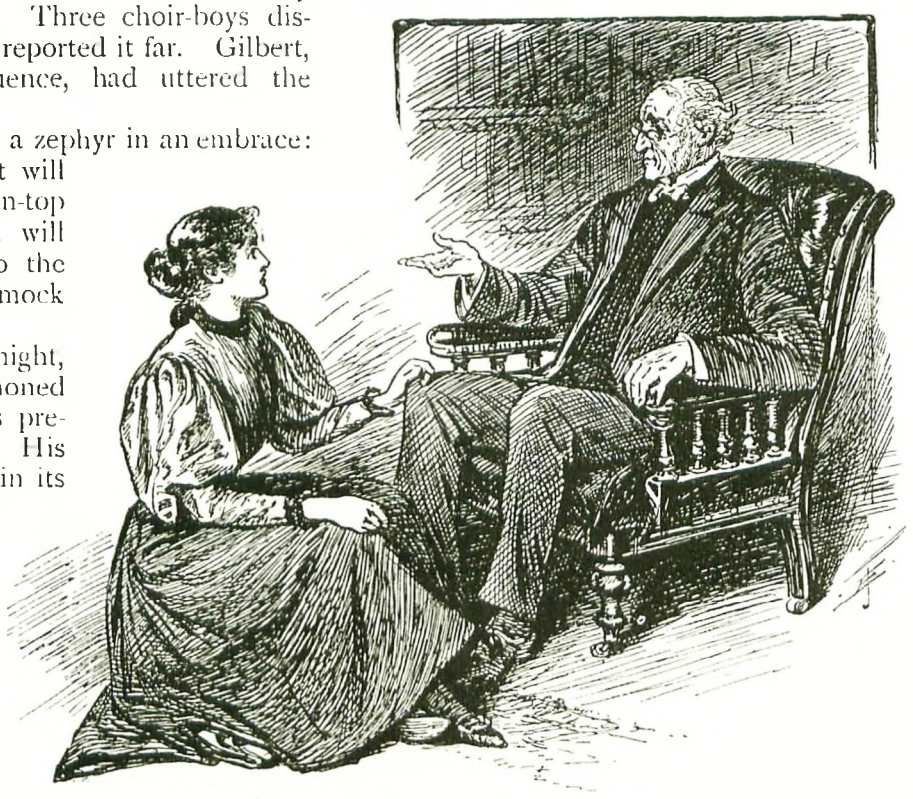
"Because—this is so strangely *unlike* you—dear papa!—and I am so positively *certain* that you must be wrong——"

The Doctor frowned.

"You make me conjecture, Rosey," he said, "that I did well in ordering this interview. Am I to understand that you are—*attached*—to Mr. Gilbert?"

"I am pleased with his society, papa," she answered, with extravagantly innocent round eyes of surprise.

"I see. Then you are, no doubt, a close listener to his discourses. You may, therefore, chance to remember a sentence of to-night's harangue beginning, 'You cannot bind a zephyr in an embrace.' Now, I say to you that that sentence has for years, by some extraordinary chance, been running in my own head. I know it perfectly well. So well that, having heard it, I was able to know also that to-day's sermons were quite certainly not Mr. Gilbert's own. And you cannot, I think, hold a man honest who takes to himself credit, aye, and possible emolument and advancement in his future career, on the strength of another's thoughts. You must see that, I think."



"I AM PLEASED WITH HIS SOCIETY, PAPA."

"Not his *own*, do you say, papa?"

"No."

The roses had whitened in Rosey's cheeks.

"And *you* know whose they are?"

"No. I *should*, however. I have certainly heard or seen them. They are not unfamiliar to me."

"He must be a very foolish man to act in that way," she broke out. "It seems so sudden and incredible—unless there be some mistake—some other point of view. But, of course, darling papa—it can be nothing to me——"

She was on his breast in a moment, her throat dry and aching; the old man patted her hair, kissing her face; and she ran from him to hide her moistening eyes.

The crash of the bankruptcy fell ruinously upon Dr. Grandford: there was a month's confinement to his bed; then came a sad migration from the manor-house to the parsonage—the carriage and footmen were gone—and strange men walked with an air of ownership in the halls of an ancient race. Rosey, of course, now knew the truth, and her lips compressed haughtily. There are natures which require poverty to bring out all their latent pride, of birth, or culture, or loveliness. A week after taking up his lodgings in Lyston town, Gilbert at last found the chance of speaking, of which she had been clever to baulk him. "There is little hope in life for me, Miss Rosey, if you do not care for me," he said.

It was a proud-necked patrician who answered him. The Doctor, hearing her, would have pronounced her manner and voice-inflexions the perfection of tone and taste.

"You surprise me. May you not have allowed your fancies to over-reach your instincts, Mr. Gilbert?"

"Ah, Miss Rosey——"

"I am sorry if you suffer. You will let the question drop now. You have business with papa?"

The Doctor had waited with almost peevish impatience to see if the series of sermons would cease. But they had revoltingly continued. At every fresh sight of the packed church he had had an impulse to interfere. At last he summoned Gilbert.

With a multiplicity of "ah's," he lying a-bed, Gilbert sitting near, he said that circumstances over which he had no, ah, control had, to his great—annoyance, and, he might say, sorrow, compelled him to think about engaging another curate. He recognised the value of Gilbert's zeal, and had actually reported of him in that sense to the Bishop, who, he had reason to think, might, on his approaching visit to Lyston, have something to say to Gilbert.

The double blow fell upon the simple, tough fibre of Gilbert like a sledge upon a block of oak. He was stunned, but never winced. He started forth upon a headlong walk, away from men, over the lonely country. All life seemed slipped from him. "I now depend largely upon your efforts, Mr. Gilbert"—how the words had puffed him with a glad, boyish pride, pricking his uttermost energy! And it had ended in this: unconcerned dismissal—from all he cared for in life—from the old man, from her. To live without tie, all unrelated to the world—this, surely, is the supreme bitterness. To a man of affectionate soul it is a taste of purgatory. The night came down upon him far from home.

"Oh, Rosey, Rosey!" he cried, to the waving wood, "if you had only pity, child!"

Had he done anything—neglected to do anything? The sermons! Those sermons of another mind! They were a rather sore place in his consciousness. Ought he ever to have preached them? God knew his motive, that it was pure. At their first discovery, he had promised himself never to utter them on any occasion when there was a chance that personal benefit might accrue to himself from them; hence, on going to a new place, while he could at all consider himself as being more or less on his trial, he spoke his own words only. And the finding of the sermons had seemed to him so directly an answer to his cry for help; and *now* it was Dr. Grandford's expression of dependence upon him that had led him to keep the church, by these means, a centre of interest. He could not manage to blame himself; he looked deeply within, and found all clear and selfless. For a sensitively upright nature to commit a deception for the good of others may be a greater exhibition of self-sacrifice than to tell a truth at the cost of life itself. He tossed his head backward in cloudless appeal to God. But the sermons had nothing to do with it! It was all the crookedness of his own bitter fate. No one knew of the sermons, or could know. Some spears of rain dashed upon his face: he turned back, walking still in the same wild haste. The night was very black. Again and again from the shuddering breast came the half-cry: "Oh, Rosey, Rosey, my child!"

Rosey was at his lodgings, waiting for him! The Bishop's visit to Lyston to confirm a flock of young people was only a few days off, and Rosey was to return to the cathedral

town with him as governess to his little girls; this last bitterness of her poverty she had bravely brought herself to swallow. She had been paying farewell visits among the parish poor, and had undertaken now to tell Gilbert, in passing, that Mrs. Grimes, the quarryman's mother, was near to death, and eager to see him. He was out. Should she wait a few minutes? The landlady showed her into his sitting-room. She stood in her cape, hatted and gloved, at a window, twirling her parasol. Two heavy oak sticks of his stood near; she took one and looked at it, then, as if it were hot, put it quickly from her. She walked listlessly, upon her parasol, to and fro. On the drawer of an escritoire there lay a manuscript in faded ink, which, as she passed, caught her eye. She stood fixed, for the life of her unable to lift her gaze from the sheets. That hand—surely she knew it—that strong, running scrawl! Could *two* people ever have written so peculiarly, and so similarly? It was hard to believe. And the sentence she read told her that here was the last sermon preached by Gilbert. She was lost in bewilderment. Not now did she wait a moment, but hurried forth, fluttered, into the rain of the already late night.

"Oh, I did so love him!"

The way to the parsonage lay through lanes, and a long, darksome avenue of sycamores. She had reached this, when, quite close, she heard a heaved breath bearing her name. She could see nothing, but the "Rosey, Rosey!" fell like a burthen upon her heart. The next moment she collided with Gilbert. He would have known her presence in a sunless world, she his . . . She was in his arms, her lips found out . . . There was a little, hard scar on her short upper-lip, the mark of a cut in childhood; kissing her, he felt it, with a thrill. . . . In an instant she was flying like a roe, pursued by the wild pain of his cry: "Rosey, Rosey, Rosey . . . "

She stopped suddenly and stood away from the path, fearing, hoping, that he might follow her. They were so soon to part! But he had no notion where she was. Panting, pressed against the tree-trunk, she could faintly hear him pass away from her. She stretched out an arm after him, and a low wail came from her.

"Oh, I did so love him!"

In the parsonage, wet, with haggard face, she walked straight to the Doctor's bedside.

"Papa," she said, calmly, "I have been to Mr. Gilbert's rooms. I chanced to see his last sermon. It is unaccountable—and I do not know what bearing it may have upon your opinion of him—but, judging from the packet of old letters I have of my mamma's, this sermon was certainly written by her."

The Doctor's hand went sharply up to his brow.

"My—my *good* child——"

"I thought I would tell you, dear papa."

She turned and walked away, longing for solitude. The Doctor sat up, smoothing his whisker, deep in thought.

For two days he did not refer to Gilbert; but once, when he was unexpectedly announced, Rosey was surprised to notice a twinkle in the Doctor's grey eyes.

On the Saturday my lord Bishop arrived—a little, quick man, with a brisk, bird-like perk of the head. He had heard of Gilbert's pastoral qualities from the Doctor, and had it in mind to place him well. At dinner he said:—

"Is he—tell me, now—a man of liberal utterance, this Mr. Gilbert?"

"I can at least promise you a very, ah, tolerable discourse from him to-morrow evening," replied the Doctor, with a twinkle, ending in a frown.

"Mr. Gilbert cannot preach!" blurted out Rosey, with a flush like anger.

"Rosey! you are candid," cried the Doctor.

The Bishop's head perked from one to the other.

"There is—come, now—clearly a difference of stand-point between the new age and the old," he said, puzzled. "Well—I shall keep an open mind, and judge for myself."

There was confirmation at both services, the Bishop preaching in the morning. Dr. Grandford constrained himself to attend both times, and read the lessons. Gilbert's coming departure from Lyston had got abroad, and he was generally understood to be in some measure on his trial before the Bishop. Expectation of special effort from him was on tip-toe, as his white robes slowly ascended the pulpit. Rosey bent a perfectly pallid face over the still open hymn-book in her lap. Gilbert's massive, slanting brow, slightly bald on the top, was beaded with moisture.

"I WAS MISTAKEN, MY LORD."

There was a strong mournfulness in him this night. He had a way of shaking his bent forefinger as he preached; but to-night, he buried both fists in the cushion, leaning forward on his arms, with a slow, solemn enunciation. He did not read: and the drop from the clever flow and utterance of the last few months to this stolid speech was tremendous. But the sermon differed as much from Gilbert's own laboured and artificial discourses of other days as from the borrowed sermons. For the first time, he spoke the words of life. As perfect love "casteth out fear," so profound sorrow will not admit of embarrassment. In Gethsemane there was no flurry. He did not stammer—he was strongly clear and calm. The voice of this melancholy human heart held the mind of the people in a sterner grip that night than though he had had the tongue of angels.

Something or other deeply moved Dr. Grandford. His face showed it. His hands trembled. In a flash the whole secret of motive and character had illumined him!—the reason why those borrowed sermons had not been preached on Gilbert's first coming to Lyston—something of the reason why they had been preached afterwards—the reason why one of them was not preached *now!* He divined the whole. This man he had supposed capable of appearing before the Bishop in borrowed plumes for his own advancement—and, lo, he was a man to whom his own advancement was as nothing.

He said, as Gilbert was leaving the vestry: "Will you, ah, Mr. Gilbert, lend me an arm to the parsonage?"

The Bishop, walking in front with Rosey along the lane, said:—

"You told me—come, now—that Mr. Gilbert could not preach?"

"I was mistaken, my lord." She was trembling.

"He is not brilliant, certainly."

"Neither is the bread by which men live," she answered.

The Doctor, behind, was leaning heavily upon Gilbert. He said:—

"I must speak to you—now. I have misjudged you. I must humble myself

before you. The matter is this: For some months you have been preaching to me a series of my own sermons——"

"Sir, sir——" cried Gilbert.

"I did not know *that* fact—till a few days since, or should have told you. It was a circumstance discovered by Rosey at your rooms which opened my eyes. They must have been written by my wife at my dictation at least thirty years ago, and I had forgotten them wholly, except a single sentence. I knew, however, that they were not yours, and thought——but let that pass. I say to you now that I divine your motives, and honour them, and extol them."

"But, sir, sir——" Gilbert was all in trance and amaze.

"What you have to do in the first place is to appease my curiosity. By what miracle did you obtain these writings?"

"I found them, sir, in a secret panel at St. Jerome's parsonage, at Hurley, in——"

"You have been there, then? Well, but that partially explains it. For before inheriting the manor here, I, too, was incumbent at that very St. Jerome's."

They had reached the parsonage. The Doctor led Gilbert into the study. They sat facing each other.

"The fact of the secret panel," said the Doctor, "I can explain. In the parsonage lived with us my wife's sister and their grandfather, a Mr. Pritchard. The house was, indeed, his property. He was an eccentric person, of great age, and very wealthy. A man of irreligious and essentially worldly mind, he yet conceived it necessary to his salvation to hear a sermon once a week; and as he was almost bed-ridden and unable to attend church, upon me was imposed the task of reading to him a weekly sermon, which he insisted should be specially written for him. I had to humour his whim: for a clever young man with energy and a command of florid language such as he loved, the labour was not great. He invariably took possession of the sermons after hearing them, and, I suppose, treasured them in this panel, which was known to himself alone."

"But, sir—the will!" cried Gilbert, starting to his feet with sudden recollection.

"What will? Mr. Pritchard died intestate."

"James Anthony Pritchard's will!—bequeathing £170,000 to Alice Jane Woodhouse!—signed, sir!—wrapping up the sermons!"

The Doctor's face on the red chair-back went white as death. His hands fluttered.

"She was—my wife's—ah, sister," he panted. "Rosey is her—heir. Mr. Pritchard's wealth went to a cousin—this, this is salvation—and the providence—of God."

"The will is in the hands of a lawyer in London, sir," said Gilbert. "I committed it to him for inquiries, which have proved unsuccessful. It is duly executed."

The Doctor's eyes closed.

An hour later, when Gilbert rose, he, too, rose, scribbled some words, and handed them in an envelope to Gilbert.

"As you pass by the drawing-room, you might hand this to Rosey," he said.

The Bishop, tired, had retired early. Rosey sat, with dejected eyes, alone. He came, handed her the note—a low cry from her! She read:—

"Have no longer any fear, my child, that Mr. Gilbert is not at all points worthy of us."

"Miss Rosey!"—he had sat down rather awkwardly by her.

Instantly her sadness changed to lightest frolic.

"Is anything wrong, Mr. Walter? You tend to sighs."

"Ah—Rosey . . ." He was one big sigh.

"It is the Sabbath evening. Am I to understand that you are again making love to me?"

"Rosey! my breath of life—my zephyr from Heaven——"

He tried to take her. She was up, and gone from him.

"You cannot bind a zephyr in an embrace, sir," she cried, with a curtsy; "it will escape you: it will away to the mountain-top and elude you: it will dance with wings to the uttermost sea to mock you!"

Then with a little run, a little trouble and murmur of love, she was crouching before him, her upturned lips beseeching his kiss.

A NIGHT IN VENICE.

HAROLD BRAND was a British person of twenty-four, moneyed and cosmopolitan. The way in which he dashed away his hair, which drooped from the parting, was characteristic of him; his blue eyes were quite alert; his blood fresh and brisk. But Woman, somehow, had hitherto engaged little of the interest of his free manhood. She, he guessed, would come; and meantime the bustling world was a keen concern and pleasure to him. Till, on the third day of Carnival, he beheld a chin, white between the draperies of a gondola cabin; and this he followed.

Venice, the mysterious! By Martedì Grasso (Shrove Tuesday) he had already brushed the lips above the chin, and was told that he did it in peril of his life. That was a great carnival-night, the Venetians in wild fête. Gliding eastward he could hear the revelry from the Place of St. Mark, and at eleven was at the old Procurator Palace, where a municipal masquerade was in full gala reel. By twelve he had left the roulette-room, had descended a stairway, and walked on the tufted carpet of a dim corridor. He found himself alone—with her.

Her bosom heaved. Her eyes were like bright, black moons behind her mask.

'*Listen!*—I was *foolish*, you see. We cannot speak here. These tassels may be ears—*believe* me——'

To him it was incredible. He was unable to sympathise with her agitation. Yet that chin, the emphasis of these tones, could hardly appertain to one given over to fancies. She posed with one projected slipper, the other hip supporting her palm. He stood admiring the dash and curve of her, the young full figure clasped in a trainless dress of amber silk. A *tabura*, or mantilla of black lace, fluttered from her head.

'But, Belvidera, I say, do not agitate yourself'— with a tenderness new to his voice; 'what I had to say is this: they have summoned me back to England—soon. Am I to go alone? If you are beset with dangers, as you say, that is the more reason——'

'Dangers?'—her fan touched his arm—'but not to *me*—Harold. It is for *you* I fear—dear. He *dares* not hurt me, you *see*? His motives for wishing me dead are too *evident*, and there is *law*, isn't there? . . . But *you*! you cannot *guess* Mauro Bellini's powers—the number of his sworn emissaries——'

'Dear love! what emissaries? He can have no power over *me*.'

She whispered, 'They are members of *the Banda*! He looks upon himself as the last of the old *nobility*, and the design of his life has been the enthronement of himself in the old majesty of the Doges. As it is, he is chief magistrate. Hence *the League*—it includes all classes; he knows that I know of it, and secretly fears me. Guesses that I, too, have friends—servants—I! But you must not think that he will be lightly baulked in his life-work—in his old age—by a whim, as he certainly considers our love—Harold——'

'But I am innocent of desire to baulk this old boy in anything whatever! Personally, I do not care a rush——'

'It is all a question of money! you *see*? You know that my wealth is wonderful? Ah, you did not know! It is for myself only, is it not . . . *good* you are! But it is in his hands, dear—till I marry. That by my father's will, you perceive? Meanwhile I am Mauro Bellini's niece and ward. My money is his *power*—the power of the Banda. My lover is, to him, the deadliest foe of Venice. He will destroy *a thousand* lives, and he *can*, if they interfere with his dream—'

'But the question is this, Belvidera: in a week, ten days, do you leave Venice, with or without the consent of this old gentleman?'

'But *yes*, if it is *possible*, without *sacrificing* you! Look there! did you see the tapestry stir? I have much to say to you—at One—meet me—you know the archway near the porch of Santa Maria della Salute—'

The tapestry parted, and a signore in evening dress sauntered toward them. He bowed profusely. Belvidera held up a finger to Brand with a whispered 'One,' and walked after the stranger. As Brand ascended once more to the halls, the throng had formed a lane, down which paced an old man, gorgeous in cramoisy velvet. The double line of heads went undulating at his advance, like foliage before a wind. A neighbour whispered Brand that this was Mauro Bellini himself. The candle-light illustrated the thousand puckers of the skinny face, the mouth, whose lips had inclined inward to a crevice; but the bald brow told of mental majesty. Some great priest he seemed more than a civil dignitary. As he passed, his head deliberately turned and directed upon the rosy face of Brand a warning gaze. Brand, surprised, returned the look with a frown of coolest insolence. It was a challenge, and its answer.

Before the stroke of One, behind a turret of Santa Maria, two men lurked. One, a Moor named Ali, a squat ox, with corded

throat and huge jaw ; the other was Ronaldo, the signore of the profuse bow in the corridor.

But Belvidera was again in the corridor, even while the challenge of eyes was being exchanged in the halls above, looking in agonised concern for Brand. Despairing, she darted out into the piazza. She reached the Merceria, down which she sped. In a lane she stopped and uttered a kind of *yodel*: a door opened, and a tall old woman with scattered hair stood shading a lamp. In contrast with her poverty, a diamond glittered on a finger—the gift of Belvidera.

'Brescia! quick—put that *lamp* down! You have to be at Santa Maria before One!'

'Yes, signorina.'

'The Englishman—you know—is in *danger*. I told him to meet me there, and was overheard—I have found out—by Ronaldo. Something is brewing, I know; some plot, something. You must be *there*—before the Inglese. *Watch* for his coming. Say I cannot meet him to-night. Warn him away—force him away, good Brescia—go with him—keep sharp *eyes*, will you? Mauro Bellini has looked at me *queerly* this night. Go! And, Brescia, at two be back with news. I will be here for you.'

Brescia had puffed out the light. She covered her head with her skirt, and walked swiftly away. Her course lay through mazes of narrow *calli*, between balconied houses, multitudes of little bridges. Northward to the Rialto she traversed the desert city, turned then westward and southward. Her intricate way she filled with mutterings; often dropped from her the words, 'Mauro Bellini.' She reached Santa Maria before One, and in the deep of the archway crouched.

'He is come!' whispered the black, running behind the abutment.

'On foot?' said Ronaldo.

'Yes, signore; I heard the step.'

'Sure?'

'It is the Inglese, signore; I heard the step—the step of a young man.'

'Give me that, then.'

He took from the Moor's hand a knife, and glided out. His cloaked spectre-stalk in a moment was doubling round the opening, before ever Brescia could dream that death was upon her. Suddenly, in the night, a cry. Ronaldo, conscious of a human form in the gloom, and of nothing more, hurried off. Round the

quay-corner lolled a gondola. He plunged into the cabin, whistled, and Ali was at the oar.

Two minutes afterwards Brand arrived, and bade his two *barcarolli* await him. Had she come? He peered into the archway and saw nothing; heard, however, a groan; and tumbled upon his hands over Brescia. 'What the mischief——,' he began to say; then, realising a claim upon his help, half-lifted the body toward the opening. There was no moon, but the vault was rich with glories. As he noticed the slit throat, the old dame, leaning heavy upon him, began to mumble. He bent to hear what he took to be only the ravings of death. 'Mauro Bellini—he hurt my life—a girl—a poor young thing. Then he shut me up in the cells—ah, years. Now—he kills me. Tell him—who are you?—ah, if I could be the death of him—yet; I, Brescia. I would trouble—end him—somehow—ah!' She stiffened suddenly. Brand said, 'She's dead, I suppose,' and at the same time noticed his bosom, his hands, all red. A measured tread startled him. Glancing, he beheld three of a cordon of the city *sbirri*, on their nightly rounds, approach. The quick thought of the blood on him, of Continental-official over-zeal, a night in the dungeons, flashed upon him, and with a 'No, thank you!' he gently posited the body and took to running. Half-laughing—at first; in two minutes not laughing. The men were after him. Brand had no notion whither he went. The narrow *calli* of Venice are slab-paved, without *trottoirs*; a runner resounds upon them, guiding his pursuer. They twist and double infinitely, with tiny bridges everywhere. Brand's heels went flying down every turning he met; his rage to be free grew into a very *furore* of action. But his pursuers, intimate with the labyrinth, were quite his equals. One especially gained surely upon him. At last, on a low quay, hearing the near foot-beats round a corner, he pitched down three steps, and seizing an iron ring in the wall, let himself into the water to the neck. Here was a patch of deepest shadow. One of the *sbirri*, dashing forth now to the water's edge, halted astonished, and began to seek him.

Half an hour before, Mauro Bellini walked alone in a spacious oval apartment of his Residential Palazzo. The columned chamber was stately with classic chiselling. His hands were behind him, the ample sleeves ending tight at the wrist with the fine lace called *merletu*. Outside, at each of the seven doors, waited a man behind the hangings. Presently one entered. The noiseless walk ceased, and the rheumy, bleared eyes glanced at the words of a

note: 'The affair of Brand is ended. He lies, for the present, where you know.'

'Where is the lady Belvidera?' His voice was deep, contrasting with the senility of the hollow cheeks.

'She is not in the palace, Excellenza.'

'I know. But *where* is she?'

'I cannot tell you, Excellenza.'

'Send me Dandolo.'

He resumed his walk, till Dandolo, a big swaggerer, with curly hair, one-armed, in a velvet jacket, stood by him.

'Who knows the whereabouts of the signorina Belvidera?'

'Orseolo, Sebastian, and Marco, sir.'

'Where is she?'

'I cannot tell you. Sebastian should be here when there is anything to report.'

'Send me Antonello.'

He resumed his walk, till Antonello, rat-faced, diminutive, timid, of the lower orders and a waterman, stood by him. He walked to a central table beneath the dim light, from a pile of official forms selected a sheet, and held it up, reading through a magnifying glass.

'It appears, Antonello'—he spoke with strong distinctness—'that a pauper lunatic at the Asylum of San Giorgio is lately dead. You comprehend?'

Antonello ducked, nervously obsequious.

'I see by this form that a relative has been persuaded to undertake the burial, the city providing, as usual, a leaden shell. No name appears here, or address; he is doubtless of the lowest rabble; but all that one learns at the asylum itself. I hope you follow me. The number, however, by which the lunatic is known is L, 385. Say L, 3, 8, 5.'

'L, 3, 8, 5,' repeated Antonello.

'Very good. Is there now at the water-gate a swift gondola not in use?'

'One only, Excellenza. It is the signorina Belvidera's.'

'That will do. Take it; and with you take this signed authority for the delivery of the body of No. L, 3, 8, 5. You will obtain the address of his relative, and to that address you will convey the remains.'

Antonello commenced to retire backwards.

'Stop! Do I remember rightly, Antonello, that you have been employed in the craft of gondola-building?'

'Yes, Excellenza.'

'Then, I take it, you are quite capable of driving a neat, straight nail?'

'Oh, yes, sir.'

'Then, as you descend, go to Geronimo, who will supply you with some sharp long nails and a hammer; also some masses of lead; and twine. These take with you. The coffin given to you will, as usual, be closed with a sliding lid, which, I think, you will find only loosely screwed. When in the middle of the Giudecca you will draw the lid, you will securely attach the weighty masses to the body, and you will consign it to the waters. I think you comprehend me.'

'Right, Excellenza!'

'I may as well tell you something of my reasons, Antonello—' with a slight toss-out of the hand. 'A poor youth has been—killed—in a quarrel; and it is to the interests of the Banda that the body be surely secreted. Cast into the canal there is a small chance that it may some day confront us bearing its wounds. In the case of 3, 8, 5, there are no such marks, and he, discovered, would be unknown. I propose, then, to have the slain youth buried according to due and ordinary forms. You will therefore lay the corpse which you will find under the archway of Santa Maria della Salute in the lunatic's shell, *nail* the lid, and convey it to the lodging of the person undertaking burial. A man of his class will little desire, I think, to look upon the long-disregarded lunatic; and even so, your nails, I hope, will have placed such an attempt well beyond his convenience. Be sure, then, Antonello—and swift.'

In ten minutes Antonello was hasting toward the islet of San Giorgio; in thirty, on the Giudecca, he had dragged the body from its shell—a mere oblong box, not coffin-shaped. He stood in the lampless cabin staring at it.

'Body of the Madonna!' he whispered; 'but he is blacker than an ebon Christ!'

Then he had a thought which tickled him.

'It is that dog of an Ali's father!—ho! he *did*, I think, have a father in the asylum, the black! Well, but the house I am going to must be his Excellency's Red Palazzo, then!'

He struck a match, and looked at the slip received at the asylum gate. On it, in truth, was the name of Ali, and the address of the Red Palace. This was one of the three mansions

of the Bellini, an Oriental-Gothic pile, very ancient. It had long stood darksome and empty, save that Ali and some few of Bellini's henchmen used it as a sleeping-place.

In a few minutes the weighted body rolled over and disappeared like a pillar of stiffness into the waters, sending up a belch of phosphorescences; in a few more Antonello was bending over Brescia.

'But is *this* the poor youth,' he said wonderingly, 'that his Excellency spoke of? . . . Or was that his Excellency's playful way of talking merely? Yes, he is cautious!' A knowing finger went to his undulating nose. 'His Excellency does not blab every meaning as a bungler would; one must put-together his hints—and obey!'

But he took the precaution to search the vault, and finding nothing, bore the body to the shell. The diamonded finger caught his eye: he stooped to it; hesitated nervously; and covered the coffin. At the prow there was laughter when he told the gondoliers of Ali's white female father; and they set out. A few yards forward, behind an angle, lay Brand's gondola; a few yards behind, the empty gondola of the *sbirri*.

At this time Brand was again in flight. The *sbirri* had stood over him at the waterside, but failing to see him, ran further. He clung to the ring until a shivering seized him; ran then once more, trying to steer his guessed way backward to his bark. He at length reached a clear space near the quay, and had hardly recognised it, when, close behind him, the cry, 'There he is!' He forced an agony of urgency into his legs. Rushing upon his deck, he whispered his men to toil for life, and plunged into the cabin amidships. But as the gondola moved out, he could see the *sbirri* wildly oaring after him.

Antonello, bending over the coffin, with one Venetian blind drawn up, was hardly ten yards ahead. The man had closed the shell; nail and hammer were in his hand; when the temptation of the diamond again overcame him. He feared—the little rat-eyes winked. He was a person of keen nervosity, all tremors, believing in the omniscience of his Excellency, and the matter of the diamond formed no part of his instructions. If he should be discovered to have presumed, transgressed? Most stealthily he slid the lid footward a little. Then the thought came to him that the body dropped into the water would remove all possible discovery of the theft; he drew it out a little to a half-sitting position, and considered. Just then the bark passed under a

lamplight, and Brand, now close behind, recognised as he peered forth the luxurious gondola of Belvidera, its liveried cabin of purple and gold. Antonello, too, the diamond in his hand, had leered out and seen the two apparently pursuing boats. In a guilty trepidancy he ran stooping forward, bidding the gondolieri fly in his Excellency's name. As for Brand, his heart went hurrying with a thousand doubts. If she was there? in trouble, danger? why did she fly? what did she here and now? If he could secretly board her, would it not mean safety for *him*? He crept sternward, and urged his men with rich promises to catch the boat in front, a double trembling of eagerness in him at the peril behind, at the promise before. The three slender barks, light as life, went darting like swifts over the troubled water.

Venice, the Silent! the Sahara of Beauty! The Canalazzo was empty; only far yonder in the dark a gondola-lamp might shoot an instant, quenched in the flood, as meteors vanish in the void. Past pallid old palaces they sped, piles of Oriental glory rich with gold and colours, with pinnacle and cupola and arcade; where the lamps threw long streams of dusky crimson on the black water, while to the phosphoric dash of the oars wide behind them wavered their wake to its lazy slap upon the marble of stairway, or column, or façade; and around then, reaching to the ancient stars, an utter lonesomeness and hush of gloom, save where, at a turning, a gondolier sent warning of his coming in strange, lugubrious wail. The foremost boat had gone curving, like a creature of life, into a complexity of narrow channels totally dark, except where a rare corner lamp streamed out upon the waves. Near one of these, Brand, crouching ready at his prow, leapt lightly upon the poop near him, while Antonello, who had been cringing behind the cabin, at once slid at the slight concussion, diamond in hand, in mortal fear, into the water. Brand was hid by the hearse-shape of the cabin from the front gondolieri, but his own men, watching for his leap, stopped, and were overtaken by the *sbirri*. He, meanwhile, had slipped into the cabin of Belvidera; he could barely discern the half-recumbent form, and murmuring, 'Why, love, in the name of all that is——' impetuously stooped forward. He shrank with an 'ah . . . ,' cowering. That body again—and here in Belvidera's boat! The thought that she might be implicated ever so little in the dark deeds of her uncle made him sick; he spat out the suspicion. But how came this thing *here*? Much time was not given him

for questionings; the gondola was then darting past a brown Moorish-looking pile, without openings in its frontage, save one row of windows near the roof. The mansion stood at a corner, round which the gondola shot, and stopped at a side portal. Brand, springing up, found himself confronted with three men at the lighted doorway, and with the two gondolieri, come to the cabin to help Antonello with the coffin. They stared amazed at him. One raised the cry:

'Why, he is a foreigner! He has murdered little Antonello—see there, the blood on him—and thrown him into the water!'

'You idiots!' Brand began, but stopped, seeing a signore appear at the doorway whom he recognised. It was Ronaldo, come hither after the murder of Brescia. Ronaldo started at the sudden apparition of Brand; but instantly calm, whispered to the others. They advanced, and with a rush, pulled Brand to the landing-stage. His British fists went flying, but by the time the scuffle reached the doorway he was on his face, his arms, to the elbows, bound behind him by a cord, procured by Ronaldo. They dragged him to a near apartment, and left him behind the lock.

The two gondolieri, meanwhile, had entered the cabin, resettled Brescia, hurriedly pushed the lid to its place, and struggled with the burden to Ali's quarters, a room near the palace-top. As they re-entered the gondola, Ronaldo handed them a note.

At half-past two, Mauro Bellini, still pacing, stopped to read this note: Brand was alive, but bound, in his power, at the Red Palace; and Ronaldo awaited instructions. The sere face flushed with rage. 'These dull slaves!' he muttered. A mistake—a miscarried scheme; it stirred his angriest contempt. Agitated with passion, he scribbled, 'The Torture of Fear till four; then I will myself come to the palace.'

Half-past two! and Belvidera pale, with tight lips, waited inside Brescia's door, palm on supple hip, watching. 'She does not *come*,' she said. Then—all wit and energy—she slid out, ran, and at a dark water-side stepped into a hired gondola. She reached the archway of Santa Maria, and saw blood. Hers or *his*? She leaned faint; then, with her forward high-heeled step, re-entered the boat, and made for Brand's hotel. Not there! 'I must *find* him,' she said.

She stood later in a squalid apartment, before her a hump-backed man.

'You must *find* him, Paul. You have *wit* enough, I should think.'

The bent head nodded. In the man's eyes was worship—the worship of a lover.

'He is *dead*, or in great *danger*, you see, Paul. Send out all my friends, and yours; let them search everything, the *secret* of every one. I am going to the Palazzo Calvo, where I shall be alone, waiting. Send every one to me with *news*. I will do anything for you—anything, really—I promise, Paul—if you succeed.'

In twenty minutes twenty men, with intricate intrigue, were dissecting Venice for Brand.

But the Torture of Fear! it was an ordeal stern enough. Brand, seeing resistance foolish, walked, as bidden, with perfect contempt, before three men from his prison to the topmost floor. He was locked into a very large chamber, circular, lit by a mean lamp. It contained one of the frontage-windows looking out upon the water-way; this was paned with a single pane, flush with the wall. The wall seemed to be of tarnished brass. On the grimy floor he noticed three old boots and a wine-bottle. Near the door —the only sign of furniture—a mattress; and on them, once more, Brescia's coffin. It was the apartment used by Ali, one of the old torture-chambers of the Inquisition.

He became aware of a clicking somewhere—above him it seemed—and glancing, he saw that all over the domed ceiling was a multitude of oblong slits, little black openings, cut in all directions; then, that something hanging by strings in each of these holes was moving; slowly; to and fro—like pendulums. A pang, he knew not why, pierced him. In ten minutes he knew why—a faint *whizzing* filled the air. He discerned that the strings, as they swung, were lengthening: that the things they swung were massive leaden balls. His blood stopped still; it was a dog's death, and so slow. He stood with backward head, gazing up with horrid interest at the nearing masses, deliberate as fate, at their intensifying sweep and rush; legion they seemed, flying every way, yet nicely systematised, so that not one bumped another. It was an age of misery before he dodged the first; the chamber was then a very bedlam of hissing death; and in another minute Brand was ducking, darting, dodging, with bound arms, with the agility of a clown, with a maniac's starting eyeballs, from the complex, omnipresent malice of the racing lead.

Belvidera, in an apartment of the Palazzo Calvo, was receiving messenger after messenger, announcing the failure of their search.

Suddenly, as he lay fallen on his face awaiting the crash of death, the hissing ceased—a rumbling sound—and the balls went

rapidly aloft. For some time he lay gasping; but presently started up in surprise. He had noticed that the bottom of the brazen wall was pierced all round with a series of arches, and he now discerned that under each of these, far within the thickness of the wall, stood a mastiff of brass, on a low brazen base. At a *crouling* sound around him he sprang straight—it was like the winding of a thousand clock-works—and the next minute he was encompassed by a deep growl of angry hounds. From every archway, save the three by Ali's bed, out rushed, at the end of a brazen rod, a snapping dog. The tiny wheels upon which their bases ran had been cunningly adapted to the material of the flooring to exactly imitate a wolfish grumble. Forth they rushed a little way, and back, then further forth, and back, with continuous deepening growl, with snapping, far-outslanting brazen teeth. This once favourite torture of the Inquisitors was not unknown to Brand; his reading led him to remember the room's central spot, with hope that *there* might be safety; but he now observed that the dogs did not run symmetrically toward the centre, their race being directed about the chamber in a calculated disorder of wild complexity. They were of many sizes, the teeth of some reaching to his middle; caught, his nether limbs must be rent to fragments. He thought of falling to the ground, and instantly remembered that he must be at once banged to death by the frantic masses. A last hope turned to the bed, but his retreat was now barred; some had already rushed across the central point; and he, with gasping mouth, was spurting and leaping, armless, quite mad, over, among, around them. The world seemed full of the blind and dreadful teeth, of the roll and roar of this brazen rabies. In a dodge from the right, there was a snatch of flesh at his left thigh; and he dropped swooning among the hounds.

At half-past three, Belvidera was hasting from the Calvo to the Residential Palazzo, another gondola following hers, containing seven men with weapons. Her emissaries had failed. From an ante-room she sent a request to see Bellini.

The old man summoned Dandolo, whispered hurriedly, and aloud bade him admit the signorina.

She, in her amber dress, still masked, walked with brisk step to the table, placed one palm upon it, the other at her clean-curved waist, and said:

'Mauro Bellini—the Englishman, Brand!'

The shapeless eyes looked up in mild fatherliness upon her.

'Am I to take this as an open defiance, then?' he said.

'As you like.'

'It is the first time, Belvidera.'

'Is there not *cause*?'

'You must not suppose, my child, that you can defy me with impunity.'

'You think I *care*? The Englishman, Brand—tell me where he is, or by to-morrow, sunset, the whole world knows of—*the Banda*.'

'That is a vain threat, my child. But I will tell you, if you like.'

'I *like*, of course.'

'You may regret it if I tell you.'

'You fancy I *care*, Uncle? There is not *a thing* in this whole world I care for, but him. So you *know* now. I will ruin you, and Venice, and I care not what, if you dare harm him. Tell me, will you, *where* he is?'

The table-hand shifted to her hip, and the hip-hand to the table.

'You really wish, then, to know?'

'I *wish*, decidedly.'

'I will tell you; but you may accept my assurance that you will regret it.'

'You are not *trifling* with me, surely? Tell me at *once*!'

'He is in the chamber of the Torture of Fear at the Palazzo Rosso.'

Her hands met, wringing.

'On your honour that?'

'Yes.'

Without a word she walked to the door of her entrance. Bellini twice struck a bell at his hand. Belvidera found the door fastened. Five of the other six she found fastened; the sixth opened upon a corridor leading to Bellini's chamber, from which there was no egress.

'I am a *prisoner*, then?' she cried.

Bellini, perusing a document, did not answer. He presently walked toward his chamber, to prepare for his visit to the Red Palace. It was nearly four. Belvidera had cast herself, sobbing, upon a couch.

Brand stirred from swoon to find himself ragged and bleeding; but the dogs had retired to kennel. Some new sound it was

which had stabbed his sleep with a new Fear. He was worn now with the long woe; but he bent the intense ear of old misers listing to the creakings of the midnight thief at a clanking sound—from beneath; and at the same time caught sight of a black space in the flooring. He sprang horrified. The whole flooring, he now observed, was composed, not of straight planks, but of broad rings, each made up of several pieces. It was these pieces which he now beheld sharply dropping, one by one, at irregular intervals, out of sight; then deliberately rising again on concealed hinges. Gradually their movement became rapid, incalculable: here, then yonder, then here again, in endless permutation, yawned the sudden patch of black. Brand began a mad jig from ring to ring, from piece to piece. He trod upon terror—every nerve strained to detect the first sign of yielding beneath his feet—the veins swollen on his dripping brow. But the coffin! Suddenly he remembered that *it* probably lay safe on two consecutive rafters. He made a frantic rush for it, and fell, convulsed, upon the lid.

Here, after a time, he began to think. Was death, or only torture, intended him by these horrors? If death, that could have been effected long since. Probably, then, only torture—to be followed later by death. But at whose hands? He recalled Bellini's glance at the Procurazie masque, with the intuition that Bellini himself, in the triumph of his malice, would certainly visit him. And then, his forehead resting on the coffin, he began to think of Brescia's dying words—that Bellini had killed her—her prayer that she might 'trouble' and 'end' him. Raising himself, he saw that the droppings had ceased, but that one patch, by some hitch, still gaped near the door. The sight gave him a thought, a hope, half superstitious, his last. His back to the coffin, he inserted his free fingers into the notch of the lid, and drew it somewhat. In his extremity he had the distinct hope that the feeble old man, suddenly confronted with the spectacle of his victim, would step backward upon destruction. He retired to the farthest part of the room and waited.

It was past four. Belvidera did not long lie sobbing. She lifted her eyes, saw the room empty, and began to pace. 'Am I such an *idiot—born* like that?' she said. 'Can I do *nothing*?' Suddenly she was a swift roe in the room. She had noticed on a chair Bellini's discarded red robe, his four-cornered cap. She leapt to the table, found a scissors, and with it clipped the fringe

from an antimacassar. Her mask and mantilla she cast away. At a mirror, around her hair she ranged with admirable swift art the white fringe under the cap. She draped herself in the robe, touched a bell, and retired to the remotest shades. Some one entered. With half-turned head she said carelessly, in the very voice of Bellini:

'The signorina has retired to my chamber; you may now unfasten the doors, Dandolo.'

In a minute she was flying through the palace toward the watergate; in a minute Bellini, returning ready, had discovered her *ruse*, and with a stamp of rage bid five men follow him. As the pinnacles of Venice chimed out the quarter-past four, the three gondolas, Belvidera first in her hired bark, her seven next, Bellini in urgent wrath behind, went skimming and churning in wildest chase over the whitening Canalazzo.

Brand, crouching in the obscurity, heard a footstep without. Was it Bellini? His teeth went chattering. The massive lock turned; some one entered, lurched, staggered on the edge of the abyss, and fell. Sputtering oaths, he rescued himself, clinging to the other side. He stood up, staring in stupid wonderment at the hole. 'What's all *this*?' he growled. Brand saw a huge curly head, a black face: the Moor returned to bed from the wine-shop, drunk. He stood, a squat bulk, swaying on his bow-legs, with eyes straining to be open.

Soon he noticed the coffin with its drawn lid on the bed.

'Hullo!' he grumbled, 'are *you* my cursed father, then? That's all right!'

Then, after sage reflection, with pointed finger: 'But *you* are not my cursed father! Do they grow so pale then?—with long hair. . .'

He came nearer, and looked. His arms went a-kimbo, and he began to shake with merriment.

'O, ho, ho!—he's white! Poor boy's gone white! Is that the way they do, then. . .'

Suddenly he was serious, then gradually angry.

'Now, look you,' he said to Brescia, 'I want no fathers here; besides, *you* are not my cursed father——'

And now, his under-jaw grinning murderously against his upper lip:

'Here! get out of this, you——' he cried; 'where do you think I am to sleep, hey?' and with a dive he had the shell clasped

in his arms. 'Out, I tell you——' Staggering, he reached the window, and his burden went crashing through the glass.

With it went Brand's last hope.

At the same moment Belvidera rushed in, looking wildly round. She sighted Brand, pounced upon him, dragged him forth.

'Quick!—ah, so *weak*? He will be here instantly, meaning nothing but death——'

Out in the corridors there were noises—echoes of shoutings, of hurrying feet about the house.

'They are after us—you *hear*?—oh, for Heaven's sake——'

As fast as he could he ran by her side, ragged and bloody, still armless, through a large number of dark halls, down stairways, breathless, on a devious way determined by her. She seemed to know the place minutely. But in a passage they heard a tramping of feet right in their course. She stopped, baffled; turned back; in her hunted dismay ran down a side-corridor, another, another, and lost her way. The feet seemed to follow. 'Quick! in *here*, then!' she gasped. They slid through an open door into a room. She did not know it, but it was the chief room of the mansion, containing a draped bed, on which Doges of Venice had slept. The feet approached, approached. She sprang to the door; felt for the touch of metal; bolted it. The feet approached, approached—they stopped without the door. 'Oh, I will *die* with you!' she whispered. They on the outside tried the handle—there seemed to be a talk and consultation—and several shoulders went urging at the door. The woodwork strained, ripped, flew inward; the room was flooded with lamp-light borne by several hands. Brand and Belvidera stood at bay in the centre.

But the crowd of men only glanced at them, without further notice. Their faces were very grave.

'Lay him on the bed,' said Ronaldo; 'it is the only decent one in the place.'

Three of them shuffled toward the bed, bearing a body. The face and head was a mere crush and unsightliness. It was the old man, Mauro Bellini, brought to this by Brescia and her coffin, which, as he passed in chase beneath the palace window, had crashed through his cabin upon him.

Belvidera's face lay hidden upon the bosom of Brand. Later, as they glided together from the Red Palace, lo, morning was in heaven, and on the waters.

M. P. Shiel.

WHAT HAPPENED BEHIND THE LOCKED DOOR?

One of M. P. Shiel's most Weird Romances.

Lady Rowena Howard of Iste had been ten months married when—*again*—she was thrown across the path of Lord Seacombe.

It was at the Palli Opera House, where her opera-glass, in moving along the opposite row of "nobility-boxes," came upon that livid face and square brow of Seacombe, to find his glass, too, directed upon her; and the mutual gaze of the glasses remained fixed, till she, suddenly paling, bowed slightly.

Presently, as she passed out, a man costumed like a Polar bear (Seacombe's secretary) dropped into her parasol a card which bore the words, "May we meet?—at the Meta Sudans."

It was now near 8 p.m., at which hour the Lenten bell would sound the closing of the theatres, open since 10 a.m. It was the Tuesday, the last—the maddest—day of Carnival, the day of the barberi and the moccoletti. The cry of the Carnival now reached to heaven, the air dark with missiles. In two minutes Rowena was covered with powder whirled from eggs, with confetti, with flowers. The city had become one vast vertigo. Into the Corso from every by-street wended carriages filled with dominos, pierrots, marquises, contadini—a chaos of flying arms, screams, contests, and colours. Rowena among her cushions took no part in this war. She was a woman of large and languorous build, with thick, scarlet lips and dead-white skin, the globe of black hair at her nape, and the long curve of her throat, giving her a resemblance to those strange women of Rossetti's dreams. It had been remarked that Seacombe, standing by her side, was the shorter by at least half a finger.

Her carriage rolled along the Via Urbana to the Colosseum. Lord Seacombe stepped from the shadow of the trysting place, saying, "Ah! we meet again."

"It is a strange chance," she murmured.

They walked to the mouth of a vomitorium, and before them lay the ruin in gloom: for now it was night.

"You are still everywhere at once, then?" she said, smiling.

"I travel continually," he replied. "We are souls that have sinned elsewhere, and the earth is our prison; happily we may pace in it."

"Ah, that old black mood! Yet you promised to be happy, Henry." "Are you?" "I am lately married to an old man—who talks of mines and stocks. Still, there are consolations, I suppose." "What?" "Wealth, the fact of living, the sun, the Carnival." "After the Carnival, Lent," he said. "But before Lent, the Carnival!" "Really! you, at least, have changed." "Maybe." "Forgive me. I know that you cannot be other than yourself."

"But I may not be all that you have persisted in thinking me, Henry. One is not necessarily the equal of one's face. The most ethereal beauty whom I have seen is a Sevillian cigarette-maker, who is weak in the head."

"But I have never judged you by your face, but by myself. You are my double—or you used to be."

"Is it quite true?" she asked, with lifted eyebrows. "*You* produce upon the world the impression more of some Olympian being than of common man; as for me, I declare that I am a woman and not a goddess."

"The 'Olympian beings' are surely exempt from diseases of the skin," he said smiling.

(Five years previously, after a return from Iceland, that hotbed of leprosy, and just before his projected marriage with Rowena, two of the hideous nodules had appeared on the brow of Seacombe, making him a social pariah.)

"But you are not better?" she asked. "My disease is quite incurable." "Alas! and mine, Henry." "I am here to cure you, and myself also."

She looked doubtfully at him. The moon had risen, seeming to double the proportions of the ruins. Its shining infected Rowena with a certain romantic mournfulness. From afar the noise of the Carnival reached them.

"And the cure is—the old remedy?" she asked smiling. "The rendezvous in Eternity." "Ah! you persist, then, in taking me for a goddess?" "You are what I am." "And you believe, *still*, Henry, in the soul, the Hereafter?" "There is the soul, the Hereafter. Don't you believe?" "I believe, if you tell me." "I tell you so. I have known it for nearly ten years. And *there* is cure." "Tempter, tempter."

He all the time was fingering in a pocket two little vials which never left his person.

"You consent?" he said.

"No. I have ties. I love life. I—fear death." "It may be that you no longer—love." "Ah!" "Then you consent?—to-morrow at daybreak." "I—cannot. At least give one—time!" "How much?" "A month." "Where?" "At Naples." He bowed. "A month, then—at Naples." "At least I will answer you then." "You will consent." "Probably."

He bowed. Her fingers rested on his arm. They traversed the vomitorium, and at the Meta Sudans parted.

By now the moccoletti fête was in full reel, and a hundred thousand rushing tapers, lighting up faces on fourth stories, turned the streets into a flame-sea, everyone seeking to preserve his own and to put out his neighbour's moccoletto with bellows, extinguishers, monstrous fans. Suddenly the Lenten bell extinguished every light; but it was not till long afterwards that Rowena's coachman, picking his way through the home-wending carriages, reached her palazzo, where a rather cold note from her husband informed her that he had set out alone to the great function which was to close the social carnival—the bal masqué at the Rondola Palace.

The Duke of Rondola, the naturalist, who had converted his park into the famous "Rondola Zoo," was that year the chief of Roman entertainers. On this last night his halls were thronged.

At midnight Rowena was dancing; but soon afterwards, to escape the press, she descended into the cool air of the Rondola gardens. Her search for solitude was not, however, at once successful: for all among the fairly-lit avenues and bowers sat or strolled a multitude of couples. She penetrated ever further into the depths, and had reached a very shadowed part of the wood, when she saw coming toward her a masked man of medium height in Moorish costume, with crimson calpac and cashmere girdle, in which stuck a jewelled toy cangiar. At sight of his dainty black moustache and gleaming teeth Rowena started.

"*You?*" she said, as they met, "I had no idea that you were here!"

"Nor I that you were," said Seacombe.

She looked almost reverently at him, this second meeting producing upon her the same impression as though it had been brought about by his absolute power of contrivance, and Will to influence events.

"Certainly our meeting now is singular," she said. "I came out seeking for solitude, and find—you!" "If I intrude——" "Ah, no. So Saul went out to seek his father's asses, and found, Henry—a kingdom." "His discovery, however, was a tragedy." "Oh, man of the black mood! But better to die a king than live a peasant." She said it with a smile of cajolery and head held sideward.

"Or to die a goddess than live a woman," he answered. "Tempter, tempter." "True; but that is not an answer." "I have already answered. 'At Naples—in a month.'"

Had she looked well into herself she might have discovered that her answer in a month would not much differ from her answer that night; but the place and time were full of charm; a consciousness of the moonlight as it were filled all the deep romantic wood; and she returned always with secret guilt to the subject, playing with such edged tools with a mysticism and a melancholy, half childish and wholly feminine.

"Yet we meet always—we meet!" she said. "I do not understand."

"In physics," he replied, "there are atoms that find each other—they cannot be kept apart. So in the region of spirit."

"We are, then, altogether the creatures of Law?"

"Yes, only atoms obey affinities; spirits yield to the promptings of Fate."

"So that our meeting now, for instance ——"

"Stay!" he said with slightly raised voice and pointed forefinger, "*there* may be the reason of it!"

They were in a very long and narrow avenue of serried lime-trunks, lined by high bramble hedge, and rising in a gentle hill. Down this Seacombe, in saying "there," pointed, the object indicated being a good distance off near the bottom, where two Moorish lanterns made it visible. It was some spotted animal which, with gambols of pure grace, was moving up the avenue—toward them.

Rowena's dilating eyes fastened upon this apparition.

"It is ——" she whispered.

"A Nubian panther." "Escaped?" "Undoubtedly. These woods, you know, are full of caged specimens." "But—it is approaching us!" "You are not alarmed?" "Henry!" "Here is our remedy: here is cure."

The sleek beast, adorned in sinister beauty, drew nearer.

"But not in *that* way, surely!" she whispered in disgust—"surely, surely, not in *that* way!"

"But the avenue closes behind us, you see—impenetrably, I fear. There appears to be no outlet from the hedge. We are entrapped."

"Yet save me from this—pray!" she said, frowning irritably.

"You insist?" "Yes!" "But how?" "Have you no weapon?" "No—I have this, indeed."

He drew from his girdle the curved blade of the tiny cangiar.

"But that——" she whispered.

"Could merely wound," he said, "not kill; and a wound would only have the effect of maddening the creature, at present in excellent temper at his escape."

"Henry! how near it is! it is coming—see, it has stopped, it is looking at us!" "Calm yourself." "Save me, pray!" "Let us die!" "How hideous! save me—pray, pray!" "You do insist, then?" "I have told you yes!" "I can save you; but, as far as I can see, only in one way—by mutilating myself. How long shall I have to wait for you—after?" "I don't know—whenever you like. Only save me from this: it is loathsome!" "To-morrow?" "See—it is moving again! Yes—at any time—to-morrow." "At sunrise?"

The beast was not now three hundred feet away.

"Yes!" "You consent, then?" "Have I not told you! Look!" "You promise?" "Yes! Yes!"

Seacombe, without a moment's delay, now lifted the cangiar, and with three intensely rapid slashes ripped the left sleeve of his tunic at the shoulder; a slight tug, and the sleeve fell to the ground, leaving his left arm naked. The earl was not only a cosmopolitan sportsman and naturalist, intimate with the local dispositions of animals, but also one of the most learned anatomists of his time. In a moment he had the blade buried in the flesh of his own bare shoulder, at the point where the humerus meets the shoulder-blade in a ball-and-socket joint. With absolute swift art, and the remorselessness of an operator, he dissected the intervening vessels, muscles, and periosteum; then, with a shrewd twist, inserted the point between the cartilages of the joint. So wildly rapid, yet exact, was his work, that it was all but ended before Rowena, all wan with amazement, realised what was being done. Only when she observed the cascade of blood running down the white arm, and his fixed white jaw like hewn granite, did she understand and utter a cry. The panther, crouching with sniffing nostrils hardly sixty feet away, scented the blood, and sent out a sickening whine.

Seacombe dropped the cangiar, grasped his left wrist with his right hand, and by a brisk jerk severed the arm from the shoulder. He was, perhaps, not an instant too soon: the beast's eyes were already glairy with the hues of hungry lust; but even as it crawled low on the belly with a prowling stealthiness to spring, Seacombe was swinging the disconnected arm like a club held at the smaller end, and the next moment away went the limb through the air, to drop precisely before the nose of the beast.

The panther sprang instantly upon the morsel with a gurgle of glee.

Seacombe waited a minute, till the brute was well engaged in munching with sideward head and half-shut eyes; then he advanced threateningly upon it, stamping; the panther, hating interruption, caught up the arm with miserly trepidation, and slunk, growling, further down the avenue; then stopped, and recommenced its meal. Again Seacombe advanced, and again it slunk away, bearing off its windfall. In this way they reached the end of the avenue, where the panther ran down a side path further into the wood.

Rowena had stood rivetted; but when she saw Seacombe returning she moved down the hill to meet him. He now held the cashmere girdle in a heap against the gory shoulder. He was intensely livid, but she, if possible, was more bloodless still at the deep consciousness that he had bought her with his blood.

"I must, you see, leave you," he said, smiling faintly, glancing to the left, "I—am sorry."

"Yes, run! O Henry, pray! to a doctor."

"It is unnecessary," he said carelessly. "I am at the Hôtel d'Espagne, which is not far. I returned to say you an—*au revoir*."

"Ah, Henry!"

She placed her palm on his right shoulder. He gazed fondly at her, saying, "So, then, you give yourself to me at last?"

A dying "yes" sighed from her lips.

"Well, that is heavenly kind," he said.

She had brought her lips extremely near to his, perhaps intentionally. But no caress escaped his stern will. She was another's—"till death"; after death—his. Meantime, he was a man of honour, of inflexible integrity.

"At sunrise, then?" he said.

"When is sunrise?" she asked, suddenly dismayed.

"At half-past six precisely." "To-morrow?" "Why, yes." "At half-past six! To be cut off . . . Well, but say seven, or rather—eight." "At eight, then. Take this."

He let fall the cashmere from the spouting circle of red, took from a pocket two vials, and handed one to her.

"The whole of this?" she asked.

"One drop," he replied.

"At eight?" "At eight. *Au revoir*."

"Henry . . . *in God's name* . . .!" she hissed.

But he was gone down the incline, while she, standing there like marble, watched his wild, swaying gait: for already he was dying from shock, yet drunk with hilarity at his victory. As for her, her heart, which beat like the stick of a drum, was divided within her: she meant to die—but thought of life.

* * * *

Rowena slept soundly from two till after seven a.m.

The instant she opened her eyes she was conscious of a cold horror of oppression at her heart, and shuddered. But, just as on other days, she at once rang for her maid, and then in a dressing gown of primrose brocade went to lie at full length on the couch in her boudoir. She breathed the word, "Chocolate."

When she had sipped a small cup of soup-like Spanish chocolate, she enjoyed for some time with closed eyes and head propped on her forearm the luxurious sliding of a comb through her hair. Then she dismissed the maid. By this time it was twenty minutes before the appointed hour—Eight.

The morning was bright and warm. She put out her arm, took the tiny vial given her by Seacombe, and looked at it, turning it, turning it, in her fingers for some minutes. Her lips had a movement of impatience. For morning brings counsel; Night is another world and state of being, the region of dream and nightmare; upon it and its actions we look back, by the light of the sun, with a kind of astonishment and recovered sanity. She rose, therefore, and went to a window and dropped the vial into a courtyard and listened intently to hear the flimsy clash of its fracture. Now, however, she was not less pale than death itself.

But to bear his contempt—she alive, he alive! The thought was horrible to her. She stood there, waiting guiltily, letting the precious moments pass, her left hand pressing down her galloping heart. At eight he would die, and it now wanted seven minutes to eight. Should she not have sent to stop him before? Ought she to have waited quite so long? Her heart smote her. He was at the Hôtel d'Espagne—so he had said: but whereabouts that was she did not know. The time had somehow slipped away. Was she guilty—of murder?—and of *his*? She had dallied, she had foully dallied, and her heart smote her bitterly, though the thought of his contempt—he alive, she alive—was bitter too. She rang the bell.

"Where is the Hôtel d'Espagne?" she asked with angry, thick articulation.

"Not far, madame," answered the maid.

"How far?"

"A quarter of a mile perhaps."

"Then—quickly—fly with this note—a mounted messenger—quickly."

She frantically scribbled and handed to the maid the feeble words, "Pray, do nothing rash."

The instant she was left alone she locked all her doors upon herself in the instinct to hide away from sight the strong palsy that shook her frame. She threw herself upon the couch with tight-closed eyes.

Two minutes afterwards the shrill gong of a little clock near her head thrilled her through and through with the first of eight soft clashes; two, three—each like a stroke of the hammer of doom; four, five—they seemed to beat with physical torture upon her brain; the shuddering sigh which burst at the fatal eighth from her bosom was in reality—a sigh of relief.

Farewell! She felt and knew that he was dead; and at that moment bitterly hated him.

* * * *

But foolish mortal! unconscious how all about the visible is the invisible, and stronger than the temporary show of things the eternal Spiritual that underlies them!

Not till ten minutes after eight did her mounted messenger reach the Hôtel d'Espagne, only to find the establishment in a state of wildest distraction. He hurried back with the tidings that the death of Seacombe had just been discovered.

But his astonishment was boundless when, on his return, he found the palace of his master in a state of distraction precisely resembling that of the Hôtel d'Espagne. He was informed by his scared fellow servants that through and through the whole of that wing containing the Lady Rowena's apartments there had rung at precisely one minute past eight a cry so appalling, unhuman, and monstrous as chilled the blood of those who heard, a cry at the same time shrill and guttural, at once wild and muffled. But on hurrying to Rowena's boudoir the servants had been confronted only by locked doors.

And toward afternoon all Rome was thrown into excitement by rumours of two simultaneous tragedies, an excitement heightened by an element of darkest mystery which complicated the gloom of the affair. For in the case of Lord Seacombe the cause of death was soon discovered to be a terrible Tartar poison; but in the case of the Lady Rowena every mind stood baffled. The interior of her throat, indeed, gave certain indications, according to the doctors, of strangulation; but this was accompanied by the incredible announcement that the fingers of the strangler (if there was a strangler) were of such sort as to leave not the faintest mark or impression on the snow of the lady's throat.

THE BATTLE OF WATERLOO.

A Comedy adapted from the Norwegian of Kielland.

BY M. P. SHIEL.

HANS was feeling far from happy: for he was not in love. All the long year since he had been a student in Christiania, he had been on the momently look-out for the rapture to fall upon him, but nothing had come. He watched his heart minutely, and held his breath every time he saw a fresh young lady, hoping for that peculiar swooning feeling described in the latest neurotic romances as inseparable from the genuine love. But since nothing had happened, he was already growing weary, when one hot day he took a stroll to the Citadel, and sat on one of the benches there.

"Good-bye, then—*au revoir!*" he heard a sweet voice say behind him.

"Good-bye, my child!" answered a deep man's voice.

Hans looked round and saw a military man in a black, buttoned-up coat, with an "order" on the left side; a stock, carefully brushed hat, and bright-coloured trousers. He was nodding to a young girl who was going away toward the town; and Hans, who followed her with his eyes, noticed that she was particularly *petite* and daintily fashioned.

Suddenly the girl turned round to give a last nod to the old officer; and by chance her eyes met those of Hans.

And now happened what he had so long awaited in vain: there was a twitch! His blood began to gather at his heart, just as it ought to do, he breathed quicker, his hands grew moist—in short, all the right symptoms appeared.

There was no time to lose. He seized his gloves, stick, and student's-cap from the bench where they lay, and hurried after her; and she, soon perceiving the storm she had raised, experienced a sensation of half-pleasurable anxiety at the position of affairs.

With regard to his being now at last in love, Hans had no doubt; he was caught in the net—and was glad of it; so glad that he took with an apologetic smile all the little bumps, and pushes, and muttered insults which fall to the lot of one who hurries through a lively street, staring at a single point before him.

No—of his love there could be no doubt. The only thing doubtful was the earthly environment of the heavenly being. And even that was not difficult to guess: she had gone to walk with her old father, had then suddenly discovered that it was past twelve; had said a hurried *au revoir*, and was going home to see after the mid-day meal: for without a doubt she was housewifely. Where she lived, he would soon know; who she was, he would quickly find out by inquiry; and as to making her acquaintance, why, there were always some difficulties in the course of true love.

Just as the chase was at its height, the game vanished behind a house-door; and not a moment too soon, for Hans was getting very tired. Over the door he read the number, "34," and a few steps further leaned against a lamp-post to get his breath.

He could not but smile at himself as he stood there, drying his hot face, and touching his collar, which, on the sunny side, had become quite soft; but it was a happy smile, and half-aloud he said: "Love bears all, and is never weary."

"And is deuced heating!" said a little globular man, whose white vest suddenly came into view within Hans' circle of observation.

"Ah!—is it you, uncle?" Hans said a little coolly.

"It is," answered Uncle Fredrik, "and I have left the shady side only to save you from roasting. Come along this way."

"Uncle, do you know who it is that lives in No. 34?"

"No, I don't. Come, let us get into the shade."

The two things which Uncle Fredrik could not stand were heat and laughing, on account of his corpulence and "apoplectic tendencies."

"But stay," said he on the other side, "now I come to think of it, I do know who lives in No. 34—surely it is old Captain Schrappe."

"Do you know him?"

"Yes, a little—everybody does who lives near the Citadel, where he goes to walk every day."

"Yes, that is where I saw him. What an interesting old man to look at! I should like to know him."

"Well, then, all you have to do is to take

up your stand somewhere near the Citadel, and draw some lines in the sand. Then he will come."

"*He* will come?" asked Hans.

"He will speak to you. But you must be careful: he is dangerous."

"Wh—what?"

"Yes, he will talk to you. But he once nearly cost me my life."

"Ah?" said Hans.

"With his talking, I mean—you understand."

"Oh!"

"He has two narratives," continued Uncle Fredrik: "one lasts a good half-hour, and is about a military manœuvre in Schoonen; the other—the battle of Waterloo—lasts from one and a half to two hours; this last I have heard three times," and he heaved a sigh.

"And are they very tiresome, these narratives?" asked Hans.

"Oh, at first they are so-so. But remember this: during the Schoonen affair, all you have to do is to keep nodding your head; once on the field of operations you are all right——"

"The field of operations——?"

"Yes, he draws the whole manœuvre in the sand, you know. Only at one point you must be careful."

"Does he get cross, then, if you don't understand?"

"Oh, no. But if by any chance it appears that you do not follow him, he begins the whole thing over again. The most important point in the Schoonen manœuvre is the movement which the captain himself executed against the orders of his general, and which proved alike embarrassing to friend and foe. It was this stroke of genius that got him his decoration, and his—discharge. So when you come to that point you must nod violently, and say: 'Naturally: the only right thing to do—the key of the position'; don't forget 'the *key*.'"

"The key," repeated Hans.

"But should you"—and Uncle Fredrik regarded him with a look of sympathy in anticipation—"should you get drawn into the Waterloo narrative, you must be either entirely silent, or very attentive. I once brought it upon myself a second time, because, in my eagerness to show how well I understood, I spoke of Kellermann's Dragoons instead of Milhaud's cuirassiers."

"Milhaud's cuirassiers," repeated Hans vaguely.

"JUST AS THE CHASE WAS AT ITS HEIGHT, THE GAME VANISHED BEHIND A HOUSE DOOR."

"You will understand how and why when you get into that endless business; but"—and Uncle Fredrik assumed a most solemn tone—"beware—I warn you of this—*beware of Blücher!*"

"Blücher?"

"Yes—I say no more. But why all this? What in the world——?"

"Does he go to walk every forenoon?"

"From eleven to one, and every afternoon from five to seven. But what interest——?"

"Has he many children?"

"Only a daughter. But what the deuce——?"

"Good-bye, Uncle, I must go home to my books."

"Wait! Are you coming this evening with me to Aunt Maren's? I was to ask you——"

"No, thanks—no time."

"There will be a party—plenty of ladies—young ladies!" roared Uncle Fredrik after him, not understanding what had come over his nephew.

But Hans shook his head, and vanished round a corner.

"By Jericho!" thought Uncle Fredrik, "the fellow is cracked, or in love. Wasn't he muttering some nonsense about love when I found him?—and there, in front of No. 34—and his interest in old Schrappe! Can he be in love with Miss Betty? Ah, no—unfortunately he hasn't got so much sense."

II.

AT last it was five o'clock. Hans had taken his stand near the rampart, overlooking the whole open space in front of the Citadel. And punctual to the minute appeared the black coat, the bright pantaloons, and the well-brushed hat.

With beating heart Hans began to draw figures in the sand. The whole place was deserted. He heard the steady steps of the captain approaching, and then stop not far from him. He did not look up. The captain took a few more steps, and cleared his throat. Hans drew a long, meditative line with his stick. This was too much for the captain.

"Well, young gentleman," he said, bowing, "are you drawing a plan of our fortress?"

Hans looked up like one startled out of deep thought, and answered:

"No—it is only a habit I have."

"An excellent habit!"

"It strengthens the memory."

"Quite right, quite right, Mr. Student!"

"Especially in complicated situations——"

"Just what I was going to say!" cried the captain in delight; "especially in the art of war."

"Ah! those are too deep waters for me."

"Not at all, sir, not at all! With a good plan even a very involved battle may be made wonderfully clear. Look at the piece of ground before us, now; it could be made to give a very fair idea of, for instance, the Battle of Waterloo!"

"Ah!" thought Hans, "here we are in the long one——"

"Just take your seat on the bench here," continued the captain, quite gay and brisk at finding so intelligent a listener. "I will try in a few words to paint you this fateful and curious fight."

"Many thanks, captain. Nothing could interest me more. I'm afraid, though, that the trouble of explaining to a poor civilian like me——"

"Not at all! The whole is so simple, sir."

During all this time Hans could not but confess that Captain Schrappe, in spite of his sixty years, was still a fine man; the ends of his short, iron-grey moustache were curved with a certain youthful dash; and, on the whole, he was very like Oscar the First on the old twelve-shilling bits.

The captain stood some steps from the bench, using his stick as a pointer. Hans followed the narrative attentively, taking all care to make himself agreeable to his future father-in-law.

"Please imagine that I am now standing at the farm-house of Belle Alliance, which the Emperor has made his headquarters, and towards the north—two miles from Waterloo—we have Brussels, just there at the corner of the gymnasium. The footpath along the rampart is the road leading to Brussels, and here"—the captain hurried over the plain of Waterloo—"here in the grass, we have the Forest of Soignes. On the road to Brussels, and on the skirts of the forest, stand the English. On Wellington's left wing, towards the east—here in the grass—we have the castle of Houguemont: that must be marked," and he looked about him.

The helpful Hans at once found a piece of wood, which was stuck in the ground at this important point.

"Excellent!" shouted the captain, feeling that he had found an audience with both interest and imaginative power, "from this side here we must look for the Prussians."

Hans noticed that the captain took up a stone, and placed it with an air of mystery in the grass.

"Here, near Houguemont, the battle began. It was Jérôme who attacked. He captured the forest, but the castle was defended by Wellington's best troops. Meanwhile, Napoleon at Belle Alliance here was going to order Marshal Ney to attack Wellington's centre at once, when he spied masses of troops advancing from the east—under the bench there."

Hans glanced round with a feeling of uneasiness. Was it Blücher come already?

"Blü—Blü——" he said tentatively.

"It was Bülow," interposed the captain in the nick of time, "Bülow with his 30,000 Prussians. Napoleon made his dispositions with the utmost despatch to oppose these new foes, not doubting that Grouchy was following at their heels, for the day before he had detached Marshal Grouchy with his whole right wing against Bülow; but Grouchy —but all this you very likely know from your general reading."

Hans nodded.

"Ney, however, advanced to attack Wellington with his usual impetuosity. But the English cavalry threw themselves upon the French, broke their ranks, and drove them back with the loss of two eagles and several cannon. Milhaud, with his cuirassiers, hastened to their aid, and the Emperor himself, seeing the danger, puts spurs to horse, and flies down the decline of Belle Alliance."

The captain ran hopping like a horse in a gallop, to show how the Emperor rode, restored order to Ney's men, and inspired them to a fresh attack.

Now, whether it was that Hans was something of a poet, or the captain's description was so vivid, or that he was in love with his daughter—certain it is that Hans was quite carried away with interest.

He saw no more the odd old captain hopping about; no, he saw through the smoke the Emperor himself on his white horse in headlong career over ditch and hedge, through field and garden, his suite unable to keep pace with him. Steadfast and cold he sits his saddle, with the half-open grey mantle, the white pantaloons, and the turned-up hat. On his face is neither fatigue nor anxiety; smooth and pallid as marble it flits; and that form in its simple uniform has a suggestion most ghostly; and that pale horse he rides is—Death.

Onward he passes, the little bloody prodigy, who has just fought three battles in three days. All make way for him, flying peasants, advancing troops; the wounded crawl aside, gazing at him with terror and adoration, as, like cold lightning, he flits past them.

Scarcely has he shown himself to the soldiers when order is restored, as if by magic; and the indefatigable Ney can once more swing himself into a saddle and recommence the attack. And this time he drives the English back, and takes up a secure position at the farm of La Haie Sainte.

Napoleon returned to Belle Alliance.

"Now comes Bülow from the east—under this bench; the Emperor sends Mouton to oppose him. At half-past four (the battle began at one) Wellington makes the attempt to drive Ney out of La Haie Sainte. But Ney, understanding that everything depended on gaining possession of the piece of open country before the forest—here in the sand by the grass-plot"—the captain threw his glove on the spot—"Ney calls a brigade of reserves, with Milhaud's cuirassiers, to his aid, and makes a furious onslaught on the enemy. His men are soon on the higher ground, and already around the Emperor the shout of '*Victoire!*' goes up.

"'It comes an hour too late,' remarks Napoleon.

"Meanwhile, seeing that Ney in his new position is greatly exposed to the fire of the enemy, he determines to dash to his relief, and at the same time to annihilate Wellington. For this purpose he chooses Kellermann's famous dragoons and the heavy-armed *garde-cavallerie*. And now comes one of the crises of the battle; you must come here to the scene of action."

Hans rose from the bench and took up the position indicated.

"Now you are Wellington. You stand there on the plain with the greater part of the English infantry. Here comes rushing like a hurricane the whole French cavalry. Milhaud has effected a junction with Kellermann; it is all a limitless medley of horses, helmets, and drawn swords. Surround yourself with a *carré!*"

Hans stood a moment bewildered; then he understood, and marked out a square round him in the sand.

"Right!" cried the captain, gloriously beaming. "Now the French cut their way within it; your lines are broken, but they close again. Wellington has to draw a new *carré* round him every few minutes. The French horsemen fight like lions; their proud memories of the Emperor's campaigns give them that cat-o'-mountain fury which made his armies unconquerable; they fight for the French eagle and for the little cold man whom they know is on the hill behind, seeing all, forgetting nothing, whose eye is following every man among them."

But this day they have a foe worthy of their steel. They stand where they stand, those English, and if they yield a step, they recover it again. They have no eagle, no Emperor; when they fight they think neither of military honours, nor of vengeance: but they think of England. And when they remember that the proud fleet which lies away yonder in the North awaiting them might refuse them the salute of honour, that "old England" might disown her sons—they

grasp their weapons tighter, forgetting blood and massacre; cool and earnest, with pressed lips, they stand firm, and like real men they die.

Twenty times were those *carrés* broken and closed again; and 12,000 gallant Englishmen fell. Hans could well understand that

"HANS WAS QUITE CARRIED AWAY WITH INTEREST" (*p.* 563).

Wellington wept as he said: "The night, or Blücher!"

The captain had meanwhile left Belle Alliance, and was searching for something in the grass under the bench.

"Wellington would now most certainly have been beaten," he continued excitedly, "when—when—there arrived—*this!*"—and he slung the stone which he had picked up to the right spot on the battle-field.

"Now or never," thought Hans. "*Blücher!*" he cried.

"Correct! That stone is Blücher, the old were-wolf, who comes marching with his Prussians on the field."

But no Grouchy came; Napoleon was thus deprived of his whole right wing. With his usual coolness he ordered a vast change of front.

But it was too late, and his inferiority in mere numbers too great.

Wellington, now in a position to use the reserve, ordered the advance of the whole army. But the Allies received one more check. Marshal Ney, the lion of the day, executed a frenzied attack.

"Only picture him!" cried the captain with flaming eyes.

And Hans pictured him, the adventurous hero, duke of Elchingen, prince of Moscow, son of a cooper of Saarlouis, marshal and peer of France. He saw him flying before the columns—five horses shot from under him—sword in hand, his uniform in tatters, without a hat, his face washed in blood—a general till nothing was left for a general to do; then he used his sword as a soldier—till all was over, and he was torn away in the wild flight that followed. For the French army—*fled*.

"So, as far as the mere action was concerned, ended the battle of Waterloo," said the captain, sitting on the bench and arranging his neckerchief.

Hans thought with indignation of Uncle Fredrik for his tone of superiority with regard to Captain Schrappe. The captain, certainly, was a far more interesting personality than an old civil-service draught-horse like Uncle Fredrik!

As he went about picking up the gloves and other trifles, dropped by the generals on the battle-field in the heat of the action, he came upon old Blücher. He lifted and looked at it.

It was a piece of granite, rough like sugar-candy. With a deep bow he turned to the captain.

"Allow me, captain," he said, "to keep this stone. Better than all else it will help to keep alive in me the memory of this interesting conversation"; and he dropped Blücher into his jacket-pocket.

The captain assured him that it had afforded him real pleasure to observe the interest with which his young friend had followed the battle. And it was only the truth; he was delighted with Hans.

"But sit down now," he said; "we need some rest after our ten hours' fight."

Hans sat, feeling anxiously for his collar. Happily it was still stiff, and he could not but think of Wellington's words: "The night or Blücher!"—for much longer it could not last.

III.

"AND now you must come with me, and have some supper," said the captain. "My house is quiet, but I think that a young man of your character can have no objection to spend an evening in a quiet family."

Hans' heart beat audibly; he accepted the invitation in his modest way, and soon they were on the way to No. 34.

How lucky he was! Not many hours ago he had seen her for the first time, and here he was already going to spend an evening in her society, a special favourite of her father's!

The nearer he came to No. 34, the clearer he saw before him the bewitching form of the captain's daughter: that dainty figure, those blue, laughing eyes.

His heart beat so, that he could scarcely speak; and as he mounted the steps, he had to hold on to the banisters.

In the first room they found no one. The captain went out, and Hans heard him call "Betty!"

When he re-entered, his daughter was with him. She shook Hans' hand, and bade him welcome.

"But," she added, "you must excuse me, for I am in the middle of an omelette, and that is no joke, I assure you!"

Then she vanished again. The meeting only lasted a few seconds, yet it seemed to Hans that during that time he had fallen many fathoms deep into an abyss. He held on with both hands to an old, high easy-chair.

That was not "she"! The lady whom he had just seen, and who was therefore the real Miss Schrappe, had dark hair smoothly brushed down on her forehead; no laughing blue eyes, but earnest dark brown ones—altogether as unlike the real enchantress as possible.

After the first feeling of mortification, Hans' blood began to boil with rage against the captain, his daughter, Uncle Fredrik, and Wellington, and all the world. He felt like breaking the large mirror, and then rushing down the stairs out of the house, never to enter it again.

Little by little he got calmer, but a deep melancholy fell on him. He had experienced the pain of disillusion in his first love.

The captain had retired to change his coat, and now returned in high spirits. He began to talk politics, and Hans had to make the greatest effort to return even the shortest answers; now, too, he remembered with terror that on the way from the citadel he had been promised the Schoonen manœuvre during the evening.

"Come to supper!" cried Betty, opening the dining-room door.

Hans had to eat, because he was very hungry; but he hardly spoke.

"Why did you not invite Miss Bech for this evening," asked the captain, "since she is to start on her journey to-morrow morning? Then you two could have played a duet for our guest."

"I asked her to remain when she was here this morning, but she had already been asked to an evening party by some other friends," answered Betty.

Hans pricked his ears.

"Did I tell you that she came to me to the citadel to say good-bye?" continued the captain. "Poor child, I am truly sorry for her."

There could be no doubt now as to who was meant.

"Excuse me," said Hans, "are you talking of a young lady with fair hair?"

"Exactly!" answered the captain. "Do you know Miss Bech?"

"No—only I thought it might be the lady I met at about twelve o'clock to-day at the citadel."

"The very same! a charming creature, sir."

"A very pretty girl," answered Hans with conviction; "is she in any trouble? I think you said——"

"Yes, the failure of an uncle; that is why she is going away for some time—to some relatives in Westerland."

At this point the captain rose, but only to seat himself at another table in the next room, eager to begin the story of the manœuvre. Hans felt that there was no escape, and sat by him, while opposite them sat Betty with a book and some sewing. She presently asked him if he had read it, at a moment when he was bitterly thinking of that journey to Westerland the next morning; and his answer that it was one of those modish, advanced German novels, which should not be read by young ladies, was positively rude. He saw how red she became, but he was in a fatal mood, and somehow this little prim, thoughtful woman increased his irritation; and now, to fill up the measure of his sufferings, the captain began to sound the order for the advance of corps A, "under cover of darkness."

Hans saw him moving match-boxes, pen-

knives, etc., over the table, and nodded now and again, but did not hear a word, thinking only of Miss Bech, whom perhaps he should never see again; and then he would look at Betty, and regret his incivility towards her.

Suddenly he started. The captain clapped him on the shoulder, saying:

"And now I am ordered to occupy this point! What do you think of the situation?"

Hans remembered all at once Uncle Fredrik's counsel, and, on the spur of the moment, said:

"Naturally—the only right thing to do—the key of the position!"

The captain drew back, looking hurt; then, seeing Hans' dumfoundered expression, said:

"No—you are wrong: but it is an error you share with our highest military authorities, and I excuse you. No—now I will show you the key of the position."

He went on to show that the post which he was ordered to occupy was of no real strategic importance, and how the movement which he had taken it upon himself to effect played havoc with the enemy; but when at last the manœuvre came to an end, the captain found himself by no means as satisfied with his listener as in the morning.

It was now nine o'clock. But as Hans had taken it into his head that it would be polite to stay till at least half-past, he dragged through one of the longest half-hours he had ever spent. The captain became sleepy. Betty's answers were short and cold; Hans had to keep up the conversation—tired, angry, unhappy, and in love, as he was.

At last he rose, saying that it was his habit to go to bed early, because——

"What!" said the captain, "do you call this going to bed early? By nine o'clock I am between the sheets every night."

Disillusion on disillusion! In great haste Hans said "Good-night," and ran down the steps.

The captain followed him with the candle, and called out after him: "Good-night! good-night! Come again soon."

Hans' hard fate rose before him in all its irony, and he felt a keen longing to confide his ill-hap to some friend who could understand him.

Uncle Fredrik was in many things his confidant, and he set out to look for him.

Knowing that his uncle was at Aunt Maren's that evening, he went to her house, and, meaning to meet him on his way home, chose one of the narrow walks on the right of Aunt Maren's large garden, where he knew his uncle would pass; he sat on a bench to wait.

"They must be having an unusually pleasant evening at Aunt Maren's, if Uncle Fredrik endures it after ten," he thought; and just as he was thinking this he saw a round white spot approaching, which turned out to be Uncle's waistcoat.

Hans rose and said: "Good-evening."

"Ah, it is only you, Hans!" said Uncle Fredrik with relief, for he did not like meeting strange men in a dark walk; "and what are you doing here?"

"I was waiting for you."

"For me! Anything wrong?"

"Don't ask!" replied Hans.

This would have been sufficient at another time to call forth a hail of questions from Uncle Fredrik; but he had been so occupied with his own enjoyments this evening, that he had no interest to offer to the concerns of Hans.

"It was so absurd of you," he said, "not to come with me to Aunt Maren's. We have had such an evening!—it was a kind of farewell function for a young lady who is going away to-morrow."

A dreadful presentiment passed through the mind of Hans.

"What—what is her name?" he said, seizing Uncle Fredrik's arm.

"Her name? Miss—Bech!"

Hans threw himself backwards on the bench; but in one moment he had sprung up again with a cry, drawing at the same time from his pocket a little gnarled stone, which he flung down the walk with all his might.

"Why, what's up with the fellow?" cried Uncle Fredrik. "What the deuce is that you have thrown away?"

"That—that is that infernal Blücher!" answered Hans venomously, with a lump in his throat.

"Didn't I tell you so?" cried Uncle Fredrik. "Didn't I tell you to beware of Blücher?" And he broke into a highly dangerous roar of laughter, which shook him up and down all the way till he stood before his own door.

THE BRIDE

M. P. Shiel

The pattern of eccentricity among Irish writers of horror fiction is continued in our next contributor, M. P. Shiel. He, too, wrote in a fin de siècle *style for several years, published a number of influential works, but is still best remembered today for his bizarre life-style and claim to be the King of a small domain in the Leeward Islands! Shiel explained his origins and his claim to nobility in a typically colourful speech delivered in 1938. 'My parents were Irish,' he told his audience, 'and my father had the foible (Irish!) of thinking highly of people "descended from kings"—ancient kings, tamed cavemen! He had, in truth, about him some species of kingship, aloofness, was called by all "the governor", and on my fifteenth birthday had me crowned King of Redonda, a rock-island of scarcely nine square miles in the West Indies.' Although the British authorities refused to recognise this claim, Shiel referred to himself as the ruler of Redonda throughout his life and eventually made his biographer, John Gawsworth, his successor. Some less admiring of the author claimed that he used his 'kingship' as a means of obtaining credit whenever he was hard up for money!*

Matthew Phipps Shiel (1865–1947) was a multi-talented man. At college he learned to speak several languages but opted to study medicine at St Bartholomew's Hospital in London. This, however, did not suit his aspirations and for a while he worked as a teacher of mathematics in Derbyshire, before finally abandoning this profession to become a writer. He initially worked as a translator and ghost-writer for others until success came his way with his novel about a detective recluse, written in the style of Poe, called Prince Zaleski *(1895). This was followed by several collections of horror stories which he had been contributing to magazines and periodicals and then in 1901 by his classic novel,* The Purple Cloud, *about a*

gas that nearly destroys the world. Of this, the French critic Jules Claretie declared, 'The Purple Cloud *should live as long as* The Odyssey.' *The book was later filmed by MGM in 1959 as* The World, The Flesh and The Devil, *starring Harry Belafonte, Mel Ferrer and Inger Stevens, and has been acknowledged by Stephen King as the inspiration for his early novel,* The Stand *(1978).*

Mike Ashley, in his Who's Who in Horror and Fantasy Fiction *(1977) has called Shiel 'one of the overlooked masters of the horror story'. Here, in an attempt to help remedy this situation, is an example of his talent, 'The Bride', written in 1911, which I feel sure will make the reader's flesh creep with its echoes of an Irish wake—complete with a body laid out before the funeral—and what occurs during the night hours that follow . . .*

* * *

They met at Krupp and Mason's, musical-instrument-makers, of Little Britain, E.C, where Walter had been employed two years, and then came Annie to typewrite, and be serviceable. They began to 'go out' together after six o'clock; and when Mrs Evans, Annie's mamma, lost her lodger, Annie mentioned it, and Walter went to live with them at No. 13 Culford Road, N.; by which time Annie and Walter might almost be said to have been engaged. His salary, however, was only thirty shillings a week.

He was the thorough Cockney, Walter; a well-set-up person of thirty, strong-shouldered, with a square brow, a moustache, and black acne-specks in his nose and pale face.

It was on the night of his arrival at No. 13 that he for the first time saw Rachel, Annie's younger sister. Both girls, in fact, were named 'Rachel'—after a much-mourned mother of Mrs Evans'; but Annie Rachel was called 'Annie', and Mary Rachel was called 'Rachel'. Rachel helped Walter at the handle of his box to the top-back room, and here, in the lamplight he was able to see that she was a tallish girl, with hair almost black, and with a sprinkling of freckles on her very white, thin nose, on the tip of which stood collected, usually, some little sweats. She was thin-faced, and her top teeth projected a little so that her lips only closed with effort, she not so pretty as pink-and-white little Annie, though one could guess, at a glance, that she was a person more to be respected.

'What do you think of him?' said Annie, meeting Rachel as she came down.

'He seems a nice fellow,' Rachel said: 'rather goodlooking. And strong in the back, you bet.'

Walter spent that evening with them in the area front room, smoking a foul bulldog pipe, which slushed and gurgled to his suction; and at once Mrs Evans, a dark old lady without waist, all sighs and lack of breath, decided that he was 'a gentlemanly, decent fellow'. When bed-time came he made the proposal to lead them in prayer; and to this they submitted, Annie having forewarned them that he was 'a Christian'. As he climbed to his room, the devoted girl found an excuse to slip out after him, and in the passage of the first floor there was a little kiss.

'Only one,' she said, with an uplifted finger.

'And what about his little brother, then?' he chuckled—a chuckle with which all his jokes were accompanied: a kind of guttural chuckle, which seemed to descend or stick straining in the throat, instead of rising to the lips.

'You go on,' she said playfully, tapped his cheek, and ran down. So Walter slept for the first night at Mrs Evans'.

On the whole, as time passed, he had a good deal of the society of the women: for the theatre was a thing abominable to him, and in the evenings he stayed in the underground parlour, sharing the bread-and-cheese supper, and growing familiar with the sighs of Mrs Evans over her once estate in the world. Rachel, the silent, sewed; Annie, whose relation with Walter was still unannounced, though perhaps guessed, could play hymn-tunes on the old piano, and she played. Last of all, Walter laid down the inveterate wet pipe, led them in prayer, and went to bed. Most mornings he and Annie set out together for Little Britain.

There came a day when he confided to her his intention to ask for a rise of 'screw', and when this was actually promised by His Terror, the Boss, there was joy in heaven, and radiance in futurity, and secret talks of rings, a wedding, 'a Home'. Annie felt herself not far from the kingdom of Hymen, and rejoiced. But nothing, as yet, was said at No. 13: for to Mrs Evans' past grandeurs thirty shillings a week was felt to be inappropriate.

The next Sunday, however, soon after dinner, this strangeness occurred: Rachel, the silent, disappeared. Mrs Evans called for

her, Annie called, but it was found that she was not in the house, though the putting away of the dinner-things, her usual task, was only half accomplished. Not till tea-time did Rachel return. She was then cold, and somewhat sullen, and somewhat pale, her lips closing firmly over her projecting teeth. When timidly questioned—for her resentment was greatly feared—she replied that she had just been looking in upon Alice Soulsby, a few squares away, for a little chat: and this was the truth.

It was not, however, the whole truth; she had also looked in at the Church Lane Sunday School on her way: and this fact she guiltily concealed. For half an hour she had sat darkly at the end of the building in a corner, listening to the 'address'. This address was delivered by Walter. To this school every Sunday, after dinner, he put down the beloved pipe to go. He was, in fact, its 'superintendent'.

After this, the tone and temper of the little household rapidly changed, and a true element of hell was introduced into its platitude. It became, first of all, a question whether or not Rachel could be 'experiencing religion', a thing which her mother and Annie had never dreamt of expecting of her. Praying people, and the Salvationist, had always been the contempt of her strong and callous mind. But on Sunday nights she was now observed to go out alone, and 'chapel' was the explanation which she coolly gave. *Which* chapel she did not specify: but in reality it was the Newton Street Hall, at which Walter frequently exhorted and 'prayed'. In the Church Lane schoolroom there was prayer-meeting on Thursday evenings; and twice within one month Rachel sallied forth on Thursday evening—soon after Walter. The secret disease which preyed upon the poor girl could hardly now be concealed. At first she suffered bitter, solitary shame; sobbed in a hundred paroxysms; hoped to draw a veil over her infirmity. But her gash was too glaring. In the long Sabbath evenings of summer he preached at street corners, and sometimes secretly, sometimes openly, Rachel would attend these meetings, singing meekly with the rest the undivine hymns of the modern evangelist. In his presence, in the parlour, on other nights, she quietly sewed, hardly speaking. When, at 7 p.m., she heard his key in the front door her heart darted towards its master; when in the morning he flew away to business her universe was cinders.

'It's a wonder to me what's coming to our Rachel lately,' said

Annie in the train, coming home; 'you're doing her soul good, or something, aren't you?'

He chuckled, with slushy suction-sounds about the back of the tongue and molars.

'Oh, that be jiggered for a tale!' he said: '*she's* all right.'

'I know her better than you, you see. She's quite changed—since you've come. Looks to me as if she's having a touch of the blues, or something.'

'Poor thing! She wants looking after, don't she?'

Annie laughed, too: but less brutally, more uneasily.

Walter said: 'But she *oughtn't* to have the blues, if she's giving her heart to the Lord! People seem to think a Christian must be this and that. A Christian, if it comes to that, ought to be the jolliest fellow going!'

This was on a Thursday, the night of the Church Lane prayer-meeting, and Walter had only time to rush in at No. 13, wash his face, snatch his Bible, and be off. Rachel, for her part, must verily now have been badly bitten with the rabies of love, or she would have felt that to follow tonight, for the third time lately, could not fail to incur remark. But this consideration never even entered a mind now completely blinded and entranced by the personality of Walter. Through the day her work about the house had been rushed forward with this very object, and at the moment when he banged the door after him she was before her glass, dressing in blanched, intense and trembling flurry, and casting as she bent to give the last touches to her fringe, a look of bitterest hate at the projection of her lip above the teeth.

This night, for the first time, she waited in the chapel till the end of the service, and walked slowly homeward on the way which she knew that Walter would take; and he came striding presently, that morocco Bible in his hand, nearly every passage in which was neatly under-ruled in black and red inks.

'What, is that you?' he said, taking into his a hand cold with sweat.

'It is,' she answered, in a hard, formal tone.

'You don't mean to say you've been to the meeting?'

'I do.'

'Why, where were my eyes? *I* didn't see you.'

'It isn't likely that you would want to, Mr Teeger.'

'Go on—drop that! What do you take me for? I'm only too

glad! And I tell you what it is, Miss Rachel, I say to you as the Lord Jesus said to the young man: "Thou art not far from the kingdom of heaven."'

She was *in* it!—near him, alone, in a darkling square, yet suffering, too, in the flames of a passion such as perhaps consumes only the strongest natures.

She caught for support at his unoffered arm; and when he bent his steps straight homeward, she said trembling violently: 'I don't wish to go home as yet. I wish to have a little walk. Do you mind, Mr Teeger?'

'Mind, no. Come along, then,' and they went walking among an intricacy of streets and squares, he talking of 'the Work', and of common subjects. After half an hour, she was saying: 'I often wish I was a man. A man can say and do what he likes; but with a girl it's different. There's you, now, Mr Teeger, always out and about, having people listening to you, and that. I often wish I was only a man.'

'Oh, well, it all depends how you look at it,' he said. 'And, look here, you may as well call me Walter and be done.'

'Oh, I shouldn't think of *that*,' she replied. 'Not till—'

Her hand trembled on his arm.

'Well, out with it, why don't you?'

'Till—till we know something more definite about you—and Annie.'

He chuckled slushily, she now leading him fleetly round and round a square.

'Ah, you girls again!' he cried, 'been blabbing again like all the girls! It takes a bright man to hide much from them, don't it?'

'But there isn't much to hide in this case, as far as I can see—*is* there?'

Always Walter laughed, straining deep in the throat. He said: 'Oh, come—that would be telling, wouldn't it?'

After a minute's stillness, this treacherous phrase came from Rachel: 'Annie doesn't care for anyone, Mr Teeger.'

'Oh, come—that's rather a tall order, *any* one. *She's* all right.'

'But she *doesn't*. Of course, most girls are silly, and that, and like to get married—'

'Well, that's only nature, ain't it?'

This was a joke; and downward the laugh strained in his throat, like struggling phlegm.

'Yes, but they don't understand what love is,' said Rachel. 'They haven't an idea. They like to be married women, and have a husband, and that. But they don't know what love is—believe me! The men don't either.'

How she trembled!—her body, her dying voice—she pressing heavily upon him, while the moon triumphed now through cloud glaring a moment white on the lunacy of her ghostly face.

'Well, I don't know—I think *I* understand, lass, what it is,' he said.

'You don't, Mr Teeger!'

'How's that, then?'

'Because, when it takes you, it makes you—'

'Well, let's have it. You seem to know all about it.'

Now Rachel commenced to tell him what 'it' was—in frenzied definitions, and a power of expression strange for her. *It* was a lunacy, its name was Legion, it was possession by the furies; it was a spasm in the throat, and a sickness of the limbs, and a yearning of the eye-whites, and a fire in the marrow; it was catalepsy, trance, apocalypse; it was high as the galaxy, it was addicted to the gutter; it was Vesuvius, borealis, the sunset; it was the rainbow in a cesspool, St John plus Heliogabalus, Beatrice plus Messalina; it was a transfiguration, and a leprosy, and a metempsychosis, and a neurosis; it was the dance of the maenads, and the bite of the tarantula, and baptism in a sun: out poured the wild definition in simple words, but with the strife of one fighting for life. And she had not half done when he understood her fully; and he had no sooner understood her, than he was subdued, and succumbed.

'You don't mean to say—' he faltered.

'Ah, Mr Teeger,' she answered, 'there's none so blind as those who will not see.'

His arm stole round her shuddering body.

Everyone is said to have his failing; and this man, Walter, in no respect a man of strong mind, was certainly on his amatory side, most sudden, promiscuous, and infirm. And this tendency was, if anything, heightened by the quite sincere strain of his mind in the direction of 'spiritual things': for, under sudden temptation, back rushed his being, with the greater rigour, into its natural channel. On the whole, had he not been a Puritan, he would have been a Don Juan.

In an instant Rachel's weight was hanging upon his neck, he kissing her with passion.

After this she said to him: 'But you are only doing this out of pity, Walter. Tell the truth, you are in love with Annie?'

He, like Peter, tumbled at once into a fib. 'That's what *you* say!'

'You are,' she insisted, filled with the bliss of the fib.

'Bah! I'm not. Never was. *You* are the girl for me.'

When they went home, they entered the house at different times, she first, he waiting twenty minutes in the street.

The house was small, so the sisters slept together in the second-floor front room; Walter in the second-floor back; Mrs Evans in the first-floor back, the first-floor front being 'the drawing-room'. The girls, therefore, generally went to bed together: and that night, as they undressed, there was a row.

First, a long silence. Then Rachel, to say something, pointed to some new gloves of Annie's, asking: 'How much did you give for those?'

'Money and kind words,' replied Annie.

This was the beginning.

'Well, there's no need to be rude about it,' said Rachel. She was happy, in paradise, despised Annie that night.

'Still,' said Annie, after a silence of ten minutes before the glass, '*still*, I should never run after a man like that. I'd die first.'

'I haven't the least idea what you're talking about,' replied Rachel.

'You have. I should be *ashamed* of myself, if I were you.'

'Talk away. You're a little fool.'

'It's *you*. Throwing yourself at the head of a man who doesn't care for you. What *can* you call yourself?'

Rachel laughed—happily, yet dangerously.

'Don't bother yourself, my girl,' she said.

'Think of going out every night to meet a man in that way: look here, it's too disgusting of you, girl!'

'Is it?'

'You can't deny that you were with Mr Teeger tonight?'

'That I wasn't.'

'It's false! Anyone can see it by the joy in your face.'

'Well, suppose I was, what about it?'

'But a woman should be decent, I think; a woman should be

able to command her feelings, and not expose herself like that. Believe me, it gives me the creeps all over to think of.'

'Never mind, don't be jealous, my girl.'

The gentle Annie flamed!

'Jealous! of *you*!'

'There isn't any need, you know—not *yet*.'

'But I'm *not*! There never *will* be need! Do you take Mr Teeger for a raving lunatic? I should go and have some false teeth put in first if I were you!'

Thus did Annie drop to the rock-bed of vulgarity; but she knew it to be necessary in order to touch Rachel, as with a white-hot wire, on her very nerve of anguish, and, in fact, at these words Rachel's face resembled white iron, while she cried out, 'Never mind my teeth! It isn't the teeth a man looks at! A man knows a finely built woman when he sees her—not like a little dumpy podge!'

'Thank you. You are very polite,' replied Annie, browbeaten by an intensity fiercer than her own. 'But still, it's nonsense, Rachel, to talk of my being jealous of *you*. I knew Mr Teeger six months before you. And you won't know him much longer either, for I don't want to have mother disgraced here, and this is no fit place for him to lodge in. I can easily make him leave it soon—'

At this thing Rachel flew, with minatory palm over Annie's cheek, ready to strike. 'You *dare* do anything to make him go away! I'll tear your little—'

Annie winked, flinched, uttered a sob, no more fight left in her.

So for two weeks the situation lasted. Only, after that night, so intense grew the bitterness between the sisters, that Annie moved down to the first-floor back, sleeping now with Mrs Evans who dimly wondered. As for Walter, meanwhile, his heart was divided within him. He loved Annie; he was fascinated and mesmerised by Rachel. In another age and country he would have married both. Every day he came to a different resolve, not knowing what to do. One thing was evident—a wedding ring would be necessary, and he purchased one, uncertain for which of the girls.

'Look here, lass,' he said to Annie in the train, coming home, 'let us put a stop to this. The boss doesn't seem to be in a hurry about that rise of screw, so suppose we get spliced, and be done?'

'Privately?'

'Rather. Your ma and sister mustn't know—not just yet a while.'

'And you will still keep on living at the house?'

'Well, of course, for the time being.'

She looked up into his face and smiled. It was settled.

But two nights afterwards he met Rachel on his way home from prayer-meeting; at first was honest and distant; but then committed the incredible weakness of going with her for a walk among the squares, and ended by winning from her an easily granted promise of marriage, on the same terms as those arranged with Annie.

When, the next day at lunch-time, he put his foot on the threshold of the Registrar's office to give notice, he was still in a state of agonised indecision as to the name which he should couple with his own.

When the official said, 'Now the name of the other party?' Walter hesitated, shuffled with his feet, then answered:

'Rachel Evans.'

Not till he was again in the street did he remember that Rachel was the name of both the girls, and that liberty of choice between them still remained to him.

Now, from the day of 'notice' to the day of wedlock, an interval of twenty-one clear days must, by law, elapse, and Walter, though weak enough to inform both the sisters of the step he had taken, was careful to give them only a vague idea of the date fixed. His once clear conscience, meanwhile, was grievously troubled, his feet in a net; he feared to speak to God; and went drifting like flotsam on the river of chance.

And chance alone it was which at last cast him upon the land. The fifth day before the marriage was a Bank Holiday, and he had arranged with Rachel to go out with her that day to Hyde Park, she to wait for him at an arranged spot at two o'clock. At two, then, at a street-corner, stood Rachel waiting, twirling her parasol, walking a little, returning. Walter, however, did not appear, and what could have happened was beyond her divination. Had he misunderstood or missed her? Though incredible, it was the only thing to think. To Hyde Park, at any rate, she went alone, feeling desolate and *ennuyée*, in the vague hope of there meeting him.

What had happened was this: Walter had been halfway towards the rendezvous with Rachel, when he was met in the street by

Annie, who had gone to spend the day with a married friend at Stroud Green, but had returned, owing to the husband's illness. Seeing Walter, her face lit up with smiles.

'Harry's down with the influenza,' she said, 'so I couldn't stay and bore poor Ethel. Where are you going?'

For the first time since his 'conversion' twelve years before, Walter, with a high flush, now consciously lied.

'Only to the schoolroom,' he said, 'to hunt for something.'

'Well, I am open to be taken out, if any kind friend will be so kind,' she said fondly.

Now he had that morning vowed to himself to wed Rachel; and by this vow he now again vowed to be bound. All the more reason why, for the last time, he should 'take out' Annie.

'Come along, then, old girl,' he gaily said: 'where shall we go?'

'Let us go to Hyde Park,' said Annie. And to Hyde Park they went, Walter, ever and anon, stabbed by the bitter memory of waiting Rachel.

At five o'clock the two were walking along the north bank of the Serpentine westward towards a two-arched bridge, which is also pierced by a third narrow arch over the bank: to this narrow arch, since it was drizzling, they were making for shelter, when Rachel, a person of the keenest vision, sighted them from the south bank. She was frantic at once. Annie, who was supposed to be at Stroud Green! *What treachery!* This, then, was why . . . She ran panting along the bank, towards the bridge, then over it, northward, and now heard the two under the arch, who stood there talking—of the wedding. Unfortunately, just here is a block of masonry, which prevented Rachel from leaning directly over the arch to listen. Yet the necessity to hear was absolute: so she ran back clear of the masonry, and bent far over the parapet, outwards and sideways towards the arch, straining neck, body, ears, and anyone looking into those staring eyes *then* would have comprehended the doctrine of the Ferine Soul. But she was at a disadvantage, heard only murmurs, and—was that a kiss? Further and further forth she strained. And now suddenly, with a cry, she is in the water, where it is shallow near the bank. In the fall her head struck upon a stone in the mud.

For three days she screamed continuously the name of Walter, filling the street with it, calling him hers only. On the third night, in the midst of a frightful crisis of cries, she suddenly died.

'Oh, Rachel, don't say you are dead!' cried Annie over her.

The death occurred two days before the marriage-day, and on the next, Walter, well wounded, said to Annie: 'This knocks our little affair on the head, of course.'

Annie was silent. Then, with a pout, she said: 'I don't see why. After all, it was her own fault, entirely. Why should *we* suffer?'

For the feud between the sisters had become cruel as death; and it outlasted death: Annie, on the subject of Rachel and Walter, being no longer a gentle girl, but marble, without respect or pity.

And so, in spite of the trepidations and hesitancy of Walter, the marriage took place, even while Rachel lay stretched on the bed in the second-floor front of No. 13.

The ceremony did not, however transpire without hitch and omen. It was necessary, first of all, for Walter to forewarn Annie that he had given notice of her to the Registrar by her second name of 'Rachel'—a mad-looking proceeding that was almost the cause of a rupture which nothing but Walter's most ardent pleadings could steer him clear of. At any rate it was to 'Rachel', and not to 'Annie' that he was, as a matter of fact, after all married.

After the ceremony, performed in their lunch-time, they returned to business together in Little Britain.

At ten-o'clock the same night, as he was going up to bed, she ran after him, and in the passage there was a long, furtive kiss—their last on earth.

'Twelve o'clock?' he whispered intensely.

She held up her forefinger. 'One!'

'Oh, say twelve!'

She did not answer, but drew her palm playfully across his cheek, meaning consent, for Mrs Evans was an inveterately heavy sleeper. He went up. And, careful to leave his door a little ajar, he extinguished his candle, and went to bed. In the apartment nearby lay stark in the dark—with learned, eternal eyelids and drowsy brow—the dead.

Walter could not but think of this presence close at hand. 'Well, poor girl!' he sighed. 'Poor Rachel! Well, well. His way is in the sea, after all, and His path in the Great Deep, and His footsteps are not known.' Then he thought of Annie—the little wife! But instead of Annie, there was Rachel. The two women fought vehemently for his thought—and ever the dead was stronger than the

living . . . Instead of Annie there was Rachel—and again Rachel.

At last he could hear twelve strike from a steeple, and sat up in bed, listening eagerly for the door to open, or a footfall on the floor.

A little American clock ticked in the room; and in the flue of the chimney was a sough and chant just audible.

Suddenly she was intensely with him, filling the chamber—from nowhere. He had heard no footstep, no opening of the door: yet certainly, she was with him *now*, all suddenly, close to him, over him, talking breathlessly to him.

His first sensation was a shuddering which strongly shook him from head to foot, like the shuddering of Russian cold. She held him down by the shoulders; was stretched at length on the bed, over him; and the room seemed full of a rustling and rushing, very strange, like starched muslins rushing out in stormy agitation. She was speaking, too, to him *in breathless haste*, whimpering a secret gibberish which whimpered like a pup for passion—about love and its definition, and about the soul, and the worm, and Eternity, and the passion of death, and the nuptials of the tomb, and the lust and hollowness of the void. And he, too, was speaking, whispering through his pattering teeth, saying: 'Sh-h-h, Rachel—Annie, I mean—sh-h-h, my girl—your ma will hear! Rachel, don't—sh-h-h, now!' But even while he kept up this 'sh-h-h, dear—sh-h-h, now,' he was conscious of the invasion of a strange rage, of such a strength as if energy was being vehemently pumped into him from some behemoth omnipotence. The form above him he could hardly discern, the room was so dark, but he felt that her garment was flowing forth from her neck in a continuous flutter, with the rustling of the starch of a thousand shrouds, like the outflow of a pennant in wind; and the quivering gauze seemed now to swell and fill the chamber, and now to sink again to the size of woman. And ever the rhapsody of love and death went on, mixed with the chattered 'Sh-h-h, Rachel—Annie, I mean,' of Walter; till, suddenly, he was involved in an embrace *so* horrible, felt himself encompassed by a might so intolerable, that his soul fainted within him. He sank back; thought span and failed in darkness beneath the spell of that lullaby; he muttered, 'Receive my spirit . . .'

After two days Walter, still unconscious, died. His disfigured body they placed in a grave not far from Rachel's.

"MANY A TEAR"

BY

M. P. SHIEL

Illustrated by Bayard Jones

I FIRST heard the name of Margaret Higgs one gloomy afternoon, when passing over the Chase by Tydenham, with Severn (they don't say "*the*" Severn there) trailing itself away through a vale of haze far down on my right. The aged clergyman I was making the journey with showed me the mass of rags and gray locks, where the woman sat alone on a rock on the Chase, saying to me:

"Mark that woman, a remarkable being I assure you, a woman who during sixteen years has plumbed even the deeps of human woe; for I say that if ever the arm of the Almighty bared itself to be known openly in the affairs of men, it was in that life. There, like a pine blighted by the lightning's wrath, sits Margaret now, a living pledge of that Power which governs the world."

He spoke with no little solemnity, though I must say that when he went on to tell me the facts, he left me utterly unconvinced of this "arm of the Almighty"; and I hope that by this time he, too, has nobler thoughts with regard to Margaret Higgs.

"I remember her when she had no resemblance to the object you see there," he told me, "a shapely wench with a tripping run on her toes, soft-spoken and most soft-eyed, dark blue eyes and black hair, a gay gossip—'news-hunter' they say here, with a prayer-book in her hand in the lanes on Sunday, and a name for 'knocking around' with the young men; one of those earth-born souls of this part, unconscious of a world beyond Severn—save of Gloucester, because the magistrates say to the naughty ones: 'Go to Gloucester for a month.'

"She came of good farmer-folk in a small way, who died almost together, upon which Margaret chose to marry beneath her a quarry-man from the Wyebanks near, a thick-set, rather taciturn and nervous person, named Higgs, a widower some fifteen years Margaret's senior. He had a son of twelve or so called Fred Higgs; and I think I have heard it said that as a girl Margaret had had the nursing of this boy, and that it was her fondness for the boy which caused the heiress to make choice of the father.

"Well, Margaret and Higgs got on very well for several years. I have observed them driving toward St. Bride's of a week-end to market, frequently have called in to visit them, and they appeared happy. However, one summer there came to lodge with them a stranger — a sailor they say he was, though, as the house stands well out of the way in a bower, and as the stranger never at all showed his nose abroad, not much is known of him;

one or two, however, of the Woolaston villagers lower down the mountain—a group of people known as the most 'news-hunting' in the country—gave it out that the stranger was a good-looking chap, and that Margaret had lost her heart to him; a tale which was confirmed when he was one afternoon loudly ordered out of the house by Higgs, and was observed to pass out of the house and away over the mountains.

"Well, some time after nine that night, when the boy Fred Higgs went to bed, Margaret, from motives of revenge, probably, destroyed her husband: for from that night Higgs has never been seen, and a daft fellow called Felix, who would frequently roam the countryside all night, reported that near three that morning he had seen Mrs. Higgs struggling in a storm across the fields toward Severn beneath the burden of a body.

"This was all the evidence to begin with, except the queer fact that Margaret breathed not a syllable to anyone with regard to her husband's disappearance; but other signs and evidences soon followed, as I have told you, from Heaven itself.

"Owing, may be, to the fact that this witness, Felix, was not a man able to appreciate the nature of an oath, the police took no open action in the matter; and at this apparent sluggishness of the law, you never saw such a gush of fury, every boatman for miles up the two rivers becoming an eye to search the waters for a body; and both where the banks are all mud, and where there are reaches of beach, parties of diggers, organized by the villagers, were searching for a buried body.

"Well, no body was ever discovered: but by society, I can tell you, a way was discovered to avenge itself, and the woman was punished. The baker's cart ceased to wait at Woodside farm, the butcher declined to deal; even so far off as St. Bride's, and the Forest of Dean, Margaret Higgs could neither sell her starved calf, nor get meal for her pig, nor find a human smile.

"'Her's done away wi'n right enough,' was the word everywhere; 'hanging be too good for she, and shame ought to cover the face of the police.'

"Passing by the farm one morning, I walked up the garden-path, and saw Margaret. The round of industry there was suspended now, her step-son appeared to be aiming shots at imaginary rabbits, and the young woman, swinging her knee between her hands, was seated on the door-sill of her snowy low home. She sprang up to offer me a chair, and I said then sorrowfully to her: 'Well, Mrs. Higgs, things are not so well with you as they have been,' at which she at once became visibly inflamed, and cried out, 'the gossiping, news-hunting lot, ignorant as wagon-horses! I do have nothing off they, Mr. Somerset! They don't keep me! Why should I trouble about what they have to say?'

"'But how, Mrs. Higgs, do you propose to live, to manage the farm?' I asked.

"'I did live and find bread for the boy before, and I'll do it again, sir,' she answered.

"'But for one to defy many is up-hill work, and you without a protector now,' I said. . . . 'Tell me the truth, Margaret,' I added, 'is Higgs dead?'

"She stood against the wall, eyeing the ground, and after a silence said with a shrug of her shoulders: 'Er *be* dead, I suppose—God knows; I don't.'

"Well, I was angry at this callous shrugging, and left her at once.

"The next Sunday she dared to come to church, and as I surmised that this would be resented, especially as she walked up the aisle with so haughty a toss of the head, I uttered in my sermon a few words as to the beauty of Christian forbearance. But it had no effect, and all up the back lane that leads steeply to Woodside, though it was a stormy afternoon, Margaret was followed by the congregation—most of them her cousins, and cousins of one another. They did not at first molest her, but uttered coughs, whistles, cat-calls; all which she endured without looking around, till by becks and signs they managed to induce her boy to leave her side and join the enemy, and thenceforth the walk became a cross-fire of abuse yelled from side to side, the woman hastening on in front afraid, with a gray face, but her defiant eyes on fire, the throng eagerly speeding upon her heels with no peaceable meaning.

"'Go on!' she shouted to them, laughing with a rather ghastly grin of the mouth—'you gossiping, news-hunting lot! Shame ought to cover your face!'

"'Where's Higgs?' they all roared at her.

"'Go on, you! ignorant as wagon-horses, with your silly, foolhardy questions!'

"And so till they came to her house, where the crowd surrounded her; and now, finding herself at bay, her defiance suddenly failing, the woman broke into tears, and falling to her knees, called out upon the Almighty in

"COME WITH YOUR MOTHER, HEARTY"

passionate tones of reproach, saying 'What have I done, my good God? If I have done any wrong, send that my house may be burnt to the ground, may every evil befall me, may I be struck paralyzed from my crown to my foot——' a vow so apparently hearty, and so awful to the villagers that they went away and left her.

"But that night her house was burned to the ground.

"When the crowd had left her, she had flung herself upon a couch in the house, where she had remained in the grip of an ague till nine in the night; and getting up then to go to bed her still trembling hand had dropped the lamp. . . .

"The news of that thing flew that night like loosened effluvia, and in a few minutes Woolaston was at Woodside. They found the boy, Fred Higgs, confined in the house by the fire, for in the first panic Margaret had run out, calling out to him, but he had been asleep, and now was screaming at his window, which was too little for him to squeeze through to leap to the ground. Seeing this, some of the crowd darted off to look for the orchard-ladder, when Margaret herself to the awe of all, dived back into the fire, and presently appeared tearing at the framework of the boy's window, half of which was a fixture, and half a sideward slide. Well, as she was ever a person of great strength, the woodwork gave way to her tuggings, leaving space for the leap to the ground, and they came down safely.

"Fred Higgs was taken home by Price, the grocer; and Margaret, now all bald and baked on one side of the face, found a shelter

in her stable with the body of her starved horse, which had died that day.

"But the woman's spirit was not yet broken. When, the next morning, Morgan, the policeman, called to invite her, things being as they were, to make a clean breast of what had happened to Higgs, she still sat dumb, rocking her body to and fro. She seems to have entertained still the crazy hope of carrying on the farm on which she was born, but that same day Mr. Millings, Loreburn's land-steward, called to tell her that, of course, she must go now, offering, however, to give her a price for her implements, etc., which no one else would buy of her. These terms she had to accept: but she showed then as ever a fierce determination not to leave the place of her birth, and like a spider whose web has been torn, at once the woman set mutely to work to build up her life anew.

"On the third day after the fire she came with her face in bandages to my daughter, Nina, who owned a cottage high up there near the Chase; and though I felt bound to warn my daughter of the danger of letting, she chose to do so. On this the woman went away to Newport, bought there some new things, took her sow and fowls to her new abode, and was about once more to commence housekeeping. But it was not to be: for when all was ready, and she went down to Price, the grocer, who had taken in her boy, the boy roundly refused to go with her, saying to her: 'No, mother, I don't want to see thee face never again.'

"These words seemed to strike the woman quite silly; and turning toward the crowd for pity, with a wry mouth that tried to smile, she let slip the words: 'Why, it was for him chiefly I did it!'

"'Did it! You hear her? Did what?' cried some, while the rest of the boors booed and hissed her.

"'Come with your mother, hearty,' wooed the woman to the boy, 'don't be hard.'

"'Thee go away,' said the boy, emboldened by the mob, 'thee bisn't my own mother, nor I never did despise anybody so much as I do despise thee, never in all my life, and shame ought to cover thee face.'

"Margaret looked awe-struck at this last disaster. She said nothing more, but throwing her arm languidly at him, was gone with lagging steps, as if broken down now, given over, cowed, and done for; nor from that day, I think, did she ever show any resistance to whatever was done to her, except once, when she threw a stone at a throng of boys who were pursuing her.

"Morgan, the policeman, however, and I also, thought that with regard to the boy, to whom from his youth the woman had ever been a good mother, a hardship had been done her; especially as without his help her new nook of land would be of little use to her. So after three weeks of talk the grocer formally agreed to give up the boy; and the same morning Morgan, happening to be passing up there, called to Margaret across her gate that her boy would be coming back to her at once. Upon this she seems to have run to stand under an ash tree at the end of the lane to see him coming up the hill; several persons, hurrying past in the rain, saw her standing there that day with her dress thrown over her head; and though the boy did not come for some hours, there she stood patiently on the look out, until the afternoon had become late and dark with storm. At last the boy came. But it was to find her lying helpless on her right side, apparently struck by lightning—the ash, at any rate, had been shivered, and she was found paralyzed right down one side. Babbling with her blighted tongue, she begged the boy to give her a hand, to try to get her home without uttering a word to anyone, but he, as if out of his wits, flew down the hill, howling out the news to the four winds.

"Well, however deep the woman's sin, what followed for her that evening is really shocking to recount, for a legion of fiends seem to have taken possession of the people to make a scene out of pandemonium on the mountain that evening. The word arose, 'drum her out'—for, of course, whatever doubt may have lingered in any mind with regard to Margaret's guilt was gone now, since all that her vow had called down upon herself was now fallen upon her; nor did the rain and darkness make any difference; with one accord the crowd started up the mountain. Happily, she guessed their approach, and in her terror, gathering whatever forces remained to her, she fled before them, managing to drag her frame into some bush before they reached the tree; while they, going on to her cottage to find her, and not finding her, threw all her new goods into a hurly-burly, and by accident or design burned to the ground my daughter's house. It was not till the next morning that Margaret was discovered lying in the field called the Morplepiece, and was then carried away by the police, to be put into the St. Bride's infirmary.

"There pressure was afresh brought to bear upon the woman to make some sort of confession, but she remained as dumb as ever; and after some months was sent out with that maimed drag in her gait and speech, which even now marks her. She dared again, though now penniless and hopeless of gaining a living here, to face the load of pain that awaited her in her native place; and hereabouts, Heaven knows how, has continued to exist. My daughter Nina, whose heart has always deeply grieved for her, sometimes of an angry night will say to me: 'That poor Margaret Higgs, papa; perhaps out on the Chase in it all.' Aye, and I have known her to go out with a groom and a lantern to look for the woman, and on discovering her under one of those two-arched kilns which are common in this part, has wooed the poor soul to come home with her. Margaret when dragged has come, but always before morning was gone again. Indeed, she had soon become much of a wild woman, imbued with the mood of storm-winds and dark nights, as shy and gloomy-eyed as those shaggy nags on the Chase, her only mates, whose manes and great tails the gales up there ever ruffle; so that belated yokels on their way home have often paused to hearken to some moan or laugh of hers in the dark. Once she was sent to prison, when, ever unlucky, on happening to throw a stone at a throng of boys, the stone cut one of them, and the magistrates gave her their 'go to Gloucester for a month.' One of these magistrates, by the way, was none other than her step-son, Fred Higgs, who had been taken up by some mysterious businessman—in Glasgow they say it was—had graduated at Oxford, and is now, you may say, one of our magnates. The man has simply ignored his step-mother's existence.

"However, the new proprietor of Glanna has given orders that the woman be housed, and provided with the means of a livelihood—has let it be understood, too, that whoever injures her will incur his displeasure. In fact, during the few weeks that this Mr. Ogden has been in residence, his goodness to the poor has become the talk, though he seems something of a queer sort, and almost a hermit. At any rate, through him, the condition of Margaret may shortly be expected to undergo a change, though it is not easy to rescue her—she resists, appears to be suspicious, can't now believe perhaps that anyone really wishes her well—and whether she is capable of being reclaimed from her half-savage state it is hard to say: for the years alter us all, sir, the years leave the marks of their passing upon us."

So much Mr. Somerset, the aged clergyman, was able to give me of the story of Margaret Higgs, and that morose star of hers; and two days later I learned in further detail that every effort was being made to tame and help her.

But the bad destiny that seemed to have the woman in hand was not even yet done with her. Her new abode was actually ready for her, and she had agreed to go into it, glad, I suppose, poor soul, of a bed at last, when some men, digging for a foundation down by Severn, found the remains of a man.

It was near the spot where the daft Felix over fifteen years before had seen Margaret Higgs with a body on her back one dark morning, and the cry arose, "the body of Higgs at last."

Again, then, was Margaret taken to prison; and I, hearing of all the to-do, took train to St. Bride's to witness her trial in the petty sessions there.

Of the two justices one was her own step-son, Fred Higgs, a good-looking man of not much more than thirty, and the other, the new lord of the Manor of Glanna.

As to the woman herself, she sat through it all—she was too woefully weak to stand—in a spiritless attitude, as unmoving as a statue. It was understood that, on being pressed in prison, she had admitted that the body discovered was that of her husband, buried by her; to which admission one Inspector Jonas deposed, and spoke as to the enforcing of the Coroner's warrant, and the whole story of the horror.

But what struck me from the first was the nervousness of one of the justices, the lord of Glanna—a short-built and broad-faced man, with cropped hair, and squat fingers, with which he kept tapping on his chin, tapping on his chair, tapping ever on everything near him.

And presently his keenness to procure the release of the accused became quite clear, till it was painful. One never saw a judge so jumpy in his chair, so agitated, so impatient of opposition. When his brother justice once leaned toward him, perhaps to whisper some remonstrance, Mr. Ogden cried out loudly: "You be sure to shut your mouth!" and I then noticed that the very slight rocking of Margaret Higgs' body which was going on as regularly as a pendulum's swing suddenly

THE MASS OF RAGS IN THE DOCK SPRANG STRAIGHT WITH A CRAZY STARE

ceased, and the woman seemed to start and hearken.

Evidence, however, is evidence, and no magistrate could have saved the woman from the County assizes, had it not been that at the last, when the prosecution was summing up, saying, "there can be no doubt therefore that the remains now found are actually those of Barnaby Higgs——" Mr. Ogden at those words leaped from his chair, calling out: "But how can all that be so certain to you, sir, when here's Barnaby Higgs himself, a living man, talking to ye?"

The hands which the old man spread before us shivered with strong emotion, while tears blinded his eyes. I heard Mr. Somer-

set, seated near me on the bench, twice breath to himself: "*my God.*" The mass of rags in the dock sprang straight with a crazy stare. Throughout the crowded room, hardly a sound was heard till Mr. Higgs, stepping to the rail, spoke—with a most painful agitation at the beginning, but presently more calmly, and then again with wrathful agitation when, turning upon Fred Higgs, he scourged his son with invective. And ever afresh at the object of sorrow and rags arraigned before him he stretched his forefinger, with red-veined eyes, and a moan of love in his choked throat, calling her blessed, calling her saint.

It was the same Barnaby Higgs, he told the court—was rather surprised that some of them hadn't recognized him—only sixteen years older now, and a big-wig, in a frock-coat, and without a beard: but the same.

One summer there had come to the farm a man named John Cheyne—a sailor-man he was—a cousin, who had got into trouble for abducting a girl; and Higgs had hidden him.

But the chap had not been three days on the place when Higgs began to be jealous.

"Though she told me that there was nothing in it, I didn't believe her, nor I don't now believe her, for I distinctly saw John Cheyne kissing, or trying to kiss, her behind the sty; and that same day, between three-thirty and four by the clock, I turned the fellow off the place."

The sailor took his departure, but by ten in the night was back at the farm, craving to be again taken in; this Higgs refused. Cheyne pushed himself in, hot words arose, then fisticuffs, during which Cheyne, who must have had heart-disease, "dropped down dead before a right-handed cross-counter in the left ribs, after a lead-off with the left by himself." Some moments afterwards, Margaret, who had been out "at fair," walked in and saw what that was which Higgs was crouched over on the floor.

Higgs, in the crowd of his terrors, knowing that his row with the sailor was known, could foresee nothing but the gallows; but Margaret, after sitting like a stone a long time, proposed flight, she to bury the body down by Severn, and in three nights' time to meet Higgs secretly on the Chase, to let him know whether he might safely return home.

This was agreed. Higgs ran, Margaret buried the sailor—no one suspected that he was dead, but as to the rendezvous on the Chase on the third day, Higgs, ever nervous, had shirked it. Terrified by the tidings heard in his hiding that Margaret had been seen carrying a body on her back, he had not dared to return into the region of danger, but, having reached Liverpool, took ship.

"Yes," he said from the bench, "I abandoned her, little thinking that she'd be seriously charged with killing *me*, who knew myself to be alive and hearty, and all the time I was in South Africa I was that shy and sick of my cowardice, I couldn't write to her; I preferred she should think me dead and gone. But I didn't know, I made sure she'd be going on all right in the old style. . . . Hadn't I left one to protect her, friends? Didn't I get a business friend in Glasgow to adopt him? He did nothing for her. My own son—this man—he did nothing for her. Ah! the squalls that caught her and the frosts that froze her bones were never a bit so hard on her as this bitter heart. It was for him she did it, friends, just think! She said to me that night, for she was cross wi' me, 'it's not to screen *thee*, I do it,' she said, 'so I tell thee straight; but what kind of a life will it be for Fred with everybody having it to say he be a murderer's son?' And she kept the truth dark from him and from all—how long? For two months? For ten? While he was a dutiful boy to her? No: sixteen solid years down to this hour, though he was a beast to her. Why, sirs, talking of Christianity, there stands a Christian for you, I think? And you—you, couldn't you do some little something for her who did so much for you? Were you really bound to send her to Gloucester? And when you saw that her own husband had cowardlike abandoned her, and all the crowd of them was hounding her, and the Almighty God on high Himself—that ought to have been her Father—was all dead agen her, and she stood dumb and astonished, was that the moment for you, too, Fred, hard heart? For if only from this confession she has made that she did kill me, I can pretty well judge what she's been through; she has confessed because, when she'd once tasted her prison cell that's proved a palace of rest to her after her kilns, and her brackens, and her barns, and her storms, she was afraid of being set free, may be, if she didn't confess; or may be she was too aweary to trouble to say no to aught they asked her. Oh, well, poor wounded woman! You've had it to do, haven't you, poor mute ewe, with all your wounds and bruises on you. But a bosom is here at last to guard you, Margaret Higgs; like the morning to a murky night, and the turning to a long lane, aye,

a bosom is here to guard you. . . . The prisoner is discharged! Officer, I give myself in charge for the manslaughter of one John Cheyne."

It was now that the woman, babbling something, put out both her hands one moment toward her husband, but in the very act failed and fell. She was raised and taken out, and I, rushing out with the rest just behind her husband, witnessed everything that was done in vain to revive her, and heard the raver's frenzied vain prayers to his dead.

OUR CASTLES IN THE AIR

BY

WILLIAM J. LAMPTON

I builded my castle in the air,
  A vast and magnificent pile,
As the wonderful temples of Karnak were,
  By the thirsty shores of the Nile.

Its glittering towers emblazoned the blue,
  Its walls were of burnished gold,
Its base from the caverns of ocean grew
  Where pearls lay asleep in the cold.

Its windows were jewels that glint and gleam
  In the sun, or the moon, or the stars,
Like the eyes of a god in a Brahmin's dream
  Of the land of the deodars.

It stood like the work of a builder, alone,
  Whose measureless genius played
The music of Heaven in mortar and stone
  With the tools of his earthly trade.

I builded my castle in the air,
  From its base to its turret crown;
I stretched forth my hand to touch it there—
  And the whole damn thing fell down.

The Bell of St. Sépulcre

M. P. Shiel

It was during my tramp through Provence three summers ago that I came one evening to Leburn-les-Bruyères, a hamlet near the bottom of the Bezons valley. Here I found the inn so poor, that I resolved to tramp on to Cargnac, four miles off.

"But," said an old vigneron, whom I asked to put me on the path through the forest, "you should go round about by the road."

"Why?" I asked him—"that means another kilomètre?"

"We of these parts hardly use the path now," was his answer: "don't you go that way"—with a certain earnestness and admonition . . .

"What, wolves about here?" I asked him.

He lowered his voice to say: "You may see someone named La Mère Gouvion"—as if to say "you may see Beelzebub."

I supposed that he meant a ghost, and, as I knew something of Southern superstitiousness, and was in a hurry, I handed him a franc, and went on by the forest-path.

I found it in some parts choked with bush—myrtle, kermes-oak—which I had to part before me; and by the moonshine above the bush I saw in that short distance two of those mounds named barrows, placed there by "the fairies"; then, when I had tramped three kilomètres through a rather intolerable solitude, the shock came: three metres to my left within a sort of clearing I saw the woman . . .

She was seated on a fragment of one of those rocks that they call "menhirs."

I had the impression in the hazy moonshine that she was moving her shoulders slowly from side to side, her hand supporting her jaw, some grace in the fall of her rags suggesting a statue set on a pedestal. Her stature, I could see, was gigantic—her great arms like clubs, her great bosom and spread of shoulder, her mouth open in a cavern of darkness that looked oblong, her hair black-and-grey, a tangle of snakes; and, as I walked past, her eyes followed me with that kind of gaze with which an ox stops cropping to gaze after a passer.

The image of this woman filled my mind until I got to Cargnac, near nine; and that same night, while sitting in an inn-garden with swings, nine-pins, arbours, I was told by my host the story of "La Mère Gouvion."

"She came," he told me, "of a well-to-do family who owned land on the far side of Lebrun-les-Bruyères, her father being a mighty big man, known as a hard bargainer as far as Avignon and Orange, and in Lebrun everybody feared him, even the cure, for it was said that he did not believe in the good God, he drank half a litre of cognac every night, so that one could hear him marching up and down his verandah to a late hour, quarrelling with nobody, and carrying on; terrible he was when the drink had him, like a man mad with sun-stroke.

"And one summer, when the phylloxera had rotted his vine-leaves, and things were looking bad for harvest, on an awful night long remembered he raised his hand, defied the heavens to do their worst, and challenged the bell of St. Sépulcre to ring in his hearing—for the bell was said to be a little audible from his yard.

"His wife ran to hide under a bed, dreading the bell-toll, his daughter Maude herself trembled. Some had it to say that the bell did ring in his hearing; however that was, he perished shortly afterwards in convulsions, and was buried without the blessing of the Church.

"Soon after him his good woman also passed away: and Maude Gouvion was left mistress of all.

"And now things began to look alive indeed. If the patch of yellowish moss appeared on all the vine leaves of the parish, Maude Gouvion's trellises were still green."

Maude's spray and pruning-scissors should, no doubt, have accounted for this prosperity, but there were those who thought of black magic when the mulberry-disease and the failure of the madder-crop, which were the cry all round, seemed to keep clear of her fields.

"The truth was that her man roiled for her with the consciousness of her hard eyes behind them, for she was more masterful than any man; and, moreover, she covered her land with a new-fangled sort of sandy stuff from Marseilles, so that, the next vintage, sixty barrels of light wine rolled off in her cart to Avignon, as against le père Gouvion's maximum of fifty-three.

"Meanwhile, no one could stand the sight of her passions, if anything went wrong, as when she threw big Huguénin, the blacksmith, down some stairs for laming a mule in shoeing. In Lebrun-les-Bruyères the cure called 'Silence!' at anyone who mentioned her name. She had not once been inside the church door since her father's death."

But one Sunday morning, she being then thirty-five, Maude, to everyone's astonishment, turned up in the little church in the valley. "Never," said my landlord, "was seen such finery, rings and ribbons, though Maude was ordinarily slatternly in dress;

and she carried her head high, as though the church was not good enough for her feet, while the cure stammered and changed color.

"And why do you think she did this? It was as a preliminary to coming out as a married woman, for she was about to marry the little Tombarel, the shoemaker, as was soon known. And there was a great whispering and excitement then, for everyone knew that no one would have wished to marry Maude, rich as she was, a woman whose own father, as report said, had heard the bell: so that Maude must have fixed upon the little Tombarel for her own reasons, and done her own wooing."

"But which bell is it," I asked, "that you keep speaking of?"

He looked astonished. "Well, I should have thought that even a stranger . . . I mean—do I not?—the bell of St. Sépulcre."

"What does this bell do?" I asked him.

"It is a sound which one should not hear," he answered, with a frown. "It is believed to bring—well, I could not tell you—evil upon chose who hear it."

He was silent. Then: "But talking of this poor little Tombarel, everyone pitied him. It is said that, on his taking a pair of sabots to the presbytère, the priest admonished him to trust to the saints for protection from the Evil One; and, in saying this, he was supposed to throw a scone at Maude Gouvion. A week before the civil marriage Tombarel ran away to Cazalès, but Maude followed him, and, it was said, knocked him down with a box; so they came back together, and were married.

"Soon afterwards Maude gave birth to her son Pierre. As for the poor Tombarel, he did not survive his marriage three months.

"This Pierre grew up a sickly, pale lad; but the uglier everybody thought him, the prouder his mother was of him. He was everything to her—she went foolish with love only to look at him.

"He was a cripple, with disease of the hip-joint, and three times a week for years his mother took him over to La Risolette to be seen to. When the doctor told her that the child could not possibly live, she only laughed, and said the man was a fool who did not know his business. And live it did.

"But Pierre had a mental disease as well—his crazy craving for blood: for to sling a pebble from a catapult into the eye of a pig was his delight. At thirteen he was the death of a little girl, and later on was discovered with a cut that he had made in his own neck. His mother slung him to her shoulder that day, with that square opening of the mouth which was her way in her agitations, and ran to La Risolette with the dead weight, not waiting for a cart. It was the feat of a horse."

Such, then, was Pierre. The children shrank from contact with him, and it got to be a prophecy in the village that the day would come when the bell of St. Sépulcre would sound upon the ears of Maude Gouvion's son.

"But," said mine host, in a *patois* whose quaintness I despair of quite conveying, "whatever he did, if he stuck a calf, or half killed a child, or lay down all day fuddled by the roadside, his mother still laughed and petted him: this only made her love him the more proudly and the more loudly. She was foolish with her love."

"Pierre," he went on, "was sweet on Rosalie Tissot, granddaughter of Tissot, the schoolmaster, the prettiest goldenhaired fairy that ever was, engaged to be married to Martin Dejoie, who was a carpenter at La Risolette. Pierre lay in wait for her everywhere, with a patience which was strange for him; but she laughed at his shrunken form, with a derision in which there was ever more terror than laughter, knowing how cruelly he loved her, hardly knowing perhaps what a peril lay in her laughter.

"When the date of her marriage with Martin Dejoie came near, Pierre went and threw himself at his mother's knees in a room where she sat shelling peas, saying to her: 'Mother, I hall go and kill myself, for I am the laughing-stock of the place because I am not like others, and, if I do not have Rosalie, they will laugh at me the more.' Now, his mother's heart was like a harp to him, he knew that to tell her of the folks' laughing was to lash her into a scratching cat, and, 'Wait, Pierre,' says she now over her pease, quite quietly: 'wait, my son; you shall marry this girl.'

"That same night when the village was asleep Mother Gouvion wrapped her head up, and came down upon Tissot's cottage near the church, Tissot nearly dropping dead with fright when he hobbled from bed in his red-wool nightcap and saw her standing there, so big that she had to bend her body to get in. Well, she offered everything for Rosalie—eight thousand francs in the Crédit at Avignon, the olives, the two presses, the stock and plant—all should be Pierre's and Rosalie's: and meantime the old Tissot sat shivering, hands on knees, not knowing what to say.

"At last he stammers that Rosalie would not consent, since her marriage with Martin Dejoie was a marriage of love. 'Rosalie is only a child,' says la Mère Gouvion; 'leave her to me.' 'Well, well,' says Tissot.

"So Mother Gouvion returned home satisfied. If only matters had rested there! But she had hardly gone when Tissot woke up his grandson, and sent him with a note to tell Martin Dejoie to be sure to come over to Lebrun the next morning. So Martin Dejoie came; but, on coming, he put his head in at the school-door, the children saw him, and two hours later Mother Gouvion knew all about that meeting. The two men

had a confabulation together, Tissot declaring that the only way was for Martin to carry off Rosalie secretly to Avignon the night before the ten days' notice was up, and marry her there. But it was no secret in the village that three of the days were already gone, and the silly old man did not stop to consider that Mother Gouvion would surely know when the ten days would expire. As a matter of fact, she had no sooner heard of that interview between Tissot and Dejoie than she knew perfectly well what bad been settled. It is said in Lebrun-les-Bruyères that she sent a message that same evening to Dejoie, asking him to come and talk the matter over with her, but that Dejoie would not even receive the message. If this is true, it was the last attempt made by la Mère Gouvion to change Dejoie's mind in his scheme to outwit her."

At eleven, then, in the night preceding that tenth day of notice, Martin Dejoie, a tall active chap, was crossing the moor between La Risolette and Lebrun-les-Bruyères, the moor on which stands St. Sépulcre. He was coming to meet Rosalie, who, with Tissot's old *gouvernante*, was waiting for him in a cart behind the presbytère-wood, to be off with him to Avignon; and he was taking the shortest road to her, though people coming from La Risolette to Lebrun usually make a détour to avoid the moor, so desolate is its barren expanse, on which grows only vine-stumps and some lavender-shrubs, with here or there a miasmatic "clair" (pool), or a cypress standing out blighted against the sky, or a gang of those black rocks, having hollows, that the Provencals call "cagnards." Over all north-west winds draw along volumes of a white dust, wide-winged, there being often mistral over the moor when the valleys lie tranquil.

At one part of this Dead Sea Border of Provence stands, where it has stood since the time of the Franks, the ruins of St. Sépulcre, choked now with brambles, hiding behind a strange rankness of vegetation. But the belfry remains broken, and, they say, the bell-rope, and the bell.

I will not delay to tell you the ancient tale of bale which gave to this bell its awesomeness among all those glens: but for the poor wretch who hears its tone life is practically over heart fails and brain—this throughout a district of skeptical France extending from beyond Lebrun-les-Bruyères quite on I believe, to Hudin: the hearer of the bell is accursed; what he sets about shall fail, and shall rebound with tribulation upon his head; if he be not instantly struck down, his life will still be poisoned; the air will hurt him; water will burn him; his blessedness will be in death.

On the night when Martin Dejoie started out for Rosalie from La Risolette the mist on the moor was luminous with moonlight, and only a little wind moved: so that Mother Gouvion could see some distance from the church-step, where she stood

hidden within the mass of sarsaparilla and kermesoaks that choked the church-portal. "For many years no foot had ventured so near St. Sépulcre as hers this night, and she drank brandy from a vial to keep her defiance bright in her brain—all that I am telling you now being only what la Mère Gouvion herself revealed long afterwards, and every word's true. She had groped to see if the bell-rope was still there, intending, if not, to drag herself up like a cat to get at the bell; but the rope was there, still pretty strong, though rotted—she could see a little by the rays of moonlight that came through the ruins; and now she stood peering between the bushes at the foot-path over the moor, waiting for Martin Dejoie to appear: for she understood that, with such a business in hand, he would not make a detour round St. Pierre, but would come over the moor.

"At last, near eleven, a sound of someone whistling reached her, for Martin did not like to be passing so near the bell, so was whistling to himself for company; and at once Mother Gouvion set to work, first plugging up her ears with cotton-wool, and over this a bandage, her plan being to make the bell clang, yet not hear it herself. Her only trouble was the doubt whether the man coming was Martin. Suppose it was Pierre himself? Pierre sometimes crossed the moor at night; Pierre whistled. But it was all right—it was Martin—she saw that, when he had got opposite. He stopped his whistling then, bent his head, crossed his breast—in the vigour of his life—a young man just going to be married—suddenly dang, dang, clang for him . . .

"On her face she lay watching him where he had dropped against one of the cagnards; then she stole away home, elated, thinking in herself, 'I didn't hear the bell-sound! I didn't hear it!'

"Well, Rosalie and Tissot waited in vain for Martin Dejoie that night; it was not till five days later that his body was found at the bottom of that ravine north of the moor that is called 'Le Dé du Diablo.' Whether he rumbled down there in his distraction, or dashed himself down in his despair, is not known, but he was believed to have heard the bell; and it was years before anyone supposed that his death was not owing to an act of God.

"And so la Mère Gouvion kept her word; and Rosalie in a few months was married to Pierre.

"But," said my host, in his Doric patois, "it was never a good thing for la Mère Gouvion that she did what she had done. Rosalie was the worst wife that Pierre could have had, for she was so winning and sweet, and he loved her so much, that for months at a time he was a changed lad: and the result was this, that there would ensue

reactions, during which the white face of that little lame man became a fright in the valley, he going about like a dog with the hydrophobia his eyes alight. Once he stabbed his mother in the arm, and sometimes had to be watched lest he should stab himself. And so it went on near five years.

"And they had misfortunes in the vineyard, too. There came three bad years, when even L'Hermitage and La Nerte and the big vintages of Provence came to nothing; and the fourth year la Mère Gouvion's madder-yield was a gone hope before May; and she had to sign a paper with the agent at Cargnac which almost compromised the shelter over her head. So she was not very happy in her mischief-doing, after all.

"But she adored her 'petit,' her 'little one,' never less, gloried in secret over the deed she had done for him; and when he made himself a terror she hugged herself, preferring terror to laughing-stock. 'They won't grin with their ugly gums at my petit, my little one, now,' she'd say.

"And one bitter winter's night all came to an end . . .

"Pierre had broken loose again; screams reached even to the village from the Gouvion vineyard; and presently a girl came running down to the presbytère, saying that Rosalie would be killed. Heaven knows what really happened, for Rosalie was never seen again, so it is supposed that Pierre must have killed her, and that la Mère Gouvion did away with her body somehow; but no body was ever discovered, so that all that part of the business remains a mystery. Mother Gouvion, who raved out a great deal of what I am saying now during her brief imprisonment afterwards, never said anything about this matter.

"However, when the curé hears this, he begins to pray, than saddles his mule, and gallops off through the gale for Avignon. Before midnight a body of *sergents* arrive at the vineyard; they search for Pierre; Pierre cannot be found. La Mère Gouvion, sewing, with her mouth opened square, tells them that she does not know where he has gone to."

A wild night—I have seen three such in Provence—lightnings that terrify, a very deluge of water, tempest from the north calling to whirlwind from the west: a Southern storm . . . Mother Gouvion dashed out into it the moment she found herself free of the *sergents*—forgot her uncovered head, but remembered to take every sou she possessed. She had arranged to meet Pierre out on the moor, the only safe meeting-place, intending, it seems, to take, or send, him to the coast, to get him aboard a ship—nothing would be impossible to her. The officers, it was true, were scouring the valley on horseback with lanterns; but they were nothing; she would outwit them . . .

But when, on reaching the moor, she ran to the agreed *cagnard*, Pierre was not in it; to the next—Pierre not there; and with distracted runs she dashed from *cagnard* to *cagnard*. Her heart misgave her now, her glance questioned the heavens—they were black enough; and, stumbling about within a tempest of hair, a pillar of seaweed that stumbles, she lifted her voice: "*Pierre*!"—wayward boy of her heart: where, then, was he?

And another terror struck her—the bell . . . it was believed to bleat some midnights when storms were abroad on the moor . . . "But not to-night!"—and, as she said this, a vaster tantrum of the tempest terrorized her. She stumbled and was down in the mud; a prayer broke from her.

A night of climaxes of wind: and in the midst of each the woman beseeching, coaxing: "Any other night, not to-night; it would not be right; would be hard on a poor mother's heart"—for hours, till the gale began to abate, and the danger ended.

It was only toward morning, when, though the darkness was as black as ever, the storm had lulled and her dreads of the bell were at rest, it was then that, all at once—she heard it. Not a clamorous clang, clang, this time, as when she had rung it for Martin Dejoie, but one toll only, floating out doleful on the breast of the trembling air.

It was over, then? No hope? Suddenly the woman threw up her head, gnashed, shook her fist, as her father before her had done, at the bell, at the heavens. "Blast away bell . . . !" Bells were nothing: she would discover her little one as soon as there was a little light—would tear him from the clutch of the *sergents*: it would be all right yet . . .

"On setting out once more to search, she found herself just in front of the church, and, as some sheet-lightning was playing then, she chanced to observe the mark of a man's foot before the church-portal. At this she started, chilled to the marrow by a sense of the supernatural: for it was not to be believed that any living being would have come so near the bell on a night so wild. Under her breath she uttered 'Martin Dejoie?' . . . for what power had rung the bell in her hearing? it had not been the wind!

"Just then a tramp of horses' hoofs reached her ears—the *sergents* still ransacking the countryside for Pierre; and she ran into the bush at the church-door, lest they might spy her in the play of the lightning. Five years before she had stood just there—and done a thing. And now her flesh shivered to see the sarsaparilla freshly trampled, the branches parted: someone had entered St. Sépulcre that night! and at the thought of the vengeance of the murdered dead her heart turned faint."

But some fascination led her steps over the threshold, and she stood in the still thicker gloom within, hearing the rasping of her own throat, hearing the gallop of

a heart thumping out the whole gamut of fright, pride, desperation; till, all at once, a blaze of lightning searched the church, and by it was revealed to her the reason why the bell had rung: it was because someone had tied the bell-rope round his throat, kicked away a stone, and hanged himself there. He hung still now: and eye to eye they looked—mother and son.

They found her the next morning wandering on the moor, harmless and listless, with a slanting smile; and they took her to the asylum at Avignon where, after many weeks, something resembling reason returned to her. When they had gathered her story from her mutterings, they let her out again; but she would not go home, took up her abode in woods, etc., sleeping in *cagnards*, living on olives, nuts, fruits. Her favourite haunt (if she still lives) is the "menhir" by the abandoned path between Lebrun-les-Bruyères and Cargnac.

The Pale Ape

by

M.P. Shiel

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"A big thing of a pig."—Aristophanes.

YESTERDAY again I stood and looked at Hargen Hall from the lake; and it is this that has brought me to write of my life in it. Wintry winds were whistling through the withered bracken and the branches, whirling withered birch-leaves about the south quadrangle; and no birds sang.

When I first entered it I was a girl, one might say—gay enough; but now I have known what one never forgets; and the days and the hairs grow grey together.

Five titled names among my friends gained me an entrance to Hargen in the fall of the year '08. I arrived on the evening of 10 th November; and shall never forget the strangeness of the impression made on my mind that night: for even ere I rounded into sight of the house, the sound of the waters far off filled me with a feeling of the eerily dreary—the house being almost surrounded with mountain and cliff, down which a series of cascades shower; and that night I had some difficulty in catching quite everything that was said to me, though in two or three days, maybe, my ear became used to the tumult.

It was four days before I met Sir Philip Lister himself—Davenport, the old butler, told me that his master was "indisposed"—but Sir Philip sent me a polite missive inviting me to take things carelessly a little: so I spent the first days in learning my pupil's moods, and in roaming over the place, from "Queen Elizabeth's Room"—behind the bed still hung a velvet shield broidered with the royal arms in white

wire—to the apes and the cascades. A sense of forlornness pervaded it all, for scarcely ten of us were in all the desert of that place, with an occasional glimpse of two or three gardeners, or a groom. The kitchen was now a panelled hall like a chapel, with windows of painted glass containing the six coats-of-arms of the Lister Lynns, a hall in whose vastness the cook and her assistant looked awfully forlorn and small; and hardly even a housemaid ever now entered all that part of the east wing which had been singed by a fire fifty-five years since.

It was on the fourth forenoon, a day of "the Indian summer," that my pupil took me to see the apes. There were three of them—two chimpanzees, one gibbon—in three rooms of wire-netting close to the east line of cliffs, i.e., about six hundred yards from the house. There, chuckling and chattering in the shadow of chestnuts, they lived their lives, anon speculating like philosophers upon their knots, or hearkening to the waters which chanted near in their ears. And there was a fourth room of netting in the row, but empty; as to which my pupil said to me:

"The one that used to be in this fourth room was huge, Miss Newnes, and had a pale face. He died some time before I came to Hargen: but his ghost walks when the moon is at the full."

"Now Esmé," I muttered. (Her name was Esmé Martagon, daughter of the Marquis de Martagon and of Margaret Lister, Sir Philip's sister; the child being at this time twelve years of age, and an orphan—a rather pretty elf with ebon curls, but as changeable as the shapes of mercury, now bursting with alacrity, and now cursed with black turns of sadness.)

"But if I have seen it?" she gravely replied, gazing up at me with her great eyes.

"The ghost of an ape, Esmé," I muttered.

For answer, flying off into vivacity, she cried to me:

"Come, you shall hear it!"—and she led the way northward through the park, until we walked down a dark path tremulous with spray, where one of the smaller waterfalls came down. By stepping on the tops of rocks in its froth, one could get, in the rear of the torrent, into a grot, where the greenery grew very vigorous and gay from the perpetual spray; and when I had followed Esmé's career into this hollow in the rock, she hollaed into my ear in opposition to the tons of thunder sounding down: "Now, listen a little: this one is named 'The Ape.'"

For some minutes—three to six—I heard nothing but the burden of the cascade's murmur, and was now about to say something sceptical, when there sounded what I am bound to say affected me in a rather startling way—a sound very sharp and energetic—the chuckle, chuckle of a monkey—most pressing, most imperative, in

its summons to the attention. It was over in a moment; but presently came again: and in the course of half an hour's listening it came altogether five times, not quite at regular intervals, but still with a kind of periodicity: and I concluded that some small cause, perhaps only a condition of the wind, acted ever and anon to modify the cataract's tract, and produce this curious cackling.

My pupil hollaed to me: "And if you kept on waiting to hear, and listening to it, do you know what would happen to you, Miss Newnes?"—and when I asked what, she called:

"You would go stark mad!"

"Not I," I said.

One of the shadows darkened the child's face; and presently she remarked: "I should, I know."

"Three of the ladies of the Listers, and one of the Lynns, have—among them my mother's mother.

"It is in the blood, I think."

I started!—for I now suddenly believed her. Indeed, to my consciousness, there was something ironic in the torrent's chuckle, and at once, taking the child's hand, I said: "Come."

Late in the day when we were together in what is called "the Great Hall," Esmé, ever sage beyond her age, again spoke of the chuckling cascade, begging me not to mention or show it to her Cousin Huggins when he came: for a young man of this name, who had hardly been at Hargen since he was six, was coming from India in some months, and was expected to spend a month with us.

It was that night that, for the first time, I saw Sir Philip Lister: for he dined with Esmé and Mrs.

Wiseman and me in the main building dining-room, the old Davenport waiting upon us in state with his silent footsteps, we five making a pretty insignificant group in that great room, whose array of windows have a south aspect upon the south quadrangle.

It has (or had) tapestry all round, and rows of Jacobean carving-tables, which give the room an air of very gloomy state; and a wood-fire bickered on the iron-work fire-back, under whose oak over-mantel Sir Philip sat with Esmé and me ten minutes, then took himself away into his own sequestered nook of the house.

Two days after this he again had dinner with us, and again the day after that; but that third time the child, in one of her chatterbox fits, chanced to observe that

"Uncle Philip is lending his presence since Miss Newnes has come"—and, like a bird that shies, Sir Philip showed himself no more to us for many days.

I regretted this, for his presence interested me, his manners were in such a high degree grave, dignified, and gracious. He was big, and, if not handsome, interesting to the eye—quaint, one might say—his face smooth like an actor's, his hair longer than usual, with great owl-eyes, whose glowering underlook was thronged, to my thinking, with mysteries of sorrow—something shifting, though, uncandidly shy, in them. His age I guessed to be about forty-five.

He was engaged in the writing of what I heard was "a great work," six volumes long, on "The Old Kingdom" (fourth of sixth dynasty of Egyptian Kings), and lived a life of such privacy, that it was three weeks ere I met him afresh. Meantime, Esmé and I entered upon the course of our adventurous studies—"adventurous," for never for two hours together was my pupil the same girl. Esmé had fits of headache; and she had fits of reading, when she feasted upon volumes with a hungry vulture's greed; and she had fits of indolence, dormouse torpors, fits of crying, dark-minded lamentations, fits of flightiness, of crazy dissipation, of craving for—wine. As for her knowledge, it was astonishing in such a child, and she anon plied me with queries to which I could find no reply.

On a forenoon in the fourth week, when she was feeling out of sorts, we were sauntering in the park, when, for once, I saw Sir Philip out of doors. We came upon him with his face against the ape-house netting, gazing in at the gibbon—so eagerly, that we were near him ere he seemed to hear us. When he suddenly saw us, he stood struck into a posture as of suspense, but presently was very affable in his reserved manner, and conversed with me some minutes about the apes and their various traits. They had the names of Egyptian kings, the chimpanzees being Pepy II, and Khety, and the gibbon Sety I; and at the gibbon Sir Philip shook his finger, saying with a playful solemnity: "That fellow! That fellow!"—I had no idea what he meant.

Suddenly, in the midst of our talk, he—with a certain awkwardness of his lids—proposed a picnic-luncheon out of doors to which Esmé and I readily assented. But three minutes afterwards he started, furtively murmuring the words: "I must be getting back to work," and was gone—to my astonishment!

After this he again made himself very scarce for three weeks. Esmé and I, meantime, got into the habit of spending our hours of labour in the great hall, sitting on a day-bed that lay in the solar-room gallery there—the gallery from which of old one gazed down upon the retainers at table below; and those days of my life, that I whiled away in that place, are to me at present days touched with

much strangeness and a tone of Utopia. But the great place was quite plain and empty—a plain ceiling, plain white walls, oak-panelled half-way up: only, as it was lighted by fourteen great windows with shields of painted glass, when the sun glowed through them, it transfigured that old room into glory-land. . . . But it is gone from me now like a dream, and I shall not see it again.

It was on the Thursday afternoon of my thirteenth week at Hargan that I received from Sir Philip Lister a singular missive: he had injured his thumb, he said, and wished to know if I would "kindly write from his dictation." But what, then, I asked myself, was to become of Esmé meantime? I did not wish to leave the child! However, I could not say no: and so entered that day the sacred den. He, with his fingers in a sling, instantly jumped up with a gush of apologies, showering upon me a thousand thanks that were at once gushing and shy, till the shyness triumphed, and he was suddenly silent and done. Then, I sitting at an old abbey-table, he on an old farm-house settle, he dictated to me with his eyes closed, in a low tone, all about Khufu, and Khafra, and the things of "the Pyramid Age," until I had the impression that he was himself something Egyptian and most ancient, and I with him, and in which age of the world we were I was not at some moments certain. In the midst of the dictating he all at once pressed his left palm upon his forehead, as if tired or muddled, his eyes tight shut; and, jumping up, he muttered to me, "thank you! thank you!" offering me his hand. Some of his actions had a wonderful swiftness and suddenness; and that hand of his which I touched was as chill as snow: so that I made haste from him.

That night I retired, as usual, soon after eleven to my room, which was in a rather remote and lonely region of the house; and was soon asleep. Two hours later I awoke terrified—I could not quite tell why—but so terrified, that I found myself sitting up in bed—with a singular sound, or the memory or dream of a singular sound, lingering about my ears: and I was trembling, my brow was wet with sweat. Through my two windows, which stood open, shone the full moon's light, lying over the floor, lighting the stamp-work tapestry on my right; and I could hear the night-breeze breathing drearily through the leaves of the cedar, some of whose branches, held up with chains, brushed my panes. For some minutes I sat so, hearing my heart beating in my ears, the breezes shivering through the tree, the streams showering, the soundlessness of the house and hour, and as conscious of some living spirit hovering round me as though I saw it. If it had lasted long, I must have lost consciousness, or else cast off the oppression of it with a shriek: but presently something reached my ear—a chuckle, a little giggle of glee, just distinct enough to convince me that it was due to no lunacy of my ear: and immediately, with a creeping in my hair, but a species of rage and desperation elevating me, I

was out of bed, and at one of the windows: for just after the chuckle a sharp rush through the leafage of the cedar seemed to reach me, and I rushed to see.

What I saw made me faint—whether instantly or after some seconds I cannot say: I know that when I came to my senses I was seated on the floor with my forehead leaning on my old oak chair, and the tower-clock was now sounding the hour of three. But however soon I may have swooned after seeing it, it was not so instantly that I could have the slightest doubt as to the actualness of what my eyes saw. For though the moonlight left the interior regions of the tree's leafage in some obscurity, I was sure that some brute of the ape species with a pale face was hanging there in the cedar—hanging head-downward among the network of chains and branches in such a way as to see into my chamber; and I have an impression of hearing—either before I fell, or through my swoon afterwards—a succession of chucklings; and then a voice somewhere remonstrating, pleading, commanding, in a secret species of shout; and then a strangled outcry of horror, of anguish, somewhere, all mingled with a dream of the chuckle of the chuckling stream.

But the strongest of my impressions was undoubtedly that drowning outcry of horror—an impression so strong, that I could hardly believe it to be a dream, or all a dream. This cry was somehow connected in my mind from the first with old Davenport; and this feeling was confirmed in me when Davenport was nowhere to be seen the next day, nor for four days after.

Mrs. Wiseman, the housekeeper, who for days was pale, and occasionally fell into a vacant staring, told me that Davenport was "suffering." She asked me no questions as to the night, but I twice caught her eye piercingly bent upon me with a meaning of inquiry, of anxiety, in it; and the same thing was true of Sir Philip when, three days later, he appeared towards evening: for he took my hand with a tender solicitude, and a lingering look of question in his gaze. As for Davenport, when I next saw him it was under a tree in the park, where he sat like a convalescent, in his flesh that pathetic pallor of the flesh of aged people who have passed through an illness; and the wrappings round his neck could not wholly hide from my eyes that his throat had been most brutally bruised.

During those days it was as if a blow had fallen upon Hargen. Esmé no longer laughed, and a lower tone of talk overtook us all. It was obvious that each held the consciousness of a secret which none dared breathe to another; and in vain I consumed days of musing in seeking to see into the meaning of these things. For my part, I was ailing, nor could quite hide it. I had the thought of moving out of my room, which I now shrank from entering even in the day-time, but did not care to show so openly that I was afraid. Through the nights I burned a light, but slept

with my nerves awake. Not that I was ever of a very nervous temperament, I think: but terror infected me like a sickness in those days; the stare of eyes of affright in the night was ever present in my imagination; and Hargen soon grew to be to my haunted heart the very home of gloom. Then one day, on a sudden, all this trouble of mind rushed away from me like a shadow; and my being galloped into a mood of gladness in which gloom was abolished, and I forgot to be appalled in the dark.

I will tell of it very briefly. It happened that one afternoon when Esmé and I were sitting listlessly in that solar-room gallery, an open grammar lying idle between us, suddenly behind us, there rose out of the floor, as it seemed, a young man who clapped his fingers over Esmé's eyes, smiling with me the while. "Cousin Huggins!" the child cried out—much surprised, for Huggins Lister was not expected at Hargen for some days yet. He caught her up in his big arms, and bussed her like a gun, for he was a being made all of ardours and horse-play: and then he looked into my eyes, and I looked into his eyes.

It was as if I had always known him—long before I was born; and what hurried me more into the sort of maelstrom in which I was now caught was the circumstance, that on the day after that first day Esmé took a chill, remained in bed, and I was all alone with Huggins Lister in that wilderness of Hargen. The young man was, or pretended to be, interested in old things, and would have me show him all the cassone and old needlework, the Spanish glasses giving their glints of gold, the old girandoles with their amorini. He dined with me, we two alone, and Mrs. Wiseman: for Sir Philip more than ever kept himself to himself.

Only, on the fourth evening when Huggins Lister and I were walking in the park, Sir Philip suddenly appeared before us, walking with precipitate steps the other way; did not pause, nor utter a sound, as he passed by us with a bowed brow, his hat raised; but when he had gone some way beyond us, he stopped, and—shook his finger at us! was going, too, I am sure, to venture to say something, but failed; and suddenly was gone on his way again. I remember being very offended at the moment: but a moment more, God forgive me, had forgotten that Sir Philip Lister lived.

I showed the young man the apes, and the Queen's Room, and the cascades, save one, and the ivory inlay of the two Spanish chests, and the Tudor fireplaces, and what was in "the long gallery"; and still he wished to see things. And just under the window that lights the great staircase, there stands on the landing a sedan-chair painted with glaring variegations, the window-glass casting the gauds of the six coats-of-arms of the Lister-Lynns upon the already gaudy chair: in which chair he got me to sit—it was high noon, on the open stair, but we were as solitary there as if night veiled us in a monastery; and, indeed, all that waste of Hargen seemed but

made to beguile and mislead our feet to our fate—he got me to sit in it, I say, and then, having me well in his bondage in the sedan-chair, began to sob to me with passion; and when I hid away my face for pity of him there in his passion on his knees, and dashed one wild tear from my eyes, the young man ravished my lips with his lips, there in the chair on the stair that day. I could not help it, for in respect of me Huggins Lister came, and saw, and conquered! and I was as one drugged with honey-dew, and dancing drugged, in Huggins Lister's hands.

Also, the young man persuaded like a hurricane! and hurried me as madly into marriage as those sand-forms of the sand-storm which madly waltz into oneness. Within six months, he said, he would arrange everything so as to proclaim the marriage; but meantime it must be secret, and must be immediate! Against this tyranny I made a feint of resistance; but half-heartedly; and it availed me nothing: indeed, he was dear to me, and near, and had me all in the hollow of his hand and heart. And so one forenoon I stole out of Hargen gates, and met him at a house in St. Arvens townlet, the place of our marriage; but, as we were passing out, married, from the door of the house, my heart bounded into my mouth to see Sir Philip Lister walking hardly ten yards away. Yes, he who never left home was there before my eyes in the broad light in St. Arvens street with his oak-stick—walking away from us, indeed, seeming unaware of our presence: yet I have an impression, too, of his head half-turned toward us a moment, of a face ashen with agitation: and my heart, for all its warmth, shivered as with a mortal chill in me.

My reeling feet led me back to Hargen in a kind of dream, a wedded wife, as wild with thoughts as with wine that day, for I was my beloved's, and he was mine: and in what way I spent that day I could not say, since I was new in heaven, and can but remember my fruitless efforts to hide from Esmé's eyes the state of my mind: for she had lately risen from her ailment, and I made a pretence of study with her, and I was severe with my dear, denying him my presence until the evening; and even then retired betimes, leaving him sighing.

My chamber-door I barricaded with a chair—a bridal childishness, since, to secure the room, I should have locked it. And I lay awake for a long hour, looking at the luminosity of the full moon, until, wearied out by the reel of my day's dream, I fell into a brief sleep.

From this a roar awoke me: and may a sound like that sound never more come to me to summon me with its trump. I understood that some soul was in extremis, and out of the deeps of grief and horror was horridly appealing to his God; and, finding myself on the ground, I knelt one wild second, crying aloud: "Almighty God, guard my love from harm in this house of horror." A moment more I had thrown a gown round me, and was gone out of the door.

As I ran along the corridor, trying to strike a light to the candle that I carried, there seemed to reach my ear from somewhere a chuckle very hushed and low, like the jackal chattering over its carrion; and my fingers were so shaken by this thing, that they failed to bring the match into relation with the candle's wick. When the heat reached my hand I dashed down the match. Still running, I lit another—or half lit it: for in the instant when the match fused at the scratch, saw—-or in some manner knew—that some mad and monstrous animal was with me; at the same moment the match went out, or was puffed out; and a thing most chilly cold touched my skin. I felt pain then, the pain of the awe of the darkness; and I stood palsied. But within some seconds, I think, I was rushing afresh toward the corridor-end, without the candlestick now, which had dropped from me; so that I could not see that the portal at the end, which I expected to be open as usual, was shut; and I rushed with a shock upon it. It was not only shut, but locked!—finding which, I, standing there, piled the passion of my whole soul into cry on cry, crying "Huggins! Sir Philip! Davenport! Huggins!" then I stood, hearing the streams murmuring as through eternity in the silence of the night, and the strong knocking of my heart against my side—but no reply to my calls.

This was not very astonishing, as my room was in such a solitary part of the mansion: and I stood imprisoned, suffering, expecting every second the coming upon me of that which would strike me dead with fright. The stillness lasted half a minute, perhaps, and then I became aware of a sound outside the door, a bumping going down the stairs in a regular way, like something massive being dragged down, with bump, bump, bump: and such was the solemnity and mystery of this thing to me in my solitude there in that gruesome gloom, that to linger any longer there in my pain soon grew to be impossible to me; and before I knew what I was doing I was out of a window, moving along a ledge fifty feet aloft toward the next window. The ledge was scarcely more than a foot wide, I think, and how I dared it, and why I did not fall, I can't now say. With my nose close to the wall—conscious all the time of drizzle tossed by high winds, conscious of the night full of a wild light, though the moon was quite hidden—I stepped flutteringly along over thin snow in dizzy suspense, keeping my sob until I should reach the next window: and there, as I leapt, I gave it vent, and fainted at my safety. I did not cease to hear, though, the bumping sound going down; and when it got to the bottom, something in me gave me the dauntlessness of heart to go after it.

Down I crept, haltingly, crouching, stair by stair. Halfway down I seemed to hear something being dragged over the floor below. I went on down. The sound had now gone out through a doorway, and I knew which doorway; but as I followed that way, my bare toes struck upon something cold, and I dropped upon my hands over

it. I moaned then for pity of myself, because it was dark, and because I did so suffer. But I was conscious, as I dropped, of a rattle of matches, for I still had the match-box in my hand, without knowing that I had it: and the desire took me to strike a light. It was some time, though, before I would, or could, and when I eventually ventured, I saw the sight of the body of the old butler in his night-attire lying wildly before me on the floor: and I knew by a look that was in his eyes that they were for ever sightless.

At the same moment I was aware of the slamming of a door some way off; and again I knew which door—the little side-portal by the kitchen-entrance, leading out northward into the park—-and again something gave vigour to my knees, and lifted my feet, to go to see. I made my way to the little portal; opened it slowly; my soles were out on the snow. And before me on the short gravel-path going north into the park I distinctly saw the pale ape, bearing a body against his breast. A moment later he laid down his heavy load, and bent over it; and when I saw him horribly muttering over it, something in me stooped, took up a stone, and threw it at the brute.

It went straight to his head.

After some seconds the creature raised himself slowly, and raced with reeling feet into the darkness of the park.

I staggered then to the body, and saw that it was Huggins Lister strangled; and on the body of my beloved my senses left me.

It was ten in the day before I knew anything more; and then I lay on a bed, on one side of it Esmé, on the other side Mrs. Wiseman.

The latter had a fixed stare; and from the manner in which Esmé was smiling, with her face held sideward, while she persistently counted on her fingers, I could make out that the child was now insane.

I lay still, I said nothing; little I cared.

Presently a girl named Bertha entered to murmur the words: "He isn't found yet"; and from some words murmured in reply by Mrs. Wiseman, I gathered that Sir Philip Lister had disappeared.

Little I cared, I lay still and sullen, with closed lids.

Near noon again came the news that the men seeking for Sir Philip Lister could even yet discover no trace of him; but at about live in the evening he was found dying in the hollow of the rock that lies behind the cascade that they call "The Ape," and was brought to the Hall.

Very soon afterwards Mrs. Wiseman, who had then left my side, flew in again to me with crying eyes, imploring me to try and go for a moment to the dying man, who was hungering to have one sight of me; and I let her throw some clothes over me, and was led by her to the death-bed.

By this time I knew—for Mrs. Wiseman during the day had revealed it to me in a flood of tears—that Sir Philip Lister's mother had too much listened to the chuckling cascade, and so had borne him the being he was—a being capable at any agitation of shedding his human nature to resume the nature of the brute, and hurling away human raiment with his human nature in the murderous turbulence of his nocturnal revels—he who in my eyes had been so perfect in gentleness, so shy, so staid! But none the less I shuddered to the soul when he touched my hand to pant at me through the death-ruckle rolling in his throat: "I have loved you well"—a shudder which perhaps saved me from death or from madness, for I had lapsed that day into a mad apathy. It was nearly night then, and the light in there was very dreary; but I could still see that the hair which overgrew the ogre's frame was considerably more than an inch deep—greenish, and gross as the gorilla's. It clasped him round the throat and round the wrists in lines perfectly defined, like a perfect coat of fur that he wore; and it did not thin, but continued no less thick where it abruptly ended than everywhere else.

But he had "loved me well," and I him now—for if he had been perniciously jealous, it was for love of me that he had been jealous; and in dying he looked into my eyes with human eyes, kindly, mildly, looking "I have loved you well"; and when with his last strength he pointed to where the pebble I had flung had sunk into his skull, then I lifted my voice and wept to God because of him, and myself, and Hargen Hall and all, not caring any longer if my face was buried in the horror of his hairy breast. And so he died, and Huggins Lister, and I was left alive.

THE END

M. P. SHIEL

Dark Lot of One Saul

Matthew Phipps Shiel (1865-1947) was a complex man who produced nine science fiction novels and many short stories, primarily in a burst of writing activity before World War I. His work was always interesting and exciting, but it was marred by a pervasive racism and religious bigotry—indeed, he was one of the worst of the "Yellow Peril" instigators in literature, especially in his The Yellow Danger *(1898, one of his first novels).* The Lord of the Sea *(1901) has him expelling the Jews of Europe to Palestine, making Shiel a Zionist of sorts. He was also representative of those writers who used science fiction as advocacy, including the replacement of religion by science. "Dark Lot of One Saul" is typically Shielian in the audacity of its concept and in the soaring richness of its resonant style.*

WHAT I relate is from a document found in a Cowling Library chest of records, written in a very odd hand on fifteen strips of a material resembling papyrus, yet hardly papyrus, and on two squares of parchment, which Professor Stannistreet recognizes as "trunkfish" skin; the seventeen pages being gummed together at top by a material like tar or pitch. A Note at the end in a different hand and ink, signed "E.G.," says that the document was got out of a portugal (a large variety of cask) by the Spanish galleass *Capitana* between the Bermudas and the island of St. Thomas; and our knowledge that at this point a valley in the sea-bottom goes down to a depth of four thousand fathoms affords, as will be noticed, a rather startling confirmation of the statements made in the document. The narrator, one Saul, was born sixteen to twenty years before the accession of Queen Elizabeth, and wrote about 1601, at the age of sixty, or so; and the correspondence of his statements with our modern knowledge is the more arresting, since, of course, a sailor of that period would only know anything of submarine facts by actual experience. I modify a few of his archaic expressions (guessing at some words where his ink ran):

This pressing paucity of air hath brought me to the writing of that which befel, to the end that I may send forth the writing from the cave in the portugal for the eye of who may find it, my pen being a splinter broken from the elephant's bones,

mine ink pitch from the lake, and my paper the bulrush pith. Beginning therefore with my birth, I say that my name in the world was James Dowdy Saul, I being the third child of Percy Dowdy Saul, and of Martha his wife, born at Upland Mead, a farm in the freehold of my father, near the borough of Bideford, in Devon: in what year born I know not, knowing only this, that I was a well-grown stripling upon the coming of Her Grace to the throne.

I was early sent to be schooled by Dominie John Fisher in the borough, and had made good progress in the Latin Grammar (for my father would have me to be a clerk), when, at the age of fifteen, as I conjecture, I ran away, upon a fight with Martin Lutter, that was my eldest brother, to the end that I might adopt the sea as my calling. Thereupon for two years I was with the shipmaster, Edwin Occhines, in the balinger, *Dane,* trading with Channel ports; and at his demise took ship at Penzance with the notorious Master Thomas Stukely, who, like many another Devon gentleman, went a-pirating 'twixt Scilly and the Irish creeks. He set up a powerful intimacy with the Ulster gallant, Master Shan O'Neil, who many a time has patted me upon my back; but, after getting at loggerheads with Her Grace, he turned Papist, and set out with Don Sebastian of Portugal upon an African expedition, from the which I felt constrained to withdraw myself.

Thereupon for a year, perhaps two, I was plying lawful traffic in the hoy *Harry Mondroit,* 'twixt the Thames' mouth and Antwerp; till, on a day, I fell in at "The Bell" in Greenwich with Master Francis Drake, a youth of twenty-five years, who was then gathering together mariners to go on his brigantine, the *Judith,* his purpose being to take part in Master John Hawkins' third expedition to the settlements in Espaniola.

Master Hawkins sailed from Plymouth in the *Jesus,* with four consorts, in October of the year 1567. After being mauled by an equinox storm in Biscay Bay, we refitted at the Canaries, and, having taken four hundred blacks on the Guinea coast, sailed for the West Indies, where we gained no little gold by our business. We then proceeded to Carthagena and Rio de la Hacha; but it should now be very well known how the *Jesus* lost her rudder, how, the ships' bottoms being fouled, we had perforce to run for San Juan de Ulloa in the Gulf of Mexico; and how, thirteen Spanish galleons and frigates having surprised us there, the Admiral de Baçan made with us a treaty, the which he treacherously broke at high noon-day, putting upon us the loss of three ships and our treasure, the *Minion* and the *Judith* alone escaping: this I need not particularly relate.

The *Judith,* being of fifty tons portage only, and the *Minion* of less than one hundred, both were now crowded, with but little water aboard, and the storechests empty. After lying three days outside the sand ridge, we set sail on Saturday, the 25th September, having heard tell of a certain place on the east reaches of the Gulf where provisions might be got. This we reached on the 8th October, only to meet there little or nothing to our purpose; whereupon a council was called before Master Hawkins in the *Minion,* where one hundred of us proffered ourselves to land, to the intent that so the rest might make their way again to England on short rations.

The haps of us who landed I will not particularize, though they were various, God wot, remaining in my head as a grievous dream, but a vague one, blotted out, alas, by that great thing which Almighty God hath ordained for a poor man like

me. We wandered within the forests, anon shot at by Indians, our food being roots and berries, and within three weeks reached a Spanish station, whence we were sent captives into Mexico. There we were Christianly behaved to, fed, clothed, and then distributed among the plantations—a thing amazing to us who were not ignorant of the pains put upon English sailors in Spain; but in those days no Holy Office was in Mexico, and on this count we were spared, some of us being bound over to be overseers, some to be handicraftsmen in the towns, etc. As for me, after an absence from it of seven months, I once more found myself in the township of San Juan de Ulloa, where, having ever a handy knack in carpentry, I had soon set myself up for a wright.

No one asked me aught as to my faith; I came and went as I thought good; nor was it long but I had got some knowledge of the Spanish tongue, stablished myself in the place, and taken to wife Lina, a wench of good liking, daughter of Señora Gomez of the *confiteria,* or sweetmeat-store; and out of her were born unto me Morales and Salvadora, two of the goodliest babes that ever I have beheld.

I abode in San Juan de Ulloa two years and eleven months: and these be the two years of quietness and happiness that I have had in this my life.

On the 13th afternoon of the month of February in the year 1571 I was wending homeward over the *prado* that separated my carpentry from the *confiteria* of my mother-in-law, when I saw four men approaching me, as to whom I straightway understood that men of San Juan they were not: one was a Black Friar, so hooded and cowled, that of his countenance nothing was discovered, save the light of his eyes; another was bearded—of the Order of Jesus; another wore the broad chapeau of a notary, and the fourth had the aspect of an alguazil, grasping a bâton in his hand. And, on seeing them, I seemed to give up heart and hope together: for a frigate hulk had cast anchor that morning beyond the sand-ridge, and I conjectured that these men were of her, were ministers of the Holy Office, and had heard of me while I was awork.

I have mentioned that no Inquisition was in Mexico afore 1571: but within the last months it had been bruited in San Juan that King Phillip, being timorous of English meddling in the gold-trade, and of the spread of English heresy, was pondering the setting up of the Holy Office over Espaniola. And so said, so done, in *my* case, at any rate, who, being the sole heretic in that place, was waylaid on the *prado* in the afternoon's glooming, and heard from the alguazil that word of the familiars: "follow on"; to be then led down the little *callejon* that runneth down from the *prado* to the coast, where a cockboat lay in waiting.

To the moment when they pushed me into the boat, I had not so much as implored one more embrace of my poor mate and babes, so dumb was I at the sudden woe: but in the boat I tumbled prone, although too tongue-tied to utter prayer, whereupon an oarsman put paw upon me, with what I took to be a consoling movement: a gesture which set me belching forth into lamenting. But with no long dallying they put out, having me by my arms; and beyond the sand-ridge I was took up the poop's ladder into the frigate, led away to the far end of the forecastle's vault, and there left with a rosca loaf, four onions, and a stoup of water in the sprit room, a very strait place cumbered by the bulk of the bow-sprit's end, and by the ends of a couple of culverins.

I know not yet whither it was the will of my captors to carry me, whether to Europe, or to some port of the Spanish Main; but this I know that the next noon when I was led apoop, no land was visible, and the sea had that hard aspect of the mid-sea.

Our ship, the which was called the *San Matteo,* was a hulk of some four hundred tons portage, high afore, and high stuck up apoop, her fore castle having two tiers, and her poop's castle three, with culverins in their ports. Her topsides were so tumbled home, that her breadth at the water may have been double her breadth at her wales, and she had not the newfangled fore-and-abafts of Master Fletcher, such as the *Judith* wore to sail on a wind. But she was costly built, her square sails being every one of the seven of heavy florence, broidered in the belly, and her fifty guns of good brass fabric. She was at this time driving free afore the wind under full spread, but with a rolling so restless as to be jeopardous, I judged. In fact, I took her for a crank pot, with such a tophamper and mass of upper-works, that she could scarce fail to dip her tier of falcons, if the sea should lash.

I was brought up to the master's room, the which was being used as an audience-chamber, and there at a table beheld five men in file. He in the centre, who proved to be both my accuser and judge, presently gave me to know that the evidence against me had been laid before the Qualifiers of the Office—which Qualifiers I understood to be none other than themselves there present—and been approved by the said Qualifiers; and when I had given replies to a catalogue of interrogatories as to my way of life in San Juan, I was then straightway put to the question. My breast, God wot, was rent with terrors, but my bearing, I trust, was distinguished by Christian courage. The interview was but brief: I demurred to kiss the cross; whereupon the President addressed me—he being the Dominic that I saw on the *prado,* a man whose mass of wrinkles, although he was yet young, and his wry smile within a nest of wrinkles, I carry still in my mind. My rudeness, he said, would prove to be but puny: for that during the day I should be put to a second audience in order to move me to a confession, and after to the screws.

For that second audience I waited, but it came not: for, huddled up in a corner 'twixt the sprit's end and a culverin's end, I became more and more aware that the *San Matteo* was labouring in the sea, and by evening mine ears were crowded with the sound of winds, so that I could no more hear the little sounds of the cook's house, the which was not in the hold, as with English vessels, but in a part of the fore castle abaft my cell. No food was brought me all that day, and I understood that all had enough to trouble them other than my unblest self.

I fell into a deep sleep, nor, I believe, awaked until near the next noon, though between noon and midnight was but little difference in my prison. I now anew knew, as before, of a tumult of winds, and understood by the ship's motion that she was now fleeing afore the gale, with a swinging downhill gait. Toward night, being anhungered, I got to thumping in desperate wise upon my prison, but no signal was given me that any heard me, and doubtless I was unheard in that turmoil of sounds.

And again I fell into forgetfulness, and again about midday, as I conjecture, bounded awake, being now roused by a shout of wind pouncing in upon me through the door, the which a stripling had just opened. He tumbled toward me with a bowl

of tum-tum and pork, and, having shot it upon my lap, put mouth to mine ear with the shout: "Eat, Englishman! Thou art doomed for the ship!"

He then fell out, leaving me in a maze. But I think that I had not ended the meal when the meaning of his words was but little uncertain to me, who was versed in the manners of the sea, and of Spanish seamen in especial; and I said within myself "the *San Matteo* is now doubtless near her end; the sun hath gone out of the sky; the course peradventure lost: and I, the heretic, am condemned to be thrown away, as Jonah, to assuage the tempest."

The rest of that day, therefore, I lay upon my face, recommending my spirit, my wife, and my children to my Creator until, toward night, three sailors came in, laid hands on me, and hauled me forth; and I was hardly hauled to the castle's portal, when my old samite coif leapt off my head, and was swept away.

Surely never mortal wretch had bleaker last look at the scheme of being than I that night. There remained some sort of disastrous glimmering in the air, but it was a glimmer that was itself but a mood of gloom. A rust on the nigh horizon that was the sun was swinging on high above the working of the billows, then hurling itself below, with an alternate circular working, as it were a dissolute or sea-sick thing. The skies were, as it were, tinted with inks, and appeared to be no higher beyond the sea than the mizzen-top, where sea and sky were mixed. I saw that the poop's mast was gone, and the *San Matteo* under two sails only, the mizzen-top sail and the spritsail: yet with these she was careering in desperate wise like a capon in a scare from the face of the tempest, taking in water with an alternate process over her port and starboard wales, and whirled to her top-castles in sprays: so that she was as much within the sea as on it. Our trip from my prison to the poop's castle must have occupied, with halts, no less than twenty minutes of time, so swung were our feet between deep and high: and in that time a multitude of sounds the most drear and forlorn seemed borne from out the bowels of the darkness to mine ears, as screams of craziness, a ding-dong of sea-bells, or cadences of sirens crying, or one sole toll of a funeral-knell. I was as one adream with awe: for I understood that into all that war of waters I was about to go down, alone.

Lashed to the starboard turret of the poop's castle by a cord within the ring at its paunch was a portugal, such as be employed to store pork on big voyages; and, sprawling on the deck, with his paws clutched within a window-sill of the turret, was the Jesuit, his robes all blown into disarray, with him being the ship's master, having a hammer's handle sticking out of his pouch, and four others, the particulars of whose persons mine eyes, as though I had scores of eyes that night, observed of their own act.

As I staggered near in the lax keeping of my guardians, the portugal was cast aslant in his lashing, and I could then descry within it one of those 30-inch masses of iron ballast, such as be named dradoes; by the which I understood that I should not be tossed forth coffinless, as Jonah, but in the portugal: inasmuch as the corpse of many a Jonah hath been known to "chase i' the wake", as mariners relate, to the disaster of them in the ship; and the coffining of such in ballasted casks has long been a plan of the Spanish in especial.

On my coming to the turret, he whom I took to be the master put hand upon

me, uttering somewhat which the hurricane drowned in his mouth, though I guessed that he egged me to go into the portugal: and indeed I was speedily heeled up and hustled in. Resistance would have been but little difficult to me, had I willed, but could have resulted only in the rolling overboard of others with me: nor had I a spirit of resistance, nay, probably lost my consciousness upon entering, for nothing can I remember more, till the top was covered in, save only one segment of it, through which I on my face glimpsed three struggling shapes, and understood that the Jesuit, now upheld 'twixt two of the shipmen, was shouting over me some litany or committal. In the next moment I lay choked in blackness, and had in my consciousness a hammer's banging.

Whether awake or adream, I seemed to recognize the moment when the portugal's mass splashed the ocean; I was aware of the drado's bulk tumbling about the sides, and of double bump of the iron, the one upon my breast, the other upon my right thigh.

Now, this was hardly owing to the water's roughness, for my last glance abroad before going into the portugal had shown me a singular condition of the sea: the ship appeared to have driven into a piece of water comparatively calm, and pallid, a basin perhaps half-a-mile in breadth, on a level rather below the rest of the ocean that darkly rolled round its edge; and the whole seemed to me to move with a slow wheeling: for I had noted it well, with that ten-eyed unwittingness wherewith I noted everything that night, as the mariners' apparel, or the four-square cap of the Jesuit crushed over his nose, or the porky stench of the portugal...

Down, swiftly down, and still profounder down, I ripped toward the foundry of things, to where the mountains and downs of the mid-sea drowse. I had soon lost all sense of motion: still, I divined—I knew—with what a swiftness I slid, profoundly drowned, mile on mile, and still down, from the home of life, and hope, and light, and time. I was standing on the drado, no less steadily than if on land, for the drado's weight held the portugal straight on end, the portugal's top being perhaps one inch above my head—for my hands touched it, paddling for some moments as though I was actually adrown, like the paddling pattes of a hound in his drowning. But I stood with no gasping for a good span, the portugal was so roomy, and it proved as good-made as roomy, though soon enough some ominous creakings gave me to know that the sea's weight was crushing upon his every square inch with a pressure of tons; moreover, both my palms being pressed forth against the portugal's side, all at once the right palm was pierced to the quick by some nail, driven inward by the squeezing of the sea's weight; and quickly thereupon I felt a drop of water fall upon my top, and presently a drop, and a drop, bringing upon me a deliberate drip, drip: and I understood that the sea, having forced a crack, was oozing through atop.

No shock, no stir was there: yet all my heart was conscious of the hurry of my dropping from the world. I understood—I knew—when I had fared quite out of hue and shape, measure and relation, down among the dregs of creation, where no ray may roam, nor a hope grow up; and within my head were going on giddy divinations of my descent from depth to depth of deader nothingness, and dark after dark.

Groan could I not, nor sigh, nor cry to my God, but stood petrified by the greatness of my perishing, for I felt myself banished from His hand and the scope of His compassion, and ranging every moment to a more strange remoteness from the territories of His reign.

Yet, as my sense was toward whirling unto death, certain words were on a sudden with me, that for many a month, I think, had never visited my head: for it was as if I was now aware of a chorus of sound quiring in some outermost remoteness of the heaven of heavens, whence the shout of ten thousand times ten thousand mouths reached to me as a dream of mine ear: and this was their shout and the passion of their chanting: "If I ascend up into Heaven, He is there; if I make my bed in Hell, behold, He is there; if I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall His hand lead me, His right hand shall hold me."

But the lack of air, that in some minutes had become the main fact of my predicament, by this time was such, that I had come to be nothing but a skull and throat crowded with blood that would bound from me, but could not; yet I think that in the very crux of my death-struggle a curiosity as to the grave, and the nature of death—a curiosity as frivolous as the frolics of a trickster—delayed my failing; for I seemed to desire to see myself die.

Still upon my top, with a quickening drip, drip, dropped the leak, and this in my extremest smart I ceased not to mark.

But there came a moment when all my sentience was swallowed in an amazing consciousness of motion. First I was urgently jerked against the portugal, the which was tugged sidewards by some might: some moments more, and the portugal bumped upon something. By a happy instinct, I had stiffened myself, my feet on the drado, my head pressed against the top piece; and immediately I was aware of precipitous rage, haste the most rash, for a quick succession of shocks, upon rocks, as I imagine, quick as you may say one, two, three, knocked me breathless who was already breathless, racking the cask's frame, and battering me back, so to say, out of my death into sense. And or ever I could lend half a thought to this mystery of motion-on-the-horizontal down by the ocean's bottom, I was hounded on to a mystery still more astounding—a sound in the realm of muteness—a roar—that very soon grew to a most great and grave tumult. During which growth of tumult I got the consciousness of being rushed through some tunnel, for the concussions of the cask on every side came fast and more frightfully faster; and I now made out, how I cannot tell, that the direction of my race was half horizontal, and half downward, toward the source of that sounding. How long the trip lasted my spirit, spinning in that thundering dark, could hardly sum up: it might have been a minute or five, a mile or twenty: but there came a moment when I felt the portugal lifted up, and tossed; it was spinning through space; and it dropped upon rock with a crash which ravished me from my consciousness.

So intemperate was this mauling, that upon returning to myself after what may have been many hours, I had no doubt but that I was dead; and within myself I breathed the words, "The soul is an ear; and Eternity is a roar."

For I appeared at present to be a creature created with but one single sense,

since, on placing my fingers an inch afore my face, in vain I strained my vision to trace them; my body, in so far as I was any longer cognizant thereof, was, as it were, lost to me, and blotted out; so that I seemed to be naught but an ear, formed to hear unceasingly that tumult that seemed the universe: and anew and anew I mused indolently within me, "Well, the soul is an ear; and Eternity is a roar."

Thus many minutes I lay, listing with interest to the tone of the roar, the which hath with it a shell's echoing that calleth, making a chaunting vastly far in the void, like an angel's voice far noising. What proved to me that I was disembodied was the apparent fact that I was no longer in the portugal, since I at present breathed free; nevertheless, upon becoming conscious in the course of time of a stench of sea-brine, and presently of the mingling therewith of the portugal's stink of pork, I straightway felt myself to be living flesh; and, on reaching out my fingers, felt the sufficient reason of my breathing, to wit, that the portugal's bottom had been breached in, and a hoop there started by his fall, for the staves' ends at that part at present spread all asprawl. I was prostrate upon my back, and the drado and broken portugal's bottom lay over my legs, so that the portugal must have toppled over on his side after striking on his end.

The next circumstance that I now observed was a trembling of the ground on which I lay, the which trembled greatly, as with a very grave ague.

I set myself then to talk with myself, recalling, not without an effort of my memory, the certain facts of my predicament: to wit, firstly, that I had been cast in a cask from a bark called the *San Matteo,* not less than a century agone, I thought; I had then beyond doubt gone down toward the bottom of the sea; here some sea-river had undoubtedly seized and reeled me through some tunnel beneath the sea's base: and the under-tow of this sea-river's suction it was which must have occasioned that basin-like appearance of the sea's surface with a circular working, observed by me some moments before my going in the portugal. This salt torrent, having caught my cask, must have hurtled me through the tunnel to a hollow hall or vault in the bowels of the earth at the tunnel's mouth, and then hurled the portugal from the tunnel's mouth down upon some rock in the grotto, and so broken the portugal's bottom. The cave must contain the air which it had shut in in the age of the convulsion of nature which had made it a cave, peradventure ere the sea was there, thus permitting me to breathe. And the roar that was roaring should be the thundering of the ocean tumbling down the walls of the hall from out the tunnel's mouth, the preponderousness of which thundering's dropping-down occasioned that ague of the ground which was shaking me.

So much I could well sum up; also, from that echo's humming, whose vast psalmodying haunts the waterfall's thunder, I judged that the hollowness of the hall must be large beyond thought. More than this I understood not; but, this being understood, I covered my face, and gave myself to lamenting: for, ever and again, together with the thunder and his echo, worked certain burstings and crashes of the cataract, brief belchings breaching on a sudden, troubling the echo with yet huger rumours, madding sad to hearken to; and my hand could I not descry, stared I never so crazily nigh; and the ague of the ground was, as it were, a shivering at

the shout of God-Omnipotent's mouth: so that sobs gobbled forth of my bosom, when I understood the pathos of this place.

On throwing my hands over my eyes to cry, I felt on them a slime crass with granules, perhaps splashed upon me through the open end of the portugal on his tumble, the which when I had brushed away, with much anguish I got my head round to where my feet had been. No doubt had I but I should of necessity perish of thirst and dearth of food; but that I might come to my doom at liberty, I crept forth of my prison, as a chick from the rupture of his shell.

A tinder-box was in my pouch, but, in the swound of my comprehension, I did not then remember it, but moved in darkness over a slime with my arms outstretched, drenched ever with a drizzle, the source of which I did not know. Slow I moved, for I discovered my right thigh to be crushed, and all my body much mauled; and, or ever I had moved ten steps, my shoe stepped into emptiness, and down with a shout I sped, spinning, to the depth.

My falling was stopped by a splash into a water that was warm, into which I sank far; and I rose through it bearing up with me some putrid brute that drew the rheum of his mucus over my face. I then struck out to swim back to the island from whose cliff I had tumbled: for I saw that the cavern's bottom was occupied by a sea, or salt pond, and that upon some island in this sea the cask must have been cast. But my effort to get again to the island availed not, for a current which seized me carried me quick and still quicker, increasing at the last to such a careering that I could no more keep me up over the waves; whereupon an abandonment of myself came upon me, and I began now to drown, yet ever grasping out, as the drowning do; and afore I swooned I was thrown against a shore, where, having clutched something like a gracile trunk, I dragged my frame up on a shore covered over with that same grainy slush, and tumbled to a slumber which dured, I dare say, two days.

I started awake with those waters in mine ear whose immortal harmony, I question it not, I will for ever hear in my heart; and I sat still, listing, afeared to budge, lest I should afresh blunder into trouble, while mine eyeballs, bereft of light, braved the raylessness with their staring. My feet lay at a sea's edge, for I could feel the upwashing of the waves, the which wash obliquely upon the shore, being driven by a current: but near as they were, I could hear ne'er a splash, nor anything could hear, except the cataract's crashing, joined with the voice of his own echoing, whose music tuneth with the thundering a euphony like that of lute-strings with drum ahumming, and anon the racket of those added crashings, when masses more ponderous of the cataract drop; and I did ever find myself listing with mine ear reached sideward, drawn to the darksome chaunting, forgetting my hunger, and the coming of death: listing I wot not how long, perhaps hours, perhaps night-longs: for here in this hall is no Time, but all is blotted out but the siren's sorrow that haunts it; and a hundred years is as one hour, and one hour as a hundred years.

I remarked, however, immediately, that the waves which washed my feet were not warm like that part of the water where I had fallen into the lake: so that I understood that the lake is a cauldron of different temperatures at different parts, the waters which roll in from the ocean being cold, but the lake warmed by flames

beneath the cave: indeed, each region of the cave, so far as my feet ever reached in it, is always warm to the hand, and the atmosphere warm, though thick, and sick with stinks of the sea.

After a long while I found the tinder-box within my pouch, wherein also I found a chisel which I was bringing to my house to sharpen on the night of my capture, and also a small gar or gimlet. So I struck a flash that cut mine eyes like a gash, and I kindled a rag, the which glowed a rich gore-colour upon an agitated water rushing past the shore; and although only a small region of the dark was lit up, I could see sufficient of the shore's sweep to understand that I was standing on a mainland made of granite, but not altogether without marl on the ground, nigh behind me being a grove of well-formed growths resembling elms, all gnarled and venerable, yet no taller than my belly, although some do come to my neck. Their leaves be milk-white, and even of a quite round shape, and they do for ever shake themselves with the ground that shakes, and produce a globose fruit, the which is blanched, too, and their boles pallid. I saw long afterwards another dwarf of just the same shape, only his fruit oozeth a juice like soap's water, that maketh a lather. On the lake also I have lately seen by the torch's light near the island a weed with leaves over two yards long, the which be caused to float on the water by small bladders attached to it; and also in the marshy spot by the promontory is the forest of bulrushes that show a tuft, or plume, at their summit, and they do shake themselves, their stem being about three feet high, and they shoot out a single root that groweth visible over the ground seven feet or more in his length; besides which, I observed none other shrubs, save a pale purple fungus, well-nigh white, growing on these rocks where I write, and in the corridor which is on this side of the pond of pitch.

But in that minute's glimmering, while my rag's light was dancing on the waves, I knew what superabundance of food lay for me in this place, to be had by only putting forth of my hand: for in that paltry area of the water I saw pale creatures like snakes seven or eight feet long, tangled together in a knot, and some more alone, and four globose white beings, so that I could see that the lake is alive with life; and they lay there quite unaware of the light that pried on their whiteness, so that I decided that they be wights deprived of eyes. A very long time later on, probably many years, I came upon the stream to the lake's left, by the promontory, the which is thronged with oysters, with many sorts of pearl, and conch shells: but at the first I saw it not.

To have the creatures of the lake, I take stand to my knees in the water's margin (for farther I may not enter for the strength of the current), lean forward with the torch, and abide the coming of the creature of my liking, the which resembles the creatures called a trunk-fish in the tropics, being of triangular form, with freckles. The species of the creatures of the lake be few, though their number great; and, as all the plants be very pigmy, so all the animals be of great bigness, save one thing resembling a lizard, a finger in his length, that I have seen on the reefs, and his tail is formed in the shape of a leaf, and engorgeth itself grossly, and it gazeth through great globose eyeballs that glare lidless, but they be blind eyeballs; and one only wight of the lake hath eyes, but they do hang by a twine out of his eye-

sockets, and dangle about his countenance, and be blind. As to their catching, this I managed at starting without so much as a torch, but by the touch alone; nor do their sluggish natures struggle against my grabbing, but by their motions I understand the wonder that they have what creature he might be who removeth them from their secret home. The flesh of one and all is soft and watery, yet cruel tough, and crude to the tongue. My repasts at starting were ate raw; but afterwards I made fires with the tree-trunks, the which being dry-timbered, I could chop down with the chisel and a rock for my hammer. Later on when I did find out the rock-hall, I laid my fire there: but almost all the rags of my garments, except my jerkin, had been burned up for tinder, before I unearthed the marsh of bulrushes, whose pith served me from thenceforth both for tinder and food, and at present also for parchment: for, boiled in the hot rivulet in the rock-hall, the pith and fish together giveth an excellent good food, when, being voided of moisture, and pounded, they become a powder or flour; so that when I had once come at the bulrushes, where, too, are the oysters, being put upon the plan of boiling, I no more roasted my food as before.

For what appeared a long period, as it were long weeks, I mollified my thirst by soaking my body on the shore's verge, where the waves break; but thirst became a rage in my throat, like that lust of light in mine eyes, so that sometimes, pronouncing a shout, I did desperately drench my bowels, drinking my fill of the bitterness, the which, I am convinced, is more bitterer than the bitterness of the outer sea. By this time I had roamed exploring far around that part of the shore on which I was cast up, and had found about me a boundless house of caves, chambers, corridors, with dwarf forests, and stretches of sponges of stone, boulders, and tracts of basalt columns, a fantastic mass to me of rock and darkness, all racked, and like the aspen dancing, to the farthest point of my wandering, all inhabited by the noise of the waters' voice, and stinking of the sea with so raw a breath, that in several spots the nostrils scarce can bear it. There be shells of many shapes and dimensions upon the land, many enamelled with gems and pearl, sea-urchins also, star-fish, sea-cucumbers, and other sea-beasts with spines, mussels nigh to the promontory on the lake's left, corals, and many kinds of sponges, many monstrous huge and having a putrid stench, some, as it were, sponges of stone, others soft, and others of lucid glass, painted gallant with hues of the rainbow, and very gracious shaped, as hand-baskets, or ropes of glass, but crude of odour. Till I had set up my hearth in the rock-hall, I rambled about without any torch, for the cause that I knew not yet well the inflammable mood of the wood, nor had yet tumbled upon the sulphur, nor the pitch, with which to lard the torches; and, walking dark, with just a flash anon, I did often count my footsteps, it might be to a thousand, or two, till tired out. But spite of my ramblings, my body had knobs like leprosy, and was lacerated with my scratching, and racked with the rushing through me of the salt draughts which I drank, afore ever I chanced upon fresh water. That day I descended by three great steps that are made as by men's hands, and that lie peradventure half a mile from the lake, into a basalt hall, vastly capacious, so that forty chariots could race abreast therein; and the walls be as straight as the walls of masons, the roof low, only some twenty foot aloft, flat and smooth and black, and at the remote

end of it a forest of basalt columns stand. There I marked that the air was even warmer than the warm air near the lake, and it was not long ere I had advanced into a hot steaming, with a sulphur stench, the which I had no sooner perceived than I fell upon my hands over a heap which proved, when I had struck a flash, to be slushy sulphur. I also saw a canal cut through the floor across the rock-hall's breadth, as regular as if graved there, this being two feet deep, as I discovered, and two feet across, through which canal babbled a black brook, bubbling hot, the floor on each bank of the canal being heaped with sulphur. I had soon scooped up some of the fluid with the tinder-box, and upon his cooling somewhat, I discovered it to be fresh, though sulphurous, and also tarry, in his taste; and thenceforth I had it always cooling in rows of conch shells by the rock-hall's left wall.

And during all the years of my tarrying in this tomb, the rock-hall hath become, in some manner, my home. There, in a corner nigh the three steps, I made up a fire; I put round it stones, and over the stones a slab, and plaiting my beard into my hair behind me, I there broiled my meat, until the time when I took to boiling the mixed trunkfish and bulrush in the canal's boiling brook; and for a long while I kept the fire ever fed with wood from the tiny forests: for that I loved his light.

But, as to light, I have nineteen times beheld it in this dark from other causes than mine own fires, seventeen times the light being lightning: for lightning I must call it, the land lightning like the sky: and this I understand not at all. But I was standing by the water's margin, bent upon catching my white blindlings, when the cavern became far and wide as it were an eye that wildly opened, winked five million to the minute, and as suddenly closed; and after a minute of thick darkness as afore, it opened once more, quick quivered, and closed. And there all ghast I stayed, in my heart's heart the ghast thought: "Thou, God, Seest Me." But though mine eyes staggered at the glare, I fancy that in fact it was but faint, and the ghost only of a glare, for of the cave's secrets little was thereby revealed unto me: and sixteen times in like wise his wings have quivered, and the wildness of his eye hath stared at me like the visitations of an archangel: and twice, besides, I have beheld the cave lighted by the volcano.

But it was long before ever the volcano came that I fell in with the mescal: for it was no long time after that surprise of lightning that, in pacing once to the shore to take up some trunkfish which I had thrown in the slush there—I think eight or twelve years may have gone over me—I happened to bruise in my fingers one of the pigmy globose fruit, and there oozed out of it a milk that I put to my lips. It was bitter, but I did swallow some drops unawares, the result whereof was wondrous: for even ere I reached the beach, an apathy enwrapped my being; I let myself drop down by the breakers' brim; my brow and body collapsed in a lassitude; and my lips let out the whisper: "pour on: but as for me, I will know rest." I was thereupon lapped in trances the most halcyon and happy; the roaring rolled for me into such oratories as my mouth may not pronounce, though I appeared, so to speak, to *see*, more than to hear, that music; and in the mean time mine eyes, fast closed, had afore them a universe of hues in slow movement and communion, hues glowing, and hues ghostly and gnomelike, some of them new hues to me, so that I knew not at all how to call them, with cataracts of pomegranate grains pattering, waves

of parrot green, wheels of raspberry reeling, dapplings of apple and pansy, pallid eyeballs of bile and daffodil, pellucid tulips, brooks of rubies, auroras, roses, all awork in a world earnester than Earth, that it were empty to attempt to tell of.

I had heard tell at San Juan of the shrub which they do name "the mescal button," chewed by the Mexicans to produce upon them such revelations of hues; and I have concluded that this shrub of the cave must be of nature akin. But though the gift of it transfigured that stink-pit beneath the sea into a region of the genii for me, I was aware that to munch thereof was presumptuous, for the troubles that his rancour bringeth upon the body of men were quickly obvious upon me. But I made never an attempt to abandon his happiness, for it wheeleth through the brain to so sweet a strain, and talketh such gossip to the organs of the consciousness, as I do not suppose to be true of the very lotus, nor of that pleasant root that is known as nepenthe.

I have spent years on years, nay, as it seems to me, eras on eras, in one dreaming by the sea's rim, while my soul, so to speak, passed into the cataract's inmost roar, and became as one therewith. I lay there naked, for at first I had preserved my jerkin and shirt to serve for tinder, until I tumbled upon the discovery of the bulrush-pith, whereupon I employed the jerkin and shirt to contain the pith and fish for their boiling; so after the last of my trouser's rags had shredded from around my legs, and my shoes, too, from my feet, through great periods of time I have lain there naked, though enveloped to my belly in my hair and beard, idly dreaming, finding it too dreary a trial to seethe my food, and often eating raw, having long agone let the fire in the rock-hall go out. In the end I have shirked even the burden of bending in the sea's surf, or of journeying to the mussel stream, to get at my grub, and will spend considerable periods with never a bit other drink or meat than that bittersweet milk of the mescal.

From this life of sloth twice only have I been disturbed by fright, the first time when the volcano came, the second time when I observed the increasing dearth of air to breathe; and on each occasion I was spurred to take torch and search further afield than e'er before what the vault holds—in both searches meeting with what turned out serviceable to my needs: for in the first search I butted on the bulrush bush, which I believe I butted on years ere I observed this increasing dearth of air; and it was the increasing dearth of air which sent me peering further a second time, and then I saw the pond of pitch. This latter is beyond the forest of basalt columns at the far end of the rock-hall; and it was in passing to it through those columns that I saw the beast's bones, that be bigger, I believe, than several elephants together, although the beast resembled an elephant, having straight tusks, exceeding long; and his jaw hath six huge teeth, very strange, every several tooth being made of littler ones, the which cling about it like nipples; and there among those pillars his ribs may have rested for many a century, some of them being now brittle and embrowned; and beyond the pillars is a passage, perfectly curved, having a purplish fungus growing upon his rock; and beyond the passage is a cavern than whose threshold I could no farther advance, for the bed thereof is a bitumen sea, which is half-warm and thick at the brink, but, I think, liquid hot in the middle; and all over his face broods a universe of rainbows, dingy and fat, which be from the fat vapours of the pitch bringing forth rainbows, not rainbows of heaven, but, so to

say, fallen angels, grown gross and sluggish. But years ere this, I think, I had seen the bulrushes: for, soon after the volcano came, in roaming over the left shore of the cataract's sea—the which left shore is flat and widespread, and hath no high walls like the right side—I walked upon a freshet of fresh warm water, and after following it upward, saw all round a marsh's swamp, and the bush of bulrushes. This is where the oysters be so crass, and they be pearl oysters, for all that soil be crass with nacreous matter of every sort, with barrok pearls, mother-of-pearl, and in most of the oysters which I opened pearls, with a lot of conch shells that have within them pink pearls, and there be also the black pearl, such as they have in Mexico and the West Indies, with the yellow and likewise the white, which last be shaped like the pear, and large, and his pallor hath a blank brightness, very priceless, and, so to say, bridal. As to the bulrush, his trunk is triangular (like the trunk-fish), some five inches wide at the bottom, and giveth a white pith good for food. I came, moreover, upon the discovery after a long time that, since this pith lieth in layers, these, being steeped in water, and afterwards dried, do shrink to a parchment, quite white and soft, but tending to be yellow and brittle in time.

But for these two adventures, first to the bulrushes, and then to the pond or sea of pitch, I cannot remember that that long trance I had by the shore was broken by any excursion. But I had a rough enough rousing in that hour when, upon opening mine eyes, I beheld, not the old darkness, but all the hall disclosed in scarlet, and felt the cavern in movement, not with that proper trembling that I knew, due to the preponderousness of the cataract's mass over the earth's fabric, but racked with an earthquake's racking: and when mine eyes, now shyer than the night-bird's, recovered their courage, I observed the sea's whole surface heaved up like sand-heaps, dandled up with the earthquake's dancing. Now also for the first time I saw aloft to my right the tunnel's monstrous mouth, out of which the cataract's mass tumbleth down, the mouth's top rim being rounded, like the top lip of a man's mouth crying aloud. I saw also the cataract rolling hoary across his whole breast's breadth, woolly with flocks and beards of froth, as it were Moses' beard, except at the centre, where it gallops glassy smooth and more massy, for there the sea cometh out from the tunnel's inwards to stretch itself out in that mouth that shouteth aloud. I saw also the roof like a rufous sky of rock, and right before mine eyes lay an island, long and narrow, upon the which I had been cast at the first, for there yet lay the portugal on the right end of the island, that right end lying quite nigh the cataract, and the island's left end some twenty yards from the lake's left end. And I saw the lake in his entirety by spying over the island's centre, where the land lies low, the lake having an egg's form, perhaps two miles in his length, I being at the egg's small end. I saw also that the cave's right side, where the wall rises sheer, is washed directly by the lake's wheeling career; and since the cataract there crashes down, along that right side I cannot advance; nor along the cave's left side can I advance so much as a mile, for there a headland juts out into the lake, dividing that side of the cave into great rooms. I saw also nigh the far shore of the lake four more small islands of rock, and I was shewn, from the lake's ocean-like aspect, that his waters be vastly profound, his bottom being doubtless housed far down in the planet's bowels. All was lit up. And some distance beyond the lake's boundaries, I saw the mouth of some cave, through which came up a

haze of radiance sparkling, and vaulting stones, and therewith some tongues of flame, which now shewed, and now withdrew their rouge.

I gathered that some volcanic action was going on under the cavern, and as I there stayed, agape at it, I saw arise out of the lake in the remote distance, and come toward me, a thing, with the which I so long had lived, and known it not. His body lay soft in curves on the billows nigh a furlong behind his uplifted head, and I could not fly, nor turn mine eyes from the pitifulness of his appearing in the light. His head and face be of the dimension of a cottage, having a shameful likeness to a death's-head, being bony, shiny, and very tight-skinned, and of a mucky white colour, with freckles. It hath a forehead and nose-ridge, but, where eyes should be, stands blank skin only; and it drew nigh me with the toothless house of his mouth wide open in a scream of fear, distrusting Him that made it: for the air was waxing still hotter, and it may have had an instinct of calamity, peradventure from some experience of the volcano's fierceness a century since. It travelled nigh under the island's right end through the cataract's foam, and then close under me, nor could see me look at his discovered nudity, nor could my rooted foot flee from it; and on it journeyed, circling the lake's surface with the dirge of his lamentation. Immediately after I lost my reason through the fierceness of the heat, and reeled; and when I came back to myself the cave was as black as ever. And once again, long afterwards I saw flames flutter in the cave beyond the lake, a grey dust rained over the lake's face, the great creature arose, and a grove of the trees at this end were sered with heat; but since then the event has never been seen.

But it was soon subsequent to this second convulsion that I made an observation: to wit, that unless I was well under the rule of the mescal fruit—when I do scarce seem to breathe—I became aware of an oppression of the chest. And this grew with me; so that I began to commune within me, saying: "Though the cavern be vast, the air that it containeth must be of limited volume, and I have inhaled it long: for whereas when I hither came I was a young thing, I am now old. My lungs have day by day consumed the wholesome air; and the day approacheth when I must surely perish."

At the commencement it was only when I lay me to rest that the trouble oppressed me, but, sat I up, it passed; then after, if I sat, it oppressed me; but, stood I up it passed: so that I understood it to be so that a lake of noxious vapour lay at the bottom of the air of this place, a lake due to my breathing, that each year grew in depth and noxiousness, the longer I breathed: this vapour having a sleepy effect, not happy like the mescal's, but highly unhappy, making me nightmares and aches of my body. In the beginning I got relief by going to live in other regions than in the rock-hall and on the beach: but in every direction my way hath now been blocked, for I have now inhabited in turn every cranny of the cavern whereto I am able to penetrate, and the vapour is in all, troubling also the shrubs of all sorts, the which let fall their heads, and shed their health. There remain some coigns among the rockeries, wherein, when I toil aloft to them, I may yet breathe with some freedom; but that my days are numbered I know. My God! my God! why hast Thou created me?

But soon after understanding the manner of my undoing, I began to argue in myself as regards the cavern and his architecture as never formerly, arguing that

whereas so great volumes of water came in, and the vault was not filled, there must needs be some outlet for an equal volume to flow out. I was led to conjecture that the tunnel which admits the sea into the cavern is at some sea-mountain's summit; that the cavern must be in the mountain's bowels; and that the outflow out of the cavern must be down another much longer tunnel, leading down to the mountain's bottom into the sea. I therefore conceived the notion that, if I could reach the portugal, get it repaired, and, in it, introduce myself into the tunnel of outflow (the which I knew to be beyond the headland on the lake's left, where the lake's two wheeling currents meet), then I should be carried down and out into the bottom of the sea, should thereupon rise to the sea's surface—for the unweighted portugal would certainly float with me—and there I might bore a hole or two in the portugal's upper belly for air, and be picked up by a ship before my stores were done, and before my death from hunger or suffocation, I being well drugged with the mescal, and so but little breathing or eating. As to introducing myself into the tunnel of outflow, nothing more was necessary than to get the portugal to the headland's end, get myself into it, and roll myself in the portugal from the headland's end into the lake: where the currents would not fail to bear me toward the place of outflow, and I should be sucked down into the tunnel.

I meditated that the stupendousness of the attempt in no fashion lessened my chance: for that laws will act exactly on the immense scale as on the small. The portugal I could get to by going into the lake at the egg's-point of the lake, whence the current would carry me away along the left shore toward the island, the left end whereof I might catch by continually swimming strong to the right; and lest I should be dashed to fragments in my grand journey through the tunnel, I determined to pad the portugal's inside with the bulrush pith; and moreover I devised a sliding door in the portugal's side, the which when I should reach the sea's surface would be furnishing me with breathing: in the making whereof I did not doubt but that my former craft in carpentry would help me out. That I might be struck blind by the moon's brightness, and surely by the sun's, upon opening mine eyes up there above I reflected: but I price eyes as of but paltry value to a man, and should estimate it no hardship to dispense with mine, such as they are. On the whole, I had no fear; and the reason of my fearlessness, as I at present perceive, lay in this: that in my heart I never at all intended to attempt the venture. It was a fond thought: for, granting that I got out, how could I live without the cataract? I should surely die. And what good were life to me there in the glare of day, without the mescal's joys, and without the secret presence of the voice, and the thing which it secretly shouteth? In such separation from the power of my life I should pass frailly away as a spectre at day-break: for by the power of the voice is my frail life sustained, and thereon I hang, and therein I have my being. And this in my soul I must have known: but in the futile mood that possessed me, I made three several attempts to gain the portugal, terrified the while at mine own temerity; and twice I failed to make the left end of the island, for the current carried me beyond—toward the tunnel of outflow, I doubted not; yet were my terrors not of that horror mainly, but of the monster in the lake's depth, the which stayeth there pale and pensive, meditating his meditations: for I knew that if my foot or hand just touched his skin, I must assuredly reel and sink, shrieking mad, since I swam dark, but having an

unlighted torch in my hand, the tinder-box being tied within my beard; and the first twice I was hurled to land upon the headland, but the third time upon the island's left end, the rock of which I clambered up with my hands lacerated by shells. And after lighting the torch, I wrought my steps toward the island's right end; and there lay the portugal even as I had left it twenty, forty, years ago, the slime on his side yet wet from the water-fall's aura that haunts the island. And in that spot I saw, not the portugal alone, but moreover a sword's hilt, a human skull, and a clock's racket, thither tossed by the cataract. The portugal was still good, for the pitch which is on it: and having cast out the drado by an effort of all my strength, I struck out four of the nails from the three bottom pieces that had been sprung, nailed the three pieces, and the broken hoop of wood, too, to the side of the portugal, and so consigned the portugal to the waters, the which, I was assured, would bear it to the small end of the lake's egg-shape, as they had borne me upon mine ancient fall from the island.

But I had myself no sooner been spued again upon the mainland, more dead than alive, and there found the portugal stranded, than I knew myself for a futile dreamer, wearying myself without sincere motive: for that I should really abandon the cavern was a thing not within the capability of nature. And there by the shore's edge I left the portugal lying a good while, abiding for the most part upon the crags of these rocks that be like gradients on the right side of the hall, until that day when it was suggested to my spirit how strangely had been given me both ink and paper in this place, the knowledge moreover how to get the portugal forth of the grot with a history of that thing which my God in song hath murmured unto me, having furtively hid me with His hand, though a seraph's pen could never express it; nor could I long resist the pressure of that suggestion to write, and send forth the writing in the portugal.

For the portugal's mending I had the gimlet, the chisel, mescal timber, and some of the nails from the sprung bottom, which could be spared; nor was the job hard, since the one started hoop could be nicely spliced. I rolled and got the portugal up to this level ground in the rocks, surrounding myself, as I wrought, with tarred torches, which I stuck in the rocks' cracks: for down below it is reluctantly if a fire will now burn; and at this height also the torches do burn with shy fires.

Or ever the portugal was repaired, I had got ready the pages for writing, having divided fifteen of the bulrush piths into strips, then wetted, and dried them; but there be spongy spots in them where the lampblack that I have manufactured out of the pitch runneth rather abroad under the splint of fish-bone that serves for my pen, hurting the fairness of my writing. That I could write at all I rather doubted, on the count that I have not for so long handled pen nor spoken, and on the count moreover of the trembling: for not only the pen trembleth by reason of mine age, but the parchment trembleth by reason of the vault's trembling: and between those two tremblements, in a sick sheen which flickers ever, these sheets have, letter by letter, been writ. The fifteen sheets of pith, moreover, have proved too little, and I am writing now on the second of two sheets that are sections of a fish's skin.

But now it is finished: and I send it out, if so be a fellow in the regions above may read it, and know. My name, if I have not yet writ it down, was James Dowdy Saul; and I was born not far from the borough of Bideford in the county of Devon.

My God! My God! why hast Thou created me?

I ask it: for the question ariseth of itself to my mind because of the crass facts of my predicament; yet my heart knoweth it, Lord God, to be the grumble of an ingrate: for a hidden thing is, that is winninger than wife, or child, or the shining of any light, and is like unto treasure hid in a field, the which when a man findeth, he selleth all, and buyeth that field; and I thank, I do thank Thee, for Thy voice, and for my lot, and that it was Thy will to ravish me: for the charm of Thy secret is more than the rose, exceeding utterance.

THE PLACE OF PAIN

by

M. P. SHIEL

Shiel appears to have been an author's author; at least the list of appreciations on the dust jackets of his later books includes quotes from fantasy writers as distinguished as Arthur Machen, H. G. Wells, Edward Shanks, J. B. Priestley and Sir Hugh Walpole. It is understandable that fellow-writers would be fascinated by the bizarre eccentricities of his style, possibly eager to learn an occasional trick adaptable to their craft. For this reason, he exerted a degree of influence upon the field. With a strange talent for words, he wrote well in spite of an utter lack of discipline for orderly plotting or for maintaining control of his skills.

The original magazine publication of The Place of Pain *has not been determined even by Shiel's most devoted bibliographers, A. Reynolds Morse and the British poet John Gawsworth. One of Shiel's most effective short pieces, it received general modern-day circulation when John Gawsworth collaborated with Shiel to collect eleven short stories and excerpts from novels into a book titled* The Invisible Voices (*Richards, London, 1935*). *A tissue of new connecting material attempted to weave them into a series of related narratives; since each story was "told" by a character on a successive day, in a feeble attempt to give the chapters*

continuity, The Place of Pain *was titled* The Place of Pain Day *in the book. Later, the original version was anthologized by Gawsworth several times in horror collections, and its last known appearance was in 1951 in Number 16 of* AVON FANTASY READER.

Though my theme is about the place of evil, and about how the Rev. Thomas Podd saw it, it is rather a case of evil in heaven: for I think British Columbia very like heaven, or like what I shall like my heaven to be, if ever I arrive so high—one mass of mountains, with mirrors of water mixed up with them, torrents and forests, and roaring Rhones.

It was at Small Forks that it happened, where I went to pass a fortnight—and stayed five years; and how the place changed and developed in that short time is really incredible, for at first Small Forks was the distributing center of only three mining-camps, and I am sure that not one quarter of the district's two million tons of ore of today was then thought of.

At the so-called Scatchereen Lode, three miles from the lake, there was one copper smelter, but not one silver-lead mine within fifty miles, and no brewery, no machine-shop, no brick plant. Nor had Harper Falls as yet been thought of as a source of power.

It was Harper Falls that proved to be the undoing of Pastor Thomas Podd, as you are to hear; and I alone have known that it was so, and why it was so.

I think I saw Podd in my very first week at Small Forks—one evening on the Embankment.

(You may know that Small Forks runs along the shore of an arm of Lake Sakoonay, embowered in bush at the foot of its mountains—really very like a nook in Paradise, to my mind.)

Podd that evening was walking with another parson on the Embankment, and the effect of him upon me was the raising of a smile, my eye at that time being unaccustomed to the sight of black men in parsons' collars and frocks. But Podd was rather brown than black—a meagre little man of fifty, with prominent cheek bones, hollow cheeks, a scraggy rag of beard, a cocky carriage, and a forehead really intellectual, though his eyes did strike me as rather wild and scatterbrained.

He was a man of established standing in all Small Forks, where a colony of some forty colored persons worked at the lumber-mills. To these Podd preached in a corrugated chapel at the top of Peel Street.

He held prayer-meetings on Monday nights, and one Monday night, when I had been in Small Forks a month or so, I stepped into his conventicle, on coming home from a tramp, and heard the praying—or, rather, the demanding for those darkies banged the pew-backs and shook them irritably.

When it was over and I was going out, I felt a tap on my back, and it was the reverend gentleman, who had raced after the stranger. Out he pops his pompous paw, and then, with a smile, asked if I was "thinking of joining us." I was not doing that, but I said that I had been "interested," and left him.

Soon after this he called to see me, and twice in three months he had tea with me—in the hope of a convert, perhaps. He did not succeed in this, but he did succeed in interesting me.

The man had several sciences at his finger-ends; I discovered that he had a genuine passion for Nature; and I gathered—from himself, or from others, I can't now remember—that it was his habit ever and anon to cut himself off from humankind, so as to lose himself for a few days in that maze of mountains in which the Sakoonay district towers toward the moon.

No pressure of business, no consideration or care, could keep Podd tame and quiet in Small Forks when this call of

the wild enticed him off. It seems to have been long a known thing about the town, this trick of his character, and to have been condoned and pardoned as part of the man. He had been born within forty miles of Small Forks, and seemed to me to know Columbia as a farmer knows his two-acre meadow.

Well, some two weeks after that second visit of his to me the news suddenly reached me that something had gone wrong in the Rev. Thomas Podd's head—could not help reaching me, for the thing was the gossip and laugh of the district far outside Small Forks.

It appears that late on the Saturday evening the reverend gentleman had come home from one of his vast tramps and truant interviews with Nature; then, on the Sunday morning, he had entered the meeting-house scandalously late, and had reeled with the feet of some moon-struck creature into the pulpit—without his coat! without his collar! his braces hanging down!—and then, leaning his two elbows on the pulpit Bible, he had looked steadily, mockingly, at his flock of black sheep, and had proceeded to jeer and sneer at them.

He had called them frankly a pack of apes, a band of black and babbling babies; said that he could pity them from his heart, they were so benighted, so lost in darkness; that what they knew in their woolly nuts was just nothing; that no one knew, save him, Podd; that he alone of men know what he knew, and had seen what he had seen. . . .

Well, he had been so much respected for his intellectual parts, his eloquence, his apparent sincerity as a Christian man, that his congregation seem to have taken this gracelessness with a great deal of toleration, hoping perhaps that it might be only an aberration which would pass; but when the revered gentleman immediately afterwards took himself off anew into his mountains, to disappear for weeks—no one knew where—that was too much. So when he came back at last, it was to see another dark parson filling his place.

From that moment his social degeneration was rapid. He abandoned himself to poverty and tatters. His wife and two

daughters shook the dust of him from off their shoes, and left Small Forks—to find a livelihood for themselves somewhere, I suppose. But Podd remained, or, at any rate, was often to be met in Small Forks, when he condescended to descend from his lofty walks.

Once I saw him intoxicated on the Embankment, his braces down, his hat in tatters—though I am certain that he never became a drunkard. Anyway, the thin veneer of respectability came off him like wet paint, and he slipped happily back into savagery. On what he lived I don't know.

I met him one afternoon by the new shipbuilding yard which the Canadian Pacific Railway was running up half a mile out of Small Forks. He sat there on a pile of axed pine-trunks lying by the roadside, his chest and one shin showing through his rags, his eyes gloating on the sky, in which a daylight moon was swooning; but, on catching sight of me, he showed his fine rows of teeth, crying out flippantly in French: *"Ah, monsieur, ça va bien?"*—in French, because Negroes are given to a species of frivolity in speech which expresses itself in that way.

I stopped to speak to him, asking "What has it been all about, Podd—the sudden collapse from sancity to naughtiness?"

"Ah, now you are asking something!" he answered flippantly, with a wink at me.

I saw that he had become woefully emaciated and saffron, his cheek-bones seeming to be near appearing through their sere skin, and his eyes had in them the fire of a man living a life of some continual exaltation or excitement.

I wished, if I could, to help him; and I said "Something must have gone wrong inside or out; better make a clean breast of it, and then something may be done."

On this he suddenly became fretful, saying "Oh, you all think like a blame lot of silly little babies fumbling in the dark!"

"That is so," I answered; "but since you are wise, why not tell us the secret, and then we shall all be wise?"

"I tell you what"—shaking his head up and down, his lips turned down—"I doubt if some of them could stand the sight; turn their hairs white!"

"Which sight?" I asked.

"The sight of Hell!" he sighed, throwing up his hand a little.

After a little silence I said "Now, that's rot, Podd."

"Yes, sure to be, Sir, since you say so," he answered quietly in a dejected way. "That, of course, is what they said to Galileo when he told them that this globe moves."

With as grave a face as I could maintain, I looked at him, asking "Have you seen Hell, Podd?"

"I may have," he answered; and he added "And so have you, by the way. You have probably seen it since you started out on this walk you are taking, and haven't known."

"Well, it can't be very terrible, can it," I said, "if one can see it and not know? But is Hell in Small Forks? For I'm straight from there."

At this he threw up his head with a rather bitter laugh saying "Yes, that's beautiful, that the ignorant should make game of those who know, and the worse be judges of the better! But, then, that's how it generally is." And now, all at once, whatever blood he had rushed into his face, and he pointed upward: "You see that world there?"

"The moon?" I said, looking up.

"The souls in that place live in pain," I heard him murmur, his chin suddenly sunken to his chest.

"So there are people on the moon, Podd?" I asked. "Surely you know that there is no air there? Or do you mean to imply that the moon is Hell?"

He looked up, smiling. "My, goodness, you'd give a lot to know, wouldn't you? Well, look here, I'll say this and it's the truth: that I've had a liking for you from the first, and I'll make you a business proposition, as it's you. You agree to give me three dollars a week so long as I live, and when I'm

dying I'll tell you what I know, and how, teaching you the whole trick. Or I'll put it in writing in a sealed envelope, which you shall have on my death."

"Dear me," I said, "what a pity I can't afford it!"

"You can afford it well enough," was his answer, "but the truth is that you don't believe a word of what I say: you think I'm moonstruck. And so I am, a bit! By Heaven, that's true enough!"

He sighed and was silent some time, looking at the moon in a most abstracted manner, apparently forgetting my presence.

But presently he went on to say "Still, a spec., you might risk it. The payments wouldn't be for long, for I've developed consumption, I see—the curse of us colored folks—had a hemorrhage only yesterday. And then, as a charity, you might, for I'm mostly hungry—my own fault; but I couldn't keep on gassing to those poor fools, after seeing what I have seen. If you won't give me the three dollars a week, give me one."

Well, to this I consented—not, of course, in any expectation of ever hearing any "secret", but I saw that the man had become quite unworldly, unfit to earn his living, I considered him more or less insane—still consider so, though I am convinced now that he was not nearly so insane as I conceived: so I promised him that he might draw a weekly dollar from my bank while I was in Small Forks.

Sometimes Podd drew his dollar, but often he did not, though he was aware that arrears would not be paid, if he failed to present himself any week. And so it went on for over four years, during which he became more and more emaciated, and a savage.

Meantime, Small Forks and the Sakoonay district had ceased to laugh at the name of Podd, as at a stale joke, and the fact of his rags and degradation had become a local institution, like the Mounted Police or the sawdust mill—too familiar a thing in the eye to excite any kind of emotion in the mind.

But at the end of those four years Small Forks, like one man, rose against Podd.

It happened in this way: at that date the Sakoonay district was sending an annual cut of some four hundred million feet of lumber to the Prairie Provinces; the mining and smelter companies had increased to four—big concerns, treating three to four thousand tons of ore a day; in which consideration of things all through the district had arisen the cry: "Electricity! Electricity!"

Hence the appearance in Small Forks of the Provincial Mineralogist with a pondering and responsible forehead; hence his report to the Columbian Government that Harper Falls were capable of developing 97,000 horse-power; hence a simmering of interest through the district; and hence the decision of the Small Forks Town Council to inaugurate a municipal power-plant at Harper Falls.

But Podd objected!

He thought—this is what I found out afterwards—that Harper Falls were his; and he did not wish to have them messed with, or people coming anywhere near them.

However, he said nothing; the new works were commenced—so far as the accumulation of material was concerned; and the first hint of a hitch in the business was given one midnight of the beginning of May—a night I'll ever remember—when the mass of the municipality's material was burnt to cinders.

The blaze made a fine display five miles out of Small Forks, and I witnessed it in the thick of a great crowd of the townspeople.

It was assumed that the thing had been deliberately done by someone, since there was no other explanation. But the mystery as to who had done it!—for there was no one to suspect. And, like a spider whose web had been torn, the municipality started once more to collect materials for the plant.

Then, at the end of June, occurred the second blaze.

But this time there were night-watchmen with open eyes,

and one of them deposed that he believed that he had seen Podd suspiciously near the scene of the mischief.

The town was very irritated about it, since the power-plant was expected to do great things for everybody.

At any rate, when Podd was captured and questioned, he did not exactly deny.

"It might have been I," was his answer; and "what if it was I?"

And this answer was a proof to me that he was innocent, for I took it to be actuated by vanity or insanity. The authorities must have thought so, too, for the man was dismissed as a ninny.

The town, however, was indignant at his dismissal; and three days later I came upon him in the midst of a crowd, from which I doubt that he could have come out alive, but for me, for he was now nothing but a bundle of bones, lighted up by two eyes. Indeed, my interference was rather plucky of me, for there present was a North-West policeman lending his countenance to the hustling of the poor outcast, a real-estate agent, the sawdust-mill manager, reeking of turpentine, and others, whose place it was to have interfered. Anyhow, I howled a little speech, pledging myself that the man was innocent; and my éclat as a Briton, perhaps, helped me to get him gasping out of their grasp.

When he found himself alone with me on the road outside the town, down he suddenly knelt, and, grasping my legs, began to sob to me in a paroxysm of gratitude.

"You have been everything to me—you, a stranger. God reward you—I have not long to live, but you shall know what I know, and see what I have seen."

"Podd," I said, "you have heard me pledge my word that you are innocent. Let me hear from you this instant that it was not you who committed those outrages."

With the coolest insolence he stood up, looked in my face, and said, "Of course I committed them. Who else?"

I had to laugh. But then I sternly observed "Well, but you confess yourself a felon, that's all."

"Look here," he answered, "let's not quarrel. We see from

different standpoints—let's not quarrel. What I say is, that during the few weeks or months I have to live no plant is going to be set up at Harper Falls—afterwards, yes. You don't know what I know about the Falls. They are the eye of this world; that's it—the eye of this world. But you shall know and see"—he looked up at the westering quarter-moon, thought a little, and continued: "Meet me here at nine on Friday night. You've done a lot for me."

The man's manner was so convincing, that I undertook to meet him, though some minutes afterwards I laughed at myself for being so impressed by his pratings.

Anyway, two nights thence, at nine, I met Podd, and we began a tramp and climb of some seven miles which I shall ever remember.

If I could but give some vaguest impression of that bewitched adventure, I should begin to think well of my power of expression; but the reality of it would still be far from pictured.

That little dying Podd had still the foot of a goat, and we climbed spots which, but for his aid, I could scarcely have negotiated—ghostly gullies, woods of spruce and dreary old cedar droning, the crags of Garroway Pass, where a throng of torrents awe one's ear, and tarns asleep in the dark of forests of larch, of hemlock, of white and yellow pine.

We were struggling upward through a gullock of Garroway Pass when Podd stopped short; and when I groped for him—for one could see nothing there—I discovered him with his forehead leant against the crag.

To my question, "Anything wrong?" he answered "Wait a little—there'a blood in my mouth."

And he added "I think I am going to have a hemorrhage."

"We had better go back," I said.

But he presently brightened up, saying "It will be all right. Come."

We stumbled on.

Half an hour afterwards we came out upon a platform about eight hundred yards square, surrounded by cliffs of pine on three sides. A torrent dropped down the back cliff,

ran over most of the platform in a rather broad river, lacerated by rocks, and dropped frothing in a cataract over the front of the platform.

"Here we are," Podd said, seating himself on a rock, dropping his forehead to his knees.

"Podd, you are in trouble," I said, standing over him.

He made no answer, but presently raised himself with an effort, to look at the moon with eyes that were themselves like moons—the satellite, about half-full, then waxing; and now in her setting quadrant.

"Now, look you," Podd said with pantings and tremblings, so that I had to bend down to hear him in that row of the waters, "I have brought you here because I love you a lot. You are about to see things that no mortal's eye but mine ever wept salt water at—"

As he uttered those words, I, for the first time, with a kind of shock, realized that I was really about to see something boundless for I could no longer doubt that those pantings had the accent of truth; in fact, I suddenly knew that they were true, and my heart began to beat faster.

"But how will you take the sight?" he went on. "Am I really doing you a service? You see the effect it has had on me—to think that what made us—our own—should bring forth such bitterness! No, you shan't see it all, not the worst bit: I'll stop the view there. You see that fall rushing down at our feet? I have the power, by placing a certain rock in a certain position in this river, to change that mass of froth into a mass of glass—two masses of glass—immense lenses, double-convex. Discovered it by accident one night five years since—night of my life. No, I am not well tonight. But never mind. You go down the face of the rock at the side here—easy going—till you come to the cave. Go into the cave; then climb by the notches which you'll find in the wall, till you come to a ledge, one edge of which is about two feet behind the inner eyepiece. The moon should begin to come within your view within four minutes from now; and I give you a five minutes' sight—no more. You'll see her some three hundred yards from you tearing across your

brain like ten trillion trains. But never you tell any man what you see on her. Go, go! Not very well tonight."

He stood up with an effort so painful, that I said to him "But are you going into the river, Podd, and trembling like that already? Why not show me how to place the rock for you?"

"No," he muttered, "you shan't know; you shan't! It's all right; I'll manage; you go. Keep moving your eye at first till you get the focus-length. There's a lot of prismatic and spherical aberration, iridescent fringes, and the yellow line of the spectrum of sodium bothers everywhere—the object-glass is so big and so thin, that it hardly seems at all to decompose light. Never mind, you'll see well—upside down, of course—dioptric-telescope images. Go, go; don't waste time; I'll manage with the stone. And you must always say —I paid you back—full measure—for all your love."

At every third word of all this his breast gave up a gasp, and his eyes were most wild with excitement or the fever of disease. He pushed and led me to the spot where I was to descend. And "There she comes," his tongue stuttered, with a nod at the moon, as he flew from me, while I went feeling my way with my feet, the cataract at my right, down a cliff-side that was nearly perpendicular, but so rugged and shrub-grown, that the descent was easy.

When I was six feet down I lifted my chin to the ledge, and saw Podd stooping within some bush at the foot of the platform-cliff to my left, where he had evidently hidden the talisman-rock; and I saw him lift the rock, and go tottering under its weight toward the river.

But the thought came to me that it was hardly quite fair to spy upon him, and when he was still some yards from the river I went on down—a long way—until I came to the floor of the cave in the cliff face, a pretty roomy cavern, fretted with spray from the cataract in front of it.

I went in and climbed to the ledge, as he had said; and there in the dark I lay waiting, wet through, and, I must confess, trembling, hearing my heart knocking upon my ribs through that solemn oratory of the torrent dropping in froth

in front of me. And presently through the froth I thought I saw a luminous something that must have been the moon, moving by me.

But the transformation of the froth into the lenses which I awaited did not come.

At last I lifted my voice to howl "Hurry up, Podd!"—though I doubted if he could hear.

Anyway, no answer reached my ear, and I waited on.

It must have been twenty minutes before I decided to climb down; I then scrambled out, clambered up again, disgusted and angry, though I don't think that I ever believed that Podd had wilfully made a fool of me. I thought that he had somehow failed to place the rock.

But when I got to the top I saw that the poor man was dead.

He lay with his feet in the river, his body on the bank, his rock clasped in his arms. The weight had proved too much for him: on the rock was blood from his lungs.

Two days later I buried him up there with my own hands by his river's brink, within the noise of the song of his waterfall, his stupendous telescope—his "eye of this world."

And then for three months, day after day, I was endeavouring in that solitude up there so to place the rock in the river as to transform the froths of the waterfall into frothless water. But I never managed. The secret is buried with the one man whom destiny intended, maybe for centuries to come, to know what paths are trodden, and what tapestries are wrought, on another orb.

The Primate of the Rose

M. P. SHIEL

'"Friends of the Rose?"' said E. P. Crooks to Smyth one night, at the Savage Club. 'Is it an actual fact that there are secret societies in London?'

And Smyth, with his expression of lazy surprise, replied: 'Why, yes. Ask me another time. Come and dine with us too, if you like.'

It is a wonder that Crichton Smyth ever did invite Crooks. As editor of the *Westminster Magazine*, he had known Crooks as a little story-writer, and had never had any such impulse; but suddenly Englishmen, with their genius for discovery, had discovered that they had a Crooks; proceeded to pay him ninepence for writing 'the'; and then Smyth, with his eyebrows of surprise, muttered: 'Come and dine with us.'

Smyth was of that better aristocracy, the upper middle-class, which gives to England its ladies: slim, clean-looking, old-blooded—not much blood, and thin: but rare, like wine of Yquem.

Of another family was Crooks—a fatty little man, fat-cheeked, with an outsticking moustache that hung. Still, there was something or other in him—something brisk in his glance, in the dash of his hair across his forehead; and if at seventeen he had vended soda-water from door to door, at twenty-six he was a graduate, and at thirty-six a star.

But he was a gay Romeo, Crooks—in a rather vulgar mood; and Smyth had a sister.

If one had prophesied to Smyth that his sister, Minna Smyth of the Smyths, could possible commit follies for E. P. Crooks, or look twice at Crooks, Smyth would hardly have bothered to smile. . . .

However, the human female can be pretty queer and wayward; and her heart is like spittle on the palm that the Tartar slaps—no telling which way it will pitch.

From that first night of the dinner Minna Smyth showed herself amiable to the celebrity—a *chic* dinner of dated wines in a flat in Westminster: for editors are awfully well-to-do people—do you know? The piano there was a mosaiced thing in mother-of-pearl; and, in turning Miss Smyth's music, Crooks's fingers got positive magnetism, hers negative, and they met.

She was a tall, thin girl of twenty-five, very like Smyth, very English in type, pretty, but washed-out and superfine, with light eyes of the colour of quinine-solution which X-rays make 'fluorescent.' Was Crooks genuinely smitten with this? It is doubtful. Besides, he was married. But she was a conquest worth making, and he was a man ever on the *qui vive* to add yet a photo to his packet, and a feather to his cap.

Minna Smyth, for her part, took studiously from that night to feeding her mind on the spiced meat of Crooks's books, who, meanwhile, had retaliated upon Smyth by banqueting him at the National Liberal, and might drive home anon with him from the Savage, Crooks felt that he was patronizing Smyth; and Smyth felt that he was patronizing Crooks: for when one has known a tremendous man in his days of '£2-a-thousand-words,' one has no respect for his tremendousness—especially Smyth, who was the chilliest thing that the Heavens ever invented. At any rate, they became friendly.

During which time Crooks and Minna Smyth had a way of meeting at private views, lectures, concerts—meetings of which Smyth did not know; letters were written which Smyth did not see; and it happened one evening at the flat, at a moment when Smyth was in the next room, that Minna mentioned to Crooks in the course of conversation that on Friday nights her brother was out 'at his secret society,' and never came home till 4 a.m.

On this Crooks, picking up her hand, said to her: 'I'll come on Friday night.'

She looked at him under her eyes, meditating upon him; then moved her face from side to side, while her lips took the shape of 'No.'

'Something to *say*,' said he 'I hope you are inexorable.'

Her lids now veiled her eyes, while her bosom rose and rose, unloaded itself of a sigh, and tumbled back.

'Is it yes?' he whispered.

'*Crichton!*' she breathed, with a sudden expression of shrinking and fright in her eyes.

'Oh, I think that that will be all right about Crichton,' Crooks said.

'You don't *know* him!' she whispered: 'his nose goes white. . . .'

Smyth now came in; and presently, when Minna had gone out, Crooks said to him: 'By the way, how about that wondrous "Friends of the Rose," Smyth, that you are always to tell me of?' He threw himself into roomy red velvet opposite Smyth's red velvet on the other side of a fire—it was December—and drank from a large and fragile glass.

'What can one tell of it, if it is a secret society?' Smyth asked, his eyebrows raised over lazy lids that seemed to strain to be open, for there was an ample valley of country between his eyebrows and his nose-tip.

'I mean to say—is the thing *real*? Is it like *London*?'—from Crooks, who had an inquisitive intellect, and, then, was ever on the quest of 'copy.' He added: 'Years ago I wrote a story about a secret society—you must remember it; but I never for a moment believed that there are such things. Anarchism, yes—Freemasonry—the Irish—'

'Those are mushrooms,' Smyth remarked, his lips giving out a trickle of thick cigar-smoke, languid as himself; while Crooks smoked a briar pipe.

'What! Freemasonry a mushroom?' — from Crooks — 'on the contrary—'

'Comparatively, of course, I meant. And I don't call those secret societies, of whose existence and objects everyone knows. Where's the secrecy? . . . But there are others.'

Crooks bent forward. He knew that Smyth was Cockney, as much a thing of London as was Charles Lamb, sometimes burrowing in some Slav night-club at the docks, or among 'Ye Merrie Men,' when supposed to be at holiday in Homburg: a being deeply initiated into London lore, knowing somewhat more behind those eyebrows of mild surprise than he ever mentioned at table: hence Crooks's interest; and his interest, like his other emotions, was usually shown.

'But in London?' he said. 'Really, now? Why have I never dropped across them? In Paris, yes—'

Smyth answered—his taciturnity sometimes melted when the subject was London—'Paris is to London as a shilling dictionary to the Encyclopaedia Britannica. Everything's in London.'

'Except Paris'—from Crooks.

'Paris is, too: I could take you to the Bal Bullier within half a mile of here. Only, in Paris it has name and fame, in London it is lost.'

'But this "Rose" business—"secret societies"—you assure me they're a fact?'

'I am a member of two; I know of a third; and have suspicions of a fourth.' Smyth laughed a little to himself.

'That's three, say'—Crooks had animated eyes—'now, tell me how I can join them all!'

Smyth chuckled inwardly at this crude enthusiasm; and he said: 'You don't seem quite to realize—they are *secret* societies. There are more multi-millionaires—more experts in Becquerel rays—than members. To become a member of those I know is about as rare a thing as the conjunction of four planets; and requires long preparation. You can't go about "joining them" like that. One of them has consisted of sixteen members since the time of Edward II, another of twenty-three—'

'But what are they *for*?' Crooks fretfully cried. 'What's—what's their *motif*, their *idea*?'

'Different *motifs*. Most are benevolent, I think. All mystic.'

'Then, why on earth are they secret, if they are benevolent?' Crooks peered piercingly into it with the interest of the perplexed busybody: 'The mere fact that they are benevolent—'

'Different reasons for secrecy: some are secret to avoid—hanging sometimes.' Smyth showed his teeth in a silent laugh.

'Then, I don't tumble,' from Crooks. 'Why need they avoid hanging, if they are benevolent?'

'Seems fairly obvious to me,' Smyth remarked, his straining lids half-shut behind his *pince-nez*: 'There are three types of really secret societies—absurd, obscene, and benevolent: and the benevolent ones can only be created for one reason—because Government, so far, is immature and defective. They assist Government by taking the law into their own hands, executing justice, doing good, in cases where Government can't, or won't, yet do it, and calling upon God to witness in a mystic mood.'

'Oho! Is that it? Then, they have my approval. And as to these "Friends of the Rose" tell me the particular—'

'It was a bad day for me,' Smyth interrupted, 'when I mentioned to you "Friends of the Rose," for you have left me no peace since. What business is it of yours? And what can you expect me to tell? Does the great Crooks take it for granted that secrets guarded six centuries will be blabbed to him for the asking? You may be perfectly certain, for instance, that "Friends of the Rose" is not really their name—though it is not unlike that. What can one tell? Perhaps I may tell you that the membership has always been limited to sixteen; or I may tell you that there is a certain apartment somewhere in London of whose existence only one man at a time—occasionally two—has known for five hundred years.

Crooks winked quick, hearing it; then threw his face about, frowning, fretted, almost offended, for he disliked being 'out of'

anything. 'Apartment,' he muttered. . . . 'and who is that one man who knows?'

'The Primate of the Society.'

'Primate . . .' Crooks meditated it over the fire; then animatedly looked up to ask: 'Now, where can that apartment be?'

On which Smyth, tickled, let himself go into a sort of laugh, saying: 'What, want to take a lady there? I am sorry I can't tell you, if only because I have no notion myself. But when the Primate dies—he is a very old man—lives in Camden Town—I shall know.

'Oh, *you'll* be Primate then?'

Smyth's lids lay closed. He made no answer.

'I should just like half-an-hour's interview with that "very old man who lives in Camden Town",' Crooks mentioned.

And Smyth answered: 'If you saw him hobbling along Gray's Inn Road, it would not occur to you to glance twice at him. London is like that. We brush shoulders with angels at Charing Cross, little divining the depths that some common-looking type has dived, the oddity of his destiny, his store of lore, his giftedness, or the dignity on his head. I know an old patternmaker in Wapping—'

But at this point Minna came in, and, as Crooks's attention was drawn off, Smyth suddenly stopped.

That was a Wednesday.

Now, on Fridays Smyth invariably left his office an hour earlier, dined at home, locked himself in his book-room for two hours, and then went out dumb, like a monk, not to come back till the morning hours.

Years had seen no break in this routine; but this Friday there was a break: for, for some unknown reason, Smyth was back at home before eleven.

In Victoria Street he glanced up at his windows on the second floor; noticed that the drawing-room light seemed low behind the blinds; and muttered something to himself.

He then went up by the lift, opened the flat-door with his key—and did it noiselessly, though he was *far* from admitting to himself that he did it noiselessly. He now glanced into the kitchen, and his eyebrows went higher because of the fact that it was in darkness. He passed, on padded carpet, to two other rooms — no one there: the servants had perhaps gone to the theatre. He then stepped down a passage to the drawing-room door, and, still without sound, turned the handle. But that door was locked: and his eyebrows went higher still.

Standing there, he seemed to come to a sudden decision: and walked sharply, softly, out of the flat.

Down below he stepped into a by-street where there is a Police Ambulance cot; and, standing in the shadow of this, looking toward Victoria Street, he waited.

After half-an-hour he saw Crooks come out of his 'Mansion'; saw him walk away with quite an air of jauntiness; and presently saw his drawing-room lights turned on full.

He slept at the Hotel Victoria that night; and the next morning turned up at Covent House the same cold Smyth as ever—made a jest with the lift-man, going up to his office; and his sub-editor did not dream that day what was in him, nor that its name was Legion.

But in the afternoon his sister Minna, who had spent a day of wonderment and trembling, received a note 'by hand' from him:

'Dear Minna,

I regret that reasons have arisen which make it impossible for us to live any longer together. Pray write me by tomorrow whether you desire to stay on at the flat, or would rather that I took another for you.

Yours,
Crichton.'

So they parted.

She, knowing that he was attached to the flat, left it for one in Maida Vale, he settling an income upon her. From that night of the lowered lights he did not see her again—not for an instant. To her prayers for an explanation he made no answer.

But his pain proved more than he had bargained for, and he would have done better to have left those rooms which had known her presence. Though not very visible to others, there was a friendship and link between them extremely sacred and sweet; and he pretty soon discovered that, in sending her away, he had plucked out his right eye. Sometimes for days now he would absent himself from the office; his thin, palish face went pinched and paler; some grey began to mingle with his hair; his taciturnity turned to something like dumbness.

But he never relented; until, after six months, it came to his ears, through a doctor, that she was not well, and in a tragic fix. And then he wrote to her:

'Dear Minna,

I know everything: and whatever there is to forgive I forgive. Please, dear, come back to my arms.

Yours,
Crichton.'

She would not at first; but then the wings of love proved stronger than her shrinkings: and she took herself back to the old flat.

But she was not well for she, too, had rued and gnashed, chewing the ashes of the fire of passion; so that daily he saw her vanishing like a shadow from him; and in a month she sighed at him, and died, leaving him a little girl to nurse.

As for Crooks, he was at Naples, and it was three months before he had definite knowledge that a child was born, a mother dead. Then he asserted himself. Since that Friday night of Smyth's earlier return he had had no interview with Smyth, for Minna, as it were on her knees, had ever pleaded with him, 'Please, please, try not to meet Crichton!' But now Crooks asserted himself.

He sought out Smyth one night at the Savage, and, standing before Smyth's chair, said: 'Smyth, I must have the child.'

Smyth looked up from the slightly surprising thing in his *Standard* to the slightly surprising object before him, and said 'No.'

'Then, I have to see her sometimes—fair's fair.'

'If you like,' Smyth muttered. 'She is at my flat. Try not to see her often'—he read again.

So Crooks went and revolved philosophic thoughts over the insignificant stick of womanhood, that one could push into a jug: and she exclaimed on seeing his fat face, with hair stuck on it.

Then twice a month he went; and once, when, on meeting Smyth in Smyth's hall, he put out his hand, Smyth, with his eyebrows on high, let his long fingers be shaken. (Smyth, in fact, never participated in a hand-shake with any child of Adam, simply permitted and witnessed it, with surprise.)

And when this had happened several times in the course of a year, one night found Crooks seated by the fire, the child on his knee, over against Smyth, as of old. Without greatly caring, he had set himself to be friends again with Smyth, doing it in a patronizing mood, and so caring nothing for Smyth's surprise—nor, in truth, could he be sure that Smyth was more surprised than usual, since Smyth was for ever surprised. Moreover, Crooks's fame had lately swelled and mellowed; if he had an opinion on this or that matter, that was put into the newspapers; and he was puffed up, the fact being that the little men of his trade and grain have no essential self, nor impregnable self-estimation, which cannot be raised at all by any applause, nor depressed at all by any dispraise: but when the wind blows they are big, and when the wind lulls they are little. As for Crooks, at this time he felt that his presence honoured inventors and philosophers.

And 'Cluck, cluck,' he went, cantering his chick on his knee

with a gee-up cackling; then 'I say, Smyth, did you ever become Primate of the Rose Society?'

'Yes,' Smyth replied with surprise.

'Ah, you did. So *you* have the secret now of that mysterious "Apartment"—'

'Yes,' Smyth replied with surprise.

'Then,' says Crooks to himself, 'I shall *set foot* in that apartment—sooner or later'; and he sat an hour with Smyth.

In this sort of relaxation they co-existed, until the midget Minna, fair and frail like its mother, could crawl, could walk, the months for mourning now long over, though Crichton Smyth still dressed in raiment of the raven—crape never more to leave that sleeve of his. Every Sunday sun-down found him in the Brompton Cemetery moping over a tomb; and most who saw him thought him cold; but some thought not. Meantime, Crooks came fairly regularly to the flat; and he said one night by the fire: 'I shall leave off coming here, Smyth, if you don't talk to me. I have assumed that there can be no resentment left, since you realize that I loved Minna.'

Smyth's lips oozed smoke a minute; then: 'How many others did you love that year?'

'Several perhaps. I consider the question irrelevant—'

'How many have you loved since?'

'Several—many, perhaps. That is quite outside—'

'You are married.'

'Yes, but I am impatient of argument of the subject, Smyth. It simply means that your views on sex-relations are different from mine; and, as mine are the offspring of thought—'

'I am not "arguing",'—from Smyth with sleep-loaded lids: 'it is not a question of anyone's "views." I merely said that you are married, and it is a fact that, if a married man lets himself love a girl of the middle class, he runs a risk of killing her with shame. I do not say that it ought to be so—I am not arguing—I only state, what you know, that it *is* so—at present; and when a death occurs, you get murder. Of course, there is no law against it, but—' He stopped, passing his palm lazily across his raised forehead, his lids closed down, straining to open.

'Men are not exactly angels,' Crooks remarked.

'More like devils, some'—a mutter.

'Not referring to poor me?'

'Your existence seems to do a great deal of harm. I don't know that you do any good.'

'You don't know that my books do good?'

'No, I don't know. I know that men are already getting past "novels" without novelty, and that as soon as women cease to be

children the last "novel" will be written. Yours are entertaining, I believe—'

'Not prophetic? Not vital?'

This tickled three of Smyth's ribs on the right side, and he let out on a breath of disdain: 'Lot of Simple-Simons we still are.'

But at this statement the little maid commenced to lament, and Crooks, handing her to her nurse, kissed her head, murmuring: 'I'll go.'

But, half-way to the door, he turned to say: 'What about that "Apartment" of yours, Smyth, that I am to be taken to? You said you'd consider it.'

Smyth's answer was a little singular. With a push of the lips, pettish, yet mixed with a smile, he said: 'Oh, you keep on about that!'

This was the *sixth* time that Crooks had asked—Smyth knew the number. At the first asking a flush of offence had touched Smyth's forehead at the cocky pushfulness that could prick Crooks to make such a request. But since then Smyth had begun to answer with a certain demur, a flirting reluctance, as of a girl who murmurs 'no,' but blushes 'yes.'

'Oh, you keep on about that. . . .'

'Where's the harm?' asked Crooks on his next visit. 'Provided you can absolutely rely upon my lifelong silence. My curiosity, of course, is intrinsically *literary*. Energize my imagination with an actual sight of the place, and I tell you what—I'll do a series of mystery-stories, and *The Westminster* shall have 'em.'

And Smyth, his lids closed but for a slit that rested on Crooks, answered: 'Ah, Crooks, don't tempt me.'

It was, then, a question of temptation now? Crooks felt exultation. Had not the sister yielded to his tempting? The brother should be his conquest, too. . . .

But on the next occasion of Smyth's temptation, Smyth said with a laugh: 'You don't apparently care whether you urge me to the breach of a vow of office! And you do it with that same facile callousness with which you break your own marriage-vow.'

'Smyth, you will not do as a conscience—you are too pale,' said Crooks. 'Please leave our evil marriage-customs out of the discussion. As to your "vow of office," did you not yourself tell me that sometimes *two* men have known the alleged "Apartment"?'

'Well, yes, I think I did say so. And you conceive, do you, that *you* have a right to be one of the two? Well, perhaps you have—I'll look into the question. But, if ever I do take you, I hope you are not nervous.'

'Fancy a nervous E. P. Crooks! What is there to see, then?'

'It is a little—lethal.'

'Then, I'm the man. But when?'

'I haven't said yes. Give one time. I have to get the approval of others. . . .' .

But only three weeks afterwards Smyth yielded. 'Very well,' he said: 'you shall see it; the thing's settled; your imagination shall be "energized," as you call it. But you are not permitted to know *where* the room is: you have to go to it blindfold. And, by the way, you must go disguised: just hang a beard round your ears—that'll do. And be before the Temple Church on Tuesday night, to hear the Law Courts clock strike eleven.'

'*Fiet!*' Crooks cried.

That Tuesday night in October a high wind blew, and by the light of a moon that flew to encounter flying troops of cloud, Crooks stood looking at those eight old tombs, and the circular west-end of the church. The Strand river had thinned now to a trickle of feet: in there in the secrecy of the Inn not a step passed; and Crooks felt upon him the mood of adventure: London was partly Baghdad; this an Arabian night: some time or other he'd make 'copy' of the mood of it. To be disguised, too, was quite novel to him: anon he pawed his false beard with a mock pomposity; then he had the thought: 'But why, after all, the disguise ?'; and just then eleven struck.

At its last stroke a step was on the paving, and Crichton Smyth with his crape and raven dress was there. He put finger to lip when Crooks began to say something, beckoned, and Crooks followed out through Hare Court, by Middle Temple Lane, past the under-porter's lodge; when Smyth got into a coupé brougham waiting by the Griffin, Crooks followed in.

'I must blindfold you here,' Smyth said at his ear.

'There remains the inward eye,'—from Crooks—'blindfold away.'

At once Smyth produced two pads of black cotton, and a black ribbon that had two narrower ribbons sewed to its ends; cottons and ribbon he tied over Crooks's eyes and nose: and now it could be seen that the broad ribbon had crimson borders, and three roses embroidered on it.

As soon as it was secured, Smyth, unknown to Crooks, slipped a strip of brass-plate inside the band of Crooks's bowler-hat—a brass-plate on which were etched the words: 'Edgar Crichton Smyth, P.' Whereupon the driver, as if he had waited for all this, went forward without being ordered.

But Crooks understood that they were going eastward. He heard Bennett's Clock quite near above strike the quarter-past. And

presently the following words were uttered within that brougham

Crooks: Talk to me. I am lost in darkness. Silence must be awful to the blind.

Smyth: I don't want to talk. This is not a night like every night for you and me.

Crooks: You think something of that 'Apartment' of yours!

Smyth: It is not an Apartment with 'To Let' in the window. It has no window. I hope you have said your prayers.

Crooks: Men of my birth have no need to say prayers, Smyth. Behind and underneath we are essentially religious; and our existence, properly understood, is a prayer.

Smyth: Good thing you are religious behind.

Crooks: Did you not *know* that I am ?

Smyth: No, how was I to know ? You aren't where one sees you.

Crooks: Smyth, you are the most—

Smyth: Don't chatter.

Here Crooks could hear a tram droning somewhere through the humdrum plod-clap, plod-clap, of the brougham-horse's hoofs on asphalt; he thought to himself: 'We must be somewhere in Whitechapel; and presently they spoke again:

Crooks: Is it far now?

Smyth: Ten minutes.

Crooks: I don't like the blindfolding, though—and, by the way, what is the disguise for? I understand the blindfold, but why the disguise?

Smyth: You will soon guess why.

Crooks : Your disguise is a mystery, and your blindfolding a plague. Ah, it must be sad to be blind!

Smyth: What about being dead ?

Crooks: The dead don't know that they are blind, but the blind know that they are dead. Oh, it is a great thing to see the sun! to be alive, and see it. People don't realize, because the universe is not meant for men to see, but for the lords of older orbs than this to cast down their crowns before. Tomorrow morning when I have back my sight, I shall build me an altar.

Smyth: Don't make any vows at it.

Crooks: Certainly, Smyth, you are the most surly and cynical—

Smyth: We get out here.

On this the brougham, without order, stopped; Smyth, having

got out, led out Crooks; and, without order, the brougham rolled away.

As it had made several turnings, Crooks did not know in what district of London he now was—he knew that it was East. But no sound of foot-falls passing here; only, he could hear a rush of machinery going on somewhere.

'Those are alternators driven by steam-turbines,' he said. 'But are we in a street?'

'Sh-h, don't talk.' said Smyth.

Crooks next felt himself led by the hand over what seemed to be cobble-stones, where the feet echoed, and there was a draught, so that he thought he must be under some tunnel, or vault. Then he felt himself in the open again, still going over old cobble-stones; and still the thump and rush of machinery reached the ear from somewhere. As for Smyth, he uttered not a word, and would listen to none.

Then there was a stoppage: Crooks knew that a door was being unlocked. And, hearing now a click at his ear, he could guess that Smyth had switched on the light of a torch.

He was next led over bare boards in some place that had a smell of soap and candles, tar and benzoline; and twice his steps tripped over what seemed to be empty bags. Then he was led slowly down some board steps; at the bottom of which Smyth stooped to unlock something—apparently a trapdoor in the ground.

Through this Crooks was led down, Smyth now saying to him: 'Hold my jacket; these steps are narrow'—and Crooks went down some steep steps of stone, each step a jolt, where he ceased to hear the beat of the machinery.

After this he passed through a passage, apparently of hardened marl, markedly damp and clammy, and uneven to the feet, where even sightless eyes could see and feel the thickness of the darkness; at the far end of which Smyth was again known to open some door—evidently a very heavy one—whose lock gnashed at the key, whose hinges chattered. From which point Crooks was led up steps so narrow, that he could easily feel the wall on either hand, they going now in single file.

To these steps there seemed no end—up and still up; and soon Crooks was afresh conscious of the throb and thresh of steam-machinery, jumbled with the hum of generators making their jew's-harp music: this business and to-do seeming to increase on the ear, and then, as still up they climbed, seeming to die away. Whenever they came to a landing or passage, Crooks, who was fat, and panted, said to himself 'at last'; but several times he had

to recommence the climb; and he thought to himself 'Can it be the Tower of London? We are in some tower, within the thickness of the wall'; but he did not say anything: a mood of utter dumbness had come upon him.

At last, in moving along a passage over stone floor, he being then in front of Smyth, he stumbled, apparently in dust or rubbish; the next moment he was stopped, butting upon wall; and 'Hallo,' said he, 'what's this?'

There was no reply. . . .

Waiting against the wall for guidance, Crooks was conscious of a clang behind him, as of a massive portal slammed, and of the croak of a rusty lock being coaxed by a key. Then he was aware of a scraping, as if a ponderous object was being dragged across the corridor; and simultaneously he was aware of an odour under his nose.

'Smyth!' he called out: 'are you there?'

There was no reply. . . .

Now he was aware of a match being struck, then of another, and another. By this time his bones were as cold as the stones that enclosed him.

He suddenly cried out 'Smyth! I am going to take the bandage off!'

Still there was no answer but some moments afterwards there burst upon his startled heart a most bizarre noise, a babbling, or lalling, half-talk, half-song, in some unknown tongue—from Smyth. The next instant Crooks had the bandage snatched from his eyes.

There was light—a pink light—brilliant at first to him; and by it he instantly realized that he was interned. He stood in a room of untooled ashlar some fourteen feet square, with a doorway three feet wide looking down a corridor three feet wide. It was the door of this doorway that had been slammed; but he could still look out, since the door had a hole in its iron—a hole Gothic in shape like the door itself; and outside the door stood an old pricket-candlestick of iron supporting seven candles, all alight, higher than a man's head, occupying all the breadth of the corridor.

Crooks understood that that scraping sound he had heard must have been due to the placing of the candlestick in position, and that the striking of the matches had been for lighting the seven candles, each of which had, before and behind it, a screen of pink porcelain with a pattern of roses—two perpendicular rows of roses—so that, as the candles got lower, they would still glow through a rose.

All this he noticed in some moments; also that there was a handbag open on the floor, out of which he assumed that Smyth had got the sort of linen amice, dotted with roses, which he now wore round his shoulders; moreover, in some moments it had entered his consciousness that the dust and rubbish into which he had stumbled was made of the bones and dust and clothes of men who had ended their days there; moreover, he noticed that, hanging before the hole in the portal, was an old Toledo *puñal* of damascened steel, and he understood that this was mercifully meant for his use against himself, if he so chose. If he had doubted this—if he had cherished a hope—it would have vanished when he saw what was hanging on the shaft of the candlestick—a bit of ebony, or black marble, on which had been scribbled in red pencil:

MINNA AND FOUR OTHERS

But what most froze the current of Crooks's blood was the horrid comedy of Smyth's psalmodying and dancing in his amice a yard beyond the candles, like one putting forth a spell of 'woven paces and of waving hands,' his head cast back, his gaze on Heaven—his pince-nez on his nose! But in what occult Chaldæan was that bleating to Moloch and Baal that his tongue baa'd and bleated? Crooks knew some languages but this recitative had no affinity with any speech of men which he had ever conceived; and then that antic fandango-tangle of writhing palms and twining thighs that went on with the psalming, like some entranced wight steadily treading the treadmill of dance in the land of the tarantula—a piece of witchcraft as antique and aboriginal as torch-lit orgies of Sheba and Egypt . . .

His throat straining out of the hole—his eyes straining out of his head—Crooks sent out to that dread dancer the whisper: '*Smyth, don't do it, Smyth . . .*'

He might as well have whispered to the dust and ashes in which he stood.

After three minutes the ritual ceased; Smyth stood another minute, his brow bowed down, with muttering mouth; then took off and put the amice into a handbag; picked up and put on his hat; and, without speaking, went away, leaving the candles watching there, as for a wake.

CHALLENGE TO THE READER

In 1895 M. P. Shiel, that comparatively unsung genius of the weird and the fantastic, had his first book published. The three short stories in PRINCE ZALESKI *were a frank throwback to Poe's Dupin trilogy which had first appeared in book form exactly half a century before. Like Poe, however, Shiel wearied of his eccentric sleuth and abandoned him — for precisely another half-century.*

And therein lies our tale . . .

It is not commonly known that in 1945 Mr. Shiel revived the character of Prince Zaleski — he wrote a fourth Zaleski short story especially for EQMM, but strangely enough we were not even aware of the epic event until it was too late. The details were sent to us by John Gawsworth, a personal friend and at times a collaborator of Mr. Shiel's. As Gawsworth expressed it, the return of Prince Zaleski nearly cost Mr. Shiel his life. The fourth, and last, Zaleski story was written in October 1945, when the author was past eighty. As soon as the manuscript was finished, Mr. Shiel walked to Horsham to mail it to EQMM's First Annual Short Story Contest. The effort was too much for the grand old man: he fainted and was taken to a hospital. When he recovered Mr. Shiel was uncertain whether or not he had actually posted the manuscript. In any event, the story never reached EQMM, and no trace of the original was ever found. Mr. Shiel died on February 17, 1947 and the mystery of the missing manuscript will probably remain a mystery forever. But think: if an accident of fate had not intervened, we should have gained possession of the only Prince Zaleski manuscript extant!

While we cannot bring you a new Prince Zaleski story — and now that Mr. Shiel is dead all hope for the resurrection of Prince Zaleski is gone — we can bring you a Shiel story which, according to the author himself, has never been published in the United States. It is a story, moreover, that was written by Mr. Shiel in collaboration with his good friend John Gawsworth. It is a story, too, that reveals Mr. Shiel's genius for the weird and the fantastic, and yet within the framework, within the technical boundaries, of the modern detective story.

So, dear reader, hone thy logic — one of the great Old Masters is throwing down the gauntlet. Whet thy wits, dear reader — one of the Old Foxes is laying down the clues. And just before the end, when Mr. Shiel says (through his character, Uncle Quintus) that he has "provided you with sufficient clues to solve the problem," we shall have a few more words to say — by way of warning!

A CASE FOR DEDUCTION

by M. P. SHIEL and JOHN GAWSWORTH

"Since you pride yourself on solving mysteries," said my Uncle Quintus, puffing from a petty pipette the smoke of some preparation of *cannabis* which had followed him from the East, "I will give you some facts in the case of a young artist friend of mine, Aubrey Smith; enough, I should think, for you to elucidate and explain his troubles to me, without my telling you the successful conclusions arrived at by the detective in charge. That would interest you?"

"Indeed, yes," I replied, and settled down into my fireside armchair to listen attentively and to make notes.

"Well," pursued my Uncle Quintus, "that night when he was to rescue two lives from — death, maybe, Aubrey Smith, as was his way on Wednesdays, spent the evening with his sweetheart, Hylda, at Rose Villa, her home in Clapham. But from the moment when she opened the door to Aubrey that evening, Hylda had a feeling that this Wednesday was in some way special and different from the rest.

"'Quite a beauty,' she said of the bouquet which Aubrey handed her, but with a touch of reproach she said it, since Aubrey could ill afford such displays. Every Wednesday, it was true, he brought a bouquet, but this was a mass that must have cost ten shillings.

"She wondered why, and he knew that she wondered, there was such a sympathy between their natures, yet he offered no explanation; and she wondered why he was in black, with a black tie. . . .

"Captain Hood himself — Hylda's father — noticed it, as they sat to dinner, and made the remark, 'Why, Aubrey, you look as if you were in mourning tonight.'

"'But you know, sir,' said Aubrey, 'that I am the last of the crew — I haven't a relative now to mourn for.'

"But he said it with shy eyelids, and Hylda, to whose ken his soul was an open book, understood that this evening Aubrey, for some reason, was concealing something or other from her.

"That startled her heart! There was the big bouquet, the black garb. . . . What, then, was in the wind? Her eyes, when he was looking at his plate, kept silently inquiring it of his face.

"Once when Captain Hood had limped his lamed leg to his ingle-nook to muse there over his cheroot as usual, Aubrey looked as if disposed to tell something; Hylda by this time

had withdrawn her pampered Lupot fiddle from its silk covering, and had it at her chin, Aubrey was accompanying her on the piano, and all down Rosehill Road faces were looking out from the rows of oriels, as was usual on Wednesday evenings, to hear the music — for Hylda, the hope of the Royal College, could make her fiddle discourse strange sorrows. She and Aubrey had done the *Sonata in F*, and were about to give a *Lied*, when, in the interval, their hands met as they turned the leaves of the second book, their hands and their eyes, and Hylda smiled, and he smiled; and he began then to say, 'Hylda, perhaps I had better tell you ——'—when Captain Hood from his nook called out, 'Aubrey, let me hear that last melody of the *Wallenstein* that I like'; and Aubrey called back: 'Quite so, sir,' and started to render it.

"After which for hours they wearied out the ear with sweetness, and through it all Hylda waited to hear, but Aubrey said nothing.

" 'Dear heart,' she whispered to him at the door near eleven when he was going, gazing up a moment on his breast into those girl-beguiling eyes of Aubrey, 'God keep you.'

"He stooped to kiss her — a steepish stoop, he was so high up compared with her — saying, 'We'll meet for luncheon tomorrow at the Circus,' and he went, she gazing after him, he in the falling snow waving his hat back at her — the most picturesque old hat on this planet, in such an egregious tone of green, turned down over the nose, with *Art Student* and *Latin Quarter* written all over it — and he was gone from her.

"He took train at Clapham Junction for Victoria, and from Victoria was off afoot (to save 'bus fare!) to his little flatlet in Maida Vale.

"It was during this tramp that he rescued the two lives.

"In an alley behind the Edgware Road it was. At that very spot, earlier in the night, a hungry man, who had desired to go to prison, had broken a street lamp; and just there, as Aubrey passed, stood a cab and a barrow, blocking the way; at the same moment a motor-car came round a corner, and, its driver not apparently sighting the barrow under the cab's shadow, dashed on. Out of Aubrey's mouth a shout of warning broke; in the rashness of the moment he even ran out from the pavement, so that, although the driver at once had his brakes on, Aubrey was knocked staggering, as the car bumped softly upon the barrow.

"In a moment there stood with him an old man and a young lady from the car, the old man saying: 'My dear sir! are you hurt?'

" 'Not a bit!' Aubrey cried.

" 'Papa, this is you in the rôle of chauffeur,' the young lady remarked — in a queer species of whisper, husky, rapid, which, however (though the noise of the engine, running free, was in the ear), Aubrey could still hear.

" 'Now, Laura!' — the old man

turned upon her to insist that he was an accomplished chauffeur, then requested that Aubrey must go home with him for a glass of whisky, rather confirming Aubrey's surmise that he was talking to an Irishman.

" 'But, sir, really ——' he began to say.

" 'Yes, come,' Laura said to him in that same whispered way, and he gathered that her voice, owing to some affection of the vocal chords, was gone.

" 'Yes, come.' There she stood, almost as tall as her tall father, draped in a pony-skin coat, its opening framing her face. 'Yes, come.' And now he went.

" 'An adventure!' he said, as the three passed into a house in Brook Street: 'on my birthday, too' — this fact not having been mentioned to his sweetheart, Hylda Hood; and although he and Hylda had been engaged since they were thirteen, Hylda still remained ignorant what day his birthday was.

" 'Your birthday?' from the old man, whose name had now turned out to be Sir Phipps O'Dowdy O'Donague: 'now, that's singular. I'll give you some whisky for it — come on!'

"Aubrey was brought into an apartment with silken walls and two brawling fires; and here, pointing to a picture, he said at once, 'Why, I saw that in last year's Academy.'

" '*Ego pinxi*,' Laura said with a curtsey.

" 'Awfully well done,' he breathed under it.

" 'Praise from Raphael.' She curtseyed again.

" 'Who told you that I am an artist?' he asked.

" 'I may be dumb,' she said, 'but I'm not blind.'

" '*You* dumb?' he cried: 'not quite, I think!'

"Her tongue flew as she sat stooped forward before him, her chin on her fists, flew in that breathy throat-whisper that went on as busily as a threshing-machine, or paddle-boxes threshing the sea; and he, listening with one ear to her and with the other to her father — for they fought against each other, speaking together in a race — thought that he had never lighted upon a pair of such live and brilliant beings. Father and daughter tossed rains of repartee at each other, jeered at each other, despaired of each other, yet were evidently chums. Neither could sit still six minutes. Sir Phipps jumped up to show the latest novel by Bourget, Laura jumped up, humming, to dash her hand over the piano keys, to show a Welsh crowth, or a miniature of Coquelin. Before twenty minutes Aubrey was at home with them; and once — the whisky had then come, and Laura had run out for a moment — Sir Phipps furtively took from out of his breast pocket a photograph, and furtively gave Aubrey a glimpse of it — the photograph of a lady.

" 'Well, the old sinner!' was Aubrey's first thought; his second was: 'How perfect a beauty!'

" 'La Rosa,' whispered the old man,

thinking apparently that Aubrey would know the name; but Aubrey had no notion who La Rosa was.

"He wanted to take the photograph to feast his eyes on it; but now they could hear Laura's steps, and Sir Phipps hurriedly hid it.

"After this for hours Aubrey could hardly find a chance to say 'Now I must go': if he did, it was at once drowned in talk, and he passed a merry night, which was only marred by one awkward moment, when, during another absence of Laura, Sir Phipps hurriedly drew a check, and held it out to Aubrey.

" 'My good sir!' Aubrey breathed with shy eyelids.

" 'Tush!' Sir Phipps said, 'you are only a boy, and I an old fellow whose life you have saved — your birthday, too.'

" 'Yes, sir,' — from Aubrey, with a breath of laughter, 'but really — I am only sorry that these things can't be done.'

" 'Oh, well, we won't quarrel over it' — Sir Phipps tore the check in shreds.

"Aubrey could hear Big Ben striking three, as he stepped out into streets now powdery with snow, over which a late and waning moon had moved up, revealing him to Laura, who at a window peered after him till he disappeared. Laura at that window then clasped her hands behind her neck, and stretched, and then, alone in the room, lay sideways on a sofa, and mused. What a tall, rough-clad fellow! she thought; his dash of dark mustache did not cover his rich lips; he had a modest way of lowering his eyelids, which was both shy and disdainful; he threw out odd breaths of laughter: and under the eyelids, eyes all beauty, like the Moonlight Sonata, drowsy, brown, brown. She turned, and stretched, murmuring, 'Yes, charming,' with half a yawn, and half a laugh, and said 'Ah!'

"Aubrey, for his part, on getting home, sat up yet an hour smoking cigarettes, thinking it out, and soon came to the conclusion that he would go no more to the O'Donagues. Laura was a remarkable creature, he thought! So lively, vital — and pretty; even the loss of her voice somehow added to her: just as she was, she was — she, was 'just *so*.' His brain kept comparing Laura with Hylda: Hylda was little, Laura big; Hylda was fair, with a broad face, dimples in her smile, bright eyes that laughed; Laura was dark, and had gaudy eyes. Which was the prettier — Laura or Hylda? Certainly, Laura was as far prettier than Hylda as La Rosa was more lovely than Laura. But Hylda was good, born good to the heart — was Laura good? Laura was glitter, Hylda was gold; if Laura was a genius, Hylda was an angel. 'Well, the birthday has come, and the birthday has gone,' he murmured at last; and tossing off the mourning clothes, he turned in to bed.

"The next day at luncheon in their usual Piccadilly tea shop, on his relating the adventure to Hylda, she overwhelmed him with questions as to

Laura — Laura's looks, Laura's throat-whisper, Laura's touch, and was she really so very clever? 'And are you expected to go back?' — her eyes fastened on his face, for wherever she was with him, she could not help it, she could see nothing but him alone; she hung only upon him, her soul dancing in her gladdened glances: 'did they seem really to want you again?'

"'I think so,' Aubrey answered; 'but I'm not going, all the same.'

"'Why not?'

"'Hard to say quite why.' His eyes dropped from her face.

"But Aubrey was not to escape the baronet so easily, for only a week later that Rolls car which he had saved from a shock drew up before his block of flats, the O'Donague mounted many stairs to him, and, glancing round Aubrey's cheap but chaste interior, remarked: 'Now, this *is* a charming den I find you in!' while Aubrey stood all shy eyes at the honor, and brought forth liqueurs. The fact was, that the old baronet had an absolute need of someone new to whom to give peeps of Salvadora Rosa's photograph and make a confidant of, and his fancy had fixed upon Aubrey: so that within a month or two now, Aubrey, without having ever set eyes on her, knew La Rosa by rote. She turned out to be a lady with something of a European fame, Spanish by birth, divorced wife of a Polish Count; and what mainly made her notorious, apart from some duels and suicides which had been due to her; was the fact that she had a little daughter whom her ex-husband had for years been seeking to sneak from her: for this child, on attaining her eighteenth year, would be as rich as Crœsus: so Salvadora Rosa, who seemed to have a keen sense of the good of money, stuck to the child, though its father was its lawful guardian. At that moment, Sir Phipps told Aubrey, though scores of secret emissaries in several countries were intriguing to get at the child, probably no soul but Salvadora Rosa and her own agents had any notion where the child was.

"'Must be a clever sort of lady,' Aubrey remarked.

"'Clever as ten monkeys!' Sir Phipps cried out.

"'Rich?'

"'She is like a bank or the Severn — sometimes full, sometimes empty,' Sir Phipps O'Dowdy O'Donague answered: 'it comes and it goes, like a maid's flushes and the monthly moon. At present, it strikes me, she is rather hard up — *embarrassée*, her little tongue calls it, with a roll on the *r*.'

"'Take care she doesn't get what she wants from *you*, sir.'

"'My dear fellow, you are talking of a lady.'

"'I beg pardon,' Aubrey said.

"But he seemed destined to have to hear of La Rosa: although he did not go to Brook Street (save once to a crush-reception, when he got only glimpses of Miss O'Donague) Brook Street came to him. One day, looking out of the window, down there in the

street he saw a gig roll slowly past, the reins in a lady's hand, and the lady was Laura O'Donague. He watched with interest to see if she glanced up at his windows, but she did not. However, one day some three months later he opened his door to a rap, and there, to his amazement, was the busy breath of Laura, whispering: 'I have to talk to you about Papa. It is serious.'

"It was all about La Rosa and her Papa that she had come!

" 'You have a lot of influence over Papa, let me tell you,' she said, seated within the nook made by the half-round seat that surrounded Aubrey's fireplace: 'he never so took to anyone as to you; and you have to speak to him.'

"Aubrey began to say: 'I'm rather afraid ——'

"But she said: 'No, really, you don't know how serious it is: he is getting more and more entangled with this lady, and three days ago, just after getting home from her place, had a most strange illness. . . .'

" 'Oh, I say, Miss O'Donague!'

" 'You have no idea of this woman,' Laura said — 'she sticks at nothing. I have never seen her, but one night last week, at the Mansion House, Detective-Sergeant Barker — ever heard of Barker? — impressed upon me that she's most dangerous, said that the woman's hungers are like a tiger's, and it is only because she is so much deeper than the European police that she can continue her career.'

"Aubrey, with puckered brows, sat at a loss what to say, but in the end promised to use his 'influence with poor Papa,' and after an hour's windstorm of whispering, Miss O'Donague at last accused herself of being unconventional in coming alone, and left him.

"Two months later, in July, he spent a weekend with the O'Donagues at Clanning, their seat in Gloucestershire, and then, as they went to Italy, saw them no more for some months.

"It was autumn when the O'Donagues returned to England, passed a fortnight in Gloucestershire, and then were in London once more, La Rosa having also been abroad at the same time; and shortly after she was back, they were back.

"Aubrey was at work one afternoon in November on a *Kermesse*, when the O'Donague anew came breezily in.

" 'I am now straight from Regent's Park [*Regent's Park* meant Salvadora Rosa]; got back from Italy three weeks ago, then went down to Clanning — beastly unpleasant thing happened down there — give me a glass of liqueur: I don't feel well today, boy.'

" 'What unpleasant thing, sir?' — Aubrey presented liqueur.

" 'Not seen it in the papers? Little girl of seven lost from the village — vanished — I knew her quite well; little thing named Ada Price — black-haired — Welsh — nice little thing — child of one of my underkeepers — the whole countryside searched, everybody very excited, and the burden

of it all on me — Oh, I say, I feel bad, Aubrey.'

"Even as he sipped the liqueur Sir Phipps became pale, and presently Aubrey had to accompany him below to his car, the baronet was so tottery. However, Sir Phipps did not look mortally ill, and it was profoundly shocking when at nine o'clock that night Aubrey got a telegram: 'Papa died in the car on the way home from you. I wish to see you. Laura O'Donague.'

"So he was gone, the gay, the bountiful old fellow, with his gray imperial and regal brow. Aubrey's heart smote him at the thought of the daughter who, he knew well, would be very deeply bereaved, and he hurried to her in Brook Street.

"He found her in the baronet's bedroom, however, quite her average self, chatty, agile, showing no sign that anything out of the common had happened. Only once, when she thought that he was not looking, he saw her shake her head at her father's portrait, and smile sorrowfully at it, with the reproach of love. From the chauffeur she already knew all the old man's movements that afternoon: how he had passed from Regent's Park to Aubrey's.

" 'He was hardly ten minutes with me,' Aubrey told her. 'First he spoke of his doings since his arrival from Italy, then of an unpleasant thing happening down at Clanning, and then, saying he felt bad, asked for a liqueur.'

" 'He isn't lying there poisoned, is he?' asked Laura quite calmly over the baronet on his bed.

" 'Oh, I say, don't ——' Aubrey breathed, shrinking.

" 'Aubrey, this world isn't done all in water colors,' she said to him.

"Aubrey's eyes dropped. Laura had called him 'Aubrey'! And even in the presence of that sternness on the bed, some nerve of him that ran down from his crown to his feet thrilled throughout, his brow rushing into brown with a blush.

"That wild word 'poison,' however, was only that one time uttered, since there was nothing to suggest such a thing to any mind, and as Sir Phipps's physician had long been aware that the baronet was suffering from 'tobacco heart,' liable to sudden dilatation, the death certificate and verdict were in accordance.

"All during that funeral week Aubrey was so much with Laura, driving with her, acting the lackey, that actually on three days of it he did not see Hylda at all.

"On returning from the grave-side, 'Now for some Hylda!' he sighed to himself with a certain hunger, like one yearning for fresh air and rest; but the first thing the next morning for him was yet a telegram from Laura in the words:

"More death — I should like to see you.'

"When he went to her it was to learn that an old person, known as Davenport, a butler, for over thirty years in the service of Sir Phipps, had suddenly ceased to live on returning

from the funeral — a new woe which had the effect of throwing Laura O'Donague into an extraordinary passion of anguish. At her father's death her self-control had been so complete as to appear even cold to everyone; but less careful, maybe, in this lesser case, at this second stroke she broke out into torrents of tears, terrible tantrums, hysterias, that astounded her household. Aubrey, however, found her in a condition of mere depression and ill-temper, like a child sullen after punishment. She would hardly speak to him, and when he touched her hand, saying, 'Laura, I am sorry,' she replied: 'Oh, my back is broad. Why did you come?'

"'Did you not send for me? What about this poor Davenport,' said Aubrey: 'at what hour ——?'

"'Oh, pray don't mention to me the name of Davenport,' said she; 'I am soaked with death.'

"Aubrey wondered why he had been sent for, since she snapped at everything which he could find to say; and before long left her alone to her sorrows.

"It was still too soon for him to go to the tea shop to Hylda, so he went home once more, and it was as he now opened his flat-door that he saw on the floor the note which was to play nine-pins with his whole life.

"It came from some attorneys, and it was a breathless Aubrey Smith whose eyes perused these lines:

> "'. . . have the pleasure to inform you . . . by the last will of the late Sir Phipps O'Dowdy O'Donague . . . you become the life-legatee of the sum of £175 per annum . . . shall be pleased to see you at your convenience . . . Ife & Siemens. . . .'

"So good, so large, the old man! A good heart that wished one well! Aubrey's eyes sprang water, and then — he ran. Outside, he found walking too slow now, a 'bus too slow, he sprang into a cab — for the tea shop. But he was too soon, Hylda had not come, and now he paced impatiently about, counting the seconds, waiting for the appearance down Piccadilly of a neat figure with a winged toque on her head. Anyhow, all was well now, his way clear. Just that little sum each year, the difference it would make! In three days' time he could be married. . . . For four years now, since she was seventeen, Hylda and he had been ever on the jump of being married, but always the same tiny trouble — no money to buy things with. The old captain on his half-pay had none, Aubrey's masterpieces had had no market. Now it was well.

"'I haven't really worked, you know, Hylda,' he said to her in the tea shop that day: 'I see it now. I seem to be the laziest beggar going, somehow. But won't I work *now!*'

"'Dear, you have worked hard,' she answered, 'and this is your well-earned reward.'

"'But, Hylda, tell me frankly,' Aubrey said, 'is it not a fact that we can be married straight away?'

" 'Dear, there seems to be no reason why not,' Hylda answered; 'you know that I can usually win Papa.'

" 'Then, let's take a half-holiday and go now straight down to Clapham. . . .'

" 'Really so eager for me?' she asked gravely.

" 'Eager is hardly the word: I'm afraid I am a little off my nut.'

" 'All right, let's go, then. . . .'

"It was soon settled: for though Captain Hood, who was of an unmodern school, would not hear of the Registry Office, but must have a church wedding, he agreed that the banns should be given in immediately.

"And now came busy days for Aubrey Smith. His den was too small to take Hylda into, so that had to be changed; and since they were an artist pair, no ordinary purchases would do for the furnishing of that home: stern were Aubrey's exclusions of this and that, delicate his selections, not of the dearest, nor even of the best, but of the best for *his* idea and dream; and all this needed time. At night he would come home worn out, lacked the time to call on the attorneys, as he had been asked to, forgot Laura O'Donague's existence, and of the small sum in his bank spent every penny on the strength of his fresh wealth.

"Once only — one forenoon — he saw Laura for a moment close to Hyde Park Corner, she all mourning black in her car; and she stopped to besiege Aubrey's ear with her busy breath-whispering, asking, 'Have you heard?'

" 'What?' he asked.

" 'About the woman.'

" 'Which woman?'

" 'Why, La Rosa.'

" 'No, not heard.'

" 'Not one penny does she touch! Papa has left her thirty thousand pounds on a life-policy — that's why she poisoned him. . . .'

" 'Oh, Laura, really you are not to say such things even in fun.'

" 'Not one penny does she touch, though! I mean to fight it in every possible way — "undue influence" — When are you coming?'

" 'Soon.'

" 'I don't want you.'

" 'Then I won't come.'

" 'Yes, do. Goodbye ——' She was away.

"It was on that same night, five days before his wedding day, that Aubrey found awaiting him at home yet another letter from the lawyers, this one stating that, as his legacy was, by the terms of the will, to be paid on his birthday, the firm would be glad if he would send them a certificate of birth.

"Having read it, Aubrey sat down, and with his brow on his hand stared there at the floor without a motion for an hour; and though no moan broke from him, his head hung low, like a man who has received a grievous blow, upon whom gloom and ruin have suddenly swooped.

"It would have been far better, he thought, then, if he had never met

that motor-car that night of his birthday, and many times he asked himself with torture why he had ever mentioned to Sir Phipps that that was his birthday: for it was clear that the baronet's idea in thus drawing the will was to remind him through life of the rescue he had effected that night: and Aubrey buried his head, shaking it from side to side, asking himself how he was to tell Hylda that they could not, after all, marry, how he was to make her understand that it was no mere delay that had arisen, but a permanent matter — unless he was to reveal to her now a thing, an old tale of sin and sorrow, a strange and ominous date, which he had so far very artfully contrived to hide from her ken. How tell her this now? How overthrow now all her hopes — for years perhaps? How pay for the ordered articles of furniture that were waiting for payment?

"But on a sudden he started, he was up, with the cry, '*Smith*'!

"There was more than one Aubrey Smith in the world!

"However, he hesitated a little, scratched his forehead, with a puckered nose, asking himself 'Would it be quite pretty?' But the relief, the gaiety, revealed in his grimace, proved that his mind had really decided, whatever scruples might come between; and suddenly he had snatched his hat, and was away with a rush.

"In a cab he drove to a dreary by-street near Russell Square, to a boarding house in it, where in answer to his query if Mr. Aubrey Smith was in, a girl answered him: 'I think he is — right at the top, the door facing the stairs'; and with careful footsteps Aubrey climbed through a darkness that had a fusty odor, high up, till he saw light through a keyhole, tapped at the door, and now a man in a rather ragged dressinggown appeared, peering, demanding, 'Who is it?'

" 'Your namesake, Smith.'

" 'O-ho-o-o!' cried the other Smith. 'My dear fellow, come in' – he bent cordially over Aubrey's hand; however, he suddenly added, 'Wait a moment,' turned back inwards, was heard whispering to someone, and it was two minutes before he returned to let Aubrey in.

"This Aubrey Smith the Second was a man of fifty, handsome, with the rather exaggerated manner which some judges call 'fascinating' (he had been schooled, and had lived, mainly abroad); a military mustache, a ducal carriage; and here was a man of contrasts — cousin of a nobleman, had hobnobbed with princes, living now in a den with holes in the carpet and a broken teapot on the hob. What that head of his did not know of this world was not worth knowing; and who could converse of it more charmingly? Yet there he was, aging and a failure. He had had a career! Had been frozen out of the British-Indian army, had sung in Italian Opera at *La Scala*, had been forbidden evermore to show his nose in Monte Carlo.

" 'My dear fellow!' Smith cried, 'you are the very man, for I have now

a scheme at hand that should bring us in the coolest five thousand each without fail.'

"Aubrey laughed, for many were Smith's schemes, and now he was about to do something astounding in wines, now to sell a mine, to buy a public house, or build flats: but nothing ever happened: so Aubrey said 'I, too, have a scheme.'

"Instantly Smith was gravity itself; a look of eagerness and business rushed to those old eyes that had seen so much: but at that moment, before Aubrey could say more, a girl of seven, running in from an inner room, was before them.

"At this Smith looked very put out, and was about to bundle her back out of sight, when Aubrey said, 'This your little girl, Smith? I'm sure I didn't know that you had a child.'

" 'A neighbor's child' — from Smith shyly.

" 'Isn't she a little beauty.'

" 'Come, come, young lady, into the next room!' Smith now said in French.

" '*Alors, tu es française, mademoiselle?*' Aubrey asked.

" '*Oui, monsieur,*' the black-haired child replied, with quite a nice bow of the head, and, catching up a doll out of the fender, she ran away back in.

" 'Look here, it's like this, Smith,' Aubrey now said, sitting on a shaky chair before Smith on the bed, 'I have just been left a legacy ——'

" 'O ho-o-o!' Smith cried with pantomime eyes and a round mouth, 'that's talking! My dear fellow.'

" 'Smith, when is your birthday?' Aubrey asked suddenly.

" 'Birthday? Three days' time — the twenty-fifth ——'

" 'Good!' Aubrey breathed: 'I thought I remembered hearing you say that it is in November. Well, as this legacy of mine — it isn't much, one hundred and seventy-five pounds a year — is to be paid on my birthdays, you have to get your birth certificate, and go and take the money for me, as if you were I.'

" 'But stay — I don't quite see what's what,' Smith said. 'Why am I to assume your personality in this way? Is it because you are urgently hard up, and my birthday comes first?'

" 'No, of course,' Aubrey shyly replied: 'It isn't that: I wish it was merely that; it is something much deeper.'

" 'O-ho-o-o!' Smith cried aloud with a round mouth in his theatrical way: 'ha! ha! *that's* how the land lies — I see!'

" 'So, then, you will, Smith.'

" 'My dear chap, I'm your man.'

" 'Good! And, I say, Smith, I offer you ten per cent. ——'

" 'Not one little soul' Smith cried; 'it would be odd if I couldn't do you a service of that sort without asking to be tipped. You need merely hand me say thirty shillings now for necessary expenses. . . .'

"So it was settled. Aubrey gave Smith all the facts of the case, also his address, where they were to meet and dine together at seven on the

third night thence, Smith undertaking to bring the hundred and seventy-five pounds with him; and Aubrey went away light of heart.

"But at seven on the third night thence no Smith turned up; and after waiting till eight, till nine, a terrible fright sprang up in Aubrey's heart; and he flew to Bloomsbury to see Smith.

"He was told at Smith's boarding house that Smith had gone away; and no one was aware where Smith had gone to.

"The next morning — the morning before his wedding day — Aubrey gathered from a clerk in the outer office at Ife and Siemens, the attorneys, that Mr. Aubrey Smith had duly presented himself and got the hundred and seventy-five pounds of Sir Phipps O'Dowdy O'Donague's legacy; and feeling too unwell to face Hylda just then, longing only for a hole to hide himself in, Aubrey went home to his new flat.

"It was about two hours afterwards that a curious incident occurred to him there: on the landing outside his flat door was a man crouching with his ear at the keyhole, listening patiently, with a grimace of eagerness on his face, till suddenly he ran soft-footed down the three flights of stairs to the street door, where he whistled, and now another man ran to him from round a corner.

" 'He has the child at this moment in his flat!' the first man, whose name was Barker, whispered to the second.

" 'Sure?' the other asked.

" 'Has *a* child, anyway, if not *the* child, for though I couldn't hear much distinctly, I distinctly heard a child say, *Now that I am seven years of age* ——'

" 'Let's pounce upon him sharp!' Upon which the two men, running up, pressed Aubrey's electric bell.

"Aubrey did not answer it at once, and Barker, his ear at the keyhole, could clearly hear a scurry and whispering within; fully two minutes passed, and then Aubrey appeared.

" 'Your name, I think, is Mr. Aubrey Smith?' Barker asked.

" 'Yes.'

" 'We may mention that we are police officers. Are you living alone in this flat, may I ask?'

" 'Yes.'

" 'You haven't a child of seven now with you, for example?'

" 'No, I'm not married.'

" 'There are more ways of having a child of seven than by being married. We should like to look through the flat.'

" 'My good sir, what is it all *about?* I am engaged . . .'

" 'Listen, sir.' Barker said, 'we have with us no warrant to force a search; but, take my tip, it will be better for you to consent, whether you are innocent or guilty.'

" 'Of what?'

" 'You are believed to have in your custody the child Ada Price, abducted from the village of Clanning, Gloucestershire, on the 3rd instant. You were seen talking to the child on a road ——'

"'I!' Aubrey cried, with a breath of laughter.

"'Look here, quick, is it yes or no?'

"'Well, if you insist, you can search, since that will comfort you,' Aubrey now said; 'but do get it over, officers.'

"The men, now coming in, went first into the newly-furnished drawing-room, and were looking round it when Aubrey did what certainly appeared a suspicious thing — ran down the hall passage, and turned the door key of his new studio. The officers, peeping, of course saw what he did; and when, after looking through the other rooms, they came near to the studio door, Aubrey made a halt.

"'Not in there,' he whispered to them with shy eyes.

"'How is that?' Barker wished to know.

"'Oh, I say, don't raise your voice,' he whispered, blushing; '*there's someone in there.*'

"'We are well aware of that: let's have a look at her' — now Barker pounded upon the door.

"'My good sir, will you be so good as to go to the devil,' Aubrey now said in an agonized low tone. 'Come, go out of my flat.'

"The detective scribbled something in his notebook, and without any other word the two turned, went away.

"They did not, however, go far — one of them, at least — for when Aubrey went out afterwards to go down to Hylda's, he saw that he was watched, and understood that he would soon hear from them anew.

"Down there at Clapham the dining-room table was aglitter with wedding gifts, for many were the girl friends of Hylda, many were coming to the wedding, and bright that day were Hylda's eyes to the moment when she opened the door to Aubrey; but instantly now, though he put on his bravest looks, her face clouded.

"'All not well?' she asked him presently, with a look.

"He could not utterly kill his bride's brightness, and replied: 'Why not?'

"The next morning, his wedding day, he discovered that all his wealth was seventeen-and-sixpence; and having with the sixpence sent a 'good morning' telegram to Hylda, at a loss now how to spend the time till one o'clock, he took his gun and went down to Grange House, a friend's place in Surrey, where there was some shooting, thinking that he would at least shoot his bride's dinner and borrow a five-pound note. He came back rather in a haste, a little late, with a hare and a rabbit, but without the five-pound note, since his friend was away from home, and three at a time he stormed up the flights of stairs to dress: for already it was a quarter to one. On the other hand, the church was hardly three hundred yards away up the street, so that he had no journey to make.

"At three minutes to one Hylda's bridesmaids were there, ready, waiting in the church porch for her; a knot

of people, and a policeman, stood in the street to see; inside, the organist, a personal friend of Hylda's, was amusing his fingers with the tune of *O Perfect Love*; the clergyman stood ready. As the church clock struck one, a carriage bearing the bride, all in heliotrope *voile* with white orchids, bearing also the bride's father, drove round a corner; and one minute afterwards Aubrey, a late and troubled bridegroom, flew down his stairs and out upon the pavement.

"It was just then that at a window above him a girl-child, looking out, cried gleefully aloud in French to some person behind her: 'O, *monsieur!* look! a wedding!' and upon this, the person popped his head out, to look.

Hylda, at the moment, was being handed out of her carriage, but her eyes were on Aubrey coming: and she stood hesitant, one foot on the carriage step, in wonderment at what she saw.

"For, as the child cried 'O, *monsieur*, look!' Hylda saw that Aubrey heard and glanced up, and as the man above popped out his head, she saw that Aubrey saw him, although the man instantly pulled himself back; at which Aubrey seemed to become possessed, for, immediately stopping in his career toward the church, he darted back into the house.

"She was so amazed that there, with her slipper on the carriage step, she remained, staring at the building into which Aubrey had vanished; the eyes of everyone, in fact, had turned from the bride, everyone awaiting in silence what the next instant would bring with it; till in about two minutes, or less, the sound of a gun-shot rang out of the house; from the window at which the child had cried out a cloud of smoke was seen to drift; and now the policeman in the crowd began running. . . .

"He had not, however, run halfway to the house, when out of it darted a dark-haired child, howling, washed in blood, staring, staggering; ten yards from the building she dropped to the ground and lay silent; and as the policeman approached her, out of the door dashed two men, one in a dressing-gown, the other Aubrey, his coat bellying behind him — pelting, both of them, with white, wild faces, the man flying, Aubrey chasing — away from the church; and without delay, leaving the wounded girl on the ground, the policeman, too, blowing his whistle, was pursuing the two, and a fourth man, who had been watching the place on Detective-Sergeant Barker's behalf, joined in.

"The two, however, in their agony of eagerness, easily distanced the two policemen.

At the same moment, Hylda felt her senses almost fail her, and in a sort of vision saw her father prostrate, half on the carriage step, half on the street, breathing hard in a rather queer way. . . .

"It was nearly two weeks after that distracted wedding day of hers, when, one morning, Hylda Hood presented

herself before Laura in Brook Street.

" 'I do hope I don't come too early ——' Hylda began.

" 'Not even a little. Sit down. I am glad — I am very glad — that you have come. Do you know, I know you quite well -- for years, it seems — I could have drawn your face just from Aubrey's chatter of you, and here you are exactly as I conceived you. Only — in black. Why in black?'

"Hylda, looking downwards, after a moment said: 'My father was buried yesterday, Miss O'Donague.'

" 'Oh! poor ——' Laura breathed, shrinking, then in an impulse ran and knelt and kissed Hylda's hands.

" 'He had not been strong for some time,' Hylda remarked, 'and what has happened was all too much for him. I should have come to you before, but have been ill myself; now I feel called upon to make some sort of effort to confront all this mystery, though I'm afraid ——'

" 'Oh, courage, we shall win to the surface yet,' said Laura. '*Seek and you shall find:* I believe in that. I take it that you have not heard from poor Aubrey?'

" 'No.' — low in tone.

" 'Why? Why?' Laura asked of herself, staring.

" 'There can be only two reasons,' Hylda said; 'either he is no longer alive, or he is in some situation in which he finds it impossible to write.'

" 'But what kind of situation can that be? Perhaps he is conscious of having done something wrong, and shrinks from writing ——'

" 'He?' — from Hylda with raised eyebrows; then she smiled, saying, 'Excuse me, I am always assuming that others know him with the same certainty as I do.'

" 'But how can you say *not*, in that undoubting way, Miss Hood? Of the two guns found together in the other man's flat one was Aubrey's, and the gunshots found in the child's throat fit Aubrey's gun, not the other man's; so Detective-Sergeant Barker was telling me ——'

" 'How can he know which of the two is Aubrey's gun?' Hylda asked.

" 'Aubrey's initials are on it!'

" 'Still, Aubrey would hardly have taken up a loaded gun for any reason. . . . It may be that the other man's initials are the same as Aubrey's ——'

" 'It *may* be, of course.'

" 'And as to this other man,' Hylda asked, 'no trace of him yet?'

" 'None!' Laura spun round with a laugh, 'he has disappeared from the face of creation as completely as Aubrey has. It strikes me that the pair of them have been up to something, so both are in hiding.'

" 'Aubrey would not hide, I assure you, Miss O'Donague,' replied Hylda.

"Laura, looking contemplatively at her, remarked: 'Do you know, I think we are going to be friends?'

" 'We won't be foes?' asked Hylda.

" 'Let's hope not. I am a ripping good hater.'

" 'And I am a good lover — if I love. But will you tell me now everything that you know?'

"Laura, now sitting by Hylda's

side, told how 'the other man' who had vanished with Aubrey round that street corner had taken the flat in Aubrey's block of buildings only two days before the wedding day, and had moved into it without waiting to have the flat repapered. He had taken it in the name of 'Hamilton Jones,' but it had been ascertained by the police that this was not really his name. 'Jones' had bought his furniture in Tottenham Court Road only the day before he moved into his new abode, an abode whose hall door happened to face Aubrey's; and whether this 'Jones' had taken that flat knowing that Aubrey was there, or just by chance, or what was the nature of the relation between him and Aubrey, remained all a mystery. As to the wounded child, she was a little maid of seven, of an extraordinary beauty — foreign, it was believed, since dark, and since she wore a diamond medallion of the Madonna about her throat, and as her costume was found to be luxurious in the extreme, it was doubted if she really belonged to this 'Hamilton Jones,' whose furniture was cheap. There was no name on the child's linen, only a bird in blue silk. She was then lying in St. George's Hospital, had not yet spoken, but would recover; and Laura had thrice been to see her.

"To all which Hylda listened with her eyes on the floor, and then a sigh rose from the depths of her; her pretty, broad face looked rather drawn and pale; and Laura, sitting by her, whispered:

" 'Don't be too sad; wait, I'll find him for you; it will be all right'; and she took a hand of Hylda's, saying, 'What lovable hands you have, Miss Hood — Hylda! These warm little mortal hands, imperfect and dear: I am going to kiss this left one near the heart' — she kissed it, mourning, 'Don't grieve, don't grieve, my heart bleeds for you'; and playing with the hand; while Hylda smiled at her, she asked, 'What are these dents in the flesh of the first and second fingers? — Funny. . . .'

" 'They are due to years of interval-stopping on the violin,' Hylda said.

" 'Of course, that's it. I have heard that you are a virtuoso, and I demand to hear you soon. Are you still at the College?'

" 'Nominally; but all that's over for me now, I'm afraid.'

" 'But why?'

" 'My father had no money to leave me, Miss O'Donague: I shall have to earn my living.'

"Up started Laura at this, dancing, clapping her palms, crying, 'Oh, how jolly!'

" 'Hardly for *me*,' said Hylda.

" 'For *me*, yes,' cried Laura. 'For that means you living with me! Do you know, I dreamed it? Yes, one night: and here it is, come to pass. Why, I want a companion! I have actually been inquiring ——'

" 'Miss O'Donague, you are very good ——'

" 'Call me Laura this instant!'

"Hylda looked at her with dimples in her smile, but said nothing.

"'Why, how jolly!' cried Laura; 'just think, always to be together now, and we'll talk of Aubrey all day, and be good to each other, and bear with each other, and read each other's letters, and go incognito on sprees to Venice on our own, and down to Clanning — did Aubrey tell you about Clanning?'

"'He told me,' said Hylda, 'and of that child lost down there. By the way, he had a most ludicrous story to tell me on the day before our wedding day about two men going to his flat and as good as charging him with having stolen the child. Has she been found, do you know?'

"'I think not.'

"'Aubrey said that the two men entered his flat and searched all through —'

"'Ah?' said Laura, smiling to herself with downcast eyes.

"'Yes, and insisted that they had actually *heard* the child speaking in the flat.'

"'Oh? . . . Poor old Aubrey! he was in for it those few days, wasn't he?'

"'Haven't you heard anything of this incident before?'

"'Well, yes, I think I heard something of it from — Barker,' and Laura jumped up anew from the sofa, opened a book on a table, looked at it, humming, cast it aside.

"'She doesn't invariably utter everything that she is thinking,' thought Hylda; and she added aloud: 'To what could such a delusion of these officers have been due?'

"Laura pouted, asking: 'How can you be sure that it was a delusion?'

"'Because there was no one at all in Aubrey's flat, so no one could have been heard in it!'

"'I see. But since Detective-Sergeant Barker vows that he heard the child with his own ears in the flat, what answer can be made to that? Maybe Aubrey saw the child down at Clanning, fell in love with her, for she was very pretty, and — nicked her.'

"'Miss O'Donague,' said Hylda very gravely, 'we seem to disagree on the subject of Aubrey; so perhaps we had better not talk much of him.'

"'Meaning that I am in love.'

"'Did I imply that?'

"'You exhaled it. But when did Aubrey tell you about his little legacy? When did he say he was going to draw it?'

"'He told me on the fourth day before the wedding day that he meant to draw it in two days' time,' answered Hylda.

"'So his birthday was two days before the wedding day?'

"'Birthday? What has his birthday to do with it?'

"'So you don't know — *he never told you* — that the legacy was to be paid on his birthday?'

"'I — no — you must be mistaken — he never mentioned it.'

"Hylda's eyes were so large with scare and amazement, that Laura leaped up laughing and could not help saying, 'What, are there things which Aubrey kept dark from you?'

"Hylda was dumb; spoke only with her eyes, which dwelt upon Laura with reproach.

" 'There, now I have wounded you,' said Laura ruefully, darting suddenly anew to her, 'because I am an ungenerous mean beast who kicks when one is down. . . . He forgot to mention it to you, that's all. You are so sensitive, so finely strung, and to bruise you is like trampling brutally upon a lute that breathes music to every breeze. . . . But, dear, it *is* so: he was to be paid on his birthdays, it was papa's whim. *When* is his birthday?'

" 'I — don't happen to know,' said Hylda in a maze; 'it must have been two days before the wedding day, since he said he was going to draw the legacy on that day.'

" 'No, it wasn't, then,' said Laura decisively: 'for the wedding day was in November, but it was not in November that he rescued Papa in the car: and that day was his birthday. It was, if I remember right, an evening in March.'

" 'He said that *that* night was his birthday?'

" 'Aye — told papa.'

" 'Then, that was why he brought me that specially large bouquet *that* Wednesday night. But why, why was he in black?' Hylda wondered.

"Laura, whirling a gold breloque about her forefinger, murmured, 'It is curious that he never told you, or that you never asked him, as to his birthday!'

"Hylda said, 'I have always had an instinct of anything which Aubrey did not wish to discuss, so never asked him that — not directly, that is; twice indirectly I have: but he never mentioned it.'

"But now, before she could say more, a footman, looking in, announced Detective-Sergeant Barker.

" 'Don't go,' Laura said to Hylda, 'Barker and I are pals — he says the Force missed something when I was born a woman.'

"Barker came in — a man who, though his grade in the police was not high, would have received a telegram addressed to 'Barker, London' - or to 'Rob Roy,' his name among the cracksmen, others of the 'gentry' naming him 'Old Moore.' Tallish, forty, agile, he had an agreeable smile beneath his mustache, and a wary gaze out of the tail of his eye. His teeth seemed excellent, but three in front were false, to replace the three knocked forty degrees inward by the maulers of 'Fred the Freak,' and that cheek-scar was from a stab by a Greek in a Soho club-raid. Since he had had occasion, some months before, to warn Laura with regard to her father's intimacy with the notorious Salvadora Rosa, or La Rosa, he had seen her several times in respect to various phases of the same matter; and she, fascinated by the extraordinary existence which this man lived, had sat chin on fist to hearken to histories of his hundred and one disguises as cab-driver, or street-artist, or weak-minded curate, of the clicking of the 'snips' on the wrists of the Dresden

bank-robbers, the Frameley forgers, famous 'receivers,' crib-crackers, of kind deeds done among those beasts of society, and tiger-struggles on the stairs of benighted lairs. In he now came, bowing, hat in hand, and Laura in her frank way gave him her hand, saw him seated, saying:

"'You already know Miss Hood of the vanished bridegroom, Sergeant Barker?'

"'I have that honor,' says Barker.

"'We were just talking,' Laura remarked, hand on hip, with her saucy air, her dark hair parted at the side — 'this lady derides the idea that you heard anyone in Mr. Aubrey Smith's flat that day when, as you affirm, you heard the child in it.'

"'A lady is invariably right,' the detective admitted.

"'What did you hear the child say, if one may ask?' Hylda demanded, paying no attention to his politeness.

"'Surely you may ask, Miss Hood. There was little to be heard, you understand, with a thick door between, but I distinctly heard a child utter the words: "*Now that I am seven years of age.*" As to that, I give you my word.'

"'How miraculous this thing!' Hylda murmured. 'There was no one in the flat!'

"'Mr. Aubrey Smith told you that, did he?' Barker asked.

"'He told me of the incident, and did not tell me that there was anyone.'

"'Negative evidence,' Barker laughed. 'To me, now, he admitted that there *was* someone in the flat, implying that it was a lady; but then I heard the child, and knew who it was.'

"'*Lady*,' Hylda breathed.

"'You see now, Hylda' — from Laura: 'a detective, like a lady, is invariably right, except when a detective and a lady differ, and then both are sure to be wrong.'

"'Did he — actually say that there was a lady?' Hylda asked.

"'No,' said the detective, 'but he looked, or tried to look, shy when we came to the locked door ——'

"'Locked door?' Hylda's eyes dropped.

"'Ah, the incident of the locked door was never told you, I see,' said Barker; 'but it is well, Miss Hood, for us all to know what's what. I was allowed to look all through the flat, you see; but when it came to that locked room — ah, that was another affair; and it was "*there's someone in there*" in a whisper, with shy looks.'

"Laura, standing against a cabinet with her arms spread out like one crucified, and her head thrown back, looked down upon Hylda, contemplating her suffering; while Hylda, now quite gaunt, looked at the carpet.

"'Never mind, dear,' said Laura; 'there's some explanation.'

"Suddenly Hylda flushed, and looking up with a smile, her eyes bravely met Laura's, as she said: 'I *know* that, Miss O'Donague'; then, turning to Barker, she asked: 'And you seriously believe, Sergeant Barker, that it was the lost child from Clanning that Mr. Smith had in that locked room?'

"'I believe that it was, Miss Hood, and I know that it was *a* child.'

"'Then, what do you say has become of this child?'

"'Ah, there now you ask one of the most difficult questions of all in this extraordinary matter,' said Barker. 'The house, of course, was closely watched from that moment, and he never brought out the child — that we know; nor is the child now in the building: vanished is the word — unless the child whom I heard in his flat is the same child whom he shot; but, then, the shot child is foreign. . . . By the way, that's one of the questions I have to ask you now, Miss O'Donague: you know little Ada Price, and you have seen the wounded child in hospital: do you not see a likeness between the two?'

"'It did not strike me,' Laura replied.

"'Kindly look at little Ada's photo,' said Barker, producing it, and Laura, looking at it, now said: 'Yes, I do rather see it now: only the wounded child is much more beautiful.'

"'Still, you notice that they are alike. . . . And now, Miss O'Donague, I must next say to you what will be greatly against the grain.'

"'Oh?' said Laura. 'My grain or yours?'

"'Both our grains.'

"'Ah, they both run the same way. But I am dying to hear ——'

"'Well, the Home Office has issued an order for the exhumation of your father's body.'

"Laura stood pale, then darting three steps at him with a face of wrath, 'You wouldn't dare!' she breathed.

"'Now, do not take it to heart,' Detective-Sergeant Barker said gently. 'If it could be avoided, it wouldn't be done. But in the circumstances ——'

"'What circumstances, pray, Sergeant?'

"'Why, I have heard you hint yourself that he was poisoned!'

"'I was not in the least serious,' Laura answered: 'a natural death! So why is this outrage perpetrated?'

"'No, don't take it to heart — think of the circumstances: your father dies suddenly on the way home from Mr. Aubrey Smith's, where, as you yourself have told me, he had had something to drink; to Mr. Smith's he had gone from Madame Rosa's; to both Mr. Smith and to that lady, as we know, he has left sums of money, so that both stood to profit by his death.

"'Oh, my poor Papa!' Laura mourned, falling into a sofa, her hands over her face.

"But neither anger nor grief could avail to change the process of the Government machine, and within some days, by the time Hylda's household effects had been sold, and Hylda herself was a part of Laura's household, the disinterred coffin of the old baronet lay open one Thursday morning in December under the eyes of the responsible persons.

"Never, maybe, did the eyes of men light on a wilder sight than those

eyes that day, on a more woeful, on a more bewildering. They refused to believe their five wits! That sight seemed to be an evil dream that one feels to be a dream:

"1. The baronet's throat was most brutally butchered right into the inner carotids, with gashes jagged as by some blunt cutter.

"2. His mouth was crowded full of some substance resembling powdered glass.

"3. In his stomach was discovered enough prussic acid to kill thirty persons.

"There," concluded my Uncle Quintus, "I have now given you by my method of narration far more information than Detective-Sergeant Barker had to go on at this point in the mystery. Indeed, I have provided you with sufficient clues to solve the problem, if you have the aptitude that you claim for such work. Tell me now, before we go up to bed, what do you make of these strange affairs?"

It was a wild night, rags of gusts tormented the tapestries, the flicker only of the fire lighted us. My uncle bent forward and applied a match to a three-branched candelabra. I arranged my few half-illegible notes on my knee and prepared to answer this formidable query.

"Uncle Quintus," I said, "as I see it, there are nine questions that need answering. If in each instance I surmise right, I should reach the same conclusion — the successful conclusion — that you tell me Detective-Sergeant Barker arrived at. Let me, first of all, read you my questions. I will then attempt to answer them.

"(1) What is the mystery of that 'strange and ominous date,' Aubrey Smith the First's birthday?

"(2) Who stole the black-haired, seven-year-old, Welsh, Ada Price from Clanning?

"(3) Was the O'Donague poisoned when he died in his car?

"(4) Is any significance to be attached to the death of Davenport, the butler?

"(5) Who is the black-haired, seven-year-old, French-speaking little girl found living with Aubrey Smith the Second in the squalid by-street near Russell Square?

"(6) Who uttered the phrase 'Now that I am seven years of age' from behind locked doors in Aubrey Smith the First's new flat?

"(7) Which Aubrey Smith shot the black-haired, seven-year-old, French-speaking little girl?

"(8) What happened to the two Aubrey Smiths subsequent to their chase on the young painter's wedding day?

"(9) What is the explanation of the atrocities revealed by the exhumation of the O'Donague?"

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Why don't you too accept Uncle Quintus's challenge? Can you deduce, determine — or, yes, divine — the answers to the nephew's nine questions? We use the word "divine" advisedly. As a verb, "divine" means to perceive through sympathy or intuition*

— and that is perhaps what you will have to do to see all the truth behind Mr. Shiel's riddle. For remember that M. P. Shiel, that wonderful man, was unique: his "cases for deduction" were never cut-and-dried affairs, susceptible wholly to sheer and unadulterated logic. He always permitted a margin for imagination. As we once wrote of Mr. Shiel's work, he created a kind of rich and redolent romanticism; a kind of bizarre bravado, full of flamboyant and fantastic felony, wild and wilful wiliness. Take all this into account: allow for Shielesque shenanigans, both in the use of the English language and in the conception of ideas. Only thus can you match wits with that strange man and savor his stories to the deep . . .

"Now, Uncle, if you will permit, I will expound. If it will not irritate you, I will tabulate my answers in just the same manner as I have tabulated my questions.

"These are my surmises. You can tell me, when I have done, exactly where I have gone astray.

"(1) Aubrey Smith the First was born on the 29th of February in Leap Year, and so only had a birthday every four years, which explains his despair over his legacy (since £175 every fourth year would not be sufficient to marry on) and his appeal that his namesake should collect his money annually for him. On that four-year birthday he wore mourning — perhaps because his birth had cost his mother her life?

"(2) Count Poldoff's emissaries stole Ada Price, since they had reason to believe that she resembled the child they were searching for. Once the opportunity presented itself, they intended substituting their prisoner for the Count's daughter.

"(3) The O'Donague was not poisoned when, to all appearance, he died in his car. He was neither poisoned nor dead! — was buried alive in a coma!

"(4) The death of Davenport, the butler, was a natural one; but there was a significance, I suspect, attached to it, a significance which I will explain in answering my last question.

"(5) The black-haired, seven-year-old, French-speaking little girl living in squalor with Aubrey the Second was Count Poldoff's daughter. Brought over by La Rosa from France, where for some years, no doubt, she had been educated and brought up as French in some obscure convent, she was entrusted by her mother to her agent, Aubrey Smith the Second. You will remember that La Rosa was abroad at the same time as the O'Donagues were in Italy; it was then, I think, that the child came to England. The fact that her mother was financially *embarassée* explains the squalor, too, of her agent's circumstances.

"(6) Aubrey Smith the First uttered 'Now that I am seven years of age' in his new flat — uttered it to Laura, who, in her unconventional way, was visiting him. He had let her know that his birthday was the 29th of February, and he meant by 'now that I am seven' that he had had seven birthdays — or rather six.

"(7) Aubrey Smith the Second

shot his little charge — unintentionally. Aubrey Smith the First's gun was unloaded when he dashed upstairs to take it, to intimidate his betrayer. The child, no doubt, got shot in some scuffle between the two. The initialed gun, of course, belonged to Aubrey Smith the Second, being probably a relic of his British-Indian Army days.

"(8) Aubrey Smith the Second flying before Aubrey Smith the First made for Regent's Park and La Rosa. Here he found sanctuary, and his pursuer, coming upon him, was seized and imprisoned by man-servants of La Rosa.

"(9) The atrocities on the body of the O'Donague were self-inflicted. Davenport the butler had placed in his master's coffin before interment a bottle of poison. The only significance of the butler's death is that when the exhumation took place he was not there to explain. Sir Phipps, I fancy, must once have been nearly buried alive in a coma, and so have made his old servant swear that whenever he was being buried, he, the butler, would put poison in the coffin. Sir Phipps must have waked in the grave, drank the poison. In his agony he ground the glass of the bottle in his teeth, and cut his throat with the broken glass. Barker may well have found a statement among the butler's papers to the effect that the butler placed the poison there.

"I think, Uncle, that these are the facts, which the police must have discovered. Hylda, I suppose, married her Aubrey the First when, on La Rosa's mansion being searched, that young man was released. Count Poldoff recovered his daughter from the Hospital. Laura retired to Clanning and painting."

My Uncle Quintus looked at me approvingly. "My boy," he said — and never before had he praised me so highly — "you are right in nearly everything: I am pleased to note that you have the family brain. And now to bed. A cuneiform stele's due from Khosabad tomorrow: you will give me your views on that."

'Q'