

man by whom she had been sitting, seized her left hand and squeezed it so hard that it almost hurt. It was a hot July day, and the London they had left three hours ago—for Eva hated motor-ing too fast—had been like a furnace.

Malton, too, felt in exultantly high spirits. Though his dark, handsome face bore the marks of strain, and his bright brown eyes signs of sleeplessness, he looked as if, at last, life had given him what he had been seeking for always.

Again and again during their long drive he had congratulated himself on his marvellous good fortune. He had only three days more of England left, but they would be perfect days, spent not only with the most physically perfect, but also with the most mentally alluring woman it had ever been his luck to meet.

As she sank down into the comfortable cushioned seat, he slipped his arm round her.

“Darling!” he exclaimed. “Darling, darling, *darling!*”

“Don’t be silly, Jim.” But she said the words very kindly. She, too, was in an exultant mood, determined to enjoy every halcyon moment of her last adventurous journey into the kingdom of illicit romance. Her present companion had laid a strange, potent spell, if not on her heart, then on her senses, during their brief acquaintance. In a way she was glad that he was leaving England for ever.

“We shall be there in about ten minutes from now, sweetheart. You won’t mind there being nobody to wait on you?”

In a low, ardent voice, he added, “I’ll wait on you, my lovely, perfect, goddess.”

She answered merrily: “I’m not afraid of housework, Jim; and though I say it, I’m a really good cook!”

“It’s far too hot for cooking. Besides, I’ve brought everything we’re likely to want.”

And his eyes rested contentedly on the huge hamper which stood on the two seats in front of them.

He was telling himself, with a touch of real sentiment, how different the future would look to him if the woman he was going to marry within ten days or a fortnight from now, the enormously rich Canadian widow whom he had met by chance in a Bourne-mouth hotel two months ago, resembled in even the slightest degree the woman he now held closely pressed to his side. Still, no man can expect to have all the luck! His future wife was not actively repulsive, and she certainly adored him. They would lead

a very pleasant, if placid, existence on her large income, and he would keep away from his one fatal temptation—the gambling table.

“There’s ‘The Folly,’” he said suddenly, and Eva, turning round quickly, was surprised to see that he had become darkly red. She told herself, with a touch of tenderness, that he was an odd, emotional creature.

Malton called out to the chauffeur: “It’s the first turn to the left, but you’ll have to be somewhat careful, for it’s only a rough track, as well as very steep.”

The man, who had been promised a big tip, called back cheerily: “I’ll manage all right, sir, never fear! I’ve been in worse places than this with my car.”

Halfway up the bare, almost cliff-like hill to their left, a curious looking white house stood in an oasis of greenery.

Eva’s large violet eyes, those eyes so beautiful and dove-like in their softness when looking at a lover—yet which were so quick to see what to many women would pass unnoticed, travelled slowly over the great expanse of short turfed down which lay below the little property for which they were bound.

“What a strange, lonely place to choose for a house!” she exclaimed. And then, “It must have cost a tremendous lot of money to build it up there, even in the good old days before the war. It doesn’t look a bit English,” she went on thoughtfully, “in fact, I once saw a house near Monte Carlo which looked almost exactly like this house.”

He was amused and pleased. How sharp and clever she was!

“As a matter of fact you’ve hit the bull’s eye. ‘The Folly’ is a copy of an Italian villa. It was built about fifty years ago by the father of the man who owns it now.”

“I thought you said it belonged to you,” she said quickly.

“Well, it’s been practically mine for the last ten years, for the owner lives in Italy. Now and again we’ve managed”—he corrected himself quickly—“*I’ve* managed to get it let. But it’s far too lonely to please the sort of people who generally want a house by the seaside.”

A sudden bend in the lane brought them just below the villa, and Eva saw that the actual building was of white stone, though the terrace, which was its most arresting architectural feature, was of marble.

The terrace was supported by wide substantial brick arches, and

through the arches could be seen the windows of what was apparently the ground floor of this unusual looking dwelling.

"It must be a very dark basement," she said musingly.

"Far too dark to be of any use," he said quickly.

Then, more slowly he added, "The last people who were here were American, and they insisted on having what they called a kitchenette made out of a small room beyond the dining-room. They shut up the basement altogether, and it's not been opened again. There's a good little oil stove in the kitchenette, quite good enough for any cooking we're likely to want to do."

He let his voice drop. "We'll live on bread and cheese and kisses," he whispered.

She looked round at him. "Very few men would really care to do that!" she exclaimed drily.

A few moments later Eva Bude was springing up the broad low shallow stone steps which led to the banked up platform on to which the second storey of the villa opened.

From the hanging gardens to her right floated the delicious scent of roses and jasmine and, turning round, she caught her breath at the loveliness of the scene spread out below, for the setting sun made a golden path across the pale sea.

Malton opened the high front door, and his companion noticed that the Yale lock was a new lock.

As soon as they had passed through into the curious, foreign-looking round hall, Malton hurried over to the French window opening on to the terrace, and flung it open.

But Eva stood still, looking about her. She admired the frescoed walls which formed so suitable a background to the ivory-inlaid ebony table which stood on the marble floor. Her work had taught her to be appreciative of beauty in every form.

"It's wonderful," she murmured, "wonderful! We might be hundreds of miles from England."

"I wish the man would hurry up with the hamper," said Malton impatiently. "We may as well start our honeymoon with a bottle of fizz!"

His words jarred on her. This strange and lovely house had brought back to her memory an Italian who had loved her for a longer time than she generally allowed any man to love her. He would never have said a thing like that. Also, with dismay, she realised that Malton looked tired, haggard, and, what she had never seen him yet, ill-tempered.

"He won't be a moment," she said soothingly; and he muttered, "I'll go and get the glasses and the wire-cutter."

He opened a pale, grey-painted door, and she followed him into the spacious drawing-room. There was a slight feeling of airlessness there, and this time it was she who flung open one of the three French windows. Then she turned round to find that her lover had disappeared.

The drawing-room pleased Eva less than the hall had done. The furniture, of carved wood and gilt, was Italian, and upholstered in green damask which had faded in patches. She made up her mind that only the sofa would be comfortable—the chairs were too like thrones. The carpet, of a cheap, British-made variety, swore with the rest of the room.

Malton reappeared, and Eva laughed joyously, for he looked so funny, carrying a tray with three glasses on it.

Her laugh proved infectious; his good temper came back. "I want the chap who drove us down to have a drink of the bubbly, too," he exclaimed. "I'm sure he's earned it!" And she answered: "Indeed he has."

The chauffeur, a merry-eyed little Cockney, stood in the hall, waiting by the luggage, and the big hamper. "It was a bit of a tug getting that up," he observed.

Malton opened the hamper, and took out one of six bottles of champagne. "Now then!" he exclaimed, cutting the wire. Carefully twisting out the cork he filled up the three big glasses to the brim.

"I think we ought to eat something with this," observed the one lady of the party.

A moment later a cake stood on the round table, and the same knife which had severed the strong cords binding the top of the hamper, was cutting the cake.

"I don't want you to go your way zig-zagging back to town," said Malton cheerily, and the chauffeur grinned. "No fear of that, sir!"

Eva only drank a quarter of the champagne which had fallen to her share. She was an abstemious woman, well aware of how much of her now mature beauty was due to her own good sense and care.

She felt just a little sorry to see—after the chauffeur had departed with his big tip, and order for his return in three days' time—Malton empty her glass.

Again and again during the three days spent by her at the villa, Eva Bude told herself that till this, her last secret adventure, had been in being, she had never known what life in its perfection could be.

She and Jim Malton appeared to be the perfect complement the one of the other. Every waking hour brought some new delightful proof of how well they were attuned. They walked, they gardened, they talked, they made love. . . . She was completely under his spell ; he held her enthralled.

Small wonder that when the time came, she found herself counting the hours, measuring the minutes, almost the moments, of their last complete day.

They worked in the garden all the morning really hard. But they lazed the afternoon away on the terrace. Both felt heavy-hearted at the thought of to-morrow's parting.

For the first time a hawker called at the house, and once they saw a group of walkers on the path which edged the cliff far, far below ; and the sight seemed so surprising that she turned to him and said : " This is an astonishingly lonely place, Jim, only fit—"

Catching her thought as it flew, he cried : " —for lovers ! "

A moment later he exclaimed, " I wish to God we had settled to stay here a week. You won't let me telegraph to Deauville ? "

It was for Deauville that he was leaving on the morrow.

She shook her head. " Oh, no ; I've got a lot of business waiting for me in London," and then she sighed.

It was her first sigh. She would not allow herself to indulge in a second.

Early the next morning, just after sunrise, she awoke to see her lover bending over her.

His face was blanched, and a thrill of terror ran through her. " What's the matter ? " she asked, sitting up.

" Don't you hear a noise downstairs ? " he murmured affrightedly ; and he gripped her arm with such force that she bore the mark of the clutch for days.

She listened intently. " No, I hear nothing, Jim."

" Listen ! "

And then she did hear—curious stuffless sounds coming up from the garden below.

" It's only some animal, a sheep probably," she murmured, " I

think it's got into that queer tin garden-room, near the back door."

She saw an expression of intense relief sweep over his haggard face.

"Perhaps it is a sheep," he whispered back.

But all at once there came the sounds of a door opening and shutting.

"You're right! Someone's gone into the basement," she exclaimed. "But how can they have opened the door, if, as you say, Jim, it's always kept locked?"

Malton's face was dusky. He was evidently convulsed with fear, and Eva felt a little amused, and yes, a little disgusted, too.

"It may be that hawker who came yesterday. Those sort of people hate sleeping out of doors. In any case I'll go down and see who it is." She added, "I'm not a bit afraid."

She was putting on her silk dressing-gown as she spoke, "How do I get down?" she asked, in a rather peremptory tone.

Malton was staring at her, still obviously unmanned.

"Perhaps it is that hawker," he murmured. And then, "Somehow I don't like your going downstairs all by yourself. Yet—yet I don't feel I *can* go down there."

"One gets down through that locked door in the dining-room, doesn't one?" she said quickly. "Where is the key kept?"

"I've got it here, somewhere."

She was surprised to see him get up and walk, uncertainly, to a locked chest of drawers.

As he handed her the key, he muttered "I wonder if you'd better go down to the basement?"

She made no answer to that. Instead, she ran down to the dining-room, and put the key in the lock of the door which he had once told her led to the lower storey.

The door opened straight on to a dark steep wooden staircase, and, treading cautiously, she made her way down, down, down, till she reached the large disused kitchen.

It was very dark there, though a little of the fresh morning light filtered in between the broad arches.

Eva looked with aversion at the rusty kitchen range; and then, standing still, she listened intently.

Yes, there was certainly someone moving about next door, in what had once probably been a servants' hall.

"Who's there?" she called out boldly.

The cobwebbed door between the two rooms swung open, and a small, still boyish-looking man advanced towards her, while a refined voice exclaimed: "I'm awfully sorry, madam, to have disturbed you. I haven't had any food since yesterday morning, so I'm terribly hungry. Don't be frightened. I'm not a burglar, though I fear I look like one."

"How did you get in?" she asked.

And then, in the pale light filtering in through the dirty window, she saw that the tramp smiled.

"I went into that queer little tin house you've got in the garden," he answered. "And behind the door I found a bunch of keys. I couldn't help hoping that one of them would fit the back door to this house—and it did!"

"I see."

She felt relieved. No harm in this poor little chap. And then, for she was a good-hearted woman, she said in a concerned tone: "You do look bad. If you'll wait here a minute, I'll go upstairs and get you something to eat, and to drink, too."

He said gratefully: "You *are* kind."

For a moment she thought of asking him to come up with her. She would have done so, had she been alone in the house, for she was a fearless woman. But the thought of Malton stopped her; not that she wanted to think just then of Malton, for his attack of nerves had shocked her. Even so, she had become aware, during their short acquaintance, that he was a highly sensitive and nervous man, in spite of his air of virile strength.

She ran quickly up both flights of stairs, and opened the door behind which she found Malton waiting for her, still with an expression of craven fear on his face.

"It's all right! Only a hungry tramp. I'm giving him a bit of meat, and some bread and butter."

She hastened down into the little kitchenette where she had spent happy moments during the three days, doing odd bits of cooking, mostly of the fresh egg variety. Now she put some meat, a generous hunk of bread, and a quarter of a pound of butter on a tray, together with a bottle of beer.

Once more she made her way down the sombre steep stairway to the basement, and as, turning again into the dark kitchen, she put down the tray on a table near the window, she was woman enough to feel flattered at her unbidden guest's look of mingled gratitude and admiration.

As he fell to, ravenously, she noticed that his hands were white, and that he used his knife and fork like an educated man.

"What brought you to this pass?" she asked suddenly. "What sort of work is it that you can do?"

In reply he told her that he had been a medical student in his first term at the outbreak of war, and that he had at once joined up. Twice he had been badly wounded, and after the Armistice his physical condition had made it out of the question for him to study medicine. He had foolishly commuted his pension, and now he was penniless.

"There's an old friend of my father's living in Dover," he concluded, "I think he may help me to get some writing work."

He got up. "You have been a sport!" he exclaimed. "The more so that I'm afraid I gave you a fright."

"Well, yes, you did. The basement hasn't been used for ever so long," she said lightly. "We have a tiny kitchen upstairs."

He gave her a quick, rather peculiar look. "Someone's been cooking down here lately," he said thoughtfully. "There's a nasty smell in the next room. Would you like me to clean out the place for you?"

"Oh, no! I expect it's only a dead rat." She held out her hand. "Good-bye, and good luck!"

"The same to you" he said cordially. Then, turning, he limped across the wide kitchen.

"You'll shut the outer door and put the keys back where you found them?" she called out, just as he disappeared through the door.

He made no answer, but she could not doubt that he had heard. She found Malton in the kitchenette busy preparing breakfast. "What I can't make out," he said uneasily, "is how the chap got in."

When she had told him he struck his right hand against the palm of his left.

"How could I have been such a fool!" he exclaimed. "But I haven't thought of that bunch of keys since—well—" he hesitated a moment, "the last tenants left."

When she came down again, dressed, the now sun-filled, tiny kitchen was empty. "Jim," she called out, "Jim! Where are you?"

But there came no answering cry of jovial welcome, and she sat down alone and ate her breakfast.

Then, all at once, Malton was there, in the doorway, a bunch of rusty keys in his hand. He looked moody, preoccupied, troubled, and she, too, felt heavy-hearted. "Our last morning," she said with a sigh.

"I can't make any key fit the back door," he said abruptly, "I've tried them all, over and over again. I thought one of them *was* the right key, but it won't turn in the lock."

"I'm certain I could make it work," she said impatiently. After all the matter was of no importance.

"Give me a little of that salad oil. It will be all right once I've oiled the rust off it."

His face cleared, as he watched her rub up the key he had detached from the ring.

She gave him a little oil in a cup, and he refused, rather curtly, to let her come too.

Off he went again, but soon he came back. "No! It's not the right key. You don't think that young chap could have taken it off the ring and gone off with it?"

She stared at him, surprised. "What possible reason could he have had to do such a thing? He may have wrenched the lock in some way when turning the key. Old locks are queer things."

Malton made no further allusion to the matter, but three times during that long morning she heard him going round the garden to the door which gave access to the basement. And each time, as he came back, she saw by his vexed, preoccupied look that he had met with disappointment.

The day had opened for them both too early, as well as badly, and she felt tired, and out of spirits.

For the first time since they had exchanged that long beckoning look in the railway carriage where had begun their strange, ardent friendship, Eva Bude felt as if Jim Malton were a stranger. She had completely lost the adoring lover who was also an admiring friend. He was now cold, preoccupied, absent-minded.

Being the manner of woman she was, Eva had made up her mind to leave everything in perfect order.

Malton watched her with a look of cynical amusement. "I don't suppose there'll be anyone here again for years," he exclaimed brusquely, "Why give yourself so much trouble?"

The motor was late, and he paced about the sunny rooms, nervously afraid of missing the boat for France. At last, however, it arrived and, as her companion locked the front door, Eva

Bude stood gazing over the sea, wishing Malton had not spoiled, by his strange moodiness, the last morning of her last adventure.

As they drove quickly to Dover they had the car closed, for neither he nor she wished anyone to see them.

It was a strange, silent drive, but when they drew up near the jetty, he crushed her to him with something of his old ardour, and tears started to her beautiful eyes.

She waited till the boat started, and then she brushed her tears away, and, as she drove on, alone, there came over her a sincere feeling of relief that she had now done, for ever, with the secret joys and dangers of lawless love.

V

“A gentleman for you, ma’am. I think he said his name was Eaton.”

Mrs. Bude turned round quickly from her writing-table, and there ran through her mind just a very slight sensation of discomfort and surprise. She knew no one of the name of Eaton, she was not expecting a caller, and she was very busy.

It was the first of September, and a great deal had happened in the two months which had elapsed since she had come back from the short holiday Mr. Milman had willingly granted to his highly valued buyer.

Poor Mr. Milman! He was as yet happily unconscious of the fact that Mrs. Bude was going to give him notice on the morrow.

Eva had accepted this morning an offer of marriage from the man of whom she had spoken to her friend Agnes Harsham. And she was writing to Agnes now, telling her the great news.

When the maid opened the door she had just written the words :

“I am happier than I thought it possible any human being could ever be in this drab world. Harry is an angel, and he thinks me one, too! I know you think me a hard, worldly woman, Agnes, but I would still marry Harry if he became ruined to-morrow. You will laugh at me, but I feel, now, that I know for the first time what *real* love is, and can be. I feel like a girl, a lovely, pure, innocent girl, rejoicing in her first love——”

“As you didn’t say you was expecting anyone, ma’am, I left the gentleman in the hall,” went on the well-trained maid.

“Show him in,” said Mrs. Bude quickly.

A moment later she was shaking hands with her visitor, and deciding quickly in her own mind that he was a professional man of good stamp.

She also told herself wordlessly that he was ill at ease. Indeed for a moment or two he did not say anything. He simply stood gazing at her fixedly, and there was no touch of the admiration to which she was accustomed in the quiet keen glance.

It was she who at last broke a silence which had become oppressive.

“ May I enquire why you wish to see me ? ” she asked suavely.

He answered at once, in quick, incisive tones. “ I have come on what I am afraid is unpleasant business, Mrs. Bude.”

“ Unpleasant business ? ” she echoed.

The colour rushed into her face. Everything in her business life was absolutely above board.

In the world in which she moved, and where she held so high and secure a place, there were both men and women who sometimes talked, half jokingly, of the ways in which they could “ bilk ” the income tax. But she, Eva Bude, always said, and it was true, “ I put *everything* in—though, of course, I keep a very exact record of my expenses ! ”

There came such a look of real astonishment and troubled perplexity on the lovely face now turned enquiringly towards him, that Mr. Eaton felt that perhaps the carefully-built-up story, the truth of which he had come to probe, might be going to turn out, at any rate inasmuch as it concerned this charming lady, a mare's nest.

And though the way of his life made him, if not exactly a hard man, then a man whom it was almost impossible to surprise, so familiar had he become with the astonishing tricks and strange turns of our poor fallible human nature, her feminine charm so far affected him that he began to hope that a mistake had been made.

Everything he knew about Mrs. Bude—and he had learnt a great deal about her in the last few days—was entirely to her credit. Her name was widely known and respected in that branch of the wholesale trade where she was so successful, and though she was there known as “ the beautiful Mrs. Bude,” there had apparently never been a word against her character.

“ Do sit down,” she said courteously.

He sat down ; and then, after a pause, he asked what he knew

to be a crucial question : " May I take it, Mrs. Bude, that your telegraphic address is ' Bonako, Frampton ' ? "

" Yes," she said quickly. " What of it ? "

She saw his face change, and a slight tremor of fear came over her.

He opened his black attache case, and, taking out of it a telegraph form, handed it to her. She read :

" *Copy.*

The Old Cottage, Frampton-on-Thames. Handed in at Dover, 3.25, delivered Frampton, 4.17, July 3rd.

The motor meets you Waterloo three o'clock to-morrow.
—JIM."

She stared down at the piece of paper with a feeling of terror in her heart. Could this mean—it must mean—that she was about to be cited as co-respondent in a divorce case ? That Malton's account of himself had been a lie from beginning to end ; that he was not a widower, but a married man ; and that his wife had had him watched ?

Suddenly she remembered the tramp ! *He* must have been the detective who had tracked them down. Mr. Eaton was, of course, a solicitor. How stupid of her not to have guessed it sooner. Still she might, even so, manage to keep out of the case.

" I did receive that telegram," she said at last, in a low voice, and looking down as she spoke.

" Do you admit having motored in the company of one James Malton, to a house called ' The Folly,' some eight miles from Dover ? "

She said : " Am I bound to answer that question ? " and moistened her lips with her tongue nervously.

He made no reply to that for a few moments, and she added, " I suppose you are Mrs. Malton's solicitor ? "

" Mrs. Malton ? " he repeated questioningly. " I do not think she has an English lawyer."

Then he said, in a firm impressive tone, " I think it best to be frank with you, Mrs. Bude. I belong to the Criminal Investigation Department at Scotland Yard."

To his amazement he saw a look of relief flash over her face. Eva Bude was a clever and a well-informed woman, but even so, she supposed, in her ignorance, that Scotland Yard, among its other attributes, has that of taking a hand in obtaining evidence

with regard to divorce cases. So it was a great relief to her to learn that she was not dealing with a private firm of solicitors, or, worse still, with a private firm of detectives. It was within her knowledge that a high official at Scotland Yard had been very kind, with regard to a difficult and delicate matter concerning a case of blackmail. She also knew that the person who had received valuable assistance had been an attractive woman, though not nearly as attractive as she, Eva, was herself.

Tears—how amazed her visitor would have been had he realised that they were tears of relief!—began trickling down her cheeks.

“ I was only at ‘ The Folly ’ three days,” she whispered, “ and if it’s ever found out, I mean if I’m brought into a horrible divorce case, it will be my ruin, Mr. Eaton, not only as a business woman——”

And then she stopped ; she would not mention her engagement unless she were driven to it.

“ I have been a widow many years. I was very lonely——”

She stopped again, aware that he was looking at her with a thoughtful, measuring glance, as if wondering whether she were really telling him the truth.

Desperately she went on. “ Surely, *surely*, you can do something to help me ? Surely, especially now, it won’t be necessary for my name to appear in the papers ? I have often read in divorce cases the phrase ‘ an unknown woman.’ ”

He said suddenly : “ How long had you known James Malton, Mrs. Bude ? I suppose your acquaintance with him was of short standing ? ”

She bowed her head. Feelings of acute, agonising shame seemed to envelop her as in tongues of fire.

“ I—I can’t remember exactly when I did first meet him,” she faltered ; and at once he knew that she was not telling the truth.

“ Try and remember,” he said coldly.

She looked at him pleadingly. “ What is it I ought to remember ? ”

And the half-appeal went home. Mr. Eaton was beginning to feel very sorry for this beautiful woman.

“ I will be honest with you, Mrs. Bude. We know a great deal about Malton, but we do not know whether your acquaintance with the man was of long standing. Whether, for instance, you had ever been to ‘ The Folly ’ in his company before ? ”

"Never," she said eagerly. "Never! I swear it! It was the first time I had ever done anything of that kind."

Again her eyes dropped before his passionless scrutiny.

"Then I may take it that your acquaintance with Malton was of very short duration?"

Reluctantly, very reluctantly, she murmured, "Yes."

"You were abroad on business from the 9th to the 19th of June. May I assume that you had not yet met James Malton before you went to Paris?"

She made no answer for what seemed to them both a very long time. Should she lie, or should she admit the truth?

The fact that Mr. Eaton was a Scotland Yard official made up her mind for her. Wisely—far more wisely than she knew—she decided for the truth.

"I met him," she said, in a strangled voice, "on my journey home that time. I mean during the railway journey from Dover to London."

Again he glanced at his book. "I see. A fortnight almost to a day before you and he went to the house called 'The Folly' together?"

She felt too humiliated, too ashamed, to do more than bend her head.

"And now," he said, "we come to certain events which occurred while you were at 'The Folly.'"

She looked at him dumbly. To what events could he be referring? Nothing had happened which could possibly be called an "event" during those three days.

He opened a note-book. "Early on the morning of July the sixth a tramp effected an entrance into the basement of the house. As a matter of fact he was looking for food. You heard the sounds made by him, and you came downstairs in your dressing-gown. Then you went upstairs and procured him some food. You told him that the basement had not been used for a long time, and then he commented on the fact that there was a peculiar odour in the scullery. You answered that it was probably caused by a dead rat."

Eva Bude stared at her visitor. What an astonishing thing that those few idle words which she had quite forgotten, but which she now recalled, should be repeated to her now!

Again she told herself that the man who had so imposed on her good nature had, of course, been a detective.

"Yes, I remember his coming quite well," she said with quivering lip.

"The young man—his name is Skinner—locked the back door behind him. *But he took away the key.* A week ago he went back to the house, and a certain suspicion he had formed when he was there before was confirmed by him. Quite properly he then went to the Dover police station."

She said uncertainly: "Why did he do that? There was no one there when he went again—was there?"

He looked at her significantly. "On the occasion of Mr. Skinner's second visit there was no one alive in the house."

He slightly accentuated the word "alive."

As she said nothing, only looked at him with puzzled, frightened eyes, he asked another, and a final, question. "I suppose you had no occasion to go again into the basement of the house, Mrs. Bude?"

The colour rushed into her face. "I was only in the basement that one time. It's quite cut off from the rest of the house. What little cooking I had occasion to do was done on an oil stove in a little room upstairs."

She was becoming more and more bewildered. Yet the turn this curious conversation had taken was giving her a measure of comfort and re-assurance.

She realised, now, that no ordinary divorce case could be in question.

Suddenly her visitor leant forward.

"I am afraid," he said very gravely, "that I am going to give you a great shock, Mrs. Bude."

The colour had come back into her face; for she was beginning to see that the mystery concerned not herself, but either young Skinner or James Malton.

Mr. Eaton opened out a piece of paper he held in his hand. "I have here a plan of the basement."

She got up and bent over the paper, while he, pointing with a pencil, observed, "Here is the kitchen in which you had that talk with the man Skinner."

"Yes?" she said hesitatingly.

"Here, next to it, is the scullery, almost as large, you will observe, as is the kitchen. Beyond the kitchen is a cellar."

He waited a moment; then said slowly, impressively, "Now in that cellar, Mrs. Bude, was found, just five days ago, the body of a woman. That woman was Malton's first wife."

The words formed themselves on her lips : " Malton's first wife ? " but she did not utter them aloud. She only stared at him, while terror slowly filled her beautiful eyes.

" We have reason to suppose that there will be no difficulty in proving that the last woman James Malton took there before he took you there was his wife, and that he left her there, dead or alive, on the afternoon that you and he met for the first time."

" How horrible ! " she murmured ; and for a moment he feared she was going to faint.

" The opening day of the inquest has been fixed for next Saturday morning. I have with me a subpoena calling for your attendance. By that time the extradition formalities will have been completed, and we hope Malton will be present."

" Present ? " she echoed stupidly.

" Yes, we discovered his whereabouts quite easily. He was with his new wife, a rich Canadian lady, at Deauville. But for Skinner, and but"—he added with unconscious cruelty—" your going down to Skinner, and giving him that food, and letting him stay there long enough to take his bearings, so to speak, and—you'll pardon my mentioning something so unpleasant—giving him the opportunity of sniffing that curious odour, the body of that poor woman might not have been found, one may almost say, for years ! Malton had already sent the absent owner the purchase money for the house."

" Can *nothing* save me, Mr. Eaton ? *Must* I appear at the inquest ? "

She was looking at him with eyes dilated with terror.

" I'm afraid you must be at the inquest ; and further, if Malton is committed for trial, you will, of course, have to give evidence at the trial."

He waited a moment : " Here is the summons to attend the inquest," he murmured.

She took it from his hand, and then she walked over to the fireplace and rang the bell.

After he had gone Eva Bude went to her writing-table and took up the letter she had been writing to her friend.

Violently she tore it across and across—and then, setting fire to the pieces, she watched them burn.

E. W. Hornung

THE WRONG HOUSE

from RAFFLES

Methuen, 1899

My brother Ralph, who now lived with me on the edge of Ham Common, had come home from Australia with a curious affection of the eyes, due to long exposure to the glare out there, and necessitating the use of clouded spectacles in the open air. He had not the rich complexion of the typical colonist, being indeed peculiarly pale, but it appeared that he had been confined to his berth for the greater part of the voyage, while his prematurely grey hair was sufficient proof that the rigours of bush life had at last undermined an originally tough constitution. Our landlady, who spoilt my brother from the first, was much concerned on his behalf, and wished to call in the local doctor; but Ralph said dreadful things about the profession, and quite frightened the good woman by arbitrarily forbidding her ever to let a doctor inside her door. I had to apologise to her for the painful prejudices and violent language of "these colonists," but the old soul was easily mollified. She had fallen in love with my brother at first sight, and she never could do too much for him. It was owing to our landlady that I took to calling him Ralph, for the first time in our lives, on her beginning to speak of and to him as "Mr. Raffles."

"This won't do," said he to me. "It's a name that sticks."

"It must be my fault! She must have heard it from me," said I self-reproachfully.

"You must tell her it's the short for Ralph."

"But it's longer."

"It's the short," said he; "and you've got to tell her so."

Henceforth I heard as much of "Mr. Ralph," his likes and his dislikes, what he would fancy and what he would not, and ah, what a dear gentleman he was, that I often remembered to say, "Ralph, old chap," myself.

It was an ideal cottage, as I said when I found it, and in it our delicate man became rapidly robust. Not that the air was also ideal, for, when it was not raining, we had the same faithful mist from November to March. But it was something to Ralph to get any air at all, other than night air, and the bicycle did the rest.

We taught ourselves; and may I never forget our earlier rides, through and through Richmond Park when the afternoons were shortest, upon the incomparable Ripley Road when we gave a day to it. Raffles rode a Beeston Humber, a Royal Sunbeam was good enough for me, but he insisted on our both having Dunlop tyres.

“They seem the most popular brand. I had my eye on the road all the way from Ripley to Cobham, and there were more Dunlop marks than any other kind. Bless you, yes, they all leave their special tracks, and we don't want ours to be extra special; the Dunlop's like a rattlesnake, and the Palmer leaves telegraph-wires, but surely the serpent is more in our line.”

That was the winter when there were so many burglaries in the Thames Valley from Richmond upward. It was said that the thieves used bicycles in every case, but what is not said? They were sometimes on foot to my knowledge, and we took a great interest in the series, or rather sequence of successful crimes. Raffles would often get his devoted old lady to read him the latest local accounts, while I was busy with my writing (much I wrote) in my own rooms.

We even rode out by night ourselves, to see if we could not get on the tracks of the thieves, and never did we fail to find hot coffee on the hob for our return. We had indeed fallen upon our feet. Also, the misty nights might have been made for the thieves. But their success was not so consistent, and never so enormous, as people said, especially the sufferers, who lost more valuables than they had ever been known to possess. Failure was often the caitiffs' portion, and disaster once; owing, ironically enough, to that very mist which should have served them. But I am going to tell the story with some particularity, and perhaps some gusto, you will see why, who read.

The right house stood on high ground near the river, with quite a drive (in at one gate and out at the other) sweeping past the steps. Between the two gates was a half-moon of shrubs, to the left of the steps a conservatory, and to their right the walk leading to the tradesmen's entrance and the back premises; here also was the pantry window, of which more anon. The right house was the residence of an opulent stockbroker who wore a heavy watch-chain and seemed fair game. There would have been two objections to it had I been the stockbroker. The house was one of a row, though a goodly row, and an army-crammer had established himself next door. There is a type of such institutions in the suburbs; the youths

go about in knickerbockers, smoking pipes, except on Saturday nights, when they lead each other home from the last train. It was none of our business to spy upon these boys, but their manners and customs fell within the field of observation. And we did not choose the night upon which the whole row was likely to be kept awake.

The night that we did choose was as misty as even the Thames Valley is capable of making them. Raffles smeared vaseline over the plated parts of his Beeston Humber before starting, and our dear landlady cosseted us both, and prayed we might see nothing of the nasty burglars, not denying us the reward would be very handy to them that got it, to say nothing of the honour and glory. We had promised her a liberal perquisite in the event of our success, but she must not give other cyclists our idea by mentioning it to a soul. It was about midnight when we cycled through Kingston to Surbiton, having trundled our machines across Ham Fields, mournful in the mists as those by Acheron, and so over Teddington Bridge.

I often wonder why the pantry window is the vulnerable point of nine houses out of ten. This house of ours was almost the tenth, for the window in question had bars of sorts, but not the right sort. The only bars that Raffles allowed to beat him were the kind that are let into the stone outside ; those fixed within are merely screwed to the woodwork, and you can unscrew as many as necessary if you take the trouble and have the time. Barred windows are usually devoid of other fasteners worthy the name ; this one was no exception to that foolish rule, and a push with the penknife did its business. I am giving householders some valuable hints, and perhaps deserving a good mark from the critics. These, in any case, are the points that I would see to, were I a rich stockbroker in a river-side suburb. In giving good advice, however, I should not have omitted to say that we had left our machines in the semi-circular shrubbery in front, or that Raffles had most ingeniously fitted our lamps with dark slides, which enabled us to leave them burning.

It proved sufficient to unscrew the bars at the bottom only, and then to wrench them to either side. Neither of us had grown stout with advancing years, and in a few minutes we had both wormed through into the sink, and thence to the floor. It was not an absolutely noiseless process, but once in the pantry we were mice, and no longer blind mice. There was a gas-bracket, but we did not meddle with that. Raffles went armed these nights with a better

light than gas ; if it were not immoral, I might recommend a dark-lantern which was more or less his patent. It was that handy invention, the electric torch, fitted by Raffles with a dark hood to fulfil the functions of a slide. I had held it through the bars while he undid the screws, and now he held it to the keyhole, in which a key was turned upon the other side.

There was a pause for consideration, and in the pause we put on our masks. It was never known that these Thames Valley robberies were all committed by miscreants decked in the livery of crime, but that was because until this night we had never even shown our masks. It was a point upon which Raffles had insisted on all feasible occasions since his furtive return to the world. To-night it twice nearly lost us everything—but you shall hear.

There is a forceps for turning keys from the wrong side of the door, but the implement is not so easy of manipulation as it might be. Raffles for one preferred a sharp knife and the corner of the panel. You go through the panel because that is thinnest, of course in the corner nearest the key, and you use a knife when you can, because it makes least noise. But it does take minutes, and even I can remember shifting the electric torch from one hand to the other, before the aperture was large enough to receive the hand and wrist of Raffles.

He had at such times a motto of which I might have made earlier use, but the fact is that I have only once before described a downright burglary in which I assisted, and that without knowing it at the time. The most solemn student of these annals, cannot affirm that he has cut through many doors in our company, since (what was to me) the maiden effort to which I allude. I, however, have cracked only too many a crib in conjunction with A. J. Raffles, and at the crucial moment he would whisper "Victory or Wormwood Scrubbs, Bunny!" or instead of Wormwood Scrubbs it might be Portland Bill. This time it was neither one nor the other, for with that very word "victory" upon his lips, they whitened and parted with the first taste of defeat.

"My hand's held!" gasped Raffles, and the white of his eyes showed all round the iris, a rarer thing than you may think.

At the same moment I heard the shuffling feet and the low excited young voices on the other side of the door, and a faint light shone round Raffles's wrist.

"Well done, Beefy!"

"Hang on to him!"

“ Good old Beefy ! ”

“ Beefy’s got him ! ”

“ So have I—so have I ! ”

And Raffles caught my arm with his one free hand. “ They’ve got me tight,” he whispered. “ I’m done.”

“ Blaze through the door,” I urged, and might have done it had I been armed. But I never was. It was Raffles who monopolised that risk.

“ I can’t—it’s the boys—the wrong house ! ” he whispered. “ Curse the fog—it’s done me. But you get out, Bunny, while you can ; never mind me ; it’s my turn, old chap.”

His one hand tightened in affectionate farewell. I put the electric torch in it before I went, trembling in every inch, but without a word.

Get out ! His turn ! Yes, I would get out, but only to come in again, for it was my turn—mine—not his. Would Raffles leave me held by a hand through a hole in a door ? What he would have done in my place was the thing for me to do now. I began by diving head first through the pantry window and coming to earth upon all fours. But even as I stood up, and brushed the gravel from the palms of my hands and the knees of my knickerbockers, I had no notion what to do next. And yet I was half-way to the front door before I remembered the vile crape mask upon my face, and tore it off as the door flew open, and my feet were on the steps.

“ He’s into the next garden,” I cried to a bevy of pyjamas with bare feet and young faces at either end of them.

“ Who ? Who ? ” said they, giving way before me.

“ Some fellow who came through one of your windows head first.”

“ The other Johnny, the other Johnny,” the cherubs chorused.

“ Biking past—saw the light—why, what have you there ? ”

Of course it was Raffles’s hand that they had, but now I was in the hall among them. A red-faced barrel of a boy did all the holding, one hand round the wrist, the other palm to palm, and his knees braced up against the panel. Another was rendering ostentatious but ineffectual aid, and three or four others danced about in their pyjamas. After all, they were not more than four to one. I had raised my voice, so that Raffles might hear me and take heart, and now I raised it again. Yet to this day I cannot account for my inspiration, that proved nothing less.

“Don't talk so loud,” they were crying below their breath ;
“don't wake 'em upstairs, this is our show.”

“Then I see you've got one of them,” said I as desired. “Well, if you want the other you can have him too. I believe he's hurt himself.”

“After him, after him !” they exclaimed as one.

“But I think he got over the wall——”

“Come on, you chaps, come on !”

And there was a soft stampede to the hall door.

“Don't all desert me, I say !” gasped the red-faced hero who held Raffles prisoner.

“We must have them both, Beefy !”

“That's all very well——”

“Look here,” I interposed, “I'll stay by you. I've a friend outside, I'll get him too.”

“Thanks awfully,” said the valiant Beefy. The hall was empty now. My heart beat high.

“How did you hear them ?” I inquired, my eye running over him.

“We were down having drinks—game o' nap—in there.”

Beefy jerked his great head towards an open door, and the tail of my eye caught the glint of glasses in the firelight, but the rest of it was otherwise engaged.

“Let me relieve you,” I said, trembling.

“No, I'm all right.”

“Then I must insist.”

And before he could answer, I had him round the neck with such a will that not a gurgle passed my fingers, for they were almost buried in his hot smooth flesh. Oh, I am not proud of it ; the act was as vile as act could be ; but I was not going to see Raffles taken, my one desire was to be the saving of him, and I tremble even now to think to what lengths I might have gone for its fulfilment. As it was I squeezed and tugged until one strong hand gave way after the other and came feeling round for me, but feebly because they had held on so long. And what do you suppose was happening at the same moment ? The pinched white hand of Raffles, reddening with the returning blood, and with a clot of blood upon the wrist, was craning upward and turning the key in the lock without a moment's loss.

“Steady on, Bunny !”

And I saw that Beefy's ears were blue ; but Raffles was feeling

in his pockets as he spoke. "Now let him breathe," said he, clapping his handkerchief over the poor youth's mouth. An empty phial was in his other hand, and the first few stertorous breaths that the poor boy took were the end of him for the time being.

Oh, but it was villainous, my part especially, for he must have been far gone to go the rest of the way so readily. I began by saying I was not proud of this deed, but its dastardly character has come home to me more than ever with the penance of writing it out. I see in myself, at least my then self, things that I never saw quite so clearly before. Yet let me be quite sure that I would not do the same again. I had not the smallest desire to throttle this innocent lad (nor did I), but only to extricate Raffles from the most hopeless position he was ever in; and after all it was better than a blow from behind. On the whole, I will not alter a word, nor whine about the thing any more.

We lifted the plucky fellow into Raffles's place in the pantry, locked the door on him, and put the key through the panel. Now was the moment for thinking of ourselves, and again that infernal mask which Raffles swore by, came near the undoing of us both. We had reached the steps when we were hailed by a voice, not from without but from within, and I had just time to tear the accursed thing from Raffles's face before he turned.

A stout man with a blonde moustache was on the stairs, in his pyjamas like the boys.

"What are you doing here?" said he.

"There has been an attempt upon your house," said I, still spokesman for the night, and still on the wings of inspiration.

"Your sons——"

"My pupils."

"Indeed. Well, they heard it, drove off the thieves, and have given chase."

"And where do you come in?" enquired the stout man, descending.

"We were bicycling past, and I actually saw one fellow come head first through your pantry window. I think he got over the wall."

Here a breathless boy returned.

"Can't see anything of him," he gasped.

"It's true, then," remarked the crammer.

“Look at that door,” said I.

But unfortunately the breathless boy looked also, and now he was being joined by others equally short of wind.

“Where’s Beefy?” he screamed. “What on earth’s happened to Beefy?”

“My good boys,” exclaimed the crammer, “will one of you be kind enough to tell me what you’ve been doing, and what these gentlemen have been doing for you? Come in all, before you get your death. I see lights in the class-room, and more than lights. Can these be signs of a carouse?”

“A very innocent one, sir,” said a well-set-up youth with more moustache than I have yet.

“Well, Olphert, boys will be boys. Suppose you tell me what happened, before we come to recriminations.”

The bad old proverb was my first warning. I caught two of the youths exchanging glances under raised eye-brows. Yet their stout easy-going mentor had given me such a reassuring glance of side-long humour, as between man of the world and man of the world, that it was difficult to suspect him of suspicion. I was nevertheless itching to be gone.

Young Olphert told his story with engaging candour. It was true that they had come down for an hour’s nap and cigarettes; well, and there was no denying that was whisky in the glasses. The boys were now all back in their class-room, I think entirely for the sake of warmth; but Raffles and I were in knickerbockers and Norfolk jackets, and very naturally remained without, while the army-crammer (who wore bedroom slippers) stood on the threshold, with an eye each way. The more I saw of the man the better I liked and the more I feared him. His chief annoyance thus far was, that they had not called him when they heard the noise, that they had dreamt of leaving him out of the fun. But he seemed more hurt than angry about that.

“Well, sir,” concluded Olphert, “we left old Beefy Smith hanging on to his hand, and this gentleman with him, so perhaps he can tell us what happened next?”

“I wish I could,” I cried, with all their eyes upon me, for I had had time to think. “Some of you must have heard me say I’d fetch my friend in from the road?”

“Yes, I did,” piped an innocent from within.

“Well, and when I came back with him things were exactly as you see them now. Evidently the man’s strength was too much

for the boy's ; but whether he ran upstairs or outside, I know no more than you do."

"It wasn't like that boy to run either way," said the crammer, cocking a clear blue eye on me.

"But if he gave chase !"

"It wasn't like him even to let go."

"I don't believe Beefy ever would," put in Olphert. "That's why we gave him the billet."

"He may have followed him through the pantry window," I suggested wildly.

"But the door's shut," put in a boy.

"I'll have a look at it," said the crammer.

And the key no longer in the lock, and the insensible youth within ! The key would be missed, the door kicked in ; nay, with the man's eye still upon me, I thought I could smell chloroform, I thought I could hear a moan, and prepared for either any moment. And how he did stare ! I have detested blue eyes ever since, and blonde moustaches, and the whole stout easy-going type that is not such a fool as it looks. I had brazened it out with the boys, but the first grown man was too many for me, and the blood ran out of my heart as though there was no Raffles at my back. Indeed, I had forgotten him. I had so longed to put this thing through by myself ! Even in my extremity it was almost a disappointment to me, when his dear cool voice fell like a delicious draught upon my ears. But its effect upon the others is more interesting to recall. Until now the crammer had the centre of the stage, but at this point Raffles usurped a place which was always his at will. People would wait for what he had to say, as these people waited now for the simplest and most natural thing in the world.

"One moment !" he had begun.

"Well ?" said the crammer, relieving me of his eyes at last.

"I don't want to lose any of the fun——"

"Nor must you," said the crammer, with emphasis.

"But we've left our bikes outside, and mine's a Beeston Humber," continued Raffles. "If you don't mind, we'll bring 'em in before these fellows get away on them."

And out he went without a look to see the effect of his words, I after him with a determined imitation of his self-control. But I would have given something to turn round. I believe that for one moment the shrewd instructor was taken in, but as I reached

the steps I heard him asking his pupils whether any of them had seen any bicycles outside.

That moment, however, made the difference. We were in the shrubbery, Raffles with his electric torch drawn and blazing, when we heard them kicking at the pantry-door, and in the drive with our bicycles before man and boys poured pell-mell down the steps.

We rushed our machines to the nearer gate, for both were shut, and we got through and swung it home behind us in the nick of time. Even I could mount before they could reopen the gate, which Raffles held against them for half an instant with unnecessary gallantry. But he would see me in front of him, and so it fell to me to lead the way.

Now, I have said that it was a very misty night (hence the whole thing) and also that these houses were on a hill. But they were not nearly on the top of the hill, and I did what I firmly believe that almost everybody would have done in my place. Raffles, indeed, said he would have done it himself, but that was his generosity, and he was the one man who would not. What I did was to turn in the opposite direction to the other gate, where we might so easily have been cut off, and to pedal for my life—up-hill!

“My God!” I shouted when I found it out.

“Can you turn in your own length?” asked Raffles, following loyally.

“Not certain.”

“Then stick to it. You couldn't help it. But it's the devil of a hill!”

“And here they come!”

“Let them,” said Raffles, and brandished his electric torch, our only light as yet.

A hill seems endless in the dark, for you cannot see the end, and with the patter of bare feet gaining on us, I thought this one could have no end at all. Of course the boys could charge up it quicker than we could pedal, but I even heard the voice of their stout instructor growing louder through the mist.

“Oh, to think I've let you in for this!” I groaned, my head over the handle-bars, every ounce of my weight first on one foot and then on the other. I glanced at Raffles, and in the white light of his torch he was doing it all with his ankles, exactly as though he had been riding in a Gymkhana.

“It's the most sporting chase I was ever in,” said he.

“ All my fault ! ”

“ My dear Bunny, I wouldn't have missed it for the world ! ”

Nor would he forge ahead of me, though he could have done so in a moment, he who from his boyhood, had done everything of the kind so much better than anybody else. No, he must ride a wheel's length behind me, and now we could not only hear the boys running, but breathing also. And then of a sudden I saw Raffles on my right striking with his torch ; a face flew out of the darkness to meet the thick glass bulb with the glowing wire enclosed ; it was the face of the boy Olphert, with his enviable moustache, but it vanished with the crash of glass, and the naked wire thickened to the eye like a tuning-fork struck red-hot.

I saw no more of that. One of them had crept up on my side also ; as I looked, hearing him pant, he was grabbing at my left handle, and I nearly sent Raffles into the hedge by the sharp turn I took to the right. His wheel's length saved him. But my boy could run, was overhauling me again, seemed certain of me this time, when all at once the Sunbeam ran easily ; every ounce of my weight with either foot once more, and I was over the crest of the hill, the grey road reeling out from under me as I felt for my brake. I looked back at Raffles. He had put up his feet. I screwed my head round still farther, and there were the boys in their pyjamas, their hands upon their knees, like so many wicket-keepers, and a big man shaking his fist. There was a lamp-post on the hill-top, and that was the last I saw.

We sailed down to the river, then on through Thames Ditton as far as Esher station, when we turned sharp to the right, and from the dark stretch by Imber Court came to light in Molesey, and were soon pedalling like gentlemen of leisure through Bushey Park, our lights turned up, the broken torch put out and away. The big gates had long been shut, but you can manœuvre a bicycle through the others. We had no further adventures on the way home, and our coffee was still warm upon the hob.

“ But I think it's an occasion for Sullivans,” said Raffles, who now kept them for such. “ By all my gods, Bunny, it's been the most sporting night we ever had in our lives ! And do you know which was the most sporting part of it ? ”

“ That up-hill ride ! ”

“ I wasn't thinking of it.”

“ Turning your torch into a truncheon ? ”

“ My dear Bunny ! A gallant lad—I hated hitting him.”

"I know," I said. "The way you got us out of the house!"

"No, Bunny," said Raffles, blowing rings. "It came before that, you sinner, and you know it!"

"You don't mean anything I did?" said I, self-consciously, for I began to see that this was what he did mean. And now at last it will also be seen why this story has been told with undue and inexcusable gusto; there is none other like it for me to tell; it is my one ewe-lamb in all these annals. But Raffles had a ruder name for it.

"It was the Apotheosis of the Bunny," said he, but in a tone I never shall forget.

"I hardly knew what I was doing or saying," I said. "The whole thing was a fluke."

"Then," said Raffles, "it was the kind of fluke I always trusted you to make when runs were wanted."

And he held out his dear old hand.

"I know," I said. "The way you got us out of the house."

"No, Brandy," said Ralfee, blowing fangs. "It came before that."

"You don't mean anything I did?" said I, self-complacently, for I might be sure that this was what he did mean. And now at last it would be seen why this story had been told with such and such details; there is none other like it for me to tell; it is a piece of evidence in all these cases. But Ralfee had a rider, a name, a name that was given to the story. The name was "The House of the Bunnies," and he, but in a tone I shall never forget, when he said it, said, "The House of the Bunnies," I hardly knew what I was doing or saying," I said. "The House of the Bunnies" was a thing, a thing that I had always found to be true. It was the kind of thing I always found to be true when I was young. It was the kind of thing I always found to be true when I was young. It was the kind of thing I always found to be true when I was young.

SECTION II

STORIES OF MYSTERY AND HORROR

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STORIES OF
MYSTERY AND HORROR

Mrs. Oliphant

THE OPEN DOOR

from STORIES OF THE SEEN AND THE UNSEEN

Blackwood, 1881

I took the house of Brentwood on my return from India in 18—, for the temporary accommodation of my family, until I could find a permanent home for them. It had many advantages which made it peculiarly appropriate. It was within reach of Edinburgh, and my boy Roland, whose education had been considerably neglected, could go in and out to school, which was thought to be better for him than either leaving home altogether or staying there always with a tutor. The first of these expedients would have seemed preferable to me, the second commended itself to his mother. The doctor, like a judicious man, took the midway between. "Put him on his pony, and let him ride into the High School every morning; it will do him all the good in the world," Dr. Simson said; "and when it is bad weather there is the train." His mother accepted the solution of the difficulty more easily than I could have hoped; and our pale-faced boy, who had never known anything more invigorating than Simla, began to encounter the brisk breezes of the North in the subdued severity of the month of May. Before the time of the vacation in July we had the satisfaction of seeing him begin to acquire something of the brown and ruddy complexion of his schoolfellows. The English system did not commend itself to Scotland in these days. There was no little Eton at Fettes; nor do I think, if there had been, that a genteel exotic of that class would have tempted either my wife or me. The lad was doubly precious to us, being the only one left us of many; and he was fragile in body we believed, and deeply sensitive in mind. To keep him at home, and yet to send him to school—to combine the advantages of the two systems—seemed to be everything that could be desired. The two girls also found at Brentwood everything they wanted. They were near enough to Edinburgh to have masters and lessons as many as they required for completing that never-ending education which the young people seem to require nowadays. Their mother married me when she was younger than Agatha, and I should like to see them improve upon their mother! I myself was then no more than twenty-five—an age at which I see the young fellows now groping

about them, with no notion what they are going to do with their lives. However, I suppose every generation has a conceit of itself which elevates it, in its own opinion, above that which comes after it.

Brentwood stands on that fine and wealthy slope of country, one of the richest in Scotland, which lies between the Pentland Hills and the Firth. In clear weather you could see the blue gleam—like a bent bow, embracing the wealthy fields and scattered houses—of the great estuary on one side of you; and on the other the blue heights, not gigantic like those we had been used to, but just high enough for all the glories of the atmosphere, the play of clouds, and sweet reflections, which give to a hilly country an interest and a charm which nothing else can emulate. Edinburgh, with its two lesser heights—the Castle and the Calton Hill—its spires and towers piercing through the smoke, and Arthur's Seat lying crouched behind, like a guardian no longer very needful, taking his repose beside the well-beloved charge, which is now, so to speak, able to take care of itself without him—lay at our right hand. From the lawn and drawing-room windows we could see all these varieties of landscape. The colour was sometimes a little chilly, but sometimes, also, as animated and full of vicissitude as a drama. I was never tired of it. Its colour and freshness revived the eyes which had grown weary of arid plains and blazing skies. It was always cheery, and fresh, and full of repose.

The village of Brentwood lay almost under the house, on the other side of the deep little ravine, down which a stream—which ought to have been a lovely, wild, and frolicsome little river—flowed between its rocks and trees. The river, like so many in that district, had, however, in its earlier life been sacrificed to trade, and was grimy with paper-making. But this did not affect our pleasure in it so much as I have known it to affect other streams. Perhaps our water was more rapid—perhaps less clogged with dirt and refuse. Our side of the dell was charmingly *accidenté*, and clothed with fine trees, through which various paths wound down to the river-side and to the village bridge which crossed the stream. The village lay in the hollow, and climbed, with very prosaic houses, the other side. Village architecture does not flourish in Scotland. The blue slates and the grey stone are sworn foes to the picturesque; and though I do not, for my own part, dislike the interior of an old-fashioned pewed and galleried church, with its little family settlements on all sides, the square box outside,

with its bit of a spire like a handle to lift it by, is not an improvement to the landscape. Still, a cluster of houses on differing elevations—with scraps of garden coming in between, a hedgerow with clothes laid out to dry, the opening of a street with its rural sociability, the women at their doors, the slow waggon lumbering along—gives a centre to the landscape. It was cheerful to look at, and convenient in a hundred ways. Within ourselves we had walks in plenty, the glen being always beautiful in all its phases, whether the woods were green in the spring or ruddy in the autumn. In the park which surrounded the house were the ruins of the former mansion of Brentwood, a much smaller and less important house than the solid Georgian edifice which we inhabited. The ruins were picturesque, however, and gave importance to the place. Even we, who were but temporary tenants, felt a vague pride in them, as if they somehow reflected a certain consequence upon ourselves. The old building had the remains of a tower, an indistinguishable mass of mason-work, overgrown with ivy, and the shells of walls attached to this were half filled up with soil. I had never examined it closely, I am ashamed to say. There was a large room, or what had been a large room, with the lower part of the windows still existing, on the principal floor, and underneath other windows, which were perfect, though half filled up with fallen soil, and waving with a wild growth of brambles and chance growths of all kinds. This was the oldest part of all. At a little distance were some very commonplace and disjointed fragments of the building, one of them suggesting a certain pathos by its very commonness and the complete wreck which it showed. This was the end of a low gable, a bit of grey wall, all encrusted with lichens, in which was a common doorway. Probably it had been a servants' entrance, a back-door, or opening into what are called "the offices" in Scotland. No offices remained to be entered—pantry and kitchen had all been swept out of being; but there stood the doorway open and vacant, free to all the winds, to the rabbits, and every wild creature. It struck my eye, the first time I went to Brentwood, like a melancholy comment upon a life that was over. A door that led to nothing—closed once perhaps with anxious care, bolted and guarded, now void of any meaning. It impressed me, I remember, from the first; so perhaps it may be said that my mind was prepared to attach to it an importance, which nothing justified.

The summer was a very happy period of repose for us all. The

warmth of Indian suns was still in our veins. It seemed to us that we could never have enough of the greenness, the dewiness, the freshness of the northern landscape. Even its mists were pleasant to us, taking all the fever out of us, and pouring in vigour and refreshment. In autumn we followed the fashion of the time, and went away for change which we did not in the least require. It was when the family had settled down for the winter, when the days were short and dark, and the rigorous reign of frost upon us, that the incidents occurred which alone could justify me in intruding upon the world my private affairs. These incidents were, however, of so curious a character, that I hope my inevitable references to my own family and pressing personal interests will meet with a general pardon.

I was absent in London when these events began. In London an old Indian plunges back into the interests with which all his previous life has been associated, and meets old friends at every step. I had been circulating among some half-dozen of these—enjoying the return to my former life in shadow, though I had been so thankful in substance to throw it aside—and had missed some of my home letters, what with going down from Friday to Monday to old Benbow's place in the country, and stopping on the way back to dine and sleep at Sellar's and to take a look into Cross's stables, which occupied another day. It is never safe to miss one's letters. In this transitory life, as the Prayer-book says, how can one ever be certain what is going to happen? All was well at home. I knew exactly (I thought) what they would have to say to me: "The weather has been so fine, that Roland has not once gone by train, and he enjoys the ride beyond anything." "Dear papa, be sure that you don't forget anything, but bring us so-and-so and so-and-so"—a list as long as my arm. Dear girls and dearer mother! I would not for the world have forgotten their commissions, or lost their little letters, for all the Benbows and Crosses in the world.

But I was confident in my home-comfort and peacefulness. When I got back to my club, however, three or four letters were lying for me, upon some of which I noticed the "immediate," "urgent," which old-fashioned people and anxious people still believe will influence the post-office and quicken the speed of the mails. I was about to open one of these, when the club porter brought me two telegrams, one of which, he said, had arrived the night before. I opened, as was to be expected, the last first, and this was what I read: "Why don't you come or answer? For God's

sake, come. He is much worse." This was a thunderbolt to fall upon a man's head who had only one son, and he the light of his eyes! The other telegram, which I opened with hands trembling so much that I lost time by my haste, was to much the same purport: "No better; doctor afraid of brain-fever. Calls for you day and night. Let nothing detain you." The first thing I did was to look up the time-tables to see if there was any way of getting off sooner than by the night-train, though I knew well enough there was not; and then I read the letters, which furnished, alas! too clearly, all the details. They told me that the boy had been pale for some time, with a scared look. His mother had noticed it before I left home, but would not say anything to alarm me. This look had increased day by day; and soon it was observed that Roland came home at a wild gallop through the park, his pony panting and in foam, himself "as white as a sheet," but with the perspiration streaming from his forehead. For a long time he had resisted all questioning, but at length had developed such strange changes of mood, showing a reluctance to go to school, a desire to be fetched in the carriage at night—which was a ridiculous piece of luxury—an unwillingness to go out into the grounds, and nervous start at every sound, that his mother had insisted upon an explanation. When the boy—our boy Roland, who had never known what fear was—began to talk to her of voices he had heard in the park, and shadows that had appeared to him among the ruins, my wife promptly put him to bed and sent for Dr. Simson—which, of course, was the only thing to do.

I hurried off that evening, as may be supposed, with an anxious heart. How I got through the hours before the starting of the train, I cannot tell. We must all be thankful for the quickness of the railway when in anxiety; but to have thrown myself into a post-chaise as soon as horses could be put to, would have been a relief. I got to Edinburgh very early in the blackness of the winter morning, and scarcely dared look the man in the face at whom I gasped "What news?" My wife had sent the brougham for me, which I concluded, before the man spoke, was a bad sign. His answer was that stereotyped answer which leaves the imagination so wildly free—"Just the same." Just the same! What might that mean? The horses seemed to me to creep along the long dark country-road. As we dashed through the park, I thought I heard some one moaning among the trees, and clenched my fist at him (whoever he might be) with fury. Why had the fool of a woman

at the gate allowed any one to come in to disturb the quiet of the place? If I had not been in such hot haste to get home, I think I should have stopped the carriage and got out to see what tramp it was that had made an entrance, and chosen my grounds, of all places in the world—when my boy was ill!—to grumble and groan in. But I had no reason to complain of our slow pace here. The horses flew like lightning along the intervening path, and drew up at the door all panting, as if they had run a race. My wife stood waiting to receive me with a pale face, and a candle in her hand, which made her look paler still as the wind blew the flame about. "He is sleeping," she said in a whisper, as if her voice might wake him. And I replied, when I could find my voice, also in a whisper, as though the jingling of the horses' furniture and the sound of their hoofs must not have been more dangerous. I stood on the steps with her a moment, almost afraid to go in, now that I was here; and it seemed to me that I saw without observing, if I may say so, that the horses were unwilling to turn round, though their stables lay that way, or that the men were unwilling. These things occurred to me afterwards, though at the moment I was not capable of anything but to ask questions and to hear of the condition of the boy.

I looked at him from the door of his room, for we were afraid to go near, lest we should disturb that blessed sleep. It looked like actual sleep—not the lethargy into which my wife told me he would sometimes fall. She told me everything in the next room, which communicated with his, rising now and then and going to the door of communication; and in this there was much that was very startling and confusing to the mind. It appeared that ever since the winter began, since it was early dark and night had fallen before his return from school, he had been hearing voices among the ruins—at first only a groaning, he said, at which his pony was as much alarmed as he was, but by degrees a voice. The tears ran down my wife's cheeks as she described to me how he would start up in the night and cry out, "Oh, mother, let me in! oh, mother, let me in!" with a pathos which rent her heart. And she sitting there all the time, only longing to do everything his heart could desire! But though she would try to soothe him, crying, "You are at home, my darling. I am here. Don't you know me? Your mother is here," he would only stare at her, and after a while spring up again with the same cry. At other times he would be quite reasonable, she said, asking eagerly when I was coming, but

declaring that he must go with me as soon as I did so, "to let them in." "The doctor thinks his nervous system must have received a shock," my wife said. "Oh, Henry, can it be that we have pushed him on too much with his work—a delicate boy like Roland?—and what is his work in comparison with his health? Even you would think little of honours or prizes if it hurt the boy's health." Even I! as if I were an inhuman father sacrificing my child to my ambition. But I would not increase her trouble by taking any notice. After a while they persuaded me to lie down, to rest, and to eat—none of which things had been possible since I received their letters. The mere fact of being on the spot, of course, in itself was a great thing; and when I knew that I would be called in a moment, as soon as he was awake and wanted me, I felt capable, even in the dark, chill morning twilight, to snatch an hour or two's sleep. As it happened, I was so worn out with the strain of anxiety, and he so quieted and consoled by knowing I had come, that I was not disturbed till the afternoon, when the twilight had again settled down. There was just daylight enough to see his face when I went to him; and what a change in a fortnight! He was paler and more worn, I thought, than even in those dreadful days in the plains before we left India. His hair seemed to me to have grown long and lank; his eyes were like blazing lights projecting out of his white face. He got hold of my hand in a cold and tremulous clutch, and waved to everybody to go away. "Go away—even mother," he said—"go away." This went to her heart, for she did not like that even I should have more of the boy's confidence than herself; but my wife has never been a woman to think of herself, and she left us alone. "Are they all gone?" he said, eagerly. "They would not let me speak. The doctor treated me as if I were a fool. You know I am not a fool, papa."

"Yes, yes, my boy, I know; but you are ill, and quiet is so necessary. You are not only not a fool, Roland, but you are reasonable and understand. When you are ill you must deny yourself; you must not do everything that you might do being well."

He waved his thin hand with a sort of indignation. "Then, father, I am not ill," he cried. "Oh, I thought when you came you would not stop me—you would see the sense of it! What do you think is the matter with me, all of you? Simson is well enough, but he is only a doctor. What do you think is the matter with me?"

I am no more ill than you are. A doctor, of course, he thinks you are ill the moment he looks at you—that's what he's there for—and claps you into bed."

"Which is the best place for you at present, my dear boy?"

"I made up my mind," cried the little fellow, "that I would stand it till you came home. I said to myself, I won't frighten mother and the girls. But now, father," he cried, half jumping out of bed, "it's not illness—it's a secret."

His eyes shone so wildly, his face was so swept with strong feeling, that my heart sank within me. It could be nothing but fever that did it, and fever had been so fatal. I got him into my arms to put him back into bed. "Roland," I said, humouring the poor child, which I knew was the only way, "if you are going to tell me this secret to do any good, you know you must be quite quiet, and not excite yourself. If you excite yourself, I must not let you speak."

"Yes, father," said the boy. He was quiet directly, like a man, as if he quite understood. When I had laid him back on his pillow, he looked up at me with that grateful, sweet look with which children, when they are ill, break one's heart, the water coming into his eyes in his weakness. "I was sure as soon as you were here you would know what to do," he said.

"To be sure, my boy. Now keep quiet, and tell it all out like a man." To think I was telling lies to my own child! for I did it only to humour him, thinking, poor little fellow, his brain was wrong.

"Yes, father. Father, there is some one in the park—some one that has been badly used."

"Hush, my dear; you remember, there is to be no excitement. Well, who is this somebody, and who has been ill-using him? We will soon put a stop to that."

"Ah," cried Roland, "but it is not so easy as you think. I don't know who it is. It is just a cry. Oh, if you could hear it! It gets into my head in my sleep. I heard it as clear as clear; and they think that I am dreaming—or raving perhaps," the boy said, with a sort of disdainful smile.

This look of his perplexed me; it was less like fever than I thought. "Are you quite sure you have not dreamt it, Roland?" I said.

"Dreamt?—that!" He was springing up again when he suddenly bethought himself, and lay down flat with the same sort

of smile on his face. "The pony heard it too," he said. "She jumped as if she had been shot. If I had not grasped at the reins—for I was frightened, father——"

"No shame to you, my boy," said I, though I scarcely knew why.

"If I hadn't held to her like a leech, she'd have pitched me over her head, and she never drew breath till we were at the door. Did the pony dream it?" he said, with a soft disdain, yet indulgence for my foolishness. Then he added slowly: "It was only a cry the first time, and all the time before you went away. I wouldn't tell you, for it was so wretched to be frightened. I thought it might be a hare or a rabbit snared, and I went in the morning and looked, but there was nothing. It was after you went I heard it really first, and this is what he says." He raised himself on his elbow close to me, and looked me in the face. "'Oh, mother, let me in! oh, mother, let me in!'" As he said the words a mist came over his face, the mouth quivered, the soft features all melted and changed, and when he had ended these pitiful words, dissolved in a shower of heavy tears.

Was it a hallucination? Was it the fever of the brain? Was it the disordered fancy caused by great bodily weakness? How could I tell? I thought it wisest to accept it as if it were all true.

"This is very touching, Roland," I said.

"Oh, if you had just heard it, father! I said to myself, 'if father heard it he would do something'; but mamma, you know, she's given over to Simson, and that fellow's a doctor, and never thinks of anything but clapping you into bed."

"We must not blame Simson for being a doctor, Roland."

"No, no," said my boy, with delightful toleration and indulgence; "oh, no; that's the good of him—that's what he's for; I know that. But you—you are different; you are just father: and you'll do something—directly, papa, directly—this very night."

"Surely," I said. "No doubt, it is some little lost child."

He gave me a sudden, swift look, investigating my face as though to see whether, after all, this was everything my eminence as "father" came to—no more than that? Then he got hold of my shoulder, clutching it with his thin hand: "Look here," he said, with a quiver in his voice; "suppose it wasn't—living at all!"

"My dear boy, how then could you have heard it?" I said.

He turned away from me, with a pettish exclamation—"As if you didn't know better than that!"

"Do you want to tell me it is a ghost?" I said.

Roland withdrew his hand ; his countenance assumed an aspect of great dignity and gravity ; a slight quiver remained about his lips. " Whatever it was—you always said we were not to call names. It was something—in trouble. Oh, father, in terrible trouble ! "

" But, my boy," I said—I was at my wits' end—" if it was a child that was lost, or any poor human creature—but, Roland, what do you want me to do ? "

" I should know if I was you," said the child, eagerly. " That is what I always said to myself—' Father will know.' Oh, papa, papa, to have to face it night after night, in such terrible, terrible trouble ! and never to be able to do it any good. I don't want to cry ; it's like a baby, I know ; but what can I do else ?—out there all by itself in the ruin, and nobody to help it. I can't bear it, I can't bear it ! " cried my generous boy. And in his weakness he burst out, after many attempts to restrain it, into a great childish fit of sobbing and tears.

I do not know that I ever was in a greater perplexity in my life ; and afterwards, when I thought of it, there was something comic in it too. It is bad enough to find your child's mind possessed with the conviction that he has seen—or heard—a ghost. But that he should require you to go instantly and help that ghost, was the most bewildering experience that had ever come my way. I am a sober man myself, and not superstitious—at least any more than everybody is superstitious. Of course I do not believe in ghosts ; but I don't deny, any more than other people, that there are stories which I cannot pretend to understand. My blood got a sort of chill in my veins at the idea that Roland should be a ghost-seer ; for that generally means a hysterical temperament and weak health, and all that men most hate and fear for their children. But that I should take up his ghost and right its wrongs, and save it from its trouble, was such a mission as was enough to confuse any man. I did my best to console my boy without giving any promise of this astonishing kind ; but he was too sharp for me. He would have none of my caresses. With sobs breaking in at intervals upon his voice, and the rain-drops hanging on his eyelids, he yet returned to the charge.

" It will be there now—it will be there all the night. Oh think, papa, think, if it was me ! I can't rest for thinking of it. Don't ! " he cried, putting away my hand—" don't ! You go and help it, and mother can take care of me. "

“ But, Roland, what can I do ? ”

My boy opened his eyes, which were large with weakness and fever, and gave me a smile such, I think, as sick children only know the secret of. “ I was sure you would know as soon as you came. I always said—‘ Father will know ’ : and mother, he cried, with a softening of repose upon his face, his limbs relaxing, his form sinking with a luxurious ease in his bed—“ mother can come and take care of me.”

I called her, and saw him turn to her with the complete dependence of a child, and then I went away and left them, as perplexed a man as any in Scotland. I must say, however, I had this consolation, that my mind was greatly eased about Roland. He might be under a hallucination, but his head was clear enough, and I did not think him so ill as everybody else did. The girls were astonished even at the ease with which I took it. “ How do you think he is ? ” they said in a breath, coming round me, laying hold of me. “ Not half so ill as I expected,” I said ; “ not very bad at all.” “ Oh, papa, you are a darling,” cried Agatha, kissing me, and crying upon my shoulder ; while little Jeanie, who was as pale as Roland, clasped both her arms round mine, and could not speak at all. I knew nothing about it, not half so much as Simson ; but they believed in me ; they had a feeling that all would go right now. God is very good to you when your children look to you like that. It makes one humble, not proud. I was not worthy of it ; and then I recollected that I had to act the part of a father to Roland’s ghost, which made me almost laugh, though I might just as well have cried. It was the strangest mission that ever was entrusted to mortal man.

It was then I remembered suddenly the looks of the men when they turned to take the brougham to the stables in the dark that morning : they had not liked it, and the horses had not liked it. I remembered that even in my anxiety about Roland I had heard them tearing along the avenue back to the stables, and had made a memorandum mentally that I must speak of it. It seemed to me that the best thing I could do was to go to the stables now and make a few inquiries. It is impossible to fathom the minds of rustics ; there might be some devilry of practical joking, for anything I knew ; or they might have some interest in getting up a bad reputation for the Brentwood avenue. It was getting dark by the time I went out, and nobody who knows the country will need to be told how black is the darkness of a November night

under high laurel-bushes and yew-trees. I walked into the heart of the shrubberies two or three times, not seeing a step before me, till I came out upon the broader carriage-road, where the trees opened a little, and there was a faint grey glimmer of sky visible, under which the great limes and elms stood darkling like ghosts; but it grew black again as I approached the corner where the ruins lay. Both eyes and ears were on the alert, as may be supposed; but I could see nothing in the absolute gloom, and, so far as I can recollect, I heard nothing. Nevertheless, there came a strong impression upon me that somebody was there. It is a sensation which most people have felt. I have seen when it has been strong enough to awake me out of sleep, the sense of some one looking at me. I suppose my imagination had been affected by Roland's story; and the mystery of the darkness is always full of suggestions. I stamped my feet violently on the gravel to rouse myself, and called out sharply, "Who's there?" Nobody answered, nor did I expect any one to answer, but the impression had been made. I was so foolish that I did not like to look back, but went sideways, keeping an eye on the gloom behind. It was with great relief that I spied the light in the stables, making a sort of oasis in the darkness. I walked very quickly into the midst of that lighted and cheerful place, and thought the clank of the groom's pail one of the pleasantest sounds I had ever heard. The coachman was the head of this little colony, and it was to his house I went to pursue my investigations. He was a native of the district, and had taken care of the place in the absence of the family for years; it was impossible but that he must know everything that was going on, and all the traditions of the place. The men, I could see, eyed me anxiously when I thus appeared at such an hour among them, and followed me with their eyes to Jarvis's house, where he lived alone with his old wife, their children being all married and out in the world. Mrs. Jarvis met me with anxious questions. How was the poor young gentleman? but the others knew, I could see by their faces, that not even this was the foremost thing in my mind.

"Noises?—ou ay, there'll be noises—the wind in the trees, and the water soughing down the glen. As for tramps, Cornel, no, there's little o' that kind of cattle about here; and Merran at the gate's a careful body." Jarvis moved about with some embarrassment from one leg to another as he spoke. He kept in the shade,

and did not look at me more than he could help. Evidently his mind was perturbed, and he had reasons for keeping his own counsel. His wife sat by, giving him a quick look now and then, but saying nothing. The kitchen was very snug, and warm, and bright—as different as could be from the chill and mystery of the night outside.

“ I think you are trifling with me, Jarvis,” I said.

“ Triflin’, Cornel ? no me. What would I trifle for ? If the deevil himsel’ was in the auld hoose, I have no interest in’t one way or another——”

“ Sandy, hold your peace ! ” cried his wife imperatively.

“ And what am I to hold my peace for, wi’ the Cornel standing there asking a’ thae questions ? I’m saying, if the deevil himsel’——”

“ And I’m telling ye hold your peace ! ” cried the woman, in great excitement. “ Dark November weather and lang nights, and us that ken a’ we ken. How daur ye name—a name that shouldna be spoken ? ” She threw down her stocking and got up, also in great agitation. “ I tell’t ye you never could keep it. It’s no a thing that will hide ; and the haill toun kens as weel as you or me. Tell the Cornel straight out—or see, I’ll do it. I dinna hold wi’ your secrets ; and a secret that the haill toun kens ! ” She snapped her fingers with an air of large disdain. As for Jarvis, ruddy and big as he was, he shrank to nothing before this decided woman. He repeated to her two or three times her own adjuration, “ Hold your peace ! ” then, suddenly changing his tone, cried out, “ Tell him then, confound ye ! I’ll wash my hands o’t. If a’ the ghosts in Scotland were in the auld hoose, is that ony concern o’ mine ? ”

After this I elicited without much difficulty the whole story. In the opinion of the Jarvises, and of everybody about, the certainty that the place was haunted was beyond all doubt. As Sandy and his wife warmed to the tale, one tripping up another in their eagerness to tell everything, it gradually developed as distinct a superstition as I ever heard, and not without poetry and pathos. How long it was since the voice had been heard first, nobody could tell with certainty. Jarvis’s opinion was that his father, who had been coachman at Brentwood before him, had never heard anything about it, and that the whole thing had arisen within the last ten years, since the complete dismantling of the old house : which was a wonderfully modern date for a tale so well authenticated. According to these witnesses, and to several

whom I questioned afterwards, and who were all in perfect agreement, it was only in the months of November and December that "the visitation" occurred. During these months, the darkest of the year, scarcely a night passed without the recurrence of these inexplicable cries. Nothing, it was said, had ever been seen—at least nothing that could be identified. Some people, bolder or more imaginative than the others, had seen the darkness moving, Mrs. Jarvis said, with unconscious poetry. It began when night fell and continued, at intervals, till day broke. Very often it was only an inarticulate cry and moaning, but sometimes the words which had taken possession of my poor boy's fancy had been distinctly audible—"Oh, mother, let me in!" The Jarvises were not aware that there had ever been any investigation into it. The estate of Brentwood had lapsed into the hands of a distant branch of the family, who had lived but little there; and of the many people who had taken it, as I had done, few had remained through two Decembers. And nobody had taken the trouble to make a very close examination into the facts. "No, no," Jarvis said, shaking his head, "No, no, Cornel. Wha wad set themsels up for a laughin'-stock to a' the country-side, making a wark about a ghost? Naebody believes in ghosts. It bid to be the wind in the trees, the last gentleman said, or some effec' o' the water wrastlin' among the rocks. He said it was a' quite easy explained: but he gave up the hoose. And when you cam, Cornel, we were awfu' anxious you should never hear. What for should I have spoiled the bargain and hairmed the property for no-thing?"

"Do you call my child's life nothing?" I said in the trouble of the moment, unable to restrain myself. "And instead of telling this all to me, you have told it to him—to a delicate boy, a child unable to sift evidence, or judge for himself, a tender-hearted young creature——"

I was walking about the room with an anger all the hotter that I felt it to be most likely quite unjust. My heart was full of bitterness against the stolid retainers of a family who were content to risk other people's children and comfort rather than let the house lie empty. If I had been warned I might have taken precautions, or left the place, or sent Roland away, a hundred things which now I could not do; and here I was with my boy in a brain-fever, and his life, the most precious life on earth, hanging in the balance, dependent on whether or not I could get to the reason of a commonplace ghost-story! I paced about in high wrath, not

seeing what I was to do ; for, to take Roland away, even if he were able to travel, would not settle his agitated mind ; and I feared even that a scientific explanation of refracted sound, or reverberation, or any other of the easy certainties with which we elder men are silenced, would have very little effect upon the boy.

“Cornel,” said Jarvis, solemnly, “and *she’ll* bear me witness—the young gentleman never heard a word from me—no, nor from either groom or gardener ; I’ll gie ye my word for that. In the first place, he’s no a lad that invites ye to talk. There are some that are, and some that arena. Some will draw ye on, till ye’ve tellt them a’ the clatter of the toun, and a’ ye ken, and whiles mair. But Maister Roland, his mind’s fu’ of his books. He’s aye civil and kind, and a fine lad ; but no that sort. And ye see it’s for a’ our interest, Cornel, that you should stay at Brentwood. I took it upon me mysel’ to pass the word—‘No a syllable to Maister Roland, nor to the young leddies—no a syllable.’ The women-servants, that have little reason to be out at night, ken little or nothing about it. And some think it grand to have a ghost so long as they’re no in the way of coming across it. If you had been tellt the story to begin with, maybe ye would have thought so yourself.”

This was true enough, though it did not throw any light upon my perplexity. If we had heard of it to start with, it is possible that all the family would have considered the possession of a ghost a distinct advantage. It is the fashion of the times. We never think what a risk it is to play with young imaginations, but cry out, in the fashionable jargon, “A ghost !—nothing else was wanted to make it perfect.” I should not have been above this myself. I should have smiled, of course, at the idea of the ghost at all, but then to feel that it was mine would have pleased my vanity. Oh, yes, I claim no exemption. The girls would have been delighted. I could fancy their eagerness, their interest, and excitement. No ; if we had been told, it would have done no good—we should have made the bargain all the more eagerly, the fools that we are. “And there has been no attempt to investigate it,” I said, “to see what it really is ?”

“Eh, Cornel,” said the coachman’s wife, “wha would investigate, as ye call it, a thing that nobody believes in ? Ye would be the laughing-stock of a’ the country-side, as my man says.”

“But you believe in it,” I said, turning upon her hastily. The woman was taken by surprise. She made a step backward out of my way.

“ Lord, Cornel, how ye frichten a body ! Me !—there’s awful strange things in this world. An unlearned person doesna ken what to think. But the minister and the gentry they just laugh in your face. Inquire into the thing that is not ! Na, na, we just let it be.”

“ Come with me, Jarvis,” I said, hastily, “ and we’ll make an attempt at least. Say nothing to the men or to anybody. I’ll come back after dinner, and we’ll make a serious attempt to see what it is, if it is anything. If I hear it—which I doubt—you may be sure I shall never rest till I make it out. Be ready for me about ten o’clock.”

“ Me, Cornel ! ” Jarvis said, in a faint voice. I had not been looking at him in my own preoccupation, but when I did so, I found that the greatest change had come over the fat and ruddy coachman. “ Me, Cornel ! ” he repeated, wiping the perspiration from his brow. His ruddy face hung in flabby folds, his knees knocked together, his voice seemed half extinguished in his throat. Then he began to rub his hands and smile upon me in a deprecating, imbecile way. “ There’s nothing I wouldna do to pleasure ye, Cornel,” taking a step further back. “ I’m sure *she* kens I’ve aye said I never had to do with a mair fair, weelspoken gentleman——” Here Jarvis came to a pause, again looking at me, rubbing his hands.

“ Well ? ” I said.

“ But eh, sir ! ” he went on, with the same imbecile yet insinuating smile, “ if ye’ll reflect that I am no used to my feet. With a horse atween my legs, or the reins in my hand, I’m maybe nae worse than other men ; but on fit, Cornel—— It’s no the—boggles ;——but I’ve been cavalry, ye see,” with a little hoarse laugh, “ a’ my life. To face a thing ye didna understan’—on your feet, Cornel ——”

“ Well, sir, if *I* do it,” said I tartly, “ why shouldn’t you ? ”

“ Eh, Cornel, there’s an awfu’ difference. In the first place, ye tramp about the haill country-side, and think naething of it ; but a walk tires me mair than a hunard miles’ drive ; and then ye’e a gentleman, and do your ain pleasure ; and you’re no so auld as me ; and it’s for your ain bairn, ye see, Cornel ; and then——”

“ He believes in it, Cornel, and you dinna believe in it,” the woman said.

“ Will you come with me ? ” I said, turning to her.

She jumped back, upsetting her chair in her bewilderment. "Me!" with a scream, and then fell into a sort of hysterical laugh. "I wouldna say but what I would go; but what would the folk say to hear of Cornel Mortimer with an auld silly woman at his heels?"

The suggestion made me laugh too, though I had little inclination for it. "I'm sorry you have so little spirit, Jarvis," I said. "I must find some one else, I suppose."

Jarvis, touched by this, began to remonstrate, but I cut him short. My butler was a soldier who had been with me in India, and was not supposed to fear anything—man or devil—certainly not the former; and I felt that I was losing time. The Jarvises were too thankful to get rid of me. They attended me to the door with the most anxious courtesies. Outside, the two grooms stood close by, a little confused by my sudden exit. I don't know if perhaps they had been listening—at least standing as near as possible, to catch any scrap of the conversation. I waved my hand to them as I went past, in answer to their salutations, and it was very apparent to me that they also were glad to see me go.

And it will be thought very strange, but it would be weak not to add, that I myself, though bent on the investigation I have spoken of, pledged to Roland to carry it out, and feeling that my boy's health, perhaps his life, depended on the result of my inquiry—I felt the most unaccountable reluctance to pass these ruins on my way home. My curiosity was intense; and yet it was all my mind could do to pull my body along. I daresay the scientific people would describe it the other way, and attribute my cowardice to the state of my stomach. I went on; but if I had followed my impulse, I should have turned and bolted. Everything in me seemed to cry out against it; my heart thumped, my pulses all began, like sledge-hammers, beating against my ears and every sensitive part. It was very dark, as I have said; the old house, with its shapeless tower, loomed a heavy mass through the darkness, which was only not entirely so solid as itself. On the other hand, the great dark cedars of which we were so proud seemed to fill up the night. My foot strayed out of the path in my confusion and the gloom together, and I brought myself up with a cry as I felt myself knock against something solid. What was it? The contact with hard stone and lime, and prickly bramblebushes, restored me a little to myself. "Oh, it's only the old gable," I said aloud, with a little laugh to reassure myself. The rough feeling of

the stones reconciled me. As I groped about thus, I shook off my visionary folly. What so easily explained as that I should have strayed from the path in the darkness? This brought me back to common existence, as if I had been shaken by a wise hand out of all the silliness of superstition. How silly it was, after all! What did it matter which path I took? I laughed again, this time with better heart—when suddenly, in a moment, the blood was chilled in my veins, a shiver stole along my spine, my faculties seemed to forsake me. Close by me at my side, at my feet, there was a sigh. No, not a groan, not a moaning, not anything so tangible—a perfectly soft, faint, inarticulate sigh. I sprang back, and my heart stopped beating. Mistaken! no, mistake was impossible. I heard it as clearly as I hear myself speak; a long, soft, weary sigh, as if drawn to the utmost, and emptying out a load of sadness that filled the breast. To hear this in the solitude, in the dark, in the night (though it was still early), had an effect which I cannot describe. I feel it now—something cold creeping over me, up into my hair, and down to my feet, which refused to move. I cried out with a trembling voice, “Who is there?” as I had done before—but there was no reply.

I got home—I don’t quite know how; but in my mind there was no longer any indifference as to the thing, whatever it was, that haunted these ruins. My scepticism disappeared like a mist. I was as firmly determined that there was something as Roland was. I did not for a moment pretend to myself that it was possible I could be deceived; there were movements and noises which I understood all about, cracklings of small branches in the frost, and little rolls of gravel on the path, such as have a very eerie sound sometimes, and perplex you with wonder as to who has done it, *when there is no real mystery*; but I assure you all these little movements of nature don’t affect you one bit *when there is something*. I understood *them*. I did not understand the sigh. That was not simple nature; there was meaning in it—feeling, the soul of a creature invisible. This is the thing that human nature trembles at—a creature invisible, yet with sensations, feelings, a power somehow of expressing itself. I had not the same sense of unwillingness to turn my back upon the scene of the mystery which I had experienced in going to the stables; but I almost ran home, impelled by eagerness to get everything done that had to be done in order to apply myself to finding it out. Bagley was in the hall as usual when I went in. He was always there in the afternoon,

always with the appearance of perfect occupation, yet, so far as I know, never doing anything. The door was open, so that I hurried in without any pause, breathless ; but the sight of his calm regard, as he came to help me off with my overcoat, subdued me in a moment. Anything out of the way, anything incomprehensible, faded to nothing in the presence of Bagley. You saw and wondered how *he* was made : the parting of his hair, the tie of his white neckcloth, the fit of his trousers, all perfect as works of art ; but you could see how they were done, which makes all the difference. I flung myself upon him, so to speak, without waiting to note the extreme unlikeness of the man to anything of the kind I meant. "Bagley," I said, "I want you to come out with me to-night to watch for——"

"Poachers, Colonel," he said, a gleam of pleasure running all over him.

"No, Bagley ; a great deal worse," I cried.

"Yes, Colonel ; at what hour, sir ?" the man said ; but then I had not told him what it was.

It was ten o'clock when we set out. All was perfectly quiet indoors. My wife was with Roland, who had been quite calm, she said, and who (though, no doubt, the fever must run its course) had been better since I came. I told Bagley to put on a thick greatcoat over his evening coat, and did the same myself—with strong boots ; for the soil was like a sponge, or worse. Talking to him, I almost forgot what we were going to do. It was darker even than it had been before, and Bagley kept very close to me as we went along. I had a small lantern in my hand, which gave us a partial guidance. We had come to the corner where the path turns. On one side was the bowling-green, which the girls had taken possession of for their croquet-ground—a wonderful enclosure surrounded by high hedges of holly, three hundred years old and more ; on the other, the ruins. Both were black as night ; but before we got so far, there was a little opening in which we could just discern the trees and the lighter line of the road. I thought it best to pause there and take breath. "Bagley," I said, "there is something about these ruins I don't understand. It is there I am going. Keep your eyes open and your wits about you. Be ready to pounce upon any stranger you see—anything, man or woman. Don't hurt, but seize—anything you see," "Colonel," said Bagley, with a little tremor in his breath, "they do say there's things there—as is neither man nor woman." There was no

time for words. "Are you game to follow me, my man? that's the question," I said. Bagley fell in without a word, and saluted. I knew then I had nothing to fear.

We went, so far as I could guess, exactly as I had come, when I heard that sigh. The darkness, however, was so complete that all marks, as of trees or paths, disappeared. One moment we felt our feet on the gravel, another sinking noiselessly into the slippery grass, that was all. I had shut up my lantern, not wishing to scare any one, whoever it might be. Bagley followed, it seemed to me, exactly in my footsteps as I made my way, as I supposed, towards the mass of the ruined house. We seemed to take a long time groping along seeking this; the squash of the wet soil under our feet was the only thing that marked our progress. After a while I stood still to see, or rather feel, where we were. The darkness was very still, but no stiller than is usual in a winter's night. The sounds I have mentioned—the crackling of twigs, the roll of a pebble, the sound of some rustle in the dead leaves, or creeping creature on the grass—were audible when you listened, all mysterious enough when your mind is disengaged, but to me cheering now as signs of the livingness of nature, even in the death of the frost. As we stood still there came up from the trees in the glen the prolonged hoot of an owl. Bagley started with alarm, being in a state of general nervousness, and not knowing what he was afraid of. But to me the sound was encouraging and pleasant, being so comprehensible. "An owl," I said, under my breath. "Y—es, Colonel," said Bagley, his teeth chattering. We stood still about five minutes, while it broke into the still brooding of the air, the sound widening out in circles, dying upon the darkness. This sound, which is not a cheerful one, made me almost gay. It was natural, and relieved the tension of the mind. I moved on with new courage, my nervous excitement calming down.

When all at once, quite suddenly, close to us, at our feet, there broke out a cry. I made a spring backwards in the first moment of surprise and horror, and in doing so came sharply against the same rough masonry and brambles that had struck me before. This new sound came upwards from the ground—a low, moaning, wailing voice, full of suffering and pain. The contrast between it and the hoot of the owl was indescribable; the one with a wholesome wildness and naturalness that hurt nobody—the other a sound that made one's blood curdle, full of human misery. With a great deal of fumbling—for in spite of everything I could do

to keep up my courage my hands shook—I managed to remove the slide of my lantern. The light leaped out like something living, and made the place visible in a moment. We were what would have been inside the ruined building had anything remained but the gable-wall which I have described. It was close to us, the vacant doorway in it going out straight into the blackness outside. The light showed the bit of wall, the ivy glistening upon it in clouds of dark green, the bramble-branches waving, and below, the open door—a door that led to nothing. It was from this the voice came which died out just as the light flashed upon this strange scene. There was a moment's silence, and then it broke forth again. The sound was so near, so penetrating, so pitiful, that, on the nervous start I gave, the light fell out of my hand. As I groped for it in the dark my hand was clutched by Bagley, who I think must have dropped upon his knees ; but I was too much perturbed myself to think much of this. He clutched at me in the confusion of his terror, forgetting all his usual decorum. "For God's sake, what is it, sir?" he gasped. If I yielded, there was evidently an end of both of us. "I can't tell," I said, "any more than you ; that's what we've got to find out : up, man, up !" I pulled him to his feet. "Will you go round and examine the other side, or will you stay here with the lantern?" Bagley gasped at me with a face of horror. "Can't we stay together, Colonel?" he said—his knees were trembling under him. I pushed him against the corner of the wall, and put the light into his hands. "Stand fast till I come back ; shake yourself together, man ; let nothing pass you," I said. The voice was within two or three feet of us, of that there could be no doubt.

I went myself to the other side of the wall, keeping close to it. The light shook in Bagley's hand, but tremulous though it was, shone out through the vacant door, one oblong block of light marking all the crumbling corners and hanging masses of foliage. Was that something dark huddled in a heap by the side of it? I pushed forward across the light in the doorway, and fell upon it with my hands ; but it was only a juniper-bush growing close against the wall. Meanwhile, the sight of my figure crossing the doorway had brought Bagley's nervous excitement to a height : he flew at me, gripping my shoulder. "I've got him, Colonel ! I've got him !" he cried, with a voice of sudden exultation. He thought it was a man, and was at once relieved. But at that moment the voice burst forth again between us, at our feet—more close to us

than any separate being could be. He dropped off from me, and fell against the wall, his jaw dropping as if he were dying. I suppose, at the same moment, he saw that it was me whom he had clutched. I, for my part, had scarcely more command of myself. I snatched the light out of his hand, and flashed it all about me wildly. Nothing—the juniper-bush which I thought I had never seen before, the heavy growth of the glistening ivy, the brambles waving. It was close to my ears now, crying, crying, pleading as if for life. Either I heard the same words Roland had heard, or else, in my excitement, his imagination got possession of mine. The voice went on, growing into distinct articulation, but wavering about, now from one point, now from another, as if the owner of it were moving slowly back and forward—"Mother! mother!" and then an outburst of wailing. As my mind steadied, getting accustomed (as one's mind gets accustomed to anything), it seemed to me as if some uneasy, miserable creature was pacing up and down before a closed door. Sometimes—but that must have been excitement—I thought I heard a sound like knocking, and then another burst, "Oh, mother! mother!" All this close, close to the space where I was standing with my lantern—now before me, now behind me: a creature restless, unhappy, moaning, crying, before the vacant doorway, which no one could either shut or open more.

"Do you hear it, Bagley? do you hear what it is saying?" I cried, stepping in through the doorway. He was lying against the wall—his eyes glazed, half dead with terror. He made a motion of his lips as if to answer me, but no sounds came; then lifted his hand with a curious imperative movement as if ordering me to be silent and listen. And how long I did so I cannot tell. It began to have an interest, an exciting hold upon me, which I could not describe. It seemed to call up visibly a scene any one could understand—a something shut out, restlessly wandering to and fro; sometimes the voice dropped, as if throwing itself down—sometimes wandered off a few paces, growing sharp and clear. "Oh, mother, let me in! oh, mother, mother, let me in! oh, let me in!" every word was clear to me. No wonder the boy had gone wild with pity. I tried to steady my mind upon Roland, upon his conviction that I could do something, but my head swam with the excitement, even when I partially overcame the terror. At last the words died away, and there was a sound of sobs and moaning. I cried out, "In the name of God who are you?" with

a kind of feeling in my mind that to use the name of God was profane, seeing that I did not believe in ghosts or anything supernatural ; but I did it all the same, and waited, my heart giving a leap of terror lest there should be a reply. Why this should have been I cannot tell, but I had a feeling that if there was an answer, it would be more than I could bear. But there was no answer ; the moaning went on, and then, as if it had been real, the voice rose, a little higher again, the words recommenced, " Oh, mother, let me in ! oh, mother, let me in ! " with an expression that was heart-breaking to hear.

As if it had been real ! What do I mean by that ? I suppose I got less alarmed as the thing went on. I began to recover the use of my senses—I seemed to explain it all to myself by saying that this had once happened, that it was a recollection of a real scene. Why there should have seemed something quite satisfactory and composing in this explanation I cannot tell, but so it was. I began to listen almost as if it had been a play, forgetting Bagley, who, I almost think, had fainted, leaning against the wall. I was startled out of this strange spectatorship that had fallen upon me by the sudden rush of something which made my heart jump once more, a large black figure in the doorway waving its arms. " Come in ! come in ! come in ! " it shouted out hoarsely at the top of a deep bass voice, and then poor Bagley fell down senseless across the threshold. He was less sophisticated than I—he had not been able to bear it any longer. I took him for something supernatural, as he took me, and it was some time before I awoke to the necessities of the moment. I remembered only after, that from the time I began to give my attention to the man, I heard the other voice no more. It was some time before I brought him to. It must have been a strange scene ; the lantern making a luminous spot in the darkness, the man's white face lying on the black earth, I over him, doing what I could for him. Probably I should have been thought to be murdering him had any one seen us. When at last I succeeded in pouring a little brandy down his throat he sat up and looked about him wildly. " What's up ? " he said ; then recognizing me, tried to struggle to his feet with a faint " Beg your pardon, Colonel." I got him home as best I could, making him lean upon my arm. The great fellow was as weak as a child. Fortunately he did not for some time remember what had happened. From the time Bagley fell the voice had stopped, and all was still.

"You've got an epidemic in your house, Colonel," Simson said to me next morning. "What's the meaning of it all? Here's your butler raving about a voice. This will never do, you know; and so far as I can make out, you are in it too."

"Yes, I am in it, doctor. I thought I had better speak to you. Of course you are treating Roland all right—but the boy is not raving, he is as sane as you or me. It's all true."

"As sane as—I—or you. I never thought the boy insane. He's got cerebral excitement, fever. I don't know what you've got. There's something very queer about the look of your eyes."

"Come," said I, "you can't put us all to bed, you know. You had better listen and hear the symptoms in full."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders, but he listened to me patiently. He did not believe a word of the story, that was clear; but he heard it all from beginning to end. "My dear fellow," he said, "the boy told me just the same. It's an epidemic. When one person falls a victim to this sort of thing, it's as safe as can be—there's always two or three."

"Then how do you account for it?" I said.

"Oh, account for it!—that's a different matter; there's no accounting for the freaks our brains are subject to. If it's delusion; if it's some trick of the echoes or the winds—some phonetic disturbance or other——"

"Come with me to-night, and judge for yourself," I said.

Upon this he laughed aloud, then said, "That's not such a bad idea; but it would ruin me for ever if it were known that John Simson was ghost-hunting."

"There it is," said I; "you dart down on us who are unlearned with your phonetic disturbances, but you daren't examine what the thing really is for fear of being laughed at. That's science!"

"It's not science—it's common-sense," said the doctor. "The thing has delusion on the front of it. It is encouraging an unwholesome tendency even to examine. What good could come of it? Even if I am convinced, I shouldn't believe."

"I should have said so yesterday; and I don't want you to be convinced or to believe," said I. "If you prove it to be a delusion, I shall be very much obliged to you for one. Come; somebody must go with me."

"You are cool," said the doctor. "You've disabled this poor fellow of yours, and made him—on that point—a lunatic for life; and now you want to disable me. But for once, I'll do it. To save

appearance, if you'll give me a bed, I'll come over after my last rounds."

It was agreed that I should meet him at the gate, and that we should visit the scene of last night's occurrences before we came to the house, so that nobody might be the wiser. It was scarcely possible to hope that the cause of Bagley's sudden illness should not somehow steal into the knowledge of the servants at least, and it was better that all should be done as quietly as possible. The day seemed to me a very long one. I had to spend a certain part of it with Roland, which was a terrible ordeal for me—for what could I say to the boy? The improvement continued, but he was still in a very precarious state, and the trembling vehemence with which he turned to me when his mother left the room filled me with alarm. "Father!" he said, quietly. "Yes, my boy; I am giving my best attention to it—all is being done that I can do. I have not come to any conclusion—yet. I am neglecting nothing you said," I cried. What I could not do was to give his active mind any encouragement to dwell upon the mystery. It was a hard predicament, for some satisfaction had to be given him. He looked at me very wistfully, with the great blue eyes which shone so large and brilliant out of his white and worn face. "You must trust me," I said. "Yes, father. Father understands," he said to himself, as if to soothe some inward doubt. I left him as soon as I could. He was about the most precious thing I had on earth, and his health my first thought; but yet somehow, in the excitement of this other subject, I put that aside, and preferred not to dwell upon Roland, which was the most curious part of it all.

That night at eleven I met Simson at the gate. He had come by train, and I let him in gently myself. I had been so much absorbed in the coming experiment that I passed the ruins in going to meet him, almost without thought, if you can understand that. I had my lantern; and he showed me a coil of taper which he had ready for use. "There is nothing like light," he said, in his scoffing tone. It was a very still night, scarcely a sound, but not so dark. We could keep the path without difficulty as we went along. As we approached the spot we could hear a low moaning, broken occasionally by a bitter cry. "Perhaps that is your voice," said the doctor; "I thought it must be something of the kind. That's a poor brute caught in some of these infernal traps of yours; you'll find it among the bushes somewhere." I said nothing. I felt no

particular fear, but a triumphant satisfaction in what was to follow. I led him to the spot where Bagley and I had stood on the previous night. All was silent as a winter night could be—so silent that we heard far off the sound of the horses in the stables, the shutting of a window at the house. Simson lighted his taper and went peering about, poking into all the corners. We looked like two conspirators lying in wait for some unfortunate traveller; but not a sound broke the quiet. The moaning had stopped before we came up; a star or two shone over us in the sky, looking down as if surprised at our strange proceedings. Dr. Simson did nothing but utter subdued laughs under his breath. "I thought as much," he said. "It is just the same with tables and all other kinds of ghostly apparatus; a sceptic's presence stops everything. When I am present nothing ever comes off. How long do you think it will be necessary to stay here? Oh, I don't complain; only, when you are satisfied, I am—quite."

I will not deny that I was disappointed beyond measure by this result. It made me look like a credulous fool. It gave the doctor such a pull over me as nothing else could. I should point all his morals for years to some, and his materialism, his scepticism, would be increased beyond endurance. "It seems, indeed," I said, "that there is to be no——" "Manifestation," he said, laughing; "that is what all the mediums say. No manifestations, in consequence of the presence of an unbeliever." His laugh sounded very uncomfortable to me in the silence; and it was now near midnight. But that laugh seemed the signal; before it died away the moaning we had heard before was resumed. It started from some distance off, and came towards us, nearer and nearer, like some one walking along and moaning to himself. There could be no idea now that it was a hare caught in a trap. The approach was slow, like that of a weak person, with little halts and pauses. We heard it coming along the grass straight towards the vacant doorway. Simson had been a little startled by the first sound. He said hastily, "That child has no business to be out so late." But he felt, as well as I, that this was no child's voice. As it came nearer, he grew silent, and, going to the doorway with his taper, stood looking out towards the sound. The taper being unprotected blew about in the night air, though there was scarcely any wind. I threw the light of my lantern steady and white across the same space. It was a blaze of light in the midst of the blackness. A little icy thrill had gone over me at the first sound, but as it came close,

I confess that my only feeling was satisfaction. The scoffer could scoff no more. The light touched his own face, and showed a very perplexed countenance. If he was afraid, he concealed it with great success, but he was perplexed. And then all that had happened on the previous night was enacted once more. It fell strangely upon me with a sense of repetition. Every cry, every sob seemed the same as before. I listened almost without any emotion at all in my own person, thinking of its effect upon Simson. He maintained a very bold front on the whole. All that coming and going of the voice was, if our ears could be trusted, exactly in front of the vacant, blank doorway, blazing full of light, which caught and shone in the glistening leaves of the great hollies at a little distance. Not a rabbit could have crossed the turf without being seen ; but there was nothing. After a time, Simson, with a certain caution and bodily reluctance, as it seemed to me, went out with his roll of taper into this space. His figure showed against the holly in full outline. Just at this moment the voice sank, as was its custom, and seemed to fling itself down at the door. Simson recoiled violently, as if some one had come up against him, then turned, and held his taper low as if examining something. " Do you see anybody ? " I cried in a whisper, feeling the chill of nervous panic steal over me at this action. " It's nothing but a ——— confounded juniper-bush," he said. This I knew very well to be nonsense, for the juniper-bush was on the other side. He went about after this round and round, poking his taper everywhere, then returned to me on the inner side of the wall. He scoffed no longer ; his face was contracted and pale. " How long does this go on ? " he whispered to me, like a man who does not wish to interrupt some one who is speaking. I had become too much perturbed myself to remark whether the successions and changes of the voice were the same as last night. It suddenly went out in the air almost as he was speaking, with a soft, reiterated sob dying away. If there had been anything to be seen, I should have said that the person was at that moment crouching on the ground close to the door.

We walked home very silent afterwards. It was only when we were in sight of the house that I said, " What do you think of it ? " " I can't tell what to think of it," he said, quickly. He took—though he was a very temperate man—not the claret I was going to offer him, but some brandy from the tray, and swallowed it almost undiluted. " Mind you, I don't believe a word of it," he

said, when he had lighted his candle ; “ but I can't tell what to think,” he turned round to add, when he was half-way upstairs.

All of this, however, did me no good with the solution of my problem. I was to help this weeping, sobbing thing, which was already to me as distinct a personality as anything I knew—or what should I say to Roland ? It was on my heart that my boy would die if I could not find some way of helping this creature. You may be surprised that I should speak of it in this way. I did not know if it was man or woman ; but I no more doubted that it was a soul in pain than I doubted my own being ; and it was my business to soothe this pain—to deliver it, if that was possible. Was ever such a task given to an anxious father trembling for his only boy ? I felt in my heart, fantastic as it may appear, that I must fulfil this somehow, or part with my child ; and you may conceive that rather than do that I was ready to die. But even my dying would not have advanced me—unless by bringing me into the same world with that seeker at the door.

Next morning Simson was out before breakfast, and came in with evident signs of the damp grass on his boots, and a look of worry and weariness, which did not say much for the night he had passed. He improved a little after breakfast, and visited his two patients, for Bagley was still an invalid. I went out with him on his way to the train, to hear what he had to say about the boy. “ He is going on very well,” he said ; “ there are no complications as yet. But mind you, that's not a boy to be trifled with, Mortimer. Not a word to him about last night.” I had to tell him then of my last interview with Roland, and of the impossible demand he had made upon me—by which, though he tried to laugh, he was much discomposed, as I could see. “ We must just perjure ourselves all round,” he said, “ and swear you exorcized it ” ; but the man was too kind-hearted to be satisfied with that. “ It's frightfully serious for you, Mortimer. I can't laugh as I should like to. I wish I saw a way out of it, for your sake. By the way,” he added shortly, “ didn't you notice that juniper-bush on the left-hand side ? ” “ There was one on the right hand of the door. I noticed you made that mistake last night.” “ Mistake ! ” he cried, with a curious low laugh, pulling up the collar of his coat as though he felt the cold—“ there's no juniper there this morning, left or right. Just go and see.” As he stepped into the train a few minutes after, he

looked back upon me and beckoned me for a parting word. "I'm coming back to-night," he said.

I don't think I had any feeling about this as I turned away from that common bustle of the railway, which made my private preoccupations feel so strangely out of date. There had been a distinct satisfaction in my mind before that his scepticism had been so entirely defeated. But the more serious part of the matter pressed upon me now. I went straight from the railway to the manse, which stood on a little plateau on the side of the river opposite to the woods of Brentwood. The minister was one of a class which is not so common in Scotland as it used to be. He was a man of good family, well educated in the Scotch way, strong in philosophy, not so strong in Greek, strongest of all in experience—a man who had "come across," in the course of his life, most people of note that had ever been in Scotland—and who was said to be very sound in doctrine, without infringing the toleration with which old men, who are good men, are generally endowed. He was old-fashioned ; perhaps he did not think so much about the troublous problems of theology as many of the young men, nor ask himself any hard questions about the Confession of Faith—but he understood human nature, which is perhaps better. He received me with a cordial welcome. "Come away, Colonel Mortimer," he said ; "I'm all the more glad to see you, that I feel it's a good sign for the boy. He's doing well?—God be praised—and the Lord bless him and keep him. He has many a poor body's prayers—and that can do nobody harm."

"He will need them all, Dr. Moncrieff," I said, "and your counsel too." And I told him the story—more than I had told Simson. The old clergyman listened to me with many suppressed exclamations, and at the end the water stood in his eyes.

"That's just beautiful," he said. "I do not mind to have heard anything like it ; it's as fine as Burns when he wished deliverance to one—that is prayed for in no kirk. Ay, ay ! so he would have you console the poor lost spirit ? God bless the boy ! There's something more than common in that, Colonel Mortimer. And also the faith of him in his father !—I would like to put that into a sermon." Then the old gentleman gave me an alarmed look, and said, "No, no ; I was not meaning a sermon ; but I must write it down for the *Children's Record*." I saw the thought that passed through his mind. Either he thought, or he feared I would think,

of a funeral sermon. You may believe this did not make me more cheerful.

I can scarcely say that Dr. Moncrieff gave me any advice. How could any one advise on such a subject? But he said, "I think I'll come too. I'm an old man; I'm less liable to be frightened than those that are further off the world unseen. It behoves me to think of my own journey there. I've no cut-and-dry beliefs on the subject. I'll come too; and maybe at the moment the Lord will put into our heads what to do."

This gave me a little comfort—more than Simson had given me. To be clear about the cause of it was not my grand desire. It was another thing that was in my mind—my boy. As for the poor soul at the open door, I had no more doubt, as I have said, of its existence than I had of my own. It was no ghost to me. I knew the creature, and it was in trouble. That was my feeling about it, as it was Roland's. To hear it first was a great shock to my nerves, but not now; a man will get accustomed to anything. But to do something for it was the great problem; how was I to be serviceable to a being that was invisible, that was mortal no longer? "Maybe at the moment the Lord will put it into our heads." This is very old-fashioned phraseology, and a week before, most likely, I should have smiled (though always with kindness) at Dr. Moncrieff's credulity; but there was a great comfort, whether rational or otherwise I cannot say, in the mere sound of the words.

The road to the station and the village lay through the glen—not by the ruins; but though the sunshine and the fresh air, and the beauty of the trees, and the sound of the water were all very soothing to the spirits, my mind was so full of my own subject that I could not refrain from turning to the right hand as I got to the top of the glen, and going straight to the place which I may call the scene of all my thoughts. It was lying full in the sunshine, like all the rest of the world. The ruined gable looked due east, and in the present aspect of the sun the light streamed down through the doorway as our lantern had done, throwing a flood of light upon the damp grass beyond. There was a strange suggestion in the open door—so futile, a kind of emblem of vanity—all free around, so that you could go where you pleased, and yet that semblance of an enclosure—that way of entrance, unnecessary, leading to nothing. And why any creature should pray and weep to get in—to nothing: or be kept out—by nothing! You could not dwell upon it, or it made your brain go round. I remembered,

however, what Simson said about the juniper, with a little smile on my own mind as to the inaccuracy of recollection, which even a scientific man will be guilty of. I could see now the light of my lantern gleaming upon the wet glistening surface of the spiky leaves at the right hand—and he ready to go to the stake for it that it was the left ! I went round to make sure. And then I saw what he had said. Right or left there was no juniper at all. I was confounded by this, though it was entirely a matter of detail: nothing at all : a bush of brambles waving, the grass growing up to the very walls. But after all, though it gave me a shock for a moment, what did that matter ? There were marks as if a number of footsteps had been up and down in front of the door ; but these might have been our steps ; and all was bright, and peaceful, and still. I poked about the other ruin—the larger ruins of the old house—for some time, as I had done before. There were marks upon the grass here and there, I could not call them footsteps, all about ; but that told for nothing one way or another. I had examined the ruined rooms closely the first day. They were half filled up with soil and *débris*, withered brackens and bramble—no refuge for any one there. It vexed me that Jarvis should see me coming from that spot when he came up to me for his orders. I don't know whether my nocturnal expeditions had got wind among the servants. But there was a significant look in his face. Something in it I felt was like my own sensation when Simson in the midst of his scepticism was struck dumb. Jarvis felt satisfied that his veracity had been put beyond question. I never spoke to a servant of mine in such a peremptory tone before. I sent him away “with a flea in his lug,” as the man described it afterwards. Interference of any kind was intolerable to me at such a moment.

But what was strangest of all was, that I could not face Roland. I did not go up to his room as I would have naturally done at once. This the girls could not understand. They saw there was some mystery in it. “Mother has gone to lie down,” Agatha said ; “he has had such a good night.” “But he wants you so, papa !” cried little Jeanie, always with her two arms embracing mine in a pretty way she had. I was obliged to go at last—but what could I say ? I could only kiss him, and tell him to keep still—that I was doing all I could. There is something mystical about the patience of a child. “It will come all right, won't it, father ?” he said. “God grant it may ! I hope so, Roland.” “Oh yes, it will come all right.” Perhaps he understood that in

the midst of my anxiety I could not stay with him as I should have done otherwise. But the girls were more surprised than it is possible to describe. They looked at me with wondering eyes. "If I were ill, papa, and you only stayed with me a moment, I should break my heart," said Agatha. But the boy had a sympathetic feeling. He knew that of my own will I would not have done it. I shut myself up in the library, where I could not rest, but kept pacing up and down like a caged beast. What could I do? and if I could do nothing, what would become of my boy? These were the questions that, without ceasing, pursued each other through my mind.

Simson came out to dinner, and when the house was all still, and most of the servants in bed, we went out and met Dr. Moncrieff, as we had appointed, at the head of the glen. Simson, for his part, was disposed to scoff at the doctor. "If there are to be any spells, you know, I'll cut the whole concern," he said. I did not make him any reply. I had not invited him; he could go or come as he pleased. He was very talkative, far more than suited my humour, as we went on. "One thing is certain, you know, there must be some human agency," he said. "It is all bosh about apparitions. I never have investigated the laws of sound to any great extent, and there's a great deal in ventriloquism that we don't know much about." "If it's the same to you," I said, "I wish you'd keep all that to yourself, Simson. It doesn't suit my state of mind." "Oh, I hope I know how to respect idiosyncrasy," he said. The very tone of his voice irritated me beyond measure. These scientific fellows, I wonder people put up with them as they do, when you have no mind for their cold-blooded confidence. Dr. Moncrieff met us about eleven o'clock, the same time as on the previous night. He was a large man, with a venerable countenance and white hair—old, but in full vigour, and thinking less of a cold night walk than many a younger man. He had his lantern as I had. We were fully provided with means of lighting the place, and we were all of us resolute men. We had a rapid consultation as we went up, and the result was that we divided to different posts. Dr. Moncrieff remained inside the wall—if you can call that inside where there was no wall but one. Simson placed himself on the side next the ruins, so as to intercept any communication with the old house, which was what his mind was fixed upon. I was posted on the other side. To say that nothing could come near without being seen was self-evident. It had been so

also on the previous night. Now, with our three lights in the midst of the darkness, the whole place seemed illuminated. Dr. Moncrieff's lantern, which was a large one, without any means of shutting up—an old-fashioned lantern with a pierced and ornamental top—shone steadily, the rays shooting out of it upward into the gloom. He placed it on the grass, where the middle of the room, if this had been a room, would have been. The usual effect of the light streaming out of the doorway was prevented by the illumination which Simson and I on either side supplied. With these differences, everything seemed as on the previous night.

And what occurred was exactly the same, with the **same** air of repetition, point for point, as I had formerly remarked. I declare that it seemed to me as if I were pushed against, put aside, by the owner of the voice as he paced up and down in his trouble—though these are perfectly futile words, seeing that the stream of light from my lantern, and that from Simson's taper, lay broad and clear, without a shadow, without the smallest break, across the entire breadth of the grass. I had ceased even to be alarmed, for my part. My heart was rent with pity and trouble—pity for the poor suffering human creature that moaned and pleaded so, and trouble for myself and my boy. God ! if I could not find any help—and what help could I find ?—Roland would **die**.

We were all perfectly still till the first outburst was exhausted, as I knew (by experience) it would be. Dr. Moncrieff, to whom it was new, was quite motionless on the other side of the wall, as we were in our places. My heart had remained almost at its usual beating during the voice. I was used to it ; it did not rouse all my pulses as it did at first. But just as it threw itself sobbing at the door (I cannot use other words), there suddenly came something which sent the blood coursing through my veins and my heart into my mouth. It was a voice inside the wall—the minister's well-known voice. I would have been prepared for it in any kind of adjuration, but I was not prepared for what I heard. It came out with a sort of stammering, as if too much moved for utterance. "Willie, Willie ! Oh, God preserve us ! is it you ?"

These simple words had an effect upon me that the voice of the invisible creature had ceased to have. I thought the old man, whom I had brought into this danger, had gone mad with terror. I made a dash round to the other side of the wall, half crazed myself with the thought. He was standing where I had left him,

his shadow thrown vague and large upon the grass by the lantern which stood at his feet. I lifted my own light to see his face as I rushed forward. He was very pale, his eyes wet and glistening, his mouth quivering with parted lips. He neither saw nor heard me. We that had gone through this experience before, had crouched towards each other to get a little strength to bear it. But he was not even aware that I was there. His whole being seemed absorbed in anxiety and tenderness. He held out his hands, which trembled, but it seemed to me with eagerness, not fear. He went on speaking all the time. "Willie, if it is you—and it's you, if it is not a delusion of Satan—Willie, lad! why come ye here frightening them that know you not? Why came ye not to me?"

He seemed to wait for an answer. When his voice ceased, his countenance, every line moving, continued to speak. Simson gave me another terrible shock, stealing into the open doorway with his light, as much awe-stricken, as wildly curious, as I. But the minister resumed, without seeing Simson, speaking to some one else. His voice took a tone of expostulation—

"Is this right to come here? Your mother's gone with your name on her lips. Do you think she would ever close her door on her own lad? Do ye think the Lord will close the door, ye faint-hearted creature? No!—I forbid ye! I forbid ye!" cried the old man. The sobbing voice had begun to resume its cries. He made a step forward, calling out the last words in a voice of command. "I forbid ye! Cry out no more to man. Go home, ye wandering spirit! go home! Do you hear me?—me that christened ye, that have struggled with ye, that have wrestled for ye with the Lord!" Here the loud tones of his voice sank into tenderness. "And her too, poor woman! poor woman! her you are calling upon. She's no here. You'll find her with the Lord. Go there and seek her, not here. Do you hear me, lad? go after her there. He'll let you in, though it's late. Man, take heart! if you will lie and sob and greet, let it be at heaven's gate, and no your poor mother's ruined door."

He stopped to get his breath: and the voice had stopped, not as it had done before, when its time was exhausted and all its repetitions said, but with a sobbing catch in the breath as if overruled. Then the minister spoke again, "Are you hearing me, Will? Oh, laddie, you've liked the beggarly elements all your days. Be done with them now. Go home to the Father—the Father! Are you hearing me?" Here the old man sank down

upon his knees, his face raised upwards, his hands held up with a tremble in them, all white in the light in the midst of the darkness. I resisted as long as I could, though I cannot tell why—then I, too, dropped upon my knees. Simson all the time stood in the doorway, with an expression in his face such as words could not tell, his under lip drooped, his eyes wild, staring. It seemed to be to him, that image of blank ignorance and wonder, that we were praying. All the time the voice, with a low arrested sobbing, lay just where he was standing, as I thought.

“Lord,” the minister said—“Lord, take him into Thy everlasting habitations. The mother he cries to is with Thee. Who can open to him but Thee? Lord, when is it too late for Thee, or what is too hard for Thee? Lord, let that woman there draw him inower! Let her draw him inower!”

I sprang forward to catch something in my arms that flung itself wildly within the door. The illusion was so strong, that I never paused till I felt my forehead graze against the wall and my hands clutch the ground—for there was nobody there to save from falling, as in my foolishness I thought. Simson held out his hand to me to help me up. He was trembling and cold, his lower lip hanging, his speech almost inarticulate. “It’s gone,” he said, stammering—“it’s gone!” We leant upon each other for a moment, trembling so much both of us that the whole scene trembled as if it were going to dissolve and disappear; and yet as long as I live I will never forget it—the shining of the strange lights, the blackness all round, the kneeling figure with all the whiteness of the light concentrated on its white venerable head and uplifted hands. A strange solemn stillness seemed to close all round us. By intervals a single syllable, “Lord! Lord!” came from the old minister’s lips. He saw none of us, nor thought of us. I never knew how long we stood, like sentinels guarding him at his prayers, holding our lights in a confused dazed way, not knowing what we did. But at last he rose from his knees, and standing up at his full height, raised his arms, as the Scotch manner is at the end of a religious service, and solemnly gave the apostolical benediction—to what? to the silent earth, the dark woods, the wide breathing atmosphere—for we were but spectators gasping an Amen!

It seemed to me that it must be the middle of the night, as we all walked back. It was in reality very late. Dr. Moncrieff put his arm into mine. He walked slowly, with an air of exhaustion. It

was as if we were coming from a deathbed. Something hushed and solemnized the very air. There was that sense of relief in it which there always is at the end of a death-struggle. And nature persistent, never daunted, came back in all of us, as we returned into the ways of life. We said nothing to each other, indeed, for a time ; but when we got clear of the trees and reached the opening near the house, where we could see the sky, Dr. Moncrieff himself was the first to speak. " I must be going," he said ; " it's very late, I'm afraid. I will go down the glen, as I came."

" But not alone. I am going with you, doctor."

" Well, I will not oppose it. I am an old man and agitation wearies more than work. Yes ; I'll be thankful of your arm. To-night, Colonel, you've done me more good turns than one."

I pressed his hand on my arm, not feeling able to speak. But Simson, who turned with us, and who had gone along all this time with his taper flaring, in entire unconsciousness, came to himself, apparently at the sound of our voices, and put out that wild little torch with a quick movement, as if of shame. " Let me carry your lantern " he said ; " it is heavy." He recovered with a spring, and in a moment, from the awe-stricken spectator he had been, became himself sceptical and cynical. " I should like to ask you a question," he said. " Do you believe in Purgatory, Doctor? It's not in the tenets of the Church, so far as I know."

" Sir," said Dr. Moncrieff, " an old man like me is sometimes not very sure what he believes. There is just one thing I am certain of—and that is the loving-kindness of God."

" But I thought that was in this life. I am no theologian——"

" Sir," said the old man, again with a tremor in him which I could feel going over all his frame, " if I saw a friend of mine within the gates of hell, I would not despair but his Father would take him by the hand still—if he cried like *yon*."

" I allow it is very strange—very strange. I cannot see through it. That there must be human agency, I feel sure. Doctor, what made you decide upon the person and the name ? "

The minister put out his hand with the impatience which a man might show if he were asked how he recognized his brother. " Tuts ! " he said, in familiar speech—then more solemnly, " how should I not recognize a person that I know better—far better—than I know you ? "

" Then you saw the man ? "

Dr. Moncrieff made no reply. He moved his hand again with a

little impatient movement, and walked on, leaning heavily on my arm. And we went on for a long time without another word, threading the dark paths, which were steep and slippery with the damp of the winter. The air was very still—not more than enough to make a faint sighing in the branches, which mingled with the sound of the water to which we were descending. When we spoke again, it was about indifferent matters—about the height of the river, and the recent rains. We parted with the minister at his own door, where his old housekeeper appeared in great perturbation, waiting for him. “Eh, me, minister! the young gentleman will be worse?” she cried.

“Far from that—better. God bless him!” Doctor Moncrieff said.

I think if Simson had begun again to me with his questions, I should have pitched him over the rocks as we returned up the glen; but he was silent, by a good inspiration. And the sky was clearer than it had been for many nights, shining high over the trees, with here and there a star faintly gleaming through the wilderness of dark and bare branches. The air, as I have said, was very soft in them, with a subdued and peaceful cadence. It was real, like every natural sound, and came to us like a hush of peace and relief. I thought there was a sound in it as of the breath of a sleeper, and it seemed clear to me that Roland must be sleeping, satisfied and calm. We went up to his room when we went in. There we found the complete hush of rest. My wife looked up out of a doze, and gave me a smile; “I think he is a great deal better: but you are very late,” she said in a whisper, shading the light with her hand that the doctor might see his patient. The boy had got back something like his own colour. He woke as we stood all round his bed. His eyes had the happy half-awakened look of childhood, glad to shut again, yet pleased with the interruption and glimmer of the light. I stooped over him and kissed his forehead, which was moist and cool. “All is well, Roland,” I said. He looked up at me with a glance of pleasure, and took my hand and laid his cheek upon it, and so went to sleep.

For some nights after, I watched among the ruins, spending all the dark hours up to midnight patrolling about the bit of wall which was associated with so many emotions; but I heard nothing, and saw nothing beyond the quiet course of nature: nor, so far as I am aware, has anything been heard again. Dr. Moncrieff gave

me the history of the youth, whom he never hesitated to name. I did not ask, as Simson did, how he recognized him. He had been a prodigal—weak, foolish, easily imposed upon, and “led away,” as people say. All that we had heard had passed actually in life, the Doctor said. The young man had come home thus a day or two after his mother died—who was no more than the housekeeper in the old house—and distracted with the news, had thrown himself down at the door and called upon her to let him in. The old man could scarcely speak of it for tears. To me it seemed as if—heaven help us, how little do we know about anything!—a scene like that might impress itself somehow upon the hidden heart of nature. I do not pretend to know how, but the repetition had struck me at the time as, in its terrible strangeness and incomprehensibility, almost mechanical—as if the unseen actor could not exceed or vary, but was bound to re-enact the whole. One thing that struck me, however, greatly, was the likeness between the old minister and my boy in the manner of regarding these strange phenomena. Dr. Moncrieff was not terrified, as I had been myself, and all the rest of us. It was no “ghost,” as I fear we all vulgarly considered it, to him—but a poor creature whom he knew under these conditions, just as he had known him in the flesh, having no doubt of his identity. And to Roland it was the same. This spirit in pain—if it was a spirit—this voice out of the unseen—was a poor fellow-creature in misery, to be succoured and helped out of his trouble, to my boy. He spoke to me quite frankly about it when he got better. “I knew father would find out some way,” he said. And this was when he was strong and well, and all idea that he would turn hysterical or become a seer of visions had happily passed away.

I must add one curious fact which does not seem to me to have any relation to the above, but which Simson made great use of, as the human agency which he was determined to find somehow. We had examined the ruins very closely at the time of these occurrences; but afterwards, when all was over, as we went casually about them one Sunday afternoon in the idleness of that unemployed day, Simson with his stick penetrated an old window which had been entirely blocked up with fallen soil. He jumped down into it in great excitement, and called me to follow. There we found a little hole—for it was more a hole than a room—entirely hidden under the ivy ruins, in which there was a quantity of straw

laid in a corner, as if some one had made a bed there, and some remains of crusts about the floor. Some one had lodged there, and not very long before, he made out ; and that this unknown being was the author of all the mysterious sounds we heard he is convinced. " I told you it was human agency," he said, triumphantly. He forgets, I suppose, how he and I stood with our lights seeing nothing, while the space between us was audibly traversed by something that could speak, and sob, and suffer. There is no argument with men of this kind. He is ready to get up a laugh against me on this slender ground. " I was puzzled myself—I could not make it out—but I always felt convinced human agency was at the bottom of it. And here it is—and a clever fellow he must have been," the Doctor says.

Bagley left my service as soon as he got well. He assured me it was no want of respect ; but he could not stand " them kind of things," and the man was so shaken and ghastly that I was glad to give him a present and let him go. For my own part, I made a point of staying out the time, two years, for which I had taken Brentwood ; but I did not renew my tenancy. By that time we had settled, and found for ourselves a pleasant home of our own.

I must add that when the doctor defies me, I can always bring back gravity to his countenance, and a pause in his railing, when I remind him of the juniper-bush. To me that was a matter of little importance. I could believe I was mistaken. I did not care about it one way or other ; but on his mind the effect was different. The miserable voice, the spirit in pain, he could think of as the result of ventriloquism, or reverberation, or—anything you please : an elaborate prolonged hoax executed somehow by the tramp that had found a lodging in the old tower. But the juniper-bush staggered him. Things have effects so different on the minds of different men.

THE STORY OF
THE BAGMAN'S UNCLE

from THE POSTHUMOUS PAPERS OF
THE PICKWICK CLUB

Chapman & Hall, 1837

“My uncle, gentlemen,” said the bagman, “was one of the merriest, pleasantest, cleverest fellows that ever lived. I wish you had known him, gentlemen. On second thoughts, gentlemen, I *don't* wish you had known him, for if you had, you would have been all, by this time, in the ordinary course of nature, if not dead, at all events so near it as to have taken to stopping at home and giving up company: which would have deprived me of the inestimable pleasure of addressing you at this moment. Gentlemen, I wish your fathers and mothers had known my uncle. They would have been amazingly fond of him, especially your respectable mothers; I know they would. If any two of his numerous virtues predominated over the many that adorned his character, I should say they were his mixed punch, and his after-supper song. Excuse my dwelling on these melancholy recollections of departed worth; you won't see a man like my uncle every day in the week.

“I have always considered it a great point in my uncle's character, gentlemen, that he was the intimate friend and companion of Tom Smart, of the great house of Bilson and Slum, Cateaton Street, City. My uncle collected for Tiggin and Welps, but for a long time he went pretty near the same journey as Tom; and the very first night they met, my uncle took a fancy for Tom, and Tom took a fancy for my uncle. They made a bet of a new hat, before they had known each other half an hour, who should brew the best quart of punch and drink it the quickest. My uncle was judged to have won the making, but Tom Smart beat him in the drinking by about half a salt-spoonful. They took another quart apiece to drink each other's health in, and were staunch friends ever afterwards. There's a destiny in these things, gentlemen; we can't help it.

In personal appearance, my uncle was a trifle shorter than the middle size; he was a thought stouter, too, than the ordinary run

of people, and perhaps his face might be a shade redder. He had the jolliest face you ever saw, gentlemen : something like Punch, with a handsomer nose and chin ; his eyes were always twinkling and sparkling with good-humour ; and a smile—not one of your unmeaning, wooden grins, but a real merry, hearty, good-tempered smile—was perpetually on his countenance. He was pitched out of his gig once, and knocked, head first, against a milestone. There he lay, stunned, and so cut about the face with some gravel which had been heaped up alongside it, that, to use my uncle's own strong expression, if his mother could have revisited the earth, she wouldn't have known him. Indeed, when I come to think of the matter, gentlemen, I feel pretty sure she wouldn't, for she died when my uncle was two years and seven months old, and I think it's very likely that, even without the gravel, his top-boots would have puzzled the good lady not a little : to say nothing of his jolly red face. However, there he lay, and I have heard my uncle say, many a time, that the man said who picked him up that he was smiling as merrily as if he had tumbled out for a treat, and that after they had bled him, the first faint glimmerings of returning animation were, his jumping up in bed, bursting out into a loud laugh, kissing the young woman who held the basin, and demanding a mutton chop and a pickled walnut instantly. He was very fond of pickled walnuts, gentlemen. He said he always found that, taken without vinegar, they relished the beer.

“ My uncle's great journey was in the fall of the leaf, at which time he collected debts, and took orders, in the north : going from London to Edinburgh, from Edinburgh to Glasgow, from Glasgow back to Edinburgh, and thence to London by the smack. You are to understand that his second visit to Edinburgh was for his own pleasure. He used to go back for a week, just to look up his old friends ; and what with breakfasting with this one, lunching with that, dining with a third, and supping with another, a pretty tight week he used to make of it. I don't know whether any of you gentlemen, ever partook of a real substantial hospitable Scotch breakfast, and then went out to a slight lunch of a bushel of oysters, a dozen or so of bottled ale, and a noggin or two of whiskey to close up with. If you ever did, you will agree with me that it requires a pretty strong head to go out to dinner and supper afterwards.

“ But bless your hearts and eyebrows, all this sort of thing was nothing to my uncle ! He was so well seasoned, that it was mere

child's play. I have heard him say that he could see the Dundee people out any day, and walk home afterwards without staggering; and yet the Dundee people have as strong heads and as strong punch, gentlemen, as you are likely to meet with between the poles. I have heard of a Glasgow man and a Dundee man drinking against each other for fifteen hours at a sitting. They were both suffocated, as nearly as could be ascertained, at the same moment, but with this trifling exception, gentlemen, they were not a bit the worse for it.

“ One night, within four-and-twenty hours of the time when he had settled to take shipping for London, my uncle supped at the house of a very old friend of his, a Baillie Mac something, and four syllables after it, who lived in the old town of Edinburgh. There were the baillie's wife and the baillie's three daughters, and the baillie's grown-up son, and three or four stout, bushy-eyebrowed, canty old Scotch fellows, that the baillie had got together to do honour to my uncle, and help to make merry. It was a glorious supper. There were kippered salmon, and Finnan haddocks, and a lamb's head, and a haggis—a celebrated Scotch dish, gentlemen, which my uncle used to say always looked to him, when it came to table, very much like a cupid's stomach—and a great many other things besides, that I forget the names of, but very good things notwithstanding. The lassies were pretty and agreeable; the baillie's wife, one of the best creatures that ever lived; and my uncle in thoroughly good cue: the consequence of which was, that the young ladies tittered and giggled, and the old lady laughed out loud, and the baillie and the other old fellows roared till they were red in the face, the whole mortal time. I don't quite recollect how many tumblers of whiskey toddy each man drank after supper; but this I know, that about one o'clock in the morning, the baillie's grown-up son became insensible while attempting the first verse of “ Willie brewed a peck o' maut; ” and he having been, for half an hour before, the only other man visible above the mahogany, it occurred to my uncle that it was almost time to think about going: especially as drinking had set in at seven o'clock, in order that he might get home at a decent hour. But, thinking it might not be quite polite to go just then, my uncle voted himself into the chair, mixed another glass, rose to propose his own health, addressed himself in a neat and complimentary speech, and drank the toast with great enthusiasm. Still nobody woke; so my uncle took a little drop more—neat

this time, to prevent the toddy disagreeing with him—and, laying violent hands on his hat, sallied forth into the street.

“It was a wild gusty night when my uncle closed the baillie’s door, and setting his hat firmly on his head, to prevent the wind from taking it, thrust his hands into his pockets, and looking upwards, took a short survey of the state of the weather. The clouds were drifting over the moon at their giddiest speed : at one time wholly obscuring her : at another, suffering her to burst forth in full splendour and shed her light on all the objects around : anon, driving over her again with increased velocity, and shrouding everything in darkness. ‘Really, this won’t do,’ said my uncle, addressing himself to the weather, as if he felt himself personally offended. ‘This is not at all the kind of thing for my voyage. It will not do at any price,’ said my uncle very impressively. Having repeated this several times, he recovered his balance with some difficulty—for he was rather giddy with looking up into the sky so long—and walked merrily on.

“The baillie’s house was in the Canongate, and my uncle was going to the other end of Leith Walk, rather better than a mile’s journey. On either side of him, there shot up against the dark sky, tall, gaunt, straggling houses, with time-stained fronts, and windows that seemed to have shared the lot of eyes in mortals, and to have grown dim and sunken with age. Six, seven, eight stories high, were the houses ; story piled above story, as children build with cards—throwing their dark shadows over the roughly paved road, and making the dark night darker. A few oil lamps scattered at long distances, but they only served to mark the dirty entrance to some narrow close, or to show where a common stair communicated, by steep and intricate windings, with the various flats above. Glancing at all these things with the air of a man who had seen them too often before to think them worthy of much notice now, my uncle walked up the middle of the street, with a thumb in each waistcoat pocket, indulging, from time to time, in various snatches of song, chanted forth with such good-will and spirit, that the quiet honest folk started from their first sleep, and lay trembling in bed till the sound died away in the distance ; when, satisfying themselves that it was only some drunken ne’er-do-weel finding his way home, they covered themselves up warm and fell asleep again.

“I am particular in describing how my uncle walked up the middle of the street, with his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets,

gentlemen, because, as he often used to say (and with great reason too), there is nothing at all extraordinary in this story, unless you distinctly understand at the beginning that he was not by any means of a marvellous or romantic turn.

“Gentlemen, my uncle walked on with his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets, taking the middle of the street to himself, and singing, now a verse of a love song, and then a verse of a drinking one, and when he was tired of both, whistling melodiously, until he reached the North Bridge, which, at this point, connects the old and new towns of Edinburgh. Here he stopped for a minute, to look at the strange irregular clusters of lights piled one above the other, and twinkling afar off, so high in the air, that they looked like stars, gleaming from the castle walls on the one side, and the Calton Hill on the other, as if they illuminated veritable castles in the air : while the old picturesque town slept heavily on, in gloom and darkness below : its palace and chapel of Holyrood, guarded day and night, as a friend of my uncle’s used to say, by old Arthur’s Seat, towering, surly and dark, like some gruff genius, over the ancient city he has watched so long. I say, gentlemen, my uncle stopped here, for a minute, to look about him ; and then paying a compliment to the weather, which had a little cleared up, though the moon was sinking, walked on again, as royally as before : keeping the middle of the road with great dignity, and looking as if he should very much like to meet with somebody who would dispute possession of it with him. There was nobody at all disposed to contest the point, as it happened ; and so, on he went, with his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets, like a lamb.

“When my uncle reached the end of Leith Walk, he had to cross a pretty large piece of waste ground, which separated him from a short street which he had to turn down, to go direct to his lodging. Now, in this piece of waste ground, there was, at that time, an enclosure belonging to some wheelwright, who contracted with the Post Office for the purchase of old worn-out mail-coaches ; and my uncle, being very fond of coaches, old, young, or middle-aged, all at once took it into his head to step out of his road for no other purpose than to peep between the palings at these mails : about a dozen of which he remembered to have seen, crowded together in a very forlorn and dismantled state, inside. My uncle was a very enthusiastic, emphatic sort of person, gentlemen ; so, finding that he could not obtain a good peep between the palings, he got over them, and sitting himself quietly down on an old

axletree, began to contemplate the mail-coaches with a deal of gravity.

“There might be a dozen of them, or there might be more—my uncle was never quite certain on this point, and being a man of very scrupulous veracity about numbers, didn't like to say—but there they stood, all huddled together in the most desolate condition imaginable. The doors had been torn from their hinges and removed ; the linings had been stripped off : only a shred hanging here and there by a rusty nail ; the lamps were gone, the poles had long since vanished, the iron-work was rusty, the paint worn away ; the wind whistled through the chinks in the bare wood-work ; and the rain which had collected on the roofs, fell, drop by drop, into the insides with a hollow and melancholy sound. They were the decaying skeletons of departed mails, and in that lonely place, at that time of night, they looked chill and dismal.

“My uncle rested his head upon his hands, and thought of the busy bustling people who had rattled about, years before, in the old coaches, and were now as silent and changed : he thought of the numbers of people to whom one of those crazy, mouldering vehicles had borne, night after night, for many years, and through all weathers, the anxiously expected intelligence, the eagerly looked-for remittance, the promised assurance of health and safety, the sudden announcement of sickness and death. The merchant, the lover, the wife, the widow, the mother, the school-boy, the very child who tottered to the door at the postman's knock—how had they all looked forward to the arrival of the old coach ! And where were they all now ?

“Gentlemen, my uncle used to *say* that he thought all this at the time, but I rather suspect he learnt it out of some book afterwards, for he distinctly stated that he fell into a kind of doze as he sat on the old axletree looking at the decayed mail-coaches, and that he was suddenly awakened by some deep church bell striking two. Now, my uncle was never a fast thinker, and if he had thought all these things, I am quite certain it would have taken him till full half-past two o'clock, at the very least. I am, therefore, decidedly of opinion, gentlemen, that my uncle fell into the kind of doze, without having thought about anything at all.

“Be this as it may, a church bell struck two. My uncle woke, rubbed his eyes, and jumped up in astonishment.

“In one instant after the clock struck two, the whole of this