

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**A STRANGE STORY —
VOLUME 03**

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A Strange Story — Volume 03

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Содержание

CHAPTER XXV	4
CHAPTER XXVI	7
CHAPTER XXVII	22
CHAPTER XXVIII	29
CHAPTER XXIX	39
CHAPTER XXX	46
CHAPTER XXXI	48
CHAPTER XXXII	66
CHAPTER XXXIII	76
CHAPTER XXXIV	82

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

A Strange Story — Volume 03

CHAPTER XXV

My intercourse with Margrave grew habitual and familiar. He came to my house every morning before sunrise; in the evenings we were again brought together: sometimes in the houses to which we were both invited, sometimes at his hotel, sometimes in my own home.

Nothing more perplexed me than his aspect of extreme youthfulness, contrasted with the extent of the travels, which, if he were to be believed, had left little of the known world unexplored. One day I asked him bluntly how old he was.

"How old do I look? How old should you suppose me to be?"

"I should have guessed you to be about twenty, till you spoke of having come of age some years ago."

"Is it a sign of longevity when a man looks much younger than he is?"

"Conjoined with other signs, certainly!"

"Have I the other signs?"

"Yes, a magnificent, perhaps a matchless, constitutional organization. But you have evaded my question as to your age; was it an impertinence to put it?"

"No. I came of age—let me see—three years ago."

"So long since? Is it possible? I wish I had your secret!"

"Secret! What secret?"

"The secret of preserving so much of boyish freshness in the wear and tear of man-like passions and man-like thoughts."

"You are still young yourself,—under forty?"

"Oh, yes! some years under forty."

"And Nature gave you a grander frame and a finer symmetry of feature than she bestowed on me."

"Pooh! pooh! You have the beauty that must charm the eyes of woman, and that beauty in its sunny forenoon of youth. Happy man! if you love and wish to be sure that you are loved again."

"What you call love—the unhealthy sentiment, the feverish folly—left behind me, I think forever, when—"

"Ay, indeed,—when?"

"I came of age!"

"Hoary cynic! and you despise love! So did I once. Your time may come."

"I think not. Does any animal, except man, love its fellow she-animal as man loves woman?"

"As man loves woman? No, I suppose not."

"And why should the subject animals be wiser than their king? But to return: you would like to have my youth and my careless enjoyment of youth?"

"Can you ask,—who would not?" Margrave looked at me for a moment with unusual seriousness, and then, in the abrupt

changes common to his capricious temperament, began to sing softly one of his barbaric chants,—a chant different from any I had heard him sing before, made, either by the modulation of his voice or the nature of the tune, so sweet that, little as music generally affected me, this thrilled to my very heart's core. I drew closer and closer to him, and murmured when he paused,—

"Is not that a love-song?"

"No;" said he, "it is the song by which the serpent-charmer charms the serpent."

CHAPTER XXVI

Increased intimacy with my new acquaintance did not diminish the charm of his society, though it brought to light some startling defects, both in his mental and moral organization. I have before said that his knowledge, though it had swept over a wide circuit and dipped into curious, unfrequented recesses, was desultory and erratic. It certainly was not that knowledge, sustained and aspiring, which the poet assures us is "the wing on which we mount to heaven." So, in his faculties themselves there were singular inequalities, or contradictions. His power of memory in some things seemed prodigious, but when examined it was seldom accurate; it could apprehend, but did not hold together with a binding grasp what metaphysicians call "complex ideas." He thus seemed unable to put it to any steadfast purpose in the sciences of which it retained, vaguely and loosely, many recondite principles. For the sublime and beautiful in literature he had no taste whatever. A passionate lover of nature, his imagination had no response to the arts by which nature is expressed or idealized; wholly unaffected by poetry or painting. Of the fine arts, music alone attracted and pleased him. His conversation was often eminently suggestive, touching on much, whether in books or mankind, that set one thinking; but I never remember him to have uttered any of those lofty or tender sentiments which form the connecting links between youth and

genius; for if poets sing to the young, and the young hail their own interpreters in poets, it is because the tendency of both is to idealize the realities of life,—finding everywhere in the real a something that is noble or fair, and making the fair yet fairer, and the noble nobler still.

In Margrave's character there seemed no special vices, no special virtues; but a wonderful vivacity, joyousness, animal good-humour. He was singularly temperate, having a dislike to wine, perhaps from that purity of taste which belongs to health absolutely perfect. No healthful child likes alcohol; no animal, except man, prefers wine to water.

But his main moral defect seemed to me in a want of sympathy, even where he professed attachment. He who could feel so acutely for himself, be unmanned by the bite of a squirrel, and sob at the thought that he should one day die, was as callous to the sufferings of another as a deer who deserts and butts from him a wounded comrade.

I give an instance of this hardness of heart where I should have least expected to find it in him.

He had met and joined me as I was walking to visit a patient on the outskirts of the town, when we fell in with a group of children, just let loose for an hour or two from their day-school. Some of these children joyously recognized him as having played with them at their homes; they ran up to him, and he seemed as glad as themselves at the meeting.

He suffered them to drag him along with them, and became

as merry and sportive as the youngest of the troop.

"Well," said I, laughing, "if you are going to play at leap-frog, pray don't let it be on the high road, or you will be run over by carts and draymen; see that meadow just in front to the left,—off with you there!"

"With all my heart," cried Margrave, "while you pay your visit. Come along, boys."

A little urchin, not above six years old, but who was lame, began to cry; he could not run,—he should be left behind.

Margrave stooped. "Climb on my shoulder, little one, and I'll be your horse."

The child dried its tears, and delightedly obeyed. "Certainly," said I to myself, "Margrave, after all, must have a nature as gentle as it is simple. What other young man, so courted by all the allurements that steal innocence from pleasure, would stop in the thoroughfares to play with children?"

The thought had scarcely passed through my mind when I heard a scream of agony. Margrave had leaped the railing that divided the meadow from the road, and, in so doing, the poor child, perched on his shoulder, had, perhaps from surprise or fright, loosened its hold and fallen heavily; its cries were piteous. Margrave clapped his hands to his ears, uttered an exclamation of anger, and not even stopping to lift up the boy, or examine what the hurt was, called to the other children to come on, and was soon rolling with them on the grass, and pelting them with daisies. When I came up, only one child remained by

the sufferer,—his little brother, a year older than himself. The child had fallen on his arm, which was not broken, but violently contused. The pain must have been intense. I carried the child to his home, and had to remain there some time. I did not see Margrave till the next morning. When he then called, I felt so indignant that I could scarcely speak to him. When at last I rebuked him for his inhumanity, he seemed surprised; with difficulty remembered the circumstance, and then merely said, as if it were the most natural confession in the world,

"Oh, nothing so discordant as a child's wail. I hate discords. I am pleased with the company of children; but they must be children who laugh and play. Well, why do you look at me so sternly? What have I said to shock you?"

"Shock me! you shock manhood itself! Go; I cannot talk to you now. I am busy."

But he did not go; and his voice was so sweet, and his ways so winning, that disgust insensibly melted into that sort of forgiveness one accords (let me repeat the illustration) to the deer that forsakes its comrade. The poor thing knows no better. And what a graceful beautiful thing this was!

The fascination—I can give it no other name—which Margrave exercised, was not confined to me; it was universal,—old, young, high, low, man, woman, child, all felt it. Never in Low Town had stranger, even the most distinguished by fame, met with a reception so cordial, so flattering. His frank confession that he was a natural son, far from being to his injury,

served to interest people more in him, and to prevent all those inquiries in regard to his connections and antecedents which would otherwise have been afloat. To be sure, he was evidently rich,—at least he had plenty of money. He lived in the best rooms in the principal hotel; was very hospitable; entertained the families with whom he had grown intimate; made them bring their children,—music and dancing after dinner. Among the houses in which he had established familiar acquaintance was that of the mayor of the town, who had bought Dr. Lloyd's collection of subjects in natural history. To that collection the mayor had added largely by a very recent purchase. He had arranged these various specimens, which his last acquisitions had enriched by the interesting carcasses of an elephant and a hippopotamus, in a large wooden building contiguous to his dwelling, which had been constructed by a former proprietor (a retired fox-hunter) as a riding-house; and being a man who much affected the diffusion of knowledge, he proposed to open this museum to the admiration of the general public, and, at his death, to bequeath it to the Athenaeum or Literary Institute of his native town. Margrave, seconded by the influence of the mayor's daughters, had scarcely been three days at L—— before he had persuaded this excellent and public-spirited functionary to inaugurate the opening of his museum by the popular ceremony of a ball. A temporary corridor should unite the drawing-rooms, which were on the ground floor, with the building that contained the collection; and thus the fete would be elevated

above the frivolous character of a fashionable amusement, and consecrated to the solemnization of an intellectual institute. Dazzled by the brilliancy of this idea, the mayor announced his intention to give a ball that should include the surrounding neighbourhood, and be worthy, in all expensive respects, of the dignity of himself and the occasion. A night had been fixed for the ball,—a night that became memorable indeed to me! The entertainment was anticipated with a lively interest, in which even the Hill condescended to share. The Hill did not much patronize mayors in general; but when a Mayor gave a ball for a purpose so patriotic, and on a scale so splendid, the Hill liberally acknowledged that Commerce was, on the whole, a thing which the Eminence might, now and then, condescend to acknowledge without absolutely derogating from the rank which Providence had assigned to it amongst the High Places of earth. Accordingly, the Hill was permitted by its Queen to honour the first magistrate of Low Town by a promise to attend his ball. Now, as this festivity had originated in the suggestion of Margrave, so, by a natural association of ideas, every one, in talking of the ball, talked also of Margrave.

The Hill had at first affected to ignore a stranger whose debut had been made in the mercantile circle of Low Town. But the Queen of the Hill now said, sententiously, "This new man in a few days has become a Celebrity. It is the policy of the Hill to adopt Celebrities, if the Celebrities pay respect to the Proprieties. Dr. Fenwick is requested to procure Mr. Margrave the advantage

of being known to the Hill."

I found it somewhat difficult to persuade Margrave to accept the Hill's condescending overture. He seemed to have a dislike to all societies pretending to aristocratic distinction,—a dislike expressed with a fierceness so unwonted, that it made one suppose he had, at some time or other, been subjected to mortification by the supercilious airs that blow upon heights so elevated. However, he yielded to my instances, and accompanied me one evening to Mrs. Poyntz's house. The Hill was encamped there for the occasion. Mrs. Poyntz was exceedingly civil to him, and after a few commonplace speeches, hearing that he was fond of music, consigned him to the caressing care of Miss Brabazon, who was at the head of the musical department in the Queen of the Hill's administration.

Mrs. Poyntz retired to her favourite seat near the window, inviting me to sit beside her; and while she knitted in silence, in silence my eye glanced towards Margrave, in the midst of the group assembled round the piano.

Whether he was in more than usually high spirits, or whether he was actuated by a malign and impish desire to upset the established laws of decorum by which the gayeties of the Hill were habitually subdued into a serene and somewhat pensive pleasantness, I know not; but it was not many minutes before the orderly aspect of the place was grotesquely changed.

Miss Brabazon having come to the close of a complicated and dreary sonata, I heard Margrave abruptly ask her if she could

play the Tarantella, that famous Neapolitan air which is founded on the legendary belief that the bite of the tarantula excites an irresistible desire to dance. On that highbred spinster's confession that she was ignorant of the air, and had not even heard of the legend, Margrave said, "Let me play it to you, with variations of my own." Miss Brabazon graciously yielded her place at the instrument. Margrave seated himself,—there was great curiosity to hear his performance. Margrave's fingers rushed over the keys, and there was a general start, the prelude was so unlike any known combination of harmonious sounds. Then he began a chant—song I can scarcely call it—words certainly not in Italian, perhaps in some uncivilized tongue, perhaps in impromptu gibberish. And the torture of the instrument now commenced in good earnest: it shrieked, it groaned, wilder and noisier. Beethoven's Storm, roused by the fell touch of a German pianist, were mild in comparison; and the mighty voice, dominating the anguish of the cracking keys, had the full diapason of a chorus. Certainly I am no judge of music, but to my ear the discord was terrific,—to the ears of better informed amateurs it seemed ravishing. All were spellbound; even Mrs. Poyntz paused from her knitting, as the Fates paused from their web at the lyre of Orpheus. To this breathless delight, however, soon succeeded a general desire for movement. To my amazement, I beheld these formal matrons and sober fathers of families forming themselves into a dance, turbulent as a children's ball at Christmas; and when, suddenly desisting from his music, Margrave started up,

caught the skeleton hand of lean Miss Brabazon, and whirled her into the centre of the dance, I could have fancied myself at a witch's sabbat. My eye turned in scandalized alarm towards Mrs. Poyntz. That great creature seemed as much astounded as myself. Her eyes were fixed on the scene in a stare of positive stupor. For the first time, no doubt, in her life, she was overcome, deposed, dethroned. The awe of her presence was literally whirled away. The dance ceased as suddenly as it had begun. Darting from the galvanized mummy whom he had selected as his partner, Margrave shot to Mrs. Poyntz's side, and said, "Ten thousand pardons for quitting you so soon, but the clock warns me that I have an engagement elsewhere." In another moment he was gone.

The dance halted, people seemed slowly returning to their senses, looking at each other bashfully and ashamed.

"I could not help it, dear," sighed Miss Brabazon at last, sinking into a chair, and casting her deprecating, fainting eyes upon the hostess.

"It is witchcraft," said fat Mrs. Bruce, wiping her forehead.

"Witchcraft!" echoed Mrs. Poyntz; "it does indeed look like it. An amazing and portentous exhibition of animal spirits, and not to be endured by the Proprietaries. Where on earth can that young savage have come from?"

"From savage lands," said I,— "so he says."

"Do not bring him here again," said Mrs. Poyntz. "He would soon turn the Hill topsy-turvy. But how charming! I should like

to see more of him," she added, in an under voice, "if he would call on me some morning, and not in the presence of those for whose Proprieties I am responsible. Jane must be out in her ride with the colonel."

Margrave never again attended the patrician festivities of the Hill. Invitations were poured upon him, especially by Miss Brabazon and the other old maids, but in vain.

"Those people," said he, "are too tamed and civilized for me; and so few young persons among them. Even that girl Jane is only young on the surface; inside, as old as the World or her mother. I like youth, real youth,—I am young, I am young!"

And, indeed, I observed he would attach himself to some young person, often to some child, as if with cordial and special favour, yet for not more than an hour or so, never distinguishing them by the same preference when he next met them. I made that remark to him, in rebuke of his fickleness, one evening when he had found me at work on my Ambitious Book, reducing to rule and measure the Laws of Nature.

"It is not fickleness," said he,—"it is necessity."

"Necessity! Explain yourself."

"I seek to find what I have not found," said he; it is my necessity to seek it, and among the young; and disappointed in one, I turn to the other. Necessity again. But find it at last I must."

"I suppose you mean what the young usually seek in the young; and if, as you said the other day, you have left love behind you, you now wander back to re-find it."

"Tush! If I may judge by the talk of young fools, love may be found every day by him who looks out for it. What I seek is among the rarest of all discoveries. You might aid me to find it, and in so doing aid yourself to a knowledge far beyond all that your formal experiments can bestow."

"Prove your words, and command my services," said I, smiling somewhat disdainfully.

"You told me that you had examined into the alleged phenomena of animal magnetism, and proved some persons who pretend to the gift which the Scotch call second sight to be bungling impostors. You were right. I have seen the clairvoyants who drive their trade in this town; a common gipsy could beat them in their own calling. But your experience must have shown you that there are certain temperaments in which the gift of the Pythoness is stored, unknown to the possessor, undetected by the common observer; but the signs of which should be as apparent to the modern physiologist, as they were to the ancient priest."

"I at least, as a physiologist, am ignorant of the signs: what are they?"

"I should despair of making you comprehend them by mere verbal description. I could guide your observation to distinguish them unerringly were living subjects before us. But not one in a million has the gift to an extent available for the purposes to which the wise would apply it. Many have imperfect glimpses; few, few indeed, the unveiled, lucent sight. They who have but the imperfect glimpses mislead and dupe the minds that consult

them, because, being sometimes marvellously right, they excite a credulous belief in their general accuracy; and as they are but translators of dreams in their own brain, their assurances are no more to be trusted than are the dreams of commonplace sleepers. But where the gift exists to perfection, he who knows how to direct and to profit by it should be able to discover all that he desires to know for the guidance and preservation of his own life. He will be forewarned of every danger, forearmed in the means by which danger is avoided. For the eye of the true Pythoness matter has no obstruction, space no confines, time no measurement."

"My dear Margrave, you may well say that creatures so gifted are rare; and, for my part, I would as soon search for a unicorn, as, to use your affected expression, for a Pythoness."

"Nevertheless, whenever there come across the course of your practice some young creature to whom all the evil of the world is as yet unknown, to whom the ordinary cares and duties of the world are strange and unwelcome; who from the earliest dawn of reason has loved to sit apart and to muse; before whose eyes visions pass unsolicited; who converses with those who are not dwellers on the earth, and beholds in the space landscapes which the earth does not reflect—"

"Margrave, Margrave! of whom do you speak?"

"Whose frame, though exquisitely sensitive, has still a health and a soundness in which you recognize no disease; whose mind has a truthfulness that you know cannot deceive you, and a

simple intelligence too clear to deceive itself; who is moved to a mysterious degree by all the varying aspects of external nature,—innocently joyous, or unaccountably sad,—when, I say, such a being comes across your experience, inform me; and the chances are that the true Pythoness is found."

I had listened with vague terror, and with more than one exclamation of amazement, to descriptions which brought Lilian Ashleigh before me; and I now sat mute, bewildered, breathless, gazing upon Margrave, and rejoicing that, at least, Lilian he had never seen.

He returned my own gaze steadily, searchingly, and then, breaking into a slight laugh, resumed:—

"You call my word 'Pythoness' affected. I know of no better. My recollections of classic anecdote and history are confused and dim; but somewhere I have read or heard that the priests of Delphi were accustomed to travel chiefly into Thrace or Thessaly, in search of the virgins who might fitly administer their oracles, and that the oracles gradually ceased in repute as the priests became unable to discover the organization requisite in the priestesses, and supplied by craft and imposture, or by such imperfect fragmentary developments as belong now to professional clairvoyants, the gifts which Nature failed to afford. Indeed, the demand was one that must have rapidly exhausted so limited a supply. The constant strain upon faculties so wearying to the vital functions in their relentless exercise, under the artful stimulants by which the priests heightened their power, was

mortal, and no Pythoness ever retained her life more than three years from the time that her gift was elaborately trained and developed."

"Pooh! I know of no classical authority for the details you so confidently cite. Perhaps some such legends may be found in the Alexandrian Platonists, but those mystics are no authority on such a subject. "After all;" I added, recovering from my first surprise, or awe, "the Delphic oracles were proverbially ambiguous, and their responses might be read either way,—a proof that the priests dictated the verses, though their arts on the unhappy priestess might throw her into real convulsions, and the real convulsions, not the false gift, might shorten her life. Enough of such idle subjects! Yet no! one question more. If you found your Pythoness, what then?"

"What then? Why, through her aid I might discover the process of an experiment which your practical science would assist me to complete."

"Tell me of what kind is your experiment; and precisely because such little science as I possess is exclusively practical, I may assist you without the help of the Pythoness."

Margrave was silent for some minutes, passing his hand several times across his forehead, which was a frequent gesture of his, and then rising, he answered, in listless accents,—

"I cannot say more now, my brain is fatigued; and you are not yet in the right mood to hear me. By the way, how close and reserved you are with me!"

"How so?"

"You never told me that you were engaged to be married. You leave me, who thought to have won your friendship, to hear what concerns you so intimately from a comparative stranger."

"Who told you?"

"That woman with eyes that pry and lips that scheme, to whose house you took me."

"Mrs. Poyntz! is it possible? When?"

"This afternoon. I met her in the street; she stopped me, and, after some unmeaning talk, asked if I had seen you lately; if I did not find you very absent and distracted: no wonder;—you were in love. The young lady was away on a visit, and wooed by a dangerous rival."

"Wooed by a dangerous rival!"

"Very rich, good-looking, young. Do you fear him? You turn pale."

"I do not fear, except so far as he who loves truly, loves humbly, and fears not that another may be preferred, but that another may be worthier of preference than himself. But that Mrs. Poyntz should tell you all this does amaze me. Did she mention the name of the young lady?"

"Yes; Lilian Ashleigh. Henceforth be more frank with me. Who knows? I may help you. Adieu!"

CHAPTER XXVII

When Margrave had gone, I glanced at the clock,—not yet nine. I resolved to go at once to Mrs. Poyntz. It was not an evening on which she received, but doubtless she would see me. She owed me an explanation. How thus carelessly divulge a secret she had been enjoined to keep; and this rival, of whom I was ignorant? It was no longer a matter of wonder that Hargrave should have described Lilian's peculiar idiosyncrasies in his sketch of his fabulous Pythoness. Doubtless Mrs. Poyntz had, with unpardonable levity of indiscretion, revealed all of which she disapproved in my choice. But for what object? Was this her boasted friendship for me? Was it consistent with the regard she professed for Mrs. Ashleigh and Lilian? Occupied by these perplexed and indignant thoughts, I arrived at Mrs. Poyntz's house, and was admitted to her presence. She was fortunately alone; her daughter and the colonel had gone to some party on the Hill. I would not take the hand she held out to me on entrance; seated myself in stern displeasure, and proceeded at once to inquire if she had really betrayed to Mr. Margrave the secret of my engagement to Lilian.

"Yes, Allen Fenwick; I have this day told, not only Mr. Margrave, but every person I met who is likely to tell it to some one else, the secret of your engagement to Lilian Ashleigh. I never promised to conceal it; on the contrary, I wrote word to

Anne Ashleigh that I would therein act as my own judgment counselled me. I think my words to you were that 'public gossip was sometimes the best security for the completion of private engagements.'"

"Do you mean that Mrs. or Miss Ashleigh recoils from the engagement with me, and that I should meanly compel them both to fulfil it by calling in the public to censure them—if—if—Oh, madam, this is worldly artifice indeed!"

"Be good enough to listen to me quietly. I have never yet showed you the letter to Mrs. Ashleigh, written by Lady Haughton, and delivered by Mr. Vigors. That letter I will now show to you; but before doing so I must enter into a preliminary explanation. Lady Haughton is one of those women who love power, and cannot obtain it except through wealth and station,—by her own intellect never obtain it. When her husband died she was reduced from an income of twelve thousand a year to a jointure of twelve hundred, but with the exclusive guardianship of a young son, a minor, and adequate allowances for the charge; she continued, therefore, to preside as mistress over the establishments in town and country; still had the administration of her son's wealth and rank. She stinted his education, in order to maintain her ascendancy over him. He became a brainless prodigal, spendthrift alike of health and fortune. Alarmed, she saw that, probably, he would die young and a beggar; his only hope of reform was in marriage. She reluctantly resolved to marry him to a penniless, well-born, soft-minded young lady

whom she knew she could control; just before this marriage was to take place he was killed by a fall from his horse. The Haughton estate passed to his cousin, the luckiest young man alive,—the same Ashleigh Sumner who had already succeeded, in default of male issue, to poor Gilbert Ashleigh's landed possessions. Over this young man Lady Haughton could expect no influence. She would be a stranger in his house. But she had a niece! Mr. Vigors assured her the niece was beautiful. And if the niece could become Mrs. Ashleigh Sumner, then Lady Haughton would be a less unimportant Nobody in the world, because she would still have her nearest relation in a Somebody at Haughton Park. Mr. Vigors has his own pompous reasons for approving an alliance which he might help to accomplish. The first step towards that alliance was obviously to bring into reciprocal attraction the natural charms of the young lady and the acquired merits of the young gentleman. Mr. Vigors could easily induce his ward to pay a visit to Lady Haughton, and Lady Haughton had only to extend her invitations to her niece; hence the letter to Mrs. Ashleigh, of which Mr. Vigors was the bearer, and hence my advice to you, of which you can now understand the motive. Since you thought Lilian Ashleigh the only woman you could love, and since I thought there were other women in the world who might do as well for Ashleigh Sumner, it seemed to me fair for all parties that Lilian should not go to Lady Haughton's in ignorance of the sentiments with which she had inspired you. A girl can seldom be sure that she loves until she is sure that she is loved. And

now," added Mrs. Poyntz, rising and walking across the room to her bureau,— "now I will show you Lady Haughton's invitation to Mrs. Ashleigh. Here it is!"

I ran my eye over the letter, which she thrust into my hand, resuming her knitting-work while I read.

The letter was short, couched in conventional terms of hollow affection. The writer blamed herself for having so long neglected her brother's widow and child; her heart had been wrapped up too much in the son she had lost; that loss had made her turn to the ties of blood still left to her; she had heard much of Lilian from their common friend, Mr. Vigors; she longed to embrace so charming a niece. Then followed the invitation and the postscript. The postscript ran thus, so far as I can remember:

"Whatever my own grief at my irreparable bereavement, I am no egotist; I keep my sorrow to myself. You will find some pleasant guests at my house, among others our joint connection, young Ashleigh Sumner."

"Woman's postscripts are proverbial for their significance," said Mrs. Poyntz, when I had concluded the letter and laid it on the table; "and if I did not at once show you this hypocritical effusion, it was simply because at the name Ashleigh Sumner its object became transparent, not perhaps to poor Anne Ashleigh nor to innocent Lilian, but to my knowledge of the parties concerned, as it ought to be to that shrewd intelligence which you derive partly from nature, partly from the insight into life which

a true physician cannot fail to acquire. And if I know anything of you, you would have romantically said, had you seen the letter at first, and understood its covert intention, 'Let me not shackle the choice of the woman I love, and to whom an alliance so coveted in the eyes of the world might, if she were left free, be proffered.'"

"I should not have gathered from the postscript all that you see in it; but had its purport been so suggested to me, you are right, I should have so said. Well, and as Mr. Margrave tells me that you informed him that I have a rival, I am now to conclude that the rival is Mr. Ashleigh Sumner?"

"Has not Mrs. Ashleigh or Lilian mentioned him in writing to you?"

"Yes, both; Lilian very slightly, Mrs. Ashleigh with some praise, as a young man of high character, and very courteous to her."

"Yet, though I asked you to come and tell me who were the guests at Lady Haughton's, you never did so."

"Pardon me; but of the guests I thought nothing, and letters addressed to my heart seemed to me too sacred to talk about. And Ashleigh Sumner then courts Lilian! How do you know?"

"I know everything that concerns me; and here, the explanation is simple. My aunt, Lady Delafield, is staying with Lady Haughton. Lady Delafield is one of the women of fashion who shine by their own light; Lady Haughton shines by borrowed light, and borrows every ray she can find."

"And Lady Delafield writes you word—"

"That Ashleigh Sumner is caught by Lilian's beauty."

"And Lilian herself—"

"Women like Lady Delafield do not readily believe that any girl could refuse Ashleigh Sumner; considered in himself, he is steady and good-looking; considered as owner of Kirby Hall and Houghton Park, he has, in the eyes of any sensible mother, the virtues of Cato and the beauty of Antinous."

I pressed my hand to my heart; close to my heart lay a letter from Lilian, and there was no word in that letter which showed that her heart was gone from mine. I shook my head gently, and smiled in confiding triumph.

Mrs. Poyntz surveyed me with a bent brow and a compressed lip.

"I understand your smile," she said ironically. "Very likely Lilian may be quite untouched by this young man's admiration, but Anne Ashleigh may be dazzled by so brilliant a prospect for her daughter; and, in short, I thought it desirable to let your engagement be publicly known throughout the town to-day. That information will travel; it will reach Ashleigh Sumner through Mr. Vigors, or others in this neighbourhood, with whom I know that he corresponds. It will bring affairs to a crisis, and before it may be too late. I think it well that Ashleigh Sumner should leave that house; if he leave it for good, so much the better. And, perhaps, the sooner Lilian returns to L—— the lighter your own heart will be."

"And for these reasons you have published the secret of—"

"Your engagement? Yes. Prepare to be congratulated wherever you go. And now if you hear either from mother or daughter that Ashleigh Sumner has proposed, and been, let us say, refused, I do not doubt that, in the pride of your heart, you will come and tell me."

"Rely upon it, I will; but before I take leave, allow me to ask why you described to a young man like Mr. Margrave—, whose wild and strange humours you have witnessed and not approved—any of those traits of character in Miss Ashleigh which distinguish her from other girls of her age?"

"I? You mistake. I said nothing to him of her character. I mentioned her name, and said she was beautiful, that was all."

"Nay, you said that she was fond of musing, of solitude; that in her fancies she believed in the reality of visions which might flit before her eyes as they flit before the eyes of all imaginative dreamers."

"Not a word did I say to Mr. Margrave of such peculiarities in Lilian; not a word more than what I have told you, on my honour!"

Still incredulous, but disguising my incredulity with that convenient smile by which we accomplish so much of the polite dissimulation indispensable to the decencies of civilized life, I took my departure, returned home, and wrote to Lilian.

CHAPTER XXVIII

The conversation with Mrs. Poyntz left my mind restless and disquieted. I had no doubt, indeed, of Lilian's truth; but could I be sure that the attentions of a young man, with advantages of fortune so brilliant, would not force on her thoughts the contrast of the humbler lot and the duller walk of life in which she had accepted as companion a man removed from her romantic youth less by disparity of years than by gravity of pursuits? And would my suit now be as welcomed as it had been by a mother even so unworldly as Mrs. Ashleigh? Why, too, should both mother and daughter have left me so unprepared to hear that I had a rival; why not have implied some consoling assurance that such rivalry need not cause me alarm? Lilian's letters, it is true, touched but little on any of the persons round her; they were filled with the outpourings of an ingenuous heart, coloured by the glow of a golden fancy. They were written as if in the wide world we two stood apart alone, consecrated from the crowd by the love that, in linking us together, had hallowed each to the other. Mrs. Ashleigh's letters were more general and diffusive,—detailed the habits of the household, sketched the guests, intimated her continued fear of Lady Haughton, but had said nothing more of Mr. Ashleigh Sumner than I had repeated to Mrs. Poyntz. However, in my letter to Lilian I related the intelligence that had reached me, and impatiently I awaited her reply.

Three days after the interview with Mrs. Poyntz, and two days before the long-anticipated event of the mayor's ball, I was summoned to attend a nobleman who had lately been added to my list of patients, and whose residence was about twelve miles from L——. The nearest way was through Sir Philip Derval's park. I went on horseback, and proposed to stop on the way to inquire after the steward, whom I had seen but once since his fit, and that was two days after it, when he called himself at my house to thank me for my attendance, and to declare that he was quite recovered.

As I rode somewhat fast through the park, I came, however, upon the steward, just in front of the house. I reined in my horse and accosted him. He looked very cheerful.

"Sir," said he, in a whisper, "I have heard from Sir Philip; his letter is dated since—since—my good woman told you what I saw,—well, since then. So that it must have been all a delusion of mine, as you told her. And yet, well—well—we will not talk of it, doctor; but I hope you have kept the secret. Sir Philip would not like to hear of it, if he comes back."

"Your secret is quite safe with me. But is Sir Philip likely to come back?"

"I hope so, doctor. His letter is dated Paris, and that's nearer home than he has been for many years; and—but bless me! some one is coming out of the house,—a young gentleman! Who can it be?"

I looked, and to my surprise I saw Margrave descending the

stately stairs that led from the front door. The steward turned towards him, and I mechanically followed, for I was curious to know what had brought Margrave to the house of the long-absent traveller.

It was easily explained. Mr. Margrave had heard at L—— much of the pictures and internal decorations of the mansion. He had, by dint of coaxing (he said, with his enchanting laugh), persuaded the old housekeeper to show him the rooms.

"It is against Sir Philip's positive orders to show the house to any stranger, sir; and the housekeeper has done very wrong," said the steward.

"Pray don't scold her. I dare say Sir Philip would not have refused me a permission he might not give to every idle sightseer. Fellow-travellers have a freemasonry with each other; and I have been much in the same far countries as himself. I heard of him there, and could tell you more about him, I dare say, than you know yourself."

"You, sir! pray do then."

"The next time I come," said Margrave, gayly; and, with a nod to me, he glided off through the trees of the neighbouring grove, along the winding footpath that led to the lodge.

"A very cool gentleman," muttered the steward; "but what pleasant ways he has! You seem to know him, sir. Who is he, may I ask?"

"Mr. Margrave,—a visitor at L——, and he has been a great traveller, as he says; perhaps he met Sir Philip abroad."

"I must go and hear what he said to Mrs. Gates; excuse me, sir, but I am so anxious about Sir Philip."

"If it be not too great a favour, may I be allowed the same privilege granted to Mr. Margrave? To judge by the outside of the house, the inside must be worth seeing; still, if it be against Sir Philip's positive orders—"

"His orders were, not to let the Court become a show-house, —to admit none without my consent; but I should be ungrateful indeed, doctor, if I refused that consent to you."

I tied my horse to the rusty gate of the terrace-walk, and followed the steward up the broad stairs of the terrace. The great doors were unlocked. We entered a lofty hall with a domed ceiling; at the back of the hall the grand staircase ascended by a double flight. The design was undoubtedly Vanbrugh's,—an architect who, beyond all others, sought the effect of grandeur less in space than in proportion; but Vanbrugh's designs need the relief of costume and movement, and the forms of a more pompous generation, in the bravery of velvets and laces, glancing amid those gilded columns, or descending with stately tread those broad palatial stairs. His halls and chambers are so made for festival and throng, that they become like deserted theatres, inexpressibly desolate, as we miss the glitter of the lamps and the movement of the actors.

The housekeeper had now appeared,—a quiet, timid old woman. She excused herself for admitting Margrave—not very intelligibly. It was plain to see that she had, in truth, been unable

to resist what the steward termed his "pleasant ways."

As if to escape from a scolding, she talked volubly all the time, bustling nervously through the rooms, along which I followed her guidance with a hushed footstep. The principal apartments were on the ground-floor, or rather, a floor raised some ten or fifteen feet above the ground; they had not been modernized since the date in which they were built. Hangings of faded silk; tables of rare marble, and mouldered gilding; comfortless chairs at drill against the walls; pictures, of which connoisseurs alone could estimate the value, darkened by dust or blistered by sun and damp, made a general character of discomfort. On not one room, on not one nook, still lingered some old smile of home.

Meanwhile, I gathered from the housekeeper's rambling answers to questions put to her by the steward, as I moved on, glancing at the pictures, that Margrave's visit that day was not his first. He had been to the house twice before,—his ostensible excuse that he was an amateur in pictures (though, as I had before observed, for that department of art he had no taste); but each time he had talked much of Sir Philip. He said that though not personally known to him, he had resided in the same towns abroad, and had friends equally intimate with Sir Philip; but when the steward inquired if the visitor had given any information as to the absentee, it became very clear that Margrave had been rather asking questions than volunteering intelligence.

We had now come to the end of the state apartments, the

last of which was a library. "And," said the old woman, "I don't wonder the gentleman knew Sir Philip, for he seemed a scholar, and looked very hard over the books, especially those old ones by the fireplace, which Sir Philip, Heaven bless him, was always poring into."

Mechanically I turned to the shelves by the fireplace, and examined the volumes ranged in that department. I found they contained the works of those writers whom we may class together under the title of mystics,—Iamblichus and Plotinus; Swedenborg and Behmen; Sandivogius, Van Helmont, Paracelsus, Cardan. Works, too, were there, by writers less renowned, on astrology, geomancy, chiromancy, etc. I began to understand among what class of authors Margrave had picked up the strange notions with which he was apt to interpolate the doctrines of practical philosophy.

"I suppose this library was Sir Philip's usual sitting-room?" said I.

"No, sir; he seldom sat here. This was his study; "and the old woman opened a small door, masked by false book backs. I followed her into a room of moderate size, and evidently of much earlier date than the rest of the house. "It is the only room left of an older mansion," said the steward in answer to my remark. "I have heard it was spared on account of the chimneypiece. But there is a Latin inscription which will tell you all about it. I don't know Latin myself."

The chimneypiece reached to the ceiling. The frieze of the

lower part rested on rude stone caryatides; the upper part was formed of oak panels very curiously carved in the geometrical designs favoured by the taste prevalent in the reigns of Elizabeth and James, but different from any I had ever seen in the drawings of old houses,—and I was not quite unlearned in such matters, for my poor father was a passionate antiquary in all that relates to mediæval art. The design in the oak panels was composed of triangles interlaced with varied ingenuity, and enclosed in circular bands inscribed with the signs of the Zodiac.

On the stone frieze supported by the caryatides, immediately under the woodwork, was inserted a metal plate, on which was written, in Latin, a few lines to the effect that "in this room, Simon Forman, the seeker of hidden truth, taking refuge from unjust persecution, made those discoveries in nature which he committed, for the benefit of a wiser age, to the charge of his protector and patron, the worshipful Sir Miles Derval, knight."

Forman! The name was not quite unfamiliar to me; but it was not without an effort that my memory enabled me to assign it to one of the most notorious of those astrologers or soothsayers whom the superstition of an earlier age alternately persecuted and honoured.

The general character of the room was more cheerful than the statelier chambers I had hitherto passed through, for it had still the look of habitation,—the armchair by the fireplace; the kneehole writing-table beside it; the sofa near the recess of a large bay-window, with book-prop and candlestick screwed to its

back; maps, coiled in their cylinders, ranged under the cornice; low strong safes, skirting two sides of the room, and apparently intended to hold papers and title-deeds, seals carefully affixed to their jealous locks. Placed on the top of these old-fashioned receptacles were articles familiar to modern use,—a fowling-piece here, fishing-rods there, two or three simple flower-vases, a pile of music books, a box of crayons. All in this room seemed to speak of residence and ownership,—of the idiosyncrasies of a lone single man, it is true, but of a man of one's own time,—a country gentleman of plain habits but not uncultivated tastes.

I moved to the window; it opened by a sash upon a large balcony, from which a wooden stair wound to a little garden, not visible in front of the house, surrounded by a thick grove of evergreens, through which one broad vista was cut, and that vista was closed by a view of the mausoleum.

I stepped out into the garden,—a patch of sward with a fountain in the centre, and parterres, now more filled with weeds than flowers. At the left corner was a tall wooden summer-house or pavilion,—its door wide open. "Oh, that's where Sir Philip used to study many a long summer's night," said the steward.

"What! in that damp pavilion?"

"It was a pretty place enough then, sir; but it is very old,—they say as old as the room you have just left."

"Indeed, I must look at it, then."

The walls of this summer-house had once been painted in the arabesques of the Renaissance period; but the figures were now

scarcely traceable. The woodwork had started in some places, and the sunbeams stole through the chinks and played on the floor, which was formed from old tiles quaintly tessellated and in triangular patterns; similar to those I had observed in the chimneypiece. The room in the pavilion was large, furnished with old worm-eaten tables and settles. "It was not only here that Sir Philip studied, but sometimes in the room above," said the steward.

"How do you get to the room above? Oh, I see; a stair case in the angle."

I ascended the stairs with some caution, for they were crooked and decayed; and, on entering the room above, comprehended at once why Sir Philip had favoured it.

The cornice of the ceiling rested on pilasters, within which the compartments were formed into open unglazed arches, surrounded by a railed balcony. Through these arches, on three sides of the room, the eye commanded a magnificent extent of prospect. On the fourth side the view was bounded by the mausoleum. In this room was a large telescope; and on stepping into the balcony, I saw that a winding stair mounted thence to a platform on the top of the pavilion,—perhaps once used as an observatory by Forman himself.

"The gentleman who was here to-day was very much pleased with this look-out, sir," said the housekeeper. "Who would not be? I suppose Sir Philip has a taste for astronomy."

"I dare say, sir," said the steward, looking grave; "he likes most

out-of-the-way things."

The position of the sun now warned me that my time pressed, and that I should have to ride fast to reach my new patient at the hour appointed. I therefore hastened back to my horse, and spurred on, wondering whether, in the chain of association which so subtly links our pursuits in manhood to our impressions in childhood, it was the Latin inscription on the chimneypiece that had originally biassed Sir Philip Derval's literary taste towards the mystic jargon of the books at which I had contemptuously glanced.

CHAPTER XXIX

I did not see Margrave the following day, but the next morning, a little after sunrise, he walked into my study, according to his ordinary habit.

"So you know something about Sir Philip Derval?" said I. "What sort of a man is he?"

"Hateful!" cried Margrave; and then checking himself, burst out into his merry laugh. "Just like my exaggerations! I am not acquainted with anything to his prejudice. I came across his track once or twice in the East. Travellers are always apt to be jealous of each other."

"You are a strange compound of cynicism and credulity; but I should have fancied that you and Sir Philip would have been congenial spirits, when I found, among his favourite books, Van Helmont and Paracelsus. Perhaps you, too, study Swedenborg, or, worse still, Ptolemy and Lilly?"

"Astrologers? No! They deal with the future! I live for the day; only I wish the day never had a morrow!"

"Have you not, then that vague desire for the something beyond,—that not unhappy, but grand discontent with the limits of the immediate Present, from which man takes his passion for improvement and progress, and from which some sentimental philosophers have deduced an argument in favour of his destined immortality?"

"Eh!" said Margrave, with as vacant a stare as that of a peasant whom one has addressed in Hebrew. "What farrago of words is this? I do not comprehend you."

"With your natural abilities," I asked with interest, "do you never feel a desire for fame?"

"Fame? Certainly not. I cannot even understand it!"

"Well, then, would you have no pleasure in the thought that you had rendered a service to humanity?"

Margrave looked bewildered; after a moment's pause, he took from the table a piece of bread that chanced to be there, opened the window, and threw the crumbs into the lane. The sparrows gathered round the crumbs.

"Now," said Margrave, "the sparrows come to that dull pavement for the bread that recruits their lives in this world; do you believe that one sparrow would be silly enough to fly to a house-top for the sake of some benefit to other sparrows, or to be chirruped about after he was dead? I care for science as the sparrow cares for bread,—it may help me to something good for my own life; and as for fame and humanity, I care for them as the sparrow cares for the general interest and posthumous approbation of sparrows!"

"Margrave, there is one thing in you that perplexes me more than all else—human puzzle as you are—in your many eccentricities and self-contradictions."

"What is that one thing in me most perplexing?"

"This: that in your enjoyment of Nature you have all the

freshness of a child, but when you speak of Man and his objects in the world, you talk in the vein of some worn-out and hoary cynic. At such times, were I to close my eyes, I should say to myself, 'What weary old man is thus venting his spleen against the ambition which has failed, and the love which has forsaken him?' Outwardly the very personation of youth, and revelling like a butterfly in the warmth of the sun and the tints of the herbage, why have you none of the golden passions of the young,—their bright dreams of some impossible love, their sublime enthusiasm for some unattainable glory? The sentiment you have just clothed in the illustration by which you place yourself on a level with the sparrows is too mean and too gloomy to be genuine at your age. Misanthropy is among the dismal fallacies of gray beards. No man, till man's energies leave him, can divorce himself from the bonds of our social kind."

"Our kind! Your kind, possibly; but I—" He swept his hand over his brow, and resumed, in strange, absent, and wistful accents: "I wonder what it is that is wanting here, and of which at moments I have a dim reminiscence." Again he paused, and gazing on me, said with more appearance of friendly interest than I had ever before remarked in his countenance, "You are not looking well. Despite your great physical strength, you suffer like your own sickly patients."

"True! I suffer at this moment, but not from bodily pain."

"You have some cause of mental disquietude?"

"Who in this world has not?"

"I never have."

"Because you own you have never loved. Certainly, you never seem to care for any one but yourself; and in yourself you find an unbroken sunny holiday,—high spirits, youth, health, beauty, wealth. Happy boy!"

At that moment my heart was heavy within me.

Margrave resumed,—

"Among the secrets which your knowledge places at the command of your art, what would you give for one which would enable you to defy and to deride a rival where you place your affections, which could lock to yourself, and imperiously control, the will of the being whom you desire to fascinate, by an influence paramount, transcendent?"

"Love has that secret," said I,— "and love alone."

"A power stronger than love can suspend, can change love itself. But if love be the object or dream of your life, love is the rosy associate of youth and beauty. Beauty soon fades, youth soon departs. What if in nature there were means by which beauty and youth can be fixed into blooming duration,—means that could arrest the course, nay, repair the effects, of time on the elements that make up the human frame?"

"Silly boy! Have the Rosicrucians bequeathed to you a prescription for the elixir of life?"

"If I had the prescription I should not ask your aid to discover its ingredients."

"And is it in the hope of that notable discovery you have

studied chemistry, electricity, and magnetism? Again I say, Silly boy!"

Margrave did not heed my reply. His face was overcast, gloomy, troubled.

"That the vital principle is a gas," said he, abruptly, "I am fully convinced. Can that gas be the one which combines caloric with oxygen?"

"Phosoxygen? Sir Humphrey Davy demonstrates that gas not to be, as Lavoisier supposed, caloric, but light, combined with oxygen; and he suggests, not indeed that it is the vital principle itself, but the pabulum of life to organic beings."¹

"Does he?" said Margrave, his, face clearing up. "Possibly, possibly, then, here we approach the great secret of secrets. Look you, Allen Fenwick: I promise to secure to you unfailing security from all the jealous fears that now torture your heart; if you care for that fame which to me is not worth the scent of a flower, the balm of a breeze, I will impart to you a knowledge which, in the hands of ambition, would dwarf into commonplace the boasted wonders of recognized science. I will do all this, if, in return, but for one month you will give yourself up to my guidance in whatever experiments I ask, no matter how wild they may seem to you."

"My dear Margrave, I reject your bribes as I would reject the moon and the stars which a child might offer to me in exchange for a toy; but I may give the child its toy for nothing, and I may

¹ See Sir Humphrey Davy on Heat, Light, and the Combinations of Light

test your experiments for nothing some day when I have leisure."

I did not hear Margrave's answer, for at that moment my servant entered with letters. Lilian's hand! Tremblingly, breathlessly, I broke the seal. Such a loving, bright, happy letter; so sweet in its gentle chiding of my wrongful fears! It was implied rather than said that Ashleigh Sumner had proposed and been refused. He had now left the house. Lilian and her mother were coming back; in a few days we should meet. In this letter were inclosed a few lines from Mrs. Ashleigh. She was more explicit about my rival than Lilian had been. If no allusion to his attentions had been made to me before, it was from a delicate consideration for myself. Mrs. Ashleigh said that "the young man had heard from L—— of our engagement, and—disbelieved it;" but, as Mrs. Poyntz had so shrewdly predicted, hurried at once to the avowal of his own attachment, and the offer of his own hand. On Lilian's refusal his pride had been deeply mortified. He had gone away manifestly in more anger than sorrow.

"Lady Delafield, dear Margaret Poyntz's aunt, had been most kind in trying to soothe Lady Haughton's disappointment, which was rudely expressed,—so rudely," added Mrs. Ashleigh, "that it gives us an excuse to leave sooner than had been proposed,—which I am very glad of. Lady Delafield feels much for Mr. Sumner; has invited him to visit her at a place she has near Worthing. She leaves to-morrow in order to receive him; promises to reconcile him to our rejection, which, as he was my poor Gilbert's heir, and was very friendly at first, would be a great relief to my

mind. Lilian is well, and so happy at the thoughts of coming back."

When I lifted my eyes from these letters I was as a new man, and the earth seemed a new earth. I felt as if I had realized Margrave's idle dreams,—as if youth could never fade, love could never grow cold.

"You care for no secrets of mine at this moment," said Margrave, abruptly.

"Secrets!" I murmured; "none now are worth knowing. I am loved! I am loved!"

"I bide my time," said Margrave; and as my eyes met his, I saw there a look I had never seen in those eyes before, sinister, wrathful, menacing. He turned away, went out through the sash-door of the study; and as he passed towards the fields under the luxuriant chestnut-trees, I heard his musical, barbaric chant,—the song by which the serpent-charmer charms the serpent,—sweet, so sweet, the very birds on the boughs hushed their carol as if to listen.

CHAPTER XXX

I called that day on Mrs. Poyntz, and communicated to her the purport of the glad news I had received.

She was still at work on the everlasting knitting, her firm fingers linking mesh into mesh as she listened; and when I had done, she laid her skein deliberately down, and said, in her favourite characteristic formula,—

"So at last?—that is settled!"

She rose and paced the room as men are apt to do in reflection, women rarely need such movement to aid their thoughts; her eyes were fixed on the floor, and one hand was lightly pressed on the palm of the other,—the gesture of a musing reasoner who is approaching the close of a difficult calculation.

At length she paused, fronting me, and said dryly,—

"Accept my congratulations. Life smiles on you now; guard that smile, and when we meet next, may we be even firmer friends than we are now!"

"When we meet next,—that will be to-night—you surely go to the mayor's great ball? All the Hill descends to Low Town to-night."

"No; we are obliged to leave L—— this afternoon; in less than two hours we shall be gone,—a family engagement. We may be weeks away; you will excuse me, then, if I take leave of you so unceremoniously. Stay, a motherly word of caution.

That friend of yours, Mr. Margrave! Moderate your intimacy with him; and especially after you are married. There is in that stranger, of whom so little is known, a something which I cannot comprehend,—a something that captivates and yet revolts. I find him disturbing my thoughts, perplexing my conjectures, haunting my fancies,—I, plain woman of the world! Lilian is imaginative; beware of her imagination, even when sure of her heart. Beware of Margrave. The sooner he quits L—— the better, believe me, for your peace of mind. Adieu! I must prepare for our journey."

"That woman," muttered I, on quitting her house, "seems to have some strange spite against my poor Lilian, ever seeking to rouse my own distrust of that exquisite nature which has just given me such proof of its truth. And yet—and yet—is that woman so wrong here? True! Margrave with his wild notions, his strange beauty!—true—true—he might dangerously encourage that turn for the mystic and visionary which distresses me in Lilian. Lilian should not know him. How induce him to leave L——? Ah, those experiments on which he asks my assistance! I might commence them when he comes again, and then invent some excuse to send him for completer tests to the famous chemists of Paris or Berlin."

CHAPTER XXXI

It is the night of the mayor's ball! The guests are assembling fast; county families twelve miles round have been invited, as well as the principal families of the town. All, before proceeding to the room set apart for the dance, moved in procession through the museum,—homage to science before pleasure!

The building was brilliantly lighted, and the effect was striking, perhaps because singular and grotesque. There, amidst stands of flowers and evergreens, lit up with coloured lamps, were grouped the dead representatives of races all inferior—some deadly—to man. The fancy of the ladies had been permitted to decorate and arrange these types of the animal world. The tiger glared with glass eyes from amidst artificial reeds and herbage, as from his native jungle; the grisly white bear peered from a mimic iceberg. There, in front, stood the sage elephant, facing a hideous hippopotamus; whilst an anaconda twined its long spire round the stem of some tropical tree in zinc. In glass cases, brought into full light by festooned lamps, were dread specimens of the reptile race,—scorpion and vampire, and cobra capella, with insects of gorgeous hues, not a few of them with venomed stings.

But the chief boast of the collection was in the varieties of the Genus *Simia*,—baboons and apes, chimpanzees, with their human visage, mockeries of man, from the dwarf monkeys

perched on boughs lopped from the mayor's shrubberies, to the formidable ourangoutang, leaning on his huge club.

Every one expressed to the mayor admiration, to each other antipathy, for this unwonted and somewhat ghastly, though instructive, addition to the revels of a ballroom.

Margrave, of course, was there, and seemingly quite at home, gliding from group to group of gayly-dressed ladies, and brilliant with a childish eagerness to play off the showman. Many of these grim fellow-creatures he declared he had seen, played, or fought with. He had something true or false to say about each. In his high spirits he contrived to make the tiger move, and imitated the hiss of the terribly anaconda. All that he did had its grace, its charm; and the buzz of admiration and the flattering glances of ladies' eyes followed him wherever he moved.

However, there was a general feeling of relief when the mayor led the way from the museum into the ballroom. In provincial parties guests arrive pretty much within the same hour, and so few who had once paid their respects to the apes and serpents, the hippopotamus and the tiger, were disposed to repeat the visit, that long before eleven o'clock the museum was as free from the intrusion of human life as the wilderness in which its dead occupants had been born.

I had gone my round through the rooms, and, little disposed to be social, had crept into the retreat of a window-niche, pleased to think myself screened by its draperies,—not that I was melancholy, far from it; for the letter I had received that morning

from Lilian had raised my whole being into a sovereignty of happiness high beyond the reach of the young pleasure-hunters, whose voices and laughter blended with that vulgar music.

To read her letter again I had stolen to my nook, and now, sure that none saw me kiss it, I replaced it in my bosom. I looked through the parted curtain; the room was comparatively empty; but there, through the open folding-doors, I saw the gay crowd gathered round the dancers, and there again, at right angles, a vista along the corridor afforded a glimpse of the great elephant in the deserted museum.

Presently I heard, close beside me, my host's voice.

"Here's a cool corner, a pleasant sofa, you can have it all to yourself. What an honour to receive you under my roof, and on this interesting occasion! Yes, as you say, there are great changes in L—— since you left us. Society has much improved. I must look about and find some persons to introduce to you. Clever! oh, I know your tastes. We have a wonderful man,—a new doctor. Carries all before him; very high character, too; good old family, greatly looked up to, even apart from his profession. Dogmatic a little,—a Sir Oracle,—'Lets no dog bark;' you remember the quotation,—Shakspeare. Where on earth is he? My dear Sir Philip, I am sure you would enjoy his conversation."

Sir Philip! Could it be Sir Philip Derval to whom the mayor was giving a flattering yet scarcely propitiatory description of myself? Curiosity combined with a sense of propriety in not keeping myself an unsuspected listener; I emerged from the

curtain, but silently, and reached the centre of the room before the mayor perceived me. He then came up to me eagerly, linked his arm in mine, and leading me to a gentleman seated on a sofa, close by the window I had quitted, said,—

"Doctor, I must present you to Sir Philip Derval, just returned to England, and not six hours in L——. If you would like to see the museum again, Sir Philip, the doctor, I am sure, will accompany you."

"No, I thank you; it is painful to me at present to see, even under your roof, the collection which my poor dear friend, Dr. Lloyd, was so proudly beginning to form when I left these parts."

"Ay, Sir Philip, Dr. Lloyd was a worthy man in his way, but sadly duped in his latter years; took to mesmerism, only think! But our young doctor here showed him up, I can tell you."

Sir Philip, who had acknowledged my first introduction to his acquaintance by the quiet courtesy with which a well-bred man goes through a ceremony that custom enables him to endure with equal ease and indifference, now evinced by a slight change of manner how little the mayor's reference to my dispute with Dr. Lloyd advanced me in his good opinion. He turned away with a bow more formal than his first one, and said calmly,

"I regret to hear that a man so simple-minded and so sensitive as Dr. Lloyd should have provoked an encounter in which I can well conceive him to have been worsted. With your leave, Mr. Mayor, I will look into your ballroom. I may perhaps find there some old acquaintances."

He walked towards the dancers, and the mayor, linking his arm in mine, followed close behind, saying in his loud hearty tones,—

"Come along, you too, Dr. Fenwick, my girls are there; you have not spoken to them yet."

Sir Philip, who was then half way across the room, turned round abruptly, and, looking me full in the face, said,—

"Fenwick, is your name Fenwick,—Allen Fenwick?"

"That is my name, Sir Philip."

"Then permit me to shake you by the hand; you are no stranger, and no mere acquaintance to me. Mr. Mayor, we will look into your ballroom later; do not let us keep you now from your other guests."

The mayor, not in the least offended by being thus summarily dismissed, smiled, walked on, and was soon lost amongst the crowd.

Sir Philip, still retaining my hand, reseated himself on the sofa, and I took my place by his side. The room was still deserted; now and then a straggler from the ballroom looked in for a moment, and then sauntered back to the central place of attraction.

"I ain trying to guess," said I, "how my name should be known to you."

Possibly you may, in some visit to the Lakes, have known my father?"

"No; I know none of your name but yourself,—if, indeed, as

I doubt not, you are the Allen Fenwick to whom I owe no small obligation. You were a medical student at Edinburgh in the year ——?"

"Yes."

"So! At that time there was also at Edinburgh a young man, named Richard Strahan. He lodged in a fourth flat in the Old Town."

"I remember him very well."

"And you remember, also, that a fire broke out at night in the house in which he lodged; that when it was discovered there seemed no hope of saving him. The flames wrapped the lower part of the house; the staircase had given way. A boy, scarcely so old as himself, was the only human being in the crowd who dared to scale the ladder that even then scarcely reached the windows from which the smoke rolled in volumes; that boy penetrated into the room, found the inmate almost insensible, rallied, supported, dragged him to the window, got him on the ladder,—saved his life then: and his life later, by nursing with a woman's tenderness, through the fever caused by terror and excitement, the fellow-creature he had rescued by a man's daring. The name of that gallant student was Allen Fenwick, and Richard Strahan is my nearest living relation. Are we friends now?"

I answered confusedly. I had almost forgotten the circumstances referred to. Richard Strahan had not been one of my more intimate companions, and I had never seen nor heard of him since leaving college. I inquired what had become of him.

"He is at the Scotch Bar," said Sir Philip, "and of course without practice. I understand that he has fair average abilities, but no application. If I am rightly informed, he is, however, a thoroughly honourable, upright man, and of an affectionate and grateful disposition."

"I can answer for all you have said in his praise. He had the qualities you name too deeply rooted in youth to have lost them now."

Sir Philip remained for some moments in a musing silence; and I took advantage of that silence to examine him with more minute attention than I had done before, much as the first sight of him had struck me.

He was somewhat below the common height,—so delicately formed that one might call him rather fragile than slight. But in his carriage and air there was remarkable dignity. His countenance was at direct variance with his figure; for as delicacy was the attribute of the last, so power was unmistakably the characteristic of the first. He looked fully the age his steward had ascribed to him,—about forty-eight; at a superficial glance, more, for his hair was prematurely white,—not gray, but white as snow. But his eyebrows were still jet black, and his eyes, equally dark, were serenely bright. His forehead was magnificent,—lofty and spacious, and with only one slight wrinkle between the brows. His complexion was sunburnt, showing no sign of weak health. The outline of his lips was that which I have often remarked in men accustomed to great dangers, and contracting

in such dangers the habit of self-reliance,—firm and quiet, compressed without an effort. And the power of this very noble countenance was not intimidating, not aggressive; it was mild, it was benignant. A man oppressed by some formidable tyranny, and despairing to find a protector, would, on seeing that face, have said, "Here is one who can protect me, and who will!"

Sir Philip was the first to break the silence.

"I have so many relations scattered over England, that fortunately not one of them can venture to calculate on my property if I die childless, and therefore not one of them can feel himself injured when, a few weeks hence, he shall read in the newspapers that Philip Derval is married. But for Richard Strahan at least, though I never saw him, I must do something before the newspapers make that announcement. His sister was very dear to me."

"Your neighbours, Sir Philip, will rejoice at your marriage, since, I presume, it may induce you to settle amongst them at Derval Court."

"At Derval Court! No! I shall not settle there." Again he paused a moment or so, and then went on: "I have long lived a wandering life, and in it learned much that the wisdom of cities cannot teach. I return to my native land with a profound conviction that the happiest life is the life most in common with all. I have gone out of my way to do what I deemed good, and to avert or mitigate what appeared to me evil. I pause now and ask myself, whether the most virtuous existence be not that in which

virtue flows spontaneously from the springs of quiet everyday action; when a man does good without restlessly seeking it, does good unconsciously, simply because he is good and he lives. Better, perhaps, for me, if I had thought so long ago! And now I come back to England with the intention of marrying, late in life though it be, and with such hopes of happiness as any matter-of-fact man may form. But my hope will not be at Derval Court. I shall reside either in London or its immediate neighbourhood, and seek to gather round me minds by which I can correct, if I cannot confide to them, the knowledge I myself have acquired."

"Nay, if, as I have accidentally heard, you are fond of scientific pursuits, I cannot wonder, that after so long an absence from England, you should feel interest in learning what new discoveries have been made, what new ideas are unfolding the germs of discoveries yet to be. But, pardon me, if in answer to your concluding remark, I venture to say that no man can hope to correct any error in his own knowledge, unless he has the courage to confide the error to those who can correct. La Place has said, 'Tout se tient dans le chaine immense des verites;' and the mistake we make in some science we have specially cultivated is often only to be seen by the light of a separate science as specially cultivated by another. Thus, in the investigation of truth, frank exposition to congenial minds is essential to the earnest seeker."

"I am pleased with what you say," said Sir Philip, "and I shall be still more pleased to find in you the very confidant I require."

But what was your controversy with my old friend, Dr. Lloyd? Do I understand our host rightly, that it related to what in Europe has of late days obtained the name of mesmerism?"

I had conceived a strong desire to conciliate the good opinion of a man who had treated me with so singular and so familiar a kindness, and it was sincerely that I expressed my regret at the acerbity with which I had assailed Dr. Lloyd; but of his theories and pretensions I could not disguise my contempt. I enlarged on the extravagant fallacies involved in a fabulous "clairvoyance," which always failed when put to plain test by sober-minded examiners. I did not deny the effects of imagination on certain nervous constitutions. "Mesmerism could cure nobody; credulity could cure many. There was the well-known story of the old woman tried as a witch; she cured agues by a charm. She owned the impeachment, and was ready to endure gibbet or stake for the truth of her talisman,—more than a mesmerist would for the truth of his passes! And the charm was a scroll of gibberish sewn in an old bag and given to the woman in a freak by the judge himself when a young scamp on the circuit. But the charm cured? Certainly; just as mesmerism cures. Fools believed in it. Faith, that moves mountains, may well cure agues."

Thus I ran on, supporting my views with anecdote and facts, to which Sir Philip listened with placid gravity.

When I had come to an end he said: "Of mesmerism, as practised in Europe, I know nothing except by report. I can well understand that medical men may hesitate to admit it amongst the

legitimate resources of orthodox pathology; because, as I gather from what you and others say of its practice, it must, at the best, be far too uncertain in its application to satisfy the requirements of science. Yet an examination of its pretensions may enable you to perceive the truth that lies hid in the powers ascribed to witchcraft; benevolence is but a weak agency compared to malignity; magnetism perverted to evil may solve half the riddles of sorcery. On this, however, I say no more at present. But as to that which you appear to reject as the most preposterous and incredible pretension of the mesmerists, and which you designate by the word 'clairvoyance,' it is clear to me that you have never yourself witnessed even those very imperfect exhibitions which you decide at once to be imposture. I say imperfect, because it is only a limited number of persons whom the eye or the passes of the mesmerist can effect; and by such means, unaided by other means, it is rarely indeed that the magnetic sleep advances beyond the first vague shadowy twilight-dawn of that condition to which only in its fuller developments I would apply the name of 'trance.' But still trance is as essential a condition of being as sleep or as waking, having privileges peculiar to itself. By means within the range of the science that explores its nature and its laws, trance, unlike the clairvoyance you describe, is producible in every human being, however unimpressible to mere mesmerism."

"Producible in every human being! Pardon me if I say that I will give any enchanter his own terms who will produce that

effect upon me."

"Will you? You consent to have the experiment tried on yourself?"

"Consent most readily."

"I will remember that promise. But to return to the subject. By the word 'trance' I do not mean exclusively the spiritual trance of the Alexandrian Platonists. There is one kind of trance,—that to which all human beings are susceptible,—in which the soul has no share: for of this kind of trance, and it was of this I spoke, some of the inferior animals are susceptible; and, therefore, trance is no more a proof of soul than is the clairvoyance of the mesmerists, or the dream of our ordinary sleep, which last has been called a proof of soul, though any man who has kept a dog must have observed that dogs dream as vividly as we do. But in this trance there is an extraordinary cerebral activity, a projectile force given to the mind, distinct from the soul, by which it sends forth its own emanations to a distance in spite of material obstacles, just as a flower, in an altered condition of atmosphere, sends forth the particles of its aroma. This should not surprise you. Your thought travels over land and sea in your waking state; thought, too, can travel in trance, and in trance may acquire an intensified force. There is, however, another kind of trance which is truly called spiritual, a trance much more rare, and in which the soul entirely supersedes the mere action of the mind."

"Stay!" said I; "you speak of the soul as something distinct

from the mind. What the soul may be, I cannot pretend to conjecture; but I cannot separate it from the intelligence!"

"Can you not? A blow on the brain can destroy the intelligence! Do you think it can destroy the soul?"

'From Marlbro's eyes the tears of dotage flow,
And Swift expires, a driveller and a show.'

"Towards the close of his life even Kant's giant intellect left him. Do you suppose that in these various archetypes of intellectual man the soul was worn out by the years that loosened the strings, or made tuneless the keys, of the perishing instrument on which the mind must rely for all notes of its music? If you cannot distinguish the operations of the mind from the essence of the soul, I know not by what rational inductions you arrive at the conclusion that the soul is imperishable."

I remained silent. Sir Philip fixed on me his dark eyes quietly and searchingly, and, after a short pause, said,—

"Almost every known body in nature is susceptible of three several states of existence,—the solid, the liquid, the aeriform. These conditions depend on the quantity of heat they contain. The same object at one moment may be liquid; at the next moment solid; at the next aeriform. The water that flows before your gaze may stop consolidated into ice, or ascend into air as a vapour. Thus is man susceptible of three states of existence,—the animal, the mental, the spiritual; and according as he is

brought into relation or affinity with that occult agency of the whole natural world, which we familiarly call heat, and which no science has yet explained, which no scale can weigh, and no eye discern, one or the other of these three states of being prevails, or is subjected."

I still continued silent, for I was unwilling discourteously to say to a stranger so much older than myself, that he seemed to me to reverse all the maxims of the philosophy to which he made pretence, in founding speculations audacious and abstruse upon unanalogous comparisons that would have been fantastic even in a poet. And Sir Philip, after another pause, resumed with a half smile,—

"After what I have said, it will perhaps not very much surprise you when I add that but for my belief in the powers I ascribe to trance, we should not be known to each other at this moment."

"How? Pray explain!"

"Certain circumstances, which I trust to relate to you in detail hereafter, have imposed on me the duty to discover, and to bring human laws to bear upon, a creature armed with terrible powers of evil. This monster, for without metaphor, monster it is, not man like ourselves, has, by arts superior to those of ordinary fugitives, however dexterous in concealment, hitherto for years eluded my research. Through the trance of an Arab child, who, in her waking state, never heard of his existence, I have learned that this being is in England, is in L——. I am here to encounter him. I expect to do so this very night, and under this very roof."

"Sir Philip!"

"And if you wonder, as you well may, why I have been talking to you with this startling unreserve, know that the same Arab child, on whom I thus implicitly rely, informs me that your life is mixed up with that of the being I seek to unmask and disarm,—to be destroyed by his arts or his agents, or to combine in the causes by which the destroyer himself shall be brought to destruction."

"My life!—your Arab child named me, Allen Fenwick?"

"My Arab child told me that the person in whom I should thus naturally seek an ally was he who had saved the life of the man whom I then meant for my heir, if I died unmarried and childless. She told me that I should not be many hours in this town, which she described minutely, before you would be made known to me. She described this house, with yonder lights, and yon dancers. In her trance she saw us sitting together, as we now sit. I accepted the invitation of our host, when he suddenly accosted me on entering the town, confident that I should meet you here, without even asking whether a person of your name were a resident in the place; and now you know why I have so freely unbosomed myself of much that might well make you, a physician, doubt the soundness of my understanding. The same infant, whose vision has been realized up to this moment, has warned me also that I am here at great peril. What that peril may be I have declined to learn, as I have ever declined to ask from the future what affects only my own life on this earth. That life I regard with supreme indifference, conscious that I have only to

discharge, while it lasts, the duties for which it is bestowed on me, to the best of my imperfect power; and aware that minds the strongest and souls the purest may fall into the sloth habitual to predestinarians, if they suffer the action due to the present hour to be awed and paralyzed by some grim shadow on the future! It is only where, irrespectively of aught that can menace myself, a light not struck out of my own reason can guide me to disarm evil or minister to good, that I feel privileged to avail myself of those mirrors on which things, near and far, reflect themselves calm and distinct as the banks and the mountain peak are reflected in the glass of a lake. Here, then, under this roof, and by your side, I shall behold him who—Lo! the moment has come,—I behold him now!"

As he spoke these last words, Sir Philip had risen, and, startled by his action and voice, I involuntarily rose too. Resting one hand on my shoulder, he pointed with the other towards the threshold of the ballroom. There, the prominent figure of a gay group—the sole male amidst a fluttering circle of silks and lawn, of flowery wreaths, of female loveliness and female frippery—stood the radiant image of Margrave. His eyes were not turned towards us. He was looking down, and his light laugh came soft, yet ringing, through the general murmur.

I turned my astonished gaze back to Sir Philip; yes, unmistakably it was on Margrave that his look was fixed. Impossible to associate crime with the image of that fair youth! Eccentric notions, fantastic speculations, vivacious egotism,

defective benevolence,—yes. But crime! No! impossible!

"Impossible," I said aloud. As I spoke, the group had moved on. Margrave was no longer in sight. At the same moment some other guests came from the ballroom, and seated themselves near us.

Sir Philip looked round, and, observing the deserted museum at the end of the corridor, drew me into it.

When we were alone, he said in a voice quick and low, but decided,—

"It is of importance that I should convince you at once of the nature of that prodigy which is more hostile to mankind than the wolf is to the sheepfold. No words of mine could at present suffice to clear your sight from the deception which cheats it. I must enable you to judge for yourself. It must be now and here. He will learn this night, if he has not learned already, that I am in the town. Dim and confused though his memories of myself may be, they are memories still; and he well knows what cause he has to dread me. I must put another in possession of his secret. Another, and at once! For all his arts will be brought to bear against me, and I cannot foretell their issue. Go, then; enter that giddy crowd, select that seeming young man, bring him hither. Take care only not to mention my name; and when here, turn the key in the door, so as to prevent interruption,—five minutes will suffice."

"Am I sure that I guess whom you mean? The young light-hearted man, known in this place under the name of Margrave?"

The young man with the radiant eyes, and the curls of a Grecian statue?"

"The same; him whom I pointed out. Quick, bring him hither."

My curiosity was too much roused to disobey. Had I conceived that Margrave, in the heat of youth, had committed some offence which placed him in danger of the law and in the power of Sir Philip Derval, I possessed enough of the old borderer's black-mail loyalty to have given the man whose hand I had familiarly clasped a hint and a help to escape. But all Sir Philip's talk had been so out of the reach of common-sense, that I rather expected to see him confounded by some egregious illusion than Margrave exposed to any well-grounded accusation. All, then, that I felt as I walked into the ballroom and approached Margrave was that curiosity which, I think, any one of my readers will acknowledge that, in my position, he himself would have felt.

Margrave was standing near the dancers, not joining them, but talking with a young couple in the ring. I drew him aside.

"Come with me for a few minutes into the museum; I wish to talk to you."

"What about,—an experiment?"

"Yes, an experiment."

"Then I am at your service."

In a minute more, he had followed me into the desolate dead museum. I looked round, but did not see Sir Philip.

CHAPTER XXXII

MARGRAVE threw himself on a seat just under the great anaconda; I closed and locked the door. When I had done so, my eye fell on the young man's face, and I was surprised to see that it had lost its colour; that it showed great anxiety, great distress; that his hands were visibly trembling.

"What is this?" he said in feeble tones, and raising himself half from his seat as if with great effort. "Help me up! come away! Something in this room is hostile to me, hostile, overpowering! What can it be?"

"Truth and my presence," answered a stern, low voice; and Sir Philip Derval, whose slight form the huge bulk of the dead elephant had before obscured from my view, came suddenly out from the shadow into the full rays of the lamps which lit up, as if for Man's revel, that mocking catacomb for the playmates of Nature which he enslaves for his service or slays for his sport. As Sir Philip spoke and advanced, Margrave sank back into his seat, shrinking, collapsing, nerveless; terror the most abject expressed in his staring eyes and parted lips. On the other hand, the simple dignity of Sir Philip Derval's bearing, and the mild power of his countenance, were alike inconceivably heightened. A change had come over the whole man, the more impressive because wholly undefinable.

Halting opposite Margrave he uttered some words in a

language unknown to me, and stretched one hand over the young man's head. Margrave at once became stiff and rigid, as if turned to stone. Sir Philip said to me,—

"Place one of those lamps on the floor,—there, by his feet."

I took down one of the coloured lamps from the mimic tree round which the huge anaconda coiled its spires, and placed it as I was told.

"Take the seat opposite to him, and watch."

I obeyed.

Meanwhile, Sir Philip had drawn from his breast-pocket a small steel casket, and I observed, as he opened it, that the interior was subdivided into several compartments, each with its separate lid; from one of these he took and sprinkled over the flame of the lamp a few grains of a powder, colourless and sparkling as diamond dust. In a second or so, a delicate perfume, wholly unfamiliar to my sense, rose from the lamp.

"You would test the condition of trance; test it, and in the spirit."

And, as he spoke, his hand rested lightly on my head. Hitherto, amidst a surprise not unmixed with awe, I had preserved a certain defiance, a certain distrust. I had been, as it were, on my guard.

But as those words were spoken, as that hand rested on my head, as that perfume arose from the lamp, all power of will deserted me. My first sensation was that of passive subjugation; but soon I was aware of a strange intoxicating effect from the odour of the lamp, round which there now played a dazzling

vapour. The room swam before me. Like a man oppressed by a nightmare, I tried to move, to cry out, feeling that to do so would suffice to burst the thrall that bound me: in vain.

A time that seemed to me inexorably long, but which, as I found afterwards, could only have occupied a few seconds, elapsed in this preliminary state, which, however powerless, was not without a vague luxurious sense of delight. And then suddenly came pain,—pain, that in rapid gradations passed into a rending agony. Every bone, sinew, nerve, fibre of the body, seemed as if wrenched open, and as if some hitherto un conjectured Presence in the vital organization were forcing itself to light with all the pangs of travail. The veins seemed swollen to bursting, the heart labouring to maintain its action by fierce spasms. I feel in this description how language fails me. Enough that the anguish I then endured surpassed all that I have ever experienced of physical pain. This dreadful interval subsided as suddenly as it had commenced. I felt as if a something undefinable by any name had rushed from me, and in that rush that a struggle was over. I was sensible of the passive bliss which attends the release from torture, and then there grew on me a wonderful calm, and, in that calm, a consciousness of some lofty intelligence immeasurably beyond that which human memory gathers from earthly knowledge. I saw before me the still rigid form of Margrave, and my sight seemed, with ease, to penetrate through its covering of flesh, and to survey the mechanism of the whole interior being.

"View that tenement of clay which now seems so fair, as it was when I last beheld it, three years ago, in the house of Haroun of Aleppo!"

I looked, and gradually, and as shade after shade falls on the mountain side, while the clouds gather, and the sun vanishes at last, so the form and face on which I looked changed from exuberant youth into infirm old age,—the discoloured wrinkled skin, the bleared dim eye, the flaccid muscles, the brittle sapless bones. Nor was the change that of age alone; the expression of the countenance had passed into gloomy discontent, and in every furrow a passion or a vice had sown the seeds of grief.

And the brain now opened on my sight, with all its labyrinth of cells. I seemed to have the clew to every winding in the maze.

I saw therein a moral world, charred and ruined, as, in some fable I have read, the world of the moon is described to be; yet withal it was a brain of magnificent formation. The powers abused to evil had been originally of rare order,—imagination, and scope, the energies that dare, the faculties that discover. But the moral part of the brain had failed to dominate the mental,—defective veneration of what is good or great; cynical disdain of what is right and just; in fine, a great intellect first misguided, then perverted, and now falling with the decay of the body into ghastly but imposing ruins,—such was the world of that brain as it had been three years ago. And still continuing to gaze thereon, I observed three separate emanations of light,—the one of a pale red hue, the second of a pale azure, the third a silvery spark.

The red light, which grew paler and paler as I looked, undulated from the brain along the arteries, the veins, the nerves. And I murmured to myself, "Is this the principle of animal life?"

The azure light equally permeated the frame, crossing and uniting with the red, but in a separate and distinct ray, exactly as, in the outer world, a ray of light crosses or unites with a ray of heat, though in itself a separate individual agency. And again I murmured to myself, "Is this the principle of intellectual being, directing or influencing that of animal life; with it, yet not of it?"

But the silvery spark! What was that? Its centre seemed the brain; but I could fix it to no single organ. Nay, wherever I looked through the system, it reflected itself as a star reflects itself upon water. And I observed that while the red light was growing feebler and feebler, and the azure light was confused, irregular,—now obstructed, now hurrying, now almost lost,—the silvery spark was unaltered, un disturbed. So independent was it of all which agitated and vexed the frame, that I became strangely aware that if the heart stopped in its action, and the red light died out; if the brain were paralyzed, that energetic mind smitten into idiotcy, and the azure light wandering objectless as a meteor wanders over the morass,—still that silver spark would shine the same, indestructible by aught that shattered its tabernacle. And I murmured to myself, "Can that starry spark speak the presence of the soul? Does the silver light shine within creatures to which no life immortal has been promised by Divine Revelation?"

Involuntarily I turned my sight towards the dead forms in the

motley collection, and lo, in my trance or my vision, life returned to them all!—to the elephant and the serpent; to the tiger, the vulture, the beetle, the moth; to the fish and the polypus, and to yon mockery of man in the giant ape.

I seemed to see each as it lived in its native realm of earth, or of air, or of water; and the red light played more or less warm through the structure of each, and the azure light, though duller of hue, seemed to shoot through the red, and communicate to the creatures an intelligence far inferior indeed to that of man, but sufficing to conduct the current of their will, and influence the cunning of their instincts. But in none, from the elephant to the moth, from the bird in which brain was the largest to the hybrid in which life seemed to live as in plants,—in none was visible the starry silver spark. I turned my eyes from the creatures around, back again to the form cowering under the huge anaconda, and in terror at the animation which the carcasses took in the awful illusions of that marvellous trance; for the tiger moved as if scenting blood, and to the eyes of the serpent the dread fascination seemed slowly returning.

Again I gazed on the starry spark in the form of the man. And I murmured to myself, "But if this be the soul, why is it so undisturbed and undarkened by the sins which have left such trace and such ravage in the world of the brain?" And gazing yet more intently on the spark, I became vaguely aware that it was not the soul, but the halo around the soul, as the star we see in heaven is not the star itself, but its circle of rays; and if the light itself

was undisturbed and undarkened, it was because no sins done in the body could annihilate its essence, nor affect the eternity of its duration. The light was clear within the ruins of its lodgment, because it might pass away, but could not be extinguished.

But the soul itself in the heart of the light reflected back on my own soul within me its ineffable trouble, humiliation, and sorrow; for those ghastly wrecks of power placed at its sovereign command it was responsible, and, appalled by its own sublime fate of duration, was about to carry into eternity the account of its mission in time. Yet it seemed that while the soul was still there, though so forlorn and so guilty, even the wrecks around it were majestic. And the soul, whatever sentence it might merit, was not among the hopelessly lost; for in its remorse and its shame, it might still have retained what could serve for redemption. And I saw that the mind was storming the soul, in some terrible rebellious war,—all of thought, of passion, of desire, through which the azure light poured its restless flow, were surging up round the starry spark, as in siege. And I could not comprehend the war, nor guess what it was that the mind demanded the soul to yield. Only the distinction between the two was made intelligible by their antagonism. And I saw that the soul, sorely tempted, looked afar for escape from the subjects it had ever so ill controlled, and who sought to reduce to their vassal the power which had lost authority as their king. I could feel its terror in the sympathy of my own terror, the keenness of my own supplicating pity. I knew that it was imploring release from

the perils it confessed its want of strength to encounter. And suddenly the starry spark rose from the ruins and the tumult around it,—rose into space and vanished; and where my soul had recognized the presence of soul, there was a void. But the red light burned still, becoming more and more vivid; and as it thus repaired and recruited its lustre, the whole animal form, which had been so decrepit, grew restored from decay, grew into vigour and youth: and I saw Alargrave as I had seen him in the waking world, the radiant image of animal life in the beauty of its fairest bloom.

And over this rich vitality and this symmetric mechanism now reigned only, with the animal life, the mind. The starry light fled and the soul vanished, still was left visible the mind,—mind, by which sensations convey and cumulate ideas, and muscles obey volition; mind, as in those animals that have more than the elementary, instincts; mind, as it might be in men, were men not immortal. As my eyes, in the Vision, followed the azure light, undulating as before, through the cells of the brain, and crossing the red amidst the labyrinth of the nerves, I perceived that the essence of that azure light had undergone a change: it had lost that faculty of continuous and concentrated power by which man improves on the works of the past, and weaves schemes to be developed in the future of remote generations; it had lost all sympathy in the past, because it had lost all conception of a future beyond the grave; it had lost conscience, it had lost remorse; the being it informed was no longer accountable through eternity for

the employment of time. The azure light was even more vivid in certain organs useful to the conservation of existence, as in those organs I had observed it more vivid among some of the inferior animals than it is in man,—secretiveness, destructiveness, and the ready perception of things immediate to the wants of the day, and the azure light was brilliant in cerebral cells, where before it had been dark, such as those which harbour mirthfulness and hope, for there the light was recruited by the exuberant health of the joyous animal-being. But it was lead-like, or dim, in the great social organs, through which man subordinates his own interest to that of his species, and utterly lost in those through which man is reminded of his duties to the throne of his Maker.

In that marvellous penetration with which the Vision endowed me, I perceived that in this mind, though in energy far superior to many; though retaining, from memories of the former existence, the relics of a culture wide and in some things profound; though sharpened and quickened into formidable, if desultory, force whenever it schemed or aimed at the animal self-conservation which now made its master—impulse or instinct; and though among the reminiscences of its state before its change were arts which I could not comprehend, but which I felt were dark and terrible, lending to a will never checked by remorse arms that no healthful philosophy has placed in the arsenal of disciplined genius; though the mind in itself had an ally in a body as perfect in strength and elasticity as man can take from the favour of nature,—still, I say, I felt that the mind wanted the something

without which men never could found cities, frame laws, bind together, beautify, exalt the elements of this world, by creeds that habitually subject them to a reference to another. The ant and the bee and the beaver congregate and construct; but they do not improve. Man improves because the future impels onward that which is not found in the ant, the bee, and the beaver,—that which was gone from the being before me.

I shrank appalled into myself, covered my face with my hands, and groaned aloud: "Have I ever then doubted that soul is distinct from mind?"

A hand here again touched my forehead, the light in the lamp was extinguished, I became insensible; and when I recovered I found myself back in the room in which I had first conversed with Sir Philip Derval, and seated, as before, on the sofa, by his side.

CHAPTER XXXIII

My recollections of all which I have just attempted to describe were distinct and vivid; except with respect to time, it seemed to me as if many hours must have elapsed since I had entered the museum with Margrave; but the clock on the mantelpiece met my eyes as I turned them wistfully round the room; and I was indeed amazed to perceive that five minutes had sufficed for all which it has taken me so long to narrate, and which in their transit had hurried me through ideas and emotions so remote from anterior experience.

To my astonishment now succeeded shame and indignation,—shame that I, who had scoffed at the possibility of the comparatively credible influences of mesmeric action, should have been so helpless a puppet under the hand of the slight fellow-man beside me, and so morbidly impressed by phantasmagorical illusions; indignation that, by some fumes which had special potency over the brain, I had thus been, as it were, conjured out of my senses; and looking full into the calm face at my side, I said, with a smile to which I sought to convey disdain,—

"I congratulate you, Sir Philip Derval, on having learned in your travels in the East so expert a familiarity with the tricks of its jugglers."

"The East has a proverb," answered Sir Philip, quietly, "that

the juggler may learn much from the dervish, but the dervish can learn nothing from the juggler. You will pardon me, however, for the effect produced on you for a few minutes, whatever the cause of it may be, since it may serve to guard your whole life from calamities, to which it might otherwise have been exposed. And however you may consider that which you have just experienced to be a mere optical illusion, or the figment of a brain super-excited by the fumes of a vapour, look within yourself, and tell me if you do not feel an inward and unanswerable conviction that there is more reason to shun and to fear the creature you left asleep under the dead jaws of the giant serpent, than there would be in the serpent itself, could hunger again move its coils, and venom again arm its fangs."

I was silent, for I could not deny that that conviction had come to me.

"Henceforth, when you recover from the confusion or anger which now disturbs your impressions, you will be prepared to listen to my explanations and my recital in a spirit far different from that with which you would have received them before you were subjected to the experiment, which, allow me to remind you, you invited and defied. You will now, I trust, be fitted to become my confidant and my assistant; you will advise with me how, for the sake of humanity, we should act together against the incarnate lie, the anomalous prodigy which glides through the crowd in the image of joyous beauty. For the present I quit you. I have an engagement, on worldly affairs, in the town this

night. I am staying at L——, which I shall leave for Derval Court tomorrow evening. Come to me there the day after to-morrow, at any hour that may suit you the best. Adieu!"

Here Sir Philip Derval rose and left the room. I made no effort to detain him. My mind was too occupied in striving to recompose itself and account for the phenomena that had scared it, and for the strength of the impressions it still retained.

I sought to find natural and accountable causes for effects so abnormal.

Lord Bacon suggests that the ointments with which witches anointed themselves might have had the effect of stopping the pores and congesting the rain, and thus impressing the sleep of the unhappy dupes of their own imagination with dreams so vivid that, on waking, they were firmly convinced that they had been borne through the air to the Sabbat.

I remember also having heard a distinguished French traveller—whose veracity was unquestionable—say, that he had witnessed extraordinary effects produced on the sensorium by certain fumigations used by an African pretender to magic. A person, of however healthy a brain; subjected to the influence of these fumigations, was induced to believe that he saw the most frightful apparitions.

However extraordinary such effects, they were not incredible,—not at variance with our notions of the known laws of nature. And to the vapour or the odours which a powder applied to a lamp had called forth, I was, therefore, prepared to ascribe

properties similar to those which Bacon's conjecture ascribed to the witches' ointment, and the French traveller to the fumigations of the African conjuror.

But, as I came to that conclusion, I was seized with an intense curiosity to examine for myself those chemical agencies with which Sir Philip Derval appeared so familiar; to test the contents in that mysterious casket of steel. I also felt a curiosity no less eager, but more, in spite of myself, intermingled with fear, to learn all that Sir Philip had to communicate of the past history of Margrave. I could but suppose that the young man must indeed be a terrible criminal, for a person of years so grave, and station so high, to intimate accusations so vaguely dark, and to use means so extraordinary, in order to enlist my imagination rather than my reason against a youth in whom there appeared none of the signs which suspicion interprets into guilt.

While thus musing, I lifted my eyes and saw Margrave himself there at the threshold of the ballroom,—there, where Sir Philip had first pointed him out as the criminal he had come to L—— to seek and disarm; and now, as then, Margrave was the radiant centre of a joyous group. Not the young boy-god Iacchus, amidst his nymphs, could, in Grecian frieze or picture, have seemed more the type of the sportive, hilarious vitality of sensuous nature. He must have passed unobserved by me, in my preoccupation of thought, from the museum and across the room in which I sat; and now there was as little trace in that animated countenance of the terror it had exhibited at Sir Philip's

approach, as of the change it had undergone in my trance or my fantasy.

But he caught sight of me, left his young companions, came gayly to my side.

"Did you not ask me to go with you into that museum about half an hour ago, or did I dream that I went with you?"

"Yes; you went with me into that museum."

"Then pray what dull theme did you select to set me asleep there?"

I looked hard at him, and made no reply. Somewhat to my relief, I now heard my host's voice,—

"Why, Fenwick, what has become of Sir Philip Derval?"

"He has left; he had business." And, as I spoke, again I looked hard on Margrave.

His countenance now showed a change; not surprise, not dismay, but rather a play of the lip, a flash of the eye, that indicated complacency,—even triumph.

"So! Sir Philip Derval! He is in L——; he has been here to-night? So! as I expected."

"Did you expect it?" said our host. "No one else did. Who could have told you?"

"The movements of men so distinguished need never take us by surprise. I knew he was in Paris the other day. It is natural eno' that he should come here. I was prepared for his coming."

Margrave here turned away towards the window, which he threw open and looked out.

"There is a storm in the air," said he, as he continued to gaze into the night.

Was it possible that Margrave was so wholly unconscious of what had passed in the museum as to include in oblivion even the remembrance of Sir Philip Derval's presence before he had been rendered insensible, or laid asleep? Was it now only for the first time that he learned of Sir Philip's arrival in L——, and visit to that house? Was there any intimation of menace in his words and his aspect?

I felt that the trouble of my thoughts communicated itself to my countenance and manner; and, longing for solitude and fresh air, I quitted the house. When I found myself in the street I turned round and saw Margrave still standing at the open window, but he did not appear to notice me; his eyes seemed fixed abstractedly on space.

CHAPTER XXXIV

I walked on slowly and with the downcast brow of a man absorbed in meditation. I had gained the broad place in which the main streets of the town converged, when I was overtaken by a violent storm of rain. I sought shelter under the dark archway of that entrance to the district of Abbey Hill which was still called Monk's Gate. The shadow within the arch was so deep that I was not aware that I had a companion till I heard my own name, close at my side. I recognized the voice before I could distinguish the form of Sir Philip Derval.

"The storm will soon be over," said he, quietly. "I saw it coming on in time. I fear you neglected the first warning of those sable clouds, and must be already drenched."

I made no reply, but moved involuntarily away towards the mouth of the arch.

"I see that you cherish a grudge against me!" resumed Sir Philip. "Are you, then, by nature vindictive?"

Somewhat softened by the friendly tone of this reproach, I answered, half in jest, half in earnest,—

"You must own, Sir Philip, that I have some little reason for the uncharitable anger your question imputes to me. But I can forgive you, on one condition."

"What is that?"

"The possession for half an hour of that mysterious steel

casket which you carry about with you, and full permission to analyze and test its contents."

"Your analysis of the contents," returned Sir Philip, dryly, "would leave you as ignorant as before of the uses to which they can be applied; but I will own to you frankly, that it is my intention to select some confidant among men of science, to whom I may safely communicate the wonderful properties which certain essences in that casket possess. I invite your acquaintance, nay, your friendship, in the hope that I may find such a confidant in you. But the casket contains other combinations, which, if wasted, could not be resupplied,—at least by any process which the great Master from whom I received them placed within reach of my knowledge. In this they resemble the diamond; when the chemist has found that the diamond affords no other substance by its combustion than pure carbonic-acid gas, and that the only chemical difference between the costliest diamond and a lump of pure charcoal is a proportion of hydrogen less than $1/100000$ part of the weight of the substance, can the chemist make you a diamond?

"These, then, the more potent, but also the more perilous of the casket's contents, shall be explored by no science, submitted to no test. They are the keys to masked doors in the ramparts of Nature, which no mortal can pass through without rousing dread sentries never seen upon this side her wall. The powers they confer are secrets locked in my breast, to be lost in my grave; as the casket which lies on my breast shall not be transferred to the

hands of another, till all the rest of my earthly possessions pass away with my last breath in life and my first in eternity."

"Sir Philip Derval," said I, struggling against the appeals to fancy or to awe, made in words so strange, uttered in a tone of earnest conviction, and heard amidst the glare of the lightning, the howl of the winds, and the roll of the thunder,— "Sir Philip Derval, you accost me in a language which, but for my experience of the powers at your command, I should hear with the contempt that is due to the vaunts of a mountebank, or the pity we give to the morbid beliefs of his dupe. As it is, I decline the confidence with which you would favour me, subject to the conditions which it seems you would impose. My profession abandons to quacks all drugs which may not be analyzed, all secrets which may not be fearlessly told. I cannot visit you at Derval Court. I cannot trust myself, voluntarily, again in the power of a man, who has arts of which I may not examine the nature, by which he can impose on my imagination and steal away my reason."

"Reflect well before you decide," said Sir Philip, with a solemnity that was stern. "If you refuse to be warned and to be armed by me, your reason and your imagination will alike be subjected to influences which I can only explain by telling you that there is truth in those immemorial legends which depose to the existence of magic."

"Magic!"

"There is magic of two kinds,—the dark and evil, appertaining to witchcraft or necromancy; the pure and beneficent, which is

but philosophy, applied to certain mysteries in Nature remote from the beaten tracks of science, but which deepened the wisdom of ancient sages, and can yet unriddle the myths of departed races."

"Sir Philip," I said, with impatient and angry interruption, "if you think that a jargon of this kind be worthy a man of your acquirements and station, it is at least a waste of time to address it to me. I am led to conclude that you desire to make use of me for some purpose which I have a right to suppose honest and blameless, because all you know of me is, that I rendered to your relation services which can not lower my character in your eyes. If your object be, as you have intimated, to aid you in exposing and disabling man whose antecedents have been those of guilt, and who threatens with danger the society which receives him, you must give me proofs that are not reducible to magic; and you must prepossess me against the person you accuse, not by powders and fumes that disorder the brain, but by substantial statements, such as justify one man in condemning another. And, since you have thought fit to convince me that there are chemical means at your disposal, by which the imagination can be so affected as to accept, temporarily, illusions for realities, so I again demand, and now still more decidedly than before, that while you address yourself to my reason, whether to explain your object or to vindicate your charges against a man whom I have admitted to my acquaintance, you will divest yourself of all means and agencies to warp my judgment so illicit and fraudulent

as those which you own yourself to possess. Let the casket, with all its contents, be transferred to my hands, and pledge me your word that, in giving that casket, you reserve to yourself no other means by which chemistry can be abused to those influences over physical organization, which ignorance or imposture may ascribe to—magic."

"I accept no conditions for my confidence, though I think the better of you for attempting to make them. If I live, you will seek me yourself, and implore my aid. Meanwhile, listen to me, and —"

"No; I prefer the rain and the thunder to the whispers that steal to my ear in the dark from one of whom I have reason to beware."

So saying, I stepped forth, and at that moment the lightning flashed through the arch, and brought into full view the face of the man beside me. Seen by that glare, it was pale as the face of a corpse, but its expression was compassionate and serene.

I hesitated, for the expression of that hueless countenance touched me; it was not the face which inspires distrust or fear.

"Come," said I, gently; "grant my demand. The casket—"

"It is no scruple of distrust that now makes that demand; it is a curiosity which in itself is a fearful tempter. Did you now possess what at this moment you desire, how bitterly you would repent!"

"Do you still refuse my demand?"

"I refuse."

"If then you really need me, it is you who will repent."

I passed from the arch into the open space. The rain had

passed, the thunder was more distant. I looked back when I had gained the opposite side of the way, at the angle of a street which led to my own house. As I did so, again the skies lightened, but the flash was comparatively slight and evanescent; it did not penetrate the gloom of the arch; it did not bring the form of Sir Philip into view; but, just under the base of the outer buttress to the gateway, I descried the outline of a dark figure, cowering down, huddled up for shelter, the outline so indistinct, and so soon lost to sight as the flash faded, that I could not distinguish if it were man or brute. If it were some chance passer-by, who had sought refuge from the rain, and overheard any part of our strange talk, "the listener," thought I with a half-smile, "must have been mightily perplexed."