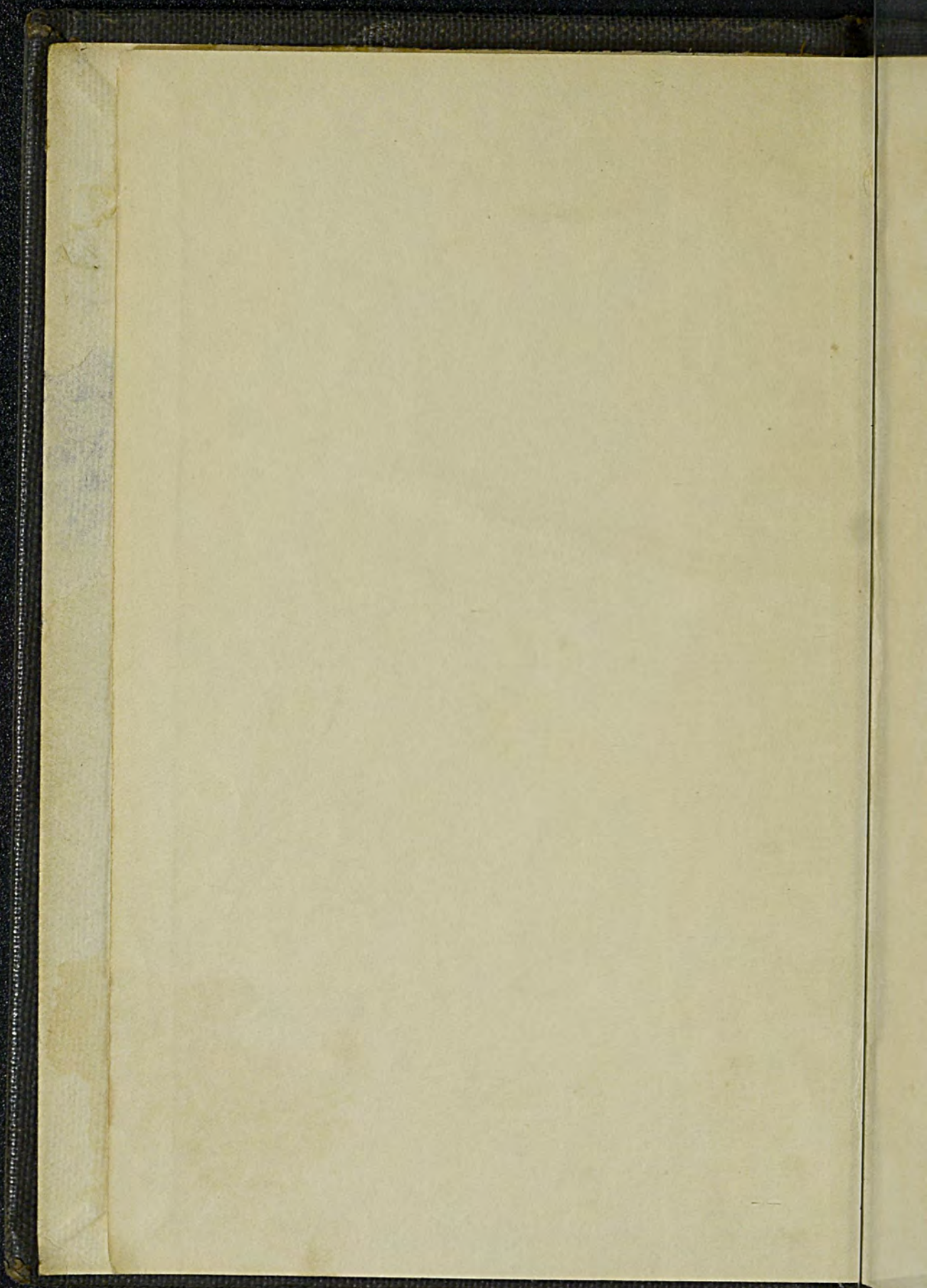
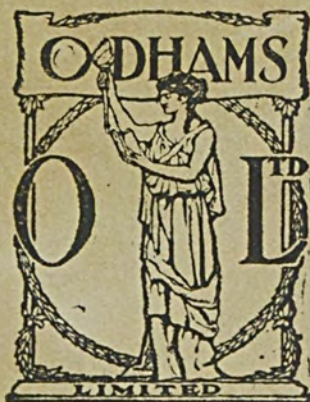


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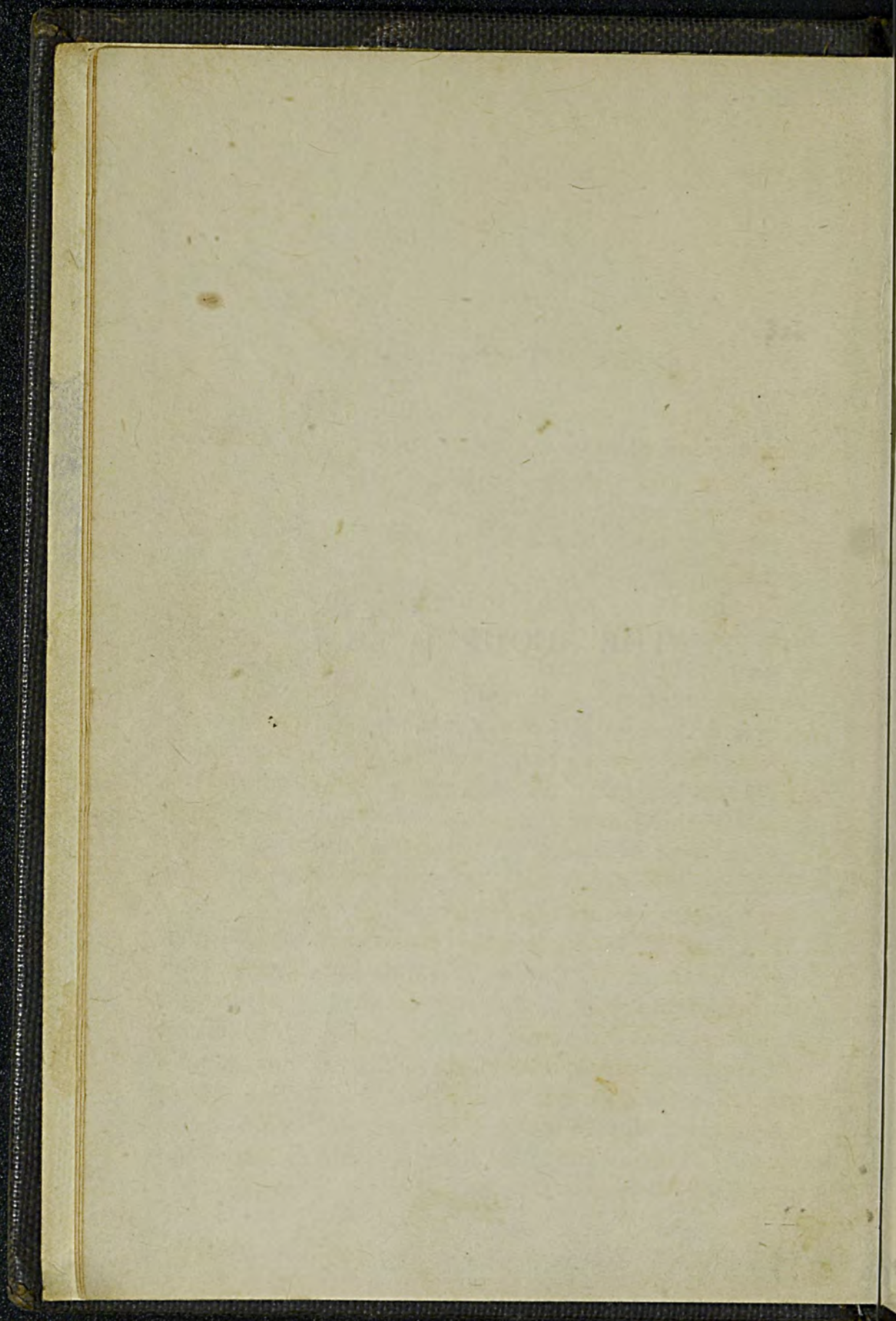
CONTENTS

	PAGE
× THE SCoured SILK	5
× THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURE OF MR. JOHN PROUDIE	35
HEARTSEASE	59
× THE HOUSEKEEPER	83
THE GILT SEDAN CHAIR	107
THE PACKET OF COMFITS	127
× BRENT'S FOLLY	147
A QUIET WOMAN.	161

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

I.—PRIDE	175
II.—GLUTTONY	189
III.—LUXURY	204
IV.—WRATH	220
V.—ENVY.	238
VI.—AVARICE	254
VII.—SLOTH	271

THE SCOURED SILK



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THE SCOURED SILK

THIS is a tale that might be told in many ways and from various points of view; it has to be gathered from here and there—a letter, a report, a diary, a casual reference; in its day the thing was more than a passing wonder, and it left a mark of abiding horror on the neighbourhood.

The house in which Mr. Orford lived has finally been destroyed, the mural tablet in St. Paul's, Covent Garden, may be sought for in vain by the curious, but little remains of the old Piazza where the quiet scholar passed on his daily walks, the very records of what was once so real have become blurred, almost incoherent in their dealings with things forgotten; but this thing happened to real people, in a real London, not so long ago that the last generation had not spoken with those who remembered some of the actors in this terrible drama.

It is round the person of Humphrey Orford that this tale turns, as, at the time, all the mystery and horror centred; yet until his personality was brought thus tragically into fame, he had not been an object of much interest to many; he had, perhaps, a mild reputation for eccentricity, but this was founded merely on the fact that he refused to partake of the amusements of his neighbours, and showed a dislike for much company.

But this was excused on the ground of his scholarly predilections; he was known to be translating, in a leisurely fashion, as became a gentleman, Ariosto's great romance into English couplets, and to be writing essays on recondite subjects connected with grammar and language, which were not the less esteemed because they had never been published.

His most authentic portrait, taken in 1733 and intended for a frontispiece for the Ariosto when this should come to print, shows a slender man with reddish hair, rather severely clubbed, a brown coat, and a muslin cravat; he looks straight out of the picture, and the face is long, finely shaped, and refined, with eyebrows rather heavier than one would expect from such delicacy of feature.

When this picture was painted Mr. Orford was living near Covent Garden, close to the mansion once occupied by the famous Dr. Radcliffe, a straight-fronted, dark house of obvious gentility, with a little architrave portico over the door and a few steps leading up to it; a house with neat windows and a gloomy air, like every other residence in that street and most other streets of the same status in London.

And if there was nothing remarkable about Mr. Orford's dwelling-place or person there was nothing, as far as his neighbours knew, remarkable about his history.

He came from a good Suffolk family, in which county he was believed to have considerable estates (though it was a known fact that he never visited them), and he had no relations, being the only child of an only child, and his parents dead; his father had purchased this town house in the reign of King William, when the neighbourhood was very fashion-

able, and up to it he had come, twenty years ago—nor had he left it since.

He had brought with him an ailing wife, a house-keeper, and a man-servant, and to the few families of his acquaintance near, who waited on him, he explained that he wished to give young Mrs. Orford, who was of a mopish disposition, the diversion of a few months in town.

But soon there was no longer this motive for remaining in London, for the wife, hardly seen by anyone, fell into a short illness and died—just a few weeks after her husband had brought her up from Suffolk. She was buried very simply in St. Paul's, and the mural tablet, set up with a draped urn in marble, and just her name and the date, ran thus:

“FLORA, WIFE OF HUMPHREY ORFORD, ESQ.,
of this Parish,
Died November, 1713, aged 27 years.”

Mr. Orford made no effort to leave the house; he remained, people thought, rather stunned by his loss, kept himself close in the house, and for a considerable time wore deep mourning.

But this was twenty years ago, and all had forgotten the shadowy figure of the young wife, whom so few had seen and whom no one had known anything about or been interested in, and all trace of her seemed to have passed out of the quiet, regular, and easy life of Mr. Orford, when an event that gave rise to some gossip caused the one-time existence of Flora Orford to be recalled and discussed among the curious. This event was none other than the sudden betrothal of Mr. Orford and the announcement of his almost immediate marriage.

The bride was one who had been a prattling child when the groom had first come to London; one old lady who was for ever at her window watching the little humours of the street, recollected and related how she had seen Flora Orford, alighting from the coach that had brought her from the country, turn to this child, who was gazing from the railing of the neighbouring house, and touch her bare curls lovingly and yet with a sad gesture.

And that was about the only time anyone ever did see Flora Orford, she so soon became ailing; and the next the inquisitive old lady saw of her was the slender brown coffin being carried through the dusk towards St. Paul's Church.

But that was twenty years ago, and here was the baby grown up into Miss Elisa Minden, a very personable young woman, soon to be the second Mrs. Humphrey Orford. Of course there was nothing very remarkable about the match; Elisa's father, Dr. Minden, had been Mr. Orford's best friend (as far as he could be said to have a best friend, or indeed any friend at all) for many a long year, both belonged to the same quiet set, both knew all about each other. Mr. Orford was not much above forty-five or so, an elegant, well-looking man, wealthy, with no vices and a calm, equable temper; while Miss Elisa, though pretty and well-mannered, had an insufficient dowry, no mother to fend for her, and the younger sisters to share her slender advantages. So what could anyone say save that the good doctor had done very well for his daughter, and that Mr. Orford had been fortunate enough to secure such a fresh, capable maiden for his wife?

It was said that the scholar intended giving up his bookish ways—that he even spoke of going abroad a

while, to Italy, for preference ; he was, of course, anxious to see Italy, as all his life had been devoted to preparing the translation of an Italian classic.

The quiet betrothal was nearing its decorous conclusion when one day Mr. Orford took Miss Minden for a walk and brought her home round the piazza of Covent Garden, then took her across the cobbled street, past the stalls banked up with the first spring flowers (it was the end of March), under the portico built by the great Inigo Jones, and so into the church.

"I want to show you where my wife Flora lies buried," said Mr. Orford.

And that is really the beginning of the story.

Now, Miss Minden had been in this church every Sunday of her life and many week-days, and had been used since a child to see that tablet to Flora Orford ; but when she heard these words in the quiet voice of her lover and felt him draw her out of the sunlight into the darkness of the church, she experienced a great distaste that was almost fear.

It seemed to her both a curious and a disagreeable thing for him to do, and she slipped her arm out of his as she replied.

"Oh, please let us go home!" she said. "Father will be waiting for us, and your good Mrs. Boyd vexed if the tea is over-brewed."

"But first I must show you this," he insisted, and took her arm again and led her down the church, past his seat, until they stood between his pew end and the marble tablet in the wall which was just a hand's space above their heads.

"That is to her memory," said Mr. Orford. "And you see there is nothing said as to her virtues."

Now, Elisa Minden knew absolutely nothing of her

predecessor, and could not tell if these words were spoken in reverence or irony, so she said nothing but looked up rather timidly from under the shade of her Leghorn straw at the tall figure of her lover, who was staring sternly at the square of marble.

"And what have you to say to Flora Orford?" he asked sharply, looking down at her quickly.

"Why, sir, she was a stranger to me," replied Miss Minden.

Mr. Orford pressed her arm.

"But to me she was a wife," he said. "She is buried under your feet. Quite close to where you are standing. Why, think of that, Lizzie, if she could stand up and put out her hand she could catch hold of your dress—she is as near as that!"

The words and his manner of saying them filled Miss Minden with shuddering terror, for she was a sensitive and fanciful girl, and it seemed to her a dreadful thing to be thus standing over the bones of the poor creature who had loved the man who was now to be her own husband, and horrible to think that the handful of decay so near them had once clung to this man and loved him.

"Do not tremble, my dear girl," said Mr. Orford. "She is dead."

Tears were in Elisa Minden's eyes, and she answered coldly:

"Sir, how can you speak so?"

"She was a wicked woman," he replied, "a very wicked woman."

The girl could not reply as to that; this sudden disclosing of a painful secret abashed her simple mind.

"Need we talk of this?" she asked; then, under her breath—"Need we be married in this church, sir?"

"Of course," he answered shortly, "everything is arranged. To-morrow week."

Miss Minden did not respond; hitherto she had been fond of the church, now it seemed spoilt for her—tarnished by the thought of Flora Orford.

Her companion seemed to divine what reflection lay behind her silence.

"You need not be afraid," he said rather harshly. "She is dead. Dead."

And he reached out the light cane he wore and tapped on the stone above his wife's grave, and slowly smiled as the sound rang hollow in the vaults beneath.

Then he allowed Elisa to draw him away, and they returned to Mr. Orford's comfortable house, where in the upper parlour Dr. Minden was awaiting them together with his sister and her son, a soldier cousin whom the quick perceptions of youthful friends had believed to be devoted to Elisa Minden. They made a pleasant little party with the red curtains drawn, and the fire burning up between the polished andirons and all the service for tea laid out with scones and Naples cake, and Mrs. Boyd coming to and fro with plates and dishes. And everyone was cheerful and friendly and glad to be indoors together, for it was a bleak afternoon, grey out of doors, with a snowstorm coming up and people hurrying home with heads bent before a cutting wind.

But to Elisa's mind had come an unbidden thought:

"I do not like this house—it is where Flora Orford died."

And she wondered in which room, and also why this had never occurred to her before, and glanced rather thoughtfully at the fresh young face of the soldier

cousin as he stood by the fire in his scarlet and white, with his glance on the flames.

But it was a cheerful party, and Elisa smiled and jested with the rest as she served the dishes at tea.

There is a miniature of her painted about this time, and one may see how she looked with her bright brown hair and bright brown eyes, rosy complexion, pretty nose and mouth, and her best gown of lavender blue tabinet with a lawn tucker and a lawn cap fastened under the chin with frilled lappets, showing now that the big Leghorn hat with the velvet strings was put aside.

Mr. Orford also looked well to-night; he did not look his full age in the ruddy candle-glow, the grey did not show in his abundant hair nor the lines in his fine face, but the elegance of his figure, the grace of his bearing, the richness of his simple clothes, were displayed to full advantage; Captain Hoare looked stiff and almost clumsy by contrast.

But now and then Elisa Minden's eyes would rest rather wistfully on the fresh face of this young man who had no dead wife in his life. And something was roused in her meek youth and passive innocence, and she wondered why she had so quietly accepted her father's arrangement of a marriage with this elderly scholar, and why Philip Hoare had let her do it. Her thoughts were quite vague and amounted to no more than a confused sense that something was wrong, but she lost her satisfaction in the tea-drinking and the pleasant company, and the warm room with the drawn curtains and the bright fire, and rose up saying they must be returning, as there was a great store of mending she had promised to help her aunt with; but Mrs. Hoare would not help her out, but protested, laughing,

that there was time enough for that, and the good doctor, who was in a fine humour and in no mood to go out into the bleak streets even as far as his own door, declared that now was the time they must be shown over the house.

"Do you know, Humphrey," he said, "you have often promised us this but never done it, and, all the years that I have known you, I have never seen but this room and the dining-room below; and as to your own particular cabinet——"

"Well," said Mr. Orford, interrupting in a leisurely fashion, "no one has been in there, save Mrs. Boyd now and then, to announce a visitor."

"Oh, you scholars!" smiled the doctor. "A secretive tribe—and a fortunate one; why, in my poor room I have had to have three girls running to and fro!"

The soldier spoke, not so pleasantly as his uncle.

"What have you so mysterious, sir, in this same cabinet, that it must be so jealously guarded?" he asked.

"Why, nothing mysterious," smiled the scholar; "only my books, and papers, and pictures."

"You will show them to me?" asked Elisa Minden, and her lover gave graceful consent; there was further amiable talk, and then the whole party, guided by Mr. Orford holding a candle, made a tour of the house and looked over the fine rooms.

Mrs. Hoare took occasion to whisper to the bride-to-be that there were many alterations needed before the place was ready for a lady's use, and that it was time these were put in hand—why, the wedding was less than a fortnight off!

And Elisa Minden, who had not had a mother to advise her in these matters, suddenly felt that the house was

dreary and old-fashioned, and an impossible place to live in; the very rooms that had so pleased her good father—a set of apartments for a lady—were to her the most hateful in the house, for they, her lover told her, had been furnished and prepared for Flora Orford, twenty years ago.

She was telling herself that when she was married she must at once go away and that the house must be altered before she could return to it, when the party came crowding to the threshold of the library or private cabinet, and Mr. Orford, holding the candle aloft, led them in. Then as this illumination was not sufficient, he went very quickly and lit the two candles on the mantelpiece.

It was a pleasant apartment, lined with books from floor to ceiling, old, valuable, and richly bound books, save only in the space above the chimney piece, which was occupied by a portrait of a lady and the panel behind the desk; this was situate in a strange position, in the farthest corner of the room fronting the wall, so that anyone seated there would be facing the door with the space of the room between; the desk was quite close to the wall, so that there was only just space for the chair at which the writer would sit, and to accommodate this there were no bookshelves behind it, but a smooth panel of wood on which hung a small picture; this was a rough, dark painting, and represented a man hanging on a gallows on a wild heath; it was a subject out of keeping with the luxurious room with its air of ease and learning, and while Mr. Orford was showing his first editions, his Elzevirs and Aldines, Elisa Minden was staring at this ugly little picture.

As she looked she was conscious of such a chill of

horror and dismay as nearly caused her to shriek aloud. The room seemed to her to be full of an atmosphere of terror and evil beyond expression.

Never had such a thing happened to her before; her distaste at her visit to the tomb in the afternoon had been as nothing to this. She moved away, barely able to disguise an open panic. As she turned, she half-stumbled against a chair, caught at it, and noticed, hanging over the back, a skirt of peach-coloured silk. Elisa, not being mistress of herself, caught at this garment.

"Why, sir," cried she hysterically, "what is this?"

All turned to look at her; her tone, her obvious fright, were out of proportion to her discovery.

"Why, child," said Mrs. Hoare, "it is a silk petticoat, as all can see."

"A gift for you, my dear," said the cheerful doctor.

"A gift for me?" cried Elisa. "Why, this has been scoured, and turned, and mended, and patched a hundred times!"

And she held up the skirt, which had indeed become like tinder and seemed ready to drop to pieces.

The scholar now spoke.

"It belongs to Mrs. Boyd," he said quietly. "I suppose she has been in here to clear up, and has left some of her mending."

Now, two things about this speech made a strange impression on everyone; first, it was manifestly impossible that the good housekeeper would ever have owned such a garment as this, that was a lady's dress and such as would be worn for a ball; and, secondly, Mr. Orford had only a short while before declared that Mrs. Boyd only entered his room when he was in it, and then of a necessity and for a few moments.

All had the same impression, that this was some garment belonging to his dead wife and as such cherished by him ; all, that is, but Elisa, who had heard him call Flora Orford a wicked woman.

She put the silk down quickly (there was a needle sticking into it and a spool of cotton lying on the chair beneath) and looked up at the portrait above the mantelpiece.

"Is that Mrs. Orford?" she asked.

He gave her a queer look.

"Yes," he said.

In a strange silence all glanced up at the picture.

It showed a young woman in a white gown, holding a crystal heart that hung round her neck ; she had dark hair and a pretty face ; as Elisa looked at the pointed fingers holding the pretty toy, she thought of the tablet in St. Paul's Church and Mr. Orford's words—"She is so near to you that if she could stretch out her hand she could touch you," and without any remark about the portrait or the sitter, she advised her aunt that it was time to go home. So the four of them left, and Mr. Orford saw them out, standing framed in the warm light of the corridor and watching them disappear into the grey darkness of the street.

It was little more than an hour afterwards when Elisa Minden came creeping down the stairway of her home and accosted her cousin, who was just leaving the house.

"Oh, Philip," said she, clasping her hands, "if your errand be not a very important one, I beg you to give me an hour of your time. I have been watching for you to go out, that I might follow and speak to you privately."

The young soldier looked at her keenly as she stood

in the light of the hall lamp, and he saw that she was very agitated.

"Of course, Lizzie," he answered kindly, and led her into the little parlour off the hall where there was neither candles nor fire, but leisure and quiet to talk.

Elisa, being a housekeeper, found a lamp and lit it, and apologized for the cold, but she would not return upstairs, she said, for Mrs Hoare and the two girls and the doctor were all quiet in the great parlour, and she had no mind to disturb them.

"You are in trouble," said Captain Hoare quietly.

"Yes," replied she in a frightened way, "I want you to come with me now to Mr. Orford's house—I want to speak to his housekeeper."

"Why, what is this, Lizzie?"

She had no very good explanation; there was only the visit to the church that afternoon, her impression of horror in the cabinet, the discovery of the scoured silk.

"But I must know something of his first wife, Philip," she concluded. "I could never go on with it—if I did not—something has happened to-day—I hate that house, I almost hate—*him*."

"Why did you do it, Lizzie?" demanded the young soldier sternly. "This was a nice home-coming for me . . . a man who might be your father . . . a solitary . . . one who frightens you."

Miss Minden stared at her cousin; she did not know why she had done it; the whole thing seemed suddenly impossible.

"Please, you must come with me now," she said.

So overwrought was she that he had no heart to refuse her, and they took their warm cloaks from the hall and went out into the dark streets.

It was snowing now and the ground slippery under foot, and Elisa clung to her cousin's arm. She did not want to see Mr. Orford or his house ever again, and by the time they reached the doorstep she was in a tremble; but she rang the bell boldly.

It was Mrs. Boyd herself who came to the door; she began explaining that the master was shut up in his cabinet, but the soldier cut her short.

"Miss Minden wishes to see you," he said, "and I will wait in the hall till she is ready."

So Elisa followed the housekeeper down to her basement sitting-room; the man-servant was out, and the two maids were quickly dismissed to the kitchen.

Mrs. Boyd, a placid soul, near seventy years, waited for the young lady to explain herself, and Elisa Minden, flushing and paling by turns, and feeling foolish and timid, put forth the object of her coming.

She wanted to hear the story of Flora Orford—there was no one else whom she could ask—and she thought that she had a right to know.

"And I suppose you have, my dear," said Mrs. Boyd, gazing into the fire, "though it is not a pretty story for you to hear—and I never thought I should be telling it to Mr. Orford's second wife!"

"Not his wife yet," said Miss Minden.

"There, there, you had better ask the master yourself," replied Mrs. Boyd placidly; "not but that he would be fierce at your speaking of it, for I do not think a mention of it has passed his lips, and it's twenty years ago and best forgotten, my dear."

"Tell it me and then I will forget," begged Miss Minden.

So then Mrs. Boyd, who was a quiet, harmless soul with no dislike to telling a tale (though no gossip, as

events had proved, she having kept her tongue still on this matter for so long), told her the story of Humphrey Orford's wife; it was told in very few words.

"She was the daughter of his gamekeeper, my dear, and he married her out of hand, just for her pretty face. But they were not very happy together that I could ever see; she was afraid of him and that made her cringe, and he hated that, and she shamed him with her ignorant ways. And then one day he found her with a lover, saving your presence, mistress, one of her own people, just a common man. And he was just like a creature possessed; he shut up the house and sent away all the servants but me, and brought his lady up to town, to this house here. And what passed between her and him no one will know, but she ever looked like one dying of terror. And then the doctor began to come, Dr. Thursby, it was, that is dead now, and then she died—and no one was able to see her even when she was in her coffin, nor to send a flower. 'Tis likely she died of grief, poor, fond wretch. But, of course, she was a wicked woman, and there was nothing to do but pity the master."

And this was the story of Flora Orford.

"And the man?" asked Miss Minden, after a little.

"The man she loved, my dear? Well, Mr. Orford had him arrested as a thief for breaking into his house—he was wild, that fellow, with not the best of characters—well, he would not say why he was in the house, and Mr. Orford, being a Justice of the Peace, had some power, so he was just condemned as a common thief. And there are few to this day know the truth of the tale, for he kept his counsel to the last, and no one knew from *him* why he had been found in the Squire's house."

"What was his end?" asked Miss Minden in a still voice.

"Well, he was hanged," said Mrs. Boyd; "being caught red-handed, what could he hope for?"

"Then that is a picture of him in the cabinet!" cried Elisa, shivering for all the great fire; then she added desperately, "Tell me, did Flora Orford die in that cabinet?"

"Oh, no, my dear, but in a great room at the back of the house that has been shut up ever since."

"But the cabinet is horrible," said Elisa; "perhaps it is her portrait and that picture."

"I have hardly been in there," admitted Mrs. Boyd, "but the master lives there—he has always had his supper there, and he talks to that portrait, my dear—'Flora, Flora,' he says, 'how are you to-night?' and then he imitates her voice, answering."

Elisa Minden clapped her hand to her heart.

"Do not tell me these things or I shall think that you are hateful too, to have stayed in this dreadful house and endured them!"

Mrs. Boyd was surprised.

"Now, my dear, do not be put out," she protested. "They were wicked people both of them and got their deserts, and it is an old story best forgotten; and as for the master, he has been just a good creature ever since we have been here, and he will not go talking to any picture when he has a sweet young wife to keep him company."

But Elisa Minden had risen and had her fingers on the handle of the door.

"One thing more," said she breathlessly; "that scoured silk—of a peach colour——"

"Why, has he got that still? Mrs. Orford wore

it the night he found her with her sweetheart. I mind I was with her when she bought it—fine silk at forty shillings the yard. If I were you, my dear, I should burn that when I was mistress here."

But Miss Minden had run upstairs to the cold hall.

Her cousin was not there; she heard angry voices overhead and saw the two maid-servants affrighted on the stairs; a disturbance was unknown in this household.

While Elisa stood bewildered, a door banged, and Captain Hoare came down red in the face and fuming; he caught his cousin's arm and hurried her out of the house.

In an angry voice he told her of the unwarrantable behaviour of Mr. Orford, who had found him in the hall and called him "intruder" and "spy" without waiting for an explanation; the soldier had followed the scholar up to his cabinet and there had been an angry scene about nothing at all, as Captain Hoare said.

"Oh, Philip," broke out poor Elisa as they hastened through the cold darkness, "I can never, never marry him!"

And she told him the story of Flora Orford. The young man pressed her arm through the heavy cloak.

"And how came such a one to entangle thee?" he asked tenderly. "Nay, thou shalt not marry him."

They spoke no more, but Elisa, happy in the protecting and wholesome presence of her kinsman, sobbed with a sense of relief and gratitude. When they reached home they found they had been missed and there had to be explanations; Elisa said there was something that she had wished to say to Mrs. Boyd,

and Philip told of Mr. Orford's rudeness and the quarrel that had followed.

The two elder people were disturbed and considered Elisa's behaviour strange, but her manifest agitation caused them to forbear pressing her for an explanation; nor was it any use addressing themselves to Philip, for he went out to his delayed meeting with companions at a coffee-house.

That night Elisa Minden went to bed feeling more emotion than she had ever done in her life; fear and disgust of the man whom hitherto she had placidly regarded as her future husband, and a yearning for the kindly presence of her childhood's companion united in the resolute words she whispered into her pillow during that bitter night:

"I can never marry him now!"

The next day it snowed heavily, yet a strange elation was in Elisa's heart as she descended to the warm parlour, bright from the fire and light from the glow of the snow without.

She was going to tell her father that she could not carry out her engagement with Mr. Orford, and that she did not want ever to go into his house again.

They were all gathered round the breakfast-table when Captain Hoare came in late (he had been out to get a newsletter) and brought the news that was the most unlooked for they could conceive, and that was soon to startle all London.

Mr. Orford had been found murdered in his cabinet.

These tidings, though broken as carefully as possible, threw the little household into the deepest consternation and agitation; there were shrieks, and cryings, and runnings to and fro.

Only Miss Minden, though of a ghastly colour, made

no especial display of grief; she was thinking of Flora Orford.

When the doctor could get away from his agitated womenkind, he went with his nephew to the house of Mr. Orford.

The story of the murder was a mystery. The scholar had been found in his chair in front of his desk with one of his own bread-knives sticking through his shoulders; and there was nothing to throw any light as to how or through whom he had met his death.

The story, sifted from the mazed incoherency of Mrs. Boyd, the hysterics of the maids, the commentaries of the constables, and the chatter of the neighbours, ran thus:

At half-past nine the night before, Mrs. Boyd had sent one of the maids up with her master's supper; it was his whim to have it always thus, served on a tray in the cabinet. There had been wine and meat, bread and cheese, fruit and cakes—the usual plates and silver—among these the knife that had killed Mr. Orford.

When the servant left, the scholar had followed her to the door and locked it after her; this was also a common practice of his, a precaution against any possible interruption, for, he said, he did the best part of his work in the evening.

It was found next morning that his bed had not been slept in, and that the library door was still locked; as the alarmed Mrs. Boyd could get no answer to her knocks, the man-servant had sent for someone to force the lock, and Humphrey Orford had been found in his chair, leaning forward over his papers with the knife thrust up to the hilt between

his shoulders; he must have died instantly, for there was no sign of any struggle, nor any disarrangement of his person or his papers. The first doctor to see him, a passer-by, attracted by the commotion about the house, said he must have been dead some hours—probably since the night before; the candles had all burnt down to the socket, and there were spillings of grease on the desk; the supper tray stood at the other end of the room, most of the food had been eaten, most of the wine drunk, the articles were all there in order excepting only the knife sticking between Mr. Orford's shoulder-blades.

When Captain Hoare had passed the house on his return from buying the newsletter he had seen the crowd and gone in and been able to say that he had been the last person to see the murdered man alive, as he had had his sharp encounter with Mr. Orford about ten o'clock, and he remembered seeing the supper things in the room. The scholar had heard him below, unlocked the door, and called out such impatient resentment of his presence that Philip had come angrily up the stairs and followed him into the cabinet; a few angry words had passed, when Mr. Orford had practically pushed his visitor out, locking the door in his face and bidding him take Miss Minden home.

This threw no light at all on the murder; it only went to prove that at ten o'clock Mr. Orford had been alive and locked in his cabinet.

Now here was the mystery; in the morning the door was still locked, *on the inside*, the window was, as it had been since early evening, shuttered and fastened across with an iron bar, *on the inside*, and, the room being on an upper floor, access would have

been in any case almost impossible by the window which gave on to the smooth brickwork of the front of the house.

Neither was there any possible place in the room where anyone might be hidden—it was just the square lined with the shallow bookshelves, the two pictures (that sombre little one looking strange now above the bent back of the dead man), the desk, one or two chairs and side tables; there was not so much as a cupboard or bureau—not a hiding-place for a cat.

How, then, had the murderer entered and left the room?

Suicide, of course, was out of the question, owing to the nature of the wound—but murder seemed equally out of the question; Mr. Orford sat so close to the wall that the handle of the knife touched the panel behind him. For anyone to have stood between him and the wall would have been impossible; behind the back of his chair was not space enough to push a walking-stick.

How, then, had the blow been delivered with such deadly precision and force?

Not by anyone standing in front of Mr. Orford, first because he must have seen him and sprung up; and secondly, because, even had he been asleep with his head down, no one, not even a very tall man, could have leant over the top of the desk and driven in the knife, for experiment was made, and it was found that no arm could possibly reach such a distance.

The only theory that remained was that Mr. Orford had been murdered in some other part of the room and afterwards dragged to his present position.

But this seemed more than unlikely, as it would have

meant moving the desk, a heavy piece of furniture that did not look as if it had been touched, and also because there was a paper under the dead man's hand, a pen in his fingers, a splutter of ink where it had fallen, and a sentence unfinished. The thing remained a complete and horrid mystery, one that seized the imagination of men; the thing was the talk of all the coffee-houses and clubs.

The murder seemed absolutely motiveless, the dead man was not known to have an enemy in the world, yet robbery was out of the question, for nothing had been even touched.

The early tragedy was opened out. Mrs. Boyd told all she knew, which was just what she had told Elisa Minden—the affair was twenty years ago, and the gallows bird had no kith or kin left.

Elisa Minden fell into a desperate state of agitation, a swift change from her first stricken calm; she wanted Mr. Orford's house pulled down—the library and all its contents burnt; her own wedding-dress she did burn, in frenzied silence, and none dare stop here; she resisted her father's entreaties that she should go away directly after the inquest; she would stay on the spot, she said, until the mystery was solved.

Nothing would content her but a visit to Mr. Orford's cabinet; she was resolved, she said wildly, to come to the bottom of this mystery and in that room, which she only had entered once and which had affected her so terribly, she believed she might find some clue.

The doctor thought it best to allow her to go; he and her cousin escorted her to the house that now no one passed without a shudder and into the chamber that all dreaded to enter.

Good Mrs. Boyd was sobbing behind them; the

poor soul was quite mazed with this sudden and ghastly ending to her orderly life; she spoke all incoherently, explaining, excusing, and lamenting in a breath; yet through all her trouble she showed plainly and artlessly that she had had no affection for her master, and that it was custom and habit that had been wounded, not love.

Indeed, it seemed that there was no one who did love Humphrey Orford; the lawyers were already busy looking for a next-of-kin; it seemed likely that this property and the estates in Suffolk would go into Chancery.

"You should not go in, my dear, you should not go in," sobbed the old woman, catching at Miss Minden's black gown (she was in mourning for the murdered man) and yet peering with a fearful curiosity into the cabinet.

Elisa looked ill and distraught but also resolute.

"Tell me, Mrs. Boyd," said she, pausing on the threshold, "what became of the scoured silk?"

The startled housekeeper protested that she had never seen it again; and here was another touch of mystery—the old peach-coloured silk skirt that four persons had observed in Mr. Orford's cabinet the night of his murder, had completely disappeared.

"He must have burnt it," said Captain Hoare, and though it seemed unlikely that he could have consumed so many yards of stuff without leaving traces in the grate, still it was the only possible solution.

"I cannot think why he kept it so long," murmured Mrs. Boyd, "for it could have been no other than Mrs. Orford's best gown."

"A ghastly relic," remarked the young soldier grimly. Elisa Minden went into the middle of the room and

stared about her; nothing in the place was changed, nothing disordered; the desk had been moved round to allow of the scholar being carried away, his chair stood back, so that the long panel on which hung the picture of the gallows, was fully exposed to view.

To Elisa's agitated imagination this portion of the wall sunk in the surrounding bookshelves, long and narrow, looked like the lid of a coffin.

"It is time that picture came down," she said; "it cannot interest anyone any longer."

"Lizzie, dear," suggested her father gently, "had you not better come away?—this is a sad and awful place."

"No," replied she. "I must find out about it—we must know."

And she turned about and stared at the portrait of Flora Orford.

"He hated her, Mrs. Boyd, did he not? And she must have died of fear—think of that!—died of fear, thinking all the while of that poor body on the gallows. He was a wicked man and whoever killed him must have done it to revenge Flora Orford."

"My dear," said the doctor hastily, "all that was twenty years ago, and the man was quite justified in what he did, though I cannot say I should have been so pleased with the match if I had known this story."

"How did we ever like him?" muttered Elisa Minden. "If I had entered this room before I should never have been promised to him—there is something terrible in it."

"And what else can you look for, my dear," snivelled Mrs. Boyd, "in a room where a man has been murdered?"

"But it was like this before," replied Miss Minden; "it *frightened* me."

She looked round at her father and cousin, and her face was quite distorted.

"There is something here now," she said, "something in this room."

They hastened towards her, thinking that her overstrained nerves had given way; but she took a step forward.

Shriek after shriek left her lips.

With a quivering finger she pointed before her at the long panel behind the desk.

At first they could not tell at what she pointed; then Captain Hoare saw the cause of her desperate terror.

It was a small portion of faded, peach-coloured silk, showing above the ribbed line of the wainscot, protruding from the wall, like a fragment of stuff shut in a door.

"She is in there!" cried Miss Minden. "In there!"

A certain frenzy fell on all of them; they were in a confusion, hardly knowing what they said or did. Only Captain Hoare kept some presence of mind and, going up to the panel, discerned a fine crack all round.

"I believe it is a door," he said, "and that explains how the murderer must have struck—from the wall."

He lifted up the picture of the hanged man and found a small knob or button, which, as he expected, on being pressed sent the panel back into the wall, disclosing a secret chamber no larger than a cupboard.

And directly inside this hidden room that was dark to the sight and noisome to the nostrils, was the body of a woman, leaning against the inner wall with a white kerchief knotted tightly round her throat, showing how

she had died; she wore the scoured silk skirt, the end of which had been shut in the panel, and an old ragged bodice of linen that was like dirty parchment; her hair was grey and scanty, her face past any likeness to humanity, her body thin and dry.

The room, which was lit only by a window a few inches square looking on to the garden, was furnished with a filthy bed of rags and a stool with a few tattered clothes; a basket of broken bits was on the floor.

Elisa Minden crept closer.

"It is Flora Orford," she said, speaking like one in a dream.

They brought the poor body down into the room, and then it was clear that this faded and terrible creature had a likeness to the pictured girl who smiled from the canvas over the mantelpiece.

And another thing was clear and, for a moment, they did not dare speak to each other.

For twenty years this woman had endured her punishment in the wall chamber in the library that no one but her husband entered; for twenty years he had kept her there, behind the picture of her lover, feeding her on scraps, letting her out only when the household was abed, amusing himself with her torture—she mending the scoured silk she had worn for twenty years, sitting there, cramped in the almost complete dark, a few feet from where he wrote his elegant poetry.

"Of course she was crazy," said Captain Hoare at length, "but why did she never cry out?"

"For a good reason," whispered Dr. Minden, when he had signed to Mrs. Boyd to take his fainting daughter away. "He saw to that—*she has got no tongue.*"

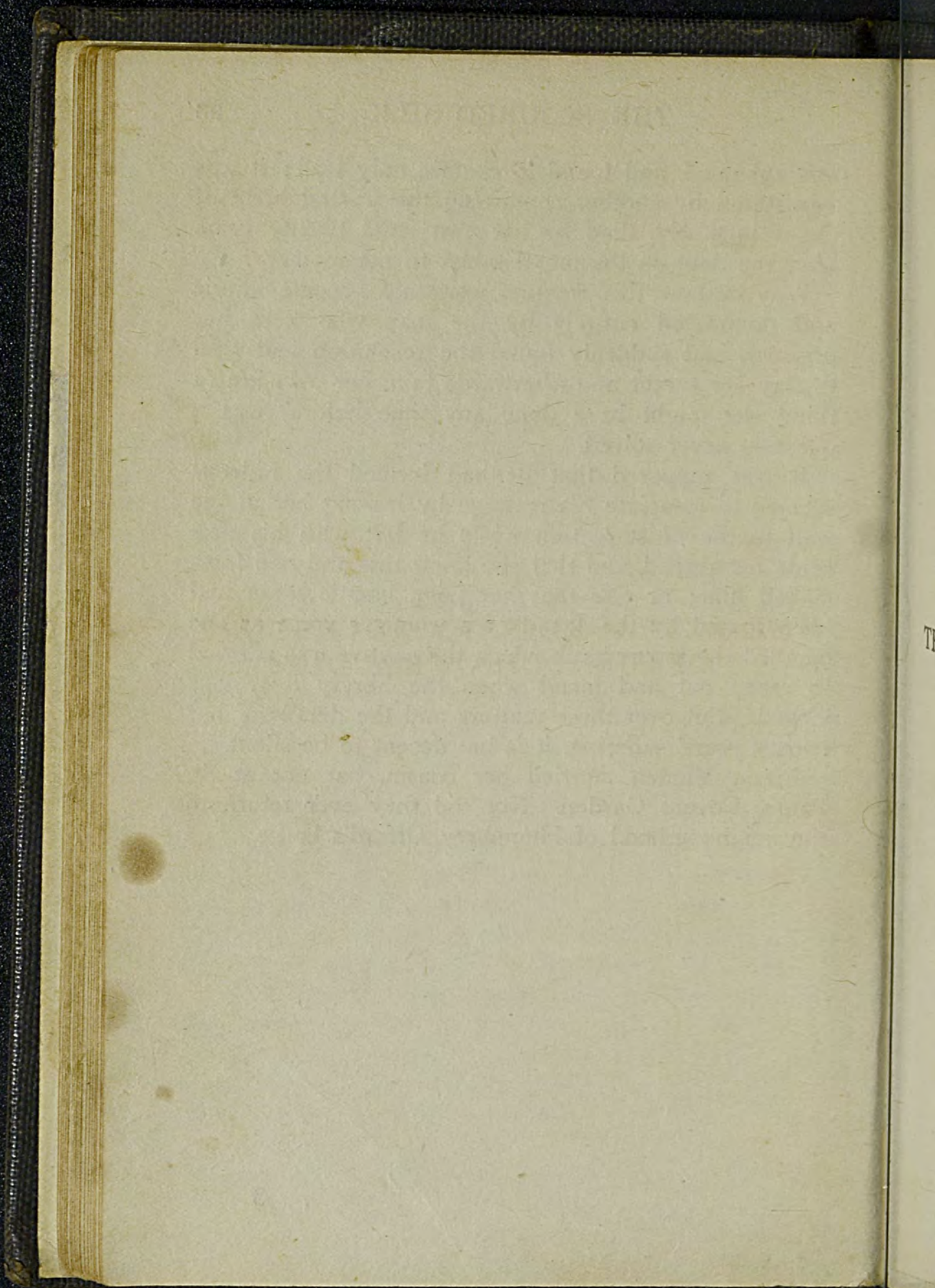
The coffin bearing the nameplate "*Flora Orford*"

was exhumed, and found to contain only lead; it was substituted by another containing the wasted body of the woman who died by her own hand twenty years after the date on the mural tablet to her memory.

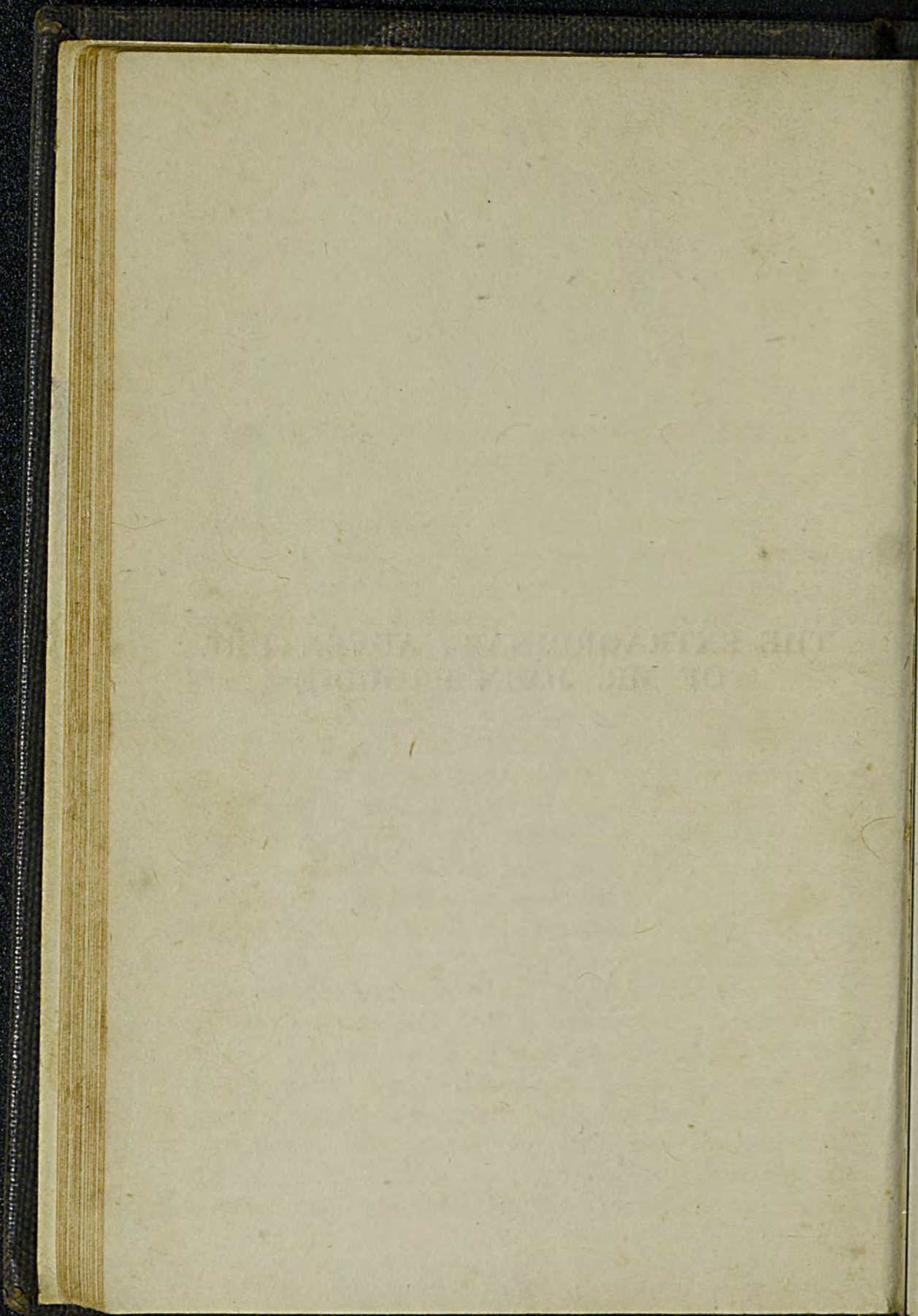
Why or how this creature, certainly become idiotic and dominated entirely by the man who kept her prisoner, had suddenly found the resolution and skill to slay her tyrant and afterwards take her own life (a thing she might have done any time before) was a question never solved.

It was supposed that he had formed the hideous scheme to complete his revenge by leaving her in the wall to die of starvation while he left with his new bride for abroad, and that she knew this and had forestalled him; or else that her poor, lunatic brain had been roused by the sound of a woman's voice as she handled the scoured silk which the captive was allowed to creep out and mend when the library door was locked. But over these matters and the details of her twenty years' suffering, it is but decent to be silent.

Lizzie Minden married her cousin, but not at St. Paul's, Covent Garden. Nor did they ever return to the neighbourhood of Humphrey Orford's house.



**THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURE
OF MR. JOHN PROUDIE**



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THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURE OF MR. JOHN PROUDIE

MR. JOHN PROUDIE kept a chemist's shop in Soho Fields, Monmouth Square; it was a very famous shop, situated at the corner, so that there were two fine windows of leaded glass, one looking on Dean Street and one on the Square, and at the corner the door, with a wooden portico, by which two steps descended into the shop.

A wooden counter, polished and old, ran round this shop, and was bare of everything save a pair of gleaming brass scales; behind, the walls were covered from floor to ceiling by shelves which held jars of Delft pottery, blue and white, and Italian Majolica, red and yellow, on which were painted the names of the various drugs; in the centre the shelves were broken by a door that led into an inner room.

On a certain night in November when the shop was shut, the old housekeeper abed, and the fire burning brightly in the parlour, Mr. John Proudie was busy in his little laboratory compounding some medicines, in particular a mixture of the milky juice of blue flag root and pepper, which he had found very popular for indigestion.

He was beginning to feel cold, and, not being a

young man (at this time, the year 1690, Mr. Proudie was nearly sixty), a little tired, and to think with pleasure of his easy chair, his hot drink of mulled wine on the hearth, his *Gazette* with its exciting news of the war and the Commons and the plots, when a loud peal at the bell caused him to drop the strainer he was holding; not that it was so unusual for Mr. Proudie's bell to ring after dark, but his thoughts had been full of these same troubles of plots and counter-plots of the late Revolution, and the house seemed very lonely and quiet.

"Fine times," thought Mr. Proudie indignantly, "when an honest tradesman feels uneasy in his own home!"

The bell went again, impatiently, and the apothecary wiped his hands, took up a candle, and went through to the dark shop. As he passed through the parlour he glanced up at the clock and was surprised to see that it was nearly midnight.

He set the candle in its great pewter stick on the counter, whence the light threw glistening reflections on the rows of jars in their riches, and opened the door. A gust of wind blew thin, cold sleet across the polished floor, and the apothecary shivered as he cried out:

"Who is there?"

Without replying a tall gentleman stepped down into the shop, closing the door behind him.

"Well, sir?" asked Mr. Proudie a little sharply.

"I want a doctor," said the stranger, "at once."

He glanced round the shop impatiently, taking no more notice of Mr. Proudie than if he had been a servant.

"And why did you come here for a doctor?" demanded the apothecary, not liking his manner, and hurt

THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURE 39

at the insinuation that his own professional services were not good enough.

"I was told," replied the stranger, speaking in tolerable English, but with a marked foreign accent, "that a doctor lodged over your shop."

"So he does," admitted Mr. Proudie grudgingly, "but he is abed."

The stranger approached the counter and leant against it in the attitude of a man exhausted; the candle light was now full on him, but revealed nothing of his features, for he wore a black mask, such as was used for travelling on doubtful rendezvous; a black lace fringe concealed the lower part of his face.

Mr. Proudie did not like this; he scented mystery and underhand intrigue, and he stared at the stranger very doubtfully.

He was a tall, graceful man, certainly young, wrapped in a dark blue mantle lined with fur, and wearing riding gloves and top boots; the skirts of a blue velvet coat showed where the mantle was drawn up by his sword, and there was a great deal of fine lace and a diamond brooch at his throat.

"Well," he said impatiently, and his black eyes flashed through the mask holes, "how long are you going to keep me waiting? I want Dr. Valletort at once."

"Oh, you know his name?"

"Yes, I was told his name. Now, for God's sake, sir, fetch him—tell him it is a woman who requires his services!"

Mr. Proudie turned reluctantly away and picked up the candle, leaving the gentleman in the dark, mounted the stairs to the two rooms above the shop, and roused his lodger.

"You are wanted, Dr. Valletort," he said through the door; "there is a man downstairs come to fetch you to a lady—a bitter night and he a foreign creature in a mask," finished the old apothecary in a grumble.

Dr. Francis Valletort at once opened the door; he was not in bed, but had been reading by the light of a small lamp.

Tall and elegant, with the pallor of a scholar and the grace of a gentleman, the young doctor stood as if startled, holding his open book in his hand.

"Do not go," said Mr. Proudie on a sudden impulse; "these are troubled times, and it is a bitter night to be abroad."

The doctor smiled.

"I cannot afford to decline patients, Mr. Proudie—remember how much I am in your debt for food and lodging," he added with some bitterness.

"Tut, tut!" replied Mr. Proudie, who had a real affection for the young man. "But no doubt I am an old fool—come down and see this fellow."

The doctor took up his shabby hat and cloak and followed the apothecary down into the parlour and from there into the shop.

"I hope you are ready," said the voice of the stranger from the dark; "the patient may be dead through this delay."

Mr. Proudie again placed the candle on the counter; the red flame of it illuminated the tall, dark figure of the stranger and the shabby figure of the doctor against the background of the dark shop and the jars labelled "Gum Camphor," "Mandrake Root," "Dogwood Bark," "Blue Vervain," "Tansy," "Hemlock," and many other drugs, written in blue and red lettering under the glazing.

THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURE 41

"Where am I to go and what is the case?" asked Francis Valletort, eyeing the stranger intently.

"Sir, I will tell you all these questions on the way; the matter is urgent."

"What must I take with me?"

The stranger hesitated.

"First, Dr. Valletort," he said, "are you skilled in the Italian?"

The young doctor looked at the stranger very steadily.

"I studied medicine at the University of Padua," he replied.

"Ah! Well, then, you will be able to talk to the patient, an Italian lady who speaks no English. Bring your instruments and some antidotes for poisoning, and make haste."

The doctor caught the apothecary by the arm and drew him into the parlour. He appeared in considerable agitation.

"Get me my sword and pistols," he said swiftly, "while I prepare my case."

He spoke in a whisper for the door was open behind them into the shop, and the apothecary, alarmed by his pale look, answered in the same fashion:

"Why are you going? Do you know this man?"

"I cannot tell if I know him or not—what shall I do? God help me!"

He spoke in such a tone of despair and looked so white and ill, that Mr. Proudie pushed him into a chair by the fire and bade him drink some of the wine that was warming.

"You will not go out to-night," he said firmly.

"No," replied the doctor, wiping the damp from his brow, "I cannot go."

Mr. Proudie returned to the shop to take this message to the stranger, who, on hearing it, broke into a passionate ejaculation in a foreign language, then thrust his hand into his coat-pocket.

"Take this to Francis Valletort," he answered, "and then see if he will come!"

He flung on the counter, near the scales and candle, a ring of white enamel, curiously set with alternate pearls and diamonds very close together, and having suspended from it a fine chain from which hung a large and pure pearl.

Before the apothecary could reply Francis Valletort, who had heard the stranger's words, came from the parlour and snatched at the ring.

While he was holding it under the candle flame and gazing at the whiteness of diamond, pearl, and enamel, the masked man repeated his words.

"Now will you come?"

The doctor straightened his thin shoulders, his hollow face was flushed into a strange beauty.

"I will come," he said; he pushed back the brown locks that had slipped from the black ribbon on to his cheek and turned to pick up his hat and cloak, while he asked Mr. Proudie to go up to his room and fetch his case of instruments.

The apothecary obeyed; there was something in the manner of Francis Valletort that told him he was now as resolute in undertaking this errand as hitherto he had been anxious to avoid it; but he did not care for the adventure. When the stranger had thrust his hand into his pocket to find the ring that had produced such an effect on the doctor, Mr. Proudie had noticed something that he considered very unpleasant.

The soft doeskin glove had fallen back, caught in

THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURE 43

the folds of the heavy mantle as the hand was withdrawn, and Mr. Proudie had observed a black wrist through the lace ruffles: the masked cavalier was a negro.

Mr. Proudie had seen few coloured men, and regarded them with suspicion and aversion; and what seemed to him so strange was that what he styled a "blackamoor" should be thus habited in fashionable vestures and speaking with an air of authority.

However, evidently Francis Valletort knew the man, or at least his errand; doubtless from some days of student adventure in Italy, and the apothecary did not feel called upon to interfere.

He returned with the case of instruments to find the stranger and the doctor both gone, the parlour and the shop empty, and the candle on the counter guttering furiously in the fierce draught from the half-open door.

Mr. Proudie was angry; there had been no need to slip away like that, sending him away by a trick, and still further no need to leave the door open at the mercy of any passing vagabond.

The apothecary went and peered up and down the street; all was wet darkness; a north wind flung the stinging rain in his face; a distant street lamp cast a fluttering flame but no light on the blackness.

Mr. Proudie closed the door with a shudder and went back to his fire and his *Gazette*.

"Let him," he said to himself, still vexed, "go on his fool's errand."

He knew very little of Francis Valletort, whose acquaintance he had first made a year ago when the young doctor had come to him to buy drugs. The apothecary had found his customer earnest, intelligent,

and learned, and a friendship had sprung up between the two men, which had ended in the doctor renting the two rooms above the shop and, under the wing of the apothecary, picking up what he could of the crumbs let fall by the fashionable physicians of this fashionable neighbourhood.

"I hope he will get his fee to-night," thought Mr. Proudie, as he stirred the fire into a blaze; then, to satisfy his curiosity as to whether this were really a medical case or only an excuse, he went to the dispensary to see if the doctor had taken any drugs.

He soon discovered that two bottles, one containing an antidote against arsenic poisoning, composed of oxide of iron and flax seed, the other a mixture for use against lead poisoning, containing oak bark and green tea, were missing.

"So there *was* someone ill!" cried Mr. Proudie aloud, and at that moment the door bell rang again.

"He is soon back," thought the apothecary, and hastened to undo the door; "perhaps he was really hurried away and forgot his case."

He opened the door with some curiosity, being eager to question the doctor, but it was another stranger who stumbled down the two steps into the dark shop; a woman, whose head was wrapped in a cloudy black shawl.

The wind had blown out the candle on the counter, and the shop was only lit by the illumination, faint and dull, from the parlour; therefore, Mr. Proudie could not see his second visitor clearly, but only sufficiently to observe that she was richly dressed and young; the door blew open, and wind and rain were over both of them; Mr. Proudie had to clap his hand to his wig to keep it on his head.

"Heaven help us!" he exclaimed querulously. "What do you want, madam?"

For answer she clasped his free hand with fingers so chill that they struck a shudder to the apothecary's heart, and broke out into a torrent of words, in what was to Mr. Proudie an incomprehensible language; she was obviously in the wildest distress and grief, and perceiving that the apothecary did not understand her, she flung herself on her knees, wringing her hands and uttering exclamations of despair.

The disturbed Mr. Proudie closed the door and drew the lady into the parlour; she continued to speak, rapidly and with many gestures, but all he could distinguish was the name of Francis Valletort.

She was a pretty creature, fair and slight, with braids of seed pearls in her blonde hair showing through the dark net of her lace shawl, an apple green silk gown embroidered with multitudes of tiny roses, and over all a black Venetian velvet mantle; long corals were in her ears, and a chain of amber round her throat; her piteously gesticulating hands were weighted with large and strange rings.

"If you cannot speak English, madam," said Mr. Proudie, who was sorry for her distress, but disliked her for her outlandish appearance, and because he associated her with the blackamoor, "I am afraid I cannot help you."

While he spoke she searched his face with eager, haggard brown eyes, and when he finished she sadly shook her head to show that she did not understand.

She glanced round the homely room impatiently, then, with a little cry of despair and almost stumbling in her long silken skirts, which she was too absorbed in her secret passion to gather up, she turned back

into the shop, making a gesture that Mr. Proudie took to mean she wished to leave; the apothecary was not ill-pleased at this; since they could not understand each other her presence was but an embarrassment. He would have liked to have asked her to wait the doctor's return, but saw that she understood no word of English; he thought it was Italian she spoke, but he could not be even sure of that.

As swiftly as she had come she had gone, unbolting the door herself and disappearing into the dark; as far as Mr. Proudie could see, she had neither chair nor coach; in which case she must have come from near by, for there was but little wet on her clothes.

Once more the apothecary returned to his fire, noticing the faint perfume of iris the lady had left on the air to mingle with the odours of Peruvian bark and camomile, rosemary and saffron, beeswax and turpentine, myrrh and cinnamon, that rendered heavy the air of the chemist's shop.

"Well, she knows her own business, I have no doubt," thought Mr. Proudie, "and as I cannot help her I had better stay quietly here till Francis Valletort returns and elucidates the mystery."

But he found that he could not fix his thoughts on the *Gazette*, nor, indeed, on anything whatever but the mysterious events of the evening.

He took up an old book of medicine and passed over the pages, trying to interest himself in old prescriptions of blood root, mandrake and valerian, gentian, flax seed and hyssop, alum, poke root and black cherry, which he knew by heart, and which did not now distract him at all from the thought of the woman in her rich foreign finery, her distress and distraction, who had come so swiftly out of the night.

THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURE 47

Now she was gone uneasiness assailed him—where had she disappeared? Was she safe? Ought he not to have forcibly kept her till the return of Francis Valletort, who spoke both French and Italian? Certainly he had been the cause of the lady's visit, for she had said—again and again—"Valletort—Francis Valletort."

The apothecary drank his spiced wine, trimmed and snuffed his candles, warmed his feet on the hearth, and his hands over the blaze, and listened for the bell that should tell of the doctor's return.

He began to get sleepy, almost dozed off in his chair, and was becoming angry with these adventures that kept him out of his bed, when the bell rang a third time, and he sat up with that start that a bell rung suddenly in the silence of the night never fails to give.

"Of course it will be Francis Valletort back again," he said, rising and taking up the candle that had now nearly burnt down to the socket; it was half an hour since the doctor had left the house.

Once again the apothecary opened the door on to the wet, windy night; the candle was blown out in his hand.

"You—must come," said a woman's voice out of the darkness; he could just distinguish the figure of his former visitor, standing in the doorway and looking down on him; she spoke the three English words with infinite care and difficulty, and with such a foreign accent that the apothecary stared stupidly, not understanding, at which she broke out into her foreign ejaculations, caught at his coat, and dragged at him passionately.

Mr. Proudie, quite bewildered, stepped into the

street and stood there hatless and cloakless, the candlestick in his hand.

"If you could only explain yourself, madam!" he exclaimed in despair.

While he protested she drew the door to behind him and, seizing his arm, hurried along down Dean Street.

Mr. Proudie did not wish to refuse to accompany her, but the adventure was not pleasing to him; he shivered in the night air and felt apprehensive of the darkness; he wished he had had time to bring his hat and cloak.

"Madam," he said, as he was hurried along, "unless you have someone who can speak English, I fear I shall be no good at all, whatever your plight."

She made no answer; he could hear her teeth chattering and feel her shivering; now and then she stumbled over the rough stones of the roadway. They had not gone far up the street before she stopped at the door of one of the mansions and pushed it gently open, guiding Mr. Proudie into a hall in absolute darkness.

Mr. Proudie thought that he knew all the houses in Dean Street, but he could not place this; the darkness had completely confused him.

The lady opened another door and pushed Mr. Proudie into a chamber where a faint light burnt.

The room was unfurnished, covered with dust and in disrepair; only in front of the shuttered windows hung long, dark blue silk curtains. Against the wall was hung a silver lamp of beautiful workmanship, which gave a gloomy glow over the desolate chamber.

The apothecary was about to speak when the lady, who had been standing in an attitude of listening,

THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURE 49

suddenly put her hand over his mouth and pushed him desperately behind the curtains; Mr. Proudie would have protested, not liking this false position, but there was no mistaking the terrified entreaty in the foreign woman's blanched face, and the apothecary, altogether unnerved, suffered himself to be concealed behind the flowing folds of the voluminous curtains that showed so strangely in the unfurnished room.

A firm step sounded outside and Mr. Proudie venturing, in the shadow, to peer from behind the curtain, saw his first visitor of the evening enter the room. He was now without mask, hat, or wig, and his appearance caused Mr. Proudie an inward shudder.

Tall and superb in carriage, graceful, and richly dressed, the face and head were that of a full-blooded negro; his rolling eyes, his twitching lips, and an extraordinary pallor that rendered greenish his dusky skin, showed him to be in some fierce passion.

His powerful black hands grasped a horse collar of elegant leather, ornamented with silver studs.

With a fierce gesture he pointed to the lady's draggled skirts and wet shawl, and in the foreign language that she had used, questioned her with a flood of invective—or such it seemed to the terrified ears of Mr. Proudie.

She seemed to plead, weep, lament, and defy all at once, sweeping up and down the room, and wringing her hands, and now and then, it seemed, calling on God and his saints to help her, for she cast up her eyes and pressed her palms together.

To the amazed apothecary, to whom nothing exciting had ever happened before, this was like a scene in a stage play; the two brilliant, fantastic figures, the

negro and the fair woman, going through this scene of some incomprehensible passion in the empty room, lit only by the solitary lamp.

Mr. Proudie hoped that there might be no violence in which he would feel called upon to interfere on behalf of the lady; neither his age nor his strength would give him any chance with the terrible blackamoor—he was, moreover, totally unarmed.

His anxieties on this score were ended; the drama being enacted before his horrified yet fascinated gaze was suddenly cut short. The negro seized the lady by the wrist and dragged her from the room.

Complete silence fell; the shivering apothecary was straining his ears for some sound, perhaps some call for help, some shriek or cry.

But nothing broke the stillness of the mansion, and presently Mr. Proudie ventured to creep forth from his hiding-place.

He left the room and proceeded cautiously to the foot of the stairs. Such utter silence prevailed that he began to think that he was alone in the house, and that anyhow he might now return; the front door was ajar as his conductress had left it; the way of escape was easy.

To the end of his days Mr. Proudie regretted that he had not taken it; he never could tell what motives induced him to return to the room, take down the lamp, and begin exploring the house.

He rather thought, he would say afterwards, that he wanted to find Francis Valletort; he felt sure that he must be in the house somewhere, and he had a horrid premonition of foul play; he was sure, in some way, that the house was empty, and the lady and the blackamoor had fled, and an intense curiosity got

THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURE 51

the better of his fear, his bewilderment, and his fatigue.

He walked very softly, for he was startled by the creaking of the boards beneath his feet; the lamp shook in his hand so that the fitful light ran wavering over walls and ceiling; every moment he paused and listened, fearful to hear the step or voice of the blackamoor.

On the first floor all the doors were open, the rooms all empty, shuttered, desolate, covered with dust and damp.

"There is certainly no one in the house," thought Mr. Proudie, with a certain measure of comfort. "Perhaps Valletort has gone home while I have been here on this fool's errand."

He remembered with satisfaction his fire and his bed, the safe, comfortable shop with the rows of jars, and the shining counter, and the gleaming scales, and the snug little parlour beyond, with everything to his hand, just as he liked to find it.

Yet he went on up the stairs, continuing to explore the desolate empty house, the chill atmosphere of which caused him to shiver as if he was cold to the marrow.

On the next landing he was brought up short by a gleam of light from one of the back rooms. In a panic of terror he put out his own lamp and stood silent and motionless, staring at the long, faint ray of yellow that fell through the door that was ajar.

"There is someone in the house, then," thought Mr. Proudie. "I wonder if it is the doctor?"

He crept close to the door, but did not dare look in; yet could not go away. The silence was complete; he could only hear the thump of his own heart.

Curiosity, a horrible, fated curiosity, urged him nearer, drove him to put his eye to the crack. His gaze fell on a man leaning against the wall; he was dressed in a rich travelling dress, and wore neither peruke nor hat; his superb head was bare to the throat, and he was so dark as to appear almost of African blood; his features, however, were handsome and regular, though pallid and distorted by an expression of despair and ferocity.

A candle stuck into the neck of an empty bottle stood on the bare floor beside him and illuminated his sombre and magnificent figure, casting a grotesque shadow on the dark panelled wall.

At his feet lay a heap of white linen and saffron coloured brocade, with here and there the gleam of a red jewel.

Mr. Proudie stared at this; as his sight became accustomed to the waving lights and shades, he saw that he was gazing at a woman.

A dead woman.

She lay all dishevelled, her clothes torn, and her black hair fallen in a tangle—the man had his foot on the end of it, her head was twisted to one side, and there were dreadful marks on her throat.

Mr. John Proudie gave one sob and fled, with the swiftness and silence of utter terror, down the stairs, out into the street, and never ceased running until he reached home.

He had his key in his pocket, and let himself into his house, panting and sighing, utterly spent. He lit every light in the place, and sat down over the dying fire, his teeth chattering and his knees knocking together.

Like a man bewitched he sat staring into the fire,

raking the embers together, rubbing his hands and shivering, with his mind a blank for everything but that picture he had seen through the crack of the door in the empty house in Dean Street.

When his lamp and candles burnt out he drew the curtains and let in the colourless light of the November dawn; he began to move about the shop in a dazed, aimless way, staring at his jars, and scales, and pestle, and mortar, as if they were strange things that he had never seen before.

Now came the young apprentice with a muffler round his neck, whistling, and red with the cold; and as he took down the shutters and opened the dispensary, as the housekeeper came down and bustled about the breakfast, and there was a pleasant smell of coffee and bacon in the place, Mr. Proudie began to feel that the happenings of last night were a nightmare indeed that had no place in reality; he felt a cowardly and strong desire to say nothing about any of it, but to try to forget the blackamoor, the foreign lady, and that horrible scene in the upper chamber as figments of his imagination.

It was, however, useless for him to take cover in the refuge of silence—old Emily's first remark went to the root of the matter.

"Why, where is the doctor? He has never been so late before."

Where, indeed, was Francis Valletort?

With a groan Mr. Proudie dragged himself together; his body was stiff with fatigue, his mind amazed, and he wished that he could have got into bed and slept off all memories of the previous night.

But he knew the thing must be faced, and, snatching up his hat and coat, staggered out into the air, looking

by ten years an older man than the comfortable, quiet tradesman of last night.

He went to the nearest magistrate and told his story ; he could see that he was scarcely believed, but a couple of constables were sent with him to investigate the scene of last night's adventure, which, remarked the magistrate, should be easily found, since there was, it seemed, but one empty house in Dean Street.

The house was reached, the lock forced, and the place searched, room by room.

To Mr. Proudie's intense disappointment and amazement absolutely nothing was found ; the blue silk curtains had gone, as had the silver lamp the apothecary had dropped on the stairs in his headlong flight—in the upper chamber where he had stared through the crack of the door nothing was to be found—not a stain on the boards, not a mark on the wall ; dusty, neglected, desolate, the place seemed as if it had not been entered for years.

Mr. Proudie began to think that he had been the victim of a company of ghosts or truly bewitched. Then, inside the door, was found the pewter candlestick he had held mechanically in his hand when hurried from his shop, and as mechanically let fall here as he had afterwards let fall the lamp.

This proved nothing beyond the fact that he had been in the house last night ; but it a little reassured him that he was not altogether losing his wits.

The fullest inquiries were made in the neighbourhood, but without result. No one had seen the foreigners, no one had heard any noise in the house, and it would have been generally believed that Mr. Proudie had really lost his senses but for one fact—*Francis Valletort never returned!*

THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURE 55

There was, then, some mystery, but the solving of it seemed hopeless. No search or inquiries led to the discovery of the whereabouts of the young doctor, and as he was of very little importance and had no friends but the old apothecary, his disappearance was soon forgotten.

But Mr. Proudie, who seemed very aged, and, the neighbours said, strange since that November night, was not satisfied with any such reasoning. Day and night he brooded over the mystery, and hardly ever out of his mind was the figure of the young scholar in his shabby clothes, with the strange face of one doomed as he stood putting his heavy hair back from his face and staring at the little white ring on the old, polished counter.

As the years went by the rooms over the chemist shop were occupied by another lodger, and Mr. Proudie took possession of the poor effects of Francis Valletort—a few shabby clothes, a few shabby books—nothing of value or even of interest. But to the apothecary these insignificant articles had an intense if horrid fascination.

He locked them away in his cabinet, and when he was alone he would take them out and turn them over.

In between the thick, yellow leaves of a Latin book on medicine he found the thin leaves of what seemed to be the remains of a diary—fragments torn violently from their cover—mostly half-effaced and one torn across and completely blotted with ink.

There was no name, but Mr. Proudie recognized the handwriting of Francis Valletort. With pains and difficulty the dim old eyes of the apothecary made out the following entries :

"July 15th, 1687.—I saw her in the church to-day—Santa Maria Maggiore. He is her husband. A Calabrese." Several lines were blotted out, then came these words—"a man of great power; some mystery—his half-brother is an African . . . children of a slave . . . that such a woman . . .

"July 27th.—I cannot see how this is going to end; her sister is married to the brother—Vittoria, the name—*hers* Elena della Cxxxxxx.

"August 3rd.—She showed me the ring to-day. I think she has worn it since she was a child; it only fits her little finger." Again the manuscript was indecipherable; then followed some words scratched out, but readable—"As if I would not come to her without this token! But she is afraid of a trick. *He* is capable of anything—*they*, I mean; the brother is as his shadow. I think she trusts her sister. My little love!"

On another page were found further entries

"October 10th.—She says that if he discovered us he would kill her—us together. He told her he would kill her if she angered him; showed her a horse-collar, and said *they* would strangle her. My God, why do I not murder him? Carlo Fxxxxxx warned me to-day.

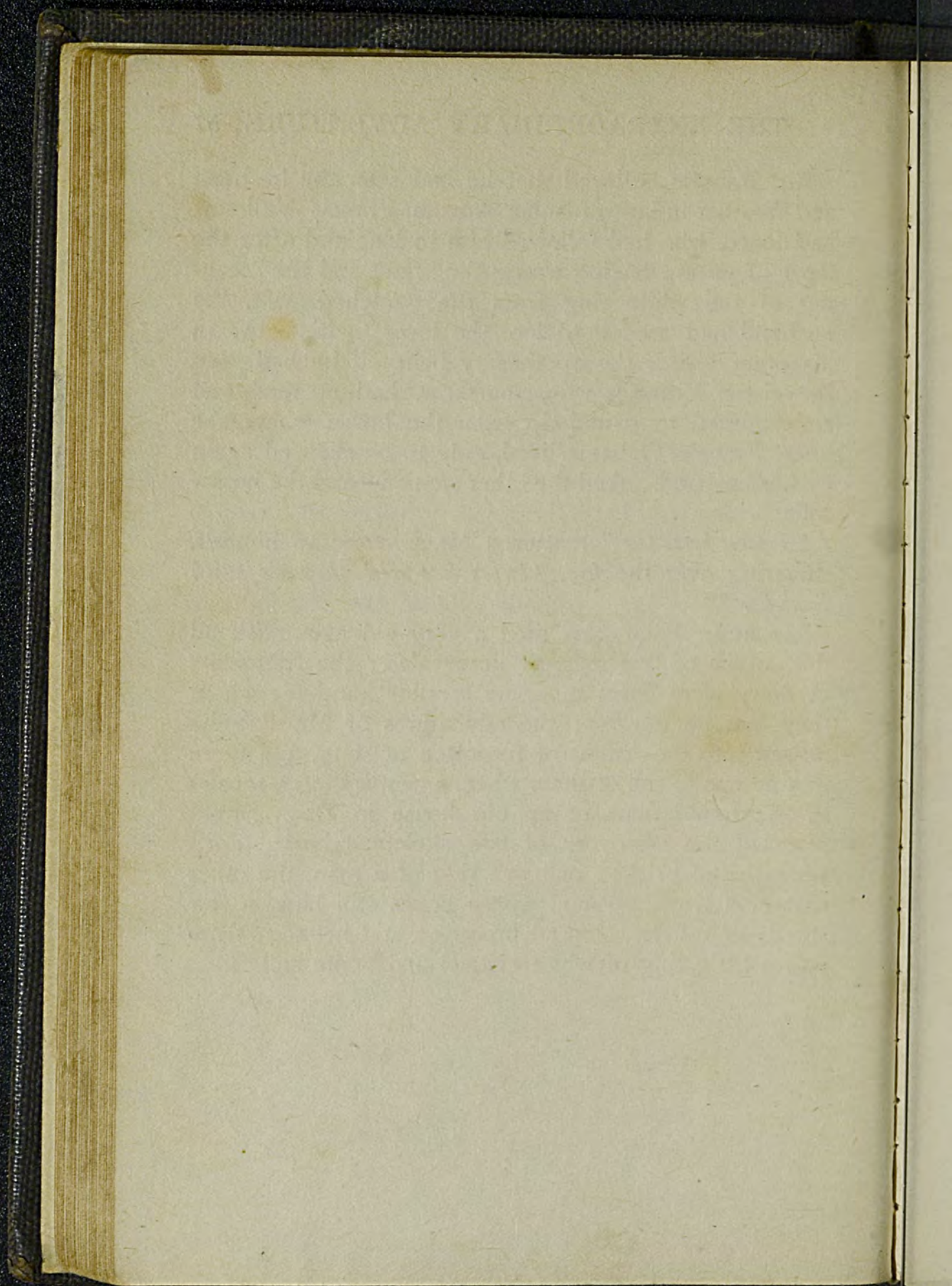
"October 29th.—I must leave Padua. For her sake—while she is safe—if she is in trouble she will send me the ring. I wonder why we go on living—it is over, the farewells."

Mr. Proudie could make out nothing more; he put down the pages with a shudder. To what dark and secret tale of wrong and passion did they not refer? Did they not hold the key to the events of that awful night?

Mr. Proudie believed that he had seen the husband and brother-in-law of some woman Francis Valletort had loved, who had followed him to England after the lapse of years; having wrung the secret and the meaning of the white ring from the wretched wife, the husband had used it to lure the lover to his fate; in his other visitor the apothecary believed he had seen the sister Vittoria, who, somehow, had escaped and endeavoured to gain help from the house where she knew Francis Valletort lived, only to be silenced again by her husband. And the other woman—and the horse-collar?

"I saw her, too," muttered Mr. Proudie to himself, shivering over the fire, "*but what did they do with Frank?*"

He never knew, and died a very old man, with all the details of this mystery unrevealed; the fragments of diary were burnt by some careless hand for whom they had no interest; the adventures of Mr. Proudie passed into the realms of forgotten mystery, and there was no one to tell of them when, a century later, repairs to the foundations of an old house in Dean Street revealed the discovery of two skeletons buried deep beneath the bricks; one was that of a man, the other that of a woman, round whose bones still hung a few shreds of saffron-coloured brocade; and between them was a little ring of white enamel and white stones.



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HEARTSEASE

ABOUT eleven o'clock at night on the 28th of August, 1696, the watchman on duty at the corner of Drury Lane and Queen Street was startled by a woman brushing past him at a run; he had the impression that she had come from the house just behind him, a respectable mansion of some importance.

He raised his lantern and turned its beams on the figure hastening away from him towards Lincoln's Inn Fields; it was a young gentlewoman decently habited, such a one as he had never seen alone after dark in this or any other neighbourhood of London, and he was minded to follow her, but that she appeared in no way discomposed or agitated; he thought that he had heard her laugh, as she passed him, in a contented manner.

"Belike she knows her own business best," he said to himself, thinking of elopements or clandestine meetings in the Fields, and so returned to his box at the corner.

His laggardly conduct was further induced by the weather, which was of a wildness seldom known at this time of year; tearing clouds obscured the moon, now in its first quarter, gusts of rain shook down the silent street, a wind fit to take a man off his feet raged from

the north; and there was no one abroad; even the Lane was empty.

The watchman, with his thick cape about him, and withdrawn into the shelter of his box, could not dismiss from his mind that slender figure.

He began to recall certain details that had made little impression at the time; first, she had had no cloak, or mantle, or hat, or gloves, nothing but a muslin cap tied under the chin, and a grey gown of some fine stuff, and a little apron of silvered silk; secondly, she had worn at her heart a great bunch of heartsease—purple, yellow, and white.

He turned his lantern on the house which he thought was the one that the young woman had come from; but now he admitted himself mistaken, for the house was closed and shuttered; he knew that it belonged to Mr. James Fortis, Member of Parliament for Guildford, and that the family had been away some time.

The watchman shivered back into his box, so that he could no longer see the street, and, being warm and comfortable, presently dozed a little.

It was but a short while before the violence of the wind disturbed him and he sat up, almost expecting the box to be blown about his head.

His lantern gleamed down an empty street; he raised it, and saw, with an unaccountable start, the figure of a man standing on the steps of Mr. Fortis' house.

The stranger, who had started violently when the lantern light fell on his face, recovered himself and spoke.

"It is all right, fellow," he said quietly. "I am Mr. Stephen Fortis."

He seemed in some considerable perturbation, and stood there with the wind and rain blowing on him as

if uncertain what to do, which air of agitation and hesitancy was foreign to this gentleman, who was a well-known lawyer and man of fashion.

"I thought the family was away, your honour," said the watchman, raising his voice against the storm.

"Everyone *is* away," replied Mr. Fortis hastily. "I am up from Guildford on business, and my brother lent me the house."

"There will be a servant here, then, sir?"

"There is no one."

"I thought I saw a young woman come from your house, sir; not that she could have been a servant——"

Mr. Fortis, who was a singularly handsome man, turned a face of such distress and alarm on the watchman that the latter was suddenly both suspicious and frightened.

"She did not come from this house," said Mr. Fortis. "I am alone and I have had no visitors; the creature you speak of was some lost wretch from the Lane or St. Giles—there are many about."

"Not on such a night as this, sir, and without a cloak—and this was a gentlewoman——"

Mr. Fortis interrupted.

"It has nothing to do with me," he said.

The watchman could say no more; before such a man as Mr. Stephen Fortis he could only bow, and he was lumbering away when a gust of wind blew aside Mr. Fortis' mantle and showed that he grasped something in his bare hand, a cluster of purple and yellow flowers.

"By God, sir," exclaimed the watchman, "that is what she wore on her heart!"

Mr. Fortis gave a stifled exclamation and then controlled himself.

"Come into the house," he said.

The man followed him into the hall, and then into the dining-room, where a couple of candles burnt.

On the table, near the candles, were two little piles of gold, an ink-horn, a quill, and some paper.

Mr. Fortis flung off his soaked beaver.

"I have good reasons," he said, "for keeping secret my presence in town. No wrong has been done or is intended. Take a couple of those gold pieces and hold your tongue."

The watchman saw no objection to this course; the intrigues of gentlemen were not part of his duty; he was stretching out dirty fingers for the money when he paused.

"There is blood on your left hand!" he exclaimed.

Mr. Fortis started.

"Throw down those flowers, sir, for God's sake!" cried the watchman, trembling.

Mr. Fortis obeyed, mechanically it seemed, and cast the crushed cluster of heartsease beside the gold pieces on the table.

They were fastened by a length of grey ribbon, dark and stiff with blood; Mr. Fortis' hand, wrist, ruffle, and shirt were alike stained.

"Oh, Heavens!" he cried. "What is this?"

"What indeed," exclaimed the watchman, "but evidence of some damnable crime against that poor creature—— Sir, you must help me look for the woman who wore that posy."

Mr. Fortis gave him a wild glance, then looked with loathing at his stained hand; he tore away the lace and flung it down, then wiped away the blood on palm and finger with an end of his rain-wet cloak.

"I know nothing of your wayfarer," he said. He

spoke rather wildly, and as if to himself. "Was ever man so persecuted and on the eve of the elections? My brother must not lose his seat through this——" He turned again to the watchman. "Take this money and begone."

But the fellow shook his head.

"Where did you get that posy, sir?"

"Faugh! A trick—a silly trick—it was thrust on me by a passer by——"

"Then that passer by knows something of that young woman, sir."

"Maybe—but I do not—you cannot prove that I do or that she was ever in this house—why, the whole thing may be a trick of your imagination—likely you were half-asleep or half-drunk——"

Mr. Fortis now spoke more with the usual assurance of a gentleman and the customary firmness of a man of law; but as he finished he fetched a little groan and turned aside as one pressed beyond bearing.

"It will show ill against you if you will not search with me, sir," said the watchman with clumsy persistence; he did not like the looks of the gentleman, and he put the cluster of heartsease into his greatcoat pocket, and Mr. Fortis, noticing this, started and muttered "Fool!" against himself for not destroying the hideous posy.

"Very well, I will come with you," he said desperately, "but it is near one o'clock now—where may she not have got in two hours?"

"Who said it was two hours since I saw her, sir?" demanded the watchman.

"Was ever a man so tormented?" cried Mr. Fortis frantically.

The watchman was now convinced that there was

some ugly mystery behind all this, and resolved to gain some credit for himself in the unravelling of it; the very position and fame of Mr. Stephen Fortis added zest to the affair.

"'Tis a wild night to go abroad for nothing," remarked the lawyer, as they closed the front door behind them.

"And you wet through once, sir," replied the watchman; "but maybe you were not thinking of the weather when you last went out."

Mr. Fortis cried out passionately at this insolence; but the fellow answered him—shouting between the volleys of the wind:

"Don't try—and slip away—Mr. Fortis—I know your name—and your residence."

The gentleman made no answer, and together they battled through the stormy night until they came to the corner of Wilde House, and there they paused to get breath under the low arcade.

"You are sure you would know her again?"

"Quite, sir; she had a very happy face."

"Happy? She looked happy?"

"Yes, sir, and she was hastening like one on a cheerful and important errand——"

"Then it was not she!" cried Mr. Fortis.

"Not who, sir?"

"Not——" Mr. Fortis checked himself. "If you had seen some pale, mad woman with melancholy in her countenance I might have known her—never mind, let us search for this happy creature."

The wind had fallen a little, and the moon now setting, sent a faint, vaporish light through the forlorn waste of clouds.

These singular companions faced the desolation of

Lincoln's Inn Fields and took an aimless road across the darkness.

The yellow splash of lantern light, moving uncertainly over the rough cobbles was noticed by a man crouching against the railings of one of the great mansions.

He came running forward.

"Watch, watch!" he cried. "Are you the watch?"

Mr. Fortis stepped back from the light and pulled his hat over his eyes.

"I am looking for a young woman," said the newcomer, who appeared to be an artisan of the better sort. "She is lodging with my wife in Holborn; she went out this evening and never came home. I thought she might be lost in the Fields, but there is neither light nor peace abroad to-night, and I can find nothing."

"We are on the same errand," said the watchman, "we are looking for a young gentlewoman—had she a grey dress and muslin cap?"

"That is she; have you seen her?"

"And had she," continued the watchman, "a bunch of heartsease at her heart?"

"She had, sir, she had bought them at Covent Garden this morning."

"Well," replied the watchman, "I have seen her, but that was a matter of over two hours ago."

The storm was dying away; a gentler wind cleared the loose clouds from the sky, here and there a star appeared; it no longer rained.

"Let us continue our search," said Mr. Fortis in a faint voice. He kept his face hidden.

Together the three traversed the great space of the open square, past the empty hackney stand, the deserted theatre, in and out the great trees whose branches still

shook and quivered with the violence of the tempest—until, on the farther side of the fields, finally, they found her, washed, by the force of wind and rain, against two of the posts of the footway, as a broken branch of flowers might be driven by cruel weather against the garden wall.

She was as wet as if she had been drowned, her skirts clinging to her limbs and stuck with mud and small stones, snapped twigs, and glistening leaves; her cap and hair together made one soaked twist on the stones beneath her; on her bosom was a red-stained rag; the same hue was washed over her rain-soaked clothes; her eyes, blue as summer, gazed up from a wan and childish face that the rain had washed free from every impurity, and that faced the inscrutable heavens with an expression of wild question and smiling agony for ever fixed there by the hand of Death.

The first to move was Mr. Fortis; he turned away with a terrible shudder and put his hand over his eyes.

The watchman bent over her and raised the scrap of linen that had been pressed to the welling wound on her heart.

"Just where she wore her posy," he muttered. "Who was she?" he asked the stranger.

"A young lady from Guildford," answered the man hoarsely.

"Well, then," said the watchman slowly, "Mr. Stephen Fortis will know her."

"Mr. Stephen Fortis!" cried the other. "Is he here? He is her murderer—there is none other on God's earth had cause to take her life!"

As with one impulse he and the watchman caught

at the wretched gentleman and dragged him near the body that lay in the beams of the lantern now set on the ground.

He struggled to get at his sword, but they gripped him firmly.

"As I live," he cried fiercely, in his desperation, "I am innocent. This will ruin my brother. He has many enemies. And I—I am but six weeks off my marriage day."

Before the day dawned the brother of the Member for Guildford was lodged in prison under a charge of murder.

As soon as the ghastly news had got hot-foot through the town, before even the brother or friends of the accused man could rally to his defence, a lady attended only by her maid came to see the unhappy gentleman in his prison. It was his betrothed, the daughter of the Earl of Thanet, Lady Sarah Pryde; she had come without the consent of her parents, nay, against their wishes, but in the first confusion and horror of the news they had been powerless to resist her passionate resolve to stand by her lover.

She was not allowed to see the prisoner nor to send any letter or message.

White-lipped and dry-eyed she hastened to the mansion of Mr. James Fortis.

The Member for Guildford had just arrived in London and received the lady in the parlour, where his brother had spoken the night before with the watchman.

He was as pallid, as agitated as she, and had not so much control.

"I am ruined," he burst out, "ruined! Those damned Tories will make this cost me my seat!"

He saw her desperate look and was instantly remorseful.

"My lady, my lady, you had best keep out of this," he cried. "It is no story for you."

Slight and fragile-looking in her blue muslin morning gown, a dark cloak flung about her shoulders, and her black locks falling in disorder about her agonized face, she fronted James Fortis, more serene than he in her greater love and greater faith.

"Tell me all you know," she urged. "Who was—this most unfortunate gentlewoman?"

Mr. Fortis commanded himself as best he could.

"So far there is no mystery, my lady," he answered. "She was a Quakeress of Guildford—a quiet creature of uneventful life—about twenty-seven years of age."

"Tell me what else you know—tell me quickly. Do you not see that I must know everything—that I may discover the truth and save him?"

She spoke with a dignity and power that overawed Mr. Fortis' shaken soul.

"What do I know?" he answered. "Next to nothing! She was missed the day before yesterday, did not return from her usual walk—they found she had taken the mail coach from Guildford to London—the guard remembers her in a grey cardinal. It was found here last night."

At this Lady Sarah shuddered and took a step back from the table.

"You must not say that," she exclaimed, "it could not be the same—go on," she added, controlling herself. "What did this poor creature do when she got to London?"

"Hannah Power—that is her name—went straight to the lodgings of a Mrs. Garnet, in High Holborn,

the wife of a saddler, formerly of Guildford; she had stayed there before, with her mother, when they had come to London to see the celebrations for the fall of Namur."

"And these people," cried Lady Sarah, quickly, "seeing this young woman alone and without luggage, did they not communicate with Guildford?"

"Would to God they had! Instead, they let her mope in her chamber; she only went out in the morning, when she returned with a root of heartsease which she had bought at Covent Garden; in the evening she went out, saying that she had an appointment at Lincoln's Inn Fields, and that it was a matter of life and death."

"And they let her go—alone?"

"Yes. The next thing is, the uncle appears, having come up from Guildford after the runaway, who has been traced to London. They went out to search for her—it was the saddler, Matthew Garnet, who met Stephen and the watchman in the Fields—and found her."

"Who are these Garnets?" cried Lady Sarah. "They play a strange part, never telling anyone the girl is with them, letting her out alone, after noticing she was distraught!"

"I do not trust them," replied Mr. Fortis. "At the last election this fellow was the agent of Pryor, the Tory who tried for my seat, an unscrupulous knave, deep in obligation to his patron, who had saved him from a hanging, to my thinking."

"Why, then," cried the lady eagerly, "that is something to go upon."

The Member for Guildford answered almost sharply in his deep distress:

"I fear it is nothing at all; they can prove the truth of their tale, and the Pryors have nothing to do with Hannah Power."

"Do you know the Powers?" she asked.

"Nay, by name and repute only; they are not of our station, and belong to the faction of the Pryors."

"Then Stephen did not know this poor soul?" cried the lady, with a great hope beaming in her heart.

"He knew her," replied Mr. Fortis reluctantly. "A few years ago she came into a little property from an aunt; the charge of this was in Stephen's hands, he had to call at her house to deliver her her moneys. I never heard that he saw her at any other time, unless it was by chance in the streets."

"Then why should there be any suspicion whatever on Stephen?" cried the brave-hearted girl.

"Why?" answered Mr. Fortis in despair. "What of the watchman's tale—the bunch of heartsease in his hand, the grey cardinal found here, and the handkerchief with 'S. F.' on it found on her bosom?"

Lady Sarah had not heard this detail before; she turned faint and could no longer stand, but sank into the nearest chair, her hands clasped tightly in her lap.

Before either could speak the Earl of Thanet was ushered into their presence.

He had come to claim his daughter—an angry and an outraged man.

"Sarah, you must come home with me; matters are beyond your meddling."

She rose but shook her head.

"You cannot keep me out of this, my lord. I am to be Stephen's wife."

"That is yet to be seen," answered the wrathful Earl.

Now Mr. Fortis was roused to his brother's defence, and to championing that honour which was as dear to him as his own.

"My lord, my lord!" he cried. "Beware how you are harsh or unjust! You, who were willing to give your daughter to my brother, ought to be the last to credit the foul aspersion cast on him."

The Earl was something ashamed; he stood fumbling at his sword hilt and staring at the floor.

"What is your brother's tale?" he asked.

"What should it be but the simple truth?" replied Mr. Fortis, with an expression of great uneasiness that belied the confidence of his words. "He denies everything. He had come up to town, as you know, my lord, on business connected with his marriage—and was lodging at the 'Black Bull,' Holborn."

"And what was he doing here last night?" demanded the Earl sharply.

"He came to get some papers I had asked him to send me to Guildford—the money on the table was some loose coin he had found in my desk; he went out to buy some twine to do up the parcel."

"At that hour of the night—in that weather?" asked my lord sarcastically.

Mr. Fortis, pallid to the lips, stuck doggedly to his story.

"The hour had escaped him—his mind was full of many things."

"And the bunch of flowers?"

"They were thrust into his hand by a poor creature whom he met in the Fields; he had given her a coin. Till the watchman called out, he had not noticed what he was carrying."

"Ah! The grey cardinal?"

Mr. Fortis smiled sadly.

"I see, my lord, that you have made yourself master of all points against my poor brother."

"I have spoken with the lawyer in whose hands the case is, and gone through all the evidence."

"The grey cardinal," said Mr. Fortis, with a quivering lip, "is not that worn by Hannah Power; it belongs to my wife."

At this lie Lady Sarah gave a shudder of anguish. The Earl broke out into bitter anger.

"And is this the best tale you can put up between you? Good God, if you get a jury of fools there is not one who will believe you!"

Such was also the private opinion of Mr. Fortis, but he stood gallantly to his weak defences.

"There has never been a breath against my brother, my lord," he said proudly, "even a hint of scandal—even in his college days; he has always been respected and admired. How should anyone dare to suspect him of this monstrous crime?"

The Earl was not convinced.

"He will find great difficulty in clearing himself," he remarked dryly. "Why, the truth is clear on the face of it! Had he not seen her many times in private? Was not she a simple woman and he a likely man?"

Quivering in every fibre Lady Sarah turned to her father.

"My lord, what do you mean?"

"Come, my dear," he said very kindly, "you must let me take you home."

But she turned on him wildly.

"No! I belong to Stephen—I am going to Stephen—you must take me to him. I must speak with him."

In the end her frantic insistence prevailed; the Earl and Mr. Fortis conducted her to the prison and obtained permission for her to see Stephen Fortis in private.

Inside the cell where the accused man was confined, the two young people, each pale and haggard as death, clung desperately together, each forgetful, in the first few moments, of everything save the overwhelming emotion of love.

She was the first to regain her self-control; panting, pallid, and quivering, she lay in his arms (alone she could hardly stand on her feet), and begged him (for her sake!) to have strength and courage.

"Tell me the truth," she entreated. "What are you concealing?"

"Have you not heard what I told James?" he groaned.

"No one believes that, not even my father, Stephen."

She drew away from him, struggling for composure and courage.

"Child, are you so sure the truth will set me free?"

The glory of her great love and loyalty shone in her beautiful eyes.

"Quite sure," she said.

He covered his face in his hands for a moment, then looked at her straightly.

"The truth," he answered hoarsely, "would damn me in any eyes but yours, Sarah. I did meet Hannah Power last night."

"Oh!"

"She came to James' house; that was her cardinal they found."

Lady Sarah went up to him and rested her head, with complete trust and faith, against his shoulder.

"Tell me all," she whispered.

"I do not know that I have a right, Sarah. And yet I must, and you will think meanly of me for this telling. God knows I had never spoken but for this extremity!"

She clasped him closer, and he held to her as he spoke.

"This unhappy gentlewoman loved me," he said faintly. "I think she was in a melancholy, not in her right mind to so pursue one who cared not for her. I—I did what I could. It is a position above all others intolerable for a man. I avoided her; she filled me with much compassion and some repulsion. God forgive me! She tormented me. Every time there was some excuse to fetch me into her presence and to argue with me her fond delusion that we must love each other. I often thought this passion was a madness, and that she might do some mischief, but I was the person above all others who could not betray her state."

"Alas, poor creature!" murmured Lady Sarah.

"I saw her as seldom as I could. I would not have seen her at all but for fear she would commit some open folly. She used to write to me when I was in town, letters no woman in her senses would have written. When she heard of our betrothal she came at once to town, and wrote to me asking me to see her for the last time. She said it must be in the evening, near Holborn. I made the appointment at my brother's house."

She pressed his arm, strengthening him with her courage.

"I decided this must be the end of everything," he resumed. "I took with me some money due to her and all her papers—she came, all distraught. I noticed

that she wore a cluster of pansies—heartsease, as the old women call them. Once I had told her that I admired these flowers. She bade me look at them, telling me that they stood for ‘penseroso,’ or thought. I put her off this theme, and told her that she must, for her own fair fame, find another man of business. She became so stormy that I doubted more than ever if she were in full possession of her wits, and with all the force I was able to command I bade her leave this folly that would be her ruin. Then she became so calm that I had good hopes of her finally seeing reason.”

“It was but the calm of despair,” murmured Lady Sarah.

“But I—fool that I was, did not see it. I was half-distracted myself. She made me one request, asking if I would step out at midnight as far as Wilde House portico, where a messenger of hers would meet me and tell me she was safely on her way home. ‘For I know,’ she said, ‘that you will have no peace of mind while I am in town, and I intend to take the night mail to Guildford.’ She was so importunate that I agreed to this fantasy of hers, and she broke from me and rushed out into the rain, leaving behind her mantle, the money, and papers. At midnight I went out and waited under the lamp at the corner of the Fields. A woman wrapped in a heavy shawl accosted me and asked if I were Mr. Stephen Fortis; as I said ‘Yes’ she thrust the flowers into my hand, and disappeared into the dark. I half-saw, half-guessed that this was the posy lately worn by Hannah Power, and that this was her manner of saying farewell. As I returned to the house I met the watchman, whom—God help me!—I had forgotten. The rest you know.”

"She slew herself," said Lady Sarah, in a low tone. "And the Garnets are helping the Powers and the Pryors to fix a crime on you. But tell me, my dear, my love, your handkerchief was found on her breast."

He started.

"I did not know that! But she had one of mine I lent her to tie up a wound on her dog's foot in Guildford once."

"And her letters—did you keep any of her letters?" asked Lady Sarah.

"Nay, in compassion, I destroyed them all."

The girl shivered.

"Then there is nothing but your word for this?"

"Nothing at all," he answered with a sad smile. "And probably you are the only person who will believe me."

So indeed it proved; the extraordinary tale of Stephen Fortis was received with general incredulity; the Powers furiously denied that Hannah was capable of the conduct imputed to her by the prisoner, and even his friends held that his tale had further damaged a weak cause.

No influence could stem the tide of popular feeling. The verdict at the inquest was "Wilful Murder against Stephen Fortis."

Three days before the date appointed for his execution, Stephen Fortis asked his betrothed to bring him his little Bible that he had left with his other effects in his chamber at the "Black Bull."

These things, after having been searched by the lawyer's agents, had been delivered to Mr. James Fortis; the Bible was found in the open portable desk that had been on the table in the bed-chamber.

The unfortunate lady was clasping it to her bosom

with tears of utter anguish, when a thick letter, twice sealed, fell out on the floor at her feet.

This, which had never been opened, was addressed to:

“STEPHEN FORTIS, Esquire,”

at the Black Bull Inn, High Holborn, and had been sent by the post.

The lady took this to Mr. James Fortis, who went with her to the Black Bull Inn, and there the waiter was found who remembered the arrival of the letter on the 29th of August and having taken it upstairs and put it with the other papers on the gentleman's little desk; the arrest not then having been heard of, afterwards, in the excitement, he had forgotten all about it; it must have got inside the shagreen case which held the Bible, and been overlooked by the constables in their search.

The letter was opened before a magistrate.

It was from Hannah Power, dated from High Holborn, August 28th.

“My own dear love—I may call you that now, and you will not frown, for when you read this I shall not be able to vex you any more. You have been never kind to me—always chiding, and I love you so! Why could you not have loved me a little? I will not live to see another woman your wife. When I leave you to-night I shall be happy, for I shall be nearing the end of my sufferings. You will see me calm, I shall tell you I am going home—’twill not be to Guildford.

“I have stolen one of Matthew Garnet's knives from his shop—’tis wrapped in your handkerchief that you left behind the day you dressed poor Roreo's foot. I

bought some pansies this morning—belike you have forgotten how you commended them once?

“’Twill be a wild night, and I must die in the dark—but ’tis a sweet pain that ends a long agony. Oh, heart, how I have suffered! I have loved you beyond reason and beyond hope—and now beyond despair. When this reaches you I shall be dead—perhaps they will have found me. Will you see that they compose me decently for all I was a suicide? Do not come to see me—you always hated me, but you will be sorry, and I do not want your pity.

“I wonder why I want to see you again? I think it is because I should not have the courage unless I came straight from your scorn. My head hurts to-day, and I cannot remember things. Oh, God pity me!

“HANNAH POWER.”

After the discovery of Hannah Power’s letter, the Garnets were frightened into a full confession.

The woman had been taken into the wretched girl’s confidence as regards her feelings towards Mr. Fortis, and had perfectly understood from her wild behaviour and words she let fall, that she was going to visit him that evening, and afterwards take her life.

She had spoken to her husband, who had callously told her to let things take their course; he was an agent of Mr. Pryor’s, and would be paid heavily for anything that would injure the Member for Guildford.

Fate played into their hands; soon afterwards Hannah Power returned, gave a letter to Mrs. Garnet and begged her to deliver it to Mr. Stephen Fortis, who would be under the portico of Wilde House at midnight, and then ran out again into the wet.

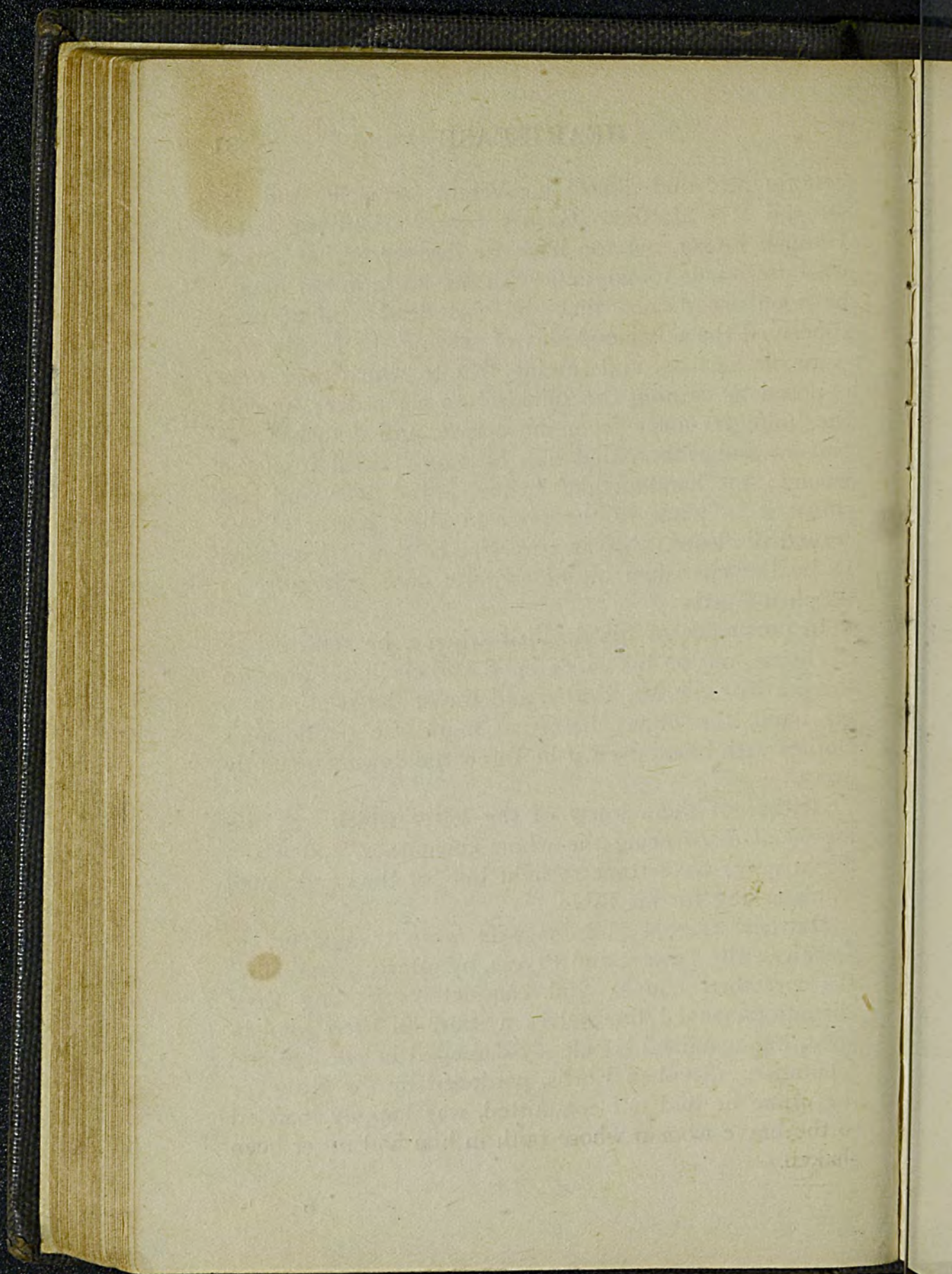
The miserable couple opened the letter, found it to

contain wild and almost incoherent farewells, and destroyed it; Matthew Garnet now hurried out after Hannah Power, but too late; he discovered her as she was afterwards found, only with the knife in her hand; he soon ascertained that she was dead, and at once conceived the villainous idea of serving the family who were his patrons, and ruining that to which they were opposed by turning the suicide into a murder; he cast the knife far away from the corpse, and detached the pansies and ribbon that had become stained from the wound; the handkerchief he had found near, and had thrust it in place of the posy in sheer horror at the wound disclosed; it was pure chance that it happened to be the cherished bit of cambric once belonging to Stephen Fortis.

In pursuance of his devilish scheme, he returned to his house, put on his wife's hood and cloak, returned to the portico, saw Mr. Fortis, and thrust the pansies into his hand, the object being to mark the gentleman's clothes with blood even if he threw the flowers instantly away.

Neither of them knew of the letter which was the means of discovering the whole conspiracy, and which might never have come to light but for the condemned man's asking for his Bible.

Matthew Garnet and his wife were transported to Jamaica; the Powers and Pryors, by utterly abandoning the wretched couple, and completely denying their allegations, saved themselves a share in their punishment, but remained hopelessly damaged in prestige and reputation. Stephen Fortis, pardoned by the King for the crime he had not committed, was happily married to the brave woman whose faith in him had never been shaken.



THE HOUSEKEEPER

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THE HOUSEKEEPER

MR. ROBERT SEKFORDE, a rather damaged man of fashion, entered, with a lurching step, his mansion near the tavern of the "Black Bull," High Holborn. He was still known as "Beau Sekforde," and was still dressed in the extreme of the fashion of this year 1710, with wide brocade skirts, an immense peruke, and a quantity of lace and paste ornaments that were nearly as brilliant as diamonds.

About Mr. Sekforde himself was a good deal of this spurious gorgeousness; from a little distance he still looked the magnificent man he once had been, but a closer view showed him ruddled with powder and rouge like a woman, heavy about the eyes and jaw, livid in the cheeks; a handsome man yet, but one deeply marked by years of idleness, good living, and the cheap dissipations of a nature at once brutal and effeminate. In the well-shaped features and dark eyes there was not a contour or a shadow that did not help towards the presentment of a type vicious and worthless; yet he had an air of breeding, of gallantry and grace that had hitherto never failed to win him facile admiration and help him over awkward places in his career. This air was also spurious—spurious as the diamonds at his throat and in his shoe-buckles; he was not even of gentle birth; the obscurity that hung round his origin

was proof of the shame he felt at the dismal beginning of a career that had been so brilliant.

He entered his mansion, that was modest but elegant, and called for candles to be brought into his study.

Taking off slowly his white, scented gloves, he stared thoughtfully at his plump, smooth hands, and then at the walnut desk scattered with silver and ebony stand dishes, pens and taper-holders, and a great number of little notes on gilt-edged and perfumed papers.

There was a great many others, neither gilt-edged nor perfumed; Mr. Sekforde knew that these last were bills as surely as he knew the first were insipid invitations to rather third-rate balls and routs.

Everything in Mr. Sekforde's world was becoming rather third-rate now.

He looked round the room desperately with that ugly glance of defiance which is not courage but cowardice brought to bay.

Nothing in the house was paid for; and his credit would not last much longer; this had been a last venture to float his shaky raft on the waters of London society; he could foresee himself going very comfortably to the bottom.

Unless——

Unless he could again carry off some successful "coup" at cards; and this was unlikely; he was too well known now.

Every resource that could, at any pinch, afford means of livelihood to an unscrupulous rogue and yet permit him to move among the people on whom he preyed, had already been played by Mr. Sekforde.

The sound of the opening door caused him to look up; he dreaded duns, and was not sure of the unpaid servants.

But it was his wife who entered; at sight of her, Beau Sekforde cursed in a fashion that would have surprised his genteel admirers, over whose tea-tables he languished so prettily.

"Oh, pray keep civil," said the lady, in a mincing tone.

She trailed to the fireplace and looked discontentedly at the logs that were falling into ashes.

"The upholsterer came," she added, "with a bill for near a thousand guineas—I had difficulty in sending him away; is nothing in the house paid for?"

"Nothing."

She looked at him with a contempt that was more for herself than for him; she was quite callous and heartless; a sense of humour, a nice appreciation of men and things alone prevented her from being odious.

"Lord!" she smiled. "To live to be fooled by Beau Sekforde!"

She was a Countess in her own right; her patent was from Charles II. and explained her career; she still had the air of a beauty, and wore the gowns usually affected by loveliness, but she was old with the terrible old age of a wanton, soulless woman.

Her reputation was bad even for her type; she had cheated at everything from love to cards, and no tenderness or regrets had ever softened her ugly actions. At the end of her career as presiding goddess of a gambling saloon she had married Robert Sekforde, thinking he had money or at least the wits to get it, and a little betrayed by his glib tongue that had flattered her into thinking her beauty not lost, her charm not dead, only to find him an adventurer worse off than herself, who had not even paid for the clothes in which

he had come to woo her ; her sole satisfaction was that he had also been deceived.

He had thought her the prudent guardian of the spoils of a lifetime ; instead, selfishness had caused her to scatter what greed had gained, and for her too this marriage had been seized as a chance to avert ruin.

Haggard and painted, a dark wig on her head, false pearls round her throat, and a dirty satin gown hanging gracefully round a figure still upright and elegant, she stared at the fire.

"We shall have to disappear," she remarked dryly.

He looked at her with eyes of hate.

"You must have some money," he said bluntly.

Avarice, the vice of old age, flashed in her glance as jealousy would have gleamed in that of a younger woman.

"What little I have I need," she retorted. "The man has turned simple." She grinned at her reflection in the glass above the fireplace.

"Well, leave me, then," he said bitterly ; could he be rid of her, he felt it would gild his misfortune.

But my lady had come to the end of all her admirers ; she could not even any longer dazzle boys with the wicked glory of her past ; she had no one save Mr. Sekforde, and she meant to cling to him ; he was a man, and twenty years younger than herself ; he ought, she thought, to be useful.

Besides, this woman who had never had a friend of her own sex, shuddered to think of the last loneliness it would be to live without a man attached to her—better the grave, and of that she had all the horror of the true atheist.

"You talk folly," she said with a dreadful ogle. "I shall remain."

"Then you will starve, my lady!" he flung out violently.

"Oh, fie, sir, one does not starve."

He could not endure to look at her, but staring at the desk, began to tear up the notes before him.

"Will you not go to a mask to-night?" she asked querulously.

"I have no money to pay for a chair," he sneered.

"We might win something at cards."

"People are very wary."

"You were very clever at tricking me," remarked the Countess, "cannot you trick someone else, Mr. Sekforde?"

He wheeled round on her with concentrated venom.

"Ah, madam, if I were a bachelor——"

She quailed a little before his wrath, but rallied to reply with the spirit of the woman who had been spoilt by a king:

"You think you are so charming? Wealthy matches are particular. *Look in the glass, sir; your face is as ruined as your reputation.*"

He advanced on her and she began to shriek in a dreadful fashion; the town woman showed through the airs of the great lady.

"I'll call the watch!" she shrilled.

He fell back with a heavy step and stood glaring at her.

"A pair of fools," said my lady bitterly.

Then her cynical humour triumphed over her disgust.

"Your first wife would smile to see us now," she remarked.

Beau Sekforde turned to her a face suddenly livid.

"What do you know about my first wife?" he demanded fiercely.

"Nothing at all," replied my lady. "You kept her rather in the background, did you not? But one can guess."

Mr. Sekforde raged; he loathed any reference to the woman whom he had married in his obscurity, and who had been his drudge in the background through all his shifting fortunes; her worn face, her wagging tongue, her rude manners, had combined to make the thorn in the rose-bed of his softest days.

He had hated her and believed that she had hated him; she was a Scotchwoman, a shrew, thrifty, honest, plain, and a good housekeeper; she had always made him very comfortable at home, though she had shamed him on the rare occasions when she had forced him to take her abroad.

She had died only a few months before his present marriage.

"One can guess," repeated the Countess, showing teeth dark behind her rouged lips in a ghastly grin, "that you made her life very pleasant."

He sprang up and faced her, a big, heavy bully for all his satins and French peruke.

"Oh," she shrilled, frightened but defiant, "you look like murder."

He turned away sharply and muttered some hideous words under his breath.

"What are you going to do?" asked my lady, with a quizzical glance round the tawdry splendour that had been hired to lure her into marriage, and that now would be so shortly rent away.

Beau Sekforde controlled his wrath against the terrible woman who had deceived him into losing his last chance of retrieving ruin.

"Where are the servants?" he asked.

"All gone. I think they have taken some of the plate and all the wine. There is some food downstairs."

Mr. Sekforde had seen it as he came up; a hacked piece of fat ham on a dirty dish, a stained cloth and a jagged loaf had been laid out on the dining-room table.

"I have had my dinner," remarked the Countess.

Her husband rudely left the room; he was hungry and forced to search for food, but the remembrance of the meal waiting nauseated him; he was delicate in his habits, and as he descended the stairs he thought of his late wife—she had been a wonderful housekeeper—even in poverty she had never failed to secure comfort.

As he opened the door of the dining-room he was agreeably surprised.

Evidently one of the servants had remained after all.

The hearth had been swept and a neat fire burnt pleasantly; a clean cloth was on the table, and the service was set out exactly; a fresh loaf, butter, wine, fruit, a dish of hot meat, of cheese, of eggs stood ready; there was wine and brightly polished glasses.

"I did not know," Mr. Sekforde muttered, "that any of the hussies in this house could work like this."

He admired the spotless linen, the brilliant china, the gleaming glasses, the fresh and appetizing food, and ate and drank with a pleasure that made him forget for the moment his troubles.

One thing only slightly disturbed his meal; among the dishes was a plate of goblin scones; they were of a peculiar shape and taste, and he had never known anyone make them but the late Jane Sekforde.

When he had finished he rang the bell for candles, for the short November day was closing in.

There was no answer.

Surprised and slightly curious to see the servant who had been so deft, Mr. Sekforde went to the head of the basement stairs and shouted lustily; still there was no reply.

He returned to the dining-room; the candles were lit and set precisely on the table.

Mr. Sekforde ran upstairs to his wife.

"Who is in this house?" he asked in a tone of some agitation.

The Countess was by the fire, seated on a low chair; before her on the floor was a wheel of playing cards from which she was telling her fortune.

"Who is in the house?" she sneered. "A drunken ruffian."

Misery was wearing thin the courtier-like manner from both of them.

"You old, wicked jade," he replied, "there is someone hiding in this house."

She rose, scattering the cards with the worn toe of her little satin shoe.

"There is no one in the house," she said, "not a baggage of them all would stay. I am going out. I want lights and amusement. Your house is too dull, Mr. Sekforde."

With this speech and an air that was a caricature of the graces of a young and beautiful woman she swept out of the room.

Even her own maid, a disreputable Frenchwoman, had left her, having moved out of the impending crash; but my lady had never lacked spirit; she attired herself, put all the money she had in her bosom, and left

the house to pass the evening with one of her cronies, who kept an establishment similar to that which she had been forced to abandon.

Even the departure of her vindictive presence did not sweeten for Beau Sekforde the house that was the temple of his failure.

He glared at the furniture that should have been paid for by bills on his wife's fortune, and went to his chamber.

He, too, knew haunts, dark and gleaming, where health and money, wits and time might be steadily consumed, and where one who was bankrupt in all these things might be for the time tolerated if he had a flattering and servile tongue and an appearance that lent some dignity to mean vices and ignoble sins.

He found a fire in his bed-chamber, the curtains drawn, his cloak, evening rapier, and gloves put ready for him, the candles lit on his dressing-table.

He dressed himself rather soberly and went downstairs.

The meal was cleared away in the dining-room, the fire covered, the chairs put back in their places.

Beau Sekforde swore.

"If I had not seen her fastened down in her coffin I should have sworn that Jane was in this house," he muttered, and his blood-shot eyes winced a little from the gloom of the empty house.

Again he went to the head of the basement stairs and listened.

He could hear faintly yet distinctly the sound of someone moving about—the sound of dishes, of brisk footsteps, of clattering irons.

"Some wench *has* remained," he said uneasily, but

he did not offer to investigate those concealed kitchen premises.

That evening his companions found him changed—a quiet, sullen, dangerous mood was on him; they could easily understand this, as tales of the disaster of his marriage had already leaked abroad.

But something deeper and more terrible even than his almost accomplished ruin was troubling Robert Sekforde.

He returned very late to the mansion in High Holborn; he had drunk as much wine as his friends would pay for, and there was little of the elegant gallant about the heavy figure in the stained coat with wig awry and the flushed, swollen face, who stumbled into the wretched place he named home with unconscious sarcasm.

A light stood ready for him in the hall; he took this up and staggered upstairs, spilling the candle-grease over his lace ruffles.

Half-way up he paused, suddenly wondering who had thought to leave the light.

"Not my lady wife—not my royal Countess," he grinned.

Then a sudden pang of horror almost sobered him. Jane had never forgotten to put a candle in the hall.

He paused, as if expecting to hear her shrill, nagging voice.

"You're drunk," he said to himself fiercely; "she is dead, dead, *dead*."

He went upstairs.

The fire in his room was bright, the bed stood ready, his slippers and bedgown were warming, a cup of posset stood steaming on the side-table.

Mr. Sekforde snatched up his candle and hurried to the room of the Countess.

He violently entered and stood confronting her great bed with the red damask hangings.

With a shriek she sat up; her cheeks were still rouged, the false pearls dangled in her ears, the laced gown was open on her skinny throat; a cap with pink ribbons concealed her scant grey hair.

She flung herself, with claw-like hands, on an embroidered purse on the quilt, and thrust it under her pillow; it contained her night's winnings at cards.

"Have you come to rob me?" she screamed.

Terror robbed her of all dignity; she crouched in the shadows of the huge bed, away from the red light cast on her dreadful face by the candle her husband held.

Beau Sekforde was not thinking of money now, and her words passed unheeded.

"Who is in this house?" he demanded.

"You are mad," she said, a little recovering her composure, but keeping her hands very firmly on the purse beneath the pillow; "there is no one in this house."

"Did *you* put a candle for me and prepare my room and light the fire and place the posset?"

He spoke thickly and leant against the bed-post; the candle, now almost guttered away, sent a spill of grease on the heavy quilt.

"You are drunk, you monstrous man!" screamed my lady. "If you are not away instantly I'll put my head out of the window and screech the neighbourhood up!"

Beau Sekforde, regarding her with dull eyes, remained at his original point.

"There was someone in the kitchen this afternoon," he insisted. "I heard sounds——"

"Rats," said my lady; "the house is full of 'em."

A look of relief passed over the man's sodden features.

"Of course, rats," he muttered.

"What else could it be?" asked the Countess, sufficiently impressed by his strange manner momentarily to forget her grievance against him.

"What else?" he repeated; then suddenly turned on her with fury, lurching the candle into her face.

"Could rats have set *this* for me?" he shouted.

The Countess shrank back; when agitated her head trembled with incipient palsy, and now it trembled so that the false pearls rattled hollow against her bony neck.

"You will fire the bed-curtains!" she shrilled desperately.

He trembled with a loathing of her that was like a panic fear of fury.

"You time-foundered creature!" he cried. "You bitter horror! And 'twas for *you* I did it!"

She sprang to her knees in the bed, her hands crooked as if ready for his face; there was nothing left now of the fine dame nurtured in courts, the beauty nursed in the laps of princes. She had reverted to the wench of Drury Lane, screaming abuse from alley to alley.

"If you are disappointed, what about me?" she shrieked. "Have I not tied myself to a low, ugly fool?"

He stepped back from her as if he did not understand her, and, muttering, staggered back into his own room.

There he lit all the candles, piled up the fire with more fuel, glanced with horror at the bed, flung off his coat and wig, and settled himself in the chair with arms before the fire to sleep.

The Countess, roused and angered, could sleep no more.

She rose, flung on a chamber-robe of yellow satin lined with marten's fur, that was a relic of her court days and threadbare and moth-eaten in places, though giving the effect of much splendour.

Without striking a light she went cautiously out into the corridor, saw the door of her husband's room ajar, a bright glow from it falling across the darkness, and crept steadily in.

He was, as she had supposed, in an intoxicated stupor of sleep by the fire.

His head had sunk forward on the stained and untied lace cravat on his breast; his wigless head showed fat and shaven and grey over the temples, his face was a dull purple, and his mouth hung open.

His great frame was almost as loose as that of a man newly dead, his hands hung slack, and his chest heaved with his noisy breathing. My lady was herself a horrid object, but that did not prevent her giving him a glance of genuine disgust.

"Beau Sekforde indeed!" she muttered.

She put out all the candles save two on the dressing-table, found the coat her husband had flung off, and began going swiftly through the pockets.

He had been, as she had hoped, fortunate at cards that night; he was indeed, like herself, of a type who seldom was unfortunate, since he only played with fools or honest men, neither of whom had any chance against the peculiar talents of the sharper.

The Countess found sundry pieces of gold and silver, which she knotted up in her handkerchief with much satisfaction.

She knew that nothing but money would ever be able to be of any service to her in this world.

Pleased with her success, she looked round to see if

there were anything else of which she could despoil her husband.

Keeping her cunning old eyes constantly on him, she crept to the dressing-table and went over the drawers and boxes.

Most of the ornaments that she turned out glittered and gleamed heavily in the candle-light. But she knew that they were as false as the pearls trembling in her own ears; one or two things, however, she added to the money in the handkerchief, and she was about to investigate further when a little sound, like a cough, caused her to look sharply round.

The room was full of warm shadows, the fire was sinking low and only cast a dim light on the heavy, sleeping figure on the hearth, while the candle-sticks on the dressing-table served only to illuminate the bent figure of the Countess in her brilliant wrap.

As she looked round she found herself staring straight at the figure of a woman, who was observing her from the other side of the bed.

This woman was dressed in a grey tabinet fashioned like the dress of an upper servant. Her hair was smoothly banded, and her features were pale and sharp; her hands, that she held rather awkwardly in front of her, were rough and work-worn.

Across one cheek was a long scratch.

The Countess dropped her spoils; she remembered her husband's words that she had taken for the babbling of a drunkard.

So there *was* someone in the house.

"How dare you?" she quavered, and in a low tone, for she did not wish to rouse her husband. "How dare you come here?"

Without replying the woman moved across to the

sleeping man and looked down at him with an extraordinary expression of mingled malice and protection, as if she would defend him from any evil save that she chose to deal herself.

So sinister was this expression and the woman's whole attitude that the Countess was frightened as she never had been in the course of her wicked life.

She stood staring; the handkerchief, full of money and ornaments, dropped on the dressing-table unheeded.

Beau Sekforde moved in his sleep and fetched a deep groan.

"You impertinent creature!" whispered the Countess, taking courage. "Will you not go before I wake my husband?"

At these last words the woman raised her head; she did not seem to speak, yet, as if there were an echo in the room, the Countess distinctly heard the words "My husband!" repeated after her in a tone of bitter mockery.

A sense of unreality such as she had never known before touched the Countess; she felt as if her sight were growing dim and her hearing failing her; she made a movement as if to brush something from before her eyes.

When she looked again at Beau Sekforde he was alone; no one was beside him.

In dreaming, tortured sleep he groaned and tossed.

"The baggage has slipped off," muttered the Countess; "belike it is some ancient dear of his own. I will send her away in the morning."

She crept back to her own room, forgetting her spoils.

She did not sleep, and Mr. Sekforde did not wake till the pale winter dawn showed between the curtains.

The Countess looked round on a chamber in disorder, but for Beau Sekforde everything was arranged, shaving water ready, his breakfast hot and tempting on a tray, his clothes laid out.

When he had dressed and come downstairs he found his wife yawning over a copy of the *Gazette*.

She remembered last night quite clearly, and considerably regretted what she had left behind in Beau Sekforde's room in her confusion.

She gave him a glance, vicious with the sense of an opportunity lost.

He flung at her the question he had shouted last night.

"Who is in this house?"

"Some woman has stayed," she answered. "I think it was Joanna the housekeeper, but I did not see very clearly. She must be out now, as I have rung the bell and there has been no answer."

"My breakfast was brought up to me," said Mr. Sekforde. "So it is Joanna Mills, is it?"

The Countess was angry; she had had to go to the kitchen and pick among yesterday's scraps for her own food.

"And who is she?"

"You said, madam, the housekeeper."

"She must be very fond of you," sneered my lady.

He started at that and turned on her a ghastly look.

"Oh, don't think I am jealous!" she grinned cynically.

"It was the word you used," he muttered. "I do not think anyone has been *fond* of me save one——"

He paused and passed his hand over his weary, heavy eyes.

"I dreamt of her last night."

"Who?"

"Jane, my wife."

The Countess remembered the ugly echo of her words last night.

"Your wife—do you forget that I and no other am your wife?"

"I do," he replied sullenly; "to me Jane is always my wife."

"A pity," said my lady sarcastically, "that she did not live longer."

He gave her a queer look.

"And now we have got to think of ourselves," he said abruptly. "I cannot keep these things much longer—you had better go."

"Where?"

"What do I care?" he answered cruelly.

"I stay here," she replied. "Is the rent paid?"

"No."

"Well, they will not disturb us till quarter-day," said my lady calmly. "You do not want to be parted from your loving wife, do you, dear?"

He stared at her as if her words had a double meaning.

"Cannot you be quiet about my wife?" he exclaimed.

"La! The man is off his head!" shrilled my lady. "Jane Sekforde is dead!"

"That is why I think about her," he retorted grimly.

"A model husband," jeered the Countess, eyeing him viciously. "I am sorry I never knew the sweet creature you regret so keenly and so touchingly."

He raged at her like a man whose nerves are overwrought.

"Will you not let the matter be? Think of yourself, you monstrous horror! You will soon be in the Fleet!"

This picture was sufficiently realistic to make the Countess shiver.

"What are you going to do?" she asked with sudden feebleness.

He did not know; brooding and black-browed, he withdrew to the window-place and stared out at the leaden November sky that hung so heavily over the London streets.

"I suppose if you were free of me you would take your handsome face to market again?" added my lady, with a sudden flash of new fury.

He gave her a red look, at which she shrank away.

"Well, still we do not decide on anything," she quavered.

He would not answer her, but flung out of the house.

His unsteady steps were directed to St. Andrew's Church.

It was a long time since Beau Sekforde had been near a church.

Even when his wife had been buried here he had not attended the service.

He stood now in the porch, biting his thumb; then presently he entered.

Hesitating and furtive he went round the walls until he came to the new, cheap tablet with the badly cut draped urn and the florid Latin setting forth the virtues of Jane Sekforde.

"They don't say anything about her being a good housekeeper," he found himself saying aloud. "Why, she told me once she would come back from the grave to set her house in order."

He looked round as if to seek the answer of some companion, then laughed sullenly, drew his hat over his eyes, and left the church.

Towards dusk he wandered home.

The dining-room was neat and clean, the fire attended to, the dinner on the table. He managed to eat some of the food, but without appetite. The Countess was out; there was no trace anywhere of her slovenly splendour.

The whole house was as clean and precise as it had been when that neglected drudge, Jane Sekforde, had ruled over it.

When the Countess returned he was almost glad to see her—he had been thinking so much, too much, of Jane.

He had thought of her as he had seen her last, cold in her bed, clothed in her best grey gown, and how he had stared at her and hung over her and drawn suddenly away, so sharply that the button of cut steel on his cuff had left a scratch on her dead cheek.

"Where is Joanna Mills?" he abruptly asked his wife.

She stared at him; in such a moment as this could he think of nothing but the housekeeper? Was he losing his wits?

But she did not now much care; she had found a crony willing to shelter her and exploit her ancient glories.

"I am going away," she said. "I do not know who is in the house—I have seen no one."

He seemed to pay no attention at all to her first remark.

"What was that woman you saw last night like?"

"A very plain, shrewish-looking creature," replied my lady, with some bitterness, as she recalled how she had been startled into dropping the filched money.

"Are you sure it was a woman?" asked Beau Sekforde with a ghastly grin.

"Why, what else could it have been?" she replied curiously.

"I do not think it has been a woman for—some months," he said.

"Why, do you imagine there is a spectre in the place?"

He would not, could not answer; he left her, and went from room to room throwing everything into disorder, taking a horrid pleasure in making a confusion in the neatness of the house.

And then he flung himself away from the dreary mansion, leaving the Countess, like an old, weary bird of prey, wandering among the untidy rooms to see if there were anything worth taking away.

When he returned in the dark hours before the dawn he found the candle on the hall table.

"Curse you!" he screamed. "Cannot you let me alone?"

He hastened upstairs; everything was neat, his bed, his fire, his posset ready, his shoes warming, his candles lit.

His terrified eyes cast a horrid glance round the room.

"The medicine cupboard—has she tidied that?" he muttered.

He crossed to where it hung in one corner, opened the door, and looked at the rows of pots and bottles.

One he knew well had been stained—had been left with a broken stopper . . . a bottle of a peculiar, ugly look, holding a yellow liquid that stained linen purple.

Such a stain, very tiny, had been on Jane Sekforde's pillow.

As he stared into the cupboard he saw that the bottle had been cleaned and set in its place, while a new, neat label had been pasted on the front.

The writing was the writing of Jane Sekforde—it said in clear letters, "*Poison.*"

Beau Sekforde dropped the candle and ran into the Countess' room.

"Wake up!" he shouted. "Wake up and hear me! She has come back. I want to confess. I murdered her! Let them take me away—somewhere where—where she cannot tidy for me."

The room was empty of the Countess, who had fled; an unnatural light came from the unshuttered windows and showed a woman sitting up in the great bed.

She had a pale, shrewish face, a grey garment on, and a scratch across her cheek.

As the shrieks of Beau Sekforde's confession echoed into the night and drew the watch to thunder on the door, the woman smiled.

THE HOUSEHOLD

CHAPTER I. — THE HOUSEHOLD.

THE HOUSEHOLD is the foundation of the nation.

It is the first school of citizenship.

It is the first school of morality.

It is the first school of religion.

It is the first school of science.

It is the first school of art.

It is the first school of music.

It is the first school of dance.

It is the first school of drama.

It is the first school of poetry.

It is the first school of philosophy.

It is the first school of history.

It is the first school of geography.

It is the first school of natural science.

It is the first school of social science.

It is the first school of political science.

It is the first school of law.

It is the first school of medicine.

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It is the first school of honor.

It is the first school of respect.

It is the first school of esteem.

It is the first school of admiration.

It is the first school of love.

THE GILT SEDAN CHAIR

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THE GILT SEDAN CHAIR

IT was a night so terrible that man's trust in God might well be shaken.

For days the snow had lain frozen on the ground, and a dark and bitter fog had overhung London. By three o'clock the day was over, by four it was dark. Neither by day nor night was there any lift in the heavy snow pall that covered the sky—there was neither wind nor snow, only the intense, penetrating cold; even in the country, miles away from the smoke of the city, it was not possible to see farther than across the road; the hoary white, frozen fog blotted out everything save the objects close at hand.

All houses, trees, fields, the few passers-by, the sparse traffic, seemed cast out of lead, colourless, hard, immobile even in the busiest parts of the town. Here, now night had fallen, in this lonely part of Hampstead, neither man nor beast was abroad nor had been for several nights. Yet a man stood in the doorway of a great solitary mansion on the Heath, obviously peering out into the white, frozen obscurity and waiting for some arrival.

The house stood black and shuttered within the bleak, barren, and high-walled garden; only from behind the watcher at the door showed a thin glow of

light which faintly penetrated the fog. The silence was complete and profound; the situation of the house was in any case lonely, being well off the high road and on an isolated portion of the Heath. Casual passers-by seldom came that way even in the day-time and in fine weather; now it seemed as divided from the world as if it were some outpost of the infernal regions.

The watcher at the door, muffled to the chin in a fur-lined greatcoat and with a beaver hat pulled over his eyes, took an impatient step or two into the garden. The icy snow crunched under his feet, the freezing air bit his face, he strained sight and hearing, but all was veiled and silent; the cold made him shudder to his heart.

He turned back to the house, leaving the hall door ajar behind him, and entered one of the shuttered rooms at the back of the house.

A large fire burnt on the hearth, but the chamber was neither warm nor comfortable; it had no aspect of having ever been lived in; the heavy tapestry furniture was in holland covers, the massive chandelier was concealed by a bag of brown muslin; over the mirror above the large mantelpiece was also drawn muslin, the ormolu clock was not going, the polished floor, the painted ceiling were alike dusty. The two sconces either side the hearth had been filled with wax lights and lit; untended, they had dripped over the silver gilt in drops of wax.

On the green marble-topped table stood several fine decanters of wine and spirits and tankards and glass, also some delicate china plates, and a large fruit cake on a gilt salver.

By the fire, in a deep easy-chair drawn close to the

blaze, sat a terrible-looking man of about sixty—fat, diseased, bloated, in the garb of a clergyman. His worn peruke hung on the back of his chair, his bald dirty head shone in the red candle-light; he was drinking from a big mug of punch and staring with bleared eyes into the fire, on which a great kettle was boiling. Several bottles stood beside him on the floor; beside them was a dog-eared Bible and soiled prayer-book.

The man who had been waiting at the door looked at him with disgust and fury.

"You need not get drunk yet, Atkinson," he remarked fiercely.

"I'm not drunk, my lord," returned the other thickly, "but we must keep the cold out—a night like this." He looked round at the young man with a very ugly leer. "So they have not come yet?" he added. "Have a drink yourself, Lord Massingham."

My lord cursed forcibly; he flung his hat on to one of the shrouded chairs and loosened his coat at the throat, showing the close folds of his fine cambric cravat and revealing the features so well known and so well hated, also sometimes so foolishly loved.

He was handsome because he was young; when he should be as old as the man by the fire he would probably be as hideous; vitality and health were all there was to give charm and power to the finely cast and vividly coloured face. He wore a plain riding suit of dark blue silk and no jewels; his hair, of a dark, dull brown colour, hung loosely in its own natural and becoming wave and was tied by a narrow black ribbon; yet he was very plainly of the great world, his movements were full of trained grace, his manners of arrogance.

"Supposing they do not come?" asked the jackal by the fire.

My lord paled at this insolence on the part of his creature. At his look the other cringed.

"Such a night, I mean," he explained feebly, and swallowed a great draught of punch.

My lord swung on him and shook his fat shoulder.

"If you are too drunk to read the service I'll run you through," he snarled.

Before the terrified wretch could answer a low clear whistle sounded through the stillness. My lord hurried to the front door and opened it wide on to the dreadful night.

A blurred and ghastly light shone through the cold fog; soon this showed as two lanterns, which came nearer up the path; snow and ice crackled beneath footsteps, hoarse whispering sounded, black shadows appeared, detached from the surrounding gloom by that nebulous light; Lord Massingham picked up the lanthorn that stood ready in the hall and went out to meet an approaching group of men, who came slowly as if staggering under some burden.

My lord no longer felt the cold; the blood burnt hot in his cheeks. He swung up his light and seized the first figure by the arm.

"Have you got her?" he asked with fierce eagerness.

The other, who was muffled to the eyes and limped in his walk, answered with equally fierce brevity.

"Yes," he said.

Lord Massingham laughed.

"I knew you would. You are a good fellow after all, Jack," he whispered.

"Oh, yes," sneered the other. "A good fellow, Harry."

"How is it you are on foot?" questioned my lord.

"Confound you! The horses could not keep the road. I had to leave the coach at the edge of the Heath."

"Well, you are here," answered Lord Massingham with that scornful and impatient kindness he sometimes threw this chief of all his jackals, "and you have got the girl."

"She did not come willingly, after all," said the jackal in an ugly voice. "I hope you have provided the parson, for she is very nice in her notions and will likely do a mischief to someone if she is desperate."

So the two, speaking in low tones, passed from the bleak darkness into the bleak house. When they were in the hall the newcomer pushed back his hat, and the beams of the lantern that Lord Massingham held revealed the likeness between the two men.

They were brothers, and the family resemblance was strong, only the dark features of the younger were clouded by a double bitterness: the sting of his deformed foot and the sting of his subordinate position. With passions and tastes, pride and desires equal to his brother, he had always had to cringe for his living on his elder, who had everything.

They were known, in the evil world to which they belonged, by hideous nicknames; a third brother who was in the Church being called Bishopsgate, the Hon. Jack Mervyn was called Cripplegate, and my lord the Earl designated by the ferocious title of Hellgate.

The Earl returned to the lit room with a smile of satisfaction on his triumphant face. The enterprise he had on hand was a daring one, even for him; no less than the abduction, to be followed by the mock marriage (then such a fashionable device among the

men of the fashionable world), of the most charming and popular actress in London, Lavinia Bellamy, who had hitherto withstood the pleas and devices of all her lovers, and had maintained a discreet behaviour that had greatly enhanced her value in the eyes of her admirers. The fact that it was reported that her coldness was due to a secret attachment to a poor member of her own profession had whetted Lord Massingham's zeal in his present outrage, planned with a care he had given to few of his intrigues.

There was, to him, an added and peculiar attraction in the fact that, while he was taking such trouble to gain possession of this poor actress partly by force, partly by deception, he was betrothed to his cousin, the Lady Dorothy Fenton, a great match and a Duke's daughter, whose considerable fortune was a necessity for his exhausted estates.

This false secret marriage with one beautiful and famous woman, to be followed so shortly by another marriage with a woman also famous and beautiful and of his own rank and world, appealed to many passions in the dark heart of Lord Massingham.

The mock parson cocked a bleary eye up at his master's haughty and vindictive presence, fetched a groan and was about to take another draught of punch.

Lord Massingham dashed the mug from his lips and it shivered on the iron firedogs.

"The little fool is to think that you are a parson, Atkinson, do you hear?" he commanded.

The tipsy wretch tried to pull himself together.

"So Cripplegate has got her, has he?" he stuttered, straightening his clerical cravat with unsteady fingers. "I hope there will be no scenes." He shook his head with stupid gravity.

My lord smiled confidently.

"The wench will be very pleased to be made a Countess," he replied, "especially as there is no other way out of it."

As he spoke the younger brother entered, bringing with him a blast of bitter air and flinging aside his heavy cloak, on which his breath lay frozen, from his neck and shoulders.

"I wonder what Dorothy would say to this night's work," he remarked quietly.

The Earl turned on him with an impulsive movement as if he would have flung himself at his throat, then restrained himself contemptuously; he had other things to do besides punishing the insolence of Cripplegate.

"If you mention that name in this place again I will thrash you," he remarked. "Where is the woman?"

His brother smiled straight into his angry eyes.

"I told Griffiths and Savage to bring her in," he replied.

Almost as he spoke the door was pushed open and two stout, masked men entered, dragging between them the wretched occupant of the gilt sedan.

She wore a very full cardinal of quilted red sarcenet; beneath showed the white and gold of her evening petticoats and her high-heeled satin shoes covered with the slush of the trodden ice. Her scarf of gold and blue striped gauze was wound round her head and face, beneath could be seen the white of the handkerchief with which she was tightly gagged. The elaborate structure of her hair had been disarranged in her struggles—pomaded curls, pink velvet roses, and a broken braid of pearls showed on her bosom, falling from beneath her hood.

She was either unconscious or utterly exhausted, for

her limbs fell slack and her head hung from side to side. There was nothing left now of the beauty and charm that had provoked this vile robbery; she looked merely helpless and piteous, broken and humiliated in the grip of her captors.

Some vague stirrings of compassion touched the Earl's hard heart as he looked at her; as usual he vented himself on his brother.

"Was there any need to use her like this?" he frowned.

"She would have shrieked all the way—she fought like a cat."

"I think it strange," said my lord sharply, "that she did not come more easily."

He flattered himself that he had made an impression on the heart of the fair actress, and that she would not have been so unwilling as Cripplegate said he had found her. He swung round on the lady with what tenderness he could muster and addressed her in those terms of spurious gallantry in which he was so practised.

"Madam, compose yourself; you know whom you are with and what feelings hurried me to this seeming violence."

At the sound of his voice she seemed to start into life, recoiled from him deeper into the arms of her captors, and flung her shuddering hands up to her bound face.

"Madam, take heart; Lavinia, trust to me," continued the Earl with his grand air. "Here is a clergyman present who will marry us." He took the woman from her guards and set her on a chair by the table; she still had her hands so tightly pressed against her face that he could not remove the gag that held her silent.

Atkinson, the bogus parson, had now hustled the two ruffians who had brought in the woman out of the room and sent them downstairs to eat and sleep in the hall where the gilt sedan chair had been placed.

"You will be needed presently," he said. "My lord will have the lady sent into the country; you must take her to the coach."

"'Tis lost on the Heath," replied one of the men with a grin, and he began to describe the dangers and difficulties of this dangerous abduction—how they had carried the wench away from her escort in the fog and the crowd leaving the theatre, how they had placed her in the gilt sedan, in the great coach and how Cripple-gate had gagged and bound her and driven the coach himself, with two of his fellows on the box beside him and one clinging to the straps behind.

Atkinson stopped the tale.

"I hope Hellgate has not gone too far," he said with a quivering mouth. "There will be a hue and cry over this girl."

He returned up the bleak, unlit stairs to the cold splendour of the great, shrouded room where he had left the two brothers and their victim. Despite the wine he had drunk to give himself courage, he would have liked to have washed his hands of the whole business. He entered the room on tiptoe like one prepared for an ugly sight.

My lord had unknotted the bandages from the woman's face, and she was seated at the table by the wine and fruit, glasses and dishes, her countenance hidden in her hands, her body crouched into the recesses of the chair, her whole body still.

The Earl was bending over her, endeavouring to force on her a glass of spirit; Cripple-gate stood by

the fire, which he had just piled up with fresh logs, and smiled at both of them.

There was something very sinister about the appearance of this lame young man. He wore the costume of wealth and elegance, pale apricot coloured satins embroidered with gold and scarlet thread, a muslin cravat with a paste buckle, hair pomaded and powdered—all of which showed now that he had put aside his heavy travelling coat and the slouch hat that had served to disguise him.

His face was wide and fine, like his brother's, but a peculiar length of eyes, nostrils, and lips, a sharpness in the cheek-bones and chin, joined to his cold and sneering expression, gave him a very unpleasant appearance. His lameness affected his whole body, the shoulder of the left side dropped, and the balance of his figure was thrown out from the waist; this, however, the rich, heavy clothes partially concealed, and the actual deformity of the foot and leg was hidden by the high leather boots he wore, in strange contrast to his evening attire.

The Earl's short patience with the wretched object of his villainy came to an end.

"Lavinia, this is folly! Lift up your face—look at me! I swear there is no harm intended—look up before you anger me."

The woman suddenly dropped her cold stiff hands and looked at him with utter horror in her disfigured face.

Surrounded by the fallen hair in which the broken braid of pearls and the velvet flower showed as if in mockery, her features, sharp with fear and anguish, showed pallid and bruised in the candle-light. Her mouth was swollen and discoloured from the gag, her

cheeks marked, a little stain of dried blood on one of her temples showed where she had wounded herself in her frantic attempts to leave the coach; her throat was so dry, her lips so numb, that she could hardly speak.

"You—you!" she stammered. Her desperate eyes shuddered away from the Earl and rested on the man in the clergyman's dress with the prayer-book in his hand. He, staring at her, looked swiftly at my lord, for he knew that this was not Lavinia Bellamy.

My lord could not speak; in all his wicked manhood he had never faced such a moment as this.

The victim of this foul attempt was not the poor actress, whose fate would merely cause a smile or a shrug, but Lady Dorothy, the daughter of a Duke, for whose defence all the gentlemen of England would come forward—Dorothy the heiress, the toast, the aristocrat—his own promised bride.

He turned about and his glance fell on the face of Cripplegate, distorted by a hideous sneer of triumph. With a dreadful cry the elder brother flung himself on the younger, and the two closed in a fierce embrace of hatred.

Lady Dorothy did not move; a little warmth and colour was coming into her face, more life into her eyes; she gave a shuddering sigh.

Atkinson hurled himself on the brothers, and being a stout man and a desperate one, drove them apart.

"Why did you not let them kill each other?" asked Lady Dorothy hysterically. "It would have been better so." She moved stiffly towards the fire. "I am so cold," she added faintly.

Atkinson fetched her the glass of spirits the Earl had poured out for her, and this time she put it to her lips and drank a little.

In some way as she moved to the fire, she seemed to dominate the three men, and they, so lately her arrogant captors, appeared now but as her slaves. She was no silly damsel, but a woman of wit and intellect, of pride and character. Her beauty was eclipsed, bruised, and draggled as no one could ever have believed that such a sheltered beauty could be; she stood in strange surroundings, facing a strange company, but she was no longer broken; now that her first physical pain and suffering was eased, now that she was free and warm, her pride outweighed her humiliation.

Her attitude was as if she held a whip in her taut hands.

"Madam," said the Earl, not looking at her, and in muffled tones, "I will take you home"

"Like this?" she asked. "It will be dawn before we reach St. James's Square. What tale shall we tell?"

My lord groaned in very anguish; his first wild thought was to marry her instantly—if this ruffian had but been really in holy orders!

"What can I offer—what can I say?" he muttered, then stumbled over the word "marriage."

Her bitter contempt made him wince like a struck dog.

"There can be no talk of marriage between you and me, my lord!" she said, and her voice was now strong and clear. "But, by Heaven, there may be some talk of other things!"

He saw her lost—her and her money, and her beauty and her rank; he tried not to think of Cripplegate until he had adjusted this terrible situation with her, for if he had thought of him he must have turned and slain him with his bare hands. Lady Dorothy put her

hands to her forehead; for a moment she seemed bewildered by the enormity of what had happened; she cried out to the younger brother with a note of feminine woe.

"Why did you do this thing?" she asked. "What harm did I ever do to you that you should thus ruin me—all of us?"

Cripplegate gave her an evil look; he knew that her agony was the sharper because she had nearly loved the Earl and might have loved him had this never happened, for he was very attractive to high-spirited women; it was this stifled, slain passion that she lamented, all unconsciously, through all her despair.

"Both you and my lord thought me not worth your—consideration," said Cripplegate. "It was foolish, madam, very foolish."

"You did this for sheer malice, then—for sheer hatred of him and me?"

"For hatred of the whole proud pack of you."

It was the scoundrel outcast, the despised black sheep, who spoke, the man trodden on, spurned, who had at last stung, in the fullness of his vengeance, those who had bruised him, heart and soul, all his evil life.

Lady Dorothy made no attempt to answer flout with flout, nor fury with fury; in the exaltation of her supreme misery she was beyond all outward manifestations of passion.

"All hates may be satisfied now," she said quietly; "we are ruined."

She spoke of herself and her kin who would never, any of them, be able to recover from the disgrace of this night's work, but the Earl took her words for himself. He certainly was ruined; in no way could he reinstate himself in the eyes of his promised wife nor

in those of her family; before the world he was lost and dishonoured, there was no means of expiation, there would be a scandal that would mount to the heavens, not to be concealed, avoided—blotted out.

"What do you mean to do?" she asked, staring at him.

He replied like one stupid and amazed:

"You believe I never meant this?"

But by these words he showed that his usual knowledge of women had failed him, for he called to her mind the bitterest part of his offence; she might have found possible to condone some outrage inspired by love of herself, for she was a creature of high passions and of a romantic temperament; but to have been the victim of the insult designed for another woman was the unforgivable sin.

"No," she answered. "You were expecting Lavinia Bellamy, the actress. . . . You meant to have married her—three weeks before our wedding-day, my lord!"

Her wavering finger pointed scorn at the pair of them.

"The fair name you have tarnished demands that one of you pays," she continued, "with life itself. Take up your weapons, sir, if you have any manhood left."

"I would fight, but not in your presence, cousin Dorothy," returned the pallid Earl.

"Have I not seen enough to-night—do I not know enough now that I shall be frightened with a little blood?"

My lord came a step towards her.

"Whatever my follies may be, I swear I hold you dearest of women, and as for what this fiend has devised for our undoing—I would have died sooner than it should have happened!"

He spoke in all sincerity and she must have known it, but his crime was beyond all palliative.

"You see," sneered Cripplegate, "he can turn even this occasion into a pretty speech!"

My lord ignored this; he looked only at his cousin.

"What do you demand of me?" he asked. "I will do anything."

"Kill your brother or be killed by him," she replied.

"By God, I will!" he replied. His spirit leapt to meet hers; never had he so admired her as at that moment of utter loss and anguish.

Cripplegate shrugged his uneven shoulders. This much of his breed showed in him that he made no effort to shirk the consequences of his action; he also stood to lose all by this night's work, and must have known it when he first planned his mad revenge.

"This is all that you can do for me," said Lady Dorothy to the Earl. "Kill that man."

Both the brothers cried out so instantly, "I am ready!" that it sounded like one voice; but Atkinson, moved by Heaven knows what obscure impulses and dread, what long-forgotten horrors and codes, again flung himself between the young men.

"Madam," he gasped, "you cannot permit this thing—this cannot be settled here and now—have pity on these unfortunate gentlemen!"

She interrupted him with such force that it seemed as if the words were struck out of his mouth, and he cowered back into silence as if he had received a blow over the heart.

"Come from between them, you more than vile!" she cried. Again she spoke to the Earl.

"Why do you waste time?"

He swung his sword out, but she would not have this.

"That weapon is for honourable men," she said; she turned to the younger brother's coat that was flung across a chair by the fire and from the pocket of it took the case of pistols; these arms had been used against her escort; she had heard one man fall groaning.

She put the case on the table among the glasses and wine bottles, the cake and fruit.

"Take these," she said.

The brothers moved as if there were no choice but to obey her; they examined the weapons quietly.

"Load them!" she commanded.

The clock struck two; the sound a little shook her from her bitter calm; she thought of those searching for her in the ghastly cold and dark, of the grief and misery about to be entailed on all those who loved her and whom she loved, and she, faltering, recoiled from her fate.

The pistols were loaded now, and each had examined that of the other, under the eyes of Lady Dorothy.

"It is plain murder—without seconds, without a surgeon," gibbered Atkinson, crouching against the wall.

The light was uncertain, the room full of leaping shadows, for the fire was blazing in great flames and the candles had guttered to their sockets. By this shuddering light the two men faced each other.

"Now—across the table," said the Earl.

He gave a wild look at the woman by the fire; her red and pink clothes were gleaming in the lustrous folds of silk and satins, her draggled pomaded hair showed colourless as her haggard face; she no longer looked a young woman.

"Give the signal, Cousin Dorothy," added Lord Massingham.

She clasped her interlocked hands across her straining heart.

"Fire!" she said.

The table was not more than three feet across.

"Murder, murder!" mumbled Atkinson, cringing away in the corner with his hands to his ears.

One shot only broke the stillness of the great house; the Earl, with his fingers still on the trigger, fell forward, clutched at the table, swept the glasses to the ground with his cuff, and dropped to the floor.

He lay on his back, twisting.

Cripplegate laughed; he made no attempt to go to his brother, but stared at his smoking pistol as Lady Dorothy sped round the table to the dying man. She went on her knees beside him swiftly, as if expecting him to speak, but he turned over on his face without any word, only a little half-fetched groan, and presently lay dead.

Seeing him still she rose as swiftly as she had sunk to her knees, only first drawing the pistol from my lord's slack fingers. She was alone indeed, now, the one being to whom she could have looked for protection was gone; she was in the power of a merciless villain who had twice triumphed in this night of horror.

She glanced at the evil face of Cripplegate.

"Do you regret my lord?" sneered he.

Before either of the men could cry out she had raised her frail hand and emptied the second pistol into the bosom of the younger brother.

Atkinson sprang forward and seized her, but it was too late; as the smoke cleared Cripplegate was revealed prone between the table and the hearth.

"What have you done?" chattered the wretched mock parson, bent with terror and dragging at her rich skirts.

Lady Dorothy turned on him terrible eyes from which the light of reason had for ever disappeared.

"Take up your book," she said. "You'll not want the marriage service, but the prayers for the dead and damned. As for me, call the gilt sedan chair. I will go home. . . ."

THE PACKET OF COMFITS

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THE PACKET OF COMFITS

ON a May evening in the year 1785, when Vauxhall Gardens had come to be accepted as the most fashionable place of resort in London, having completely eclipsed Ranelagh, a little scene took place in one of the alleys of the Gardens which was the beginning of this story of crime.

In a summer-house surrounded with plants of laurel and box, and away from the places of entertainment, dancing, and music, a man and a woman were engaged in a conversation out of place with their frivolous surroundings. She was bitterly frightened and he was bitterly angry, and both were in the grip of a passion not conquered but subdued, that caused them to be almost beside themselves despite their forced calm.

They had purposely chosen a spot far from any lanterns or illumination, but the moonlight was strong on the white summer-house, and fell in through the narrow window on to the two who stood within facing each other.

The woman in her agitation and distress was leaning against the wall, holding in both hands her velvet mask. Her type was delicate, and she looked tired if not ill; the graces of her extreme youth were concealed by paint, powder, pomade, and an over-gorgeous

dress, for she was arrayed in the extreme of an artificial fashion. Her tight bodice and full, hooped skirt of gold and claret-coloured striped silk were adorned with frills and furbelows of gold lace, her blue velvet mantle was lined with costly black fur, and hung in great folds that made her slenderness appear fantastic by contrast. The hood had fallen back from curls elaborately dressed and twisted with a gold gauze scarf, the front was unclasped on a white bosom where diamonds showed amid lace and ribbons. All this splendour appeared but piteous in contrast with her haggard, unhappy youthfulness.

The man stood more in the shade, a fine young figure, precise in a soldier's uniform, with stiff side-curls and a sullen face.

"So this is what love ends in," said the girl, moistening her dry, rouged lips.

"You admit then that it was love?" he asked bitterly.

"You said so," she replied dully. "You said you would live—die—suffer for me—and yet you cannot show ordinary kindness."

"You," he returned fiercely, "said you would be faithful."

She moved her head against the wall in speechless distress; she was sick with trying to explain—to put into words the desperate emotions that controlled her actions.

The man gave a short laugh, suddenly contemptuous of the whole situation.

"Faithful!" he echoed. "I suppose women do not know what the thing is!"

She was tortured into a reply.

"Perhaps men do not know what it is to be afraid. I do not think they can, or they would not be so cruel."

He moved to the door, suddenly as weary as she of the terrible discussion in which the happiness of both was going to stormy wreck. But the thing that she was fighting for had not been achieved, and she urged herself in her desperation to fresh strength, as she flung herself before him, clutching at the lapels of his coat.

"You have not given me my letters," she stammered.

He flushed with a sense of shame for her, for this anxiety of hers for her own safety seemed to him a terrible baseness; he was entirely convinced that he had never been her lover, but only her fool, and that caprice, not passion, had moved her in the past; her prudence, as he thought it, appeared to him an ugly thing.

"I brought you the letters to return them to you," he said grimly, "but I have changed my mind now I see your humour, madam—you have not been so kind to me that I should forbear being cruel to you."

He loosened her hands roughly and pushed her away from him; she caught at the door and still stood facing him, her great hoop barring his path.

They were both in the full moonlight now, conspicuous against the white summer-house, which stood in tolerable imitation of a classic temple against the dark, still laurels. They were now forgetful of anything save each other, they did not seek to hush their voices, nor did they perceive a man coming along the shadowed alley towards them. He, however, saw them, recognized the blue mantle and striped gown, heard the voices raised in accents of anger and fear and stepped quickly into the bushes.

Under the cover of the thick leaves he moved quickly and quietly towards the summer-house; he

used the skill of one not unused to furtive, secret work, and was soon in safe ambush behind the close laurel, from which he could observe the distracted young creatures and hear their agonized accents.

"Oh, Robert," gasped the girl, "you know I must return, or I shall be missed."

"Why, go!" he said, "I do not keep you."

"My letters."

"Are they not safe with me?"

"But if they should fall into the hands of another—will you not understand the ruin it would be for me?"

"I understand," he replied, "but too well. I admire your great prudence."

"For God's sake do not talk so bitterly! You know how I am placed amid it all. I wish I were dead."

He answered with dreadful coldness.

"Indeed, madam, you had better be dead if you have not the courage to live."

So saying, he put her from him resolutely and in a manner that she could not resist, and turning away, left her on the moonlit steps.

The watcher noted his regimentals, his bearing, his face, with a keen and practised eye, then turned his keen gaze on the wretched girl, who was making a fierce effort to control and contain her passion. The fear that had driven her to this secret interview now nerved her to escape from her present situation; she went back into the summer-house for her mask and pulled her hood over her face.

As she was flying away with trembling steps she found the new-comer, who had come now from behind the bushes, directly in her path.

So unlooked for was this that she almost stumbled into his arms and could not repress a cry of utter

dismay. He, cool and easy, took off his hat and showed in the moonlight a fine and cynical face.

She knew him instantly for M. le Duc de Rohault, the French Ambassador, and he had known her, from the moment he had first heard her voice, for Lady Arabella Ware, the daughter of the man who was the foremost statesman in the English Ministry.

With an effort that he could not but admire, the girl commanded herself.

"Sir, you are in time to take me back to my party. I vow I shall be missed. I came but a few steps down an alley with Lady Sylvia Tremaine."

She stopped short, conscious that her explanation, forced and hurried, was but a betrayal.

"And lost your way," finished the Frenchman suavely. "It is so easy, mademoiselle—permit me to escort you back to madame the Duchess, your mother, before the *fête* completely loses its brightness from your absence."

She was staring at him with eyes more full of terror than she knew; his artificial gallantry contrasted bitterly with the crude words that Captain Robert Tarne had just spoken to her. M. de Rohault was a man almost old enough to be her father, charming, witty, polished, lively—it did not seem possible that even if she were in his power he would betray her. Yet she no longer felt secure of any man's chivalry.

As she stepped again among her own people she felt, strangely, a throb of relief, as if the interview in the lonely summer-house belonged to some evil dream which could now be forgotten, and she looked at the great Earl who was to be her husband with a sense of protection even in his mere serene presence.

She would not have enjoyed even this passing relief

from her trouble if she could have seen the further actions of M. de Rohault. As soon as he had left her he sought for his secretary, M. de Nivelles, and asked him if they had many lackeys present. He seldom went anywhere without being unobtrusively accompanied by reliable men from the Embassy, and to-night there were four waiting by the gates for the departure of His Excellency.

M. de Rohault dispatched the secretary to fetch these, and drawing him apart from the company, gave him his instructions in a quick low tone.

An hour later Captain Robert Tarne was walking away from the Gardens in a mood that recked not of earth nor sky. His love, his pride, his dignity, his very manhood had been struck at most cruelly. For a year he had indulged the dream that he, the poor soldier, would win openly, as he had won secretly, the great man's daughter. She had fostered this delusion by her passionate letters, her oft-repeated vows—all the bitter sweetness of their stolen meetings. And he had been confident with the supreme confidence of youth—the world was before him, why should he not achieve everything? She had but to wait. Then had come the rude awakening; the girl was betrothed under his eyes to one of the greatest names in the land—a man of such repute and position that Robert Tarne felt himself a boy, a fool in comparison.

Yet, all the more because of this, he hotly pressed his claim on the terrified girl who had so repeatedly sworn fidelity to him, only to find that she was not capable of sacrificing anything for him, and that her sole thought was to hush up her rash love-affair and to obtain the return of her letters.

Her last frantic appeal had moved him to accede to her request, and he had promised to bring these poor mementoes of their unhappy love to Vauxhall and there to return them to her ; but when he had seen her in her splendour, when he saw his rival magnificent in his unconscious triumph, when he considered his own sincere love and genuine trust, the unhappy young man could not rise to any generosity.

Now, as he walked along the fresh country road, surrounded by the fragrant dark of the May night, this packet of letters seemed like a weight of fire in the pocket above his heart. She should not have them back to turn over and perhaps laugh at, to profane with hasty destruction (he now saw her as wholly evil), neither would he keep them to torture himself with—he would weight them and sink them in the river and let the swift running waters of the Thames obliterate the words of false love.

So absorbed was he in these gloomy reflections that it was with utter surprise that he felt a firm hand on his shoulder.

Turning swiftly he found a group of men behind him, who had come up noiselessly out of the dark. He saw at once that they had some sinister intent and took them for footpads.

"Fellows," he said, "I have nothing of any value—you may take my watch and buckles if you will let me go at once. I am in no humour to be delayed."

"Nor am I," replied the man who had him by the arm, "but when you say you have nothing of any value, you are mistaken—you have now in your pocket, sir, something very valuable indeed."

At this voice, so cultured and cool, speaking English with a slight foreign accent, Captain Tarne became un-

comfortable, for he saw that he was in the hands of no ordinary highwayman. He made an angry movement, but one of the other strangers instantly seized his free arm, and the two held him helpless in a powerful grip. They were all cloaked and masked, and it was impossible to guess at their quality.

"Something," continued the spokesman, "very valuable to the peace of a noble lady, my dear sir."

Robert Tarne started, set his teeth, and listened in fierce silence.

"Please give me those letters," added his captor.

"Who sent you?" demanded Captain Tarne roughly.

It was the most intolerable of all his intolerable thoughts that she should have told someone her story, and set another man to gain from him by force what he had refused to her entreaties.

He groaned in his rage and struggled fiercely with his captors.

It was but a useless display of passion. They held him securely pinioned, and, being six against one, it took them but a little while to render him powerless and effect their purpose, which was easily done by a quick search through his pockets.

Having found the piteous packet, which was tied by a cherished black ribbon that had at one time been worn round the neck of the writer of them, they set free the struggling and despairing young man, and disappeared as silently and as swiftly as they had come.

Lady Arabella Ware was enlightened as to the terrible position in which she stood, when M. de Rohault called at her father's mansion in St. James's Square and requested to see her alone.

She came into the great, ornate drawing-room looking so ill, so young, and so different from what she had

done a few days previously at Vauxhall, that the cold Frenchman was almost moved to pity for his victim.

She wore a white muslin dress, plain and even untidy, her fair, but not bright hair was free of powder and hung like a child's about her slender shoulders. She looked sullen and so without charm that M. de Rohault wondered how the parents had secured her so magnificent a match; she was certainly a great heiress, but the Earl was so wealthy as to be indifferent to pecuniary advantages.

No ornaments relieved her careless attire; a small spaniel was fastened to her waist by a broad blue ribbon; she seated herself and the dog jumped on to her knee; she kept her glance on the ground, and her small, nervous hands closed over the dog.

"I am in a position to do you a service," began M. de Rohault—"a very considerable service, mademoiselle."

She did not answer nor look up.

"And you," continued the cool, pleasant voice, "are in a position to do me a considerable service."

Now she gave a furtive look at the handsome man with his rich appointments who leaned so easily against the chimney-piece and so completely dominated the situation.

"You have been very foolish, mademoiselle," said M. de Rohault; "if your folly were known it would be more than death for you."

"You were spying then in Vauxhall," she muttered sullenly.

He shrugged his elegant shoulders.

"I know what passed between you and Captain Tarne."

She glanced at him with vivid hate in her childish eyes.

"What is that to you?" she demanded roughly.

He laughed effectively.

"The Earl is my very good friend—why should I allow him to marry you—on false pretences?"

She blazed at that.

"There was never any wrong in what I did, my lord!"

"Could you prove that?"

The wretched girl was silent.

"Is your lover so chivalrous that you can trust to him, mademoiselle?"

Her hands pressed so tightly on the dog on her lap that the little animal turned and whined up at her.

"I have no longer faith in the chivalry of any man," she answered heavily.

Her glance roved from side to side, and she bit her lower lip; he, well used to read human kind, was more alarmed by this restraint of hers than he would have been for the outburst he had expected. He wished to reassure her, and spoke softly and with a smile.

"Understand that I would not frighten you—I did not come for that."

She interrupted him.

"You have a price to put upon your silence, my lord," she said then, with a pride that he had not looked for in her. "Tell me what it is, and let us end a scene so shameful to both of us."

M. de Rohault was angered into cold harshness again.

"Very well—your father has papers which are of importance to France. I know where they are—in the left-hand drawer of the ebony bureau in his cabinet. You must get these for me."

She stared at him stupidly.

"You could easily do this, mademoiselle; you could get the keys from your father or his secretary, you could enter the cabinet without suspicion."

"I'm to betray my father and my country?" she muttered.

"There is no need for heroics, mademoiselle," he said sharply. He proceeded to tell her the size and shape of the packet, the number of seals upon it, and what these were.

"It would be missed at once," she said dully.

"No, because I should return it to you immediately. I only want to take a copy."

"I will not do it," replied the girl stubbornly and fiercely. Her distorted face flamed with rage and bitter loathing. "Why should I be afraid? It is but your word against mine, and I know the Earl is of too noble a mind to listen to one who wantonly defames a woman."

"If you are in this humour," replied M. de Rohault, "I must tell you that I have proofs."

And from the bosom of his waistcoat he took out the parcel of letters that he had robbed from Captain Tarne and held them out towards her; at the sight of this object, which had lately been the cause of her unceasing uneasiness and torment, in the hands of the man who had just proved himself her ruthless enemy, a convulsion shook her thin body; she covered her face with her hands and some strangled words died in her throat.

The most cruel of her emotions was the wrath against the man she had loved, for she made no doubt that Robert Tarne had, animated by a spirit of revenge against her for her infidelity, taken this vile means to torture and humiliate the creature whom he had once vowed he would give his life to please.

The keen voice of M. de Rohault broke in on her desparate reflections ; the sound of it was like the note of doom on her distracted heart.

"I can give you two days, mademoiselle, no more."

With that, and a bow of freezing coldness, he left her, a prey to the most utter terror, bewilderment, and remorse.

Lady Arabella had neither experience nor friend to turn to in her extremity. She was a stranger, both to her parents and to the man to whom she was betrothed. A childhood of cold splendour had enclosed her soul within itself, no one had ever troubled to understand her or in any way to invite her confidence ; she regarded those who were her masters with awe, with respect, with fear, not with trust or tenderness

As the discovery of her pitiful, harmless, childish love-affair seemed to her to spell a woe worse than damnation, so the theft of her father's papers appeared to her as a crime without parallel. She foresaw unheard of disasters befalling her house and her nation through this possible action of hers, and her lack of knowledge of the world of politics made her overcharge with horror the likely consequences of her compliance with M. de Rohault's request.

She hurried up to her room, the little dog attached to her waist trotting by her side, and she flung herself on her great bed with her arms clasped round the spaniel, who seemed to her the only creature that loved her or had the least interest in her fate.

Her being was absorbed by one terrible idea: she was morally and physically incapable of getting M. de Rohault his papers, and he would expose her to her parents and the Earl.

She could not rise again that day ; towards evening

she fell into slight convulsions, followed by an excess of fever. During the night she was so ill that her governess and her maids would have sent for assistance, but it was not the custom to disturb the Duchess for any but the most serious matters, and as their mistress forbade them to leave her and appeared to make an effort for strength and calm, they forbode a duty that might have proved harmful for themselves.

Towards the dawn this unhappy creature did indeed regain some tranquillity, but it was the quiet of a fixed and terrible purpose conceived by a feeble brain tormented to the point of insanity. Feigning to have completely recovered her strength and spirit she found some excuse for sending her women out of the room and evading the vigilance of her governess, and, once alone, secured about her person a paper of arsenic that was kept in the drawer of her dressing-table for making washes for whitening the skin.

She knew of the deadly properties of this drug, for the fashionable world was yet talking of the famous young beauty who had lately died from too great a use of this same complexion paint. Her only doubt was if the quantity in her possession was sufficient to effect her purpose.

That day no one observed anything unusual in her behaviour, no one suspected the alternate shiverings and burnings of fever that coursed through her blood, no one noticed her dry lips, her blazing eyes, the light-headedness of her empty laugh, for she was of no especial object of interest to any; nothing remarkable was expected from her, and she was accepted as the very ordinary creature that she had always appeared to be.

At a big reception given that evening at her father's

house in honour of her approaching marriage, she seemed as happy as her good fortune entitled her to be; most of the women envied her; she seemed so young, so wealthy, so placed above all hurt. The *éclat* of her great match lent a charm to her presence, she moved about her father's noble rooms the belle of the evening, followed by admiring and jealous glances.

M. de Rohault was present and found occasion to speak to her amid the gay press.

"Have you the papers, mademoiselle?" he asked.

He had stopped her in a half-curtained alcove set with card-tables; she retreated into this and stood against one of the gilt mirrors.

She was again powdered, pomaded, patched, attired in pale rose-coloured silk and white gauze, wreaths of artificial flowers all over her hoop, and pearls round her neck; the paint that was such an outrage to her youth could not disguise the fever that showed on her lips and cheeks and in her eyes.

"Oh, I will get the papers," she answered hastily. She began to laugh, and pressed her handkerchief to her mouth.

M. de Rohault was vexed that his victim had not yet begun to put in motion the execution of his wishes. The matter was really important to him; the possession of the documents in question would enable him to perform a signal service to his country and to establish himself for ever as a skilful diplomat. He had long been crossing wits with the statesman who was this girl's father, and it had cost him infinite patience and skill even to discover the whereabouts of these papers.

Lady Arabella ceased laughing.

"I will do what you wish," she said in a dead tone

"To-morrow," he returned, eyeing her keenly. "I shall want them to-morrow."

"Or——" she muttered, eyeing him furtively.

"Or the Earl and your father shall know everything," he finished her broken sentence. She moistened her lips and sat down. And rose up again, fumbling at her bosom.

"I will certainly get those papers for you, sir," she said in a thick voice, and speaking very fast, "so let us be good friends, eh?"

He was pleased that she showed such sense, for he had been prepared for a scene; he bowed over the hand she offered.

"I have been foolish," she continued in a voice now perfectly controlled, "and you have been skilful—well, I must accept the situation."

She paused, looked round, and then added:

"I wish to discuss with you how we shall meet to-morrow—it will be difficult, as I am engaged all day—fetch some coffee, sir, that it may seem we talk naturally."

M. de Rohault admired the good sense of his accomplice. He left her a moment to tell a page to bring refreshments into the alcove; when he returned she was playing with a paper of comfits that she held on her rose-wreathed lap.

She offered him one on the palm of her hand.

"The Earl's gift," she smiled.

He took and ate the sweetmeat; she gave him another; when the coffee was brought she sent him after the page to ask for some Baples cake and, while his back was turned, she put two more of the comfits in his cup.

Handsome and stately in his velvets and diamonds,

with his graceful manner of courts and his cold air of power, the man at whose mercy she lay leant towards her with the air of a friend, and discussed the details of their meeting on the morrow.

The girl was not listening to what he said; her glance was on the fragile little cup he held; her features became rigid, and her eyes glazed with an intense horror.

"You are paying no attention, mademoiselle," said M. de Rohault at length.

He had now finished his coffee, and set the cup down on the card-table.

"I do not feel well," mumbled the Lady Arabella.

Her appearance was ghastly and indeed alarmed him. She rose, swaying in her hoop. He sprang to his feet.

"Keep your wits, girl," he commanded, gripping her arm.

She stared at him.

"Keep my wits," she repeated. "Yes, but my head hurts me. I will go to my room."

M. de Rohault was deeply angered.

"You will not," he said, "in this way escape the obligations that you are under to me."

She gave him a look full of an apprehension and terror that almost amounted to the stare of insanity.

With some incoherent words she escaped from his presence and staggered into the splendid ballroom, only to fall with an hysterical cry at the feet of her betrothed husband as he came to lead her out for the gavotte.

The *fête* was broken up, and she was carried unconscious to her chamber.

That night she fell into convulsions so terrible and so frequent that her life was despaired of; in the morning London rang with the news of the death of the French

ambassador, who had fallen on the threshold of his chamber, and in a short time succumbed to a swift agony that his doctors declared must be due to poison.

The uncontrolled ravings of the unhappy Lady Arabella and the discovery among the dead man's papers of her foolish love-letters soon threw a tragic light on the author and motive of this useless crime.

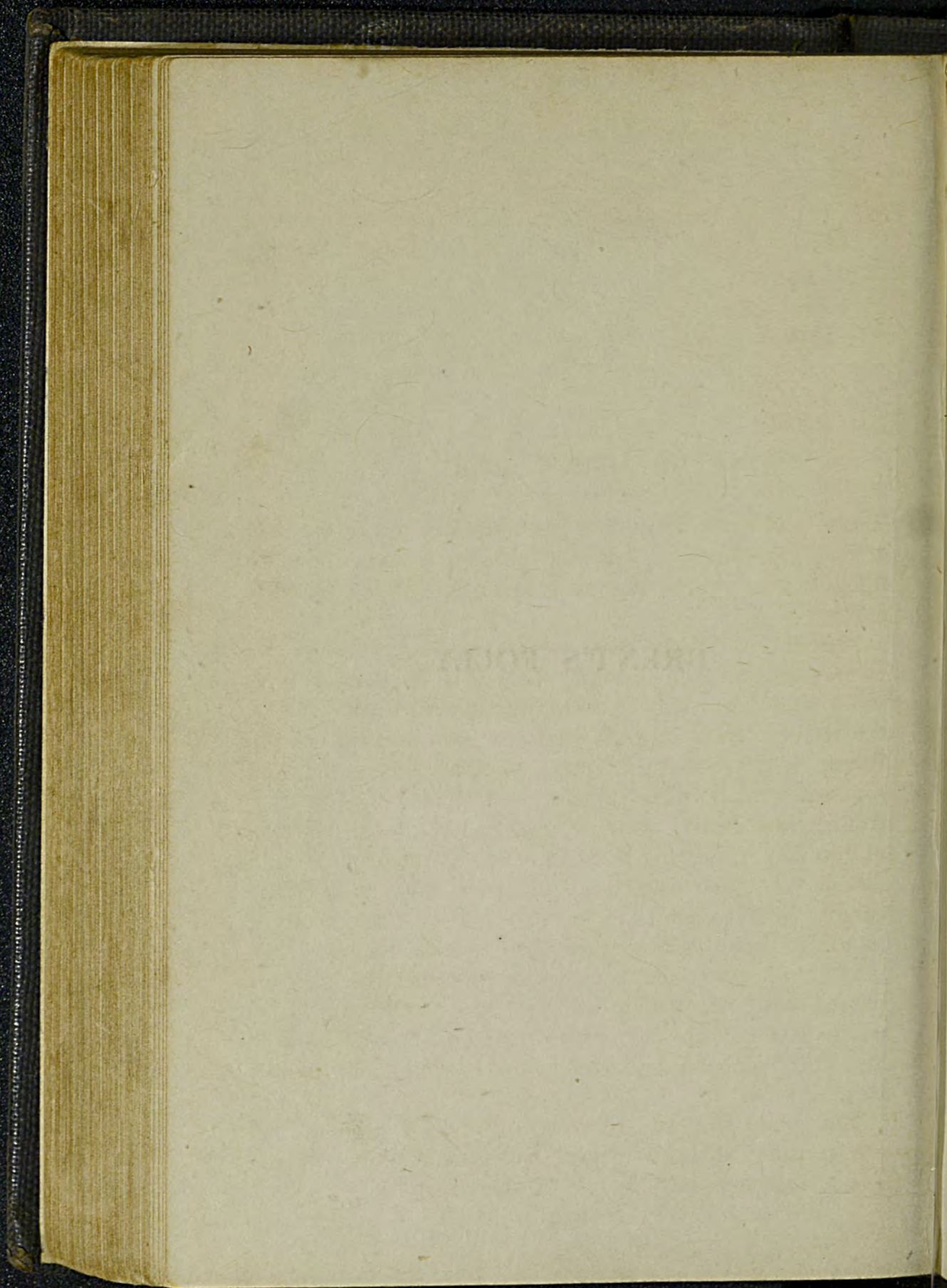
The betrothal was hastily broken off, the scandal hushed up by the great ones of the land, whom it so nearly concerned, and the wretched girl, who had planned a crime that she had not the strength to profit by, was hurried into obscurity in the country.

Her life, but not her reason, survived her dreadful illness; she never remembered her guilt nor those circumstances which had been the cause of it, but became a fond, witless creature, gentle and harmless, but with a blank mind and childish ways.

Now that she was insane, sick, and utterly disgraced, her parents were glad to cover her miserable existence by any marriage they could find, and accepted the sole offer that came for the once courted heiress—that of Captain Robert Tarne.

She knew him, and displayed the only joy she ever manifested when in his presence; he took her abroad, and it was said that this extraordinary marriage was more than commonly happy, and that the man, who felt himself guilty of the act that had first caused the tragedy, found a secret atonement in the care of a fair, loving creature as gentle and innocent as a child.

BRENT'S FOLLY



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BRENT'S FOLLY

THEY said each Brent had his folly, a horse, a woman, a building, an idea, but the present Brent outshone his ancestors by the blatant coarseness of his particular caprice.

When his father had seriously encumbered the estates to build on another wing with a massive ball-room that accorded ill with the Tudor Manor house, the county had remarked that the historic folly of the Brents had passed the limits of the picturesque and romantic and become very like stupidity.

The next Brent, however, excelled the foolish action of his father, for his folly took the form of flesh and blood; to make a mistake about a woman, said the county, was worse than to make a mistake about a building, though there were some cynics who declared that the latter error was worse because the woman passed with her generation and was easily forgotten, whereas the stone and brick remained a lasting annoyance till someone had the courage, time, and money to remove it.

But while she was there, certainly the woman was the greater cause for marvel, the greater shame to the good taste and intelligence of the Brents.

If she had been outrageous, impossible, an actress, a foreigner, a milkmaid, it might have been a folly forgiven and even admired.

If she had been ugly and very rich, or beautiful and very poor, it would have been a thing condoned—an action with at least a motive, some reason to explain the extravagance, the departure from the usual which was more or less expected of the Brents.

But here there was nothing of wonderful, nothing of romantic—nothing to make people startle and stare.

She was the younger daughter of a dull, middle-class family of correct education and morals, neither plain nor pretty, with bad health and a lethargic temperament, and most dismal dull in company.

She excelled in nothing, her taste was of the worst, she could not manage her servants nor her acquaintances, she was jealous and sullen and entirely indifferent to all that makes the fire and colour of life.

And she was five years older than her husband, and after many years of marriage was still childless.

And this was the folly of the last Brent, Sir Roger, handsome, accomplished, brilliant, wealthy.

People asked each other what hidden motive had induced him to offer all to this woman who could not even appreciate what he gave.

Of all the follies of the Brents this was the most inexplicable.

If she had been only wicked, the thing might have been understood, if she had shown the least sign of any of the arts and graces of an enchantress he would have stood excused.

But she was neutral, she was nothing, she had not a single charm that would have induced an ordinary

man to choose her for the love of a season, and instead Roger Brent had chosen her for his wife—this was what was neither understood nor forgiven.

The county disapproved and showed its disapproval; Sir Roger lost many friends; he became a gloomy self-absorbed man, withdrawn slightly from his fellows.

He rarely left Brent Manor; he was a good landlord, a good neighbour, a fine figure among the country gentry—if it had not been for his marriage.

But that had ruined all; Sir Roger at forty was considered as a man with no longer any possibilities before him; he would live and die the squire of Brent Manor, nothing more.

For, like damp ashes on fire, his wife seemed to have choked and stifled all that was eager, ambitious and ardent in Sir Roger; he had sacrificed to this nullity all that a man could sacrifice to beauty and worth.

When Charles Denton, who had known and envied Sir Roger in the days of their common youth, returned to England from Spain, where he had been fulfilling honourable and profitable duties for His Majesty's Government, he heard from several the story of the folly of the last of the Brents.

The last of the Brents and the last of the follies it appeared, since there was no one of the name to carry on the family and the family traditions.

Denton was sorry; he had almost loved Sir Roger, they had been constantly together until Denton's foreign appointment had separated them.

He wrote to Sir Roger and asked if he might spend some of his leave at Brent Manor; Sir Roger responded cordially, and Denton went down to Brent with a little ache of regret at his heart for the fate of his friend.

He found him as much changed as the reports in

London had led him to believe he would be, and despite his preparation he was shocked, almost startled.

Sir Roger, for whom "brilliant" had always seemed the most fitting epithet, had become almost dull; he was silent, almost shy, even with the old friend whom he had seemed so glad to welcome.

His clothes were of an ancient pattern, he was listless in his manner, the unpowdered hair was plentifully sprinkled with grey, the handsome face hard and lined.

The Manor house, too, seemed ill-kept and gloomy.

Denton had an impression of gloom from all his surroundings.

At supper he saw the lady of the house. She was neatly dressed in a gay sacque; her manner was dull and civil.

Denton eyed her in vain for a single merit; her figure was ill-shaped and slightly stooping, her hands and feet were large, her complexion was of an ugly pallor, her features soft and heavy, eyes and hair of a colourless brown, her movements without meaning, her words without grace.

Denton inwardly sighed and the supper hour passed heavily.

She left them early and Denton, spurred by a deep impulse, turned swiftly to his host and asked:

"Why did you marry her?"

Sir Roger was sitting in a dejected attitude with his head a little lowered.

As his friend spoke he looked up, and a smile touched his sombre features.

"You are the first who has had the courage to demand that question," he responded.

"Oh, the bad taste," apologized Denton.

Sir Roger shrugged his shoulders.

"The others were silent and stayed away, you speak and come," he said.

Denton was indignant for his friend.

"Why should they stay away? The lady is well enough."

"She blights," said Sir Roger decisively.

Denton wondered that such a mediocrity should have that power—but it was what he had heard in London.

"A woman," he replied, "can keep in a woman's place—why should she interfere with your friends?"

Sir Roger smiled again.

"She is so dull, she deadens, so stupid she frightens, so unlovely she depresses."

"And yet you married her!"

"Yes, I married her."

"Why, Roger, why?"

"You wonder?"

"Who would not wonder, you who had everything, might have married a Princess, you might have had the best of life—instead——"

"This!" finished Sir Roger.

"There must be a reason."

"You think so?"

"Assuredly."

"Would you like to hear it?"

"Certainly—I came here to hear it," smiled Denton.

Sir Roger for a while was silent; he was turning over the incidents of his past as one turns the leaves of a long closed book, with wonder and a little sadness at ancient things that once meant so much and now mean so little.

"Is it worth while?" he asked at length.

He rested his elbows on the table and looked rather drearily at his friend.

"What?"

"To tell you—to tell anyone how it happened," replied Sir Roger.

Denton looked with profound compassion at his lined face, his bowed figure, his grey sprinkled hair, his careless dress.

And Brent looked with a dull envy at the neat elegance of his friend, who, powdered, fashionable, alert, seemed indeed to come from another world than that duty circle which comprised the life of Brent Manor.

"Tell me," said Denton quietly.

Sir Roger laughed.

"Tell you why I married Lily Walters?" he asked.

"Yes."

Sir Roger shrugged his shoulders.

"Why not?" he answered.

He turned his eyes, still handsome but lustreless, towards the log fire which flickered in the sculptured chimney place, and his fine hands dropped and clasped slackly on the dark surface of the sombre oak table, where stood the glasses and the fruit and the bottles of old wine.

Then, like one who reads aloud slowly, and with a certain difficulty, he began his strange relation.

"I greatly loved my life. I had everything to make existence pleasant. Health, name, money—wits—you know what I had, my friend."

"Everything."

"Everything. But I wished for more. I had a lust for knowledge, for power, for experience—I wished to reach the limits of every sensation.

"For me there was no wine powerful enough, no woman beautiful enough, no gold bright enough—

"I wished to prove everything—to see everything—to know everything.

"For five years I travelled from one country to another; I had enough money to obtain all my desires.

"I had friends, lovers, horses, houses, ships, I travelled sometimes in a coach and six, sometimes on foot, sometimes I lodged in palaces, sometimes I slept in a ditch, I kissed princesses by the light of a hundred candles, and peasant girls by the dewy light of dawn, I stayed at the most dissolute courts in Italy, and I shut myself up for months in the austerity of a Spanish convent.

"I experienced poverty, luxury, every day I gained knowledge.

"I practised in music, poetry, botany, medicine, painting, sculpture, astronomy—I sat at the feet of wise men and drew crude knowledge from the unlettered of all countries.

"Still I was not satisfied.

"My health remained vigorous and my mind restless.

"So far I had not found one woman whom I could not replace, one friend whose company was a necessity, one art or science to which I wished to devote my life.

"Then at The Hague I met a certain Doctor Strass, and under his guidance I began to seriously study alchemy and occultism.

"In this I found at last something that absorbed my whole being.

"Here was the love, the passion that should absorb my life.

"For three years I lived for nothing else. I resolved to find the elixir of life."

Denton moved back out of the candlelight, so that he might more clearly see his friend's face, but Sir Roger was absolutely grave.

He spoke as a man who, with quiet deliberation, relates sober sense.

"The elixir of life," he repeated. "The magic powder that should confer on me eternal youth and eternal enjoyment."

"A strange whim," said Denton quietly. "You who had everything."

"I wished to keep everything," responded Sir Roger, "but more than that even, I wished for power."

"The last temptation of the Devil!" smiled his friend.

"I wished for power," repeated Brent, "but I cannot explain. Enough that the thing took hold of me."

"I lived for that alone. Occult studies absorbed my time and largely my fortune and my health."

"I seemed ever on the verge of a discovery, but I attained nothing."

He paused, and a bitter sadness darkened his sensitive face.

"Nothing," he repeated. "I but underlined the failures of others, but repeated once more the tale of delusion and disappointment."

"But in this I had more strength than some, in that I resolved to cease the fruitless and perilous study that had fascinated my entire soul."

"I determined to free myself from what was becoming an incubus."

"I was frightened by the fate of others whom I saw as half mad, half idiotic old men fumbling with their philtres and muttering over their furnaces; in short, I vowed to free myself from what I at last saw as but a net or device of the devil to draw me away from a useful and enjoyable life."

"With this resolve strong within me I returned to

England, and my desire for the normal desires of my former life was increased by the sight of familiar faces and sights.

"I made up my mind to enter politics, and was on the point of taking steps in this direction, when an event occurred which again altered everything."

He paused and pressed the palms of his hands to his brows. Denton was regarding him curiously.

"One day a sober-looking person came to see me. He seemed a doctor or a lawyer of the better sort.

"He was not English; I took him to be a Dutchman or of the Low German nationality—he was habited very neatly and very precise in his speech.

"‘I hear,’ said he without preamble, ‘that you have studied alchemy.’

"‘For a while,’ said I, ‘but I have left that business.’

"Whereat he smiled quietly and drew from his pocket a little box of tortoiseshell like a gentleman's box for snuff, and opening it, he drew out, wrapped in two foldings of scarlet silk, a piece of stone the size of a walnut and the colour of amber. ‘This is what you have been looking for,’ he said calmly; ‘this is what the vulgar called the Philosopher's Stone.’

"At these words all the blood went back on my heart, and I begged for a portion with tears in my eyes.

"Whereupon he very comfortably took off a paring with his nail, for the stone was soft like soap, and laid it in the palm of my hand.

"And while I was yet too amazed to speak he left me.

"I had yet with me my retorts and crucibles, and that night I very eagerly tested the portion of the stone on a piece of lead, and when in the morning I poured

it forth it was pure rich gold. When this was set I took it round to the jeweller who worked for the court, and asked him what it was, and he told me that it was indeed gold of a finer quality than he had ever handled before.

"I was like a madman, for I had no means of finding my stranger, but that day he came again, and without preamble asked me if I was satisfied, and what I would do to possess the secret which, he declared, had become indifferent to him, as he had passed on to higher studies.

"And he told me about the wonders of this stone, how a few drops of it dissolved in water, if allowed to stand, would leave great rubies and pearls at the bottom, and if taken would confer youth and beauty on him who drank.

"And presently he showed me this experiment, and we sat up all night talking, and in the morning there were the jewels hard and glistening in our hands.

"And then he propounded to me what he would have me do—take some poor mean creature to wife, and with the elixir make her into a goddess."

Brent paused thoughtfully; Denton was still looking at him with intent eyes.

Sir Roger continued:

"I was to marry her first, to show my trust. I was to present her to the town, and afterwards transform her. The idea pleased me beyond words; it was what no man had ever done before.

"I agreed.

"My stranger presented me to Lily Walters. I easily obtained the consent of her family—in brief, I made a match that confounded all my friends.

"My Dutchman was at the church, and afterwards

presented me with a packet, which he said contained the recipe for the famous stone.

"Such was my impatience that I opened it in the coach ere we had reached home.

"It was blank paper.

"I left my bride to run to the stranger's lodging, but he had left.

"I never saw him again."

Sir Roger ended abruptly and turned his straight gaze on his friend's serious face.

"And that is why I married Lily Walters," he concluded.

"And the rubies?" asked Denton, quietly.

"She wears them now and then, set in the gold I made with the paring of stone."

Denton was silent.

"I have searched Europe for that man," continued Sir Roger sullenly. "I hope yet to kill him before I die."

"You would be justified," said Denton, easily. He rose and crossed to the fire, still looking covertly and intently at his friend.

Sir Roger muttered to himself a little, and presently fell asleep with his head bowed on his heart.

Denton softly left the room.

He was startled to see Lady Brent waiting in the shadows of the great hall.

"I don't think Sir Roger is very well," said Denton, quietly.

Her plain face quivered and her short-sighted eyes narrowed.

"I always wait up when there is anyone here," she said simply. "I never know what he will do."

They looked at each other.

"He had a strange life before I married him," continued Lady Brent. "He brought me a ruby necklace, and told me it had been made by the Philosopher's Stone."

"Those studies turn a man's brain," said Denton.

"Oh!" answered Lady Brent in her thin ugly voice. "Roger has been mad a long time; no one knows the life I lead with him."

A QUIET WOMAN

THE QUIET ROOM

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A QUIET WOMAN

HE walked slowly through a day of complete and perfect winter; the trees were bare of even the curled leaves that had remained to them but twenty-four hours before, for a high and bitter wind had been abroad the previous night.

Now it was quite still, the early afternoon was drawing to a close, and the sun was sinking in a red haze behind the uplands of Vyse Park.

Overhead the sky was colourless and chill, the landscape lay veiled by indefinite shadows; everything had a bleak look of greyness, the frost stiffened the road, and the water in the ruts was filmed with ice.

Mathew Attenbury knew Vyse Park well, but he had never seen it in winter.

Vivid, poignant memories of these roads and fields in summer and in spring haunted his way as he approached the house.

Slowly and reluctantly, for his errand was terrible to him—yet one that could not be refused. The husband of the woman who had loved him, and who was also his own cousin and friend, had written after a year's silence:

"Come and help me burn her letters; I cannot face the deed alone."

This message had not roused in him any fear that their secret had been discovered; their friendship, their relationship had covered their love; their open fondness had disguised their hidden passion.

And she had not been an ordinary woman, but a creature of intelligence, of wit, of learning, and it had been natural for her to move amid men who admired and, perhaps, loved her. Attenbury could remember one who had certainly loved her—a young man who carried a pair of colours in the Guards; a handsome, stupid creature—they had laughed at him, quite tenderly, together.

And George Vyse had never suspected anything. Attenbury was their oldest and dearest friend, and she was the last woman anyone would have thought of as light or deceptive, she was so open and frank, so simple and natural—a quiet woman, for all her brilliancy.

To Mathew Attenbury, for five years her lover, she appeared wholly good; in his eyes she was not smirched in the very least by their relationship, they belonged to each other, and their consciences had always been at rest since they disturbed no conventions and hurt no one.

Utter secrecy had kept their love undegraded and veiled it with romance.

They had always been kind to George, and he had been happy in their affection; they had become so used to him that they hardly wished him out of the way.

A year ago she had died, very suddenly, in London, of the small-pox.

She had been brave and gay till the end; her hair, bright and tangled on the pillow, seemed like a joyous wreath even when her disfigured face was blind and cold.

Two men at least had broken hearts for this death; Mathew Attenbury went abroad, and wandered aimlessly through the decayed cities of Italy; George Vyse shut himself up in his country house, the scene of all the happy summers of his wedded life.

Soon after Attenbury returned he had received the summons of his cousin.

He was immensely sorry for George, who had no memories such as his own to illumine the bleak desolation of grievous loss.

Because of this pity he came now—and because the thing had been asked in her name.

"You were her dearest friend," George Vyse had written; "there is no one has the right to be here but you."

Poor George! How he loved her still!

Mathew Attenbury smiled from the riches of his storied treasures of remembrances—his life could never be completely dull or empty as long as he had these precious recollections of the glorious love of a woman like Anne Vyse.

She had been so utterly his; such a comrade, such a friend, such a lover!

He wondered if his cousin guessed what he had missed when he had missed the heart of Anne.

As for these letters that he had been asked to help read and destroy or preserve, he knew what they would be—the witty, gay, and charming letters she wrote to her friends, things worth preserving for their human quality of humour and sympathy, their wide culture, their keen tact.

He had read some of them, and found all her hidden graces in the frank words. Of his to her, and hers to him, he did not even think—on his side they had been

instantly destroyed ; and she told him that she had not preserved a line that he had ever written.

There had never been very many, for their separation had been of brief duration and infrequent, but there had been enough to tell everything. Her perfect discretion had been amply justified by the tragedy of her sudden death.

Had she left anything behind that could have betrayed the secret of her life, how fair an edifice of faith and belief and kind friendship had she not ruined, how much bitter pain had she not inflicted !

But there had been nothing among what had to be burnt after her death in London, nothing among the things she had at Vyse Park to mar her husband's memory of her ; her memory remained equally unspotted to both Mathew Attenbury and George Vyse.

His delicate discretion that kept inviolate their perfect love made Attenbury absolutely confident that George would never discover anything that was not pleasing to him among what Anne, taken so swiftly, so unprepared, had left behind.

As he neared the house, and looked across the beautiful lawns where the foreign trees still showed richly dark with foliage in the English bareness of winter, at the plain, red-brick building with the stone portico and flat windows, where he had spent such jewelled hours of almost unearthly happiness, his heart contracted with a pain nearly unendurable.

He came to a stand—a tall, cloaked, and muffled figure in the fading light, graceful and powerful, with that air of suppressed strength that must ever belong to healthy youth, however quiescent it may be.

He forced back the rising agony and went slowly on.

It would be pleasant to see George again, after all; he was fond of George.

The two men met in the library, a place brown and gold and red in hue, old, worn, and pleasant, with the dim-coloured pictures above the mantelpiece and dim-coloured books on the plain shelves, desks and floors polished, and chairs in faded crimson leather, and dull-hued carpets on the floor.

All was lit by the living hues of the firelight, which was tinting everything with a glow of gold and pink, like wine and roses mingled.

There was no other light save one thick candle, which stood on the desk by which Sir George Vyse awaited his guest.

He was still in complete mourning, without a sword, and looked ill, almost old; but his handsome features retained their kindly expression, his manner an air of pleasant composure.

The two men, both typical, leisured gentlemen of fine breed and comeliness—though there was a touch of wildness in Mathew Attenbury's dark good looks that, however subdued by quietness in dress, was unusual in one of his nationality and station—met and greeted each other without reference to the occasion of their coming together.

Mathew, whose senses were in general exquisite, and to-night even more than usually alert, noticed at once that George had changed; there was something about him dull and sombre, something neither happy nor cordial.

The lover, glancing at the husband out of softened eyes, more than pitied this man who had such meagre memories with which to brighten his bleak life.

He himself felt at that moment such a rush of pas-

sionate joy at the thought of what his own past held that the room seemed as bright to him as if it had held her actual presence.

"We both loved her, and she loved only me—only me!"

Exulting in this thought, a glow came into his cheek and his fine eyes shone tenderly; he was able to speak of her with that calm sorrow that was allowed him.

"You have found some of Anne's things?" he remarked.

On the heavy desk that held the one candle was a light writing-case in blue velvet, adorned with seed pearls and tied with ivory ribbon.

Mathew Attenbury smiled at this with great love and understanding, it was redolent of Anne; everything she had owned was rich and beautiful.

"Letters," said George Vyse—"a few letters."

Mathew seated himself by the great fire; he did not trouble much about what the other man was saying or doing—it was such a wonderful sensation to be here, under her roof, among her possessions, that she was dead hardly seemed to matter.

"I do not know what to do," said Sir George, "that is why I sent for you. I do not know what I feel even. I suppose I must be a fool."

Mathew glanced at him. So poor George was just finding that out.

"How can I help you, cousin?" he asked gently.

The other still stood by the desk, irresolutely fingering the blue velvet portfolio.

"You knew her so well, Mathew, you were such friends; you were akin in so many matters that I knew nothing about."

"So you noticed that, did you?" thought Mathew beneath his silence.

"So perhaps," continued George Vyse, "you could advise me what to do."

"Surely," returned the younger man, "you need no advice as to what to do in any matter that concerns Anne?"

"If she had been what I thought," said the widower, "I should have been in no difficulty, cousin."

Mathew Attenbury had been about to move; he now remained motionless, slightly leaning forwards.

"These are love-letters," added George Vyse in the same flat tone, "not written by me."

Mathew tried to laugh, to speak, to do something to ward off this monstrous thing that had suddenly crashed on him; he could only make a silly sound of horror.

"Wonderful letters," said Sir George; he untied the strings of the portfolio and laid bare on the white lining about twelve letters, bound with a gold cord. "They loved very much, these two. I did not know"—his lip curled with a smile dreadful to see—"that there was love like this outside of story-books."

Mathew Attenbury rose. He had a confused sense that something was expected of him, that there was something he could do to redeem this hideous moment; but all his faculties were occupied by the horror of what had happened—their secret betrayed, their love profaned, her memory spoilt, George struck to the heart, and he—and he——

Why, they must try to kill each other. It all seemed more grotesque than tragic; he dully put his hand to his sword.

"Yes, I thought of that," said George Vyse. "The

obvious way—the only way, I suppose, you will say. I have been thinking about it a great deal—when I have been sitting here alone with her letters.”

“You have known then—some time?”

“Several weeks.”

“And you never sent for me before?”

“No—to what end? I do not know quite why I sent for you now after all, it is between me and her. I am almost sorry that I have told you what I have found.”

“But I should have guessed,” replied Mathew Attenbury. “You do not seem angry,” he added curiously.

“Angry?” Sir George smiled. “I wonder if anyone was ever angry with Anne? You know, I really thought she loved me. She said so—so often—in many ways.”

Fury touched Attenbury. He had never cared to glance at Anne’s relations with her husband, it was a subject he had never allowed himself to think of. It was ugly to think that she had persuaded George that she cared for him. Yet—he strove to be reasonable—what else could she do?

“What was she?” broke out George, after a bitter pause of silence. “What am I? A quiet woman—these letters—why, ’tis as if they were written to a—why, I never thought she even knew of such love.”

Attenbury interrupted.

“Cousin, words are so silly. There is only the sword.”

“Why should I give her that?” replied the husband. “She had everything—her own way always—and always the laugh of me.”

His body was convulsed with a long sigh; he covered his face with his hands for an instant.

"Burn the letters, Mathew, burn them!" he muttered. "They seemed to me—*alive*. I could not throw them in the flames. Do that for me."

With a bent head he left the room.

Mathew felt sick to the soul. He accused Anne of having betrayed him by this strange carelessness with regard to his letters. Why should she, in face of all her promises to him, have kept what would ruin all their love?

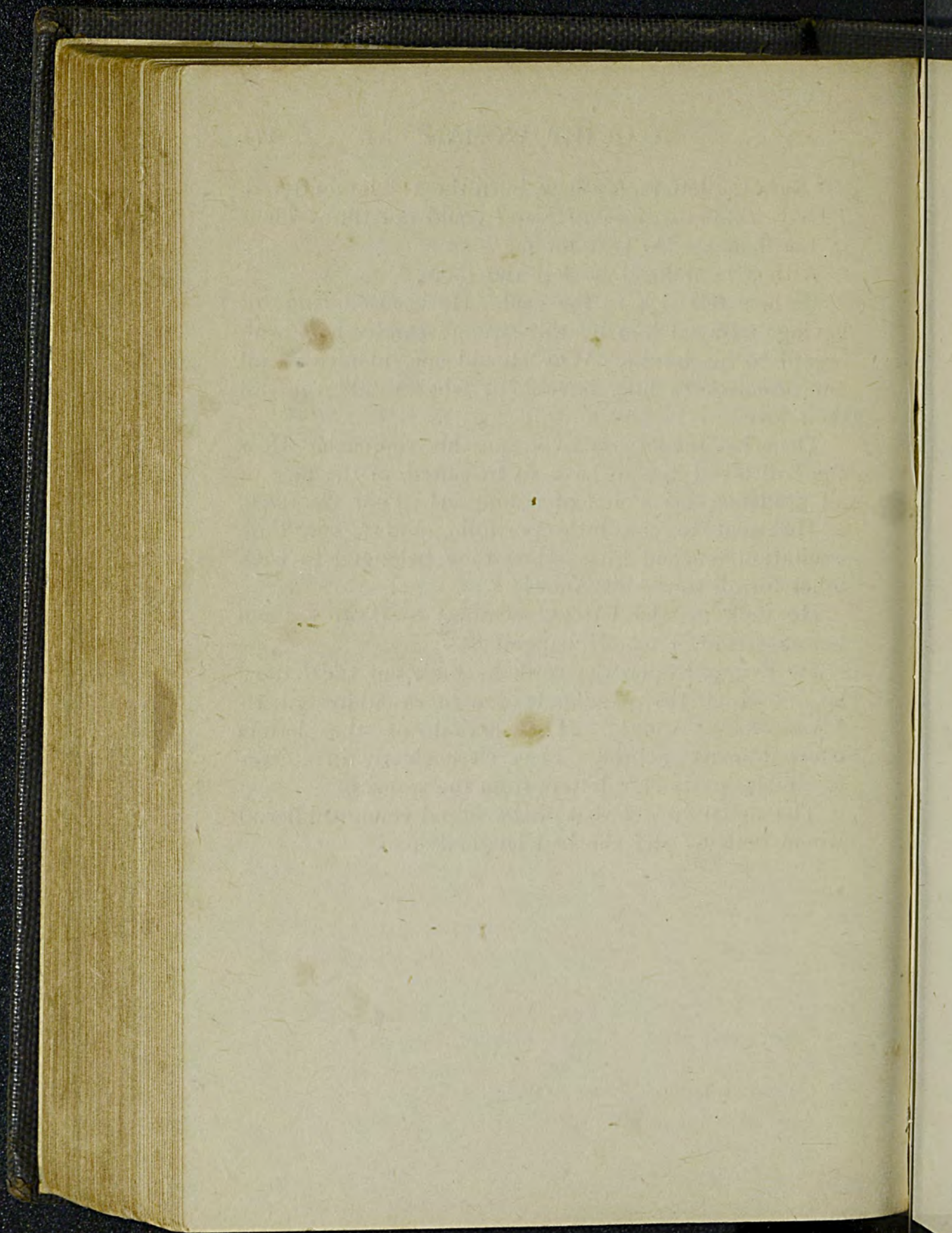
Then his tenderness overcame his reproach. How she had loved him to have so treasured, in the face of all prudence, his words of adoration! Poor George!

He went to the little portfolio, and a sense of exultation touched him. How they belonged to each other for all time—his Anne!

He took up the letters, meaning to destroy them before George's mood changed.

He dragged open the cord, he took out the letters, he stared at the passionate sentences addressed to "Anne—my Anne!" The period of the letters covered many months. They were clearly in answer to equally passionate letters from the woman.

The signature was that of the stupid young soldier at whom both he and she had laughed.



THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

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I.—PRIDE

"PRIDE is the first of the deadly sins and painted in the likeness of a peacock; there are few without this sin in great or small degree, and there is no sin so likely to catch a man by the heels and trip him into Hell's Mouth."

So spake the old monk, sitting by the fire, talking to the young novices on the long winter's evening; they liked to listen to the holy stories the old monk told them, for there was always a good comforting moral and some matter of interest too, for he had been in the world once, and remembered it well enough, though he was now so far on the path to heaven.

"A man without pride," he continued, "is a saint, and a man all pride is a devil, and a dangerous devil—especially if he be not a man at all, but a woman."

"Ah," said the novices wisely, and they looked into the fire and shook their heads and pursed their lips.

The monk finished his glass of Hippocras, wiped his lips and proceeded to tell the story of pride, the first deadly sin.

"When I was in Paris," he said, "learning theology at the Sorbonne, I often saw—riding in a gilt chariot—the Queen."

"The Queen!"

"As you may have heard, her name was Isabeau, and she came from the East; her clothes were a wonder, her life was a scandal; she was quite the proudest creature any man had ever seen or heard of; she boasted that she had never set her foot in the public street nor in the house of one who was of less than blood royal; there was always a body of the Scottish Archers about her car to prevent the mud from touching her wheels, and the foul breath of the baser sort from reaching her.

"But she did not mind their eyes; indeed, she was always raised high on her cushions that they might see her, and if she was in a litter, the curtains were drawn, and her beauty was displayed as freely, nay, as wantonly, as that of any common creature who goes about seeking her price.

"The treasury was empty because of her vesture and her servants and her dainty meats, her silk sheets, her baths of rose-water; the soldiers were few and so were the ships; the peasants were rioting in the country; the nobles pawned their plate, but the Queen went in cloth-of-gold and wore the keep of a regiment in a single ring.

"You will have heard of the King. . . . He was foolish in his mind, and played with clocks and cards all day long in his closet; his only company was his jester, and they were both in frayed robes and ill-nourished. He neither saw the Queen nor asked after her; they said that she had broken his heart and shattered his wits long ago.

"There were, of course, many cavaliers in her train—I have told you she was beautiful; her eyes and her hair were tawny, like a dark tiger-skin, her complexion

was clear yet golden, the carnation deep in the cheeks. The whole effect of her face was golden; she sparkled and glowed without the aid of jewels.

"It was said she put dye upon her lips and cheeks, the juice of scarlet geranium petals; I do not know, nor did it matter; she was beautiful as only a proud, shameless woman can be—beautiful to strike the eye and hold the heart, to excite, to subdue, to awe, to lure. . . .

"I often saw her ride past the Sorbonne; her head-dress three or four feet high, scarlet, sparkling with gems, and hung with a thin white gauze veil, that now floated away from her face and now obscured it. . . . Across her shoulders the fine ermine robe, flecked here and there with black, would fall apart, disclosing the loveliness of her bosom beneath the thin cambric sewn with pearls that edged her purple velvet bodice, and then it would be drawn together by the fairest hand in all the world, aye, and on this hand there glittered the royal gems of France.

"She was always alone, always drawn by white horses, eight of them without a speck or flaw, and always followed by the most brilliant knights and nobles in the kingdom—her humble servants all of them, her lovers, some; Duke François or another of her favourites close behind her, almost as magnificent as she herself, and almost as proud. She ruled France in those days—ruled it hideously, without justice, without sense, without pity, her sole object the making of money for her own magnificence.

"Well—there was no one to gainsay her, and her splendour and her licence pleased the great nobles, I suppose—at least they supported her; in the streets and the country-side she was cursed with many oaths,

for a foreign wanton, a tyrant, a creature who sucked the blood of the nation. What did she care?

"She never heard them, or, if she did, if any occasional murmur did penetrate the scented atmosphere she breathed, it made no impression on her gilded charm. She was cruel.

"She was also very like the peacock in this; there was little else but pride in that small head beneath the high crown.

"So it happened that she let her ruling vice destroy the only thing she cared for—if indeed it was possible for her to care; who knows?

"One day when she rode abroad she saw a young man looking from an upper window; his arms were folded on the sill and the sunlight was on his face.

"This was no unusual sight, nor was the admiration in his eyes.

"But the Queen looked at him a second longer than her usual wont.

"And the next time she rode that way (it was near the '*Près aux clercs*' and May, and very sunny weather) he was there again, and yet again until in all it was seven times she had seen him leaning from the window in the full sunlight looking down at her. The Duke François saw him; he saw the Queen look up and the young man look down, but he thought naught of it, so serene was he in his pride; could he imagine Isabeau would ever smile on one not of royal blood, or the greatest among nobles?

"So the Duke went his way, swaggering through Paris, and there came a day, about the beginning of June, the court being then at Vincennes, when the young man climbed the palace wall and dropped right at the feet of the Queen where she sat alone in the

orchard, in the daisied grass, with her psalter on her knee.

“What followed was a miracle—you may believe what I say, though, for I had it from the young man himself: she rose to her feet—she was in silk from head to foot, with gold on her hair, and he in his ordinary garb, for he was no more than a student at the Sorbonne—and she held out her arms and came to him and they kissed without a word.

“They loved each other; from the first instant their eyes had crossed they loved each other. She had never loved before—not even Duke François; yet her pride was still the stronger, for although she was a woman utterly without shame she kept this love secret—had she loved a Prince she would have flaunted it, but this was only a poor clerk and all her wit and her power were turned to conceal her passion.

“For a while she contrived it—for she had all France at her service, and who was there to spy on her, or to dare to speak if they did, and of whom should she be afraid?

“There was one—Duke François—but in her pride and her absorption in her new love, and her great haughtiness, she disdained him.

“She had dismissed him from her favour as lightly as she would have blown a feather from her sleeve, and *his* pride was sorely hit and his ambition also. I do not know what they had ever been, the one to the other, but she had given him her confidence, and made him virtually King of France, from which he had soaring hopes and delighted in the power her favour left in his hands. But there came a time when she must needs consult him on some affairs of State that she was too idle to attend to or too ignorant to under-

stand, and the Duke perceived in her the effect of advice not his own, and this angered him. For her personal coldness to himself he cared little enough, I think. He was as proud as she and as cruel, but neither so reckless nor so foolish. It was said he schemed to take the place of the poor silly King and would have stopped at nothing to this end, if he could have cloaked his designs beyond discovery.

"He made no complaint now of the Queen's waning favour, nor of the daily humiliations she put on him—for she was not a prudent woman, and too proud to conceal a changed feeling; he served her ever with the same graceful readiness, but his courtesies only masked the fact that he was employing all his wit and skill in finding out his rival, so that he might be revenged.

"At first he suspected the princes of the blood, the court gallants—yet he wondered at her secrecy, and his careful watching and spying convinced him that it was not one of these who had taken his place.

"For a while he was baffled, for she was most careful—cautious and secretive for the first time in her foolish life—and she had not a single confidante. . . .

"But the young clerk was also ambitious, and the excessive fears of discovery the Queen had began to gall him; he thought that she might have brought him to court, and let him ride openly beside her in cloth-of-gold through the streets of Paris. Yet he dared not even suggest such a thing; for when once he hinted to the Queen that she might gild his obscurity she told him that did he once lift his head out of the crowd, Duke François would set his heel on that head and crush it into the dust. So he had to content himself with his secret influence on the affairs of France—he

wrought diligently and skilfully on the evil little Queen, and she trusted him with the secrets of the statecraft of France, and he advised her and gave her long scrolls of parchment covered with what she must do, and she meekly obeyed him; it seemed in those days as if she would do all to please him—all and anything save own him.

“You might think that he would have been content, yet he was not, for she had made him take a great oath that never, no matter at what pass, would he disclose that the Queen had loved him.

“This oath rankled within him day and night, till he began to irk and fret at the concealment and to consider what he might have achieved had she set him beside her on the throne of France—of how he might have been bowed down to and worshipped by those people who now took him as naught and never turned their heads to look at him.

“So in all these three pride became the one thing burning up all other passions: in Duke François, angry pride had been supplanted, killing all lingering tenderness for the Queen, humbled pride in her began to dim her true ardour for her plebeian lover, and baffled pride in the clerk began to stifle the passion he felt for Isabeau.

“As the months rolled round to another summer this conflict of pride with the softer emotions of their bosoms became a thing unbearable to all three.

“The Queen had a secret door in her apartments in the Louvre, and when the nights were moonless, and her women dismissed, she would take her lantern and in some cunning disguise or other go forth, let herself out of the Palace with her own keys, hurry along the dark streets of Paris and meet her lover either at the

'*Près aux clercs*' where his house stood, or in the cemetery of the Couvent des Innocents, which stood open day and night. In this ghastly place they met not only for love, for the young clerk, in defiance of God and eaten up and maddened by pride, was seeking to raise the Devil or one of his emissaries, who, as he hoped, might help him to thwart the Queen and gain the place he longed for in the councils of France.

"And Isabeau helped in these experiments—her design, which she kept as secret as her lover kept his, being to obtain the aid of the Devil in safely removing Duke François, whom at last she was growing to fear.

"Perhaps a woman's instinct warned her that under his serene air of homage he might be working her fatal mischief.

"She was only afraid of one thing in the world, and that was the discovery of her common lover, and she knew that this very weak spot was that which Duke François would most like to strike.

"About the very heat and height of summer, when the war was faring badly (the English burning and slaying close within a hundred miles of Paris), the people bent beneath taxes heavier than any taxes had been yet even in the bad Queen's time, the harvest poor and rotting on the stalk, the air filled often with storms and the echoes of riots and rebellions and fierce punishments in Picardy and Normandy and Provence, Duke François, after six months of spying and watching, saw, with his own eyes, Isabeau go forth and meet a common clerk in the graveyard of the Couvent des Innocents.

"And then Duke François began to raise the Devil, too, after his own fashion.

"The next day he was the Queen's courtier as usual,

bowing and humble at her side, and she was more than ever haughty and cold with him, for his quiet presence and soft manners were becoming daily more intolerable to her and an affront to her pride—yes, an affront to her pride to look at him and imagine his laughter did he know her secret—his laughter at her, the Queen!

“But that evening she was relieved of him; he went to Aquitaine, where his estates were, on the excuse of a rebellion among his vassals, and that he must go to punish with sword and fire those who murmured against his iron government.

“But he left behind him strange rumours—it was said that Devil-worship and Devil-raising were going on in Paris, and that to these unholy dabblings in the black arts were to be traced the misfortunes and disasters overtaking France.

“The priests, who had been made desperate by the silence of the Blessed God to Whom they prayed, and somewhat discomposed besides by the temper of the people, who began to complain of a scant return for all their offerings in the churches, were eager enough to catch at these rumours and to encourage and inflame with holy zeal the miserable citizens of Paris, who, in truth, between Queen Isabeau and the English required no Devil to plague them.

“In a short while the rage against Devil-worshippers and the search for them became so fierce in France, and especially in Paris, that Isabeau’s lover was frightened and begged her to desist.

“But she was the Queen—she could not imagine danger and herself in the same company; she was infatuated in her study of black magic, and mad to raise the Devil and learn from him how to be rid of Duke François—and how to get money—for she had wrung

almost the last maravedi out of France and she was one who needed to be gorged on gold to live.

"She would not turn back, and so it came about that on one night in August—the fourteenth day of August—in the year '20, this scene took place in the cemetery of the Innocents.

"You may believe what I say, for I was there.

"It was a hot night, but thick, loose black clouds raced across the full yellow midsummer moon and the two figures crouched behind a gaunt tomb were sometimes in silver light and sometimes in complete darkness. One was the Queen and one the young student of the Sorbonne. . . .

"That night she looked most beautiful; she wore a red *cotehardie* and black hose (she was habited like a man) and a short purple cloak and a purple hood drawn over her red hair—but no poor sentences of mine could describe the flash and sparkle of her face, the delicate carnation of her cheeks and lips, the velvet sweep of her brows, the shape and softness of her throat: she was a beautiful woman—beauty itself, sirs, the pure beauty of the flesh.

"They had made a horrid brew in an iron cauldron. There were loathsome ingredients in it, that the youth shuddered to handle, but Isabeau cared not; the cauldron stood against the tomb and round it were traced pentacles and mystic signs in white chalk.

"The Queen's white hands were busy in setting fire to the sulphurous mass that she had piled beneath the cauldron, when the moon sailed languidly free of the clouds into the clear dark ocean of heaven, and glancing up, she saw she had raised the Devil indeed; he stood beside the dark wall of the tomb in the guise of Duke François.

"She raised her hand to shield her face—she thought of that even before she turned to flee; but he seized her upflung arm and dragged it down and held her fast. 'Majesty!' he said, and in that one word she heard her degradation—and realized, for the first time perhaps, the utter depth of her fall.

"For the moment sheer terror was uppermost; she appealed to his manhood—the weaker to the stronger—an ancient instinct that had long lain dormant in her imperious soul. But it did not soften him to see her abasement; his pride was mounting as hers sank. He remembered how she had flouted him, and that this was his vengeance.

"He called up his men; they came, hurrying across the graveyard.

"Here mark his devilry—*they were all fellows he had brought from Aquitaine—who had never seen the Queen*—and who beheld now nothing more than a couple of youths caught in the infamous and deadly practices of black magic.

"After them came a whole pack of the baser sort, carrying torches and lanterns and accompanied by several of those fierce dogs of the kind men take with them when they hunt highwaymen and night ruffians, and these, with the enthusiasm of the chase, and the delight of seeing the quarry cornered, and the hope that now the Devil-worshippers were caught the misfortune of France would cease, were beside themselves, leaping, shouting and pushing forward across the grave-stones, and only held in check by the pikes of the Duke's men from Aquitaine.

"It may be imagined that though some of them may have glimpsed her golden chariot in the distance, none knew the Queen.

"And she stood with her back against the wall, facing them in the moonshine, so pale now compared with the angry red dancing light of the coarse resin torches of the crowd.

"As for the other youth, the student I mean, he stood numb and bewildered and frightened to death, yet (with the instinct to stand by the woman) staying where he was though none held him. Isabeau looked up at François.

"'You must save me,' she said haughtily, and she signed furiously to her lover to leave her—but he, poor fool! did not understand and instead drew nearer to her, clapping his hand to his outmatched sword.

"'Why should I save you, little witch?' cried the Duke in a loud voice, and he beckoned his followers nearer. 'See justice done to these two,' he said, 'who were so manifestly raising the Devil! What shall their punishment be?'

"And they shouted violently, 'Death'—and Isabeau cowered a little, and then looked at François again and saw what revenge he had prepared for her—she must declare herself before these churls or be done to death by them; there was no pity in Duke François—she knew it in an instant.

"I think that in that instant, too, she had taken her resolve. Pride is a deadly sin, but always a brave one.

"She folded her arms on her bosom and looked sideways at the mob, who ever pressed nearer with shouts of hatred.

"'Tell them who you are,' said the Duke. 'Give them, sweet, your name and quality.'

"She shot a glance up at him and hell-fire flashed in her eyes; she said nothing. He swung her round to face her persecutors. At that the student sprang

forward, hardly knowing what he did—or what had happened. ‘Whom do you touch—do you know who this is?’ he cried, himself not knowing who Duke François was. But the Queen turned on him with all she knew of royalty in her looks and gesture.

“‘Silence!’ she commanded, ‘or I curse you!’

“He fell back at that and was seized by the Duke’s guard. He hung his head, he had no great desire to speak, nor for anything on the earth, for he saw that her love had vanished in a flash—that she thought no longer of him . . . that she was the Queen now, and no longer his lover. . . .

“‘Speak!’ cried François. ‘Will you not speak?’

“Surely he had never believed she would carry it so far . . . but her sole answer was to laugh.

“She stood full in the moonlight, a small figure, but dauntless; she slipped the royal signet from her finger and dropped it into the rank grass—she had only to show it to gain instant safety, remember.

“But she set her foot on it instead, and laughed at François.

“He had come to shame her and he saw she was minded to baulk him, and in his rage and his fury at the sight of pride carrying her so far he stepped aside and with a gesture offered her to the rage of the crowd.

“His men lowered their pikes and the people surged forward—little knowing on whom they were wreaking vengeance at last.

“And she did not speak . . . she put her cloak before her face and set her back against the tomb.

“And so died the Queen of France; when the crowd had finished with her she need not have feared recognition.

"Her tattered corse was flung into a ditch—and the Duke rode over it when he left the graveyard; maybe some of her blood was on his horse's hoofs.

"At least he respected her pride; it was given out that she was dead of sudden fever, and there was a gorgeous funeral—with a gorgeous doll in her place, while her bones were nosed by swine.

"The student escaped," added the monk, "or how should I be telling you this?

"And the next deadly sin is Greed, as shown in the tale of the Merchant and the Citron Pies. . . ."

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II.—GLUTTONY

THE monks were in the garden gathering the herbs for the distillery, where their sweet wines, potent spirits and fragrant perfumes were made.

The four arcades of the cloister encompassed them, slender red-brick arches with the head of an angel in white glazed pottery above each group of clustered pillars.

Overhead the sky was summer blue, against which rose the graceful height of the campanile; the monastery stood on a hill covered with fruit gardens, vineyards and cornfields, and was reached by a toilsome, winding road, so that it seemed very far from the world indeed, more than half-way to heaven, if heaven was as near as the monks believed.

The square garden in the midst of the cloisters was on the very summit of the hill and in the very centre of the buildings; it was divided into four parts—the herb garden, the flower garden, the fruit garden and God's garden, which was the graveyard, and grew neither herbs nor fruit nor flowers, but only little rusty iron crosses above the roughly turned sod.

The four divisions were marked by broad, low box edges bordering pleasant paths, and in the centre was a white alabaster well on four white alabaster steps; the ropes and buckets hung from a light iron frame-

work, and round about, in the crevices of the slabs, grew maidenhair fern and the small, odourless Italian violet.

In the flower garden were roses, carnations, syringa, freesia, stocks, wallflowers, lilies in bloom, and jasmine, magnolia, gardenias, oleanders and myrtles still only covered with green; in the herb garden grew bushes of lavender as high as a man, tufts of sweet basil, thyme, pepper, mint, clove, citron, mustard, camomile, ginger, fennel and iris.

The fruit garden was shaded by fig and pear trees; beneath them grew currant and gooseberry bushes, orange and lemon trees, raspberry canes and strawberry beds.

There the novices were walking with Father Aloysius.

In one corner of the fruit garden was the fish-pond, and some of the novices sat on the brick rim and ate figs.

They ate one for the Eternal Father, three for the Holy Trinity, one for the Virgin and seven for her seven sorrows.

Father Aloysius ate ten for the ten Commandments as well, and then twelve for the twelve Apostles, for the figs were just ripe, soft and green and gold and purple, creamy white and deep rose-pink inside, with a perfume, faint indeed and evasive, but delicate and seductive enough, as Father Aloysius said, to tempt Saint Anthony.

And he ate seven for the seven active virtues, and seven for the seven theological virtues.

Then he began to talk of the sin of Gluttony or Greed, as it is called in the rude tongue, but in the classical *Gula*.

Now Gluttony, or *Gula*, is the second deadly sin, said the monk, and is unlimited indulgence of the body, as Pride or *Superbia* is indulgence of the mind; and whereas from Pride spring many minor sins, as Disobedience, Hypocrisy, Impudence, Arrogance, Impatience, Irreverence, Strife, Vainglory, Spite and Swelling of Heart—for indeed Pride is the very root of all the sins—so out of Gluttony come various other sins, as Sloth, Selfishness, Sourness, Discourtesy and Witlessness—it is, in fact, a very ugly and horrid sin, and directly against the commandment of God. He who is a slave to Gluttony may not well withstand any other sin, and certain it is that no glutton was ever yet a saint.

The novices continued to eat figs as they drew round the fish-pond to listen; they sighed at the wickedness of the world and smiled to think how safe they were from it.

Now as Pride, continued Father Aloysius, is shown in the figure of a peacock with a crown and a beautiful coat, who thinks of nothing but how he may display himself, so is Gluttony shown in the resemblance of a pig, which is a very unpleasant beast, bare of adornment, composed of naught but flesh, with a great nose and mouth always searching for food, and a body so fat his legs can scarcely support it. When he can find nothing to eat he sleeps, and he has no wits at all, and no disdain of dirt or filth, but rather delights in it; his voice is rough and harsh, and he hath an unlovely odour. As this beast is, so is the glutton, for ever followed by contempt and laughter, the pointing of fingers and the shooting of lips.

Indeed it is doubtful if there be any sin which is so disdained as this, for a man may not be a glutton and

keep his dignity, nay, he may not be a glutton and save his soul alive, though of most other sins this is possible—with submission to Holy Church. Now how this second deadly sin, which is the ugly sin of Gluttony or *Gula*, may directly lead to a miserable end in this world (to say nothing of what punishment is in store in the next world, the which is only known to the wrath of God and the ingenuity of the Devil), is shown in the story of Denis D'Espagnet, who was a merchant of Marseilles in France, and at first a very personable young man, albeit always given to this sin of Gluttony, though it must be admitted that he had no others, at least none that were noticeable: but, as I have said, this sin sufficeth.

He had a very noble and princely fortune, a fine mansion in the town, and many ships in the port; but it must not be supposed that it was a fortune of his making, for what glutton was ever industrious? It is against nature.

It was his father who had made and left all this wealth, for he was a very thrifty and wise merchant, and generous and courteous withal.

He dealt with the East, with Algiers, with Barbary, with Turkey, India and China, and he brought gold and silver, ivory and spices, silks and jewels, perfumes and porcelain, strange birds and animals and cases of fruits and sweetmeats; and his fame for his fair bargaining, his great wealth and his high connections, was great. He lent money to Princes, to the King of Cyprus, the Doge of Venice and the Pope of Rome.

The King of France was in his debt, and, being willing to favour him, stayed under his roof before he sailed from Marseilles to fight the heathen.

It was winter weather, and in the royal guest's

chamber burnt a great fire perfumed with cascarilla, and while the King stood before it, warming his hands, D'Espagnet cast into the flames all the King's bonds for the money he owed him, thereby setting him free from the burden of his debts; so that this fire cost many thousands of gold pieces.

Now it is manifest he would have done better to have made the King pay his just debts and have given the money to Holy Church, but this was the action of Hilaire D'Espagnet, and fine and princely it was considered.

But his son was a different man: he thought nothing of gaining money nor of spending it, but only of this ungodly sin of Gluttony.

His feasts were famous in Marseilles, nay in all France, for at no other table could such delicacies be found as at his.

From all over the world came the meat, the game, the fish, the fruit, the vegetables on which he fed, the rare and costly wines which he drank.

A hundred cooks were kept busy day and night devising new dishes, and the master cook had the wage of a king's general, and wore round his neck a gold chain, one link of which would have ransomed a lord.

There were brown cooks from India who looked to the making of spices and sauces, yellow cooks from China who held the secret of many strange recipes unknown in Europe, French cooks for the pastries, Italian cooks for the creams and jellies, German cooks for the baked meats and the mulled beers, Spanish cooks for the chocolate and the game, Persians to mix the sherbet and the fruit drinks, and two English cooks to make what they call in that country "rosbiffe," "biffstek" and "plumpounding."

In his garden were great tanks full of trout and crabs and lobsters, trees laden with fruit—and many growing under glass and kept warm with fires in the winter, that he might never lack all the year round.

There were huge beds of lettuces, asparagus, tomatoes, onions, radishes, artichokes, fennel and marrows in the places where his father had had roses and carnations; these were all uprooted now, for nothing might remain in the garden which was not good to eat.

He had two hundred men looking after these things, a vast yard where he kept fat fowls and ducks and pheasants and herons and peacocks, and a plot of cabbages on which great white snails were fed; the Chinese cooks could make wonderful soups out of snails.

He neglected his business, he had no liking for the company of ladies nor for the converse of friends, he went from his bed to his table, and when one meal was ended he sat on cushions and thought of the next, or, to get an appetite, he walked round the garden and admired the juicy fruits and the succulent vegetables, and the fat birds waddling up and down.

And there was one dainty he loved more than another, and that was citron pie. A plain and an ordinary thing, said Father Aloysius, it may sound to you, but you must not think of citron pies as you may have seen them, with a sodden crust and pulpy fruit within—nay, these pies, as made by the master cook himself, were very different.

They were no bigger than a lady's palm, the crust was so delicate you could blow it away. The centre was a perfect ripe peach, and over that a jelly of strained strawberries, over that whipped cream mixed

with violets, and round about all a circle of snow flavoured with slices of citron, the whole enclosed in a silver filigree basket, frozen and sprinkled with jasmine buds preserved in sugar.

Such were the pies that Denis D'Espagnet prized above all sweetmeats; he even began to write verses in their honour, but was too lazy to do more than the first line.

He lived in this manner for several years after his father died; his fortune diminished through neglect, but he did not care, for he still had ample for his food, and his person became fat and round so that a piece the shape of a half-moon had to be cut out of the table at the place at which he sat; but he made no trouble of that, and lamented not at all his lost comeliness, but lived contentedly until one day (a fatal day for him!) a fellow-merchant, who had been one of his father's friends, came to visit him, and Denis made a feast, and the hundred cooks worked all day and all night, for the other merchant was not wholly free from the deadly sin of Gluttony. After the feast, which lasted three hours, the master cook himself brought in the citron pies, and Denis placed two of them on the plate of his friend and waited with complaisance, for he knew well enough that there was no excelling these dainties in the length and breadth of the world.

The friend tasted them.

There was a pause.

Denis still waited for the usual sigh of rapture; he waited so long that the master cook paled, thinking he had forgotten one of the ingredients.

"Well enough," said the merchant at length. "But not like those I have eaten at the Court of the Khan of Barbary."

Denis trembled like the quince jelly before him, and the master cook burst into tears; it was the first time either of them had heard such heresy.

"Something is lacking," continued the friend. "I know not what—nay, I cannot fix the flavour—but something is hopelessly wrong. If you were to taste those made for the Khan—ah, then you would know the difference!"

So the feast ended dismally, and that night Denis could not sleep for thinking of the citron pies made at the Court of the Khan of Barbary.

And the next day, before his friend departed, Denis begged and besought him by some means to procure for him the recipe of these same tarts.

But the friend laughed and said that the only Christian who had ever gone into the Khan's kitchen had come out as a pie himself—a great pie which had been served at the supper of the Prince's lampreys.

After this, life was spoiled for Denis; he could think of nothing but those pies, more perfect than his own, being eaten daily at the Court of the Khan.

The master cook, too, fell into a melancholy and became careless, and once a pheasant came to table with the upper side browner than the under, and a peach was served with a speck in the skin.

Denis began to take no pleasure in his food, he lost flesh, he brooded, and at last he resolved to go to Barbary himself, visit the Khan, and taste the pies with his own lips and tongue.

Greatly he groaned at the exertion, for never yet had he left Marseilles, but his ruling sin conquered; one of his galleons was prepared; he took the master cook with five under him, great store of food and wine,

two friends, a skilful captain and a sturdy crew, and set sail for Barbary.

Now he had hardly got to sea before his troubles began, for the rolling of the ship begot in him a sickness so that he groaned and cried for very unhappiness, and all the captain could do with the telling of witty tales did not serve to cheer him.

The cooks were ill, too, and there was nothing to eat save the ordinary ship's rations which the sailors could prepare ; but for once (for the first time, indeed) Denis did not think of food.

The captain told stories of the journey to Samarkand and of the tomb of Timour Beg, built of stone green like water, of the camels crossing the desert with nets hung with silver bells over their packs, of the wild and curious beasts he had himself seen, such as the manchora, whose teeth fit into one another like combs put together, who has a blue body, the feet of an ox, the face of a man, and a trumpet-shaped tail whereon he blows, making a fearsome noise ; Denis, however, gave no heed to these marvels, but lay and lamented.

But on the tenth day they sailed into smootner waters that were clear as an emerald, and one leaning over the ship's side could see the terrible sea-beasts at play, and the pearls and coral and amber, ready for the gathering up.

Denis had no taste for these things, and begged the captain to put back to Marseilles ; but his friends overruled him, saying that they might get to Barbary as soon as they might get to France.

Yet it had been well for Denis if he had had his way, for on the twelfth day up came a great sea-rover with black sails, and quickly made captive the French galleon.

Now it chanced that this rover was from Barbary, and the Marseilles captain explained that they were peaceful people and honest traders, and that his master was on a visit to the Khan himself.

But this availed them nothing, for the Barbary captain told them that his Prince was so vexed by the attacks of the King of France upon various heathen Princes who were in league with him, that he had himself declared war against all Christians.

Whereupon Denis proclaimed his name, which was a great name and well respected in the East; and when he heard it the heathen leapt for joy, for, said he, it is well known that that is the name of the Christian who lent the King of France money that he might war against the Mussulman, and the Khan will be greatly rejoiced to have him as a prisoner.

Denis with many tears and cries declared that he was not responsible for his father's work, and that he had never lent a maravedi to a single soul—but what availed that?

He and his friends and the cooks, the captain and the crew, were bound and put in the hold, and the rover made all haste to Barbary, where he delivered his captives to the Khan.

The cooks (alas for the frailty of human nature!) turned Mussulmans and so were taken as slaves into the houses of rich heathens; but Denis and his friends and the captain were staunch to the true faith, for they were never asked to forsake it; they were lodged in the royal prison, and the crew were sent to the royal galley; it is quite plain that the blessing of Heaven was not on that voyage.

These unfortunate Christians were cast into a miserable dungeon that looked into the Khan's garden: the

window was no bigger than two hands put together, the walls were rough and the floor was damp, and once a day bread and water were given to them, so that they sat and bewailed themselves.

But his guardian angel had not forsaken Denis, and still contrived to give him a chance to save his soul alive and die in penitence.

The Khan's daughter was in the garden among the lilies when the captives were taken to their prison, and she chanced to fall in love with Denis, who had become comely again, his flesh having shrunk from lack of food and misery.

Stout he still was, but fat is admired amongst these heathen, and the maiden herself was named Full Moon, because she was round and white, having been fed on butter to make her plump and bleached to make her fair.

Now the Khan went away hunting, and on his return intended to have the prisoners impaled to celebrate his birthday; but the maid was cunning enough, and with tricks and bribes she got the sentries away from the prison, and down she came one evening, veiled, scented with geranium and wearing a petticoat of gold silk, a petticoat of white satin, trousers of silver gauze, and all manner of gems and chains of gold and silver, and she put her face to the window and cried softly, "Denis!" (for she had found out his name) "Denis!"

He, hearing the voice and fearing some heathenish trick, desired the others to answer, but they would not; and presently he went himself, trembling with fear.

But when he fixed his face in the window and saw the Khan's daughter he smiled, and she lifted her veil and sighed.

Denis, being desperate, made love to the lady. He praised her figure and her face and her kindness (it is true that she was much to his taste)—and presently he asked for some food.

She stood on tiptoe and kissed the end of his chin (she could reach no further, neither could he get his head out of the window), and promised to return with meat and drink.

And now the other prisoners clamoured to know who it was, for they could see nothing; and Denis, willing to keep his good fortune to himself (for what is food for one shared among four?), said it was the sentry telling him the Khan was away, and that when he returned they would all be impaled; then when they were again asleep he went to the window and waited for the Princess.

Faithfully she came, and brought with her a basket and handed up to him baked meats and roast game and almond cakes, fruit and iced sherbet, till the tears of joy ran down his face.

And while he ate she told him that she had a scheme for his escape, that she would become a Christian for his sake and they could fly away together to his country. Meanwhile she promised to come every night and bring him food.

And so she did, and never a drop or a crumb did this glutton, for lust of his sin, share among the others, though he got daily fatter and fatter as they got thinner and thinner.

Strange looks they began to cast on him, for, they said, it is strange that he on bread and water should become again fat and round and soft, even as he was at Marseilles.

But he declared it was the grace of God sustaining

him because he said the Pater Noster every night, and as his guardian angel saw to it that the Princess came only when they were asleep, they were forced to believe this, though no flesh grew on their bones even if they said their Pater Noster thrice over.

One day Denis recalled the whole aim and purport of his visit, and, quivering with excitement, asked Full Moon to bring him some citron pies such as were served at her father's table.

The next night she brought them, twelve of them on little plates of saffron yellow porcelain. . . .

And Denis admitted that they were indeed better than those made by the master cook, and every day he ate them and became fatter still, for the pies were full of cream and butter and egg. So things went for a month, and then the Princess told Denis that all was arranged. She had contrived to steal the keys of the prison, and of the garden, she had swift horses prepared to carry them to the sea, and she had his galleon, all manned with Christians ready to take them to France.

To celebrate the news Denis ate five-and-thirty citron pies.

Now the next night, while the others slept, he sat waiting for the maiden to open the door, and never a thought did he give to these unfortunates, who were in mortal danger of death through him and his nasty greed—for why had the journey been undertaken but for his gluttony?

The time passed, the ivory moonlight was pouring into the cell, the *bulbul* was singing outside, the rustle of the tamarisk and the pepper tree filled the air, and presently the door was softly unlocked and the Khan's daughter stood before him, wrapped in a black veil,

and carrying such of her father's jewels as she could find, tied in a scarlet cloth.

Up sprang Denis, and she whispered to him to Haste! haste! for the Khan was returning that very night.

Haste he made indeed, but nothing did it avail him; for see the horrid consequences of this ugly sin of Gluttony or *Gula*, see the judgment of Heaven on this wretched sinner! . . .

He could not pass the door.

Yea, so fat and large and gross and heavy had he become that there was no getting him through that narrow door, either sideways or frontways or backways—the Princess stepped into the garden and pulled, he heaved and pushed till the sweat ran down his face, but it was useless: not even half of him would pass.

His groans and moans awoke the others, who quickly dragged him back into the cell and stepped into liberty themselves.

The Princess, seeing this, began to shake with fear and would have run back to the palace had not at that moment one of her slaves come panting up, saying the Khan was home.

Then the maiden, realizing how desperate the case was, and being vexed with the great fatness of Denis, besought the three other Christians to escape with her, telling them of all her preparations.

Whereat they came right gladly: the captain and the Princess mounted on one horse, and the two friends on the other, and they thundered through the white town and the blue night down to the sea, where they found the Christian vessel and so were saved, together with the other poor souls, to the great glory of God.

Full Moon married the captain, who came into all the possessions of Denis, for he, in the great fear and terror of his first days at sea, had made a will leaving all his money to the captain if he brought him safe to land; and sure enough, the captain said, "I did bring him safely, or would have done if the heathen had not captured us."

Meanwhile Denis groaned and moaned in the prison and struggled to get out of the door—but what was the use? His guardian angel was tired of this sinner.

The Khan heard these cries and came to the prison. . . . Ah, he was a wrathful heathen when he found that his daughter had escaped with all the Christians in his dominions.

No use were the cries and entreaties of Denis: the Khan's master cook entered the cell and dispatched him, and in several portions they conveyed him away to the kitchens; flavoured with bamboo shoots and mustard he fed the Khan's lampreys for a week.

So you see, added Father Aloysius, the result of this horrid sin of Gluttony.

Clearly enough the novices saw it; they sighed and shook their heads.

Then, as they had eaten all the ripe figs, they all went into the refectory to supper.

III.—LUXURY

It was the middle of October; the chestnut trees in the valleys, the olive trees on the hill-side were heavy with fruit; on the sloping roofs of the cottages the figs were placed to dry; the gold and scarlet leaves of the vines hung shrivelled, and the grapes, purple, yellow, green and rose-coloured, were revealed clustering to the bare poles; the oranges and lemons hung green as jade amongst the fresh foliage; in the garden scarlet flowers bloomed and tall spears of tuberose; all day long the sun shone warmly, but at night there were heavy rains, and the winds were chilly in the shadows.

While the monks worked in the distillery the novices made the wine, and Father Aloysius directed their labours.

The big barns outside the convent were filled with vats into which the novices trod and pressed the grapes. The brown fingers and the brown feet of the novices were stained a dull red, red also were the butts, and rivulets of red ran in and out between the square paving-stones of the courtyard.

Hot and tired were the novices; the vintage was nearly over, and the wooden taps began to yield the bright liquid of the fresh wine, while the drained masses of bloodless grapes were thrown into the garden, where numbers of pale wasps devoured them.

The novices were discontented as well as tired; the Prior was entertaining a certain Prince, on his travels through the country, and all day long his knights and squires went to and fro the gardens and courtyards, holding their noses because of the smell of the fermenting wine, and raising their skirts and mantles out of reach of the trickling lees.

The novices marked them, marked their air of contempt, their scornful laughter, their sniffs and puckering of brows and lips, marked also their garments, the nets of gold and silver on their heads, their hats with green and blue feathers, their mantles embroidered with silk and woollen, their curious boots, tasselled gloves and wonderful daggers; and because of all this, and because they were labouring in rough brown habits, they became vexed at their vocation and wishful that they, too, were in the world.

And they were still further discontented when two of the knights, seating themselves on a low pink stone wall over which the last roses poured their yellow blossoms, began discoursing lightly of holy things in a loud tone, so that the monks working at the vintage could not fail to hear.

And one knight told the other a story of a certain sinner who had gone to Rome to see the Pope.

His Holiness was in his palace of St. Giovanni in Saterno, and he received the penitent in the garden.

It was springtime (said the knight), and the square of garden between the white marble cloisters was planted with violets—nothing but violets—and in the centre was a small fountain of alabaster from which trickled water as clear and sparkling as a diamond. Near this fountain the Pope was walking, and so humble and pious was he that he wore the robe of an ordinary

monk and was telling over a string of white beads, each carved from the bone of a saint.

Now when the penitent entered the garden he felt afraid and uneasy—he knew not why: afraid as if he were in the presence of something horrible—uneasy as if in the presence of something evil.

The penitent thought it must lie with the violets; there were so many of them, and the enclosed scent of them was so strong as to make the head giddy.

Albeit, he told his sin to the Pope and was absolved.

But even as he was leaving he turned him back and said: "There is one thing more, Holiness, I have often wondered at: how can one know a damned soul?"

"A damned soul?" repeated the Pope slowly.

"Even so—is there no sign by which one can tell it? I have asked many people, and they all have said, By a certain red light in the eyes, a reflection of hell fire. Is this true, Holiness?"

"How can I tell you if it be true?" answered the Pope, and he stooped for his rosary, which he had dropped.

So the other made his reverence and was for leaving, but as he passed through the shade of the cloisters, he chanced to glance back.

The Pope was looking in his direction, and the eyes of His Holiness glowed red as a coal from the Pit—red, red and shining with flame.

Then the penitent turned and fled, and ran, and ran, and ran, because of the horror that was on him, until he came to the Tiber, and there he threw himself in and was drowned, for no one may see such a sight and live.

And when the knight had finished discussing this story, he and the rest moved away laughing.

Now at this moment up came Father Aloysius to taste the wine, and to him the novices recounted the tale they had heard told by the knight.

Make no account of that (replied the Father); now is his time, and he may levant and flourish in his impiety and wantonness: but the time will come when the Devil and his imps will snatch him away by the yellow hair of which he is so proud, and for all his cries and lamentations the saints and angels will take no heed of him.

I perceive (continued Father Aloysius, seating himself on the pink wall) that ye are discontented on beholding all the splendour of these knights.

But I tell you that Luxury—or *Luxuria*, in the classical tongue—is the third of the deadly sins. I have already told you of Pride or *Superbia*, Greed or *Gula*, and what comes of them; and now I will tell you of Luxury or *Luxuria*, which is given under the form of a goat, a creature of unbridled desires, as deaf to the voice of man as the sinner is deaf to the voice of God, and one of the symbols of the Evil One himself—he who sees an ape riding on a goat has certainly seen the Devil riding his favourite steed.

There was once (said Father Aloysius) a young man whose father kept him very straitly: every day he went in frieze, a suit of four years' wear patched and darned, and for the winter a collar of red fox from which all the hair had fallen.

No natural joyance or pleasure of youth was allowed him; when the other young men went out to the games, or to see the horse-racing, or the Morality in the public square, he had to remain at the window of his father's great dark palace and watch them with longing eyes.

When the young maidens went out to the fields be-

yond the city to gather the first flowers of the spring, he was never among the cavaliers who escorted them; when they returned with round bunches of roses, red and white, and long boughs of hawthorn, it was never to him that they offered favours taken from their posies--no, for him there was nothing but the passing glance, the light laugh or the smile of pity.

There was poor food in the palace, though it was served on heavy silver; there was thin wine in the glasses, though they were cut crystal; there were worn coverlets on the beds, and the moth had eaten the damask hangings, and dust had tarnished the gold thread of the armorial bearings in the tapestries.

For the father of Giulio (such being the name of this most unfortunate young man) was held body and soul by another deadly sin—that of avarice.

But when he was not very old he died, leaving behind him as much wealth as would have bought twice over the city in which he lived.

He left no heir but Giulio, and that youth now found himself, from a position of humiliating poverty, the most wealthy person in the land—which is to say, the most envied, the most admired, the most courted.

Everything was now changed in the old palace. Sculptors, painters and architects worked day and night to beautify it; the ceilings were soon covered with pictures like glimpses of Paradise; the walls were inlaid with precious marbles, yellow, black, white and grey; in all the dusty corners, hitherto known only to the spider, hung silken draperies of scarlet and crimson; the gardens, so long lifeless and parched, bloomed with the oleander, the palm, the orange, the camellia and the rose; the dried basins of the fountains were replenished with crystal water in which swam golden fish; the weeds

were cleared from the lake, which now bore on its pellucid surface swans white as spring blossoms.

The worn, tattered furniture disappeared, and in place of it the palace was set out with chairs and tables of rare scented woods, inlaid with ivory and ebony; with couches covered with satin cushions; with sideboards bearing dishes and goblets of rock crystal, of agate, of sardonyx, painted lustre plates and tall glasses coloured like milk and rubies; with carpets of Persia, a thousand hues mingled in their silken woof; with tapestry from Arras, stiff with thread and gold.

And the stairs that had been so silent now echoed the sound of gilt shoes, the swish of trailing mantles, the clatter of swords, the rustle of silk; and the rooms which had been so long empty were filled with perfume and sighs and laughter and gentle breaths and the wind of fans.

Giulio was transformed; instead of a doleful youth shrinking in worn homespun, he was a splendid young man, robed like an Emperor's son; he was gay, he was witty, he was generous—and, naturally, he was very much loved.

Never had the town known such gaiety. Every night there was a festival; every day there was a hunt, a tourney, races, games or some such diversion. It was as if a shower of gold had been poured over the place: the miser's money was in everyone's pocket, the praise of his son on everyone's lips.

Now this was a merry life for Giulio, and never did he pause to think of aught save this world, nor did he bestow a single penny on good works.

Nay, every holy monk who came to his door, begging the crumbs for the poor, was sent rudely away. "When I was in misery," said Giulio, "no man came to my aid,

and now will I help no one, nor will I have about me these miserable fellows, but rather those with bright looks who amuse me."

So his life went for a year or so, and during this time he had not once entered a church, or given money to the poor, or even laid a bunch of flowers before a wayside shrine—costly lilies and roses he would throw beneath the feet of some foolish woman, jasmine and camellias he would twine in her hair; but he could not spare even a cluster of wild violets for the Mother of God.

One day in full summer-tide, when Giulio felt suddenly and strangely weary of all his joyous companions, he chanced to find himself alone on the road some miles from the city gates; he was separated by the chances of the chase from his fellows, and not sorry to be alone. Nevertheless, he felt both hungry and fatigued; and as he had lost his way to the meeting-place, it seemed as if he had no chance of sharing the sumptuous collation his servants had prepared.

A storm was coming up; the sun shed a strong gold light from beneath a mass of purple cloud; the russet chestnut trees that filled the valley were half in violet shadow; a little wind cast the white dust up from the long road.

Turning a corner, Giulio suddenly saw before him a little house which stood back from the road in a herb garden.

The road was familiar to Giulio, but he had no remembrance of this house; indeed, so astonished was he at the sight that he reined up his horse and rubbed his eyes. There it was, clear enough—a square white house standing full in the sunlight.

And in the garden a man in a dark-red robe was

picking herbs. He carried on his arm a flat basket of withes full of lavender, basil, marjoram, saxifrage, vervain, citronella, clove, camomile and rue, the mingled odour of which made the air peculiarly heavy, fragrant yet sickly; and as Giulio looked, he wondered at the great size and beauty to which these herbs attained. There were no flowers in the garden, only these tall, blossomless green plants.

"Friend, who art thou?" asked Giulio; and the man in the red robe looked up from his work.

"Oh, I have all manner of names," he answered pleasantly. "We are old acquaintances, Don Giulio, and presently shall know each other better still."

The young man felt horribly afraid; he did not like the storm which was blowing up across the valley, nor the sunny white house, the long white road, the man who was working there; all seemed to him as strange as some bad dream from which he would be indeed glad to awake.

"Will you dismount and rest a little?" asked the herb-gatherer.

"Nay," said Giulio hastily. "I must endeavour to find my companions."

"Will you take some food and wine?" offered the other.

Giulio shook his head and made to ride on, but his horse would not advance.

The man in the dark red habit came and leant on the fence; the purple clouds had now overspread the whole sky. "You are very anxious to leave me," he remarked. "Why in such a hurry to get away now? One day soon you will begin to spend eternity with me."

Giulio's heart knocked against his side, his face went

white as paper, and his hair rose on his head. "You must," he groaned, "be the Devil."

"Certainly," replied the personage, leaning on the fence; "and we shall meet again very soon, Don Giulio."

"No!" shrieked the young man. "I defy you, I defy your arts! I am a Christ-born child. I defy you!"

"So they all say at first," returned the Devil. "But it is not the least use. The next time you pass this little garden of mine I shall have to ask you for the pleasure of your company."

With this he bowed very courteously and turned away, and the storm broke, blotting out the landscape with rain and darkness, and Giulio's horse bolted with him along the white road, nor stopped until he reached home, covered with foam and shivering with terror.

Giulio was also frightened. He tried to forget what he had seen and heard, he tried to believe that it was all a dream or a delusion, and more eagerly than before he filled his days with riotous living and surrounded himself with noisy and extravagant companions; but, as indeed Diabolus himself had warned him, it was no use, and in his heart Giulio knew it was no use; in the middle of the feast he would suddenly see before him the sunny house and the herb garden, in the middle of the night he would wake up and see the figure of the personage in the red robe.

At length a day came when he could bear it no longer—he confessed to a priest and prayed for his advice; but the holy man shook his head and told him he could do nothing for him. Then a deeper terror possessed the young man; he became gloomy and thin, and careless of his former pleasures; and one day he mounted

his horse and rode to Rome and threw himself at the feet of the Pope.

His Holiness was very, very old, and quite tired of life; he sat in a little black chair near a sunny wall, and the little lizards ran over his gilt shoes, so still he sat. His calm was like medicine to the distraught soul of Giulio, and there, kneeling among the daisies, he told his tale. When he had finished the Pope remained still a long while, thinking.

Then he said, "My son, there is only one way in which you can save your soul from the Father of Evil. You must build, to the Glory of God, a complete church. Complete. Not a brick must be lacking. Inside and out it must be inlaid with coloured marbles; every altar must have a painting above it; every image a lamp swinging before it. Adjoining must be a convent for the holy monks, a baptistery and a campanile. There must be a great garden for the comfort of the brothers, a fish-pond, an orchard, a vineyard."

When the Holy Father had got thus far Giulio interrupted him. "All this," he said dolefully, "cannot be accomplished in the life of one man."

"But you, my son, have exceeding riches, and riches can do more than life."

"But it would take all the riches I possess," complained the young man.

The Pope smiled. "All the better for your soul, my son. You will no longer be able to dissipate your days with riotous companions, but must spend your time in contemplation of the Holy Edifice you are erecting; and when it is finished and the last stone is in place, and the lamps all lit and the incense burning before the altar, then, then alone, you will know that your soul is saved and that you can defy the Devil."

Giulio considered. "Is there no other way?" he asked at length.

"No other way," nodded the Pope. Giulio turned to go, and before he had left the garden His Holiness was asleep in the sun.

The young man returned to his native city; he called together artists, sculptors and architects; he bought a piece of land on a high hill outside the town walls, and the church began to be built, the gardens to be laid out, the orchards and vineyards planted, the convent walls to rise up, brick by brick.

"So I defy the Devil," thought Giulio, and this prideful idea that he was setting himself against the Evil One so possessed him that he forsook his former extravagant ways and lived modestly, and thought only of the church and how it might be finished swiftly and worthily.

And whereas before he had been a mere object of wonder and amazement, and the beloved of vain fools, now he was praised by the good and the poor, for his church was becoming the wonder of the country, and the building of it gave employment to hundreds of artists and thousands of masons.

Ten years went by and the church was nearing completion, so lavishly had Giulio spent his fortune and so diligently had the workmen laboured.

One morning in spring Giulio rode out of the town to the sea-coast, and, sitting idly on a grey rock, watched the sea.

It was early morning, and the sea was a dim colour betwixt gold and silver, the misty blue of the heavens was veiled with faint pink clouds, and on the horizon gleamed a great golden argosy.

Now, while Giulio was idly gazing at this distant

ship, which looked like a flower fallen from heaven, and idly wondered what port it had sailed from and to what port it was bound, he heard the sound of gentle but very desperate sobbing.

All amazed he sprang up and gazed about the long, pale sands; and presently, in the mouth of a cave of green marble, he saw a beautiful woman seated and weeping dismally.

She wore a white velvet gown embroidered with roses made of clustering rubies; her hair was unbound, and fell down either side of her face on to the sand, where it looked like virgin amber newly washed clear by the tide.

On her little feet were shoes that each seemed one red rose, so sewn were they with rubies, and all her raiment was marked with wet sand and stained by seaweed. When she heard Giulio's footstep she looked up—and oh, but she was lovely! So beautiful was she that if she had been seated in the desert the unicorn would have come and put his head in her lap and the lion would have licked her hand.

Now while Giulio was building his church he had not thought at all of love and ladies; but when he saw this one as she sat before him, with her knots of amber hair falling about her shoulders, and the crystal tears shining in the violet eyes which lit the loveliest face ever beheld, it was as if a fierce flame broke out in his heart, consuming all thought of, and desire for, anything but this woman.

As he stood staring at her, all bewildered by this new passion, she rose up (just like a blossom she stood, straight, with a drooping head), and, blushing and sighing and weeping, with soft glances and sweet looks and sudden smiles, she told him her story.

She was a Princess, she said, and her name was Blanche fleur, and the golden argosy that Giulio had noticed was carrying her from one of her father's kingdoms to another (for he was a mighty Emperor), when her stepmother had bribed some creatures of hers to throw her overboard; which they had done, first tying together her hands and feet; yet by the help of the Madonna she had been saved, for she remembered nothing after the blackness of the water until she found herself, with the ropes gone from her wrists and ankles, on this strange shore.

Such was the damsel's story. Few beside Giulio believed it; rather was she accounted a witch or a fairy, or some such unholy creature. Yet say what they would, Giulio married her—yea, within three days of that meeting on the shore was she his wife.

Now before long he began to find that to keep this lady cost near as much as to build a church, there were so many things she needed—gems, rich garments, chariots, feasts, palaces and slaves; nor did she fail to remind him that she was an Emperor's daughter, nor did he fail to give her all she asked for, for he loved her with a deathless love.

Little by little he began to neglect the church; it was so nearly finished, he was confident that he had defeated the Devil—and Blanche fleur cared naught for the building of the holy edifice, but rather she led him gradually back to his old life, so that soon he preferred to sit and hold her mirror while she combed her amber hair, rather than to watch the painters at work on the altar-pieces; and would sooner kneel on a cushion at her feet while she sang a love song than go and hear matins or vespers in the new church.

And at last his great fortune began to vanish; he

spent less and less on the church, and more and more on Blanchefleur. He borrowed money, he sold land and palaces, he pledged the merchant ships he had at sea. The years went on, and still the church was not complete; the tower remained bare bricks, unfaced with marble, and the gilt angel with the sword which was to stand on the summit remained in the porch.

Again and again the Prior sent to him and humbly begged him to give orders to finish the tower, and the young man always replied, "To-morrow."

Now when he had sold all he could sell, and pledged all he could pledge, the day came when his creditors gathered round him demanding payment, and Giulio found that of all his great possessions there was hardly one white piece remaining that he could call his own.

Then, like a man awakening from a deep dream of Eastern delight to the cold grey of a winter morning, he remembered his soul and he remembered the church; he ran to the tower where Blanchefleur sat, and took her in his arms and kissed her again and again.

"Blanchefleur," he said, "I have lost everything, and am like to lose my soul to." He began to weep. "Give me the locket I gave thee yesterday—for I have nothing left in the world."

Blanchefleur said nothing; with a smile she took the diamond heart from the long chain by which it hung over her violet gown and gave it him, and he went swiftly out and sold it for five hundred ducats.

With the bag of gold in his hand he went sadly, sadly, humbly, humbly, up the hill to the church, and a great number of people ran after him, out from the city gates, cursing him and hooting him, for he owed more than he could ever pay.

But he hid the gold in his mantle and escaped them, and, pale and breathless, reached the convent and the Prior's room.

The Prior was painting a Book of Flowers; he sat in a black chair at a black table which was covered with little plants he was copying. "It is a long time since you have been here, Don Giulio," was his greeting.

The young man bowed his head. "I wish to finish the church," he said, "but this is all the money that I have."

He untied the canvas bag and emptied the gold coins on to the black table among the little plants.

"Alas!" said the Prior, "that is not enough—the marble alone will cost two thousand ducats—and to raise the angel——"

Giulio stayed to hear no more; he knew that nowhere could he get two thousand ducats . . . with a shriek which made the Prior shiver to his heart he turned and fled.

Only one thing was left to him now, and this was *Blanchefleur*.

More than ever did he love her in this moment of his utter desolation; she was more to him than a mere woman, however dear—she was the symbol of all his loves and lusts and likings, and of that Deadly Sin for which he stood condemned to hell. She was lost, too, he thought, one with him; and as if with winged feet he ran to her through the hooting town.

She was still in her tower. The creditors were taking the tapestries, the mirrors, the pictures from the walls; all was howling confusion in the palace, the slaves had fled—but she sat still in the seat of the arched window looking out on the garden.

"Blanchefleur!" cried the wretched young man.
"Blanchefleur!"

She turned and looked at him and began to laugh; she laughed and laughed—he sprang forward to seize her, and she broke and vanished in his hands; then he knew her for what she was—a doll, a puppet sent by the Evil One to lure him to his ruin.

Then did this most unfortunate young man run out of his ruined palace and aimlessly flee from the town back towards his church.

For even if it be unfinished, thought he, surely they will give me an asylum where by great prayer and penitence I may save my soul.

But he had not gone far on the long white road before he turned a corner and saw a sunny house standing in a herb garden. The personage in the dark red robe was leaning over the fence; he smiled and held out his hand and caught Giulio's flying gown, and drew him in through the narrow, open gate.

Nor was he ever seen again on the earth—but long remained an example of the terrible end that comes to those who follow this sin of Luxury.

IV.—WRATH.

ONE November day, when the novices were seated round the fire in the kitchen roasting chestnuts, a dispute fell out between two of them on some trifling matter, and Father Aloysius, who had observed much quarrelling of late among them, took the opportunity to talk to them of the fourth deadly sin, which is Ira, or, in the vulgar tongue, Wrath, which is the very sin, together with Pride, that caused Lucifer to be cast from heaven.

And this story that Father Aloysius told was not one of his own knowledge or his own country, but one that had been imparted to him by a certain Magister, who came from the bitter and barbarous North, and had for a few days been a guest at the convent.

And he, having witnessed divers curious things in his own land, had made a great book of them, together with paintings done to please his fancy, and the receipts for certain charms and a credible relation of his journeyings in search of the Philosopher's Stone, which, he declared, was in the hands of the Jews.

And several of these tales he had copied out and left with Father Aloysius for his instruction, declaring he knew them to be true, and that they had all happened in his time, and to his knowledge.

So this evening the monk brought down the manu-

script of the Magister and read aloud the tale entitled, "A very Faithful Account of Some late Marvellous Happenings in the town of——" (for prudence, the name of the town was omitted, but the Magister had called it Alstein in Franconia).

And this was the tale.

In a certain town there was a woman dwelling who was universally held to be a witch.

She came of a great family, and had in her time been dowered with lands and castles, but some mysterious disgrace had fallen on her youth, and she had nothing left but a small farm where she brewed beer and made sausages and kept a few herons, whose feathers she sold in the moulting season, and by these, with the revenue from the beer and the sausages, she made her living, though she used all means to disguise this fact, and pretended that she had wealth from her lands and forests which no longer existed, as all knew well enough; but, as I have said, she was a witch, and who dared offend her?

The whole town was in awe of her, from the Sheriff to the humblest peasant, and the tricks she had played on those who offended her were enough to fill a volume by themselves.

Her name was Ottilia Von Angers, and surely never did anyone disgrace a proud old name as she disgraced hers! Woe to the town that sheltered her! (For she was not a native of this place, but came from long off somewhere in Swabia, I think; at least her former history was not clearly known.)

Well, this fine morning in May she jumps out of bed, puts on her worn old velvet kirtle and her old brass chain which she had rubbed up to look like gold, and off she goes to the market to buy the herbs for the beer

and the meat for the sausages. To right and left such bowing and salutations and lifting of caps! You would have thought it was a fair young maiden going abroad instead of an old hag with a face yellow as butter looking her full seventy years (though she admitted to scarce fifty).

There she was in the market-place, bargaining and chaffering and shrieking out on the impudent rogues that dared to cheat a high-born lady like her, when she saw a little cart being driven full speed through the buyers and sellers.

There was only one person in it, and she was an old woman wrapped in a black cloak with her grey hair blowing out behind her; every one stared at her, for she was a stranger. And Ottilia was so interested that she stopped bargaining and hobbled after the cart.

When she came up with it, it was stayed outside a stall and the old woman had descended—and what was she buying but two new brooms!

So Ottilia pushes up to her and the following conversation began:

Who was she, what was she doing here, and why was she buying brooms?

Her name was Trina Von Ebers; she was a poor woman, God help her, and she made her living selling cheeses. As for the brooms, she was buying them to sweep out the new house she had taken—servants were such sluts, as the noble lady must know.

These words pleased Ottilia, for she was proud as Diabolus himself, and she answered, yes, indeed, well she knew it, therefore she kept neither man nor maid; and now she remembered she required a broom herself, and these seemed strong and cheap, though God knew how these people cheated and lied.

So they fell bargaining over the brooms and the new-comer said she had come here to live, and to open a dairy for butter and cheeses, and she hoped the noble lady would accept the present of a dish of her best butter (and good it was, she ventured to say) and a fine round cheese.

This immensely flattered Ottilia, who at once asked if her dear friend would come to dine with her. She had just brewed some new beer—as to her name she was Ottilia Von Angers, and a well-dowered maiden.

The other hag accepted, and Ottilia hurried home to prepare the feast.

On the way she met a scullion of the Sheriff's household, and, stopping him, she asked him what his master had for dinner.

To which the boy replied—a great game pie, two side-dishes of venison, an almond cream and a cake of cherries.

So home went Ottilia.

Now, though she had told old Trina she kept no servant, it was not true, for she had an old porter whom she nearly worked to death, and when she reached home, him she sent with a message to the Sheriff saying she heard he had a pie, two dishes of venison, an almond cream and a cake of cherries for his dinner, and she begged he would send them to her, together with a cask of white wine, for she desired to feed the poor of her neighbourhood, like the pious woman she was.

And in case he felt disinclined to send, she reminded him of what had befallen him the last time he would not help her charities, viz. his mouth had been twisted up to his ear, and so had remained for a week, which was doubtless God's judgment on him.

Then the hag starts cleaning up the room and laying the table and putting the furniture to the best advantage; then she goes into the bedroom and fetches a small white monkey and she puts on him a pair of green breeches and a blue coat, he crying the while and preferring his nakedness; but my hag boxes his ears and quiets him.

Then back comes the porter with the Sheriff's dinner following him, borne by two cook-boys, for the Sheriff would as soon have faced the whole army of the Margrave as deny anything to Ottilia.

So the table was ready, and the wine broached and the beer poured, and in came the other hag in a great cloak of catskin dyed to look like sable.

And Ottilia's greeting was—where were the cheese and the butter?

Well, could she carry them through the streets and she in her fine clothes? No, indeed, but to-morrow the servant wench should bring them.

This threw a cloud over their meeting, but they sat down to the Sheriff's dinner and began to gossip and chatter and say how wicked the world was, and how birth and blood met with no respect now-a-days, whereas any fat churl with a gold piece in his pocket got more deference than a belted baron.

And the monkey sat on the table eating from Ottilia's plate and snatching the best morsels while she talked.

And Ottilia brought the conversation round to the cheese, and Trina said she would send for it, and, ringing the bell, summons the porter and bids him run down to her house and ask the maid for one of her best cheeses.

Then the fellow answered; no, he would not run on any of her errands, she was not his mistress.

What, did he dare speak to a lady with that rudeness?

Lady! She might well call herself a lady, for no one else ever would. Why, she was no better born than he.

Then the hag started screaming; he had better take care, she knew how to deal with churls like him! She was a high-born maiden and could prove it!

The porter burst out laughing.

Why, she was seventy or more, and as for high-born, that she was not, he could see; and not fit to sit at table with his noble mistress.

At this Trina screams out to Ottilia to chastise her insolent servant; but it chanced that Ottilia had been by no means displeased by the fellow's rudeness: first, because Trina had not brought the present; secondly, because of the show she had made in the dyed catskin; thirdly, because the man had cunningly flattered her in his last speech.

So she said: well, the boor was rude, but it was no fault of hers, and her friend should have left him alone; after all it was her place to send the cheese, as she had promised. At this Trina crosses her thumbs under the table, and, making a grimace at the porter, she hurries away.

Ottilia should have the cheese and might she enjoy it!

So my hags part coldly.

And Ottilia, looking after her guest, sees her dancing and leaping about the entrance and making faces at the porter. So down she comes running with a beer-mug in one hand and the monkey on her shoulder; but when she had reached the gate Trina had gone.

Now that night the porter was taken ill, so that his

groans and cries echoed through the street; his head swelled, needles and pins ran out of his mouth, and something seemed to run up and down inside his throat, so that it was very plain that he had a devil.

So they carried him to the church and put him on a litter before the altar, where he lay like a dead man.

And beside him sat Ottilia, sighing and groaning and declaring the fellow was bewitched and she knew who had done it: it was that wicked woman who had lately come into the town to sell cheeses; it would be a charity to all good Christians to burn her and her cheeses too.

After the fellow had lain there all night and never moved, they sent for a holy priest from the neighbouring village who was an adept in such cases.

So he comes with the Sheriff and the Council and the knights and barons of the town and they all gather round the poor porter.

The priest exhorts the devil, who will give no answer; but, the holy man in his agitation making a mistake in his Latin, the devil suddenly speaks, in a heavy bass voice, and corrects him. Thereupon follows this conversation, which one present put down for the benefit of the curious.

Priest: Who was he, and why was he annoying the poor porter?

Diabolus: They knew well enough who he was, and as for why he was there that was no concern of theirs. Let the holy man mend his Latin.

Priest: Insolent answers would not help him; depart he must and should.

Diabolus: That was a fine tale. Evidently the holy man was stupid as well as ignorant.

Thereupon the priest recited certain prayers that

caused the devil to run in anger about the body of the poor porter till it seemed that the flesh must be torn from the bones.

Priest: Did these prayers annoy him?

Diabolus: Yes, certainly they did.

Priest: Well, would he answer a few questions and then depart?

Diabolus: What questions?

Priest: Where did he come from?

Diabolus: Where the lean priest and the fat Sheriff were going.

Priest: Let him be civil or the prayers would begin. Were there any witches in this town?

Diabolus: Yes, there was one in church now.

Then Ottilia began to weep and cry out how the ugly devil belied even a poor pious woman like herself; but the Sheriff and the knights and barons looked pale.

Priest: Would he tell them the others?

Diabolus: No.

He then proceeded to sing a love-song in Dutch, to the great scandal of Georges Potsdammer, a worthy knight and the only one who understood that language, and on the priest asking him what he sang he answered: a hymn, and began to mock the holy man in a horrid way.

Priest: He had better depart, or they would begin the prayers again.

Diabolus: Well, let them give him something.

Priest: What did he want?

Diabolus: The great fat man with the red nose and the diamond agrafe in his cap.

Priest: That was the Sheriff, and why did he want him?

Diabolus: He annoyed him.

Priest: How could he annoy him? He might have the agrafe of jewels, but not the Sheriff.

Diabolus: Very well, then, they might pray as they liked, they would not move him.

Which proved to be true. For they might pray as much as they liked, they could not pray the devil out of the porter.

So presently up gets Ottilia and away she goes out of the church, so that everyone turns to look at her, she muttering the while that this was a holy man indeed who was not able to pray the devil out of her poor porter; but as for her she had never thought that he could, not he—holy indeed! why, there were those who could tell a different tale!

So off goes my hag straight to where old Trina is busy making cheeses, and in she comes without as much as knocking.

And never a word she says at first, but looks round the room, and, sure enough, there were the two new broom-sticks lying crossed under the table and by the cupboard sits Master Cat looking as demure as you please and daintily licking the drops of grease off the ends of his fur!

Ottilia started shrieking.

She perceived that Trina was a witch and she had sent a devil into her poor porter because the fellow had resented her rudeness yesterday.

Trina: Witch indeed! How dare she say so, and what did she know of it?

Ottilia: What of the broom-sticks and the cat?

Trina: She had bought broom-sticks herself only yesterday, and what of the monkey in his little coloured hose?

Ottilia: Was it not to her credit that she tried to make a Christian of the poor animal? Everyone knew that she was a god-fearing, pious lady. But she had not come here to quarrel; let Trina take the devil out of the porter and give her the cheese and the dish of butter, and they might be good friends again.

Trina: She wanted no such friends; as for the cheeses, they were seven for a florin, and at that price she might have them.

Ottilia: Seven a florin! She must be mad to speak so to a high-born maiden!

Trina: That was a good joke. Did she think she deceived anyone with her brass chain rubbed up to look like gold, and her old velvet gown turned and scoured a dozen times?

At this Ottilia was so enraged she snatched up the broomsticks from under the table and began beating Trina; then up jumped the black cat and ran between her ankles and tripped her up, and Trina seized the broomsticks and drove her out of doors.

Back Ottilia went, muttering to herself and dancing along the street so that everyone turned aside out of pure fright, and the Sheriff, meeting her as he returned from the church, trembled all over at the sight of her, and begged her to accept a vase of his new honey.

"See that it is good measure," says she, with a leer, and she hobbles back and finds the monkey by the kitchen fire, dipping his hand in the kettle and picking out the best bits of the stew.

At this she, further enraged, falls on him and beats him without mercy.

Ottilia: He was a worthless spirit! Could he not save her porter—could he do nothing but eat and thieve?

Pipkin (which was the name of this creature): That was a powerful spell laid on the porter, but if she would stop beating him he would suggest how she might have her revenge.

Ottilia ceased her blows and they whispered together, and presently they began to laugh and dance, and, my knave from the Sheriff coming with the vase of honey, looked in at the window and seeing, as he declared, three tall shadows leaping up and down on the wall, back he ran, honey and all, and swears he will deliver no more messages there, no, not if the Sheriff was to dip him in the river.

Now Trina gets ready her cheeses and goes to the market with them. Everyone is looking grim, and the bell of the big church is tolling, for the porter is just dead and the devil, in flying out of the corpse, snatched up the altar-cloth and whirled it away through the window, and it may be seen at this moment stuck on the weathercock on the steeple.

But my hag cheerfully sets out her cheeses, and presently the people gather round, for the cheeses are large, fine and soft, and indeed better than any ever seen in that town before.

And, sure enough, she does a good trade, and it seems as if every cheese on the cart would be sold, when—what happens?

Just as she is taking up the cheeses to hand them to her customers, up they all jump, like live things, and start running down the street.

Everyone stares and shrieks and crosses himself, and off go my cheeses, one after the other—jump, jump, jump!—and after them the hag screaming and cursing.

But she might do as she liked; it was no use, the cheeses hurry along and she cannot keep up with them.

In and out of the long streets they go, out of the gate and past Ottilia's farm.

And there she is at the window laughing and clapping her hands, with the monkey on her shoulder.

Ottilia: She was well paid now for bewitching the poor porter! She might run till she burst, she would never get her cheeses again! Ha! ha! How strange she looked, with her skirts all gathered up and her skinny legs looking like two sticks dried in the sun!

But Trina took no notice; she ran after the cheeses. Only what was the use?

They made straight for the river-bank, and there they jumped into the water, one after the other—plump! plump! plump!

And that was the end of the cheeses.

Now Ottilia and Pipkin had a feast, and because the Sheriff had not sent the honey as he had promised, they put a spell on him and turned all the beer in his cellar sour, and all the fish and meat in his pantry bad, so that the smell turned the Sheriff's stomach.

So he in a fright sent another knave with a venison and a salmon and a great pot of honey; and what a feast my hag made! All the afternoon she was frying collops and sausages and making soup and boiling salmon.

Now, there were some friends of hers living near, hags like herself, but afraid of her, and to these she sent a message asking them to supper—for when she had good food she liked to make a show of it, so as to set all talking of her luxury and magnificence.

In came the hags dressed like so many young beauties, and down they sat to the feast, flattering and praising Ottilia and smirking and smiling at each other

as if they were the sweetest-tempered creatures in the world.

Well, just as my witch had brought in the salmon and set it on the table and all the guests were ready to plunge in their knives and forks, down comes the ceiling, spoils the feast, and nearly kills them all!

The table was broken beneath the wooden beams, the venison, the sausages, the salmon, the beer, the wine, the honey, were scattered right and left, so that there was not one crumb fit to eat.

Now the old women thought that this was some trick on the part of Ottilia (for she had served them not a few in the past), and as soon as they could escape from the ruins of the table they rose up and went for her, beating her black and blue and swinging Pipkin round by his tail and dashing his head against the wall, she crying out the while that she was innocent and would she have spoilt her own good dinner herself?

They never heeded a word, but beat her till they were tired; then they blew out in a cloud, scolding and quarrelling among themselves.

When they had gone, Ottilia, as soon as she could recover herself, beat Pipkin a little more for not having been able to prevent the falling in of the roof, then put on her best gown and the famous brass chain and went off to find a man to put the roof on again, then, as quick as she could, hobble, hobble, to the Sheriff's.

Shivering and trembling, he bids her come in, though he is in full council discussing no less an important thing than putting a penny a quart on the price of beer.

In comes Ottilia demurely, and, sighing and weeping, she starts her story.

Ottilia: With the venison and salmon his lordship

had been so good as to send she had made a little feast for some poor women of her acquaintance, and they, after thanking Heaven for its mercies, were just sitting to table when down came the roof and spoilt everything. This, like the death of the poor porter, was plainly witchcraft, and she accused the strange Trina Von Ebers, and called on the Sheriff to obtain justice for her and damages from that accursed witch. To wit; *item*, for the value of the porter, 50 florins; *item*, for the cost of a new roof, 10 florins; *item*, for the cost of the dinner, 5 florins; *item*, for a new gown totally spoilt by some soup falling over it, 10 florins; and for another feast to compensate her friends for their disappointment, 15 florins.

The Sheriff did not know what to answer; he was as white as the wall behind him. He bit his thumb and looked at the councillors, and the councillors looked at him, and they all coughed and scratched their heads, and did not know what to answer.

Then Ottilia began to frown and scream: What, were they not there to see justice done on a high-born maiden in distress?

And the Sheriff hastily replied, yea, they were there to see justice done, but could she prove the witchcraft? Might it not have been an accident? And, as to the damages she claimed, they did not think this stranger woman could disburse them.

So spoke the Sheriff out of fear of both witches, but Ottilia became more wrathful than ever. Let them search the stranger's house and see if they did not find money enough to satisfy her claims! And, if they found nothing, let them take her out and burn her for the witch she undoubtedly was!

At these words in walks old Trina leaning on a

crutch, and goes stumping straight up to the Sheriff and tells her tale of the bewitched cheeses and demands that Ottilia be sent to the rack until she confess it was her doing.

Then the Sheriff and the councillors wished that they had never been born, for, whichever hag they decided for, the other would destroy them with her spells, and the Sheriff saw no escape for it but to die miserably, as the poor porter had died. So he sat there, trembling and biting his thumb, while my witches glare at each other awaiting his answer.

Then presently he thinks of a solution, and declares them both pious women and innocent of all witchcraft, and suggests that perchance there is some evil person in the town who has played these ugly tricks, or else that they were no tricks at all, but mere accidents.

Accidents! screams Ottilia, when he himself had heard the devil speak from the mouth of her porter!

Accidents! cries Trina, when the cheeses had risen up like Christians and run down the street—hop; hop; hop; and the whole town had seen them!

So the Sheriff sighs and says, well, no doubt there was witchcraft in it, and he can propose nothing but a witch-hunt, and pray Heaven they may find the evil-doer.

Now, this is not at all to the liking of my hags, and they stretch out their lean throats and scream out a protest, each shrieking that the other is the witch and no need to search further.

But the councillors are pleased with the Sheriff's plan, for, think they, the excitement of a witch-hunt will help to reconcile the people to the rise in the price of beer.

So off they hurry and find swords and sticks and

bunches of hazel tied with scarlet thread and make a proclamation of a witch-hunt, to which all the town folk respond, well pleased.

And the two hags see nothing for it but to join in the chase, the one with her monkey, the other with her cat, though their wrath against each other was by no means abated, and both yet hoped to serve the other some shrewd trick or turn that would send her to the stake.

Now, while this chase was taking place through the streets, the altar-cloth that had been fluttering from the weathercock of the steeple where it had been blown by the devil to the great scandal of all good Christians, suddenly fluttered down, though there was no wind, and fell on the roof of a house in the High Street, which the crowd at this minute were passing.

And the woman who lived there came running out, shouting:

Had any one heard the like? All the apple-trees in her garden had become suddenly covered with fruit, and this but the middle of May!

Now, this greatly pleased my knaves, who thought that they had found magic at last; so they bundled the woman back into the house and rushed into the garden, and there, sure enough, were three little apple-trees, covered with red and glossy fruit; but when one stuck his teeth into them he found his mouth full of ashes.

So here they had it at last, and some were for taking the woman and burning her at once, but there were two objections; *item*, she had a very good character, and earned her living by knitting gloves for the priests; *item*, there was no one among them who knew how to burn a witch, and the fellow they had sent for had not yet arrived.

In the midst of all the delay and confusion and bawling and fighting, two of the knaves start searching through the house for broom-sticks, cauldrons, or any signs or mark of the Evil One.

And what do they find?

A fair lame maiden, seated on the floor in one of the dusty garrets.

And she could give no account of herself; so they dragged her down before the Sheriff, and the housewife declared that she had never seen her before, and that it was she, sure enough, who had bewitched the apple-trees.

And my hags join in out of jealousy, seeing the girl is young and comely, albeit lame, and swear this is the witch and no other, and now they can have their witch-burning.

So off they all go—hurry, hurry, hurry—to the market-place, and, the witch-burner having arrived, the stake is prepared, and a fine bundle of green wood brought, and everyone pleased and content at the thought of the holy and pleasant spectacle, when what must Ottilia and Trina do but start anew to quarrel, each telling the other she should join the poor maiden at the stake.

And Pipkin and the cat begin fighting until it is an awful sight; for as they fight they grow larger until the monkey is the size of a soldier, and the cat the size of a bear.

Then, while every one is shivering and trembling, and not knowing what to do, there comes a clap of thunder, and who should step into the market-square but the Devil himself?

Now, fiends, imps, evil spirits, familiars, ghosts and witches were well known to the good citizens, but the

Devil himself was quite another matter, and they all began to roar with fright.

To begin with, he was as tall as the cathedral, he had a tail that lashed over the house-tops, and his long hair shook in the sky like banners. So he puts one hoof in the market-place and glances down with his red eyes, then he takes up the two witches as a man might take up two hens and tucks them one under each arm, and off he goes over the houses—stride, stride, stride—and disappears with another clap of thunder.

And that was the end of my hags.

Now when the crowd had recovered its senses, the cat and the monkey had disappeared, and there was the poor maiden weeping at the stake. So they gave her her liberty; it seemed she was a poor orphan hired to do a day's spinning, and her mistress had denied her for fear. She afterwards married George Potsdammer; so this was a lucky day for her after all.

Now, everyone was satisfied, save the witch-burner, who said: how was he to be paid?

But the Sheriff was so pleased to be rid of Ottilia that he paid the fellow the same, and so all went to a feast in the town-hall.

Alas, they might well feast! Soon it appeared that the devil had let Ottilia loose again, and back she came in a new fur tippet; but that is not in this tale.

Here ends the story of the Magister, and the next pages of his manuscript deal with a plan for the conversion of the Jews and an account of Benedict D'Arles, who spent thirty years trying to produce the Philosopher's Stone from decayed hen's-eggs, mercury and seaweed, and died mad.

V.—ENVY

THE winter sun, pale and clear as thrice-refined gold, warmed the rich countryside which lay beneath the Convent; the pine trees with fox-red cones, the thick olive trees with the clustering grey fruit, the chestnuts heavy with tawny foliage, covered the hill-slopes to where they joined the valleys, divided by silver-stemmed larches and slender poplars, bearing a few last leaves, flat and bright as a gipsy's sequins, into fields where men, women and oxen worked, turning over the fresh brown earth.

On the roofs of the farmhouses figs were drying in flat baskets; from the doors and windows hung the red gold strings of maize; and in the gardens, by the stone wells or the marble shrines of the Madonna set in the wall, the orange trees showed the dark glossy foliage and the brilliant fruit.

The wine harvest was over; in the stone courtyards sat girls and children rapidly fashioning covers for the flasks from the dried stems and leaves of the maize; the laurels were covered with berries, scarlet, purple and green; and here and there in some sheltered garden a white or crimson rose blossomed on the same stem as the vivid yellow fruit.

Through this winter landscape rode a young lord with a sin on his soul; he rode to the Convent. In his

furred habit, with tassels of scarlet, he went humbly through the cloisters where the slanting sunlight lay, and confessed to Father Aloysius. And though the good monk absolved him, he was still uneasy, for his sin was a grievous one.

"How can it be?" he cried, "that I shall be forgiven?"

Then Father Aloysius took him by the hand and led him into the garden.

It was very still; above the low line of the cloisters fine insects crossed each other in the blue sky; there was just breeze enough to rustle the shining leaves of the lemon trees that drooped heavy fruit against the wall.

"There is no sin," said the monk, "too heinous to be forgiven, if one truly repents. As witness the tale of the hangman of Pisa, which is out of the book called *The Rosarie of Our Lady*, wherein are other examples, there being one for each bead on the rosary.

"Now this hangman was a wicked and bitter man, who had never done a good action in his life, but had taken up his awful trade for pleasure in it and would go to a hanging as merrily as a maid to a dancing. There was no one who loved him or respected him or pitied him; never was he seen in a church, nor any holy place, and when some poor wretch, about to die under his hand, would murmur a prayer for God's pity, my hangman would laugh and scoff in a way horrid to hear.

"It happened one day that he was going forth to hang an offender; he was clothed in the garments of the men he had executed, and he carried a rope in his hand, for there was need of a new one for the gallows.

"It was a sweet and lovely day in spring, the flowers were blowing in the gardens and on the hillsides, and

many people were singing because of the pleasant season of the year.

"The hangman felt suddenly uneasy: for the first time in his wicked life he noticed how the children and the young maidens ran away when they saw him coming, how the men crossed to the other footway, so that his path was always lonely.

"And for the first time since he had begun his present horrid occupation, he thought of the poor prisoner whom he was going to hang.

"When he came to Pisa bridge, where is the shrine of the Virgin set into the wall, a child running from him dropped a cluster of wood-violets. And the hangman, on the impulse, picked up the flowers and placed them on the little shelf before the Virgin, and at the same time commended his soul to Our Lady.

"Then he went on his way again, but, passing through a narrow street, he was intercepted by some relations of the man he was going to hang, and they slew him.

"Now there was then in Pisa a certain priest who nightly walked about every church in the city, and that night he rose up and went to the church of Our Lady.

"And as he passed through the churchyard, he saw a great many dead men gathered together in a company.

"Some of these dead men he knew, and of them he asked what was the matter.

"And one of them answered, 'The hangman is slain, and the Devil challenges his soul from Our Lady, who says it is hers; and the Judge is even at hand coming hither to hear the cause, and therefore,' said they, 'we are now come together.'

"Then the priest thought that he also would be at this hearing, and so hid himself behind a thorn tree,

and anon saw the judicial seat prepared and furnished, whereon the judge, to wit, St. Michael, sat, and near him was Our Lady.

"Soon after, the devils brought in the soul of the hangman pinioned, and they proved by good evidence that he belonged to them.

"On the other hand, Our Lady pleaded for this poor wretch, contending that he at the hour of death commended his soul to her, and laid a bunch of violets before her shrine on Pisa bridge.

"St. Michael, hearing the matter so well debated on either side, willing to obey Our Lady's desire, and yet loath to do the devils any wrong, gave sentence that the hangman's soul should return to his body, and by his future conduct should his fate be decided; he further ordered that the Pope should set forth a public form of prayer for the hangman's soul.

"Thereupon the devils demanded who should do this errand to His Holiness?

"'Why,' said Our Lady, 'yonder priest who lurketh behind the thorn tree.'

"So the priest was called forth, and the message given him, which he did accept, saying however, 'By what token shall I persuade His Holiness?'

"Then Our Lady took a rose from her girdle and delivered it him, saying, 'This shall be the token whereby ye may desire the Pope to take the pains to do as has been decreed.'

"So the soul of the hangman returned to his body, and the priest went to Rome, and when the Pope saw the beauty and freshness of the rose after it had been three days in the priest's wallet, he knew that the story was true, and he ordered prayers to be sent up for the recovered hangman.

"And the hangman so lived in holiness that when he died those about him very plainly heard the opening of heaven's door to admit his soul.

"By which you see," added Father Aloysius, "that one simple prayer and a handful of flowers were sufficient to save the soul of a wicked man."

At which the young lord rejoiced, and went away comforted.

But a certain young novice, seeing him depart in his finery, envied him, saying, "Look at his furred boots and his tassels, and the hat with the heron's feather, and the chain and the beryl stone!"

Father Aloysius heard him and rebuked him:

"That man whom you envy," said he, "is fallen so low that he considered himself lost until I comforted him with the tale of the great mercy vouchsafed to the hangman of Pisa.

"He takes no pleasure in his hat or his feather, in his furred boots, nor in his chain with the beryl stone: therefore be not envious of this splendour of his. And I would further remind you that Envy or *Invidia* is the fifth of the Deadly Sins."

Now several of the novices who were about under the lemon trees, picking the fruit and piling it into deep wicker baskets, began to dispute and complain about this dictum.

For envy (said they) could by no means be called a deadly sin, only a venial one, for what harm could come of it to anyone—either to the object envied or to the person who envied?

Neither could this sin be considered the beginning of other sins, or the root of evil, as were Pride, Greed, Wrath.

Besides, it was a failing common to all, and by no

means to be subdued save by a saint or hermit, and even these had been known to envy the angels in heaven.

Thereupon Father Aloysius seated himself on the edge of the well, where he had the sun, and expounded the fifth deadly sin, which some, he said, put second, as next to Pride and before Greed and Wrath.

And after this manner he expounded:

St. Augustine saith, "Envy is sorrow of other men's weal, and joy of other men's woe"; and that is a true definition.

It is a very horrible sin (said the Father), inasmuch as it goes secretly and is very often undiscovered, so escaping among the ignorant, such as ye, as a venial fault hardly to be noticed, when instead it is the generator of more evil in the world than three of the other sins put together.

And I tell ye this, though there may be many a good or brave man, tinct in some way with the other sins, yet there was never one that had a spark of virtue in him who was a prey to envy; for it is properly a sin of mean, small, creeping souls who lack the courage for lustier vice.

Envy is one and the same with Malice, which it is sometimes called; it is against all virtue and all goodness, and it is like the Devil, inasmuch as it rejoices at the harm which befalls mankind. It is the parent of backbiting, detraction, slander, false witness, scandal, unkindness and cruelty.

So great a sin is it that it is mentioned in the Ten Commandments, which say nothing of Pride, nor Greed, nor Avarice.

It goes against God when it complains of God's orderings, as, the pains of hell, or poverty, or loss of

cattle, or rain, or tempest, all of which ills man should suffer patiently, for they come from God's own hand.

And Envy is cowardly, and dare not openly show its face, but murmurs and grumbles and complains and detracts privately; and these secret mutterings of Envy are termed the Devil's *Pater Noster*, though the Devil never had a *Pater Noster*, but lewd folk so call this sour whispering of Envy.

And from Envy come rancour, and grudging, and bitterness of heart, and discord, and false witness, and malignity.

And it is the most difficult sin of all to fight, for it goes generally cloaked in the semblance of some virtue.

And there is this tale to be told of Envy, though there are many others more pointed and dreadful; but this I know to be true:

It happened in a far country, where there is much snow and little sun, many clouds and few flowers.

There the hills are so high that one may walk all day through the valleys, and never see the sun, though it be never so brightly shining. There are great waterfalls and ravines and lonely stretches of rock; and the land is mostly barren, for they find there neither gold nor silver mines, nor marble quarries nor any natural riches; nor does any fruit flourish nor any grain save that little they painfully grow on the shelves of rocks. But in the lakes and bays are plenty of fish, and there are vast forests of pine, of which they sell the wood.

In this country is a castle, the most considerable they have, close to their largest town. They call it the Blue Tower because it is built of wood and painted blue; they use neither brick nor marble in their building, but of wood they can make anything, a delicate toy for a child or a ship that will sail over the world's seas.

They are a rude people, strong and fair, and still barbarous in their ways; they have no arts save those of embroidery and carving, and their sole poetry is a number of wild, fierce songs they sing in the evenings round the fire; it is said that many of them are not even Christians, but still devoted to heathen idols.

However this may be, they are cruel and brave in war, and dart out on their icy seas in their dragon-prowed galleys and seize any luckless ship that may be in their waters.

And there is the excuse to be made for their godless conduct that they have a hard bitter life in their cold and barren land.

In this Blue Tower lived a certain nobleman with his daughter. They were very rich for that country, and would drive to and fro the town in a sledge with scarlet cushions and silver bells, drawn by four reindeer, with little gold tips to their horns; and there was always plenty of meat on their table, even in the scarce seasons, and plenty of mead in their horn goblets, a great fire burning always on their hearth, hangings of gaily worked woollens and coloured lamps in their chambers, and on the lady's arms bracelets of rough gold, and in her ears pendants of turquoise.

They were, besides, much loved by their people, for they were open-handed and gay, and brave and just and kindly.

Among their peasants was one named Frithiof, who was good and intelligent, and clever indeed at the wood-carving in which these people excelled; he could take a little bit of rough wood and turn it into the likeness of a flower, or a face, or a bird, or a toad, or a witch, or a fairy, while he drove the reindeer to their stables.

And his master encouraged him, buying his work and

praising it, and at last ordered him to carve him a chair to sit in on feast-days, a chair deep and high, with the old heroes they sang of after supper carved on the back, an inch deep in the good thick wood.

Now when Frithiof heard this it was to him as if all the little silver sledge-bells were ringing in his heart, for he was in love with a maiden named Rieke, and she loved him, and the price of the chair would be sufficient wherewith to build a house and buy a piece of ground, and perhaps even a reindeer, and so they could be married before the winter was over.

His lord knew of this ambition of his, and favoured it, and showed him the piece of land waiting for him, and his daughter declared she would give the bride a square of scarlet cloth for a wedding present; and Frithiof heard the silver bells ring louder in his heart, and saw the cold northern sky rosy with hope.

Now Rieke was a very lovely maiden, with thick pale yellow hair, which hung to her knees, and blue eyes like the little flowers which grow up in the snow-hills, and are put there by the angels to remind men of God in desolate places.

She was pious, too, and industrious; she could comb and card wool, spin and dye cloth, fashion garments and embroider them, milk the reindeer and harness them, make caps and purses and gloves and bags out of fur.

But withal she was of a discontented and jealous mind, and though she truly loved Frithiof, she never saw him in his good rough garments but she was shamed in her heart and wished that she had a finer lover.

And when he came and told her of his good fortune with the chair he was to carve for his lord, she was not so pleased as he had thought she would be, and she sighed to herself, saying, "This is not a grand

future: a few yards of ground and a hut." And in secret she filled her heart with all the old legends and tales in which maidens had come to marry great knights by reason of their fair faces.

So the winter came, and the world was white and silent with snow; it lay on the ground, on the boughs of the fir trees, on the mountains and on the ice that covered the lakes and bays, on the roof of the Blue Tower, and on the roofs of all the little huts beneath.

And as Rieke sat at her door, spinning, wearing a red gown and a blue apron and cross-cloths of yellow and red on her head, she saw the lord's daughter driving in her sledge through the forest.

She was going to some feast, for it neared Christmas-tide, and she wore, plainly visible beneath her fur mantle, a white vesture.

Now she, being a gracious lady and seeing Rieke working at her door, stopped her sledge and entered the hut and spoke kindly to the girl about the wedding drawing so near.

And as she stood talking in the warm room, she put back her mantle, and Rieke saw the white gown, pure as the snow, with white fur on the bodice, buckled with rough pearls; and she heeded nothing of what the lady said, but thought only of the white gown; and when she had gone, tinkle, tinkle with her reindeer over the snow, Rieke sat down and wept.

"I should look fairer than she in a white robe," she thought, "for I have yellow hair and hers is dark—but no one will ever give me such a gown."

So she lamented until the devils of discontent and envy and malice and jealousy got hold of her, and when Frithiof came to her that evening, flushed and happy from his work, she received him sullenly.

As he sat by the fire and her old mother told them fairy tales, he carved her a necklet of the blue mountain flowers, so delicately done that at a breath they trembled like living petals.

But Rieke put it about her white neck sadly, and thought of the fine chains the lord's daughter had worn, of pure gold, seven times round her throat, and then hanging to her knees.

And as the days went on she became more and more gloomy and distracted, and took no pleasure in Frithiof's eager talk of the home they would have, nor her mother's gossip of the wedding feast, of the mead the good lord would send, and the piece of scarlet cloth that was to be the gift from his daughter; for every day she longed more and more for the white gown, and when they spoke of the dancing there would be, she looked at her rough shoes and thought, "How can I dance in these?"

Now there was a certain neighbour of hers, named Helva, who owned a pair of shoes made of soft skin and laced with silk, and on Rieke once telling her how she envied them she pleasantly promised to lend them for the wedding.

"But what is the use," thought Rieke, "of fine shoes, if I have to go in a coarse coloured gown?"

And she became so pale and ill and sad that Frithiof, full as he was of his own joy, could not fail to notice it, and often demanded of her what the grief was; but she put him off, since she was ashamed to tell.

But one evening he came to her, happy and singing, with the price of the chair in his pocket, and she could bear it no more, but broke into tears and told him how she longed for a white gown.

And Frithiof went out into the snow and looked up

at the stars above the pine trees and tried to understand.

He loved her, therefore he could give her no blame ; he only realized that he had gold in his pocket, and that she was weeping for a white gown. So he sighed, and sighed, and presently went to a neighbour and borrowed his sledge and drove to the town.

And there he went to a merchant's and bought a white gown with fur and rough pearl buckles, and the price of it was the gold he had got for the chair, and his savings besides, so that all the long labour of days and nights and months and years went in this flimsy piece of finery.

But Frithiof did not care ; they could wait for the wedding and the house as long as he could make her gay and joyous with his gift.

And gay and joyous she was when he brought it to her ; she kissed him, she danced and sang, and cared nothing when he told her their wedding must be postponed, for he must go back to his work again to earn the money for the house and the piece of land and the reindeer.

So he went away and took a great block of wood and began hopefully to carve a dragon for the prow of a ship, the which he hoped to sell to the shipbuilders who were getting ready new ships for the spring.

But Rieke thought of nothing save the white gown. She did not like to show it to her mother, because she had a kind of shame in the possession of anything so costly ; but late one afternoon, just before it came to the time of candle-lighting, she crept up to her room, slipped out of her red and blue clothes, and put on the white gown.

Alas, there was no mirror on the rough pine walls,

so Rieke could not admire herself; but she combed out her long yellow hair and shook it over her shoulder, and fingered the texture of the gown and admired the way the silver border rippled over the floor.

But her coarse shoes spoilt all, and she thought that she would go to Helva and borrow the fine slippers, at the same time making a show of the white gown before her friend, to whom she wanted to say, "See what a fine lover I have! He went into the town and bought me this gown!"

So she stole softly down stairs and out into the snow. It was very cold, and heavy grey clouds were coming up over the hills, but Rieke thought she could get to Helva's and back before the storm came, and she put on no cloak, for she had none worthy of such a gown.

Hurrying she went over the snow. It was beginning to get dark, shadows lay blue beneath the pines, and the girl's breath showed frozen before her; shivering with cold and panting with running she came to Helva's cottage.

Impatiently she knocked at the door, crying, "Come, Helva, and see my new gown!"

But there was no answer, nor any light coming from the window.

"Come quick," cried Rieke, "for the storm is hastening over the trees. It is getting dark, and I have no mantle!"

Then, as there was still no answer, she raised the latch and entered.

And she beheld Helva's mother and little sister weeping, and they took no notice at all of her attire.

"Helva is dead," they said, and Rieke bowed her head and wept with them.

Yet she could not help secretly wondering what had become of the fine silk-sewn slippers.

And presently she went into the bedchamber to say farewell to her friend.

And there lay Helva, smiling, on the clean sheets, and on her feet were the shoes.

Now Rieke began to envy the dead.

"What are the shoes to her?" she thought. "She does not need them in her grave; if she had been alive she would have given them to me, and it is foolish for these shoes to be lost in the corruption of the earth when I need them."

And so, from envy and jealousy of the dead, she came to a more dreadful thing.

She slipped the shoes off Helva's feet and hid them in her bosom, and ran out of the cottage.

The sky was now dark and the twilight fast descending, but at the edge of the wood Rieke stopped and took off her shoes and put on the fine slippers, already cold from the cold flesh of the dead; and as she put them on she shivered to her heart.

And she began to be afraid.

"Just for to-night," she said; "to-morrow I will give them back."

Now she was dressed like the lord's daughter, but she was cold—ah, cold!

She wrapped her hair round her shoulders to keep herself warm, and she tried to hurry, but her limbs were too stiff to move swiftly, and the storm came up, and the snow began to fall in great flakes, softly, softly, softly.

When she reached home she saw the cottage lights fall cheerfully across the night; eagerly she knocked and cried to them to admit her, quick, quick! But her

mother looked from the window, and seeing the white figure crouching outside she said, "This is not my daughter Rieke, this is a ghost or witch. My daughter Rieke is up at the Blue Tower helping the maids card wool"; and she closed the shutters and bolted the door.

And Rieke cried and lamented outside in the falling snow, and darkness, and the keen wind which shook the pines

And when she saw that her mother would not open she turned away to Frithiof's cottage, and rapped with her frozen knuckles on the lattice. Frithiof was seated gazing into the red roses of the fire, and dreaming of the days when Rieke would sit beside him during the long winter evenings.

Then, while he carved, she would spin, and they would tell each other tales of the long ago, of dragons, salamanders, elves, witches and fairies, and great heroes in gold armour.

And he counted up once more on his fingers how long it would take him to earn enough for their wedding, and while he counted he heard the tap, tap, tap at the window, and presently a voice crying, "Let me in, let me in!"

So he hurried to open the door and look out into the night, and out of the snowstorm came Rieke, chilling the room with her cold presence.

And she was all white, save for the long strands of her wet yellow hair.

And Frithiof brought her to the fire, and besought her to speak to him; but she could say never a word more, for she was frozen to the heart.

Wet and chilly was the white gown, wet and chill the thin shoes; the bitter snowflakes melted on her cheeks and clung like a wreath about her hair; and though

Frithiof kissed her and put his warm cheeks next hers, he could bring no life into her; and though he brought hot mead, he could not force it between her blue lips.

So he wrapped her up in his fur coat, and set her before the fire, and ran out to fetch her mother and the neighbours.

But what was the use of their hurrying with their possets and their blankets?

Rieke was dead in her garments of ice, dead and cold, cold as the flying snow outside.

And they found that her feet were bare, so believed she had lost her shoes; and when they came to put Helva in her grave they found the fine slippers on her feet as if they had never been disturbed, which is a matter the good angels know of, surely.

So Frithiof never carved the dragon prow for the shipbuilders; of the wood he made a coffin for Rieke, and she was laid in it in the white gown, and on the day before Christmas buried in the little church on the hill-side.

And Frithiof went away from there, no one knowing what he did with his days, though it is believed he wandered much and died a monk in Syria.

But the chair with the price of which he bought the white gown may still be seen in the great hall of the Blue Tower, and though it is a little eaten by the worms and the rats, you may still discern the old heroes carved in the good black wood.

Now I might tell you many more stories of Envy—as that of the man who envied his neighbour who had the ceiling of his dining-hall covered with gold pieces, and at last did his own in like fashion; but as he was not rich, he used gilded lead, and one day as he was carving the meat, down fell a false piece of eight and

killed him; or the lady who envied her brother's wife for her small waist, and drew in her own so tightly that she died; or the man who out of malice bore witness to a forgotten crime of his neighbour's, and so discovered one of his own for which he ended his life in prison; or the thieves who envied each other's share of the booty and quarrelled so loud they were all apprehended and justly hanged; or the maid who swore evil things of another, and was ducked as a witch for coming by such secret knowledge of another's sins, which she could only have discovered (they said) by the aid of the Devil; or the monk who envied the abbot and spoke maliciously of him, and that day (being Friday) was choked with a fish-bone; or the woman who envied the statue of Our Lady for her jewelled crown, at which the lamp before the shrine went out, and in the dark the woman fell and broke her neck. But I have spoken enough of Envy and all the evil consequences thereof, which I pray you heartily beware.

So the novices took up their baskets of lemons and carried them into the Convent.

VI.—AVARICE

A CERTAIN Cardinal came to stay at the Convent, and was entertained in a royal manner, as befitted his rank; three weeks he lingered, putting the Convent to great expense, and when he left he gave them no more than his blessing, though they had expected at least a relic for the Chapel and a pound of gold for themselves.

And this led Father Aloysius, who was sorely angered, to speak of the sixth deadly sin, which is

Avarice, or, in the classical tongue, *Auaricia*, with which is included another sin, that of *Coveitise*, of which Saint Paul saith: "The root of all harm is *Coveitise*."

Which sin is different from Avarice in this, that *Coveitise* is the unlawful longing for what one has not, and Avarice is the longing to keep what one has without lawful need and excuse.

And there is an Avarice of glory and science, as well as an Avarice of cattle and treasure; an Avarice of things of the soul, as well as of things of the body.

And he who is avaricious breaks the first commandment, which is against false gods—as he who follows this sin makes many false gods and worships them all, and never chances to lift his eyes to where the only and one God sits enthroned; nay, he is absorbed in his worldly good, and thinks of naught else until the day the devil catches him by the neck, saying: "Ho, come you with me!"

Neither shall it save him (said Father Aloysius) if he wear a Cardinal's hat!

And further to impress over and above all these gathering complaints (for all from the Abbot to the scullions were murmuring against their visitor) the hideousness and evil consequence of this sin, he brought out the book of the German Magister, and read them this story:

Further back in this book of mine I spoke of a certain notorious witch named Ottilia, who was carried off bodily by the devil, and afterwards returned, wearing a new fur tippet, to the great dismay of the townsfolk.

But who dare say anything?

She had a very plausible story to tell; she said she

had been visiting an ancient aunt of hers, in a distant part of the country, who had died recently, and who had left her (honest woman that she was!) two cats, a bag of gold, and the fur tippet.

As for that scene in the market square, when one ventured to speak of it, she treated it all as a jest—that was a fine tale indeed; it was quite clear that there were a good many people with an evil conscience, when they imagined they saw things like that!

So she went back to her beer-brewing and her sausage-making; she had a new roof put on her house, and she bought some new furniture and a blue velvet gown, and no one dared say aught, though they all groaned and sighed at having her amongst them again.

As for the cats, they were not like ordinary beasts, but had large round heads and small bodies, and wore sad, dun-coloured coats. One was called Guzzling Grizel, and the other Wait-on-yourself; for the first was never happy save when eating, and the second when asked a favour, however trifling, would always reply "Wait on yourself."

Now it was perfectly well known that these cats were nothing better than imps who had taken the place of my Pipkin, who was never seen again. Nor was Trina, the other witch, ever seen again—and none dared ask after her.

So Ottilia lived quietly for a while, making her beer and her sausages, and going to the market and selling them, sometimes buying a broom and sometimes a bit of finery for herself or her imps.

And one day she was sitting by the fire after dinner when there came a knock on the door.

So up she hobbled, ready with a sour word if it

should be one of my hags come to visit her; she sees instead a handsome young man, very mournful and sad, so she begins smiling and saying all the servants were abroad, and the porter asleep, as she also would have been had she not stayed up to say her prayers. But will he step inside and state his business?

My young man listens to all these lies very courteously, and asks if she be the Lady Ottilia?

"Yes," says she, highly flattered; "come in, fair sir, and taste my beer, which is better than any brewed around."

So he entered and sat by the fire and sighed and groaned.

She: What was the matter with him that he seemed so downcast? Let him taste her beer!

He: He had not come for her beer, but for her advice; for he was quite in despair, and he had heard she was very wise.

She: She believed she had as much sense as her neighbours!

He: Well, he was in trouble; let her help him, and she should not lack for her reward.

She: She was willing to do her best as long as it was not some silly love affair, for with such things she had no patience!

He: No, he had never been in love in his life, nor ever seen a woman so pleasing to him as she was now, when she promised to do her best for him!

At which Ottilia was mightily pleased, and told him he must not think of trying to get round her with compliments, for she was not a foolish girl, but a woman turned thirty, though she had heard said she looked younger.

"Not a day more than twenty-five," said he; at

which Guzzling Grizel and Wait-on-yourself burst into laughter, and Ottilia kicked them out of the room.

They: She had some vigour in her still, though she was seventy-seven yesterday!

At this Ottilia hoped he would excuse the poor beasts, who were little better than heathen still, for all the trouble she took with them.

He: What did it matter? He was not such a good Christian himself. If she would hear his trouble, it was this:

He was a master mariner, and had made many sailings in many parts of the world, and seen many strange lands.

And ever since he was a little child one thought had tormented him—why did the ships turn back? Why not sail on and see if there was not another land?

For his part, he believed there was, and that if they sailed on through uncharted seas they would find this land: he had had visions of it, he had dreamt of it, he believed it was very rich and beautiful, with gold and silver mines; and the man who discovered it could make himself king.

But for ten years he had wandered from one place to another, to kings, to princes, to towns, to the Pope, to bishops and great knights, and no one would believe in him sufficiently to give him enough money to buy a boat and go in search of this New Country, nay, not even if he offered half of what he found.

And worse than that, he had now lost his profession, for none would trust him on their ship, for (said they) he was too crazed; and he was now at his last penny, for he had spent all his patrimony in his wanderings.

Therefore, finding himself in this town, and hearing of her and her wisdom, he had come to ask her, first

if there was such a land as he dreamt of ; second, if he should ever find it ; third, if she could help him to someone who would supply him with money for the voyage.

On hearing this Ottilia took a long drink of beer, and then sat staring into the fire.

At last she said she could do none of these things herself, but if he would come with her to a friend of hers, she thought that he might know everything, yea, and even get the help he needed.

So he said, Yes, eagerly enough would he go with her, and swear to give her a good share of whatever he got from this venture.

So my hag takes a stout broomstick from the corner, and jumps on it, and bids the young man mount behind, which he does ; then behind him climb the two imps (grumbling that they had scarcely any room), and off they go, up the chimney and over the town, which lay dark below them, dotted with little twinkling lights.

They flew over the houses and out into the open country, and alighted on the top of a hill where a large company was already gathered. A table was set in the middle, and on this stood a great lantern, which gave forth an extraordinary light.

And all about were gathered men and women, or rather, as my stranger soon perceived, witches and warlocks.

On a high chair in the centre sat a man in a black coat with a blue band, and when he rose to welcome Ottilia, my stranger noticed that he wore hoggers (*i.e.* high boots without feet), and that he had goat's hoofs, so that now he had no doubt at all about the character of the company.

The Devil (for it was no other) received him very

civilly, and took off the broad-lipped hat he wore (they were that year the fashion), and saluted him and asked him his name.

Now my master mariner was in some doubts whether he should speak to a person obviously excommunicated, but nevertheless answers that his name was Felipe Lopez.

"Very well," says the fiend, "as it is the etiquette here to call everyone by a different name from that they have been baptized with, I will call you Goodman Tib"; and under this name he was introduced to the company.

So they all took their seats; the feast was well enough, but everything was eaten without salt, for that mineral, being an emblem of eternity, is forbidden to lost souls.

Now, seated on the right hand of the Devil was a very well favoured witch, and on his left one hardly less comely, and my stranger, Don Lopez, perceived that Ottilia was not at all pleased with this arrangement, but kept up an envious grumbling that the best place should have been hers.

In the middle of the feast the Devil calls for all the screaming and gossiping to cease, and asks Don Lopez what he wants with him.

Whereupon the other musters his courage and tells his story.

So the Devil reflects a little and presently he speaks.

Devil: If he helped Goodman Tib to find this New Country, would he promise him to deliver it over to his (Satan's) worship, excluding all priests, monks, nuns and everything in the shape of a cross, even to a pair of scissors?

Don Lopez: That was an unreasonable condition to make, for everyone knew that if he did any such thing he would be seized and burnt outright!

Devil: If he was tender in his conscience, why had he come here for help?

Don Lopez: It wasn't a question of conscience at all, but of common sense; he was quite willing to serve the Devil secretly.

Devil: No, he was tired of secret worship; he wanted churches and priests and everything like God had.

Don Lopez: That was quite impossible, as he ought to know by now.

And Ottilia leant across to him, and whispered to never mind Old Nick. "Black Tom is in a bad humour," says she; "take no notice of him!"

Upon which the Devil starts up in a fury, and seizing a leg of meat comes flourishing it over his head.

Devil: Had he not forbidden them to speak of him in that way? Were they not always to call him Lord, Master, and Majesty? And here was she referring to him as Old Nick and Old Black Tom! Ah, he well knew the reason: it was because she had not had the best place at table, which she never would have again!

At this, seeing him so enraged, all the witches and warlocks began to mumble and whimper in fright, save Ottilia, who answered him roundly, and when he would have dashed out her brains with the leg of meat, she gave him a blow with her broomstick that sent him reeling, and then mounted her broomstick, pulled up Don Lopez and the imps behind her, and sailed away haughtily, for (said she), "These feasts are not what they used to be; now one never knows who will be there, and Old Black Tom himself is losing his manners."

On hearing her use this expression again, Don Lopez looked back fearfully.

But the Devil seemed already to have forgotten them, and was dancing on the table in the shape of fire-balls, a favourite diversion of his, which he performed very elegantly.

Now Don Lopez felt naturally dismal, but Ottilia took a cheerful view.

There was (she said) a certain king who was famed for his great wealth, and though he was very close with it, there were good hopes that he might part with a little of it in such an investment as this, which promised him his money back a hundred-fold; he ruled in an island in the West, about three days' journey away.

Don Lopez: It was all very well to talk, but how was he to get the money for another three days' journey? He was already at his last white piece.

Ottilia: Let him have patience and she would help him; she had taken a liking to him, and she believed in his ideas; only let him promise her half of what he found, and all would be well.

So he promised, and she set him down at his doorstep, and off she flew home, whisk, whisk, whisk, through the air as if she were trying to sweep up the stars.

And when she got home she made some hot supper, and when she had fed my cats she asked them how they should find money to send the young man on his way.

Wait-on-yourself was, as always, discouraging; said they had better keep any money they could find for themselves instead of wasting it on the first knave who asked for it; but Guzzling Grizel suggested that they should ask the Sheriff to lend them the amount, and

Ottilia, who was quite ready to plague her old victim, said it was a fine suggestion.

So the next morning off she goes to the Town Hall, arrayed in her new blue gown and fur tippet, and pops in on the Sheriff, and asks him to lend her five hundred thalers.

Now the Sheriff was as much afraid of her as ever, but he did not know where to get five hundred thalers, as he had lately made a purchase of some wine trees, which he was having planted in his garden, and as these had cost a great deal he had no money to spare.

Besides, he thought, if she was going to begin to demand money, a stand might as well be made first as last.

So he refuses as politely as possible, and offers her sweet wine and comfits, and sees her to the door in the most courtly manner, and returns to the planting of his wine trees.

Now that night while he was in bed he heard a strange chanting rising from beneath his window, and these were the words of it:

Perish, perish, soil and seed,
Flower, leaf and fruit ;
Grow, grow, briar, weed,
Nightshade and mandrake root.

So out he jumps from the bed, and there was an awful sight to be seen in the moonlight! All the fair field where he had planted his wine trees was being ploughed up, the little young trees lay prone and dying, and up and down went the plough, which was drawn by two hideous toads. The Devil himself was driving, while after came a crowd of hags, led by Ottilia, leaping and capering, and casting handfuls of

seed into the deep ruts left by the plough (by which it may be observed that my witch had made up her quarrel with Satan).

My poor Sheriff groans and goes back to bed, and tries to believe it is a dream; but no, next morning there are all the wine trees withered, and the ground covered with great coarse, rude weeds.

So he calls up the gardeners and tries to clear the ground; but what was the use?

My weeds would by no means be moved, but put out their thorny hands and flung down the gardeners, and used curses horrid to hear; so my Sheriff, all in a tremble, runs off to Ottilia.

Sheriff: He had changed his mind about the money; she should have it as soon as he could find it. Meanwhile, she might suggest something for his garden, which was clearly bewitched!

Ottilia: Let her have the money at once, and she would see what she could do for his garden—though, let him mark, she knew nothing about it!

Sheriff: How was he to raise the money at once?

Ottilia: He was very simple! Let him sell three links of his great chain of office!

Sheriff: But the chain did not belong to him, but to the town!

Ottilia: All the better for him; and he could put three links of gilded lead in place of the others, and no one would be any the wiser!

In summa, the Sheriff sold the three links privately for seven hundred thalers, five of which he sent to Ottilia, upon which my weeds, who had been quarrelling and cursing like a regiment of free lancers, disappeared in the night, and the Sheriff put back the poor shivering wine trees.

Ottilia sent three hundred of the thalers to Don Felipe and put the rest by for herself.

So Don Felipe hired a ship and sailed for that island in the West.

And when he reached it he paid off his mariners, and put on his silvered silk and went to the king.

He found him in a castle on a river, a quiet spot outside the town; it was, in fact, a quiet country, where all things were of a grey colour, and the people moved slowly.

There were no bright flowers and no rare fruits nor birds nor beasts, but there was plenty of good clothing and stout houses, and everyone seemed to have a penny in his pocket.

But the king wore a cotton velvet gown, shabby and mean, a little greasy hat, and shoes broken at the toes.

He sat under the apple trees, and by his side was the queen, pale and homely, and darning hose.

And about the orchard played the seven princes in homespun doublets and the seven princesses in linsey-woolsey kirtles; they all had long noses and small eyes like the king, and red hair and large mouths like the queen.

And though their father was the richest monarch in the world, there was not one of them who had not a patch or a darn on his garments or in his hose.

Now Don Felipe began to feel very dismal about the issue of his mission, but he tried to disguise the lowness of his spirits, and he gave the king an account of his project and his good hopes of success.

His Majesty was intelligent, and he listened keenly, stroking his long chin and closing his small eyes; and when Don Felipe had finished, he spoke thoughtfully, after this manner:

King: It was a fine story, and if there was truth in it, they might both be rich men; but he must think it over: it would cost a great deal of money to send a ship, and supposing after all it turned out a delusion? All the money would be lost, and that was dreadful to think of.

Don Lopez: His Majesty need not think of it, for it was perfectly certain that the money would not be lost, but returned a thousand-fold.

King: Yes, he might *feel* certain, but where were his proofs?

Don Lopez: He had no proofs; let His Majesty risk the money.

King: He had never risked anything yet. However, let him tell him what he would get if he gave the ship and the expedition succeeded.

Don Lopez: He would be king over the New Country, and a quarter of the treasure found there.

King: Those were miserable terms: he wanted all the treasure.

Don Lopez: That was impossible: half was promised already to a certain lady who had helped him and was a very dear friend of his.

King: Well, he would think it over.

So he dismissed Don Lopez, giving him neither drop nor crust, and began to talk over the matter with the queen.

The truth of the matter was that he was on the verge of war with another king who ruled a little island near his own, and a bitter grief it had been to him to think of the gold he must spend on this war, for though it was very certain he would conquer his neighbour, still it was a poor little land, and would not repay his expenditure: therefore how mighty convenient it would

be, could he but get this new land and the treasure! As for Don Felipe demanding half of it, that was a mere jest; they could easily find some way of disposing of *his* claims.

In summa, they agreed that if they and the fourteen princes and princesses went without butter and sugar and new clothes for ten years, if they dismissed the Lord Chamberlain (and Heaven knew how useless he was!) and did his work themselves, they might make up for what they would have to expend on the ship.

So the next day Don Felipe was sent for, and after much bargaining he agreed to take five thousand pounds (as they call the gold pieces in this country), wherewith to equip his expedition, though he swore that it was not enough.

With many sighs and groans the king took up his keys and went to his treasury, and unlocked one of the cases where his brave gold was stored. But when he saw it there, fresh and bright and smiling, and thought of counting out five thousand of these darlings and handing them over to this stranger, his heart utterly failed him; he hastily locked the casket and treasury and hurried away, saying rudely that he had changed his mind.

Now Don Felipe was an angry man: he cursed the grey island and the grey king with the long lip, and out he set for the little country with whom my miser was going to war.

And when he reached the court of the neighbouring king he had not a penny in his pocket, and he had sold his silvered silk for his poke full of meal and a piece of flesh.

He found the king and all his courtiers roaring and shrieking round a great table, and they all had jolly

red faces, their mouths full of meat and their hearts of kindness.

They made him welcome, they feasted him and toasted him, and when he came to expound his theme, they all with one accord said he should have the money.

So they went on drinking and singing until they could neither drink nor sing, and so to bed, very contentedly.

But the next morning the monarch, being sober, sends for my mariner.

King: How were they to find the money? Himself he had none. The very clothes he wore were not paid for.

Don Lopez: He might borrow from the nobles.

King: He had already; he had not left a white piece to one of them.

Don Lopez: There were always the Jews.

King: He had squeezed them dry already.

So Don Lopez could think of nothing more to say, and they sat staring at each other dismally.

Then in came the courtiers and turned their pockets out and racked their brains, but could neither find any money nor think of how to obtain any.

For, as the king remarked, all ordinary devices had been exhausted long ago.

Then one of them remembered a certain fat priest who had an image of Our Lady which worked miracles, and, as he put a good price on them, he was very rich.

King: Why did he not mention this priest years ago?

Courtier: Well, he was a holy man, and he (the speaker) was afraid of the vengeance of Heaven.

King: He was no holy man, or he would not charge for his miracles, which were not his at all, but Our

Lady's, and if she was given a new gown probably she would say nothing.

So the soldiers were sent out to seize the priest and take away his treasure, which they found was a mighty one.

They brought it away in two carts, and also the image of Our Lady, who was wearing a very poor old smock, covered with tattered lace.

So the king, who was a just man, gives her the queen's best gown; and content she must have been, for nothing happened because of their taking of the treasure.

In this way Don Felipe at last equipped his ship and set sail, leaving the harbour at noon, driving before a southern gale, and so into the distance and away.

Meanwhile the king spent the money that remained wisely (which made men marvel), and prepared his country for war.

And war began and raged for a year and a day, on the land and on the sea.

And at the end of this time the miser had nearly crushed his neighbour, for all the good fight that king made; for his country was small, and he had few ships, and few soldiers, and very little money.

But he maintained a high spirit and sang cheerfully over his bottle at night, and fought bravely in the day with his fine battle-axe, whack, whack, whack!

Still the time came when he could fight no more, for there was nothing left to fight with; and the miser was preparing to capture him and his subjects and make them all slaves for the rest of their lives, when one fine day who should sail into the harbour but Don Lopez, whom everyone had given up for lost long ago!

In summa, after many adventures which cannot here

be related, he had actually reached the New Country, and it was as rich and wonderful as ever he had dreamed: there were gold and silver, new birds, new beasts, new flowers, new fruits, and Don Lopez drew after him four great boats he had built, filled with ingots of gold and silver and strings of rubies and emeralds. You may imagine the joy of my king, how he paid his soldiers and bought them new arms, and finally fell on and defeated his enemy, who was obliged to pay a heavy price for peace, and went mourning for the rest of his days.

So my miser had not only lost the new Country because of his avarice, but nearly his own as well; while the other king speedily became one of the richest and most powerful monarchs in the world.

And the first thing he did was to send for the priest and offer to return him his treasure; but they found him with a new image working miracles, and already as rich as he had been before, so they gave him no money, but a silver bird, which shone like a lit lamp, and had tail-feathers of crimson.

But Don Lopez was not so generous: he had become avaricious, too, and the last thing he intended to do was to give half his gains to Ottilia.

He hoped the hag was dead, and resolved never to go near that country in case she was yet living, so put her out of his mind and spent his days and nights counting his money.

But one evening while he was in his strong room, surrounded by pearls and coral, and silver and amber, emeralds, rubies, lamps of turkis, royal bone and gold—while, I say, he was grinning and gloating over these treasures, down came my witch through the chimney, and oh, but he was vexed to see her.

She said nothing at all ; she just raised her broomstick and brought it skilfully down on his head.

In summa, the next morning they found Don Lopez lying, a yellow corpse, on the ground, and all about him, instead of gold and silver and jewels, were heaps of withered leaves.

So that was the end of my avaricious Don Lopez and his treasure.

As Father Aloysius closed the book a messenger came running in with a mouth like the letter O.

"The Lord Cardinal," cried he, "is dead! He was crossing the ferry when it upset and he fell in and was frozen stiff like a winter radish!"

At the time Father Aloysius said nothing, but afterwards he remarked that it was yet a third instance of the judgment overtaking Avarice.

VII.—SLOTH

IT was when the mountains were all veiled in snow, the ground stiff with ice, and not one leaf left on the vines, nor indeed on any tree save the fir and olive, that Father Aloysius had occasion to speak again of the Deadly Sins ; and this time he spoke of SLOTH, the seventh sin, or, as it is better expressed, *Accidie*, which means really more than Sloth, also Melancholy and Gloom and Sourness, but is commonly translated Sloth, and has been called by a great man "the rotten-hearted sin of Accidie."

Now Father Aloysius had need to speak of this sin because it was much abroad among the novices, who were very willing to lie abed in the morning complain-

ing of the cold, and very loth to do any work, saying it was weather to sit by the fire and do nought else, adding matter of complaints as to the snow, and their stiff fingers and cold toes, and making wry faces over the meals, and being generally dejected and miserable, huddling together and shivering in corners of the Monastery.

So Father Aloysius got them all together in the great hall and settled himself by the fire and made them sit in two rows before him while he lectured them on the sin of *Accidie*, which he could see (he said) by their blue faces and bunched shoulders had a hold of them all.

For this seventh sin (said he) had an especial Devil, which was of a blue colour, and it is credibly asserted by many that when this particular blue devil commences plaguing a man (as he does plague those who fall into the seventh sin), he is worse than all the other devils and fiends and imps put together.

Now thus (he added) do I propound *Accidie*; what says the Book? "Cursed be he who doeth the service of God negligently," and he who follows this sin of *Accidie* doeth all things negligently, yea, with heaviness and unlust and carelessness and annoy.

Saint John too saith that this *Accidie* is an abomination: it might be called the child of Wrath and Envy, for they make great bitterness in the heart, and from this bitterness is born *Accidie*; or it might be called the offspring of Pride, which so puffs up a man that he thinks there is no need for him to labour or follow goodness, and so sits him down sourly, sucking his thumbs and growing dismal that the world is passing him by without acknowledging his merits.

Then from this *Accidie* and Sloth comes a yet more dreadful thing, nay, the most awful thing known to man,

namely, a disdain and a despising of all the things of this world, and an indifferency to all man has done, and may do, and an apathy towards the great graces and beauties there are everywhere, and, worst of all, a despair of God's mercy and a dread of Hell, which last is that sin against the Holy Ghost which may not by any means be forgiven, and which opens a man's heart to all the sins and evils there are, for he is in despair and melancholy, and, believing nothing, doth that which he lusts after and slips soon to perdition. And this was the sin of Judas.

And he that is taken by *Accidie* is dull in mind and body, given to Ignorance, who is the mother of all harm, and to neglect and heavy slumbering, so that the days slip through his fingers as sand through an open hand, and return whence they came without bringing him any profit; neither in this world, nor the next, for Heaven is only to be gained by much striving, and Paradise is for them that labour and not for idle folk.

And sometimes it happens that a man may sink so deep in this sin that he take his own life, which is very unnatural and horrible to God; but more often they are like folk that fall into a ditch and will not make the effort to rise out, nay, if one help them, they fall back again and there they lie, while all pass them.

Surely this is the most miserable and wretched of all the Deadly sins, and so the Virtue that is set against it is the highest and noblest of all the Virtues, namely Fortitude, or Strength, of which there are several species, as Magnanimity and Magnificence and Faith and Constancy. And these are very powerful and princely virtues, and certainly to be put before the other virtues, which may be set forward thus: Meekness or Humility, as against Superbia, or Pride; against

Invidie, or Envy, Love and Charity; against Ire or Wrath, Patience, Obedience, and Gentleness; against Avarice, Generosity and Pity; against *Gula*, or Gluttony, Temperance; against *Luxuria*, or Lust, Chastity and Poverty; but the highest of all these remains *Fortitudo*, which (as I have said) is set against this wretched sin of *Accidie*.

And at this place I will give you the story of the young man of Arles, which is memorable and well worthy to be preserved.

This young man was so sunk in this seventh sin that he had no more pleasure in anything, but passed his days in bitter discontent and melancholy self-communings.

He was young and healthy and well-favoured, but he utterly slighted these blessings: he had a fine house, horses in his stables, and good food on his board, but he despised all of them; he had worthy friends whom he disdained, and he had certain talents that he ignored and left uncultivated and rusty.

And there was all the world before him, and many things he might perform and see, but he would have none of them, but remained always shut within his house, lazy, idle, melancholy, and drifting towards despair.

He wondered why he was born just to grow old and die; the world seemed to him very miserable, and he doubted very much of Heaven.

For he was as one blind, yea, his soul *was* blind and dumb; he crept about the town of Arles, and saw nothing but rows of houses and commonplace people and dirt and sorrow; he went into the country, and saw nothing but these same people labouring in the fields and the poor huts in which they dwelt, all so dull and

ugly that he returned home gloomier than before. He did not see the pretty maidens watering roses and carnations at their casement windows, he did not see the little children playing battledore and shuttlecock with little crowns of feathers (blue and red) that mounted up into the sunshine, nor the beautiful sleek cats on the doorsteps, nor the happy old women carding wool and singing hymns in praise of the Virgin, nor the young masons at work on the new church all flushed with pride, nor the artisans going home in the evenings with eager feet.

Nor when he went into the country did he notice the fair shapes and colours of the trees, the crystal stream churning swiftly over the stones, the little flowers on the bank, the smooth white sides of the oxen drawing the plough, the little birds on the swaying boughs, the light and shadow of the forest.

Nay, not for him was the magnificence of the hills, or the beauty of the valleys, or the glory of the changeful heavens, when the sun like red gold, the moon like a pearl, the stars like frozen dewdrops; to him night and day were light and dark, and each was more wearisome than the other.

And so tired of life did he become, that he resolved to make an end of it; and one day took a piece of rope and went outside the town walls, and wandered along till he found a quiet spot by a little river, and there he put the rope round the bough of an old thorn-tree, and hanged himself.

But the rope was too thin (he had been too lazy to search for a more fitting one), and broke, and down he fell among the alders, and sat there on the banks of the river looking up at the rope, too slothful to mend it or return for another.

And when at last he took his eyes from the thorn-tree and the rope he perceived an angel standing upon the other side of the stream, regarding him keenly.

"Good day, Messire," said the angel courteously.

Now the young man blushed a little for shame at being seen in this guise, for his hosen were all wrinkled, his doublet stained, the buttons off his cuffs and the tags off his laces, besides which his boots were broken, and he had not shaved for a week; nathless he answered with his usual apathy—"Good day."

"Why are you so melancholy?" asked the angel. "And wherefore is this rope?"

The young man made an effort and replied gloomily: "That is a rope to hang myself wherewith."

"Why?" asked the angel (he was very beautiful to look upon, with bright shining clothes, and two great wings lying out ruffled on his back, and a crown of coloured feathers, but to the dull eyes of the young man he looked no more than a large kind of bird).

Moreover, he did not wish to talk, but to roll himself up on the bank and sleep, and, had it been a mortal speaking, he would have been sullenly silent; it being, however, an angel who was addressing him, he was impelled to some civility.

"Why, life is not worthy of being lived," he said.

"Nay," replied the angel, "you are not worthy of living it."

"Not at all," said the young man. "I am a very good citizen. I never annoy my neighbours, and I always pay the taxes. But it is a miserable world, and I want to be out of it."

"Where do you mean to go?" asked the angel.

"Nowhere. I only want to be left in peace."

"Heaven is for those who labour, and there is no

peace in Hell, and very little in Purgatory," remarked the angel thoughtfully.

"I do not believe," returned the other, "in any of the three."

"Then I suppose that you do not believe in me?"

"Certainly not. I see you are trying to make me think you are an angel; but it is all a pretence."

"What do you think I am?" asked the angel; he put his head on one side and looked at his reflection in the clear running stream.

The young man yawned and replied very rudely: "I think that you are nothing better than a kind of bird—a common bird, but what your name is I have forgotten."

"You are, of course, quite blind," said the angel; "you are also, I think, unhappy."

"Naturally," snapped the young man. "I was going to hang myself when the rope broke."

"Would you not like to be happy," asked the angel in a gentle tone.

The young man began to sneer. "No one is happy."

"Then how does the world go on? Were every one like you it would all stop to-morrow."

The young man thought over that; certainly he could vaguely recall a vast number of people who seemed to be quite content; he could recall laughter and songs, and kisses, and gay dresses—he had always called these people fools and these things follies; but now, by the great goodness of God and because of the great joyousness radiating from the angel, he began to wish suddenly that he too was a fool.

"Would you not like to be happy?" repeated the angel, and he flew on to a bough of the thorn-tree, where the broken rope still hung, and sunned himself,

spreading his bright wings in a great arc either side of him.

"Yes," said the young man suddenly. "I should. But it is a miserable world, and I can find nothing to interest me—nothing to do. Tell me how I may find happiness."

"You must search for it," replied the angel.

The young man was very much disappointed. "I have heard that answer before," he said gloomily.

"Because it is the right and only one," said the angel.

The young man yawned. "You might as well set me to find the Philosopher's Stone," he remarked.

"That is just what you should look for," said the angel; "it means happiness and health and wealth and honour—it means that you will see everything and understand everything."

For a moment the sluggard was roused, then he fell again into his gloom: "for no one has ever found this stone," said he; "is it likely I shall?"

"Not at all," smiled the angel.

Now this annoyed the other. "Oh, I do not know!" he grumbled. "I suppose that, after all, I have as much chance as anyone else."

By which reply he showed that he was beginning to be a little dispossessed for his sin of *Accidie*, for a few moments previously nothing could have aroused him to anger.

"Well, try," suggested the angel; "it is better to be searching for what you will never find than to be hanging yourself on a May morning."

"Is it a May morning?" asked the young man stupidly; then he added: "Why do you trouble to give me advice?"

"Because you have the most beautiful rose-tree in

Arles in your garden," was the reply. "And I and my friends have often rested there on our way home in the evening, so I give you this advice out of gratitude for your hospitality."

Now the young man had never noticed the rose-tree, so he said nothing, but sat looking foolish, and the angel lifted his head towards heaven and flew away and away until he was but a speck in the springtide blue.

And the young man looked at the broken rope, and decided that it would be just as much trouble to get another one as to begin searching for the Philosopher's Stone, and, after all, if the angel *was* an angel, perhaps he was right in what he said, and there might be such a thing as happiness.

So he went home and made a few lazy experiments of his own, but they were quite foolish, and he began anew to be weary of it all, and to disbelieve in everything; but, on hearing some one laughing in the street, he was inspired to continue his search for happiness, and he went to a certain Alchemist who lived in that town and hired himself out to him as an assistant, so that he might learn the practical parts of this science.

Now this Alchemist had been searching for the Philosopher's Stone for fifty years, and had spent many thousands of crowns on his experiments; he had travelled in Persia, India, Arabia and Palestine in search of the great secret, and spoken with many learned and famous men, Magi, Jews and Magicians.

But none of them had the secret, or, if they had, would not part with it; so the Alchemist returned to his native town and worked by himself, and for his living he engraved gems and silver, and sold perfumes and lotions, and painted pictures to be set in rare and costly books.

Now he had lately lost his assistant, who had left him to go on his travels, and he took my young slug-gard because he offered to serve without any wage.

And so they worked together at the furnaces and retorts, mixing the metals, melting, refining, separating and combining, and the young man became interested and almost glad to be alive.

For the old Alchemist told him many strange things, and for himself he began to notice the colour and flash of jewels, the hardness and shape, the feel and sparkle of them, the scent and sweetness of the clear green essences, the crystal-clear perfumes, the white milk lotions all in their bottles, slender, squat or oblong, standing in rows on the Alchemist's shelf—he learnt to understand the excitement of the long hours of waiting beside the furnace, burning deep-coloured like a red rose or clear like a red diamond, and he began to know the delights of poring over the great old books where the ancient masters had hidden their learning.

But he was still a victim of *Accidie*; never could he quite believe that there really was such a thing as the Philosopher's Stone (though again and again the Alchemist had told him that there was no use in even beginning to look for it without *Faith*, fortified by *Contemplation* and *Prayer*), and still he had his moments of gloom and melancholy and despair, when he wished that he had hanged himself as he had meant to.

And often his Master would find him asleep by the furnace with the fire gone out, and many times he would refuse to get up in the mornings, or sit idle all day sucking his thumbs.

But the Alchemist bore all this, because he paid him no wage.

Now there was a certain book, the leaves of which

were of wood, and the covers of which were of pierced brass, and within it were most marvellous pictures made with a reed-pen, and coloured with bright colours, and this book had been given to the Alchemist by a certain Jew, to whom he had once done a service, and this Jew had told him the book contained full directions for making the Philosopher's Stone—but there was no writing in it, only symbols and pictures, so that the meaning was mighty difficult to unravel: yet the Alchemist thought that he had done it, only was his labour made useless because certain pages of the book were missing, and could by no means be found, though he had searched all the world for them.

Now soon after the young man had begun to practise Alchemy there came a stranger to the house of the Alchemist, and desired to see the Master.

He was a very sober person, decently clad in green, and was thought to be a customer for gems or perfumes; but proved to be no such thing, for when he was alone with my Alchemist he says very quietly: "Have you a certain fair book, very old and large and gilded? And has it leaves of wood, on which are certain pictures done with a reed-pen and admirably coloured?"

"Surely," replied the Alchemist, beginning to tremble with excitement; "and these same pictures are no less than directions for the *Magnum Opus*, if a man could unravel the meaning, which, to wit, I think I have done, but alack, there are some leaves missing."

"Exactly," said the stranger, and he took from the breast of his robe four leaves of wood, covered with fair and shining figures. "Here are the remaining pages of that delicate and precious book, and when you have the magistracy of them, then you will have dis-

covered the great secret for which you have so cheerfully and willingly laboured."

And at this the Alchemist began to weep and cry for joy, and begged to know who his benefactor was—if he was some great wizard as Virgilius?

"I am," said the other, "no less," and with that left, while the Alchemist, all in an amazement, went up to his laboratory and set the missing pages in the book and began to study the problem of them.

And this he now soon mastered, discovering the *prima materia*, the agents he must use, the transmutations and the projections he must proceed to.

Yet for a week he laboured, and there was no result in the vessels; then he applied himself to *Prayer*, and again set to work.

And presently he found in one of the vessels a strange stone, no larger than a nut, transparent and of a pale brimstone colour, and of smooth texture and a shining look, and this they wrapped in a piece of wax, and put in a crucible with two pounds of lead, and this crucible was set on the fire, and all night the Alchemist and the young man worked the bellows and prayed.

And towards the morning the crucible made a hissing sound, and, on taking it off the fire and looking in, they found it was full of a seething metal of the fairest colours possible, and they poured out this aurified lead on to a slab of pure clean alabaster, where it flashed into a green tint, then settled into the hue of a lively red, the colour of fresh blood. With that they poured it again into an ingot and left it to cool, and on presently looking at it, they found it to be a bar of the most splendid shining gold.

So, after praising God, they ran off with this ingot (still warm), and showed it to a goldsmith, who put it to

all the tests and pronounced it the finest gold in the world.

"We have found the Philosopher's Stone," said they to each other, and they went home, and, again following the directions, produced another piece of that excellent yellow and transparent substance, half of which they projected on to a cup of base metal, which changed to pure gold with a small ruby in the bottom, made by the great strength and virtue of this wonderful stone.

And the other half they dissolved with *aqua-fortis*, and it turned into a medicine the colour of honey and exceedingly sweet, and so strong that garnets, corals and silver-leaf being put therein, did dissolve to their natural tinctures.

Now this medicine, being tasted, proved to be a most powerful remedy, and cured them of all their pains and fatigues, and put new life into them.

So they ran to a neighbour who was ill of a dropsy and gave him to drink of the medicine, and he straightway recovered.

Now were they aware that they had really discovered that most noble substance which was also the Elixir of youth as well as capable of turning into the finest gold all baser metal.

This was a secret that must be very jealously kept, for it was obvious that if they made their discovery publicly known the King or some great one would seize them and keep them in durance, where they would be forced to use their knowledge for his benefit, as had indeed happened many times before to unfortunate alchemists.

On the other hand, if they remained in Arles, practising and saying nothing, the secret would surely get abroad through gossip, and they were equally sure to

be murdered and robbed by some profane person who lusted for gold.

So they resolved to give out that their experiments had failed, and that they were going on their travels in further search of the great secret ; and thus they would settle in some foreign land, and enjoy their discovery, protecting themselves by saying that their wealth was natural wealth. And the Alchemist, who was a very pious, holy and charitable man (else he would never have accomplished the *Magnum Opus*, for its achievement is not given to carnal-minded or common people), intended to endow seven hospitals, seven churches and seven schools, together with a charnel-house, all built new from the ground, to the glory of God.

And the ingot of gold and the gold cup with a ruby in the bowl (as the pearl is within the shell of the oyster) he gave to a poor little church that had no treasures.

Then did these two put their affairs in order and sell up their goods and make their preparations for leaving their country.

Now as the Alchemist had never been rich, and the young man's estate had decayed through his sloth and neglect, or had been dissipated by fools and stolen by knaves owing to his indifferency and apathy, they found, on putting their resources together, that they had but very little money with which to start on their travels and to set up a new laboratory, so they resolved once more to manufacture some portions of that noble and excellent substance before they started ; they calculated that, if they obtained three pieces the size of a small apple, it would be sufficient for twenty tons of gold.

So they again followed the directions of the book, and produced the three stones ; two of which they put by

in a neat box of cedar-wood, and the third they divided, and cast a portion of it, the size of a coriander seed, into the crucible with lead.

Now the Alchemist being on in years and fatigued, made a medicine of the rest of this portion (as they had done before) and drank it; soon after he fell into a sweet sleep, and my young man was left alone to watch the furnace.

As he sat there, in the silence and loneliness, this miserable sin of *Accidie*, from which he had never been quite free, came upon him strongly; he wished he was in bed, instead of tending the furnace; he wished he could lead his old lazy life, instead of undertaking travels to a foreign country, where doubtless there would be perils and fatigues to be endured.

As for the Philosopher's Stone, he began to doubt that they had really discovered it—was it not all perhaps a delusion? Had that really been gold?—and, if so, how were they sure that they would ever find it again?

So he took down the book and the cedar-wood box containing the portions of the stone, and seated himself by the furnace and looked from one to another, struggling with his doubts and his sloth.

Now at this moment there entered the room a person well known to those who follow *Accidie*, and very familiar to my young man, *i.e.*, the Blue Devil, who is the captain of a band of smaller blue devils very little better than himself.

The young man had not seen him for a long time, not since he had met the angel by the thorn-tree, and he was very displeased to see him now.

He was certainly very ugly; his feet turned backwards, he had a great hump on his back, his eyes were

set crooked so that he could never see things straight, and covered by thick black glasses so that he could never see things clear.

He took the stool in the corner, he looked at the furnace, at the book, and the cedar-wood box. "What a waste of time!" he remarked.

"No," said the young man. "I am making gold."

The Blue Devil laughed. "You had better go to bed," he replied.

The young man shook his head. "No," he said. "I have found the Philosopher's Stone, and soon I shall find happiness—as the angel told me."

"There are no angels," remarked the Blue Devil.

The young man continued, trying not to notice his visitor: "I believe this book—and the evidences of these pieces of stone."

"How silly!" said the Blue Devil. "The book is but a collection of jargon, and the stone is just a compound of mercury and sulphur."

The other doubtfully opened the book, and certainly the pictures looked very dull and stupid; he opened the box, and certainly the stones appeared very dull and ordinary. "But we made gold and a ruby and a wonderful medicine," he objected.

"Nothing of the kind," said the Blue Devil. "You lost your head, and did not know what you were looking at."

"But the goldsmith and the man with the dropsy?"

"They were fools like yourself," replied the Blue Devil; "and remember the gold was *given* away (if you had tried to *buy* something with it you would have soon seen if it was good gold or not); and, as for the sick man, he was probably not sick at all."

"Probably you are quite right," sighed the young

man. "Meanwhile, I ought to look to the fire; I see it is going out. Would you put on some more coal?"

"Not I," said the Blue Devil with a sneer. "Why should I get up from this chair where I am *moderately* comfortable to stoke that furnace when I know there is no good coming from it?"

The young man yawned seven times, and it is a well-known thing that he who yawns seven times gives the Blue Devil great power over him.

So that the fiend spoke again at once, and quite briskly: "Why do you stay here enduring all this discomfort and misery, when you might have been comfortably hanged long ago? You know that there is nothing in any of it—there is no Philosopher's Stone and no Elixir of youth and no happiness—why do you give yourself all these fatigues?"

"But I promised the Alchemist," murmured the young man.

The Blue Devil soon disposed of that objection. "The Alchemist is either a fool who is cheating himself or a knave who is cheating you—come, put an end to it. You know that you decided long ago that life was not worth living."

So saying, he produced a nice long coil of rope and fixed it to a strong nail on the wall, and up got my young man, overcome by this dreadful sin of *Accidie*, and stuck his head in the noose; but the Blue Devil had been too lazy to make the noose the right length, and so the young man stood with his feet on the ground, and, being too slothful to move, in that position went to sleep.

Now he had placed on the edge of the furnace the book and the cedar-wood box, and the Blue Devil, as he slouched away, gave them a shove and both fell into the

furnace, where they were burnt to cinders, which furnace, soon after growing cold, the transmutation in the crucible was spoilt.

And so what did my Alchemist find in the morning? That this excellent secret was for ever lost!

The furnace out—the lead unchanged in the vessel—and in the ashes the brass covers of the book and the scorched remains of that precious substance.

And by the wall the young man standing asleep, his head hanging in the noose.

Now the Alchemist was a good, holy and patient man (or, as I have said, he could never have followed this profession); but, once he had grasped what had happened, he did not hesitate a moment.

He looked at the nail; he drove it farther in with a blow from the heel of his shoe, then he lowered the knot and tightened up the rope.

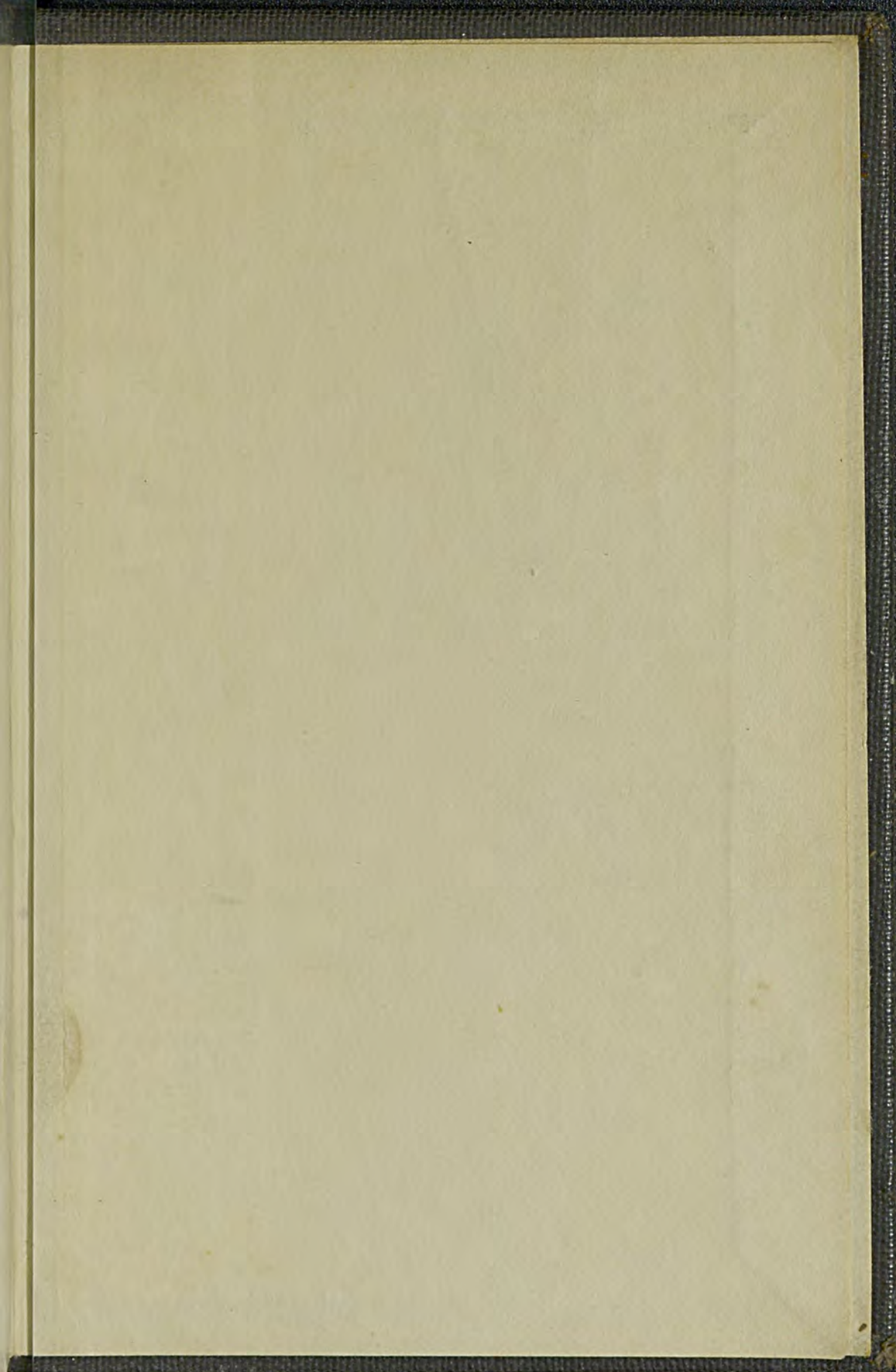
And so my sluggard was hanged in earnest.

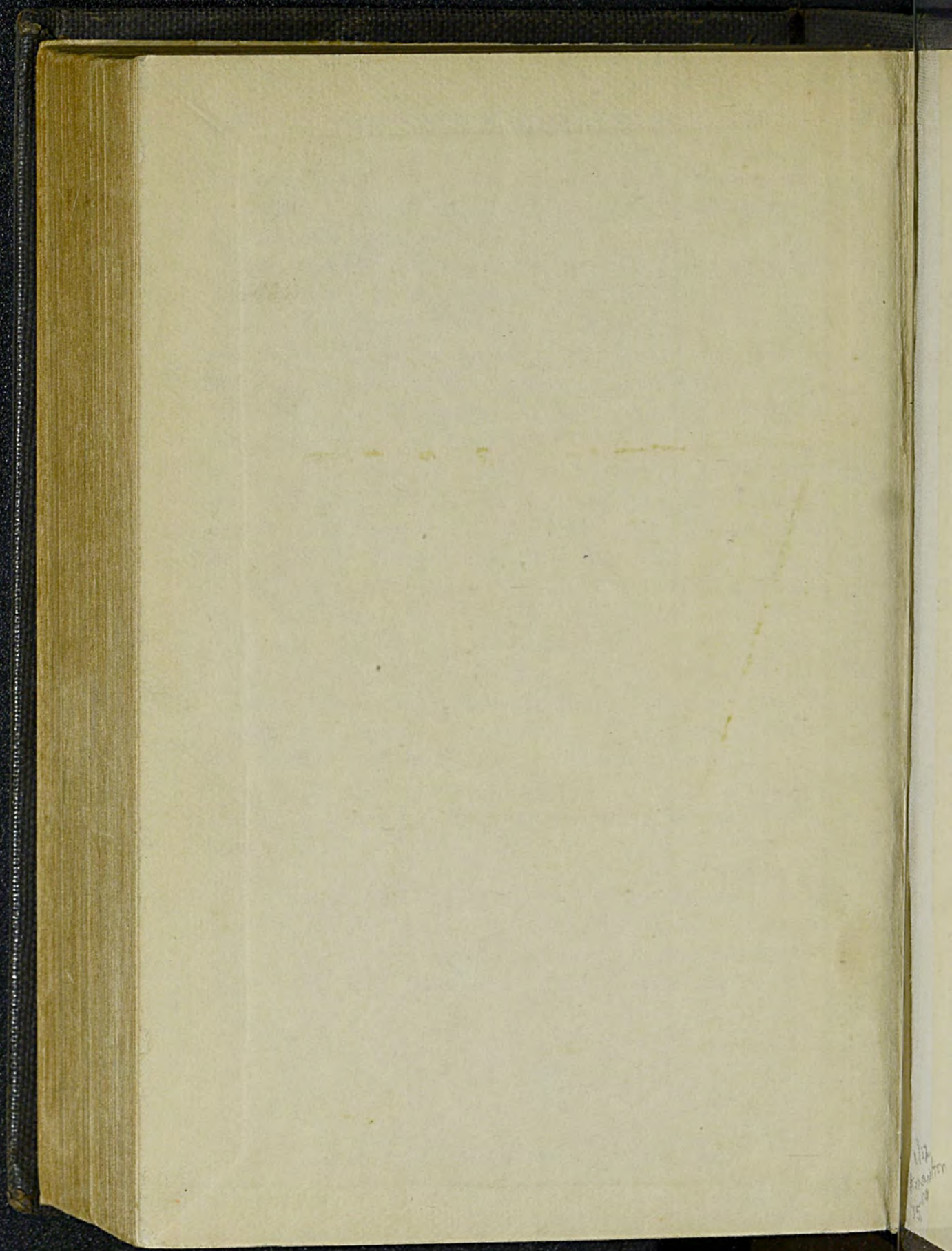
After this the Alchemist gathered up the available crowns and calmly went off to another country, where he recommenced his labours without an assistant.

And after a few years Virgilius again came to his aid, and he rediscovered that marvellous stone, and died a holy man.

This is the end of these stories of the Seven Deadly Sins; there are others to be told of the Ten Commandments, which, said Father Aloysius, are interesting, but greatly tax both power and intelligence to deal with.

THE END





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