

CHAPTER XX.

WHEN Mr. Ashcroft and I had left the chamber of death behind us and were in silence descending the stairs, the sound of voices reached our ears. To me such sounds conveyed no impression, save that I felt welcome relief at hearing once more the voice of my fellow man ; but it was otherwise with my companion. To him a stranger's speech in that awful house was a tocsin of alarm. He lifted his white bowed head, and in a startled tone he cried, "What is that ? What do I hear ?"

His words, or rather the tone of his voice, at once made me remember it was exceeding strange there should be visitors in Redpost House. My first thought was that our cries for help had been heard by some wanderer in the park, but Mr. Ashcroft shook his head when I suggested this as an explanation. "No," he murmured ; "it cannot be. The park is avoided by every one. To the neighbourhood it is a Sahara—a desert of horrors and mystery. No stranger ventures to wander through it."