

arms and knees of the drunken man relaxed, and, after a second struggle, his ponderous frame remained an inert mass in his assailant's grasp.

Poor Ruth was smoothing her ruffled plumes: "I thank thee. The Lord bless thee, Augustus! But oh, Augustus, he is choking! Loose thy hand. Thou must not slay the violent uncouth man."

"Quick, then, child—bring water. There's some in the ditch behind us," cried Lopré, impatiently.

But the merciless gripe did not relax—no, not while Lopré's other hand searched the wretch's pocket, and drew out the printed "Description"—until Ruth, with her handkerchief saturated like a sponge with water, ran back to his side. Together they untied his neckcloth, threw open the rugged chest, and sprinkled water on the face and head, but one of them knew full well that the ocean itself and a college of doctors to boot, could not restore one gasp to Nimian Small.

"It is drink, not I, that did this—the sottish hound!" said Lopré, as he rose from his knees and, with little ceremony, pushed the body from the road. "Home, now, my little maid. We must report at once what has happened."

He took the child's hand and led her, tottering and horror-stricken, home to the village.

Great, as may be supposed, was the disturbance created by this untoward event, and the proceedings of the district coroner in reference to it. Opinions were divided as to the actual cause of death, but not as to the innocence of Lopré of any homicidal intention (who was there to say how long and how fiercely the death-gripe continued?). Violent passion—sudden effusion of blood upon the already stupefied brain—accidental injury—the clubbed wits of a sapient twelve, and an admirable conclusion—"Homicide by misadventure."

If Dorcas Hodgkin had followed the bent of her secret inclination, she would have requested her pearl of a lodger, absolved though he was, to seek another home. However blameless in intention—and something whispered that was not too certain—he had slain a man, and Tabernacle Lodge was not precisely the city of refuge she could have desired. Often did she resolve to speak, and as often did the careworn melancholy face appeal to the good woman's sympathies and transform her suggestion that he should change his abiding-place into the expression of a hope that he was comfortable where he was. Ah! that she had acted upon the first wholesome thought!

There was another reason for permitting him to remain. Since the tragical affair in the wood, Ruth's interest in their lodger had increased tenfold. Not for an instant did the little maiden doubt that, under Providence, she owed her life to his timely interposition, and how could she repay him better than by redoubling her care for his soul? She took him firmly in hand, and, if patient listening and indulgent acquiescence be tokens of conversion, Ruth had every reason to be content with her disciple. The latter, on his part, seemed to grow ever more and more attached to his little friend, and could not bear that she should be many hours together out of his sight. He was fond, but never familiar, treating her very much as a well-grown child might treat a governess, young in years, but honourable by virtue of her office. They occasionally strolled through the woods together, and, at the period at which we now arrive—that is to say, about eight months subsequent to the death of the tinker, Small—this had grown to be almost a daily custom.

Lopré's health had declined somewhat rapidly of late. What was worse, the tokens of some gnawing affliction, bodily or mental, or both, had returned, and sobs and half-stifled ejaculations of the sufferer often broke upon the midnight silence of Tabernacle Lodge. The only seasons of relief appeared to be those in which the two singularly assorted friends lost themselves in the mazes of the wood, and the sulminating peace was when, seated under some old tree, Ruth's sweet voice would dwell upon that eternal rest to which her innocent heart panted to direct her hearer's.

A terrible incident suddenly occurred. Little

Ruth, who had gone out, at noon, on one of her farm-house journeys, was brought home, in the arms of two labouring men, frightfully injured, unconscious, and plainly dying. The men had found her lying, as if asleep, within a few yards of the very spot at which Nimian Small had met his violent end. The child lay in an easy attitude of rest, her dress composed, not a hair disordered, no soil, no scratch, no sign of violent usage; but closer examination revealed the evidence of a heavy blow on the back of the skull, and a deep puncture in the chest, which seemed to have bled internally.

The mother's shriek, as she realised the fatal truth, rang through the house. As it died away, the ghastly face of Lopré peered forth from his chamber-door, as in inquiry. Dorcas saw him, and her frenzy took a different turn.

"Begone, man of evil!—man of blood!" cried the bewildered woman, in her anguish. "It is thou—surely thou—that bring'st this trouble on us. Look, look! Mine innocent!"

Lopré made a step forward.

"I—I? What does she mean? What has happened? Who is—is dead?"

"Nobody said she was *dead* but you," said one of the men, with gruff pity. "But she was hard struck—and such a little one!"

They told him what had happened.

Lopré's face could not look more corpse-like; but his quivering lips betrayed his emotion, and could scarcely enunciate words:

"Has she spoken?"

Being answered in the negative, he staggered back into his room, and closed the door.

A silence, almost of the grave, reigned in that sorrowful house during several hours. Then a voice, almost awful in the hush, and the abrupt breaking of it, said, at Lopré's door:

"She has spoken."

"And—then?" gasped a choking voice within.

"She calls for thee."

Like one walking in a frightful dream, Lopré came forth and followed Dorcas into Ruth's little chamber. The dying child lay with her face towards the door, and the large heavy eyes grew brighter as he entered. The little hand made a feeble gesture, in obedience to which, and a whisper to her mother, the latter requested the doctor and others who were present to retire, herself accompanying them beyond the door.

What precisely passed was never ascertained, and our narrative can only be framed in harmony with the singular surmise hereafter to be mentioned.

"I rejoice that thou art come. Kneel beside me, Augustus, for none but God must hear us now," said Ruth. "I have been wondering why thou didst raise thy hand against so weak a thing as I; one who loved thee heartily, Augustus, and ever strove to minister to thy welfare, both of body and soul. Was I not even entreating thee to meekness and to charity, when thou didst rise and use me thus?"

Lopré only gazed at her, and groaned.

"There is mercy in thee," the child continued, "else thy wrathful weapons had not failed. Thou hast not pierced my heart, Augustus; but thou hast broken it. I shall not die of thy wounds, but of thee—of sorrow and fear of thy eternal weal, unless thou seest how thou art captive to the power of darkness, urging thee to deeds of cruelty against thy better will. I was suffered to be thy help, thy good, thy staff and stay, and thou hast cast me suddenly, broken, from thy hand. Think of me the more, Augustus, when I am gone. Go burn thy lawless, wicked books, the traps of Satan to ensnare thy soul—burn them, I say; thy dyng teacher bid thee. Add not rebellion to witchcraft, the sister-sin, now that thou art shown the truth; but turn thee quick to the Atoner, that I may meet thee there."

The heavy eyes rolled upwards, then closed, and a lonely smile settled on the gentle face, which had not passed away, when, some hours later, all that pertained to earth, of little Ruth, was dressed for its early grave.

That very strong suspicions should attach to Lopré was only to be expected. Although no one had seen him return home, it was known that they had gone out together, and had been seen walking apart, but conversing with that

quiet tenderness that had, of late, invariably marked their intercourse. One of the men who had brought the child home was, for some unexplained reason, so impressed with Lopré's guilt, that he had, on his own responsibility, hurried away to the nearest magistrate and demanded his arrest. This, however, occupied some time; and it was very midnight, or rather early morning, when those charged with the warrant reached Tabernacle Lodge.

During this period Lopré had remained secluded in his chamber, and was often heard moving busily about, as if preparing for departure. The door was therefore watched; but he made no attempt to escape, and, on the arrival of the constables, it was thought advisable to defer his capture till dawn, especially as the blinds permitted an occasional glimpse of their intended prisoner, and a strong light in the room confirmed the suspicion that he was merely destroying papers.

With the first streak of day, the watchers, not without caution—approached his door. Before they could summon him, Lopré stood before them, holding forth his hands as though to receive the handcuffs. Disordered, haggard, yet with eyes ablaze with insane fire, his spectral aspect almost daunted the stout thief-catchers. But the war was all within. He was quiet—totally dumb—and exhibited no outward sign of emotion, but once, when, on the way to the gate, he was suddenly asked if certain dark-red stains on his sleeve were the blood of the murdered child.

In this mute, half-conscious condition, the unhappy man remained for a week, growing weaker and weaker, until all idea of subjecting him to an examination was necessarily abandoned. On the ninth morning of his imprisonment, the watchers in his cell made this report:

About midnight, Lopré, who, though always preserving silence, had been unusually restless, tossing on his truckle-bed, and breathing hard, sank into a torpor. This had lasted about half an hour, when a sudden sound and movement startled the custodian then on duty. The prisoner had risen to a sitting posture, his eyes staring wild, his hand grasping the air. He was trying to speak, and he did get out some words, but they were "nothing, no meaning, as I could see," said the watcher. Pressed on this point, he explained that the words, "so's he could remember," was only this:

"My little saint! . . . My saint!"

That, having uttered these meaningless words, he dropped suddenly back, and seemed to sleep. At daybreak, observing that he remained still in the same position, very quiet, they went to examine their prisoner, and found he had expired.

Two incidents succeeded Lopré's death—the arrival of a London constable, who identified the body as that of the once-renowned gamester and debaucher, Captain Gullayde, and, secondly, the discovery of the remains of Lord George Francis Olliphant, which, with skull fractured, and a ball through the breast, had been buried in the wood.

And wherefore these apparently motiveless crimes? Shall we refer them, without comment, to the great assize, where secrets cannot live? Or can we accept the idea suggested by a writer of the day, and founded upon some scorched pages of one of the volumes Lopré, or Gullayde, had sought to destroy, namely, that the study of certain treatises, now happily obsolete, concerning occult philosophy and the "black art," acting upon a brain half-maddened by every species of excess, had beguiled the unhappy student into the belief that he had embraced the service of the powers of evil, and must blindly work their will?

THE LATE PROFESSOR AYTOUN.—Mr. Theodore Martin, joint author, with Mr. Aytoun, of the *Bon Gaultier B allads*, issued to be writing the biography of his friend, with copious selections from his correspondence. Mr. Aytoun, who died in 1865, was son-in-law to "Christopher North," whom he succeeded as principal contributor, and adviser to "Blackwood's Magazine"—a periodical which, from the first, has been edited by its founder or one of his sons.