

THE WING OF AZRAEL.

CHAPTER I.

MIST.

THE great stable-yard clock was slowly striking the hour—midnight. Over the park hung a white and stealthy mist, touched by white and stealthy moonlight. Great elm-trees loomed through it heavy and still: they seemed to be waiting for something that never came.

The mist was thick, but one could see through it a large white house with innumerable majestic windows, very broad and very high. Even in this dim light it was evident that everything was falling into decay. Grass grew in the shrubberies, and weeds in the gravel-paths; it was a melancholy, forsaken old place, closed in, and silent as the grave. The house stood hushed in the moonlight, with blinds drawn, windows closed,—all but one blind and one window on the first floor, on that side of the house which faced the garden, and beyond it a steep avenue of elm-trees.

At that open window a small figure was kneeling: a dark-haired little girl, who leant her elbows on the sill and gazed up the mystic avenue. The line of trees led the eye to the top of the hill, and there ending, created an unsatisfied longing to see over the other side. The child peered forth eagerly into the still, passionless mystery of the night. Throngs of bewildering thoughts were stirring the little soul to its depths:—what was it, and whence this strange world that does not come to an end at the top of the avenue, at the boundary of the park?—this world that goes on and on, field after field, till it comes to the sea, and then goes on and on again, wave after wave, till it comes once more to the land, and then—? then the realms of the air, and the great cloud-regions, and beyond these—Nothing, a great all-embracing Nothing that *will* not stop, that goes on and on, and still on, till the brain reels at the thought of it—but it does not stop then; it never stops, or would stop, or could stop, even when God sounded