

or had been. Sir Oliver, on the watch for a serpent's tooth in the vitals of his soul, caught himself again being glad at heart that an idiotic dream should have power to monopolise it. Little need to fear the days to come, if his work of this morning could give place to a thing like that!

He was at great cost to prove to himself that he was not beginning to be sick at heart.

"No—no; no warm water! Fill the pail at the pump. You are a cursed fool, Rackham! Who wants the tale-pyets in the kitchen to know...? Where's the warm water to come from?—answer me that!" Rackham the groom had seen thus far, that his master would not care to take his blood-patched forehead into the house unwashed, but not far enough to be beforehand with a reason why he should ask the housekeeper for warm water. He provided the pail, and stood by immovably while Colonel Mainwaring carefully detached the clotted handkerchief and helped Sir Oliver in his washing.

Mr. Rackham did all things immovably. The immobility of his close-shaved jaw gave a keynote to the conduct of his life, and sanctioned the presence of a reptile's eyes in a human head, from the Devil's point of view. These eyes were much of a colour with the greyest of the beard-crop's cleaned-off soil, and made his head a monochrome throughout, or very near it. But they had just expression enough in them to say, "Say nothing!" to an observant stable-boy who led away the horses with him, each leading one, and leaving Colonel Mainwaring's—expression enough, too, to make Sir Oliver feel he could entrust his sword to him, with his murder fresh on it, to smuggle away out of Lucinda's sight. It would not do to carry it indoors now. And yet, in days like these, few would have ridden out unarmed.

The two men left alone spoke together, little above a