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## E P I L O G U E

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**D**URING the time of this story there was an aged recluse, well-skilled in chemistry and science, who lived and studied in the vale of Aramene, near Reitzplatz, in Flanders. To his dwelling, at or near midnight, came a pair of well cloaked strangers. One was of tall and commanding presence. The other, short and very stout.

"What would you at this unseemly hour?" demanded the wise man, throwing open the door of his humble cottage. "If ye are thieves, I warn you that your trouble will be for nothing. My few books are beyond your understanding and my wealth all lies in my brain, which you may assuredly destroy yet cannot have for your own."

"We pray your patience, sir," replied the taller of the two. "We are no thieves, but honest men, come to test your knowledge upon an easy matter. We have wherewith to recompense your good service."

"The test will be welcomer than your coin, yet I must e'en live by my wisdom, in order that such wisdom may not go hungry."

The two intruders followed their host into a sort of laboratory, still keeping their cloaks wrapped tight, as if to conceal identity.