

But the gaoler had already touched him lightly on the arm, and spoken to him by the familiar title,

"Captain!"

He never moved. "Captain Gilbert! here's Mr. Hayward to see you, as you wished. It's close on twelve." Then, bending lower to rouse him up in earnest—"My God, sir, he's dead! Dead!" in a stifled sort of shriek, "~~dead!~~" and escaped them after all."

And if ever I heard with pleasure that one word spoken of anybody, I heard it then; for I was myself of Dr. West's, school and loathed hanging. Besides, there was the unutterable relief of having escaped the necessity of tormenting him.

"Dead," whispered the man reverently and trembling. "Dead, and left Jack Ketch behind, waiting for nothing! Dead, without as much as the surgeon to do a thing to help him! Dead, and not a minister to say a prayer for his sinful soul!"

Not as much as a minister. He had refused them admittance of every creed; and the Visitor, for whom he had turned round to wait, was one with no words of comfort, but one whom it is impossible to deny—

"The Shadow, cloaked from head to foot,
Who keeps the keys of all the creeds."

No words of comfort, did I say. Ah! which of us two could dare to tell, or which pretend to search into the infinite experience of him, so calm and still down there before us, to whom the Grand Secret had been already made plain?

He was past help of all, priest or physician; and when we turned round his face, and thus made sure, the face was the face of Ernest Vane.

Strangely altered from what he looked, in his bright young joyousness, on board the *Ashburton*, and won Nelly's friendship and gentle kindly recollection for many a year later by his pleasant, light-hearted, cheery, off-hand, yet absolutely well-bred manner. Strangely altered, too, from what it must have been that morning in the Pass of the Ambush, when the crape covered it from my recognition, but when I wondered vaguely where I could have heard its voice before. Strangely altered, not the face only, but the whole well-knit muscular form, by wounds and suffering and privation and imprisonment—by remorse for what was past, and by, perhaps, apprehension of what was to come.

In the dead man's hand was a packet, addressed to me. I took it mechanically, walked down to the telegraph office mechanically, wired off my half-column mechanically, and then walked a mile into the bush mechanically, before I could compel my mind to wonder why Ernest Vane should have chosen such a messenger for what I presumed to be his final commands.