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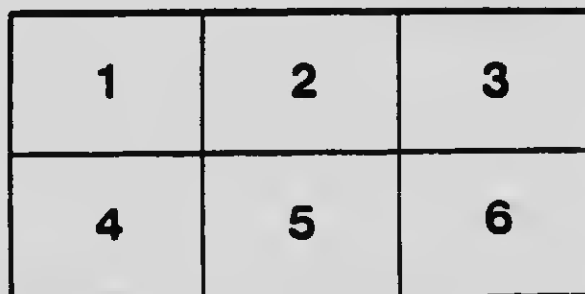
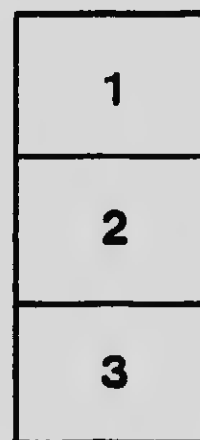
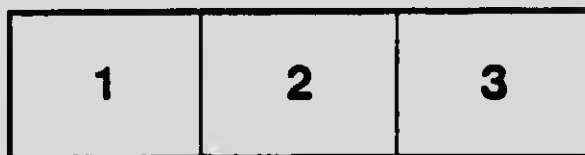
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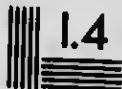
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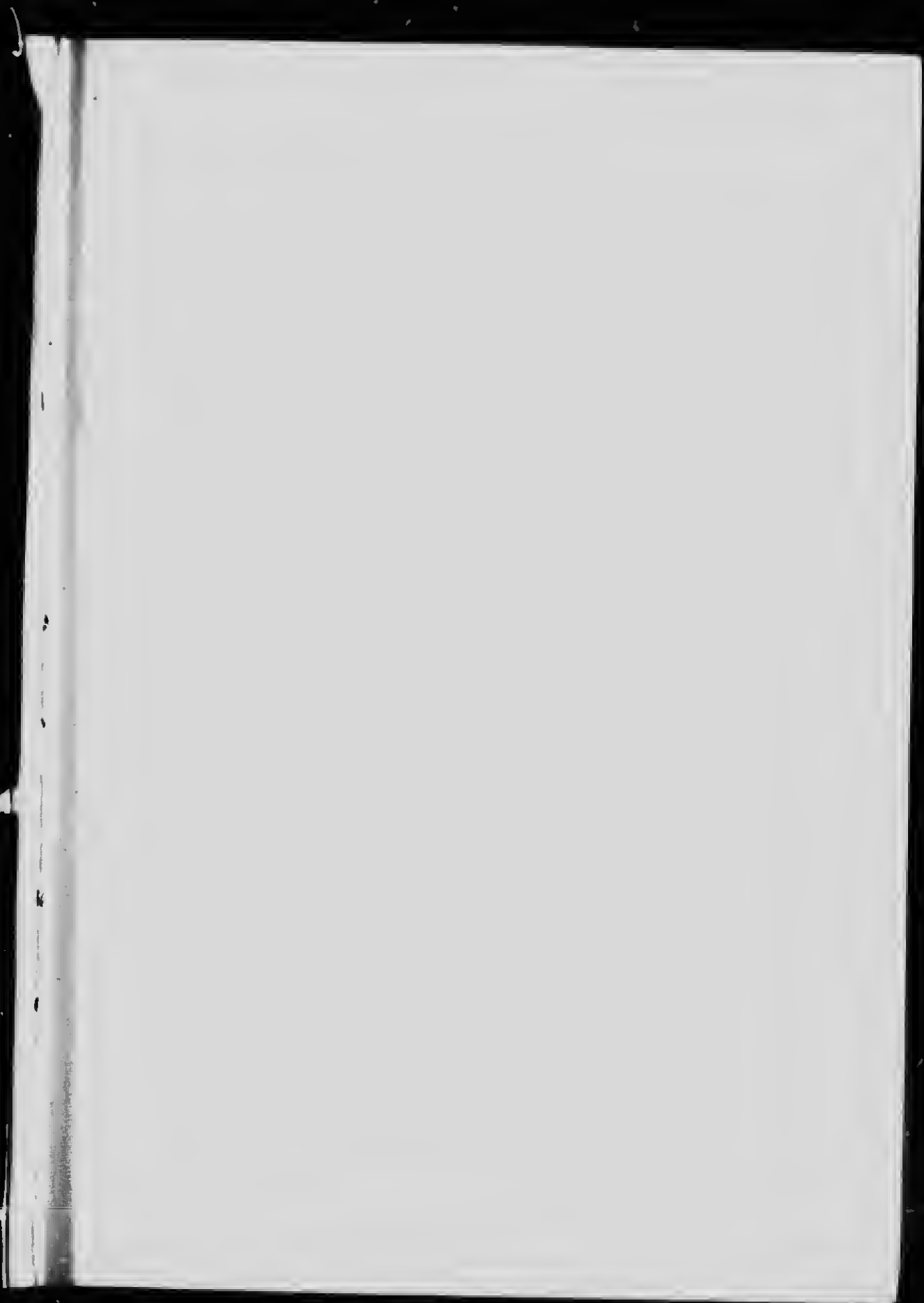
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PHILEAS FOX, ATTORNEY



PHILEAS FOX,
ATTORNEY

By ANNA T. SADLIER

THE AVE MARIA
NOTRE DAME, INDIANA
U. S. A.

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I.

IT was in the year of grace 18—, when the nineteenth century was well on the way to its close, that a new sign was placed upon a recently-varnished door of an office not many paces from Wall Street. And to the elevator boy, and the few others who gave it even cursory attention as they rushed in and out of the busy hives that constituted the score or more of offices in that building, it read: "Phileas Fox, Attorney and Counsellor at Law."

Within waited at a desk, which was saved from being too obviously new only by the fact that it had been purchased at second-hand, sat the very gentleman whose visiting card bore a similar appellation. The room which had thus been consecrated to the law was small, and it contained, besides the desk, an office chair occupied by the barrister himself, and two or three others, still vacant, upon which it was hoped that future clients would sit. There were also a certain number of pigeonholes that argued methodical arrangement of documents, which were merely pro-

spective. Other shelves were occupied by a goodly number of ponderous tomes, that had been purchased on the instalment plan, to give an air of solidity to the premises. There was a broad window, provided for the warm weather with a green shade, now pulled up high, giving a view out over the roofs and chimney-pots, down into the crowded thoroughfares, and vouchsafing in the dim distance a glimpse of the Bay of Manhattan.

Mr. Fox arose from the office chair from time to time, on various pretexts, or no pretext at all, that he might feed his self-complacency by reading and rereading that very conspicuous sign: "Phileas Fox, Attorney." It was his first day of waiting behind the sign; and he trusted that by the morrow the clients would begin to come in, for his was a sanguine nature. That could be seen by a single glance at the bright blue of the eye, redeeming a countenance sandy in coloring, and, alas! unmistakably plain, discounted also by the red hair which he considered a grievance, especially when it was taken in connection with his cognomen. The two together constituted an unfortunate suggestion.

How slowly the hours passed for the young practitioner, who had no other resource, having

examined the morning papers, than to make those exits and entries already noted, and to steal a glance from time to time at the office stationery, which likewise bore that style and title which gave him so much satisfaction, with a more detailed account of his various and altogether prospective avocations—conveyancing, notarial work, procuring of licenses, and so forth!

Even the deepest-seated complacency, which at twenty-five is usually in a flourishing condition, grows weary at last of ringing the changes upon one's own name and titles; and the monotony began to weigh particularly upon this champion of more than one athletic sport. In very weariness, Phileas took down from a shelf one of the folios that lent it respectability; and, turning over the pages idly, beheld recorded there a number of celebrated cases, most of which were now buried in the oblivion of these volumes. Some of them bore quaint old names, belonging to a period when New York was a colony; and they breathed an atmosphere of romance, despite the dry-as-dust terms in which the various documents were expressed. One of these cases caught his eye, and he noted its special peculiarity—that, off and on, it had

been on the calendar of the State of New York for nearly half a century.

This was the case of Martha Ann Spooner *vs.* John Vorst. Attracted by the names and the long legal standing, Phileas plunged deep into those mysteries, being informed by "these presents" that the party of the first part had, on the 18th day of the year of Our Lord 18—, sold and conveyed to the party of the second part the land and building and all its appurtenances, upon the southeast corner of Monroe and Rutgers Streets,—a property concerning which there had been previous litigation. That simple conveyance likewise gave rise in the course of years to successive lawsuits, all of which were set down in the pages of the folio for the guidance of future wanderers through the mazes of the law.

Phileas Fox found himself curiously fascinated by the narrative, and resolved to study the case in all its bearings during such intervals of leisure as he might have. It took hold of his imagination, of which commodity he possessed a fund that might have made him a novelist or a poet, had it not been for his legal capabilities. Those capabilities—the power to seize upon facts, to sift evidence, and to make deductions—had

been early pronounced upon by competent judges, and had caused his maternal uncle, himself in the law, to pay for his professional education, and to make him a small yearly allowance pending his initiation into the art of making money.

Phileas set all his faculties to work upon that theoretical case, in so far as he had yet studied it, and actually persuaded himself that Martha Ann Spooner was his client. Instinctively, he had chosen that party of the first part who, in point of sex at least, was the weaker of the two. He did not clearly discover, in so far as he had read the documents, if Martha Ann Spooner was still in the land of the living; for, it seemed, the suit had been divided and subdivided amongst other parties to the contest, till the original opponents appeared to have been crowded out. Phileas picked up a sheet of paper and began to scribble thereupon his notes and impressions.

Luncheon made a break in the monotony of that long day. He ensconced himself at a table in one of those crowded restaurants in the down-town districts which attract a human swarm between the hours of twelve and two, and was waited upon by an exceedingly alert and over-officious waiter, who called out the

names of the various dishes as if they had been the names of personal acquaintances, and conveyed them from the kitchen upon a large tray, and with a celerity nothing less than appalling, considering the crowded condition of the apartment.

Attorney Fox, returning to his office, which he now seemed to have inhabited for a prolonged time, also returned to the consideration of the intricate case. He felt a positive longing, as an epicure might for some dainty food, to have all the papers before him—and a goodly pile they must be by this time,—so that he might compare one with another, connoting and arranging them. Even that absorbing exercise of his faculties, however, began to pall upon him, and he was not sorry when that first long day had worn to its close. Not a single incident had disturbed its flawless monotony,—not even so much as a knock at the door.

Phileas arose at last from that office chair, replaced the folio upon the shelf, with a mark at the place of *Spooner vs. Vorst*, and locked the drawers of the desk, though they were practically empty. He retired into a corner of the room, concealed by a curtain, where there was a marble basin and two taps, overhung

by a small mirror. In the latter he took a careful survey of his collar and tie, with a rueful glance at his red hair that seemed to glow with peculiar vividness in the light of the setting sun. He hung up his office coat and adjusted his upper garment of neat tweed; and, thus equipped for departure, he paused a moment and looked out over the roofs. There was a delicious bit of sky visible—blue, enlivened near the horizon with a deep band of orange, merging presently into gold; while the waters of the Bay caught the radiance and held it upon their shining surface.

Phileas, sitting upon the broad sill, looked down into the crowded streets, fairly teeming at that hour with myriad life; for the offices, factories and stores had given forth their quota of humanity, that had been set free by the ear-piercing screech of the whistles. It was a relief, Phileas thought, to let his gaze wander amongst the steeples and the chimney-pots, idealized—as what is not?—by the descending rays of the western sun.

“O New York, thou modern Babylon,” cried Phileas, apostrophizing, in half jest, whole earnest, the mighty metropolis that lay surging at his feet, “what a multitude of saints and sinners—the latter predominating—dost

thou contain within thy huge caravansary!"

A breeze came up from the Bay while he was thus soliloquizing and fanned his cheeks, and stirred his ruddy hair, so that he was compelled to put it in order again by a few swift strokes of the brush. His spirits rose while he thus gazed and thus philosophized.

"But," he went on, using the same inflated language, in the serio-comic vein which had often predominated at class recitals and other festive occasions at the college, "thou hast a thousand possibilities for a man who is young, strong, with excellent digestion and a clear brain—also a conscience; though I am not so intimately convinced that the latter is a very serviceable commodity. But I shall chalk it down, at any rate; it shall have to be taken into the calculation. Surely, O great City, amongst all those atoms of humanity that tread thy streets, and crowd thy street cars to repletion, and eat in thy eating-houses, and buy and sell in thy market-places, some shall be found whose entangled affairs may require to be straightened out by Phileas Fox, Attorney!"

Concluding these reflections with a flourish, he took up from the desk a bundle of papers—his own scribblings in the case of *Spooner vs.*

Vorst,—which had quite a respectable appearance under his arm. They were partly designed to impress the elevator boy, who was talkative, as well as such passengers for the ground-floor as might be coming out of their offices. Phileas locked his door with exaggerated care.

As he proceeded toward the descending machine, which was but one of many kept constantly in motion, he met several of his fellow-tenants in that huge building, with a few of whom he had a nodding acquaintance. He saw various pairs of eyes travelling to the bundle under his arm, and he almost persuaded himself that he had secured a first and very lucrative client, being, moreover, associated with a certain celebrated case which had stirred legal New York within the last half century. He strove to compose his features to that grave preoccupation which he believed to be the proper professional aspect, until at the corner of the next street he was disabused of that idea. For there he perceived a shining light of the profession convulsing a learned confrère with what was evidently a good story. A stout and rubicund personage, the eminent counsel, shook from head to foot in the enjoyment of his joke, striking his

stick vigorously upon the ground to emphasize that enjoyment.

"To think of what that man has already achieved," thought Phileas to himself, "and he is still in the prime of life! But I shall achieve something too, with the blessing of God. And I hope I shall begin to-morrow inorning."

A few blocks farther on, he encountered a former classmate.

"Halloa, Fox!" cried that personage, glancing at the packet of papers which Phileas held. "Deep in the law already? I hope it's a paying case."

"It's a case that has paid out many thousands," replied Phileas, truthfully but ambiguously. And so saying he proceeded upon his way.

II.

EACH succeeding day at the office was for Phileas Fox, in almost every particular, a replica of the first. The novelty of gazing at the bill-heads and the sign had worn off; and the folios began to lose much of their interest, without apparent possibility of their accumulated learning's being practically applied. Only two resources remained by which the tedium of those leaden-winged hours might be relieved. The first was the case of *Spooner vs. Vorst*, which still exercised its primal charm upon the young lawyer's faculties, haunting him with an actual obsession; and the other was an expedient which occurred to his mind, and which was suggested by the example of various notable personages, in fiction at least. This was the practice of those gifts of forensic eloquence which he was supposed to possess,—gifts that had been stimulated by the delivery of somewhat florid addresses at the commencements and on other public occasions at the University. He therefore constituted the vacant office chairs his audience, with a final court of appeal in

the pigeonholed shelves, whereon stood the folios in regular order. He began one morning a moving address in the case of *Spooner vs. Vorst*, which he carried to a successful conclusion, melting himself almost to tears, though the chairs and the shelves alike showed themselves proof against emotion, as is too often the case with judge and jury.

He had scarcely reached the peroration when the office door opened. This was an unprecedented event, which brought the orator's eloquence to an untimely close. His attention was directed instead to a thin and cadaverous individual, who had insinuated himself between the open door and the jamb. He stood there, with his hat crammed down upon his head, his alpaca coat shining in the morning sunshine; and while Phileas, reddening to the roots of his hair, strove to stammer out an inquiry as to the other's business, the man came slowly forward and shut the door.

"You was so busy hearing yourself talk," he said, "that you didn't hear my knock, although it was loud enough too."

As he said these words he continued to regard the young barrister with a scrutiny so intent that he seemed to be taking a physical and mental inventory of him; after which he

spoke again, slowly, as if weighing every syllable:

"I tell you what, young feller, you'd better go ahead in that style. You've got the gift of the gab all right enough; and it seems to me that I can make that gift useful to myself and profitable to you."

Phileas felt his heart bound within him, and his spirits rose proportionately. A client at last, and one who had heard him—though that circumstance had been embarrassing at first—just when he had risen to forensic heights, and had been warmed by the twofold heat of virtue and righteous indignation!

He drew a chair for his first patron at a decorous proximity to himself, and took his own place at the desk, in an attitude of grave attention. While he sat thus he returned the visitor's scrutiny, observing that the face of the man before him was as of one prematurely old, though the actual age of his prospective client could not have been more than thirty; and Phileas drew thence certain other indications that did not tend to optimism. A pause of several moments ensued, during which the stranger continued to regard the figure at the desk with close attention, and, as Phileas perceived, allowed his glance to rest signifi-

cantly upon the ruddy hair. He broke the silence rather irrelevantly.

"You've got a tidy little spot here," he said, letting his eyes stray to the shelves, the chairs, and to the broad window, where the green shade but partially obscured the sunbeams that were playing obtrusively over the floor; "and I reckon that it costs a neat sum."

Phileas briefly assented.

"Got any customers yet for your wares?" the stranger inquired.

"I have been occupying the premises for only a week," the lawyer responded stiffly, repressing an inclination to display another of those arts wherein he had attained some distinction at the University, and knock the questioner down.

"Which means to say," pursued the visitor, with exasperating slowness, "that you ain't got any custom yet."

The irascible temperament of which the red hair was a visible symbol was becoming dangerously irritated by this catechising, coupled with something in the other's appearance that Phileas found repellent.

"I must say, sir," he observed, striving to maintain his calmly judicial tone, "that if your object in coming here was to put

questions concerning my private affairs—”

But the visitor interrupted.

“Hold on thar!” he cried. “I’m coming to the object of my visit all right enough, Mr. Fox,—oh, yes, indeed, Mr. Fox!”

The repetition of the name seemed to afford the newcomer a very solid satisfaction, and he chuckled and leaned back in his chair, surveying the practitioner once more with his ferret-like eyes.

“Those sentiments you was airing when I opened the door,” he went on, with a look that was intended to be humorous, “has a sartain monetary value. I suppose that’s why most young fellers indulge in them, especially at the start. They take a jury, sometimes a judge; it’s only the opposing counsel that they don’t take, nary a nickel.”

During this bit of criticism, which was peculiarly distasteful to a young man’s sensitive vanity, as well as to some other and higher feeling that was deeply ingrained in the young lawyer’s nature, Phileas colored with vexation, and moved uneasily in his chair.

“I would be obliged,” he said at last, looking at his watch, “if you would proceed to business.”

“What’s your hurry?” inquired the stranger,

jocosely. "Got a big case waiting for you? Due at the courts?"

"I am due at my luncheon in twenty minutes," answered Phileas, curtly.

The visitor shook his head.

"Let me tell you, young feller, that patience is very necessary in the profession that you've took up, and I'd advise you to practise the same. But since you are in such a hurry, I may as well spit out the 'biz' at once."

Phileas could scarcely conceal his disgust at the brutal vulgarity of the other, but he kept his eyes fixed upon the desk and waited. The stranger leaned forward impressively, and laid a hand on the lawyer's arm.

"Look here, Mr. Fox," he said, speaking in a low and cautious tone. "There's money in what I'm going to propose, Mr. Fox, if only you'll give me your help in chasing a goose."

This singular client was so amused at his own witticism that he chuckled and laughed till the tears ran down his thin cheeks, while the lawyer's face remained ominously grave. The visitor, in fact, had studied to little advantage those characteristics of which the bright blue eye, and manly and candid bearing were the outward tokens. Despite the warm and

generous sentiments which he had overheard on opening the door, he was persuaded of two things: first, that all those factors mentioned above would be valuable assets in the game which he was playing; and, second, that every one of these things could be bought.

His manner suddenly changed from the lightly facetious tone he had adopted in introducing himself. The laugh died from his face and the chuckle from his throat. His beady eyes became keen as those of a beagle upon the scent; his thin lips, sharp and decisive; his whole aspect, that of one who might prove, in any given circumstances, shrewd, merciless, unscrupulous.

He began by stating the really exorbitant fee which he was prepared to pay, being of opinion that the dazzle of gold was the best means of obscuring the moral sense. The sum mentioned caused the lawyer's heart to beat, though it scarcely seemed possible that such an amount could really come into his possession. The stranger readily noted the effect which his communication had produced, and he went on, in guarded but perfectly clear and concise language, to explain the end he had in view, and his need of the attorney's services.

Phileas listened in growing amazement while the other's explanation revealed to the white-souled young man, fresh from the high ideals and religious atmosphere of his Alma Mater, a degree of iniquity, a depth of the lowest chicanery, such as he could never have imagined. When he had begun fully to realize what his visitor really meant, and in what he was asking his co-operation, Phileas suddenly sprang from his chair and threw open his office door. Before his would-be client could guess at his intention, the lawyer had seized him by the collar, jerked him upright upon the floor, and hurried him out of the apartment and down the broad corridor to the elevator. The miserable wretch was as nothing in the grasp of one who had so often prevailed in the arena of athletics. So burning was Phileas' indignation that, had a stairway intervened, the rascal would have been in danger of being summarily thrown down. As it was, the attorney brought his swift career to a sudden stop at the wire door of the elevator. That machine was in process of ascent; and Phileas remembered just in time his professional dignity, which must necessarily be maintained. He gave his visitor a parting shake, and deposited him in a heap upon the ground.

The latter raised himself slowly, and, fixing upon the young attorney a glance which contained the venom of half a dozen asps, hissed out: "You'll pay for this, Mr. Fox,—Mr. Fox!"

The double mention of the name was uttered so as to convey a personal insult; and perhaps it was as well for the speaker that the elevator, arriving just then, prevented any further action on the part of the distinguished athlete. He, with a parting scowl at the miscreant, returned to his office, the door of which he closed with no gentle hand. Rushing over to the window, he threw up the sash to the highest, as if to purify the atmosphere. The wholesome sunshine, the bright sky above, the pure air which he inhaled in deep draughts, seemed needed to restore his equilibrium.

That the wretch should have dared to come into his office with his vile schemes and base proposals seemed to his inexperience an intolerable affront—he who had so high an idea of the dignity of the law, and who had resolved to uphold its highest traditions, and to take for his exemplars those who had been its incorruptible pillars. He wondered, helplessly, if there were indeed men even of average education and decent upbringing who would lend themselves to schemes so nefarious solely

for the sake of gain. None know better than he the necessity for that commodity vulgarly described as filthy lucre. The need thereof was staring him daily in the face; and yet he was glad to feel that not for all the money in the world would he part with one jot of his manhood, his integrity, or his sense of moral fitness. Boyish as he was, reckless almost as he had been at college, the leader in many sports, too often in mischievous pranks, he was wholesome in every fibre of his nature, transparently honest, and firm as a rock in his convictions.

He reflected gloomily, as he seated himself once more at his desk, that this was not a very propitious opening to a career upon which so many hopes had been based. He felt intimately convinced that he owed this insulting visit, and the astounding proposition which had been made to him during its progress, in a large measure to the unhappy coincidence of the color of his hair, with his all too suggestive surname. The very tone in which his late visitor had pronounced that name still sounded in his ears and rankled deep in his heart.

As his temper cooled down, however, he began to take himself to task for its violent

manifestation. It would have been much better, he thought, to refuse the proposal with firmness and dignity, ordering the creature out of his office, of course, but retaining control of his anger, righteous though it had been. By no means should he have laid hands on his objectionable client. Nevertheless, he chuckled to himself as he remembered the shaking he had given the miscreant, and felt only sorry that he had not added a kick to his other attentions. Thus inconsistently did he conclude his self-accusation.

Not the slightest feeling of regret found place in his emotions for the money he might have earned, though the amount mentioned would have saved him for many a day from pressing monetary difficulties, and set his feet securely upon the thorny path he had elected to tread. The whole incident left an unpleasant impression upon his mind, and the spectre of Discouragement showed a disposition to fasten its fangs upon a temperament prone at times to its influence; for they who are the most sanguine upon the one hand are the most easily cast down upon the other.

Little took place for several days to raise the hopes that had been thus cruelly cast down, until that memorable Friday afternoon

when there occurred an event destined not only to have an effect upon his professional and financial prospects, but to influence his whole life.

III.

ON that particular afternoon, as Phileas sat at his desk, with his folio open before him, at that fascinating case which had so much absorbed his mind, there was a gentle and deprecating knock at the door, and it opened only on his repeated summons to enter. That knock set his heart beating and his nerves fluttering, though he could scarcely have told why. Perhaps he had a vision of some lovely damsel who should follow that knock into the room. Instead, and with a surprise which gave him almost a shock of repulsion, he beheld, thrust in at the aperture, the black woolly head, plentifully besprinkled with gray, of an aged Negro. The face was deeply lined and wrinkled as with the passage of years. The head was followed by a body, clad in a livery that had once been gorgeous, but which was now merely quaint and antiquated.

Phileas stared without speaking; and the Negro, with a bow that would not have disgraced an emperor, began to speak in a low and softly modulated voice, and in an accent

that inevitably recalled the sugar plantations of "Virginny" or the Carolinas.

"Have I the distinguished honor of addressing Mr. Phileas Fox?"

"You have," answered Phileas, with an amused twinkle in his eyes. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Yes, sah,—yes, Mr. Fox," said the Negro, rolling his eyes about the apartment, and letting them rest upon the curtain. "May I inquire if we are quite alone?"

Phileas laughed.

"Oh, you need not be afraid, Uncle!" he replied carelessly. "Take a seat and let me hear your business."

The Negro so invited, gathering up the skirts of his long coat, took the proffered chair, which he brought into close proximity with the desk.

"Well, sah," he said, speaking still with the air of perfect courtesy and respect, and that indefinable something in manner and speech which marked him as a servant of the old school, "I am Cadwallader Jones, and I have been sent here, sah, by ole Missis 'erself, to discover if you could make a confidential visit to her residence."

"'Ole Missis'?" repeated the other, vaguely.

"Yes, sah," assented the Negro.

"But what is her name and address,—I mean where is her residence?"

The Negro drew himself up as if he were somewhat offended and a little bewildered too. It seemed to him that every New Yorker should know by this time whose carriage it was that he drove, and what was the name of his employer, and where was located the ancient mansion which she inhabited. He forgot how the generations in New York, succeeding each other, are swallowed up as in a mighty sea, and those famous or wealthy, or otherwise prominent, in one quarter century, are submerged and forgotten in the next.

"Ole Missis, sah," he said, with a shade of reproach in his voice, "is Mrs. Wilson,—Mrs. James Van Vechten Wilson."

Phileas being duly impressed, and by this time in a very agreeable flutter, took a pad from the desk and transferred thereto the name, waiting with pen upraised for the aged servitor to proceed.

"Her address?" he suggested, after a time; and the Negro cast upon him a glance of surprise not unmingled with contempt.

"Her address, sah," he replied with digni-

fied] brevity, "is at the ole mansion, corner of Rutgers and Monroe Streets."

The pen almost dropped from Phileas' hand, and through his veins ran an icy shudder. It seemed to him weird and fantastic, somehow, that that address of all others should be given. It was as if the dead had come to life, or some personage had stepped forth from the pages of his folio. Why, it was that very mansion that had given rise to the whole litigation between Spooner *vs.* Vorst. He could scarcely conceal his agitation. The blood mounted through his cheeks to his forehead, and his hand visibly trembled, though he was anxious to hide all traces of emotion from the Negro.

The latter presently continued:

"And, Mr. Fox, sah, may I propose that this visit to my ole Missis—I should say Mrs. Wilson—shall be considered as confidential,—entirely confidential?"

"Why, of course!" said the attorney, a trifle nettled. "I should never have thought of mentioning it to anybody."

"No, sah," said the Negro,— "to be sure not, sah. But the truth is, my ole Missis declared that the 'utmost secrecy' was necessary. Mrs. Wilson said: 'I should wish that

Mr. Fox could make it convenient to call upon me about half-past eight o'clock,'—that is to say, after dark. She preferred not to write a note; for, as she remarked, notes so often go astray."

"To-night, at half-past eight," said Phileas, "I shall call upon Mrs. Wilson."

And this time he did not write upon the pad, because he was quick to take the Negro's hint about the danger of writing down information that was to be kept secret; and, in the second place, he was well aware that there was not the smallest probability that he should forget the time, the appointment itself, or the mysterious dwelling, concerning which he had so lively a curiosity. After the messenger had gone, he speculated as to whether the old mansion had remained intact, and whether the present tenant even so much as knew the various phases of its history.

That day passed slowly, as days always do that have an excitement waiting at the end of them. Phileas dined with a friend and colleague at the Lawyers' Club; and when the shades of evening had fallen over the city, he excused himself on the ground of a pressing engagement, and hastened home to his lodgings. There he arrayed himself

as professionally as possible, giving a groan as he regarded the fiery red of his hair in the glass. His sole resource was to brush it with desperate energy, that at least it might be made as unobtrusive as possible.

This done, he set out for the practically unknown regions which long before his birth had had a distinctive character of their own, belonging to the old and once aristocratic Seventh Ward. He took the cable car down Third Avenue to Chatham, where, instead of transferring, he elected to walk, having still half an hour's time upon his hands. He threaded his way along East Broadway, which once in the long ago had been bordered upon either side by solid and even stately mansions. The remnants of these ancient residences yet lent a tinge of past dignity to the environment that had so sadly degenerated in nearly all its portions as to be fairly describable as a slum. Past Catherine and Market and Pike Streets the lawyer's course led, until he reached Rutgers, where he was confronted by a church which he knew to be Catholic.

Having still a few moments to spare, he entered and knelt unobtrusively in one of the back pews. Evening service was just over, and the smell of the incense perfumed the air.

The sexton was putting out the lights upon the altar; but the lamp of the sanctuary shed a strong clear radiance over the tabernacle and the entire chancel. Phileas felt that sense of unreality, and yet of spiritual nearness with the world unseen, that strikes the mind on entering a church, especially at nightfall. The few worshippers who lingered seemed shadowy and phantom-like. The distant murmur of bustle and confusion coming in through the open windows belonged, as it were, to some other existence. Mr. Fox bent his head for a few moments in earnest prayer. He recommended to God that first case, which he felt might prove an auspicious beginning to his chosen career, and which, from its coincidence with the subject of his late investigations, struck him as out of the ordinary.

He strode rapidly down the street, passing Henry and Madison, with the silver ribbon of the East River gleaming before him under the soft light of the stars. Through the masts of the shipping he could discern the opposite shore, with its lights twinkling through the haze of the summer twilight. At twenty-five minutes past eight Phileas stood upon the corner of Monroe and Rutgers, gazing with fascinated interest at the dwelling and its

surroundings, which might be truly described as an oasis in that desert. He saw a park-like extent of ground, with a broad, smooth lawn exquisitely kept, bordered by tall trees a century old at least,—or more probably coeval with the earliest settlers on Manhattan. The breeze blowing up from the river stirred the thick branches with a mournful, sighing sound; and the branches themselves made weird, fantastic shadows upon that spot of ground, that would seem to have been preserved by enchantment, there in the heart of the purlieus.

The lawyer gazed for an instant or two longer upon that scene; then, with a tremor passing through his frame, he entered at the broad iron gate, and passed with firm and rapid step up the gravelled path. He had an excellent view of the house,—a square, solid construction, to which a pair of Norman turrets gave a grimly castellated appearance. Only a light or two in the windows relieved the gloom.

“Ugh!” said Phileas to himself. “It’s like venturing into a wizard’s den or the castle of some robber baron.”

He rang the bell, and it sounded and resounded with a note clear and silvery indeed,

but with a long-drawn out inflection. It seemed to break a silence that was perennial. The modern young man, who stood upon the steps and waited with all the impatience that characterized the end-of-the-century youth, felt that the summons of the bell was too long-drawn out, and that the answer thereto was correspondingly delayed. At last—and to him the interval seemed very long—he heard footsteps advancing from a distance; and the next instant the broad oaken door was thrown open to admit the young practitioner into regions problematically vague, captivatingly mysterious.

IV.

THE first object which Phileas perceived was the figure of the aged Negro, so quaint that it appeared to belong rather to the seventeenth century than to the nineteenth. Past him was a large, square hall, lighted by wax tapers in a crystal chandelier suspended from the ceiling. The old Negro made a low bow, and waited for the visitor to speak.

"I have come," said Phileas, in a voice which was unconsciously low and suppressed, "according to appointment."

"Yes, sah,—yes, Mr. Fox," responded the Negro. "If you will be kind enough to step in here, sah, to the library, I will acquaint Mrs. Wilson with your presence."

Lest there should be any mistake about the announcement, the young lawyer drew from his pocket a card whereon was inscribed, "Mr. Phileas Fox"; and upon this he wrote, "By appointment."

As he stepped into the library and strolled about there, unheeding the parting invitation of the Negro to take a chair, and the still

more pressing invitation of a half score comfortable armchairs themselves, he distinctly heard, somewhere in the upper or farther gloom, a clear voice. Presumably it was that of a young girl, who, evidently reading the card to some one else, remarked:

“‘Mr. Phileas Fox.’ What an ominous name for a lawyer!”

Phileas flushed to the very roots of that hair which he felt to be another unfavorable circumstance, likely to militate against his chances of success. After that one sound, there was silence so deep and profound that the inhabitants of that spacious residence might have been buried in an enchanted sleep.

Then at last the stillness was broken by a slow, shuffling step, and the sharp tap of a cane upon the polished floor; and presently appeared in the doorway, aided by the ancient Negro, a woman of advanced years, and, as Phileas instantaneously reflected, most certainly not the owner of the silvery voice which had made that damaging remark concerning his cognomen. The lady was richly but plainly dressed in a gown of brown silk, with a small embroidered leaf upon its surface, that caught and held the visitor's observant eye. Hanging sleeves, in the fashion of earlier days, displayed

a second sleeve of peerless lace, that served only to emphasize the leanness of the wrinkled arm, of which it allowed too evident glimpses. A silver-headed cane was used to support the faltering steps, which required Cadwallader's services upon the other hand. The Negro seated her in an armchair beside a heavy mahogany table, and, with a ceremonious bow, stood near the door waiting for further orders.

"You may go," said the old lady, turning toward him with a wave of dismissal; and the Negro instantly vanished, closing the door upon himself with a swift and noiseless movement.

Meantime the old lady, leaning back in her chair, turned a penetrating gaze upon the expectant lawyer. The eyes were dark and harmonized well with an almost swarthy dark complexion, a prominent nose, and a mouth which had probably been firm and decisive in its character. It had fallen in now at either corner, after the fashion of age; and the deep lines on either side of the nose, sharply accentuated by the years, together with the clearly defined outline of chin and jaw, gave an almost skeleton-like appearance to the face. Still, it was a striking countenance upon which Phileas Fox now gazed

for the first time, and one not easily to be forgotten. Despite the extreme old age, it was a face of power, suggesting that the light of hidden fires might still be enkindled behind those piercing eyes.

"You are punctual, Mr. Fox," said the old lady at last, after a careful scrutiny of the latter's immaculately clean and eminently youthful and wholesome appearance, which seemed to afford her satisfaction.

"I believe that is expected in one of my profession," replied Phileas, with a smile which was clearly forced, since he felt altogether uncomfortable; his college manners seemed entirely out of place in presence of this survival of the feudal system.

"Yes," said the old lady, drawing out the monosyllable with a sound that was almost a hiss. "But expectations are not always realized, are they?"

Phileas felt constrained to say that they were not; though the remark sounded trivial—in fact, utterly banal,—and was so dismissed by the old lady, who proceeded at once to her subject.

"No doubt you will wonder, Mr. Fox," she said, "why, in a city which abounds perhaps more than any other in the world with legal

practitioners, and where many have attained eminence, I should have selected one who is so young." She made him a little gracious inclination of the head, with a reassuring smile, thus seeming to inform him that youth was by no means his fault, and an error which might be condoned. "And," she proceeded, "because of his youth, still unknown."

Phileas, who himself had been pondering over this very enigma, knew not how to reply. In fact, his years—the twenty-five years of which he had been so proud—seemed to dwindle down into mere juvenility within this fortress of antiquity.

"Therefore, before we proceed any further on our business, I am going to give you my reason for so doing. That will put you at ease with regard to the procedure which is expected of you, and will also, I trust, settle preliminaries on a satisfactory basis."

She leaned back in her chair after she had spoken, as if the effort had fatigued her; and, clasping her long, slender fingers before her in an attitude which has somehow gone out of fashion, or of which the secret has been lost, observed:

"The reason is to me a good and sufficient one for reposing in you a quite extraordinary confidence."

Phileas' heart beat, and he waited with some anxiety to hear that reason; for, remembering his experience of the few days previous, and aware that dark secrets existed under the fairest exterior, he could only hope that it would be indeed good and sufficient. Her very next words served entirely to reassure him:

"You are acquainted, I understand, with Father Van Buren?"

"Oh, yes, indeed!" cried Phileas, his countenance so visibly brightening that the old lady smiled. "He was my college professor, and has ever since been my best friend."

"He is also a friend of mine, standing in a relation still more intimate," said the old lady, "since he has been my director ever since my reception into the Church a year ago."

She paused, for the clearly enunciated and well-modulated sentences seemed to exhaust her.

"Now, it is at Father Van Buren's instigation that I have drawn forth once more that skeleton which I thought had been forever laid at rest, and which has already afforded legal and judicial New York sufficient food for curiosity. Have you ever heard, Mr. Fox—and it is only your very recent admission to

the bar which excuses the question,—of the case of *Spoooner vs. Vorst?*”

The lawyer barely restrained a start of astonishment. It seemed, somehow, uncanny to hear mention in these surroundings of that celebrated suit. For though, once the Negro had given him that memorable address, Phileas knew the premises to be those under dispute, still he had supposed that the original claimants were long at rest, or that their suit had gone to the limbo of forgotten cases.

“Oh, yes, I have heard of it,” he said eagerly, “and am familiar with many of its details.”

“Indeed!” cried the old lady, in a surprise which, the young man could plainly see, bordered upon incredulity. “As for instance—?”

If she expected to catch the young lawyer tripping, she was presently proved wrong by the facility with which he brought forth and laid before her, a few of the chief details of that continuous lawsuit.

“You astonish me,” said the old lady. “I will admit that you astonish me. Father Van Buren, having counselled me, for the reasons I shall presently state, to reopen the case, likewise referred to you as a man whom he believed, had a future before him, and

who, to make a beginning, required precisely such an opportunity as this case will afford. He also recommended you as conspicuously honest and worthy of trust. But I must admit that his confidence is more than justified by the grasp you have displayed upon a subject which I had believed to be forgotten."

Phileas, encouraged by her encomiums, burst into a glowing description of how his interest had been awakened, and how he had revolved the case in his mind, and formulated a theory by which could be manifested the justice of the claim of Martha Ann Spooner, who had elicited all his sympathies.

There was silence in the apartment after he had thus spoken, and a chill that, despite the season, caused the warm-blooded champion of athletics to shiver. The light of the wax tapers seemed too feeble for the size of that vast room, and its corners were filled with shadows. One of their number spluttered and died. The figure in the chair also sat very silent; and the piercing eyes were fixed upon the lawyer with an intensity that, somehow, made him uncomfortable. The expression of the face, too, was peculiar, and added to his uneasiness. He stopped in the midst of that

glowing peroration almost as suddenly as he had discontinued another flight of oratory when a miscreant had invaded his office.

"May I ask, Mr. Fox," began the old lady, in an accent which once more made him uncomfortable, "if you have any idea at all who I am?"

Phileas answered, hesitatingly: "I was led to understand by your messenger that you were Mrs. Wilson."

"The messenger, my servant Cadwallader, was quite correct," assented the old lady. "But I have an identity that is quite separate from that one. Have you made no effort to divine the probable truth?"

Then for the first time flashed upon Phileas' mind a supposition which, in connection with what he had just been saying, and the peculiarity of his client's tone, struck him as barely possible.

"Has it not at least occurred to you," went on Mrs. Wilson, "that I could be no other than Martha Ann Spooner herself?"

"I had never thought of that possibility!" cried Phileas, eagerly. "In fact, I was under the impression that—"

He paused. It did not seem to him as exactly within the proprieties to admit that

he had supposed the "party of the first part" to have been long since dead. The old lady, however, saved him from any anxiety on that score.

"Of course," she said, "you came to the conclusion that the principals in such an antediluvian contest must long before now have vanished from the scene?"

Her voice as she thus spoke became querulous, with a thin, rasping sound, as of the friction of one metal against another; it seemed to express resentment that age should have interfered with her and her transactions, of whatever nature they might be.

Phileas felt as if, in some curious fashion, the ground were slipping from under his feet. When she pronounced the name that had become so familiar to him during those tedious days in the clientless office, and declared it to be her own, he had the sensation of having been suddenly confronted by a ghost. She, with her wax lights, her slow ringing bells, and her own personality, seemed as far removed as possible from the world that was bustling past her doors, with its electricity, its telephones, and its rapid transit. That world wherein she had figured, playing no inconsiderable part, was cut off by an unfathomable

gulf from the new and modern existence, and the metropolis with its stupendous and daily increasing progress.

"I have another name, and still another identity, which shall be revealed to my learned counsel, should he choose to undertake the case. In the meantime let it be understood now and forever"—and here the speaker tapped sharply with her cane upon the oaken floor—"that whatsoever passes between us must be wrapped in inviolable secrecy. Not so much as a whisper must pass beyond that door without my express direction. Have I your promise, Mr. Fox?"

"So much I may safely promise," replied the young man, gravely; "in fact, so much is required by the etiquette of my profession."

"Give me your pledge, sir, before I speak further," demanded this extraordinary client, with a manner and tone so imperious that it completely upset that first theory which had beguiled his waiting hours at the office. In those reflections, Martha Ann Spooner had been in youth—as he sometimes pictured her in age—weak, defenceless, and the prey of strong and rapacious men, represented by "the party of the second part," John Vorst. Now he was not so sure. He prepared, how-

ever, to take the pledge offered him by his venerable client in somewhat the same terms as if he had been vowing himself to temperance or consecrating himself to some tremendous undertaking. As that pledge, so far, bound him to nothing more than the secrecy which his own sense of honor and professional discretion would have enjoined, he felt no misgivings.

"I here pledge myself, in the presence of God, and on my sacred word of honor, that I shall speak of nothing whatsoever that has here transpired, or may hereafter transpire at any future interview. Nor shall I make mention, unauthorized by my client, of my visits to this house, or of any other circumstances whatever in connection with the business there transacted."

Phileas Fox felt himself, in more senses than one, breathless as he repeated this long formula; and the woman who had just announced herself as that legally historic personage, Martha Ann Spooner, sank back in her chair and remained for several instants with closed eyes and a general aspect of profound weariness.

V.

PHILEAS FOX waited for further developments, seated as he was at the other side of the ponderous table, with the feeling that he was dreaming, and that he would suddenly awake to find that the ancient house, the park wherein it was situated, the antiquated Negro, and the old lady herself, had vanished. Outside, the sighing of the wind in the treetops grew more pronounced, as though a storm were rising; and the breeze of the night, coming in through the open window, caused the candles to splutter.

“May I trouble you, Mr. Fox,” said the voice of Mrs. Wilson, breaking in upon his musings, “to close that window? I am very susceptible to cold, and it would be lamentable were I to catch a severe one before this business is concluded. Besides, the draught wastes the candles, that always remind me of human life,—so much of them goes in idle spluttering. Moreover, one never knows. These grounds of ours attract the idle and the curious. In discussing business matters, it is safer to have doors and windows shut.”

Phileas, in obedience to these instructions, sprang from his chair, and as expeditiously as possible closed the broad French casement and let down the shades.

"That is better and safer," said the old lady, watching the agile figure with a pleased interest and a half-wistful envy. "I was once so active myself," she added under her breath.

When the lawyer had resumed his seat, and the room was once more silent, Mrs. Wilson seemed to bend all her energies to the task that still lay before her.

"Mr. Fox," she said, "this may be a case which shall necessitate a vast amount of labor and research. It is possible that old documents shall have to be brought to light, and numberless papers read. Conveyance of property, deeds of sale, and such like, will require to be examined. Some are in the courts here, others farther afield. Are you prepared to undertake the task?"

Phileas, with face fairly beaming with hopefulness, and the brave, bright spirit that of old had sent knights-errant on their quest, with a trace perhaps of self-sufficiency and confidence in his powers which belongs to the mental equipment of youth, answered readily that he would willingly undertake the case.

And once more his real kindness of heart came to the surface. Here, thought he, was an aged woman battling against the world,—or at least against that portion of it presented by the rapacious monster described as “the party of the second part.” Her white hairs—of which he had to admit there were few—appealed to him, as they must appeal to any one with a spark of manliness in him; for he had that reverence for the aged, that protective desire to shield their weakness, which is surely the very flower of manhood.

Phileas expressed himself modestly, quietly, and yet forcibly to that effect; and Mrs. Wilson gazed at him with an expression in her eyes that was at first ironical, even quizzical, but which gradually changed and softened. For there is something so fine in a whole-hearted simplicity, integrity and honesty, that few persons are so hardened as to behold it unmoved.

“It will take very much of your time, Mr. Fox, which, you will allow me the freedom of presuming, is not as yet over-valuable. But let me assure you at the very outset that whatever time you may spend in this service shall be as fully and generously recompensed as though you were a busy lawyer; because

with me expense is of small moment, and the qualities you may have to bring to bear upon this case are of more value than the highest legal reputation."

Phileas had reddened a little during this speech; for no one likes to be told bluntly that his time or his professional reputation is of little worth. But he had a fund of common-sense likely to prove serviceable in many emergencies; and, moreover, his naturally frank nature led him to make as open an avowal as possible of his circumstances, lest the question of remuneration might be based upon any misconception as to the value of his time.

"I may as well tell you," he said, "so that you may take the fact into consideration when the subject of a fee is under discussion, that I am at the present moment absolutely briefless. In the whole, wide city of New York, not one has been found to place his affairs in my hands."

Again Mrs. Wilson smiled.

"And how long, may I ask, have you been a member of the profession?"

"I took possession of my office just two weeks ago," Phileas answered.

The smile became a laugh, mirthless and soundless.

"O my dear young man," the old woman cried, "if the time you specify had been two years instead of two weeks, I should not have been surprised at the fact you mention! But impatience is part of youth. Who could wish you to wait willingly for the slow-footed hours? I have, however, put before you the worst features of the case with regard to its possible tedium and the length of time it may consume; but there is always the chance that everything may be arranged upon an amicable footing, and with but brief delay. Only time can tell which of these hypotheses is the more correct."

As Phileas made no comment, the old woman proceeded:

"Of the justice of the case with which you are to be entrusted, I suppose you are convinced by the name of Father Van Buren."

Phileas admitted that such was the case, though he added impulsively:

"But your cause is just,—I am *sure* it is just."

The smile died slowly from the aged lips as Mrs. Wilson answered:

"The case you are being asked to undertake is just,—painfully just. 'The mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small.'

You need have no apprehensions upon that score. Father Van Buren—or, as he more correctly puts it, the grace of God, with the power of that Faith which I, all unworthy, have been led to embrace—has triumphed over pride, avarice, and stubbornness. But—I should wish you to understand everything before becoming my adviser.”

The indomitable spirit within that feeble frame seemed as if nerving itself for an effort; and the failing faculties in that once vigorous body were being marshalled, as it were, into line.

“Mr. Fox,” she said presently, “from your knowledge of the various phases of the case, you will perhaps remember that upon most of those occasions when the suit was brought into the court, I, the plaintiff, was victorious.”

There was something of triumph, of exultation, in her tone. She sat upright; her eyes glittered; she had the appearance of one who was galvanized back to life. Nevertheless, when she had made that statement, the silence that followed was an uncomfortable one, and somehow lay heavy upon the spirits of Phileas Fox.

“Only twice in all those years were John Vorst or his representatives successful. I had

gone into the fight determined to win. And I warned him—I warned him before it began." (Here the old woman employed her cane to stamp this truth upon the oaken floor.) "I warned him to let us alone, me and the property I had held. And what do you think was his answer, Mr. Fox?"

Phileas very naturally replied that he could not possibly guess. But, having already formed an opinion, weakened in some indefinable manner since he had come into that room, he was disposed to expect an answer in accordance with that preconceived judgment.

"He said," declared the plaintiff, leaning forward upon the table so as to bring her face into an exact line with that of her adviser, "that 'right will in some manner triumph, however often it may suffer defeat.'"

Phileas started so obviously that his arm, upon which he had been leaning, slipped off the polished table. Mrs. Wilson took no heed of the movement. She seemed rather to be addressing some unseen personage who had arisen from the shadows of the years to confront her.

"You were a true prophet, John Vorst," she said, in her slow, incisive tones. "Right

is going to triumph at last, and before it is for evermore too late."

Phileas, in all his young, straightforward life, had never hitherto been brought into contact with one of its involved mysteries, nor vexed with those complexities which perplex the brains of casuist and jurist. Some tragedy, some vital question of right and wrong, was about to arise and encounter him sternly. He drew his breath sharply; and the personage in the chair, becoming suddenly cognizant of his presence, addressed him directly:

"I have been a sinful woman," she went on, in a hollow voice that suggested coming from a long distance; "and in my old age those sins are rising up before me in all their hideousness. The awful searchlight of your Faith, Mr. Fox, has been turned upon the dark places of my soul. And, let the modern world gloss over ill-doing as it may, sin, by whatever name it is called, is hideous, and retribution even in this life is almost a certainty."

Here was a complete reversal of all the young man's preconceived notions. For the first time he felt as if he would fain have given up this case, which seemed to offer scope for the wider experience and broader judgment

of an old practitioner. But the protesting words died upon his lips, and he waited, while Mrs. Wilson proceeded:

"A wilful girl, brought up in wealth and luxury, accustomed to have every whim considered, I had little or no perception of moral difficulties nor of religious truth. Life to me meant the utmost limit of pleasure, self-indulgence, vanity. As I grew older I developed an almost inordinate ambition, with an ever-increasing attachment to the wealth which could gratify that ambition. I am not, however, going to trouble you with a psychological treatise. I came into the possession of the Spooner estate, which included this dwelling and the ground upon which it stands. The title to that property was not free and unencumbered: there was a lien thereupon, and there had already been litigation upon the subject. The other claimant was John Vorst—"

As the speaker paused to take breath she cast her eyes upon the young lawyer, who, bewildered, stammered out the only question which occurred to him:

"Was that claim a substantial one?"

"Yes, and a just one," answered the old woman, blurting out the truth with defiant

emphasis. "It had been handed down to him from his father, who had been the original owner of these premises. There had been an informality on some of the transfers. (I can not explain matters in correct legal phraseology, despite my close connection with the law.) The claim which John Vorst might have made good was invalidated by the disappearance of some document which had not been registered. (If I am not stating the case properly, pray arrange it correctly in your legal mind.) At any rate, the claimant was put into my power. I was not going to permit this beautiful estate to be divided, much less to give up my interest in this house and land. I had some visitings of conscience at first, and wrestled with myself; but there was no tribunal to which I could bring moral difficulties, no visible authority to which I was, as it were, responsible; and so I easily persuaded myself that I was in the right, and that the claimant was obliged to abide by the decision of the courts. O Mr. Fox, you do not know yet, but you will realize sometime, that legal decisions do not always coincide with the rulings of conscience! The case went from one court to another; it made the circuit, in fact. Years elapsed and many

startling changes took place; but the litigation was from time to time renewed, until finally the Supreme Court of the State of New York decided in my favor. From that there was no appeal, and John Vorst was a ruined man."

Phileas covered his face with his hand, as if he had received a blow. That clear, cold-blooded and almost cynical avowal of wrongdoing, realized and persisted in for a term of years, filled him with a sickening horror. But the old woman continued to speak with a voice as inexorable as fate.

"I am making no excuses for myself," she said. "I am anxious that you should understand my full iniquity. By the time that final decision was reached, I would have stopped at nothing; I would have done anything to prevent John Vorst from making good his claim."

In his uneventful and carefully sheltered life, and judging from the woman he had known—his mother, who had died when he was about entering college; his sisters, both of whom had become nuns,—Phileas felt as if the sex, by a broad, general rule, at least in the upper and more exclusive classes, was irreproachable in its conduct, or that frivolity was its most grievous offence. If evil were

done by woman, it was in the lower strata of society, where circumstances offered many an excuse. But here was this woman, who from childhood had moved in an atmosphere of ultra-refinement, surrounded on every side by those conventionalities which offered to Phileas' inexperience a certain safeguard against evil, admitting herself guilty of deeds that were far removed indeed from the gentler, the more feminine emotions. With the hasty judgment of youth, he failed even to guess what that confession cost a proud and self-centred woman, who accepted it heroically as part of her expiation.

At the point when his horror of her offence was turning to a veritable repulsion toward one who could so calmly declare her iniquity, the culprit suddenly broke down. Extending toward him two withered, imploring hands, and regarding him with eyes whence the slow tears of age were falling, she cried:

"Don't turn away from me! Don't refuse to take my case when I have opened my heart to you and made this full confession!"

Her voice broke, and her tears began to fall pitifully upon the wrinkled hands, and touched Phileas to the quick. He suddenly realized that she was old and in deep affliction.

"Do not be afraid, Mrs. Wilson," he said. "I shall do whatever I can for you—" He stopped abruptly; then added hastily, though with a voice and manner as gentle as he could make them: "But always on condition of course, that it be in the direction of the right,—as Father Van Buren would advise, for instance. For no money on earth would induce me to assist in perpetuating a wrong."

Mrs. Wilson nodded approvingly.

"That is what I want above all things," she murmured,—“an honest man.” But her voice sounded faint and low, and when next she spoke it was to say imploringly: “And now go,—go at once, I beseech you. There is very much more that I have to tell you, but I am weary. I am getting very old, Mr. Fox, and I can do no more at present.”

Pitifully old, helpless and weary she looked. The fire had died out from behind her eyes, and the temporary energy from her frame.

Phileas rose at once, with a marked feeling of relief. He had found this first interview with his client most trying. He fancied that it must have planted gray hairs in his head and laid a heavy burden upon his shoulders.

"I will send for you again," said Mrs. Wilson, "as soon as I am equal to renewing

the subject. The sooner the better, too; for I feel, my dear young sir, that my days are nearly numbered, and so much has to be done!"

As she stretched out her hand in farewell, the young man took it respectfully, and the eyes that looked out from the old woman's skeleton-like face peered almost wistfully into his own.

"Good-night, Mr. Fox!" she said. "And may God keep you through the maelstrom into which you have plunged! For you little realize as yet of what value to the world is every good man."

As Phileas passed out through the hall, he was met and escorted toward the door by Cadwallader, who made some trifling allusion to the beauty of the night. A parrot, in some invisible coigne of vantage, no doubt roused from its sleep by the sound of footsteps and voices, startled him by its hoarse croaking and the distinct articulation of the name, "John Vorst! John Vorst!" And upon that name the bird rang the changes,—now loud and deep, now shrill and high, playing upon every note of the gamut. The sound was weird, and, to Phileas' excited mind, ghastly in the extreme.

"That bird, sah," remarked the old Negro, rolling his eyes upward to some point upon the stairs, where the parrot's cage was probably hung,—“he has the most earsplitting voice, and you can't by no means persuade him to discontinue.”

“Not even at night?”

“Night or day is the same to him,” answered the Negro. “If he wants to talk, sah, he just goes right straight along.”

“He must be a very unpleasant customer,” commented Phileas as he passed out onto the steps.

“Mighty unpleasant, sah,” assented the Negro. “But, then, you see, he and me are the only two that was young when ole Missis was, and she won't part with neither of us.”

Phileas smiled at the quaint conceit, which was pathetic too, he thought. But he breathed more freely when, bidding the aged servitor a cordial good-night, he went down the steps and out into the cool evening air. He felt as if he must shake himself to get rid of an intolerable impression, as one might strive to shake off a nightmare. The smooth grass of the velvety lawn seemed to have lost something of its vernal beauty, and the tall trees, a portion of their ancestral majesty, since

wrong, even crime, had flourished beneath their shelter, and the very ground whence they took their roots had been fraudulently withheld from its rightful owner. The iron railings and the massive gates suggested the same unpalatable truth, and were somehow symbolical of the unbending will that for more than one generation had maintained an unjust claim.

When Phileas had passed through the iron gate, and, turning up Rutgers Street, left that theatre of singular events behind him, he began to whistle, striving hard to be once more the blithe and merry-hearted college graduate who had passed within those portals. But in that effort he was only partially successful.

VI.

ON arriving at his office next day, Phileas felt as if he had grown older, graver, and more fully impressed with the responsibilities of the profession he had adopted, and especially those connected with that particular case which had fallen to his lot, than he could have believed possible. It is true the office chairs were still frequently vacant, the pigeonholes still empty; but his feet, as he felt, had been planted upon that ladder which he fondly hoped to ascend.

With an altogether different set of impressions, he took down the folio that had introduced him, as it were, to his client, and threw himself into a consideration of such phases in the famous litigation as were contained in that volume. He regretted that he had not at hand the succeeding volume, which should initiate him into the later details of that interesting contest. As he read the account of each separate trial, the decisions given therein appeared to him iniquitous in the light of those admissions made to him by the plaintiff. Yet the evidence apparently had

been carefully sifted, and the claim of John Vorst proved wholly untenable. So much, thought Phileas, for the limitations of human wisdom.

As he was absorbed in this captivating subject, there was a hasty knock at the door, and in flew a young man from one of the adjoining offices.

"I'm from 'Place & Atwater'!" he exclaimed, in that breathless manner wherewith business in New York is frequently transacted. "Our Mr. Place is away, and we want you to draw up a lease of the premises here described, binding on both parties for five years. Make it as ironbound as you can. We've got a slippery customer to deal with."

Phileas took up a printed form, which he was prepared to fill up according to the instructions of the young man, who sat upon the rail of the chair, as if poised for instant flight.

"You want to make it ironbound for the tenant?" Phileas asked, pausing with pen upraised.

The young man nodded assent.

"What about the other party?" asked the lawyer.

The smart young clerk grinned. "Jolly well

able to take care of himself; but, you see, he's our customer."

"The name?"

"Thomas Grant, acting for the Goodyear estate. He's a hard fellow to do business with. But the tenant has a poor record."

"In what way?"

"In the matter of payment. She's a widow who keeps lodgers."

"Name?" inquired Phileas, laconically. Each day was giving him a deeper insight into the mysteries of a great city, the petty and never-ending struggles, the continual grind, the meannesses, and most frequently the utterly unsympathetic attitude of one class toward another.

"Name!" said the clerk. "Why, it's O'Rourke,—Mrs. Susan O'Rourke."

Phileas wrote away busily for a few moments, while the clerk amused himself by whistling a lively air, and kicking his heels together, both of which occupations jarred upon the lawyer; but he could not very well offer a protest, since it was of the last importance to keep upon good terms with all the adjoining firms and their employees.

After the clerk had snatched up the paper and departed, as if the fate of the nation

depended upon the celerity with which he could get through the door, Phileas laid down the pen with a sigh. Somehow, his latest task had not been to his taste. He presently reproached himself, however, for not accepting more cheerfully these minor vexations of his office; and contrived to bustle through the day, which was tolerably well filled by a rush of small affairs. Some of these were with college friends, or clients, sent to him by his old professors, all of whom took a kindly and serviceable interest in his welfare. In fact, for many a day to come Phileas Fox was kept more busy than his depressing first experience had led him to expect. And some of the clients who presented themselves were of so singular a character that he often thought a volume could be written upon their peculiarities.

Thus, for example, one morning early he was waited upon by a handsome and showily dressed woman, who came to consult him as to the best means of obtaining a divorce; and a bank president, on the eve of becoming a defaulter, crept in surreptitiously, to discover if there were any means of evading the banking laws, and how far he was safe in deluding those who had intrusted him with

their money. The banker, despite his anxieties, took a jocose view of the situation, with many a humorous glance and innuendo; and he plainly declared in his genial way that he had been attracted by the name of Fox on the door. He even considered it an excellent joke to insist that the young practitioner had adopted the name for business purposes. Phileas had considerable difficulty in disabusing his visitor's mind of this and various other errors, one of them being that he intended to conduct his law practice on foxy principles.

The young man felt more than once, during the interview, a strong inclination to apply the same species of argument that he had employed toward his first client. But he was deterred by two considerations, one of which was the gray hairs of his would-be client; and the other, the wisdom that he had already acquired, and which taught him that even into the most respectable offices in a great city may come the most unsavory clients; that his only course was to receive the bad with the good; and, while rejecting those that his conscience disapproved, to greet all with outward civility.

Of course it was natural that whenever

his thoughts were at leisure they travelled back to that central point upon which all his future hopes rested. He continued, in fact, to revolve over in his mind that case which promised to be not only lucrative but advantageous in many ways. As he thought over the various details of the contest in the light of the additional particulars he had obtained from Mrs. Wilson, and recalled the circumstances of his first visit to the mansion in Monroe Street, there appeared to be but one spot of brightness in all that gloom. This was the voice which he had heard—high, clear and conspicuously youthful,—and which recurred to him now pleasantly, though the words spoken by that voice had rankled deep at the time. “Mr. Phileas Fox. What an ominous name for a lawyer!” The very tinge of resentment that still lingered against the speaker added to the young man’s interest in that mysterious personality, which had seemed so much at variance with everything and everybody connected with that antique dwelling.

He was pondering one day upon this enigma, as to whom the girl was and what she was doing there, while he sat smoking during the noon recess, after having taken his luncheon

in an eating-house near at hand. He always smoked as near as possible to the window, that the odor of tobacco might not infect the atmosphere. For Phileas was old-fashioned, in that respect at least; and, though he had as yet but few feminine clients, there was always the possibility that some might invade those precincts, and he did not wish that they should be offended by the smell of his favorite weed.

He sat, therefore, upon the broad window-sill, enjoying his cigar, while watching the men rushing by, microscopically, in the streets below, and musing upon this theme. He was startled by the jangle of the telephone bell striking sharply upon his ear. He jumped down from his elevated position, and, laying aside his unfinished cigar, rushed toward the still vibrating instrument.

"Halloa!" he called out; and again "Halloa!"

There was an instant's pause, and then a voice—*the* voice upon which he had been puzzling for the last four or five days—spoke softly and distinctly:

"Is that Mr. Fox's office?"

"Yes," answered that gentleman.

"Can I speak to Mr. Fox?"

"He is speaking."

"Mr. Phileas Fox?" repeated the voice.

"Yes, Mr. Phileas Fox is speaking."

"Are you quite alone?"

"Yes," Phileas answered.

"I ask that," continued the voice, "because Mrs. Wilson, for whom I am speaking, requested you to be careful in your replies, should any one else be in the office."

"There is no one here," declared Phileas.

"Then there is, of course, no need for caution. Can you conveniently come to the same address as upon a former occasion—corner of Monroe and Rutgers Streets—this evening at half-past eight?"

"I think so," answered Phileas,—“in fact, I am quite sure.” And he repeated the name and address, to make certain that there was no mistake.

"You are quite sure that it will not put you out to come after office hours?"

"I shall be very glad to do so," said Phileas, quite truthfully; for he had a keen curiosity to hear the remainder of the old woman's story, and to proceed as speedily as possible with the latest version of the case of *Spooner vs. Vorst*.

"Thanks!" said the voice, with a softly

lingering intonation, that added another motive to those already impelling Phileas Fox toward the much disputed mansion.

The young man felt quite sorry when, after that final monosyllable, the pleasant and well-modulated voice ceased to speak and the connection was shut off. The little conversation had been an agreeable break in the tedious round of office duties.

He sat down and resumed his interrupted smoke and the musings, which now took a more definite form. He wondered if the girl could be a daughter of the house, or if she bore some other relation to the formidable Martha Spooner. In his thoughts, Phileas thereafter rejected that meaningless addition to the name of Mrs. Wilson. To him, the imperious lady of the library and the chair must be ever that celebrated legal entity that had kept professional circles agog for half a century.

Perhaps it was the new interest awakened by the voice, and the possibility of seeing its owner, that caused the young man to give an unusual attention to his toilet that evening. He tried and discarded a second and a third waistcoat before he found one to his taste; and with the choice of his ties he was equally fastidious. He brushed and brushed at his

hair, that even a plentiful application of a hair-darkening preparation failed to obscure. There it was red,—unmistakably red! And how ridiculously well it coincided with his cognomen! There was nothing to be done, however; and Phileas strove to counteract those damaging circumstances by a spick-and-span costume of the very latest fashion, for which he had to pay his tailor by instalments. Even the tan shoes and socks formed a harmony with his brown clothing.

So arrayed, he set forth for that dwelling which, more than any other in the whole vast metropolis, engaged the lawyer's attention and fired his imagination. All the others seemed by comparison dull and commonplace. He was admitted by the selfsame Negro, with a respectful cordiality, mingled by this time with a tinge of familiarity, as proper toward one who had the confidence of "ole Missis." He was ushered into the same room as before, where Cadwallader proceeded to light some of the wax tapers in the crystal chandeliers, with a long lighter, resembling that used in churches.

"Ole Missis she always prefers to light her apartments, sah, with tapers. She believes

that they are less injurious to the optic nerve than other lights."

"They are certainly more restful to the eye," agreed Phileas, who had no mind to combat the prejudices of the mistress of the house, at least in indifferent matters.

"Yes, sah,—yes, Mr. Fox," assented the Negro, "that's a mighty true remark. Wax lights are restful, and I apprehend that the use of eyeglasses would not be so common if no other lights were employed."

Phileas could not help smiling, both at the pompous diction of this relic of a more tranquil era, and at the idea of Greater New York lighted by wax lights. His amusement, however, was concealed from Cadwallader, who moved about the room, arranging the chairs, drawing the curtains, and evidently in no hurry to shorten this brief interview, that gave him a glimpse, as it were, of the outer world. When he had at last gone to summon his "ole Missis" to the library, Phileas could hear through the half-closed door, not that silvery voice which he had heard upon a former occasion, but the hoarse croak of the parrot, muttering over to itself certain phrases wherein, it seemed to the listener, the name of John Vorst was conspicuous. It worked

itself into a mimic rage in its effort to pronounce its words distinctly, or to reproduce some sound of anger or of strife that the bird had at one time or another heard.

While Phileas waited, he was conscious of a new expectancy, in the glances which he cast toward the door. But when it opened, Cadwallader, as before, led in his mistress and placed her in the armchair, leaving her cane and a silver gong within reach.

"I may want you," said the old lady, laconically; "if so I shall ring."

The lawyer, with a perceptible feeling of disappointment, saw the door close upon the Negro. It was evident that no one else was to be present at that interview. With a formal bow, he seated himself upon the opposite side of the table, as he had done before; and found himself confronted by the piercing eyes, protruding chin, and skeleton-like visage of Martha Spooner Wilson.

That lady, being settled according to her pleasure, leaned back in her chair and regarded the young lawyer with her uncomfortably penetrating glance.

"So I have troubled you again to come here," she said; "and I warn you that this will be by no means the last of such visits; for

it must be quite evident that I am in no condition to call upon you in one of those phenomenally tall buildings which I am told are the order of the day."

"I should never have thought of such a thing!" cried Phileas, hastily. "I am at your service whenever you may require my attendance."

The old lady nodded, in acknowledgment of his readiness to oblige; but she had never been conspicuous for her observance of the smaller amenities, and so declared without further preface:

"We may as well proceed at once to business, Mr. Fox. A prostration, following upon our interview of last week, has lost me three days,—a no inconsiderable loss at my age."

She stopped, as was her wont, for a breathing space, rather than as if expecting a response from her listener, and he made none.

"I think," she continued, "that at our last meeting I made it clear to you that I, Martha Spooner, was the plaintiff in a suit, or series of suits, against John Vorst, wherein I was in several instances successful. The man's claim was invalidated chiefly by the non-appearance of a document, without which his claim was untenable."

"It must have been a document of considerable value," observed Phileas, who, his lawyer-like instincts being now thoroughly aroused, was following every word with the keenest attention.

"It was," said Mrs. Wilson, composedly, "no other than his father's will, wherein his claim was clearly set forth—so he said,—he being the sole legatee. In default of that will, together with those informalities previously mentioned, I and some others were to receive, by the terms of a former will, a share in the estate; and mine included the possession of this house, through circumstances which I shall hereafter explain."

"But," inquired Phileas, "was the defendant absolutely certain that this later will was really in existence?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Wilson, with great composure, "he was absolutely certain; and so, in point of fact, was I."

The old woman broke off with a mirthless laugh, wherein there was something hard and defiant; and such seemed to be her predominant mood on this occasion.

"My dear Mr. Fox," she said, "you must really try to conceal your feelings. It will never do, in your profession, to make your

face the mirror of your thoughts. You may well be shocked, however. I was, as I have said, quite sure that the later will of Mr. Vorst's father was in existence; for I had seen it myself. I therefore acted as I did with full knowledge; and, affecting to disbelieve that such a document was ever in existence, I profited doubly by its loss."

Phileas, embarrassed by her reference to those feelings of amazement and almost of repulsion which really disturbed him and were all too vividly reflected upon his face, found no word to say, even when Mrs. Wilson, after that confession, remained silent a moment as if expecting a reply. The young lawyer, by an effort, roused himself to ask a question:

"Had the defendant any idea of how that paper had disappeared?"

Mrs. Wilson looked at the questioner a moment before she responded.

"I did not make away with the document, if that is what you mean," she said emphatically. "Of that sin, at least, I am guiltless. Nor had I, then or afterward, any more knowledge as to the cause of its disappearance than John Vorst himself."

"Such an idea never occurred to me," said Phileas, gravely.

Mrs. Wilson laughed lightly.

"Not even after what you have heard?" she said, in an ironical tone. "If that is the case, may I congratulate you on having preserved a faith in human nature which is absolutely refreshing?"

To a young and unspoiled disposition, there are few things more repulsive than cynicism. It feels the sting without being able to fathom the sorrow or the carking care or the remorse which has produced the bitterness. Phileas felt his whole being in revolt against this woman and her misdeeds, which she so shamelessly, as he thought, declared; and his sympathy forcibly gravitated toward that "party of the first part," whom he had at first so unsparingly condemned. But the rasping voice of Mrs. Wilson broke in upon his reflections:

"Do you feel equal, Mr. Fox, to hearing the further confession of a woman who has been so unfortunate as to create an unfavorable impression in your mind?"

"I shall be glad to hear whatever may throw any light upon an intricate case," said Phileas, somewhat stiffly; for her sarcasm, directed against himself, seemed to him both uncalled for and unjust.

Mrs. Wilson, slightly changing her attitude, so that she did not so fully face her legal adviser, collected her thoughts for an instant and began her narrative.

VII.

SINGULAR indeed was the narrative to which the young lawyer was called upon to listen, though its leading features were of all too frequent occurrence in the whirl of large cities. It seemed a strange thing for Phileas to be sitting there as the confidential adviser of a great lady who had been conspicuous in the world before the young man had been born, and everything about whom, from the leaf on her flowered brocade to the gold eyeglasses which hung from her neck, and through which she occasionally looked at him, was outwardly worthy of respect. But inwardly his sturdy manhood abhorred those misdeeds to which she had confessed, and his Catholic principles revolted from a course of action that was so flagrantly dishonest and so injurious to another.

"From the time of which I speak," went on Mrs. Wilson, in that same high-pitched voice that was altogether refined, though grating upon the ear, "I lived in a very whirl of gayety. I entertained lavishly, gathering into my house all whom I considered as best,

socially or intellectually. My name, in so far as I permitted its use, figured in fashionable assemblies of all sorts, and even in philanthropic schemes. I married Mr. James Van Vechten Wilson, of whom you may have heard—or perhaps it was before your generation—as a yachtsman with horses upon the turf. He was very fond of amusement; being, in fact, what you of the present day would probably describe as ‘an all round sport.’”

Despite the gravity of the situation, Phileas put up his hand to conceal a smile, so oddly did the familiar expression sound upon the lips of that stately relic of a bygone generation. Mrs. Wilson was far too much occupied with the picture she was painting on the dark background of her past to observe the movement.

“Our life together,” she continued, “was not long. Severely injured in the hunting field, he lingered for a few months; and during that period the spectre of conscience that had pursued me through all my frivolities awoke to life. As I am laying bare to you, for your full enlightenment, my psychological history, I will say that I made some attempt at expiation; but that spectre of conscience

has never since been laid. And, Mr. Fox, I may add *en passant* that it had its root in a year which I spent at a French convent long ago.

"That episode in my life, however, was soon over and done with. I wore mourning for the conventional period. I had lost some of my best friends by a course of action which was not viewed so indulgently then as now; for I was a divorced woman when I married Mr. Wilson. In the New York of my young days, a divorcee, no matter what her connections or prestige, was not altogether eligible for the most exclusive and conservative element of society. Still, I contrived to find here and abroad sufficient to keep me in a giddy whirl, that served to drown recollection, to console me for a twofold sorrow, and the stings of a remorse, becoming stronger as youth was succeeded by middle age, and that again by the shadows of old age, which I dreaded most of all. During this interval, strange to relate, I held on more tenaciously than ever to my ill-gotten goods. Needless to weary you with the tale."

The old woman stopped as was her wont, and put her hand to her chest, as if she felt

there the exhaustion that was expressed on her face.

“I met in quite an accidental way Father Van Buren, who impressed upon my mind an ideal of saintliness that I had never wholly lost. Of course the books I was reading, the atmosphere wherein I lived, would have caused me to be sceptical of the existence of real goodness, had not those convent memories lain deep within my heart. That chance meeting with the priest awoke thoughts and reflections that caused the cankering sores of sorrow and remorse to reopen. Old age had begun to weigh upon me; I was compassed by its shadows and its terrors. The stakes for which I had played must soon be snatched from my hands—those hands that were empty of good deed. I felt that I was speedily to be called from those scenes, whither I could not guess. Some one must have been praying for me, Mr. Fox; for each time that I encountered the Father I felt those fears, those longings for pardon and peace, stronger within my soul. Not that the priest ever, by word or by sign, broached those unpalatable subjects; on the contrary, his conversation was always light, cheerful, even amusing, as that of one who is at peace with God and with the world.

Once or twice, when meeting him at the house of a mutual friend, I caught his eye fixed on me with an expression of the purest pity, and I could guess what he was thinking, even with the superficial knowledge he then had of my story."

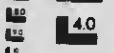
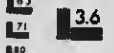
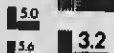
Phileas listened as one fascinated while the thin, metallic voice recounted this strange history; and it occurred to him that there was more scope for the ministrations of Father Van Buren or some other ghostly ministrant than for his own. Nothing in his life at home or at college had prepared him for such an experience as this. He felt himself lacking both in insight and in sympathy, and was becoming discouraged; the whole current of his clear young mind was in the direction of horror and repulsion.

"A year ago I was suddenly stricken by an illness that threatened to terminate fatally. In the ghastly terror of that time, overwhelmed by the realization of my sins against society and individuals, I sent for Father Van Buren. During the several visits he paid me, he asked me, I remember, whether there was any special circumstance that could account for my present state of mind. I answered that in my far-off convent days



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there had been a nun who had interested me especially, and who had taken a particular interest in the Protestant American. When I was leaving she had called me to her, in a little room looking out over the historic Invalides, and the Park that had been the theatre of so many events. She had promised me then, in saying farewell, that she would pray for me, and never cease to pray until we met in heaven. Those last words were vividly impressed upon my memory, as well as the touching expression with which she had concluded: 'For you will go to heaven, my child; will you not?'"

The old woman paused to wipe with trembling hand the perspiration that had gathered on her brow.

"I never got quite rid of the impression. It remained something tangible and real behind all the froth and glitter of life,—something that it terrified me to remember, but that, curiously enough, did not deter me from the evil things I have done."

Phileas Fox, feeling hopelessly young and bewildered, but yet with a certain natural fineness of perception, began to experience an awakening sympathy and the slow dawn of comprehension. Evil is so fatally alluring!

And good hovers often as a shadowy abstraction, with which it is so hard to grapple unaided by the illumination of faith and its authoritative sanction.

"In short, Mr. Fox," continued the old woman, "I might sum it all up by saying that a woman naturally and by heredity honest, in whom honesty was an atavistic quality, but without other guide or bulwark, found herself suddenly confronted by a powerful temptation to dishonesty, and yielded, though suffering keenly for the transgression."

The speaker, leaning forward upon the table, emphasized her words by a peculiar gesture of the head.

"It is, perhaps, more surprising," she declared, "that I yielded in another direction,—I who had been brought up in an atmosphere of the most fastidious refinement, and who was by nature conservative to a degree, and distant even to haughtiness in my deportment. I permitted my name to become for months the topic of every club-house and drawing-room in New York, as the central figure in a divorce case,—I who had always held divorce to be, from an ethical point of view, a very real degradation. All that belongs to a part of

my subject which I have not as yet broached, and which is the most painful of the revelations that I have to make."

She had an intuitive perception of the distress and embarrassment these disclosures caused to the young and right-minded attorney, to whom criminology in its various phases was as yet known only from the pages of his law books. In some vexation of spirit, Mrs. Wilson found the difficulties of her confession increased by the listener's inexperience; and, despite her faith in the good priest, she muttered to herself:

"Father Van Buren should not have sent me this boy."

She felt this at the moment to be a distinct grievance. An older man would have divined, would have understood. But when she let her keen gaze rest upon the frank face, embarrassed indeed, yet upon which a dawning sympathy was so plainly written, she realized that Father Van Buren had been right, and that in the manliness and innate gentleness of the young lawyer she was sure of a chivalrous regard for her feelings, such as she could not have been certain of finding in an older practitioner.

"Mr. Fox," she said, "I hope that in your

own mind you do not condemn me too unreservedly."

She spoke thus with eagerness, and a wistful deprecation of judgment, which showed that the woman was not all hardened, all sceptical. After a moment she added:

"You who have lived under the protecting shadow of the Faith, can never know, can never understand. I realize now that to be without that certain guide is to walk blindfold through a morass, and it is only a wonder that any reach the opposite shore in safety."

As she paused again, Phileas said, and there was something of his felt sympathy in his tone:

"There is no question of condemnation, Mrs. Wilson. I am deeply interested and—very sorry."

That was the first time in all her three-score and ten years that any one had ever said to the naughty woman of fashion that he was sorry for her. She had heard countless flattering words,—words of admiration, of love, even of condemnation,—but none had hitherto associated with her the idea of pity. Some years before, she would have rejected the offering with indignant scorn; at this moment it was welcome as dew to a parched flower.

"Yes," she said, "you are sorry for me; and, though I do not deserve it, that is the appropriate feeling toward me, and I thank you for it."

Since Phileas had touched the right note, the old woman seemed reassured; she proceeded with more ease and a less defiant attitude:

"When I told Father Van Buren of that saintly nun—of whose death I heard but recently, with a peculiar shock, as of the departure of one with whom I had failed to keep faith,—and when I represented her as the chief factor for good in my life, I likewise had to inform him of my close and intimate relation with a Catholic of the fine old heroic type, whose example and whose counsels were unhappily thrown away by my own perversity and my own wrongdoing."

Pondering as it were upon this disclosure, which she seemed to utter introspectively, and as if addressed to herself rather than to the young man, Mrs. Wilson suddenly addressed to him a question:

"Has it never occurred to you, Mr. Fox, to inquire in what relation to John Vorst stood Martha Spooner,—I mean, of course, apart from that of plaintiff toward the defendant?"

Phileas very truthfully answered in the negative; and Mrs. Wilson returned to her narrative:

"I married, when I was barely eighteen, a man who had every quality to attract and to retain affection. And that was no *mariage de convenance* on either side. Young as I was, I loved and appreciated him as fully as my undisciplined nature permitted, and I know that he truly loved me. I need not go into details, nor dwell upon the various circumstances that caused that brilliantly promising marriage to fail. They were all connected with that central fact of which you have been informed. My husband was a Catholic, and, as I learned long afterward, felt a certain remorse that he had been in so far false to his convictions as to marry one without the pale. I will admit, however, that never had I the slightest clue to this feeling, in so far as he was concerned. But from the very first it was only too evident that upon almost every principle of right and wrong my husband's views and my own were diametrically opposed. I have often remembered since with what perfect courtesy and gentleness, though with what unalterable firmness, he maintained his views; and with what anger, disdain, and

headstrong perversity I opposed him. His opposition, in fact, awakened in me a special fury against him and the constant desire to thwart him in every way. I contended that it was impossible for him to love me when he would not accede to my requests. Often have I seen him white and haggard from the struggle between his wish to please me and the dictates of conscience, which I would have overridden as I had overridden all other obstacles in the course of my life. I am perhaps wearying you, Mr. Fox; but I shall soon have done."

Phileas very truly answered that he found the narrative of absorbing interest, and the old woman went on:

"People are talking much nowadays of the Nietzschean philosophy, with its principle of the rights of strength over weakness, and the disposition to obtain all that one wants at the expense of everybody else. That is a crude summary of the matter; but that philosophy was mine. How that was necessarily opposed in many instances, and especially in one, by an earnest and devout Catholic, you will readily understand."

Phileas, while keeping his attention fixed upon the thread of that strange narrative,

felt his curiosity almost painfully aroused by the question which the old woman had asked, but which she seemed in no hurry to answer. Fumbling nervously with the objects upon the table, she let her gaze wander around the apartment, which possibly recalled to her many painful memories. All at once she leaned forward in her chair, with one of those almost convulsive movements that were of themselves sufficiently startling, and declared with a suddenness that deprived the young lawyer momentarily of his self-possession:

“John Vorst, you must know, is my divorced husband.”

VIII.

NOTHING in what had been previously said had prepared Mr. Fox for the old lady's announcement, and it shocked his moral sensibility to the uttermost. It is a remarkable fact that the Catholic ideal as to the indissolubility of marriage takes so deep a hold upon the mind and conscience that even the most careless member of the Church feels a distinct sense of repulsion on being first brought face to face with one who has disregarded this fundamental law. Of course familiarity lessens this impression, but it is never entirely removed. It was proportionately strong in Phileas, who had been brought up in one of those Catholic homes which, like salt, purify the moral atmosphere, and are as refreshing to the mind as an oasis in a desert.

The confession thus made by one who had held so high a place in the fashionable world produced something like consternation in the inner consciousness of Phileas Fox. Perhaps if Father Van Buren had not been in the background, he would have been tempted to

decline the unsavory case altogether; but as it was he hesitated.

When she had made this avowal, Mrs. Wilson let her head fall upon her breast, as though she were loath to meet the frank young eyes, wherein there must necessarily be astonishment, which was in itself severest condemnation.

"Yes," she continued, suddenly raising her head, "that is the strangest and, you will say, the most revolting part of my narrative. The information I had gained in various ways, the confiding affection of one who was once my dearest companion, placed at my disposal all the weakness of his legal position, and left him at my mercy. He had no means of opposing my nefarious suit; nor was he personally, as I believe, much interested. Had it not been for the enthusiastic championship of a legal friend of his, an eminent solicitor, and for the sake of some relatives whose interests were at stake, he would have let the litigation go by default. Particularly after the divorce it was against his will that the suit was carried on, just as it was against his will, and in entire opposition to his principles, that I procured that divorce. I obtained it very cunningly: I retained the services of one of

your profession, who was *not* recommended by Father Van Buren or any other reputable person. He was not so scrupulous as you, Mr. Fox."

She stopped to smile upon the young man—the remnant of a smile which, the latter could dimly perceive, had once been captivating.

"For, though you have said not a word, I can read within your mind the various emotions wherewith you have listened to my story; and you will admit—will you not?—that it has filled you with horror."

Phileas Fox squared his shoulders. This was no time for temporizing. He looked straight at the questioner, and the blue eyes flashed like steel points into the dark ones.

"It *has* horrified me," he said almost sternly; "and it must necessarily horrify any honest man."

The old woman bowed her head as if accepting the justice of the condemnation, which she had not, however, expected to hear pronounced so uncompromisingly. But she liked the young lawyer none the less for this show of strength, and the manifestation of those qualities wherein she had begun to fear he might be lacking. The stern young face showed precisely that quality which was most

needed—justice. She sighed deeply, however, as she resumed.

“Nevertheless, Mr. Fox,” she said, with a humility that sat strangely upon her, “there are in this case complexities beyond the reach of your experience, which constitute, if not a shadow of justification, at least some semblance of an excuse.”

She leaned toward him, resting both hands upon the arms of the chair; and there was an inflection in her voice that appealed once more to those sympathies that had been driven sharply into the background as she said:

“When you are some years older, and have begun to understand the workings of feminine nature, you will be disposed to make allowance. I shall be by that time beyond the reach of your blame or your pity; but you will recall this memorable evening, and will accord perhaps to my memory some shadow of indulgence.”

Despite the gentler promptings within him, Phileas' face was still fixed in unbending disapprobation. He even took out his watch and, with a murmured apology, regarded it, as if to intimate that his approval or disapproval was by no means vital to the

question in hand; that time was pressing and the business of the hour was still in abeyance. The movement was not lost upon the quick-sighted old lady, who went on, in an altered tone:

“I shall be brief henceforward, Mr. Fox. Nor have I intruded upon you these personal details, excessively painful to myself, but from a desire to acquaint you fully and entirely with the facts in the delicate and possibly difficult case which has been entrusted to you. One remark, however, I feel called upon to make. When I spoke just now of feminine nature, I meant, of course, as it exists in the world about us, in all classes and conditions unrestrained by any higher law, indifferent to the very existence of such laws. The courts, the problem play, the very novels of the day, prove beyond the possibility of a doubt that woman above all, because of her keener susceptibilities, needs a sure light to guide her steps, and a definite authority to regulate her conduct. By that sanction only can she prove the undoubted superiority of her nature, on the spiritual side at least.

“With this remark, that is perhaps obvious, let me say it was not altogether for love of gain that I strove to circumvent John Vorst.

I will do myself the justice to state that, unwilling as I should have been to give up part of the estate, and especially this house, I might have been induced to do so for the sake of one whom I sincerely loved, had not other elements of my nature entered into the conflict. The time came when the desire for revenge was part of the programme. I longed to avenge upon John Vorst wrongs which were purely imaginary, and an opposition to my schemes that sprang solely from fixed principle and the force of his convictions. And yet, through all the vagaries into which I was led by my capricious and undisciplined nature, and though it may seem a mockery to refer now to the existence of such emotions, I may tell you that I loved John Vorst,—I deeply and sincerely loved him."

The words rang tragically and almost weirdly through the apartment. It was as though a phantom had come back from the world beyond the tomb, to make known its share in earthly complexities. And, to add to the weirdness, the parrot in the hall, awakened no doubt by the sound of the familiar name, could be heard through the closed, heavy door, with cracked notes rising high and higher:

“John Vorst! John Vorst!”

The passions and the sorrows that are intense in youth and tragical in middle-age, seem to be in the old but faint reflections. Nevertheless, there were upon that aged face traces of the agonizing conflict which must have rent that proud and imperious nature. Because of its very strength, these traces had remained as embers of a once glowing fire. As he looked, it flashed upon Phileas that in judging cases even of the most flagrant ill-doing, there is very frequently room for the exercise of the Christlike quality of mercy, from the suffering which that very ill-doing entails.

“But now that you know the chief factors in this miserable story, and can probably guess at still more,” cried the old woman, raising her head with some of her wonted energy and defiance, “we shall proceed to the immediate business that has necessitated your intervention.”

She struck the silver gong sharply. It was answered so promptly by the Negro as to suggest enchantment.

“Cadwallader,” said Mrs. Wilson, “I require my keys to open the safe.”

The keys were brought and laid within reach of her hand.

"You may go now," said the mistress; "but I may want you again presently."

"Yes, Missis," responded the black; "and I shall be prepared to obey the summons."

The old woman turned from him impatiently, having long ceased to be amused by the Negro's pomposity, and barely waited till he had closed the door before she began to fumble amongst the keys.

"Even to Cadwallader," she said, "I have never entrusted the particular key that unlocks my safe."

She selected one long, thin and skeleton-like as the fingers which held it, extending both toward Phileas:

"That is the key," she explained; "and yonder is the safe that it will open."

The young man took the key from her outstretched hand, and, following her gaze, perceived what appeared to be a handsome rosewood structure fitted into the wall. He advanced somewhat helplessly toward it.

"Run your hand down lower," said Mrs. Wilson. "There! Do you not see a small keyhole?"

Phileas stood for an instant perplexed, since

he certainly saw nothing. The old woman's cane tapped sharply upon the floor, and the thin, rasping voice cried:

"There! there! Don't you see? Surely you can find it."

"Oh, here it is!" exclaimed Phileas, with a distinct note of relief in his voice; for he was beginning to fear that his employer would find him hopelessly lacking in most of the qualities she had seemed to expect.

"Good, yes! Turn the key once forward and twice backward, and forward again. It is a little complicated."

Obeying these instructions, Phileas found that the key turned in the lock, and the door upon its hinges, revealing a safe extending far back into the wall. It had several shelves, the upper ones containing row upon row of cases, which, as Phileas surmised, contained jewels of great price; while the lower shelves were filled chiefly with documents stacked together in bundles, and probably comprising the history of the once celebrated case of *Spronner vs. Vorst*.

"There!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilson, her keen eyes penetrating over the lawyer's bowed head, and indicating with her cane the foremost bundles upon the lower shelf. "I think those

are the parchments which we shall most immediately require."

As Phileas dropped upon one knee to secure the papers, he was disturbed by two sounds, perfectly distinct, but each of which broke the stillness with an almost weird effect. One was the voice of the parrot still ringing the changes upon a name that had once been familiar in that house; and the other was a feminine voice singing in high, clear tones a single line or two from a modern ballad.

"Shut the safe door, Mr. Fox," said the old woman, in accents that betrayed irritation, "and bring me here the keys. I never leave that safe an instant unlocked."

The lawyer did as directed, placing the keys, with the bundle of papers, upon the table, and resuming his seat. Mrs. Wilson, having inspected the bunch of keys as though she feared that one might have been abstracted, though probably more from force of habit than because she had any apprehensions on the subject, sharply rang the silver bell. On Cadwallader's appearance, she cried out:

"Go at once and cover that parrot's cage."

As the Negro was about to obey the order his imperious mistress gave another order:

"Then knock at Miss Ventnor's door and

say I should be obliged if she would discontinue her music for the present."

For some incomprehensible reason, Phileas felt this last command to be a personal grievance. It seemed so uncalled for, and, before a stranger, so discourteous a message. Moreover, though the voice possessed no uncommon quality, and was merely the outpouring of a joyous nature, it seemed so sweet a sound in the clogged and artificial atmosphere of that ancient dwelling, that he was loath to hear it cease. He could not, of course, give expression to his sensations, but fell to examining the cane that he carried, as though he had discovered something new and interesting in its manufacture. The Negro hobbled to the door, no doubt revolving in his urbane and kindly disposed mind some form of words which might render the message less offensive. But Mrs. Wilson suddenly arrested his steps.

"That last message about the music will scarcely be necessary. Say instead to Miss Ventnor that her presence is desired in the library."

While the high, clear notes still penetrated the apartment, Phileas was full of interest and curiosity. Here was a new element which might pleasantly relieve the monotony of that

tragic story, whose interest lay in the past. For age, even though it has passed through the most thrilling experiences, can never entirely captivate the imagination of youth, always unconsciously looking for some link which shall bind one generation to another. The trills of the singer, which resembled nothing so much as the bird song pouring in rapture from the heights of tall trees, continued; while the old woman sat nodding and frowning. Phileas listened likewise, with a half smile upon his lips and a light of expectation in his eyes. Suddenly it became evident that the Negro had reached his destination; for the song ceased, and the young lawyer felt as if a light had gone out. Unconsciously, thenceforth his gaze was fixed upon the door.

When it opened, there appeared upon the threshold a young girl apparently not more than nineteen or twenty years of age. She was very plainly dressed, though with an exquisite neatness and smartness that was more noticeable than any actual claim to beauty. With her coming it seemed as if a warm human interest had suddenly pervaded the apartment, which had hitherto been filled with shadows and the flotsam and jetsam, as it were, of an ideal world.

"Let me introduce Mr. Fox, my dear," said the old woman, addressing the newcomer. "Miss Ventnor, Mr. Fox."

The girl acknowledged the introduction by a bend of the head, and a smile that almost degenerated into a laugh, as at some thought of her own. Phileas remembered the remark which he had overheard upon the occasion of his first visit, and associated therewith the smile and the look of humorous intelligence in the eyes. He accordingly made his bow of acknowledgment somewhat stiffer and more formal than it would otherwise have been. Yet it was impossible not to feel in sympathy with a new and bright personality, that perhaps, in contrast with the old, seemed the more sunny and wholesome. Even the old woman, as he saw, regarded the girl with a very friendly eye, and her manner lost all trace of its previous irritation.

"I have sent for you, Isabel," she explained, "because I want you, like the good girl you are, to sort out some of these papers for me. Now that Mr. Fox and I have talked over those details which would be quite improper for young girls to hear, I will let you help us to disentangle this knot of legal documents."

She nodded and smiled at the girl as she talked, and added aside to the lawyer:

"Oh, she is a good little puss, quite fresh from the convent and knows nothing of the wicked world and its ways!"

"Thank Heaven for that!" thought the listener. "For the older generation has monopolized more than its share of such knowledge."

The young girl meanwhile regarded them both with her laughing, steady gaze, taking in good part the old lady's raillery, and without the slightest trace of having been put at a disadvantage.

"Now, my dear," went on Mrs. Wilson, speaking with that tone which Phileas had not before heard from her—light, pleasant, cheerful,—“sit down here at the table and sort out for me some of these musty documents.”

Isabel took her place with quite a business-like air; and, slipping off the rubber band that held two or three of the documents together, read out the titles to Mrs. Wilson, who briefly directed her:

"Put that one here and that one there."

Phileas watched the long, slender fingers, delicately brown in coloring, sorting over the parchments, many of which were discolored from age, and recorded the strife of warring

passions. Her movements were quick and deft. She scarcely spoke at all until after she had accomplished her task. Then she said, in the same light, half-petulant tone in which the lawyer had first heard her comment upon his own name:

"That John Vorst must feel his ears burning, for his name is repeated over so very often."

The old woman gave her a strange look, which was not lost upon the observer.

"Yes, his name is repeated over very often," she echoed. "You see, Isabel, he was the defendant in that suit."

"Why people should ever go to law," Isabel continued, "and waste so many words over their disputes, is a mystery to me."

Then she directly addressed the lawyer:

"Why don't you try, Mr. Fox, to find out a quicker way of settling matters?"

"That would not be nearly so advantageous for us," Phileas said, answering the smile in the clear eyes, and finding himself ever so much more at home with this new acquaintance than with the grim figure in the chair, who had made him feel so hopelessly young and inexperienced. "Those words, you see, are our bread and butter."

"You must have an abundant supply, then," retorted Isabel.

Mrs. Wilson meanwhile watched the two with an amused and interested glance, that softened the hard, skeleton-like contour, and brought it, as it were, within the pale of human interest.

"Have I sorted out all the papers that are to be delivered up to Mr. Fox?" Isabel presently inquired.

"Yes, I think you may give him this bundle to the left," Mrs. Wilson answered. "He will have occupation enough for the present in looking them over. Another time I may find some more work for your nimble fingers."

"Which means that I am dismissed," said Isabel; and, to the lawyer's great regret, she rose as she spoke, while the older woman smilingly nodded assent.

Isabel stood carelessly leaning upon the back of the chair; and, Phileas having likewise risen, the two confronting each other made a pleasant picture in the shadows of that old library. Isabel smilingly regarded the young man with a certain friendly interest, as remote as possible from coquetry. She had rather the manner of one who, leading a retired life, and full of the lively interest of

her age in whatever is going forward, is glad of any interruption to the dull routine.

"I don't envy you, Mr. Fox," said Isabel, "the reading of all those yellow and musty pages. The law must be a tiresome profession."

"Not always," replied Phileas. "From my short experience, I find that it is full of interest."

"Yes," admitted the girl. "That I suppose, would be its redeeming feature: meeting all sorts of people and hearing all sorts of adventures—"

"And finding criminals even where least expected," Mrs. Wilson interposed quietly.

"Oh, I should not like that part of it!" objected Isabel. "I detest criminals."

"Though they are not always entirely detestable," said Mrs. Wilson, a little wistfully, as her eyes met those of the lawyer. "Has not that been your experience, Mr. Fox?"

"My experience, as I said, has been very limited," answered the young man; "but I am sure that what you say is quite correct."

"For my part, I do not like them either in or out of fiction," persisted Isabel, still with the same laughing glance and the look of humorous intelligence in her face.

And Phileas felt that here was, indeed, a

strange situation,—the unconsciousness of the one, with the full knowledge of the other, and both pitted against the critical observation of a third.

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Wilson, in a whimsical playing with the situation that struck Phileas as somehow incongruous and surprising, "when you are a little longer out of the convent, whence such monstrosities are banished, you will find, my dear, that they often walk the streets and are met with in drawing-rooms, and that their ordinary speech and bearing differ but little from the deportment of civilized men."

"Mrs. Wilson loves to astonish me with paradoxes," said Isabel, "or to propound riddles for which there is no answer."

"She propounds only the commonplaces of life," observed the old lady; "and they are more puzzling than any riddles."

Isabel shook her head, and, still smiling, and with a nod to Phileas, retreated toward the door.

"I am sure Mr. Fox will be better at riddles than I am," she said.

"It is part of my trade," laughed Phileas, as he opened the door for the girl to pass out.

Next instant she was heard in the hall in animated converse with Cadwallader.

As the young man resumed his seat, Mrs. Wilson said:

"She is like perpetual sunshine, and I have kept her outside of the shadow in so far as possible. I thought it wiser."

"Oh, very much wiser!" exclaimed Phileas, and the unconscious warmth of his tone made the old woman smile and sigh. It was, in fact, an unintentional admission of the manner in which her story had impressed him, and there are few women so old as to be indifferent to condemnation.

"She is so ignorant of the whole affair that John Vorst is to her a mere name or abstraction, the defendant in some antediluvian lawsuit. She is no relation of mine; she is, in fact, the—"

A trifling interruption occurred. Cadwallader opened the door, and appeared upon the threshold to know if "ole Missis" had rung. Mrs. Wilson answered somewhat sharply in the negative; but even when the door was closed, and the Negro had withdrawn, she did not resume the previous subject of discourse. She forgot what she had meant to say, or perhaps she thought better of giving this young

man information that could not concern him. Whatever was her reason, and somewhat to the lawyer's disappointment, she proceeded directly to business.

IX.

AFTER Isabel had withdrawn, Mrs. Wilson, in clear, businesslike tones, that were once more a surprise to the lawyer, proceeded to give a synopsis of the various documents, refreshing her memory by a glance at the outside of each packet.

"We shall have to procure in some manner the reversal of these decisions," she said. "You will know the proper steps to take; for I am quite convinced that John Vorst will not consent to a compromise, nor accept anything in the nature of a favor at my hands. You will study the case in the light of whatever new information you may find in those documents, and then make your report to me. Everything must be done with the most scrupulous legality, to protect the rightful heirs from possible litigation on the part of the Spooner or Wilson connection."

Phileas asked permission to run his eye hastily over the most important of the documents, so that he might have his client's enlightenment upon points that seemed obscure. The eye that had been merely frank and smiling became astute and thoughtful,

and the expression of the face such as to elicit from Mrs. Wilson the mental comment:

"A natural lawyer, and one who is sure to succeed."

The few and pertinent remarks that he made as he proceeded, still further provoked her admiration. She nodded each time approvingly.

"A cool head, an admirable judgment for one so young," she thought. "I shall have more respect in future for that particular color of hair."

"I think," said Phileas, when he had concluded that cursory examination of the documents, "that I should, as the first step, ask for an interview with Mr. Vorst's legal representatives."

An expression of alarm crossed the old woman's face.

"Have nothing to do with his representatives. Avoid them as you would the plague,—at least," she added, modifying the expression, "at this stage of the proceedings. They will suppose that we are merely making a new move in the game, and will endeavor to block up every avenue of information."

"How about John Vorst himself?" inquired the lawyer. "There are cases in law, as else-

where, where absolute frankness is best. Could I not see him and explain your present ideas?"

"Mr. Fox," said the old woman, "there is an old and very vulgar proverb which will best answer that question: 'Catch your hare, then cook him.'"

Phileas looked up from the papers he was studying, with a new gleam of interest and intelligence.

"Why, how is that?" he asked eagerly.

A look as of acute suffering passed over the aged countenance as Mrs. Wilson said:

"It has been impossible for several months past to discover even the slightest trace of John Vorst or his whereabouts. We have made our inquiries as judiciously as possible but nothing whatsoever has transpired."

Here was a complication with a vengeance.

"Whether he has heard in some manner of a new activity upon our part," said Mrs. Wilson, a frown of anxious thought puckering her brows, "or whatever is the reason, the defendant in that celebrated case has apparently disappeared."

Phileas Fox hesitated an instant before he asked the question which immediately occurred to his mind:

"Have you any reason to suppose that—that the defendant in this case is—dead?"

The look of pain that crossed Mrs. Wilson's face was now so distinct that it fairly startled the attorney.

"I have this much reason to think otherwise," she said, in a low voice, wherein were the traces of a deep emotion: "that no possible evidence of his death is to be found; and surely there would be no special cause for concealment if such were the case."

"No," assented Phileas, "in so far at least as we can determine. But many men make eccentric wills and leave unusual instructions to their legatees."

"I do not believe he is dead!" cried Mrs. Wilson, passionately, striking her cane vehemently upon the floor. "After all my tears and supplications these long and weary months, Heaven would not condemn me to bear that burden to my grave. And yet, Mr. Fox," she said, after a pause, with a sharp drawing in of her breath, "I deserve that,—I deserve anything that may befall. But God forbid that I should never in this life be enabled to let him know that I had repented!"

Phileas bent over the papers, appalled by the agony that he saw betrayed before him,

and feeling how altogether commonplace had been his own experience of life, its happenings, its vicissitudes; above all, how deep and terrible are those recesses of the human heart, wherein a strong nature wrestles with its despair, its anguish, and its remorse. When she spoke again it was in a composed and natural tone of voice.

"So you begin to see, Mr. Fox, the difficulties under which we labor?"

"Yes," agreed Phileas; "and to my mind it seems evident that the first step to be taken is to discover the whereabouts of John Vorst. Such discovery might preclude the necessity for any further litigation."

"I am not quite so certain of that," commented the old woman; "but, as you say, it might."

"It would, in any event, simplify everything, or at least show us where we stand. In fact, Mrs. Wilson, either his discovery or the certain proof of—"

He hesitated to mention that word which had already given his client so keen a distress; but she herself calmly finished the sentence:

"The proof of his demise. Yes, failing all else, we must obtain that for the sake of those others."

"Then," said Phileas Fox, "I shall, of course, as you suggest, examine all the papers, and acquaint myself as fully as possible with the case; but I believe that all my activities must be in the direction of what I have just stated."

"And you are hereby fully authorized to take any step, to expend any reasonable sum of money—and that part of it I leave entirely to your own honesty,—to discover John Vorst. Remember, Mr. Fox, that is one of my reasons for selecting a young lawyer who could not possibly be busy. You see, I believe that absolute frankness and the absence of all pretence between us is best. It was not my only reason for choosing you. The others were, Father Van Buren's estimate of your perfect integrity, and the intelligence, ability and legal aptitude which he believed you to possess. But the point I wish to emphasize is this. Take any necessary time, if need be take any journey, and I will make it worth your while, so that such time or such absence may be no loss to you. And you will be liberally paid, besides, for whatever service you may render. Are you willing to accept those terms?"

"I will be frank enough to say that they

are almost too munificent, and that, so far, there is nothing to prevent my giving the chief portion of my time to your affairs."

"Very well, then; so much is settled. Study the case, if you will; but, above all, seek out a clue and follow that with all diligence and discretion. I might, indeed, have put upon the track detectives who would, no doubt, have discovered the missing defendant; but such a course of action is distasteful to myself, and would be particularly so to him."

"May I ask another question?" said Phileas,—“though no doubt I shall find the answer to it in some of these documents. But, wherever possible, I prefer to be informed by word of mouth.”

“Ask any question that occurs to you,” replied his client, readily.

“Was this claim of John Vorst a result of his marriage with you,—anything in the way of a matrimonial settlement?”

A faint flush as of shame mantled the withered cheeks.

“I might rather say,” she answered, “that my marriage with John Vorst was, to some extent, the result of his claim. It dated back a generation; there had been litigation about the property in the time of John’s father;

there was much friction; there were interviews, and what not; and it all ended in a manner that could scarcely have been foreseen. Plaintiff and defendant in these earlier lawsuits were two hotheaded and romantic young people. They were temporarily settled by our marriage; at least the matter remained in abeyance; though John Vorst had some visitings of conscience, being uncertain as to whether or not he should prosecute his claim with a view to the rights of others. The lawsuits which, in fact, followed at the instance of other heirs, were the occasion of long and bitter quarrels between my husband and myself; since he had concluded that he was bound to make common cause with the claimants, and that he could in nowise countenance the retention of their property."

Phileas took a note of this new aspect of affairs, upon which, however, he made no comment.

"He finally went away, because our life together had become intolerable; and he hoped that, when the friction of daily existence was removed, I might be led to see the justice of his conduct. In my rage at the obstinacy of his resistance no less than at his departure, I consulted the attorney of whom I have

spoken. He advised me to take advantage of John Vorst's absence to procure a divorce upon the grounds of desertion. When the papers were served upon him, John Vorst wrote to me, saying that he could not be a party to such an iniquity; that, however the law might decide, we were man and wife, and as such must appear before the eternal tribunal."

Mrs. Wison gave herself an instant wherein to draw breath; and Phileas, sitting with folded arms and head slightly bent forward, waited in silence for her to resume.

"The divorce was, nevertheless, procured, and the rest you have already heard. And, O Mr. Fox, what a scourge to this land of ours are those facile lawyers and execrable divorce courts! Apart from their ethical and moral aspect, what misery and remorse do they too often engender! Think, for instance, of my own example, and the agony of heart and conscience which I have endured, simply because I found an easy means of gratifying my ungovernable temper and my passion for revenge."

"Divorce is the scandal of our country!" exclaimed Phileas. "Apart from religion, every man who has a spark of patriotism in him

should wish to see the divorce laws made as stringent as possible."

As nothing further of moment could be arranged at that interview, Phileas took his leave, being escorted to the door, with many courteous expressions, by old Cadwallader. On this occasion there were no bolts and bars to be withdrawn, for the door was open.

"Miss Isabel," explained the Negro,—“she's out thar taking the air, and the door is left ajar so that she can conveniently come in at any time. And,” he continued impressively, “while she walks about I always keep an eye upon her; for these premises, sah, they's by no means secure from trespass. This neighborhood is not what it was when this residence was built.”

“I can well believe that, Cadwallader,” said Phileas, gravely, repressing the smile that rose to his lips as he compared the old man's bent and enfeebled frame with the fine physique and quick, alert movements of the young woman of whom he had constituted himself protector. And he added, turning back from the steps: “I think you are wise.”

For something in the darkness of the place, shut in, save for the expanse of lawn, by the thickness of many trees, gave him a swift

impression of extreme isolation that was not altogether pleasant, considering the lawless elements of society, and the haunts of evil that lay in close proximity to that solitude.

As he stepped forth into the night, he hoped that he might perceive the trim and agile figure of the young girl strolling about upon the smooth grass; for the thought of a chat with her was by no means disagreeable. At first, however, he could see nothing. He went down the steps, and stood on the gravel path leading toward the gate, breathing the freshness of the air that blew up from the river, and luxuriating in the greenness and freshness around him. He stopped to light a cigarette and to look about, wondering whither Miss Ventnor could have gone. The grounds were extensive, continuing downward to the adjoining street at least, and no doubt the young girl's stroll had extended to their farthest limits. Of course he could not follow her. He had no precise reason for speaking to her at all, and she might even prefer to keep out of his way. For, as he reflected, an attorney, with the uneuphonious name of "Fox," who was merely received at the great house as Mrs. Wilson's legal adviser, could not be a very interesting personage in the eyes of

a young girl fresh from school. Nevertheless, Phileas felt a curious sense of disappointment, at which he smiled next moment, reminding himself that he had seen Miss Ventnor only once.

As he was proceeding toward the gate, he suddenly heard the sound of light, quick footsteps, literally flying over the gravel behind him. He turned, and, somewhat to his surprise, saw Isabel advancing toward him at a run. He stopped, and even in the dimness of the starlight he saw that she was pale and breathless.

"Mr. Fox," she cried, laying an agitated hand upon his arm, "I am so glad you are not gone yet! I have just got such a fright."

"What is it?" inquired the lawyer, throwing away his cigarette and turning toward her with concern. Even in that instant Isabel noticed, with a sense of security, the broad shoulders and compact, athletic build of the lawyer.

"Listen!" said Isabel, in the same low whisper, but withdrawing her hand from the young man's arm, as if she had just realized her action. "I often walk about the grounds here after dark, in spite of Cadwallader's warnings; but I have never seen anything until to-night. Just now, as I came round

that corner of the house near the library, where it is darkest, I saw a man. I think he is there still."

"Where?" cried Phileas, starting toward the spot indicated; asking over his shoulder as he went: "Did he annoy you in any way?"

"No," answered the girl, in the same hurried whisper. "He didn't see me at all. He has climbed up on one of the garden chairs, and I think he is looking in at the library window. He may have been trying to hear what was being said in there, and did not know that you had come out."

"Go into the house, I beg of you," said Phileas, hastily, "and let me deal with this fellow."

He led her toward the steps, but she would not go in. She stood nervously upon the lower step, saying:

"You had better take care; he may be armed. I think I ought to telephone for the police."

Phileas laughed as he grasped his stick and disappeared round the corner of the house. He walked as lightly as possible; for he was anxious to catch the fellow in the act, and to discover what manner of prowler it was that

had been interested in listening to a conversation. The fellow still stood as Isabel had seen him, with his back to Phileas and his ear glued to the window though it was evident that Mrs. Wilson's precaution in causing the curtains to be drawn had prevented him from discovering that the room was empty. Phileas stole up behind the figure, which was tall and slouching. Seizing him securely by the collar, he dragged him to the ground; and the miscreant, taken by surprise, made not even the faintest attempt at resistance.

"You miserable hound!" cried the lawyer, shaking his captive as if he had been a terrier. "I have a great mind to break this stick over your head. If you ever enter these grounds again, I'll give you the best thrashing you ever got, besides a trip to the Island for trespass."

He hurried his captive along, as he spoke, toward the gate at so accelerated a pace that the man began to breathe hard, struggling the while to escape from the strong grasp. When he was about to eject him forcibly onto the sidewalk, the light from a neighboring electric lamp fell upon the sinister face, and Phileas, with a start, recognized it as that of the would-

be client who had come to his office with a nefarious proposal. The face of the wretch, ghastly with fear, was turned toward him, and the baleful eyes met his own.

"On second thoughts, my man," said Phileas, sternly, "I'll put you where you'll be safe for a while, and until we can find out what brought you spying about these premises."

In his first surprise at the rascal's identity with his visitor of the office, he slightly relaxed his grasp of the fellow's collar; and the latter, taking advantage of that momentary loosening of his adversary's hold, released himself by a desperate effort, fled round the corner with astonishing agility, and down in the direction of the river. Phileas attempted no pursuit, but instead rejoined Isabel, where she stood upon the steps, still white and trembling.

"You should not have touched him," she declared; "he might have had firearms or a knife hidden about him."

"He had no chance to use it," laughed Phileas. "I caught him unawares. I'm only sorry I didn't give him a drubbing. But I don't think he will trouble you again."

"This is such a low neighborhood," Isabel

said; adding, after a pause: "I hope he will not try to get in to-night."

"Miss Ventnor," said Phileas, quickly, "you may set your mind at rest on that score. I happen to have some knowledge of that rascal in a professional way; and, whatever his purpose in coming here, robbery, or at least house-breaking, has no part in it. He is simply curious and in quest of information, though why I do not precisely understand."

This explanation did not satisfy Isabel.

"It seems to me," she said in a low voice, "that this house is full of mysteries, secrets of all sorts."

"All old houses are," replied Phileas; and his frank, genial tone was somehow reassuring. Isabel, afterward thinking the whole occurrence over, acknowledged to herself that she almost forgave the lawyer his red hair and uneuphonious name, for the tone of his voice no less than for his prompt and manly action.

"All old houses are," he repeated; "and this is a splendid old place, and worth a dozen modern dwellings."

"Yes," she assented. "And I suppose as you say, this is some tramp who wants to find out what people are doing, I must tell Cadwallader to shut the gates at night. Inside,

we have burglar alarms and the telephone, of course; though at first Mrs. Wilson objected to their being put in; and we have the number of the police station at the very top of the telephone card. In addition to all that we have a watchman, who begins his rounds when honest people are asleep. So you need not be anxious about us, Mr. Fox. As Cadwallader says, 'we have got the powerful protection of the law.'"

Isabel had apparently quite recovered from her fright, save for a slight pallor; and the humorous expression had returned to her eyes and the smile to her lips.

"I shall not tell Mrs. Wilson," she said more gravely, breaking into an irrepressible laugh as she added: "Nor Cadwallader, or he would patrol the halls all night."

But Cadwallader had already heard; and, as Isabel mounted the steps and the lawyer waited, they presently caught sight of the Negro upon his knees within the vestibule, praying "the good Lord to watch over this dwelling."

He arose slowly at his young mistress' approach, and she perceived that he was trembling violently. She set herself to reassure him, calling upon Mr. Fox for corroboration

of her statements that the prowling vagabond was in no way dangerous to life or property. The lawyer found something very attractive in the picture which she made,—her young, slender figure and conspicuously youthful face forming a charming contrast to the feeble frame and ebony face and grizzled hair of the Negro. Indeed the old man looked up to her with something that was appealing and at the same time protective.

“You’re not hurt, honey?” he asked anxiously.

“No, no!” cried Isabel; and it seemed to Phileas that it was a pretty sight to see the grave earnestness with which she strove to set at rest the old man’s fears,—both for herself and for his personal safety.

Suddenly realizing that the lawyer still waited, she called out:

“Good-night, Mr. Fox, and thank you!”

“I am very glad that I chanced to be here,” Phileas answered simply, as raising his hat, he walked down the path, pursued already by the sound of bolts and bars being instantly drawn by the alarmed Cadwallader.

As he walked to the cars, however, he was thoughtful; for, though he had minimized the matter to Isabel, he could not precisely

determine what the wretched presence portended. He was not, he felt sure, an ordinary burglar,—unless, indeed, that the diamonds, if he knew of their existence, might have tempted his cupidity. It seemed more likely that he was in quest of some information, or had dogged his own footsteps; and for the first time the villain's threat against himself recurred to his mind.

X.

NEXT morning, Phileas, who had sat up half the night looking over the papers, drew up a résumé of the case, in so far as he understood it, and began to cast about in his mind for some clue to that first and most arduous undertaking of discovering John Vorst. As he looked at the chimney tops, whence rose a haze of blue smoke, and downward into the crowded maze of streets, it seemed as if it were useless to try to find any trace of a single individual who had chosen to disappear from the public eye.

One thought that forced itself into his mind, always keenly observant, was: "Why did that wretched creature try to spy upon the mansion on Monroe Street?" His thoughts turned to a paper which lay upon his desk, the lease between the widow, described by the smart clerk as "a slippery customer," and the agent for a big estate. There had been some delay in the affixing of the signatures, and the two were to appear to-day, at eleven precisely. He looked at his watch:

it wanted but five minutes of that hour.

As he waited he was painfully pondering the difficulties which lay in the way of the settlement of that special case that was to be so lucrative and so advantageous from every point of view. There had been little progress as yet; but the young lawyer had made the success of that undertaking the subject of simple and earnest prayer, as he had done with everything, from his school examinations to his admission to the bar. While thus pondering, he heard the clock on a neighboring tower strike eleven; and almost at the very moment, as by enchantment, a knock came to the door. It was the widow, deprecating, apologetic with the harass and worry, and the other circumstances that had made her "a slippery customer," written legibly upon her face.

"Good-morning, sir!" she said.

"Good-morning!" answered the lawyer, cheerily. "I suppose you are the tenant mentioned in this lease?"

"Yes, sir, I am Susan O'Rourke."

"The conditions," said Phileas—for something in her appearance touched him,—“seem to me rather severe.”

The widow twisted her hands and eyed

him as if uncertain what to say. She did not care to admit that she had frequently found it hard to get a house on any conditions, and that she was anxious to retain the one of which she was already in possession.

"You're not the gentleman that owns it?" she inquired.

"No, not at all," replied Phileas. "I have been merely instructed to draw up the lease. My name is Fox,—Phileas Fox."

The change that passed over the woman's face was instantaneous and perceptible. The sound of that name struck with a chill upon one who had grown accustomed to catch at straws, and attach an almost superstitious importance to the veriest trifles.

"Fox! Fox!" she repeated over to herself. "And a red fox at that! O the Lord help me, for the people I'm getting in among!"

She shrank into herself, sitting helplessly on the edge of a chair, and apparently disinclined to utter another word.

"Are you prepared to accept these conditions?" Phileas asked kindly. "If you wish I'll read them over to you."

"Oh, what's the use?" broke forth the widow, fearing some snare on the part of this legal personage, whom she now regarded as a

new adversary. "I'll have to accept them, whatever they are."

"But," said Phileas, "you should be aware of what obligations you are contracting." He spoke with a touch of severity, for it occurred to him that since she accepted conditions so recklessly she had no mind to keep them.

"It's this way, Mr. Fox," she said, pronouncing the obnoxious name with reluctance. "I want to keep the house I'm in. It suits me, and I'm used to it, and houses are always hard to get. The agent has made up his mind to raise the rent and to add new conditions, and I'll have to abide by them whatever they are, and do the best I can. It would ruin me entirely to leave the place."

"Well," said Phileas, "I have warned you, and I think you ought to hear these provisions read aloud before the agent comes, and to make up your mind if some less expensive house might not suit you better."

"Oh, that's it, is it, Mr. Fox?" said the woman, suddenly becoming aggressive, and pronouncing the name in a tone of such contempt as plainly conveyed her meaning to the lawyer.

Petty as was the offence, the young man reddened with vexation.

"You've got another tenant in your eye; and just because I'm a poor widow, you're trying to get out of the bargain. Oh, I knew what would happen the minute ever I heard your name!"

Despite the abusive tone, and the injustice of the charge, Phileas was moved to pity at sight of the thin, worn face.

"You are altogether mistaken," he said. "I have nothing at all to do with the matter, except that I was instructed to draw up this lease and procure the signatures."

The poor woman breathed more freely, resuming the seat which she had vacated; though still eyeing the young man with a suspicion that was at once exasperating and amusing.

"I ask your pardon, sir!" she said. "But I'm that put about, with the fear of losing the house and all my lodgers with it, that I scarce know what I'm saying."

"Oh, I think you can keep the house all right!" said Phileas. "But, if you have the means of paying for it, you ought to get it on easier terms."

The wistful intentness of the widow's gaze, the pitiful contraction of the mouth, touched him to the quick.

"I'll see what I can do for you," he said impetuously.

"And you won't be charging me too much?" the woman asked anxiously.

Before Phileas could reply the door was thrown open with the barest suspicion of a knock, and a burly, red-faced personage advanced into the room, with a scarcely perceptible nod to the woman, and paused beside Phileas at the desk.

"I have been referred to you by Place & Atwater," he said briefly, as if he were unwilling to waste a syllable. "Have you got the lease ready to close this affair?"

"Take a seat, if you please, Mr. Grant," answered Phileas, disregarding the other's peremptory manner. "There is a word or two that should be said, on behalf of my client here."

"Your client! What the—" began the agent roughly; and the widow cast a startled glance at the lawyer. When she had chanced to be called by that title heretofore, she had paid dearly for the privilege.

"I should recommend a little more patience and civility, Mr. Grant," said Phileas, opening the lease. "They are never wasted."

He cast his eye over the various provisions

of the lease, making a red mark here and there with a pencil.

"Before I can advise my client to sign, Mr. Grant," he said, "I must object to these provisions."

Mr. Grant, who was too shrewd a man of business to waste time in argument took the document thus amended.

"What do you propose?" he asked.

Phileas, in a few, clear and forcible words, the form of which met with the other's approval, gave what he believed to be a fairer presentment of the widow's case.

"Before we go any further, Mr. Fox," the agent objected, with a spiteful glance at the woman, "you must know that this tenant is a notorious side-stepper when it comes to paying rent. She has been ejected more than once from houses, and is registered on several offices as bad pay. I myself have had trouble enough with her."

"Still," said Phileas, his sensitive face flushing at hearing the widow thus characterized in her presence, "if you accept her at all, it must be on fair conditions. Why do you try to make payment more difficult for her? If she fails to pay, of course that will

be another matter; and, besides, you are free to reject her altogether."

"Oh, don't do that, Mr. Grant!" cried the widow. "Never heed him. I'm ready to take the house on any conditions."

The agent glanced from the woman to the young lawyer at the desk. There was something in this affair that he did not understand and he wondered why Place & Atwater had chanced to transfer this particular case to a stranger. Nevertheless, he saw that Phileas had certain qualities which he did not care to antagonize, and he had no mind to deserve the reputation of being unduly hard. Moreover, it suited him to have a tenant for a house that would require much repair to render it desirable.

"Make it out as you will," he said; "and be quick about it. I have an appointment in twenty minutes."

Phileas set to work. Mr. Grant produced from his pocket a newspaper, to the perusal of which he devoted himself; and there was no sound in the office save the scratching of the lawyer's pen. When Phileas had made the necessary corrections, the smart clerk from Place & Atwater's was called to act as witness, and the two principals affixed their

respective signatures. This done, the clerk disappeared with surprising agility, followed by the agent, with a barely civil nod to Phileas, and an admonition to the tenant to look out for herself and come up to time with her rent. The widow stood twisting her hands and gazing doubtfully at the lawyer.

"Well," said the latter, cheerfully, "the conditions of payment are somewhat easier, and the agent has promised to pay for some of the repairs that may be required. I hope you will be able to meet your obligations."

"I'll do my best," promised the widow.

"And now, sir, what have I to pay you?"

"Pay me!" said Phileas. "For what?"

"For those things you did,—the writing and all to that."

"For the writing, nothing," answered Phileas. "There is of course a fee payable by the tenant for making out the lease."

"I know that, sir," said the woman. "I have it here."

For, in fact, she was too fatally familiar with those minor forms of law, which her various experiences of house-renting had necessitated. She drew from her pocket a worn and shabby purse, and from its scanty contents took a bill.

"Never mind that!" said the lawyer. "Keep that for part of your next rent."

It was a quixotic action upon the part of a young man, who was rather hard pressed to make all ends meet. To his astonishment and somewhat to his dismay, the widow burst out crying,—not a demonstrative sobbing, but a quiet flow of tears, which she wiped away with a handkerchief of doubtful propriety.

"I'm twenty years at the business," she said, as soon as she had controlled her emotions, "and I never met with the like before. May God reward you, sir, for all you've done this day!"

"It's nothing,—not worth mentioning," Phileas protested.

"Nothing," repeated the woman, "to make that skinflint loosen his claws, and to charge me nothing for that lease and the work you've done! Oh, it's too much,—it's too much!"

"Well, perhaps you'll do *me* a good turn sometime, if you have the chance," responded Phileas. "And let me advise you again to be as punctual as you can with your payments. That agent is a hard man."

"He is that," assented the widow; "and I've met with many of them in my time. Oh, if you knew, sir, what it means to keep

lodgers in New York city, with the sharks that are going about and the dead beats and frauds of every kind!"

"I suppose," remarked Phileas, with a sudden impulse of curiosity which he could scarcely have explained, "that you happen upon a good lodger occasionally?"

"If I didn't, sir, what would become of myself and my children?" the widow answered with emphasis. "There was one gentleman I had that was the best of all."

"Old or young?" asked Phileas, idly.

"Old enough," responded the woman, whose face, now relieved momentarily from the acute symptoms of worry, suggested a bygone comeliness, and whose tongue was loosened almost to garrulity by her joy in the solution of her difficulties. "About sixty I'd judge him to be."

"Was he in comfortable circumstances?" the lawyer inquired again.

"He was that, sir, and open and free-hearted; and, not like most of them, he was a real, tony gentleman."

A sudden gleam of genuine interest shot into Phileas' eyes.

"Had he any relatives?" he said eagerly.

"None that ever came next or near him,"

answered Susan O'Rourke, decidedly; and, being now launched on what was evidently a favorite topic, and gratified by the lawyer's interest, she went on: "And I may say to you, Mr. Fox, what I wouldn't say to another." (She looked all around her and dropped her voice to a whisper.) "Sometimes it did appear to me that the poor gentleman might be in hiding."

"In hiding?" echoed Phileas, trying to conceal how profoundly he was moved by a statement which seemed to fit in with a possibility that had occurred to his mind. "But why should a gentleman such as you describe be in hiding?"

"Not from any fault of his own," said the woman,—"I'd stake my life for that. But maybe it was from some one he was afraid of or that had wronged him."

"Do you remember his name?" asked Phileas, breathlessly.

In a moment the widow's former suspicions had returned to her mind, and she answered dryly:

"He never told me his name, Mr. Fox, and I never asked him."

She watched the lawyer furtively as she spoke; for it is one of the penalties of living

in a mean and sordid atmosphere that the suspicions are ever active and the whole being permeated with the poison of distrust.

Phileas insisted no further. Bidding the woman a cheerful "Good-morning!" he dismissed her. He, however, took a careful note of all that she had said concerning her mysterious lodger, and resolved to prosecute his inquiries in that direction at a more fitting opportunity. It was not for some time later, though, that he heard anything more of Susan O'Rourke. He was afraid to approach her in the matter too soon and too directly; for he had gauged her turn of mind, and felt convinced that her suspicions had been awakened by his too lively interest in her narrative, and especially by his question as to the name.

The hard and aggressive landlord unwittingly did him a favor. Calling at the house to collect the first month's rent, he delivered a tirade against the young attorney who had thrust his nose into other people's affairs, and who had made things so easy for the tenant and cheapened the property. When the woman had informed the agent with futile garrulity of the lawyer's generosity, the agent had launched forth against soft-

heads in general, and that one in particular. This abuse, coupled with Mr. Fox's genuine kindness, had somehow served to dispel her suspicions and to transform her into a partisan.

She transported herself once more to the tall building in Pine Street, passing with the continuous stream of people through the wide entrance, with its floor of tessellated marble, and up in one of the numerous elevators—wherein she was the only female passenger—to the fourteenth story. There she alighted; confused by the similarity of the offices, she took a wrong turn and stood looking helplessly around. Finally she made up her mind to inquire for the whereabouts of Phileas Fox at one of the doors, inside of which the men were all busy, looking out at her from high-railed desks, or up from low ones. She addressed her inquiry to an elderly clerk with a bald crown, who came forth from a half-glass door and escorted her to her destination. As they went, he observed by way of conversation:

“They say he's a right smart young feller, that Fox.”

Mrs. O'Rourke threw up her hands.

“The smartest ever you met!”

"A regular fox, eh?" said the bald man, chuckling at his own joke. "Why, his name is a first-class advertisement for him, as most folks want a foxy lawyer."

"Indeed, then, he belies his name," replied the widow, with warmth. "He's the best-hearted young man that has crossed my path in many a day."

"Is that so?" commented the bald man, turning a scrutinizing glance upon his informant, as if to judge of her ability to form an opinion. "I may give him a call one of these days myself. I'm in search of an honest lawyer."

The pair had by this time reached their destination; and the bald man, with a wave of the hand to deprecate thanks, and with the ejaculation, "There you are!" departed upon his way.

Mrs. O'Rourke had to wait for some moments in a tiny anteroom beyond the curtain, as Mr. Fox was engaged with one of the clients who had begun to arrive in respectable numbers within the last week. She was presently admitted, however, and provided with a chair beside the lawyer's desk. Phileas was, in truth, both surprised and pleased to see her, having pondered for

several days on the advisability of paying her a visit. Greeting her cordially, with a jesting allusion to her landlord, he strove to put her at ease. She sat still, however, for some moments, with a painful twisting of her fingers that denoted agitation. Finally she said:

"Mr. Fox, sir, I'm afraid I was sharp with you the other day. A lone woman who has her way to make gets to be suspicious."

"Oh, said Phileas," it was perfectly natural! You were quite right to keep your lodger's secret, if he had one."

"It was all an idea of my own," said the widow, "that he wanted things kept secret. He never said so much to my face. But I was wondering, after I left you, if you had any reason for putting the questions you did."

Phileas hesitated, and the bright blue eyes gave forth their steel-like glint as he in turn questioned the speaker's face. It was shrewd of her to have surmised that he had some special motive in making inquiries; and he wondered if it were, indeed, gratitude or a desire to apologize that had brought her hither. All at once he came to a decision, and it was one in harmony with his natural disposition. It was in favor of dealing frankly

with his visitor; for it must be owned that the investigations he had been conducting in various directions had utterly failed to "locate" the missing defendant in that once celebrated case. If the surmise which had flashed into his mind with the force of an intuition should be correct, then this woman would be in a position to give him valuable information, or at least to furnish him with a clue that might be followed.

Phileas therefore answered truthfully that he had desired to learn the name of her mysterious lodger, because it had occurred to him that that personage might be identical with one of whom he was in search.

The woman hesitated, peering with her wistful, faded eyes into the lawyer's face; then she said slowly:

"If I thought it would do him harm what I'm going to tell you now, I'd be torn into bits before I'd breathe a syllable."

"If he be the gentleman I'm seeking," replied Phileas eagerly, "he will greatly benefit by my discovery of his whereabouts. In fact, there is question of an act of justice to be done by a certain client of mine,—only I must ask you not to mention this to any one."

He made the latter suggestion merely as

a precautionary measure, scarcely hoping that Susan would restrain her tongue under provocation to the contrary. But, after all, as he argued, very little harm could result if she did repeat this conversation to the wrong person; whereas there was a possibility of material gain by inducing her to tell what she knew.

Instead of going on with her story, she surprised the young lawyer by posing him a question in her turn, and one which might have seemed irrelevant to the subject.

"Tell me," said she, gazing earnestly into his face, "are you a Catholic, Mr. Fox,—one, I mean, that goes to his duty regularly?"

Phileas laughed.

"That is a very personal question, Mrs. O'Rourke," he responded. "But I don't mind telling you that I am a Catholic, and that I *do* go to confession."

"Sure I thought so!" the woman cried exultingly. "I knew it from the first." And, having thus indulged in this slight deviation from accuracy, she declared: "Well, then, I'll tell you what I never thought to tell any one. It's something I found out."

She drew her chair closer; turning again, before she began her story, to scrutinize the

room, as if she feared a listener. Susan, once launched upon her narrative, told all that she knew or surmised concerning her mysterious lodger. He had left her within the last half year, because, as she had gathered from a chance remark, he had been tracked to her house by some one whose observation he had wished to avoid. It was her opinion that the person in question was rich, or that at least he might have been so but for the machinations of evil-disposed relatives. Her prolix recital included the encomiums bestowed upon her dwelling and her system of keeping lodgers, coupled with vague theories as to the unknown one's condition, prospects, and supposed enemies. While Phileas listened, it had frequently occurred to him that the whole might be a very ordinary and sordid affair,—a good paying lodger transformed by Susan's lively imagination into a "real tony gentleman"; and that the man's reasons for secrecy might be of the most prosaic, if not disreputable, nature.

Nevertheless, in some secret corner of his mind he cherished the hope, extravagant as it might appear, that the former tenant of Mrs. O'Rourke's best room might turn out

to be the very individual of whom he was in search. At all events, it was with a stirring of the pulses that he received from Susan's hand a torn and ragged scrap of paper, which had been rescued from the sweepings of the room after the lodger's departure. Susan believed the address thereon inscribed to be the gentleman's actual place of abode. She protested again and again that she would not have given this information to any one in the world but Phileas, and hoped that he would not think she intended to betray a trust. Phileas, on his part pledged his solemn word of honor that nothing but good should accrue to her late boarder, should he prove to be the personage whom he sought; and that in any case the knowledge so obtained would not be used to his disadvantage. The lawyer thanked her warmly for the service she had rendered, and promised to pay her a visit and acquaint her with the result of her disclosure.

XI.

AFTER Susan O'Rourke had left him, Phileas was so elated that he closed his office half an hour earlier than usual, and allowed himself a brief holiday. If it had not been too late in the afternoon, he would have started at once to follow up that clue which was now the most absorbing subject of his thoughts. As it was, he strolled down toward the Battery, resolved to enjoy a trip to Staten Island. He sauntered through the Bowling Green, once a fashionable residential quarter, upon which the old Fort of Manhattan had looked out, and through which a stream of historical personages had passed in the long ago. It was now a spot frequented by emigrants, where many a forlorn waif, cast adrift upon these alien shores, tasted for the first time the bitterness of exile.

The bay, a splendid sheet of water, lay clear in the descending sunlight. Pale gold, wavering and tremulous, that sunset deepened, as he watched, into warm rose. It touched the distant statue of Liberty, ironic gift of a nation whence true liberty has been tem-

porarily banished. It hovered over the unsightly pile of buildings on Governor's Island and the green-wooded point of Brooklyn.

The sea-breeze came up and fanned his cheeks. It was an invitation and a summons,—the summons of the sea that had always appealed to him. He remembered, as he hastened down the plank walk into the ferry-house, with the noise of the elevated railroad overhead, and of the surface cars all about him, how he used to play here occasionally as a boy, and how he had wished to be a sailor, and had been turned from that vocation to this other by the influence of relatives. Ah, well, he reflected, it was no doubt for the best. But the phantom of that old longing haunted him irresistibly at times.

He stepped on board the boat, which was not yet too crowded for comfort, as it would be at a later hour; and, swinging himself up the brass-bound stairs, he passed to the forward deck. He stopped in the shade of the cabin door to light a cigarette, for the wind was blowing sharply outside; and, with a hand to his straw hat to insure its safety, he made his way to a vacant seat near the rail.

As he drew near that point of vantage, he perceived the figure of a girl which seemed

to him, somehow, familiar. She wore a close-fitting suit of gray, whose admirable tailoring displayed to advantage the grace and symmetry of her figure, and that indefinable quality of smartness which the plainest costume frequently accentuates. A sailor hat was kept in place by a veil of gauzy texture, matching the costume in tint. The girl was leaning lightly upon the rail looking seaward, and there was in her attitude a suggestion of youth and buoyancy as well as of keen enjoyment. One light spray of hair had become detached from the austere restraint of the veil, and nestled curling upon her neck; a clear pink was in the cheeks. A particularly severe blast from the water caused her to turn aside.

Phileas met the laughing eyes, brightened with enjoyment, of Isabel Ventnor. He caught the look of instant recognition, and the smile that rose to her lips as he hastened to her side with an exclamation of pleasure. He had been seeing the young girl rather frequently of late in his visits to Mrs. Wilson, and there had sprung up between the two a friendliness touched with warmer interest, from the peculiar circumstances of their acquaintance. Phileas felt now as if he had

encountered an old friend in a foreign land.

"This is good fortune!" he cried boyishly; for the community of interests—or at least Isabel's connection with the one topic which the lawyer found at the time engrossing—gave her a charm in his eyes quite apart from that which lay in her mobile face and frank, sympathetic manner.

"Yes," she assented to his last remark, "it is pleasant to see a familiar face in all these crowds. And isn't it delightful here? I just love the salt water."

"So do I," agreed Phileas, heartily. "I was recalling a moment ago that I narrowly missed becoming a sailor."

"And you are a lawyer instead," the girl commented, with something that sounded like sympathy in her tone.

"Yes, I am a lawyer, as you have discovered. But do let me get you a chair."

Having procured two instead of one, Phileas took his place beside her, resuming the conversation at the point where it had been broken off.

"Your tone," he said laughing, "does not somehow convey a high idea of the legal profession."

"Oh, it's a good enough profession, and,

as we were saying before, interesting in some respects!" said Isabel. "But it doesn't seem to suit you."

"What a set down for me," cried Phileas,—
"for me who have just become the family solicitor!"

"I hadn't the choosing, you know," retorted Isabel; "for if I had, I should certainly have chosen the conventional gray hairs."

"Are you so very conventional?"

"I scarcely know, but I think so."

"Well, in any case," continued Phileas, reflectively, "Mrs. Wilson chose me for a precisely opposite reason: because I had *not* gray hairs."

"There is no accounting for tastes!" exclaimed the girl. "If I had legal business to transact, my preference would be all for age and experience."

"I am sorry that I can not leap the years," responded Phileas, cheerfully.

After that they were silent a few moments, looking out over the bay and enjoying the salt breath that blew up from old Neptune. The boat, with a whistle discordant enough to scare the sea-birds that were flying here and there in the clear air, and with a mighty jostling and straining, broke loose from its

moorings, and forged onward into the stream, churning the water into white foam.

"As you are in the family secrets far more than I," said Isabel, once the commotion had subsided and the vessel was proceeding tranquilly upon its way, "I may say that I have often wondered what they are all about."

"And *that* Mrs. Wilson will never tell you," laughed Phileas, "until you are an old gray-haired matron. Very likely she agrees with you that, in some instances, gray hairs are a pledge of discretion."

"Don't be afraid," Isabel said. "I am not going to ask any awkward questions. I am far too well trained for that. I should never think of asking Mrs. Wilson anything that she did not volunteer to tell me, nor poor old Cadwallader neither. The parrot would willingly tell me if he could, but—"

"So would some of the rest of us if we could," echoed Phileas; "but in some way or other there are limitations."

"The way in which the parrot harps upon that one name," said Isabel, puckering her brows at the reminiscence, "is the most maddening thing. But, in fact, the house itself is fairly haunted by John Vorst. I

wonder if he is dead? Surely his ghost must walk there by night."

She gave a slight shiver as she spoke, which might have been caused by the keen salt air, or the superstitious fancies that she had conjured up.

"You see," she went on, "besides the servants, who are away in another wing, there are only Mrs. Wilson, myself, and Cadwallader in the main part of the house,—except, of course, the parrot, who sometimes wakes me in the dead of night with that weird cry of 'John Vorst.' Wouldn't you hate it, Mr. Fox?"

The girl had an appealing little way of taking the young man into her confidence, which quite enchanted him.

"Yes," he answered, "I think I should; though, after all, what's in a name?"

"There is a great deal in *that* name," persisted Isabel, half jest, whole earnest; "and I feel sure that John Vorst, whoever he is, has a good deal to do with the house and all of us."

Phileas met the laughing eyes unwinkingly. He could not betray by the smallest sign the truth or falsity of her surmise. Under the laughter of the eyes, he saw a shadow that

somehow touched him. It spoke of a lonely girlhood shut up in that ancient mansion with old people and their memories. It was wistful, dreamy, pathetic, all in one.

"Oh, I dare say John Vorst is a harmless enough individual," he remarked lightly, "and his name chanced to catch the parrot's fancy!"

"But the bird looks so malignant when he says these two words, hopping from one foot to the other, as if he had a horrible recollection of the man."

"You are getting morbid!" cried the lawyer, cheerfully.

"And, then, that name is on all the documents," Isabel added, as if she felt that to be a horrible confirmation of her fears.

Phileas leaned over the side of the vessel, as if intent on something in the water.

"Oh, you need not have any fear!" cried Isabel. "I am not trying to find out anything. I am only following out my own train of thought."

"Better try to take a more cheerful view of things in general, including the parrot," laughed Phileas.

Isabel stopped him with a little frown of vexation.

"You are so cut-and-dried!" she said. "If you had been a sailor instead of a lawyer, we could have spent this lovely hour trying to puzzle out between us this mystery of John Vorst."

Phileas laughed long and loud at this suggestion.

"If I had been a sailor," he replied, "I should not have been able to exchange a word with you for fear of sending my good ship onto rocks or shoals."

"That is a word from the wise!" the girl retorted.

"I fear I am very far from wise," said Phileas, and there was something of significance in his tone. "There are cases where I might be extremely foolish. But I think just now we had better leave carking care behind us and talk about—"

"I am only waiting for Mr. Wiseacre's suggestion."

"Oh, about anything at all!"

"Which means nothing at all."

"What do you like best to talk about?" inquired Phileas; and that question led the pair into that personal vein of likes and dislikes, and the probabilities concerning one and the other, which forms the staple con-

versation of most young people. In this way they made quite a substantial advance in the knowledge of each other, and found the topic so interesting that they were disagreeably surprised when the Island was reached.

"Are you getting off?" Phileas asked, fearing that her reply might be in the affirmative, as indeed it was.

"Alas, yes!" answered Isabel. "I have a message from Mrs. Wilson to a friend of hers who lives down here. Are you staying on the boat?"

"I had meant to. But—will you be very long in delivering your message?"

"I shall not be going back," said the girl.

"I am invited for an old-fashioned high tea, and to spend the night."

"Then I shall have a solitary sail back," Phileas said regretfully. "But perhaps you will let me walk with you to your destination first?"

"If you are not afraid of losing the boat," Isabel assented.

"I shall take all chances," the lawyer replied heartily.

Isabel made no objection; for, though the attorney was a comparatively recent acquaintance, he stood in the position of family

lawyer, honored by Mrs. Wilson's confidence, introduced by Father Van Buren; and, moreover, circumstances had tended to make her better acquainted with him than if they had both pursued for years the beaten path of ordinary intercourse.

So the two walked together through that garden-like country, past handsome villas with green hedges and verdant, velvety lawns; in the light of the setting sun, in the fresh, cool air, remote from the metropolitan dust and noise and heat. Though they exchanged but few words, and only occasionally a smile or a glance of pure enjoyment, the sail down the bay, and the walk together through that sunlit land, with the water stretched out before them in its glittering beauty, established a perfect friendliness between the two, with the hint of a warmer sentiment that arose from the fresh and unspoiled nature of each. The afternoon remained in their recollection for long after, as a thing apart.

Phileas, hearing the first whistle of the boat just as Isabel's stopping-place was reached, took a hasty leave of his companion, saying:

"This trip altogether was more than I could have hoped for. It has repaid me for the grind of the week."

"And I think it has laid the ghost of John Vorst," said Isabel. "The air here, and everything, in fact, is so delicious!"

"Good-bye!" he cried, lingering despite the imperative call of the ferryboat.

"Good-bye, Mr. Fox!" answered the girl, quite overlooking his name's lack of euphony, and the red hair that all too vividly gleamed in the sunlight. For, after all, what do such things matter when two are young, and nature is beautiful, and minds are in sympathy?

Reluctantly Phileas turned away, taking a quick run from the slope of the road to the boat landing, and catching the ferry by a hair's breadth. The solitary sail cityward was filled with the thoughts of his late companion. Once more he smiled reminiscently at her witticisms, and was conscious of an acute sympathy for her loneliness.

XII.

THE next afternoon a notice appeared above that newly varnished sign on the office door, to the effect that Mr. Fox had left town on professional business. The lawyer was thus forced to interrupt, for those few hours at least, that stream of petty affairs which had begun to flow into his office; but he consoled himself with the reflection that Saturday afternoon, especially in summer, was usually a slack time, and that the notice above mentioned would really serve as an advertisement.

Solacing himself with these reflections, Phileas took a train, which bore him to a solitary way station far up in Westchester County. He left the city, with its noise and dust, behind him; and journeyed on, past the Harlem River, with its great bridge swinging lazily open to permit the passage of a boat, and its shores dotted with small houses or occasionally with the tall chimney-stacks of a factory.

The motion of the train was restful after the fret and fever of the scenes whence he

had escaped; and he was almost sorry when that short journey was over, and he had to alight at a station without the smallest claim to architectural or any other beauty. Rude wooden benches, within and without, constituted the only furniture, save for an equally primitive desk occupying a corner. There was likewise a station master, who seemed principally busy in coming in at one door and going out at the other. Phileas contrived to engage this man in conversation, discovered from him a small inn where he might put up for a day or two, and made, moreover, a few cautious inquiries as to the house he had come to see.

"There ain't none such as you describe, that's occupied," declared the agent, who was taciturn; nor could he be moved from this declaration.

Phileas, therefore, taking his suit case, accepted the services of a single vehicle, which stood forlornly waiting the chance of wayfarers. And in this he was rattled and jolted speedily to the small country hotel which must be his temporary abode. Here he made inquiries which were still more cautious, as he feared the place might be the headquarters and centre of gossip; but

could learn nothing in particular. After his repast, which consisted of bacon, eggs, radishes, and fried eggplant, he set forth on a preliminary voyage of discovery. He walked up a broad but lonely highway, showing on either side ravines, tree-clothed and verdant. The faint, aromatic smell of the woods came borne on the night breeze that waxed the tops of the trees. A bird or two still sounded a note, breaking the silence harmoniously; a star glittered in the west—the star “beloved of lovers,”—and presently a myriad more came shimmering into view in the bright disc of the firmament.

Phileas lit a cigar, so often the solace of darkness and loneliness; and, after a brisk walk of some moments, discovered a house which must necessarily be that of which he was in search, since no other of its kind was anywhere in evidence. He paused before the low wooden gate, concealing himself, lest any eyes were observing him, in the shadow of a tree which bent downward almost to the ground. But the windows were, one and all, blank pages,—almost invisible in the complete obscurity which enwrapped the place. Not a twinkle of light, not a sound nor movement of any sort to indicate human presence. He

tried the gate: it yielded, but with a certain stiffness, as though its joints were unused to exercise; and, passing in, he stood gazing up at the house. As well as he could determine through the gloom, it was long and low, with no particular pretensions of any sort. Its wide veranda was elevated very little above the grass-grown lawn, which at the rear stretched downward, as he presently discovered, through a series of natural terraces to the banks of Long Island Sound.

It was a weird, ghostly place; and, though Phileas was as untroubled by fear as any young man of powerful frame and athletic training could very well be, he was acutely conscious of the eeriness of the atmosphere. He walked slowly around the veranda, striving to peer in through each long French window that reached to the very floor. All was impenetrable blackness. With a sigh, he gave up the attempt to make any further discovery that night, and strode home to the hotel, marvelling whether the mysterious lodger, John Vorst, if it should chance to be he, or any other person, could be at such pains to conceal the remotest trace of his presence.

Next day being Sunday, Phileas left word

that he should be called early in the morning, for eight o'clock Mass at the Catholic church, which, as he was informed, was distant half a mile or more from his hostelry. After Mass, he called at the modest rectory; but the pastor was absent, his place being taken by a stranger. The latter received Phileas cordially, but he could give him little or no information as to the district or its inhabitants. The young man turned away in disappointment. That was another hope dashed to the ground. Carefully as he had scanned the faces of the congregation: there was not one who, by any possibility, could have answered to the description of the missing defendant.

He inquired if there was to be another Mass, and was told that there was not, as the officiating priest had to sing High Mass farther up the line. Phileas was for a moment oppressed by a discouraging sense of failure. From Mrs. Wilson's account of the man who had been her husband, it was evident that he was a practical and even devout Catholic; so it was certain that if he were in the vicinity he would not be absent from Mass on Sunday,—unless, indeed (and Phileas brightened at the suggestion), that he might be ill or incapacitated from attending church

at so considerable a distance from his house.

Fortified by this hope, Phileas enjoyed a plain but excellent breakfast, to which the morning air lent a particular relish; after which he sallied forth once more in the direction of the apparently deserted dwelling. As he really saw it first that Sunday morning, with the charm of the Sabbath sunshine over all, he literally fell in love with the place, and applauded John Vorst, or whoever might be its tenant, for his superlative taste in the choice of a residence. Old rather than new, shabby rather than elegant, it nestled like a bower in those exquisite surroundings,—a lawn that was far from well kept, a flower-garden that had run riot, below which, down through refreshing masses of greenness, lay the Sound, blue and clear as the sky overhead, flowing placidly upon its way, with delightful ripples and gurgles. It was a paradisaical spot, with ambrosial airs, and the checkerwork of light, radiant, multiform, through “the incommunicable trees,” and the murmurings as of peace and content amongst their branches; a spot that should be essentially for love and happiness; a place, thought Phileas, paraphrasing the poet, which should be possessed only by the “loving and the loved.”

The young man made a leisurely but very thorough tour of inspection about the house. He looked in through the slatted blinds of the long French windows, and beheld low-ceilinged but cheerful and spaeious apartments, papered in quaint, flowered patterns, and with furniture grimly immovable against the walls. He tried the doors; he strove to undo the blinds; and at last he rang the bell, which reverberated with the hollow mockery of a sound through the vacant rooms and up the stairs (though it was evident that no feet ascended or descended them), and along halls inhabited only by the memory of the departed tenants. The summons, though several times repeated, seemed as futile as the agonized appeals made by sorrowing survivors, to those who have passed beyond the soundless bourne. If John Vorst or any other human being were there, he was in hiding with a vengeance.

So Philcas reflected, though he felt morally certain that there was no one within those four walls. Solitude had set its unmistakable seal upon that domicile. For a human presence always makes itself felt, even if it be in some intangible fashion; and the impalpable loneliness of its absence is curiously perceptible even to the least impressionable.

Therefore, a deserted dwelling in a rural district becomes almost invariably a haunted dwelling.

Phileas threw himself upon a bench on the back veranda, and gave himself up to a delicious laziness, through which floated a variety of thoughts. And those thoughts included, amongst many others, a pleasant memory of that girl who had so far lightened by her cheerful personality the somewhat dreary windings of the case of *Spoooner vs. Vorst*. He felt a sudden, keen longing for her society. How delightful it would be if she were to appear! And how she would enjoy the mystery and the loneliness of this place, with the loveliness of its situation! The young man realized with a new thrill of interest that in that eager, animated nature he could find a fresh stimulus, and how powerful might be its help in unravelling the windings of that mystery through which he had to find his way alone. Feminine intuition has solved many a difficulty, gained the key to many an enigma. If only he could have taken Isabel into his confidence! He smiled at the notion; and smiled, too, over his cigar, at various little witticisms or quaint observations of hers that had stuck in his memory.

She was so charming, he thought,—so perfectly companionable! There was her special attraction.

Thus smoking, and thus pondering pleasantly and idly, Phileas now and again saw pass a boat heavily laden with passengers going up the Sound. Its splashing and its sputtering alone broke the silence. At intervals catboats scudded along with gleaming sails of white spread to catch the breeze blowing briskly from the west. Smaller craft, with energetic rowers, flew over the surface of the stream; and cheerful voices floated up to the idler on the bench, breaking in upon his reverie. It was very shortly after the passage of the largest boat of all, bearing passengers to New London, Norwich or other Connecticut ports, that, as if evoked by its whistle and its huge bulk outlined against the sky, a figure suddenly became discernible behind a clump of trees; and Phileas presently heard a heavy step crunching the dry leaves, relics of a past autumn, that had been suffered to accumulate.

XIII.

PHILEAS started from the easy, reclining posture, his eyes keen and watchful in an instant. The figure, passing slowly behind the group of trees, paused from time to time; and it seemed evident that on each of those occasions it was engaged in reconnoitring, spying upon his own movements. As well as he could see, it was that of an oldish man, stout and somewhat heavily built. Could it be John Vorst? Or, failing that, the widow's mysterious lodger? Phileas felt a sense of irritation that he could not see the man's face, though he was aware that the eyes were scrutinizing his own countenance.

After a few minutes' silence, and just as Phileas was making up his mind to invade the ambush, the intruder suddenly stepped forth and advanced, with the same slow and heavy step, toward the veranda. In the first acuteness of his disappointment, Phileas did not catch the ludicrous aspect of the situation. It was only after a pause of several seconds that the young man burst into a laugh at the

association of ideas that rushed into his mind. That heavy, lumbering figure, dressed in the Sunday best of a mechanic, mistaken for the beau who had been reckoned first amongst his peers in the elegant society of two generations before, and the husband of the haughty and imperious mistress of the Monroe Street mansion!

The man, astonished by the laugh, paused in front of the veranda, and eyed Phileas from a pair of watery eyes set in a heavy and somewhat surly countenance.

"Wot you want here?" said a gruff voice.

"What do I want?" echoed the lawyer.

"Why, I might ask the same question of you."

"I don't want nodding," growled the man.

"Then you and I will agree perfectly," said Phileas placidly, resuming his cigar.

"I got to see no loafer comes here."

"I don't envy you your onerous charge," returned Phileas.

"But I don't let you come here no more, neder," said the German, beginning to show signs of irritation.

Phileas regarded him tranquilly.

"Don't you think you are a little late?" he inquired. "I have been here for an hour or more already."

"Den you go away!" cried the man, wrathfully.

"Yes, by the evening train," agreed the lawyer.

"You go dis minute!"

Phileas shook his head

"You stay not by here" roared the other, waxing the more irate as Phileas stretched himself again upon the bench and sent rings of smoke into the blue air. "You go out by dat gate."

"Yes; that's how I came in," assented Phileas. "It's the most convenient way. I shall presently act upon your suggestion."

"No public place is it," continued the German, his eyes fixed furiously upon the imperturbable lawyer.

"No, indeed! It's the most charming solitude I have seen in a long time. I have enjoyed my stay here immensely."

"You shall not," retorted the other.

"Ah, my friend," sighed the young man, "you can not deprive me of what I already have enjoyed, malevolent genius as you seem to be."

"You call me names, hey!" screamed the Teuton, who was rapidly losing his temper. "I show you if come here you can and call

me names in dis place where I have the care."

"Oh, you are the caretaker!" exclaimed Phileas, a light breaking in on his mind. He took off his hat and made the old man a whimsical bow. "I beg a thousand pardons! Do you live in this house?"

"Wot's dat to you?" the German said testily, though he had seemed somewhat appeased by the change in the young man's manner.

"I come here," explained Phileas, "to see, if possible, the owner of this place."

"You can not him see."

"Why not?"

The man waved his arms.

"He is not here. He is gone far."

"Where has he gone?"

The Teuton pondered the question in his slow and heavy mind, evidently deciding against giving an answer; and Phileas, eager, alert, and burning with curiosity, asked another:

"Do you live on the premises?"

"I live over dere, in dat white house," and he pointed to a low structure, which Phileas had not until that moment observed, since it was almost entirely hidden by trees.

"Well, can you tell me anything about the gentleman who lived here recently?"

"De gentlemans is gone. He is not here now," repeated the old man.

"Has he been gone long?"

"*Nein, nein!*"

"What was he like?"

"Like?" echoed the caretaker, misunderstanding the import of the question. "He's gone."

"I mean can you describe his appearance?" asked Phileas.

"*Nein, nein!*" responded the Teuton, who was either genuinely ignorant of the questioner's meaning or chose to appear so. "He was a good gentlemans," he said, after a reflective pause; while Phileas, nonplussed, was casting about for the simplest form of a query.

"Was he old?"

"Most seventy."

"Tall?"

"Yah, and not much fat."

"He is gone you say to—to—"

But the other remained imperturbable.

"To I know not where," he answered.

"Will he be gone long?"

"Oh, yah! He stay not long by here."

"Could you tell me his name?"

"*Nein, nein!*" replied the caretaker; and

Phileas could not tell whether he did not know the name or whether he refused to reveal it.

"Might I see the house?" the lawyer inquired next, perceiving that no further information was to be had through the medium of questions.

"It is not for de renting."

"Are you sure of that?" Phileas asked quickly, and the old man was plainly puzzled. "For if it be, I can very easily get you a tenant."

He also slipped a bill into the German's toil-worn hand. The latter, after minutely examining the bill—which, as Phileas put it, was for any trouble he might have,—and attentively surveying the young man from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet, agreed to show him the interior of the house.

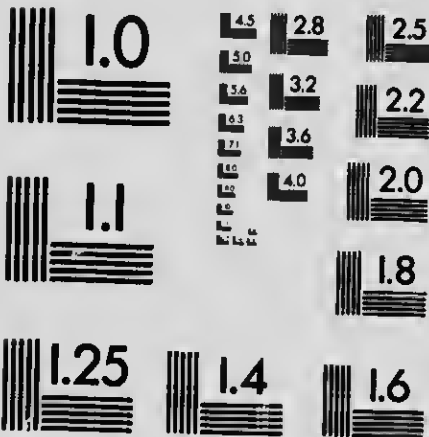
"You stay by here once," he said. "I go for bring key."

He shuffled off behind the leafy screen whence he had come, and Phileas was left for a moment more in the full enjoyment of the delightful scene in its absolute repose. Returning with the key, the caretaker led the way into the hall, and thence into the parlor and dining-room, where the cool, damp



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smell precluded the idea of very recent occupation. The latter apartment was plainly but tastefully furnished in chintz-covered furniture. A few choice engravings hung upon the wall; and on the mantelpiece a tiny Dresden clock had stopped at the hour of three,—a trifling circumstance that somehow fixed itself within the lawyer's consciousness.

From room to room went the oddly assorted pair; for the German, conscientiously fulfilling the duties of his office, would not let Phileas out of his sight. The bedrooms upstairs were still more plainly furnished, after the manner of a seaside cottage; but there was not the smallest thing in any of them to suggest the character, tastes, or habits of their late occupants, unless an austere simplicity could be considered as a guide. The hall at the top of the first flight of stairs had evidently been used as a sitting-room, and had retained a more individual look than the rest of the dwelling. There stood a large lounging chair, with a sofa covered with a Persian rug; while in the recess of the window, commanding a fine view of the bay, was a writing table. Above this, upon the wall, was a screen upon which were illuminated the words: "Here is the place of my repose."

The young attorney paused there, his eyes wandering out of the window and over the water, with its ripples transformed into molten gold by the vivid sunshine. He tried to throw himself into the mind of the man who had lounged here or worked here, and had expressed in those few significant words the secret of the charm which this lovely spot must have held for him,—especially if he were one who was weary after many tribulations and the stress of a varied life. Surely it might well be the man of whom he was in search,—a search that had so far proved futile.

As Phileas thus pondered, he brought his eyes from the study of the landscape to a consideration of the objects immediately at hand; while the German waited with a curious, stolid patience. The lawyer's keen glance was caught by a folder which lay carelessly upon the writing table. As he took it up, he noted a trifling circumstance which made his heart beat fast with an eager, almost boyish elation. It was ever so slight a pencil mark at the name of a hotel in Boston. It might mean nothing or it might mean everything. That folder was a comparatively recent issue, and it had evidently been consulted

by some one who had sat at that table and had considered the idea of travel. Phileas knew the hotel so indicated to be a modest and unpretentious one in a quiet neighborhood,—just such as he fancied might appeal to a man who was leaving 'the place of his repose' to avoid impertinent intrusion.

Phileas threw down the folder with studied carelessness (for it seemed that the German's eyes were upon him), but not before he had made a mental note of the street and the hotel. He also paid a cordial tribute of praise for the view which that window afforded; and the caretaker, who had begun to warm to his office of guide, presently grew rapturous over that prospect, and others which he declared could be seen from the different windows, and upon the situation of the house in general. He also let fall here and there a remark that permitted the lawyer some insight into the habits and character of the gentleman who had gone. The man's English became more confused as he advanced in his recital. Once launched, however, he never faltered for a moment in the pæan of praise he poured forth, the greater part of which was incomprehensible to his hearer.

Phileas would have given much to be

assured that the various hints which the Teuton let drop did, indeed, apply to the man whom he sought, and not to some other old gentleman of eccentric habits, who had chosen to make his abode at times in this solitary place, and to keep his coming and going a secret. By the time he had concluded the tour of the house, he was quite convinced that it was hopeless to expect information from the stolid and uncommunicative guide, who, even when warmed to admiration of the dwelling and its surroundings, never departed from his habitual reticence with regard to any vital matter.

As he turned to go downstairs, Phileas perceived an engraving. It represented the solitary figure of a man whose hair was whitened with the frosts of years, whose figure was bent, and whose attitude was one of intense dejection. Under it was written, in a small but eminently characteristic hand, a verse from a Greek poet that seemed to fit the theoretical personage whom he had been so busy in constructing. He remembered that Mrs. Wilson had casually mentioned John Vorst's devotion to the classics. As the young man regarded it an instant in passing, he

felt with a curious certainty that here might be a new link in the chain.

Look as he would, however, there was nothing further to be gleaned; and, the German beginning to show signs of impatience, Phileas took his leave. He felt a real reluctance to see the door locked upon him and to pass out through the unobtrusive gate. It seemed to him as if he were turning his back on a place that had already become dear and familiar.

Arriving at the hotel, he had to while away as best he might the interval between the early midday meal and the departure of the afternoon train. At nightfall he was thundering once more through the tunnel, and beholding the lights of New York twinkling out of the gloom, with the vast metropolis itself lying comparatively silent in the Sabbath restfulness.

XIV.

NO considerable cases had as yet been entrusted to Phileas Fox, with the exception of that one of *Spooner vs. Vorst*, which might, very probably, be settled out of court. But he had, otherwise, made wonderful progress in the short time during which he had sat behind the newly painted sign and was already known as a painstaking, conscientious and astute young lawyer. He had also gained more intimate knowledge of human nature, and more insight into its workings, than during all the careless years at home, in the class-room or on the campus.

He had been occasionally offered cases, on the score of his youth, his red hair, and his cognomen, which he had declined, as in that first instance, with a fervor of indignation that caused older practitioners to smile. He had been appalled at the cold-blooded cynicism, the greed, and the merciless trampling on the rights of others, or desire for a temporary advantage over them, which had characterized so many of the clients, or would-be clients,

of the law offices. Meanwhile these gifts of oratory by which he had hoped to dazzle judge and jury and crowded courtroom had remained in abeyance. He was likely to secure a good working practice, which would insure him a moderate income; but so far his prospects were by no means extensive.

That Monday after his return, he chose the luncheon hour (contenting himself with a hasty snack snatched at a counter) to proceed to the address which had been given him by the widow. It was in a quiet and once fashionable quarter, overlooking a square of green; there were gravelled walks and the inevitable fountain playing in the centre; also rows of benches, occupied from time to time by idlers or nursemaids. It was not a very cheering or invigorating prospect; but, as the young man reflected, it was better than being shut in and suffocated by buildings close crowded upon each other. Some broad, low steps led to the front door—itsself a relic of better things, in its carvings,—with two broad windows on its left-hand side, and a general appearance of striving hard to preserve the original gentility of the place in the face of numerous and insurmountable obstacles.

The little maid who admitted him asked,

after an inspection of his person, if he had come for rooms; adding "because there is none but the front parlor." This Phileas considered a hopeful prognostic for the widow. Had he been more intimately acquainted with her calling, he would have realized something of the doubts and qualms with which she examined each new aspirant for the position of lodger. For she knew, though the visitor did not, that some merely put in a week or two, or even less, and either absconded without paying at all, or took themselves off on some frivolous pretext, or harassed the soul out of the landlady during their stay. While Phileas waited in the little den-like room, which the widow reserved as a species of office, he could not help reflecting that the apartment was well calculated to drive away prospective lodgers; it was so small, so close, and its outlook through the half-glass door so depressing.

Presently Susan O'Rourke appeared, more dejected, more subdued by the spectre of care and worry than the young man had seen her yet. She brightened up a little at his appearance, especially as the lawyer greeted her cordially and seized her limp hand in a hearty shake.

"Well, Mrs. O'Rourke," he said, "how is everything going with you?"

"Pretty much as usual, sir," sighed the widow.

"I hear you have your house quite full."

"That's true, thanks be to God!" said Susan, piously. "But I never can tell from day to day how long they'll be with me, or what kind they are with regard to pay."

"And do you mean to say," cried the lawyer, aghast, "that you get no security of any kind from them,—no references?"

"I do the best I can, Mr. Fox," Susan responded. "But, oh, there are so many doubtful characters going! And as for references!" (Susan threw up her hands to express the hopelessness of such means of information.) "Some of them," she explained, "that come with the best recommendation turn out the worst. Folks have little conscience nowadays in the matter of references. But I hope, sir, that you are succeeding well with the work that you are about. The blessing of God should be with an honest, kind-hearted gentleman like yourself."

"Oh, I'm all right, Mrs. O'Rourke!" said Phileas, with cheerful optimism; for he could not help contrasting his own circumstances—

young, strong and energetic—with those of the forlorn woman before him. "But I came here to ask if you could give me any further information about the gentleman who lodged with you."

Once more the doubts, which sad circumstances had planted "thick as leaves in Vallombrosa" in the mind of the poor widow's once cheerful and sunny nature, arose; and she peered into Phileas' face with a scrutiny which the honest eyes met unfalteringly. Could that gaze of hers have penetrated deep into the young man's heart and soul, it would have found them as free from dark secrets as the face with its transparent blue eyes suggested.

"And you don't wish him any evil?" the woman queried.

"Mrs. O'Rourke," answered the lawyer, earnestly, "what pledge can I give you more than my sacred word of honor that if the man of whom I am in search should prove to be your lodger, nothing but good shall accrue to him from my discovery?"

The drawn and haggard face relaxed, and Susan heaved a sigh of relief.

"For," said she, "it has lain heavy on my soul that I gave you that bit of paper

and that I told you most everything I knew, though that same is not much. He came two years ago last December; and he'd have been here yet if it hadn't been for the machinations of a villain."

"A villain?" echoed Phileas, pricking up his ears.

"I'm coming to that," continued Mrs. O'Rourke. "It got to be so that my lodger could scarcely stir out of the door, or so much as sit near the window, without having that rascalion spying on him; and sending him, moreover, messages through the post. I don't know what they were, of course; but they disturbed the poor gentleman till he could hardly get a wink of sleep. And so I lost the rent of my front parlor, and I haven't been able to let it since."

"Could I see it?" Phileas said, feeling a certain diffidence in making the request.

It was granted without ado, Mrs. O'Rourke leading him along the broad, spacious hall which had witnessed the coming and going of people of fashion when that house had been the scene of many a brilliant event. She threw open the door of what she called the front parlor, a splendid apartment that almost rivalled in size and character any in

the mansion of Monroe Street. High ceilinged and massively plain in its appointments, it preserved an indefinable air of elegance, scarcely obscured by the squalor that had supervened.

"You see, sir," said the widow with pride, "what a fine room he had."

She stepped, as she spoke, to the broad window, deep indented in the wall; and throwing open the green blinds, admitted a flood of sunshine, while affording a glimpse of the park outside. Susan, as if fascinated by the prospect, continued to gaze thereupon, pouring forth a running stream of reminiscence, mainly concerning the "gentleman" and his satisfaction with his surroundings. Phileas meanwhile made a rapid survey of the apartment, hoping, perchance, to discover another of those links by which he had been met in the house in Westchester.

"He scarcely ever stirred out," went on Mrs. O'Rourke, "except it was to take his dinner over there on Broadway. His breakfast, which was the only other meal he took, I cooked for him with my own hands; though I wouldn't have done it for any one but himself, and he paid me well for my trouble. He

was open-hearted and free-handed, and no mistake."

"I think you told me," observed Philcas, "that he had no visitors?"

"Well, there was one elderly gentleman that came once in a while, and I suspected he was a lawyer; and, then, there was the priest from Sixteenth Street church, that would come of an odd time."

"A priest!" cried the lawyer, grasping at another clue. "Do you happen to know his name?"

"Father Driscoll it was," Mrs. O'Rourke answered.

"This gentleman, then, was a Catholic?" said Phileas.

"The best I ever saw," responded the enthusiastic landlady. "There was not a feast nor a fast of the Church that that man didn't keep, and he close to the seventies; and up and out to Mass and Holy Communion of a Sunday."

As the landlady rambled on after this fashion, still gazing out of the window, she suddenly gave a start and uttered an exclamation.

"Oh, there *he* is, the villain of the world!" she cried, thrusting out her head for a better

view of the person so objurgated. "Look, Mr. Fox, sir! There's the biggest scamp in the city of New York, and that's saying a good deal. He it was who drove away the best lodger that I ever had."

If Phileas had had some curiosity before to catch a glimpse of one who had deserved to rank so high in the annals of criminology, he was doubly anxious after that last remark, which represented the "villain" as a link in the chain that the lawyer was at such pains to forge. Abandoning his investigation of the room, he flew to the window; and what was his amazement to behold, by following Susan's directing finger, the identical individual who had aspired to be his own first client! The fellow was skulking behind some shrubs that lined the iron railing of the park, and it was evident that he was keeping an eye upon the domicile.

"He saw me coming in here," cried Phileas, involuntarily; "and that's what he's after now!"

"Then the Lord help you if he's on your track!" replied Mrs. O'Rourke, with real commiseration. "Have a care, sir; for he'll do you some harm before he ever lets you go."

Phileas laughed, with an unconscious squaring of his broad shoulders.

"Oh, I'm deep in his black books already!" he said carelessly, but he did not explain; for he had no mind to discuss what went on in his office, still less to call attention to the mansion in Monroe Street by describing the miscreant's appearance there. "Can you tell me the fellow's name?" he asked after a pause, during which he continued to regard the mean and cringing figure in the shelter of the bushes.

"Jason Trowbridge is the name he goes by hereabouts," answered the widow; "but the gentleman I had here called him, I think, by another; and he may have half a dozen names for all you or I know to the contrary."

"Do you remember that other name by which you have heard him called?" asked the lawyer.

"I disremember entirely," replied the woman. "But, whatever his name is, he's in every villainy that's going. They say he has made a mint of money; but the curse of Heaven will rest upon it, or my name is not Susan O'Rourke."

Phileas, who had retreated to a distance from the window to escape possible observation from without, next inquired:

"Have you any idea what his relations might be with your late lodger?"

"Well, it seems, sir," said Susan, seating herself upon a red velvet chair, and motioning her visitor to do likewise, smoothing out her black dress, as she spoke, as though it had been an apron, "that a good many years ago he was a clerk or something in the gentleman's employ, and he was turned out of his job,—I think it was for stealing, though my lodger would never rightly say. And since that time he did every mortal thing he could to annoy and circumvent and injure the gentleman. So when he began to haunt this house and dog my lodger's steps, the gentleman said to me: 'It's no use, Mrs. O'Rourke: I'll have to go. I like you and I like your house, but I can't stay here any longer.' And one dark night he drove away from the door, after having had me looking up and down the street and into the park yonder; for the villain might have been lurking anywhere about. He was so afraid, you see, that this man would find out where he would be going."

Mrs. O'Rourke's face and gesture as she thus chronicled her lodger's departure expressed a retrospective dejection.

"Well," she resumed presently, with another

smoothing out of her black dress, "would you believe me, sir, that rascal had the face to come here the next day, ringing at my bell and bringing me from my work, and asking if the front parlor lodger was at home! 'Not to the like of you,' said I, 'nor ever will be.'—'But I have business with him,' said he.—'Business that'll keep,' said I.—'What time will he be in?' said he, giving no heed to my words.—'Who told you he was out?' said I. 'But, out or in, go about your business, and let me go back to my work.'

"Well, he stood there, palavering and arguing, with his foot on the doorstep, so that I couldn't close it, do my best. When he found that fair words wouldn't answer, he began to try abuse, calling me an old hag, and I don't know what besides. But I never budged from the door, for fear he'd push past me and find that the room was empty, and perhaps pick up some piece of paper from the floor, as I afterward did myself when I had time to sweep."

The widow paused for breath; and, perceiving that her listener was attentive, continued the swiftly-flowing course of her narrative:

"Well, Mr. Fox, we stood there for full twenty minutes, when who should come up

the steps but one of my top-floor roomers—a big fellow that plays football, and is as good-natured and kind-hearted as a boy! 'What's going on here?' said he.—'It's this omadhaun that's forcing himself in,' said I.—'Oh, is that it?' said my footballer. 'And you're sure you have no use for him?'—'Not even to wipe up the floor,' said I.—'Come along, then, sonny,' said the big fellow. And down the steps he went with him as if he were a ball of rubber."

At that point Susan interrupted the tale to give a low laugh that was refreshing to the lawyer, it was so genuine in its enjoyment of the wretch's discomfiture.

"Well, Mr. Fox," she resumed, when her merriment had subsided, "if you could have seen the face of him! He picked himself up and he shook his fist at me. 'Look out, sonny,' said the big fellow from the top of the steps, 'or I'll race you to the corner.'"

Phileas laughed, remembering his own experience, and reflecting that the miscreant must spend great portions of his life in running or rebounding from the tips of leather toes.

A few moments later Phileas rose to take his leave, after briefly informing his voluble acquaintance that her late lodger had not

been found at the address written upon the scrap of paper. He did not, however, think it necessary to inform her of his prospective trip to Boston, nor of the motives that had led him to that decision. As the "villain" was still on the watch, and Phileas had no mind just then for a personal encounter, nor the chance of being followed, he inquired of the widow if she had any side door by which he might go out. After a moment's reflection, Mrs. O'Rourke declared that there was one which would lead him through the basement hall and to the back street. And thus did Phileas take pleasure in eluding his pursuer.

As he returned to his office, and pondered during the afternoon on the problem why this fellow should elect to dog his footsteps, he could not determine whether it was from revenge, from a naturally prying disposition, or because of his connection with the case of *Spoooner vs. Vorst*.

XV.

PHILEAS made up his mind that he would lose no time in following up the clue which should lead him next to the Hub of the Universe. It was quite an excitement, this amateur detective work,—mild flavored indeed, and not at all like the wonderful feats performed by gentlemen of leisure in the novels. Before the lawyer's mind, the end of the chase seemed like some golden ball whose luminous threads he was pursuing. He could not foresee what might result, even should he discover John Vorst; and these speculations as to how that gentleman might act, or whether he would refuse to enter into negotiations, or permit himself to be influenced by the change of circumstances,—all were involved in a delightful uncertainty.

Phileas decided that it would be necessary, before his departure, to pay another visit to Mrs. Wilson, so as to acquaint her with all that he had so far discovered, to ask her advice, and perhaps to obtain sundry valuable suggestions. He strove hard to persuade himself that his motives in desiring to present

himself at the mansion in Monroe Street were purely professional. But there was a light in his blue eyes, an eagerness in his face, and an air of pleasant expectancy about him, suggesting that other reason which lay deep down in his heart, and was scarcely recognized by himself.

He advanced to the telephone and rang up the now familiar number. After a pause, a voice which he did not recognize, and which sounded faint and muffled reached his ears. He exclaimed:

"Halloa! Is that Cadwallader?"

He distinctly heard, on that occasion, a perfectly audible titter.

"No, sir," came the prompt reply, in a feminine voice.

"Is it Miss Ventnor?" inquired Phileas.

"No, sir; but if you wait a moment I'll get her."

It was only the maid, then; and Phileas waited with an agreeable expectancy for the coming of that other whom he had learned to regard as so attractive.

Presently a voice—the voice—said:

"Halloa!"

"Is that Miss Ventnor?" asked Phileas.

"Yes."

"Mrs. Wilson's attorney is speaking." For the young man sensitively avoided pronouncing unnecessarily that name upon which Isabel had early set the seal of ridicule.

"O Mr. Fox, how do you do?" cried Isabel; and then the girl began to laugh, a delightful sound breaking upon the Babel of noise, confused and indistinct, but quite perceptible,—the concentrated roar and rush of a city buzzing through the instrument.

But he wondered why she laughed, as the maid had done before. Evidently mirth was just then the order of the day in that decorous household.

"Why are you laughing?" he asked.

"For the same reason," Isabel answered, "that sent Ellen the housemaid into a paroxysm. It was because you inquired if that was Cadwallader at the phone. The dear old soul would no more touch the telephone than he would approach a mad dog. He has a particular horror of it, and mutters and talks to himself concerning it. I believe he suspects a hoodoo or something of that sort. He was quite disturbed when Ellen told him that she had heard his name called through the telephone."

Phileas laughed too; and then he asked

in a tone which he strove to make strictly professional:

"May I come up this afternoon? I mean will Mrs. Wilson find it convenient to receive me?"

"I think it is very likely," replied the girl. "But perhaps I had better find out positively. Will you wait?"

The young man stood with the receiver in his hand, pending the return of Mrs. Wilson's charming companion—for such he considered her,—and feeling that even a little chat over the telephone was an agreeable interlude to the day's dull routine.

Isabel returned almost immediately.

"Yes, she will be glad to see you this afternoon," she announced. "She drives at three, and will be here by four o'clock. Will that be convenient?"

"It will suit me perfectly."

Phileas could not ask her if *she* would be at home. His business with the house and its inmates was strictly professional. But Isabel added, quite naturally and simply:

"When you come I shall show you some snapshots that I took down at Staten Island, after you left that afternoon. Wasn't it a perfect day there, and didn't you love it?"

"I never enjoyed anything so much," Phileas answered fervently, his spirits rising to the highest pitch at the thought that he was to see her that afternoon, and in a pleasant and informal fashion. For sometimes she had not been present at his interviews with Mrs. Wilson; or, if she had, the conversation was chiefly of documents and other professional details, which, though establishing an unusual intimacy between them, had been somehow unsatisfactory.

He had not begun to question himself very closely as to his sentiments toward this girl, with whom his acquaintance had been so brief, and who, nevertheless, interested him in some subtle and inexplicable manner. In the few leisure moments that occurred that afternoon (for the office chairs were almost continually occupied now), he began to indulge in some very sage reflections as to the impossibility of a struggling attorney's entertaining sentiments of any serious nature toward a young girl similarly situated with regard to fortune. And the upshot of these fine soliloquies was that he congratulated himself warmly upon the fact that Miss Ventnor presumably was penniless, and that her position as a companion placed her upon

an equality with himself, which could not possibly have existed had she been a daughter of the house. From that naturally followed some roseate visions as to the way that he should carve out for himself, and the self-made position that he should one day have to offer to some one, whether it should be that delightful Isabel or another.

Almost immediately after Isabel had hung up the receiver and her melodious voice had ceased to penetrate his ear, the lawyer had to give his attention to the representative of some big corporation who was offering him a lucrative case, and one which, perhaps, promised him the long-sought opportunity to display in court his natural eloquence, and so rise a rung or two higher upon that ladder he was so surely, if slowly, ascending.

As he conferred with this magnate of affairs, the young man's face was so keen, his suggestions so far-reaching and practical, that none would have imagined him the same young gentleman who had been so lately enshrouded by rosy visions, and inhabiting a morning land filled by a gracious, feminine personality.

He was very punctual at Mrs. Wilson's; and this time he was ushered, not into the library, but into the drawing-room, a long

and portentously stately apartment, where Mrs. Wilson sat enthroned, as it were, in a huge armchair. Some influence besides the trees nodding in at the window had been at work to transform the end of the room, where the lady of the house was seated, into a cheerful and homelike spot. Some palms were grouped about; some flowers stood upon a table, where was also a sprinkling of books. A cheerful water-color or two upon the walls enlivened the austerity of the room, and relieved the almost oppressive grandeur in the appointments.

Isabel sat there, in a gown of the filmiest and softest of organdies, with a ribbon belt, a fall of lace from sleeves and shoulders, and a touch of black velvet that accentuated the daintiness of the costume. That was another of her charms, Phileas thought,—perfection of costume.

"Before you and Mr. Fox proceed to business," said Isabel, "I want to show the snapshots I took at Staten Island."

"Yes, yes!" assented Mrs. Wilson. "They are really very good; I think, for an amateur."

"Mrs. Wilson has a true early Victorian disregard for amateur efforts in all directions," laughed Isabel, producing a bunch of photo-

graphs and offering them one by one to the lawyer who had taken a seat beside her; and once more the latter could not help admiring the slender brown fingers, that yet looked so capable. "I was sorry you had gone," observed the girl, "or I might also have taken some of you, my fellow-pilgrim in that lovely region."

"I only wish I had known, and I would willingly have waited for the next boat," Phileas responded.

"You escaped something, I am sure," laughed Mrs. Wilson; "for you would have run the risk at least of being caricatured."

"My appearance might lend itself to that style of art," said Phileas.

But Mrs. Wilson disagreed with him mentally. The hair, the face, she reflected, were certainly not prepossessing in the point of mere beauty; but there was about the young man in general a look of mental as well as physical strength, and a frankness and geniality of expression, that were far from displeasing. What Isabel thought could not be so easily predicted. She was, for one thing, a less experienced observer.

"You are quite too modest," the elder woman said graciously; "but that modesty has the attraction of rarity."

Isabel made no remark, but continued to show the various snapshots she had taken. They reproduced the house where she had been visiting, and glimpses of the bay, and the green and shaded road by which the two had walked. Isabel herself had been photographed by her hostess in more than one attitude. But, as it had been, of course, impossible to catch the shimmering light, with the alternations of shadow, the waving of the branches, the glow upon the water, all of which had made up that enchanting landscape, just so Phileas thought it had been impossible to convey by cold print the attractiveness of his companion, the peculiar quality of humor and of sympathy that she possessed, and her absolutely natural and unaffected manner. He glanced quickly at the face which Isabel was bending over her snapshots, and caught that smile about the lips and in the eyes that provoked an answering one.

At the end of a pleasant half hour Isabel rose, saying:

"But I am not going to keep you and Mrs. Wilson from your business conversation."

"There is no great hurry, my dear!" said the old woman graciously.

The lawyer, by an involuntary look,

seconded the remonstrance; even though he had to catch the evening boat, and had therefore but little time to spare, since he had a few preparations to make, and a hasty meal to snatch in the interval.

Isabel was not to be moved by the one appeal nor the other, though she had equally understood both.

"The time of your learned counsel is too precious to be wasted," she said lightly.

"Rather these moments are too precious to be lost," Phileas ventured, in a slightly lowered tone, which, nevertheless, caught Mrs. Wilson's phenomenally acute hearing, and amused her.

"The boy is already beginning to make pretty speeches," she thought. "Evidently Isabel and he are quite *en rapport*. It will amuse her, she has such a dull existence here. And as for our little lawyer—"

The thought remained unfinished; and Isabel, with a bright parting smile at Phileas, which he carried away with him to Boston, slipped out of a door near where she had been sitting, closing it softly after her. When Mrs. Wilson turned again toward her attorney, it was the keen, lawyer-like expression which she encountered.

"I wanted to see you particularly," the young man explained, "because I think of leaving for Boston to-night."

"For Boston? Indeed!" exclaimed the old lady, politely interested.

"I am going there," the lawyer added, "in pursuit of what seems to be a clue."

Mrs. Wilson's face became alight with interest, though Phileas noted that it was looking unwontedly gray and old that afternoon.

"A clue," she repeated, "to—to the discovery we are so anxious to make?"

Phileas nodded, and went on:

"And, if you will allow me, I will place before you the reasons for my present course of action."

In a few brief but graphic sentences he made her acquainted with all that had most recently occurred,—his interviews with the lodging-house keeper, and his excursion to Westchester. The mention of that lovely though isolated dwelling affected the listener powerfully. A mortal paleness overspread her features. She spoke with effort, controlling what was evidently a painful emotion.

"Your clue," she declared when the lawyer had finished, "I am almost certain is a

valuable one. To just such a place as you describe John Vorst brought me as a bride. I had a singular love for it, and we often retired there for rest from the turmoil of city life. Once, in a fit of perversity, I left him alone there and came into town. He closed the house immediately, and he never asked me to return thither, and I was too proud to express my real preference for the spot."

Upon another point in his narrative Mrs. Wilson was enabled to throw some light.

"That man, that ugly customer, whom you describe as dogging your footsteps," she said, "and persecuting Mr. Vorst, may very well be a certain William Gross, who was once in my husband's employ and dismissed for misconduct of some sort."

"That was not the name mentioned by the lodging-house keeper," objected the lawyer. "But it is true she suggested that he might have been passing under the alias of Jason Trowbridge."

Mrs. Wilson, after asking a few details of the miscreant's appearance, declared her conviction of his identity with the person known as Gross, who had been suspected of theft, and had, moreover, been discovered on various

occasions prying into Mr. Vorst's private papers.

"He is a dangerous creature," said the old lady emphatically; "and I warn you to have a care of him."

Then she inquired after what manner Phileas proposed to proceed upon arriving in Boston. The young man reminded her that he had obtained the address of the hotel whither the gentleman from Westchester had presumably gone; and that he had a further resource in the information, casually obtained by inquiry at the college in Sixteenth Street, that the priest who had been on friendly terms with Mrs. O'Rourke's lodger, and whom Susan had mentioned as Father Driscoll, had gone to the New England metropolis.

Mrs. Wilson agreed with the lawyer in believing that this might have been an additional reason why Mr. Vorst, supposing him to be identical with the lodger and the mysterious tenant of the Westchester dwelling, had chosen Boston as his latest place of refuge.

Phileas finally begged of his client to furnish him with as accurate a description as possible of the appearance of her former husband, and with any other circumstances that might

lead to his identification. The old woman hesitated painfully, pondering with her head upon her hand. Then she said:

"If you will give me your arm, Mr. Fox, so that I shall not be under the necessity of summoning Cadwallader, I think I shall permit you to see what few eyes except my own have looked upon. And," she added, "you will understand that Isabel is entirely ignorant of the existence of what I am about to show you. It is, in fact, a portrait of John Vorst."

Phileas silently offered his arm, upon which Mrs. Wilson leaned heavily; and thus the two passed into a small boudoir-like apartment, the door of which was opened by a key that the old woman wore on her watch chain. The light therein was so dim that the young man could not at first distinguish any object. Mrs. Wilson sank into a sofa which occupied one corner of this secret recess; and, pointing to a stained-glass window that Phileas could discern as directly facing the entrance door, she exclaimed:

"Pull that string which you see hanging there, and the window will open!"

He did so; and a stream of light, when the window had swung partially open, discovered two portraits hanging side by side. One was

that of a young man very modishly attired in the fashion of half a century before, with a strongly marked and exceedingly aristocratic face, and an almost classical purity of contour. Close beside it was the counterfeit presentment of a young girl, slender of figure, with a conspicuous distinction of bearing; and in the delicate, cameo-like features (the very qualities that had led to the wreck of two lives) Phileas could recognize, in the first hasty glance, identity with the lineaments that were now obscured by old age and by the lines that life had inscribed upon that youthful visage.

"This portrait on the left is what I was; the other is, of course, John Vorst as he appeared at the time of our marriage."

Phileas gazed awestruck at the pictures. It was a fearful contrast between the slim, girlish figure, in the full pride of life, of youth, and the shrunken old woman who was so obviously descending into the valley of the shadow. It was a cruel presentment of that truth forever present to the aged, and dimly apprehended at certain seasons by the young.

"Of course," remarked Mrs. Wilson, in a voice that sounded tremulous with emotion, "it is a very long time since that portrait of him was taken; but still I feel sure that it

will help in the work of identification. Men wear so much better than do our sex."

Phileas studied intently every pictured detail, agreeing with Mrs. Wilson that he would probably find material assistance in the work of identification from his recollection of this portrait. His prevailing sentiment toward the woman herself during that singular interview was a poignant pity. The wreck she had made of her own life and that of another must be so agonizingly apparent to her lonely old age, where her pride and folly, coupled with a perverse and reckless wickedness, had borne their fruit. As he glanced from time to time at his client, the intolerant judgment youth and inexperience are apt to pass upon the guilty was softened into a feeling of compassion, which is, after all, the safest and most consistent attitude that one mortal can assume toward another.

"Here," said Mrs. Wilson in a low voice, "I have spent many hours of expiation. Here, a forlorn old woman, I have looked back upon the past, and called upon the mountains to crush me. I have eaten out my heart in unavailing penitence and remorse."

Phileas knew not what to say, and so remained respectfully silent. She went on:

"You are young, Mr. Fox, and I suppose happy; and you can not guess the depth of suffering and humiliation, the stern and poignant punishment, that was all too swiftly meted out to me. If you could, your judgment, believe me, would not be too severe."

She looked up, as she spoke, to the young man towering above her in his six feet of honest young manhood, and clothed in that righteousness that made him seem almost as an avenging deity. He looked down gravely and pityingly, with eyes in which there was a touch of tenderness such as he might have shown to a wounded animal.

"Who is there that can judge another?" he said at last. "And you have been sorely tried."

Mrs. Wilson covered her face, for a moment, with her two withered and skeleton-like hands. The touch of sympathy had drawn from her a few reluctant and scalding tears. The young lawyer often thought of that interview afterward, and of the further discourse he had held with that proud woman, humbled, softened, opening for a brief moment the inmost recesses of her nature in presence of that representation of her own youth and of the man who had been her lover.

At her suggestion, they withdrew from that

room of haunting memory, to the library, where the lawyer read over to her his notes of the case in so far as he had mastered it,—the claim of John Vorst and his heirs, the still missing links in the chain of evidence. To all this Mrs. Wilson listened with eager attention, making but few corrections, and signing her name whenever it was necessary. Then, with a pitiful eagerness that all should be concluded, she caused him to write out a document expressing her desire for restitution, and confessing that she recognized the justice of John Vorst's claim and believed in the existence of a prior will. Phileas noticed that she looked very frail when all had been accomplished. The mental exertion through which she had passed, and the emotions which had been excited, had apparently aged and exhausted her. When the young attorney rose to go, she held out her hand and retained that of her adviser in a momentary pressure.

“You have been very kind.” she said, “and I feel that I can trust everything to you. You will hurry the matter through as much as possible; life is so uncertain, and at the best I have but little time. Oh, may a merciful God hear my prayer, and permit me to repair this injustice before I leave this life!

When you come back again, I must remember to tell you about Isabel. But you had better not wait now, lest you might lose your boat. Catch that boat, Mr. Fox,—I beg of you to catch that boat."

The name of Isabel thrilled Phileas, coming into the solemnity of that hour as a beam of light; and he would gladly have lingered to hear what it might be that his client had to tell. But he saw that her thoughts had gone before him to the Eastern metropolis, where he hoped to discover the missing defendant; and he knew, besides, that she was exhausted. He also agreed with her that he might have difficulty even then in catching the evening boat. He therefore took his leave at once.

As Mr. Fox hastened out through the park-like enclosure, more beautiful than ever in its greenness, and in its air of mystery and seclusion, which shut it off from its unsavory surroundings, he caught the distant sound of Isabel's voice, fresh and pure, singing. Tantalizingly the parrot, spurred on by the sound, also raised its discordant tones, with its everlasting cry of "John Vorst! John Vorst!"

"Yes, that is it," Phileas reflected. "Nothing else but John Vorst must occupy my thoughts till all this affair is settled."

XVI.

FORTUNATELY, Phileas did catch the evening boat, deciding to take his supper on board; and, as the darkness settled down like a pall over the face of the waters, he sat upon the deck, watching the huge leviathan of a steamer churning its way, with dashing of foam and whirring of machinery. Light talk and laughter sounded from the various groups around him, or came forth from the brilliantly lighted saloon, until gradually, as it grew late, the groups dispersed and the apartment became almost portentously still.

The young lawyer was now left in solitary possession of the deck, smoking his cigar, and letting his thoughts wander over the whole range of impressions that had been stamped upon his mind during the recent weeks. Above his head, in the clear blue of the firmament, the Northern Crown and Boötes, the Herdsman, disputed the sovereignty of the heavens with the Dipper and the princely Orion. Their radiance seemed fairly dazzling in that bright arc, thickly crowded with those constellations which, by

the quaint symbolism of their names, recall the dawn of the world's history.

It was very late indeed when Phileas abandoned that peaceful scene and the soft lulling of the waters, for his cabin, where a fellow traveller was already sleeping the sleep of the weary. The early morn found the energetic lawyer astir, and hastening to the deck to watch the steamer ploughing through the harbor of Tea Party fame, and the crowd of hurrying people. They included every class and condition, from the commercial traveller, genial, bumptious, endlessly loquacious, or grim and taciturn, to the merchant prince whose family had long since ensconced themselves at Newport or elsewhere, and who was running down to Boston for the mere pleasure of the sail; belonging for the most part, however, to the varied and often nondescript company of tourists, voluble, anxious and ardent in the pursuit of sight-seeing.

Phileas, who had but little luggage and consequently no anxiety, observed them all, as he waited, with the closeness of attention that his profession fostered, until presently the vessel came to anchor with a prodigious straining and creaking, a whistling and shrieking; and before him lay the city, which

is perhaps the most historic within the radius of the Northern States. There the pale ghosts of the Puritans seem to stalk, marvelling at modern progress; the quiet and peaceful Quakers appear to glide through the winding streets, where frequently they underwent persecution, and where, in common with other strange sectaries and the witches, ghastly victims of superstition, they endured undeserved torments. The Colonial governors, the Revolutionary worthies, and the tribesmen of old Massasoit still haunt the shores and inhabit the thoroughfares, now given over to the rush and bustle of commerce.

Phileas registered at a hotel which has been identified with the growth of the metropolis; and after breakfast set forth to seek that secluded spot where he hoped to find the widow's mysterious lodger. The lawyer was tolerably well acquainted with the Puritan city, and admired, as he went, the Common, oasis of verdure, and Beacon Street, where the magnates of the East India Company and other commercial potentates had set up their palatial residence.

He discovered without much trouble that quiet hostelry, where a gentleman answering to the lawyer's description had taken up his

abode some weeks previously, but, as the clerk added with a touch of resentment, without registering. He was elderly, he led a retired life, he saw no visitors. Phileas suggested that he would like to send up his card, but the official behind the desk was inexorable. The orders from No. 48 were to admit no callers, and those orders should be obeyed. Phileas was baffled for the moment; but, by a happy inspiration, he resolved to make his way to Father Driscoll, and see what assistance he could lend. Putting on his hat, he took a trolley to the magnificent church where the priest from New York was now stationed. He was fortunate enough to find him at home.

He was a gray-haired, rugged-featured man, considerably above the average height, with a genial manner, an all-pervading atmosphere of common-sense, and a particularly clear judgment. He heard Phileas' story to the end, measuring him meantime with that keen insight into the character of others that becomes almost a sixth sense.

"I am sorry," he said quietly, "that you did not bring me an introductory line from Father Van Buren, which would have made assurance doubly sure. But I am going to

take it upon myself, Mr. Fox, to introduce you as an old pupil of one of our colleges, and as a friend of Father Van Buren. And," he added half jestingly, "I hope you will do nothing to discredit me."

Phileas met him eye to eye, thus giving the experienced director of souls an assurance stronger than any spoken pledges.

"Just let me have one of your cards," he said, "and I will write a line upon it."

He did so; and almost immediately afterward Phileas rose to take his leave, having asked no questions and solicited no information which the priest might have preferred to withhold.

"I shall be glad to see you again," Father Driscoll said cordially; "that is, if you have a few minutes to spare; and if not, I shall be anxious to hear how your business has progressed."

That interview, brief as it was, had established an unusual friendliness of feeling between the young man and the old, and their hand-shake was a warm one. The lawyer returned to the modest hostelry in that quiet neighborhood, where birds sang and trees waved as if forgetful of the rush of city life so near. Early in the afternoon,

Phileas sent up the card upon which the priest had penciled a few words. He waited in a very fever of suspense for the result of his application, and could scarcely control his impatience when after a few moments he saw the bell-boy leisurely advancing toward him.

"The gentleman in No. 48 will see you," he announced briefly; "and you're to go up."

Phileas felt his heart beating almost to suffocation, so momentous did he realize that interview and its results to be. Interest, curiosity were, moreover, excited to an almost intolerable degree. He made an effort to gain a full command of his faculties before he followed the bell-boy to the elevator and into a corridor bordered on either side by a row of precisely similar doors. At one of these, which stood in about the centre, the boy knocked. On receiving the summons to enter, he ushered Phileas into the apartment, not without an evident lingering of curiosity concerning the unusual circumstance of a visitor being admitted.

With an emotion that caused his face to pale and his pulses to beat, the lawyer beheld seated in an armchair, close to the window, an old man of an appearance so distinguished as to seem out of place in that small and

narrow apartment. He could easily have imagined him presiding on the bench, filling a gubernatorial chair, or in any other position of distinction. But the impression that he made upon Phileas was deepened by the fact that the latter never had any doubt from the first that here was the hero in that old romance, the husband of the imperious mistress of the Monroe Street mansion, and the defendant in the celebrated suit. Nor was it alone the resemblance to the portrait which produced that conviction, since it did not so instantaneously seize him, but gradually grew from his study of the face before him.

As Phileas stood stunned, bewildered as it were, by the prospect of that success in his quest which he felt was at hand, the old man spoke. His voice was singularly harmonious, with a tone and accent that belonged to a more tranquil and possibly a more formal era than our own, when there was time to pronounce the syllables. He extended to his visitor a shapely and well-cared-for hand, which Phileas took with a deference that well became him, and elicited a mental note of approbation from the other.

"I must apologize, Mr. Fox," he said, "for

the seeming discourtesy of my attitude. I am just enough of an invalid to make motion at times irksome."

"I should rather apologize for my intrusion," Phileas replied readily, "only that it is justified by a grave necessity."

"Any one introduced by Father Driscoll is welcome," said the other, courteously; "though, as perhaps he has told you, my visiting list under present circumstances is necessarily limited."

The smile with which these words were uttered was singularly winning, and the lawyer could well understand the figure which this man must have cut in his youth. In the still noble physique were traces of that rare beauty which had been manifest in the portrait, and which detracted nothing from a dignified manliness. There was an ease and grace in the manner which betrayed an intimate association with the highest circles of society. This seemed, in fact, a relic of the early Colonial days, when the beaux of the period were no less famed for wit and genial courtesy than for the carefulness of their attire. One could have fancied this old man sitting there in that obscure lodging, as Phileas reflected, the associate of Aaron

Burr, of Alexander Hamilton, the Willises and the D'Orsays.

As there was ever so slight a pause after the last remark, the lawyer felt called upon to explain the errand which had brought him thither. Yet he was conscious of all the difficulty of approaching a painful subject; th more so that the exquisite courtesy of the older man served as a viewless but effectual barrier against any intrusion upon his private feelings.

"I will tell you frankly, sir," said Phileas, "that I am at a loss how to begin. The matter which has brought me here is vital, but at the same time it opens up issues that are so painful—"

"Perhaps," remarked the listener, who had visibly started at this preamble, and over whose face had crept a shadow, "it might be better to leave them unopened."

"Unfortunately," said the young man, "it is imperative that you should give me a hearing."

"Are you a lawyer?" the gentleman inquired.

Phileas answered in the affirmative; and the other turned away toward the window, as though he would fain have avoided a blow. After a moment he observed, in a low voice:

"I will hear what you have to say. I feel sure that you will not exceed your duty."

"I must necessarily ask a question," began the attorney, "which I did not put even to Father Driscoll, and which I trust you will not consider intrusive, since upon the answer must depend all further communications upon my part. And perhaps it is only fair to say that I have already anticipated the answer."

"Ask what you will," replied the old man, with the same air of submitting to the inevitable; and Philcas paused to arrange the form of his inquiry.

"Am I correct in assuming," he asked at length, "that you are—the defendant in the case of *Spooner vs. Vorst*,—that you are, in fact, Mr. John Vorst himself?"

It was evident that the occupant of the chair had not expected so point-blank a question, and for an instant he seemed to have lost his self-control. A mortal pallor overspread his features; he started from his reclining attitude to an erect position, and cried:

"By what right do you ask me such a question? Upon what do you base your assumption as to my identity?"

"My right is simply that of justice to

yourself and others," answered Phileas, firmly, the strength of his character suddenly asserting itself, and to some extent dominating the other. "And as to my assumption, it rests upon many small links in a chain which has led me here, upon a conviction which has seized me since I have come into your presence, and also" (he hesitated an instant) "upon your resemblance to the portrait."

"You have seen the portrait?" the older man exclaimed, and there was a startled look upon his face as of one driven to bay. Then he sank back into his chair, passing his hand wearily over his face. "Am I never to be done with that miserable case,—never to be secure even in the most obscure retreat?"

"Believe one thing, sir," interposed Phileas, seizing upon the tacit admission, and speaking under the influence of a strong emotion. "No word nor act of mine shall tend to your annoyance. I am here altogether in the interests of right and justice, that old wrongs may be righted and old difficulties adjusted."

"That can scarcely be, sir," said the gentleman, coldly. "There are difficulties which can not be adjusted, nor, I warn you, can they be discussed."

"But discussion is absolutely necessary, Mr.

Vorst," pleaded the lawyer; "and I am sure that your sense of justice will permit me to make a definite statement of much that has transpired within the past year. The credentials which I have brought from one in whom you have confidence must assure you that not without the gravest reasons would I have intruded upon your privacy. May I speak?"

The head was once more bowed and there was a look of distress upon the face, but the desired permission was given.

"Let me preface my statement of the new aspect of affairs by an announcement that may possibly be new to you," began the attorney,—“that the plaintiff in the case of Spooner *vs.* Vorst has become a Catholic.”

"She, Martha, a Catholic!" cried the old man in amazement, while wonder and incredulity were written upon every feature.

"Having been received into the Church by Father Van Buren just one year ago, she is naturally desirous of readjusting her business affairs."

The old man looked steadily down at the floor, and there was a silence between the two. Then he said slowly:

"Your statement is, indeed, of the gravest importance, and no doubt must make a

material difference. Did these business affairs, however, concern me alone, my preference would be to leave things as they are. Personally, I have but one desire—freedom from strife. But, since the rights and interests of others have to be considered, I will hear what is proposed.”

In the same attitude of weariness, and keeping a strained attention upon the lawyer, John Vorst listened, according a meed of admiration to the speaker for the brief and well-chosen words in which he made his statement, together with a delicacy that avoided all needlessly painful references. And this thought he expressed when Phileas had concluded.

“The plaintiff,” he said, “is fortunate in her attorney.”

“Who,” said Phileas, laughing off the compliment, “was introduced to her by Father Van Buren as a briefless young barrister, at liberty to give unlimited time to her affairs.”

“I am quite sure he had other considerations in his mind when he made that recommendation,” remarked the old man, courteously; “and as for the briefs, they will not be long in coming. But to return to the matter in hand. You must give me a little time to

adjust my mind to new conditions. Of course it is now unnecessary to inform you that I am indeed John Vorst. I shall be most happy to see you again in a day or two, when I have had time to consider the new aspects of the case."

He outstretched a cordial hand to Phileas, who, thus dismissed, took his leave, elated at the progress he had made, and promising to call within the week.

XVII.

FATHER DRISCOLL secured for Phileas a notification to wait upon John Vorst for a second interview. The worthy priest, glad of an opportunity to pay a friendly visit to the lawyer from New York, brought the message himself to the hotel, in the big empty drawing-room of which the two were enabled to speak quite unreservedly. After a few moments of desultory conversation, during which no allusion whatever was made to the matter in hand, Phileas himself told what had passed at his interview with John Vorst; and Father Driscoll evinced the liveliest satisfaction at the prospect of an amicable settlement of the long-standing difficulties.

"John Vorst deserves," he said, "if ever a man deserved, to have a few years of tranquillity before his final departure. He has had such a long, harassing time of it. And I may tell you that I regard him as an ideal layman. But what is the next step to be taken?"

"I should advise," answered Phileas, "that Mr. Vorst return to New York with me. I am quite satisfied that Mrs. Wilson is growing

very feeble, and the sooner matters are settled the better for all parties."

"I am altogether of your way of thinking," said the priest. "But can you make the necessary arrangements for his return in so short a time?"

"I think so," declared Phileas. "I chance to have been brought into contact, professionally, with Mr. Vorst's former landlady, and his room at her house is still vacant. If he consents, I shall wire her. Then there need not be much delay in 'fixing up things'; for Mrs. Wilson is only too anxious for a final adjustment. In fact, as a measure of precaution, and acting on my advice, she signed most of the important papers before my departure."

"Good!" said Father Driscoll. "Then you will call upon Mr. Vorst to-day, as he has expressed a desire to see you. But, if you wish, I shall go to the hotel now and prepare him for your suggestion."

"I shall be very grateful," said Phileas: and he accompanied the priest to the door, where they stood a few moments, commenting on the buildings and the streets of the Puritan city.

Father Driscoll said, in parting:

"You have a good profession, my boy. Honor it and it will honor you. It needs ideals, you know; the higher the better." Then he added, softening the admonition by a laugh: "You ought to change your name when you're dealing with honest men. I was a little afraid of you when I glanced at your card."

Phileas was somewhat sore upon that point, but he joined in the laugh.

"You will be quite a *rara avis* then: an honest lawyer, and a fox that is not predatory."

When Phileas was ushered into John Vorst's presence that afternoon, he found the old gentleman quite reconciled to the proposal, and even anxious to return to his old quarters.

"That good creature, Susan O'Rourke, made me so comfortable," he said, "she quite spoiled me for anything else; and, then, at my age one sighs for the old places that were familiar to one's youth. I don't know precisely why that should be so, Mr. Fox," he went on, reflectively. "One place ought to be quite as good as another to those who have almost finished the great journey. For, wherever we are, the mighty pageant—in which we no longer have part—goes on very well without us. But I suppose it is in the

same manner that we go back to read the pages of a well-thumbed volume. Its familiarity is its charm."

It was with evident reluctance that John Vorst entered upon the pecuniary details of the approaching contest.

"I will confess," he said, "perhaps to my shame, that I have never had any great aptitude for affairs. It is true, at one time I hotly contested that claim,—or, rather, my counsel did," he added with a smile. "But that was on abstract grounds of justice, in order not to prove myself a swindler; and also because of a sentimental attraction toward that old house in Monroe Street, where my boyhood had been passed. Moreover, then, as now, there were others to be considered,—a widowed sister, since dead, who has left children. I have never seen them, because I faded out of active life before they had entered thereupon. There is also a brother of mine, who has taken Holy Orders and resides in England. For their sakes nothing must be left to chance."

It was, therefore, agreed that Phileas should wire at once to Mrs. O'Rourke; and that, two days later, the two men should travel together to New York.

Phileas Fox was fairly treading on air, in the height of his satisfaction. That long and tedious case, which he had fancied might stretch out interminably, was thus in the way of being settled almost immediately. He sent from the office of the hotel a wire addressed to Mrs. O'Rourke. It ran thus:

Have front parlor prepared for your old lodger, who returns on Thursday.

PHILEAS FOX.

Then he went over to the cathedral, and knelt in fervent prayer for the successful issue of what remained to be done. After which he permitted himself the luxury of a carriage, and drove out to Mount Auburn and to those other lovely suburbs which have made Boston famous.

His mind, relaxed and at rest somewhat from the strain of anxiety and suspense, turned instinctively to pleasanter things; and he recalled, amongst others, that trip to Staten Island which he had so recently made with the most charming girl in the world. For by this time he had come to regard Isabel in some such light; and he felt a real gratification at the thought that he was so soon to see her again, and to be brought into active relation with her. It occurred to him, with a sudden sinking of his spirits, that the cessa-

tion of the case would no doubt bring about the cessation of their intercourse. Their ways led so far apart; he a briefless barrister; while she had been brought up in a wealthy and exclusive sphere, to which he in no sense belonged. Then, with the optimism of youth that gilds all things just as the sun was then gilding and bringing out the iridescent colors of the lovely groups of flowers, he began to wonder if she were, after all, so far removed from him; or if she would be content in a year or two, or when he had made his way somewhat, to share his fortunes and struggle upward at his side. He smiled at the swiftness with which his thoughts had gone forward; and, awaking from his reverie, he strove to give his whole attention to the sights which the driver was showing him.

That evening he dined at the hotel with John Vorst; and, in fact, was so much in his society during those two days that he felt as if he had known him for years. On board the boat returning to New York, the two, who had been so strangely brought into each other's life, talked with a freedom which is not always the result of long acquaintanceship. Upon one subject alone John Vorst maintained an inviolable reserve, and that was wherever

the plaintiff in the famous lawsuit was concerned. The name of Martha Spooner Wilson was never so much as mentioned; the relation in which the two had stood to each other, the reason of their separation, and all the rest of that tragic story, remained as a sealed book. If he were aware that the attorney had been informed of all those things, he gave no sign. And it was on only one occasion that he spoke of another matter that was dear to his heart—that religion which he had so faithfully loved and practised for nearly man's allotted span.

"Our faith," he said,—“what a splendid heritage it is, and how worthy the consideration of reasoning man! It meets us at every point during the journey of our life, and sets up landmarks. It controls, directs, satisfies and brightens intellectual aspirations; it feeds the heart. Envious the young man who sets out in life under the guidance of that true pilot, that alone can weather storms.”

They sat and conversed thus until the night was far worn. The lights in the saloon were lowered, and the groups had gradually dispersed. There was a solemnity there, under the stars looking down from a deep, calm, azure, where the white clouds scudded here

and there like wandering spirits in search of a haven.

"I have often said to myself," continued the elder man, "'Look up at those stars and doubt if you can.' That sidereal world seems the vast witness of truth."

"And," thought Phileas, "some men, like this one before me, are likewise witnesses of truth in the various positions which they fill in life."

In the early morning, the two men breakfasted at a place on Broadway where the most delicious cream-topped coffee could be had, together with Vienna rolls, crisp, delicate bacon, strawberries and cream. It was an enjoyable meal, over which the pair lingered. John Vorst rejoiced at being back once more in the city which he had known and loved.

"I have been a traveller in my time, Mr. Fox," he said; "but I am always well content to find myself in this curious, cosmopolitan thoroughfare, which boasts no beauty, and which, with its feverish bustle and haste, is unendurable to the cursory observer. But there are quiet portions of Manhattan, where tranquillity is almost as obtainable as in the country; and I see it, besides, through the glamor of years. I fancy myself once

more thrilling at thought of exhibiting my new topcoat or beaver, my patent-leather boots, or any other article of finery, on the avenue of a Sunday morning. I always see Broadway as I first consciously remember it half a century ago."

When Phileas rang the bell at Mrs. O'Rourke's door, it was opened by Susan herself. Her face was fairly beaming, though her eyes were streaming with tears. Every trace of care, of weariness or of cynical doubt, was momentarily gone.

"You see I have brought him back to you!" exclaimed Phileas, indicating his companion.

"And may God in heaven bless you for that same!" answered Susan.

To her late lodger, who was somewhat slower in reaching the upper step, she began a series of curtsies, as though the newly-arrived had been her feudal lord and she his tenant at will.

"Is it yourself, sir?" she cried.

"It is indeed, Mrs. O'Rourke," replied Mr. Vorst, with corresponding warmth, and seizing the toil-roughened hand of the landlady in a cordial grip. "I'm glad to see you again."

"And I'm as proud and glad as—"

She could find no apposite comparison, so

she left her sentence unfinished, and fell to wiping her eyes with her apron.

"But of course you got Mr. Fox's telegram?" John Vorst inquired.

"I did indeed, sir; and here's your room ready for you just as the day you left it."

She threw open the door of the same apartment into which upon a former occasion she had ushered Phileas, and showed the spacious room, clean, well-aired, and as shining as two days' good cleaning could make it.

"It's myself is glad to see you in it once again!" the poor creature repeated enthusiastically.

"You may thank Mr. Fox for that," laughed Mr. Vorst, expanding, under the warmth of her greeting.

"I do thank him; and morning and night, when I go on my knees, I'll always remember him for that same, as well as for the kind acts he did to me."

John Vorst turned a glance of warm approval upon the young attorney.

"You must tell me all about it," he said to Susan; "for you and I both are feeling very grateful to him."

"I can not wait for that recital," said Phileas, joyously. He, too, was in excellent

spirits at the result of his journey. "I have to get back to sober life, and I must not have my head turned."

Phileas, having seen his new friend, for whom he felt a real attachment and a boundless admiration, installed in his old quarters, took the Subway down town to his long-neglected office. He threw open the door with a new feeling of importance; he aired the room, which had a close smell, as though it had been long unused; he arranged the chairs and tables, and dusted the folios.

When at last he sat down at the desk, he felt as if he had been dreaming, and was still a briefless barrister, with no work to do save dozing over an imaginary case. He reviewed in swift succession all that had taken place since that first day when he took possession of this legal sanctum; and his thoughts lingered oftenest and longest upon Isabel Ventnor. He brought her image before him with a delight which no longer left him any illusion as to his sentiments toward her. Her face, fresh, laughing, yet mobile and sensitive, had a far greater charm for him—or so he said to his impressionable heart—than many a one more perfect in coloring or outline. Her slender, well-proportioned figure,

dressed always with that harmony of detail that far surpasses costliness of material, seemed to him the most delightful and the most attractive in the whole range of femininity. He hoped that he should see her again very soon and very often.

He was roused from his reverie by the opening of his office door, and a voice demanding if Mr. Fox was back yet. He answered that question in the affirmative; and during the next few hours the door continued to open and to admit an almost continuous stream of people. They were mostly petty clients such as build up a practice. Each was, however, in as great a hurry as though his particular affairs were of paramount importance, and as if it were impossible for him to wait an instant. Hence there was not a moment wherein the lawyer found himself free to wait upon Mrs. Wilson; but he decided that if he did not go thither that evening, he would certainly go the following day. And the following day he went under circumstances which he could not have foreseen.

It was immediately after luncheon; and Phileas had just come in from the crowded streets, hot, dusty and tired, when the tele-

phone rang. Isabel Ventnor, in a voice so agitated as to be barely recognizable, asked:

"Has Mr. Fox returned?"

"Yes," said Phileas. "He is speaking."

"For God's sake come at once! Don't lose an instant. It is Isabel Ventnor."

Before he could ask any questions the instrument was shut off. It took Phileas scarcely an appreciable time to reach the street and hail a passing cab, in which he caused himself to be bowled along at a breakneck pace by the quietest ways, through which there might be the least obstruction.

The mansion lay in a sort of repose that seemed more pronounced than usual. The sun fell in long, slanting beams over the trees where they stood in their prim rows or waved in swaying curves. Cadwallader, with face that was ashen gray and eyes rolling wildly, opened the door without a word. He brought the lawyer to the library. Phileas paused, spellbound, upon the threshold.

Isabel, with pallid, terror-stricken face, pointed to a figure in the chair,—the same that had fascinated the young man on the opening of the door. Seated before the table, as he had seen her last, her eyes wide open and burning in their sockets, with their un-

seeing gaze fixed upon an unoccupied corner of the room, was the mistress of the mansion.

Ghastly in the extreme was the appearance she presented. She was clad in a rich gown of brocade, and fairly ablaze with jewels, which, as Phileas quickly surmised, belonged to the rows of cases that he had seen in the safe. Those receptacles, in fact, lay empty upon the table; while their glittering contents, chiefly diamonds in the form of necklaces, tiaras, bracelets, rings and aigrettes, had been employed to deck the shrunken frame of Mrs. Wilson. The resplendence of the stones fairly dazzled the eyes that looked at them. The lawyer's glance wandered to the safe in the corner, which stood wide open, staring with desolate blankness, its long-guarded secrets displayed to every comer. From the lips of the strangely bedizened figure came forth inarticulate sounds, apparently addressed to some shadowy presentment of overwrought fancy. It was a singular, a weird scene, that sent a shudder through the attorney's frame and shook his healthy nerves.

"What should we do?" inquired Isabel, who, though white to the lips, stood ready for any emergency. "I thought it better

to wait till the doctor comes before making any effort to disturb her."

"Has she been long like this?" Phileas asked.

"I scarcely know myself," the girl answered. "I went out, as I often do, for a walk; leaving Mrs. Wilson, apparently in her usual health, taking her afternoon sleep upon the couch in her own room. I was not gone long; and when I came in Cadwallader told me that she had dressed alone—a thing she never does,—and had come downstairs, also without assistance. The Negro met her, and offered his arm; but she had passed him by without a word, walking very straight, as he had not seen her for years. She had come into the library and closed the door, so that he had been afraid to follow. Of course I rushed in here as soon as I heard his story, and found things as you see them. I tried to bring her back to consciousness and to make her hear my voice, but it was all no use. I telephoned for the priest and the doctor. Both were out, but I am expecting them every moment. Then I thought of you, and I thank you so much for coming promptly."

"I wonder," said Phileas, "if it would be better to try to rouse her, or to wait a little longer?"

"Perhaps we might try again," declared Isabel; and, kneeling down, she put her arm around the aged figure and said: "Don't you know me, dear? It's Isabel."

But the eyes looked past her with the same wild stare, and the lips continued to murmur inaudible words.

"Perhaps if *you* were to try?" said Isabel; and Phileas, bending down, took Mrs. Wilson's withered hand, now burning with fever, into his own, so cool and firm. He spoke very distinctly.

The unseeing eyes were turned on him an instant, and the voice, thick and husky, and altogether unlike its ordinary clear enunciation, managed to form the question:

"Are you John Vorst?"

"No," answered the young man. "I am your attorney, Phileas Fox."

For an instant the face became disturbed, as with some effort of memory; it seemed as if reason were struggling back into the unnaturally distended eyes. But the expression almost instantaneously faded, though the hand rested in the cool, strong grasp.

"Are you tired, Mrs. Wilson?" asked Phileas, soothingly.

The genuine pity and tenderness in the

tone fell gratefully upon Isabel's ear. It likewise seemed to please the delirious patient, whose gaze became less unnatural, while something like a smile hovered about the lips.

"If we could get her upstairs it might be better," Phileas declared to Isabel.

But at that moment the door opened, and the old family doctor entered, closely followed by Father Van Buren. The former examined the patient carefully.

"It is a singular case," he said; "but I do not think there is any immediate danger of death. It would be well, however, if she could be put to bed as soon as possible, without unduly exciting her. It is of the utmost importance that she be kept quiet."

It was Phileas who took from her the jewels—though she at first resisted the attempt,—and gave them into Father Van Buren's keeping, that they might be locked away. Then the young lawyer raised his client in his strong arms, as though she had been a little child, and carried her upstairs.

XVIII.

FOR the next few days Phileas was kept in almost constant communication with the mansion in Monroe Street. Isabel had learned to depend upon him in everything, and affairs of all sorts were referred to him. The young girl found herself in the peculiar position of being unacquainted with the more private concerns of the family, and yet feeling, intuitively, that there were grave reasons why she should not call into the intimacy of the household those relatives and friends who, on hearing of Mrs. Wilson's illness, drove up to the door in gorgeous landaus to leave cards of inquiry.

For such a remnant of the stream of fashion as yet lingered in town permitted itself to be momentarily diverted from its course into "that dreadful slum." Some few, in the hurry of departure, offered their services by telephone. In other cases that departure was delayed. The woman who led so retired a life behind the iron gates which shut in the slum was known to be very wealthy, with the accumulated wealth of the Spooner and Wilson connection, to which was added—so

far as the outside world knew—that of the Vorsts. The older people remembered when John Vorst was not only a beau (*the* beau in the most exclusive of circles) whom it was the ambition of every girl to secure as an admirer, if not a prospective husband, but the greatest “catch” from a monetary point of view. Now, it was fervently hoped amongst all these who thus remembered, or who became thus solicitous for her health, that the old woman, having no near of kin, might in the matter of her will go out into the byways of her distant blood relations and marital connections.

Isabel, on her part, was fully aware that for many a day Mrs. Wilson had had no love for her gay and fashionable kindred, and that she would feel very much aggrieved were they now permitted to intrude upon that privacy she so sedulously guarded. She believed, on the other hand, that Mr. Fox not only knew as much as, but a great deal more than, she did of the family affairs. Mrs. Wilson had told her, in fact, that the young lawyer was entirely in her confidence. Therefore, it was a perfectly safe and restful feeling to know that Phileas might be admitted at any time, without fear that he should happen

upon some family skeleton. The girl was, moreover, conscious of those qualities that had caused Father Van Buren to recommend so young a man for the delicate and difficult post of Mrs. Wilson's adviser. The tact, the discretion, the energy and resourcefulness, were coupled with a kindness of heart and a thoughtful consideration for others that were manifested in a hundred little ways.

"What should I have done without you?" cried she, impulsively. That was when the first danger from that strange seizure of Mrs. Wilson's was over, and the doctor gave some hopes of the patient's recovery. As Isabel spoke thus the two were walking under the shade of the century-old trees. Phileas had, in fact, insisted that the girl should come out, exerting over her an elder-brother sort of authority, and insisting that the paleness of her cheeks and the circles around her eyes showed the need of fresh air and relaxation.

When Isabel made this exclamation, Phileas stopped and looked at her for a few moments without speaking; he reached up instead and plucked a spray from a flowering tree above their heads and handed it to her. Then he said:

"And I have been thinking what I shall do when I no longer see you every day."

Isabel started. Perhaps that possibility, or something else which his words implied, had never struck her before.

"You must come whenever you please. Mrs. Wilson, if she is able, will always be glad to see you."

"Yes, yes, I know!" replied Phileas, abstractedly,— "or at least I hope so."

"She took a great fancy to you," continued Isabel; "and you may consider it a compliment, she is so fastidious."

"I *do* consider it a compliment," assented Phileas; "and I shall always feel grateful for her kindness. Of course I shall only be too glad to come whenever I may, but it will not be quite the same thing. I shall not come into your life as I have been doing lately; and, in the order of things, friends must drift apart."

"Why should friends drift apart?" Isabel asked.

"There are grave reasons on my part," answered Phileas, "though they may not appeal to you with the same force. For my own peace of mind, it is advisable that we should not meet hitherto on the same

intimate footing. Friendship on my side is impossible; and, as for anything else, your sphere and mine are too far removed."

"You speak as if I were a princess or something of that sort," said Isabel, with an irrepressible gleam of humor in her eyes, "instead of being a poor companion."

"But," argued the lawyer, though a light as of hope began to shine on his face, "you have lived in such luxurious surroundings you have scarcely even imagined what poverty is, and I am at the very lowest rung of the ladder."

"And I," said Isabel, with a laugh which did not conceal a tremor in her voice, "besides being poor, shall be quite alone, if anything were to happen to Mrs. Wilson."

Phileas looked eagerly into the girl's face. He was young, having scarcely left boyhood behind him, and he was very much in love. Those words of Isabel emboldened him to say more than he had intended, and to neutralize the effect of his late prudent observation.

"If in such an event, or at any time," he cried impetuously, "you would give me the right to care for you, to—to save you from that loneliness, and—forgive me if I speak

too plainly—from that poverty which is so trying to a woman—”

He spoke hurriedly, almost incoherently, and he waited for Isabel's reply; but it did not come. She was absently plucking the flowers from the branch he had given her, and said nothing.

“If you think for one moment,” he went on, “you could care for me or endure the life we should have to lead together for some years, it would be almost too great a happiness. Only remember that I have nothing to offer you but what I am and can make myself. I have no influential connections nor great prospects of any sort.”

Isabel was still silent, as though she were reflecting; and he added:

“Is it presumptuous to ask you if you could come down to me?”

“There is no question of coming down at all,” Isabel replied gravely, “since I have just told you that I am as poor and friendless as possible.”

“And, of course,” interposed Phileas, promptly, “I could never have loved you as I do if I had known—” Then almost immediately he corrected himself: “Even if you had been rich, I would have loved you

all the same; only in that case I should have followed the advice of the old monk: 'Fly far, fly quickly, fly always.' But will you not even say one word?"

"I can not think of any word to say," answered Isabel. "All my thoughts are in confusion; for I do not believe that things in this house will ever go back to their old footing."

Phileas started. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"I do not think that Mrs. Wilson can last very long."

"But the doctor said—"

"Yes, I know; but I, who have watched her closely, feel that she is steadily losing ground. I shall be very lonely, very desolate, if she is taken from me; but for that very reason I can not think of anything else now, nor answer a question which would require much thought."

"I should not have spoken," said Phileas, remorsefully. "I never dreamed of doing so when I came this afternoon. But perhaps, after all, it is better that you should know and understand how much I love you, and that you need never be lonely nor desolate if you are not afraid to be a poor man's wife."

Little more was said between the two, though they continued for a few moments longer to walk up and down under the trees awestricken by that idea of change and death which Isabel had suggested. During that interval, however, Phileas felt more forcibly convinced than ever that there was nothing henceforward outside of that enchanted solitude save work—steady, ceaseless, unremitting work—which might enable him to gain that treasure within the iron gates that now, for some mysterious reason, and despite Isabel's attitude of reserve, seemed within reach.

As he was passing out that day, the foolish young lawyer, who should have been so wise, picked up from the grass one of the flowers that Isabel's dainty fingers had plucked from the branch he had given her. He put it carefully into his pocketbook, and went forth into the fever and fret of the highways; and Isabel, watching from an upper window, noticed the little episode and smiled.

It certainly was as well, where Isabel was concerned, that the young man had spoken; for it brought a grateful warmth into the coldness of that sombre mansion, and gave a pleasant turn to her thoughts that had been all of gloom. She pondered upon the words,

which this her first lover had spoken, with a pleasure which she sought to repress as unsuited to the tragic atmosphere about her. The prospect that Phileas had held out to her had no terrors for her nature, and the personality of Mrs. Wilson's attorney strongly attracted her. She felt convinced, too, that Phileas must necessarily rise in his chosen profession, since he possessed both intellectual capacity and energy of character, together with a certain magnetism and the friend-making quality,—all of which were likely to insure ultimate success. She had learned during this time of trial and bewilderment to rely upon the lawyer's judgment and to be cheered by his sympathy. Added to all this, the dawn of a new and powerful sentiment struggled with the grief, that was both real and strong, for her aged friend and protectress, who now lay, as she feared, in the grip of approaching dissolution.

Through the dreariness of the mansion, and its almost abnormal stillness, rang the vibrant tones of the young man's declaration; and, as an echo, deep in the girl's heart sounded the words:

"I *do* love him, and I am not at all afraid to be a poor man's wife."

XIX.

AS if inspired by that understanding with Isabel, and the hopes it had engendered, Phileas Fox worked with an unremitting and ever-growing energy. Custom was pouring in upon him. He found it necessary to engage, an office boy, who should help with the copying of documents, and other such matters as could be safely entrusted to him; and this new functionary was installed at a desk behind the curtain. The office chairs, once painfully new, began now to grow shabby with constant use; the shelves were filled with papers; and the attorney himself, as he bent over his desk, was an exceedingly busy man.

Early one Monday morning he had a visit from the assistant district attorney, who wanted his co-operation in an important case.

"I say, Fox," he said, "we've got an ugly customer to deal with. He's involved in a very network of illegal doings, and yet he manages somehow to keep on the safe side of the law. He's a shrewd fellow; he's got the nerve of I don't know what; and, besides, there's money behind him. He's feathered

his own nest, and he knows how to rake in the shekels; and some big men are in the deals with him. I want you to take up the case against him jointly with myself, and to get evidence so that we can procure a conviction. I want to send him to Sing Sing for a long term; for he's about the worst blackguard in New York State."

"And that's saying a good deal!" cried Phileas, remembering certain experiences of his own.

"Yes. I suppose it would be pretty hard to beat Jason Trowbridge."

Phileas started. "Trowbridge?" he said. "Why, I've got almost enough evidence myself to convict him in any court."

The visitor raised his eyebrows incredulously. "I'm glad to hear it," he said. "But remember that 'almost' won't do for that rascal. He's a precious slippery customer."

"Well, I'll put my evidence before you in proper form," Phileas declared; "and I can tell you that I never undertook a case with greater pleasure, apart from the honor for a beginner like myself of being associated with you."

"We'll work it out together," the elder man said, with a kindly smile. "Our office

is up to its ears in work just now; but if we can capture Jason, we'll do a great service to the community."

He then proceeded, with a cynicism engendered by long years of familiarity with crime, to unfold to Phileas such deeds and such schemes as fairly nauseated the listener, who from time to time gave vent to an exclamation that was like an explosive in the serene calm of the other's talk; and the keen eyes of the elder man twinkled, and his mouth, set firmly above the grizzled chin, formed itself into a laugh.

"You'll get used to it, my boy," he said encouragingly.

"Why doesn't the law take hold of this scoundrel, and a score or two of others, and shut them up?"

"Partly on the old principle that rogues need only rope enough to hang themselves in the long run, partly from the difficulty of convicting them. The law itself is beset on all sides by dirty trucklers, who are teaching rascals to elude it. Pah! it's sickening to think of it. But you'll find that there's no use in regret. If every man in this country of ours would only work for honest law and honest administration thereof,—why, the cities

would be paradise instead of the other thing. It's graft, my boy, and graft again. But tell me now, what do you know about this Trowbridge?"

"For one thing, his real name is Gross."

"Oh, I guess he has half a dozen names! But what else?"

Phileas then related his own experience with the miscreant; and the big man laughed heartily at the description of Jason's visit and its results.

"Why, you lost the chance of your life!" cried the elder practitioner. "He'd have kept you busy from one end of the year to the other, and paid you well. You might have been driving your own motor by this time, and nine out of ten chaps would have jumped at the offer."

"Not decent fellows, surely?"

The other raised his eyebrows again and compressed his lips.

"Plenty of what the world calls decent fellows," he declared emphatically.

"They are a disgrace to our profession!" exclaimed Phileas. "They ought to be disbarred."

"You're at the boiling point of virtue yet," the District Attorney commented.

Phileas found the attorney's cynicism revolting. He liked him better in that mood when he had blurted out his honest indignation; for he knew his reputation to be that of an honest man and a civic and national reformer.

"See here," continued the other, after a pause. "I guess you're a Roman Catholic, eh?"

"Yes," said Phileas, surprised at the question; "of course I am a Catholic."

"I thought so," said the other, looking at him thoughtfully. "And that reminds me of a little rhyme I heard somewhere:

When they're good, they're very, very good;
And when they're bad, they're horrid."

"They never have any excuse for being bad," said Phileas,— "not in their religion, at all events."

"That's right," agreed the other. "I haven't time to bother my head about any religion; but I guess yours is the best police system, anyhow. It's needed in this country, to keep the masses in order."

"It's needed everywhere, to keep *all* classes in order," responded Phileas, who was not quite pleased with his senior's way of putting things.

"I suppose so,—I suppose so," assented

the official, good-naturedly; and then, dismissing the matter, he made an appointment for the next day, and passed out with a farewell hand-shake that was unwontedly genial for him. He almost knocked into a person who was advancing toward the office door, and who was the very antithesis of himself. It gave Phileas a sensation of absolute relief, mingled with astonishment, to behold John Vorst standing upon the threshold.

Phileas, having hastened to accommodate him with his own chair, which was the most comfortable in the place, expressed both his surprise and concern that the old man should have ventured so far alone.

"Oh, I am not such an old hulk as you may suppose from seeing me seated in my arm-chair!" cried John Vorst; "though it's true I am a bit stiff in the joints."

His voice and accent were so delightfully modulated that they were a distinct relief to the lawyer, especially in the mood wherein his last visitor had left him. And the personality of the late comer seemed an equally delightful contrast to those degraded beings who had been brought before the young man's mind with photographic exactitude. Here was one, as Phileas felt with a curious satisfaction,

who, with innumerable temptations offered to him, had never swerved from the path of rectitude. Occupying a high place as he had done in the world, being almost an international figure in social circles, he had held on unflinchingly to the ideals, above all to the faith, of his youth. Injuring no man, scandalizing no man, he had borne patiently and without bitterness manifold wrong and injustice; faithful to the law of God, and practising, though unostentatiously, the various devotions of the Church.

"Oh," thought Phileas, with the generous warmth of youth, "even apart from religion altogether, isn't it better to do as this man has done?"

For his heart was still sick within him, not only at the revelations he had heard, but at the cynicism with which those revelations had been made by one whom he knew to be an honest and conventionally right-doing man.

Mr. Vorst, quite unconscious of the anti-thesis he presented, and of the train of thought which his appearance had suggested, was looking with pleased interest about the apartment.

"So this," he said, "is where you dabble

in the law and expound its mysteries? It's an exceedingly pleasant room, with plenty of air and sunshine."

"Just see what a view I have from this window," said Phileas, boyishly, pleased with the other's approval of his surroundings. "I'll move your chair, and you can examine it at your leisure."

Mr. Vorst, in his whole-hearted way, expressed his wonder and delight at the strange and varied panorama outstretched before him.

"It makes me feel a century old at least," he said. "Picture to yourself, if you can, Mr. Fox, how this great wilderness of a city looked when I remember it as a boy. Not a single sky-scraper; only surface cars—horse cars at that—and omnibuses; never a telephone nor an electric light. And as for these thoroughfares, this maze of offices and buildings, those multitudes of human beings, divide them all by a tenth and you will have some idea of the New York of my boyhood. And now show me some of the sights, you watchman on the tower of human progress. To me they are all new. I never get farther down town than the twentieth streets."

Phileas pointed out the most prominent

features in the landscape, all of which John Vorst regarded with pleased interest and appreciation, noting the contrasts, asking questions, and listening with that sympathetic joyousness which was so winning a trait in his character.

"Well," he said at the end of it all, "there are only two features that I recognize in this new scene, and they are like old and faithful friends: the Bay out yonder that shall flow upon its way and beat upon this shore long after that human swarm shall be gathered to their fathers, and the twin spires of Trinity and St. Paul's."

After the old man had thus expressed his admiration of everything, he said:

"But here I am talking away as if we were still in those leisurely old days, instead of being in conversation with a busy and rising young lawyer. Are we quite alone?"

"My boy may be behind the curtain," said Phileas. "I'll make sure, though I don't think he is precisely within earshot."

To make assurance doubly sure, however, Phileas dismissed the boy upon some errand; and then, locking the door that no one might intrude, he begged of John Vorst to acquaint

him with his reasons for having made so unusual an effort.

"I received a letter *this morning*," said the old man, seeking *for* the epistle in question amongst half a dozen others in his breast pocket. "It is," he said, "from a person, whom I may possibly have mentioned to you before, and who has been the source of much annoyance to me for a long time past."

Phileas divined that his friend could be speaking of none other than William Gross, alias Jason Trowbridge.

"My connection with him," said Mr. Vorst, "dates back over several years. He was once in my employment; his father had been in that of my father. But like father, like son; we had to get rid of them both."

Phileas made no effort to interrupt the course of the narrative, even to the extent of remarking that he had heard something of all this before; and Mr. Vorst proceeded:

"He has annoyed me in many ways to gratify the grudge he bore me. He used to make it his business to spy upon my movements, to discover me in every new retreat, and to disclose the same, or to threaten that he would make such disclosure, to the lawyers. Through his machinations I was driven from

Mrs. O'Rourke's. I then went to Westchester, where, despite many painful associations, I was enjoying a real repose when he presented himself one rainy afternoon. I declined to see him. He hung about the house till late night, still kept at bay by my sturdy Teuton—"

"Whose acquaintancce I also made," laughed Phileas.

John Vorst looked up in surprise, while the young man explained, telling for the first time of his visit to the house and its results.

"But," continued Phileas, "you were about to tell me of the miscreant's last intrusion on your privacy."

"He hung about the place, as I said, till late on into the night. Even after I had retired, I heard his uneasy step skulking about the gallery. Had he dared, he would, I verily believe, have forced an entrance, though he usually strives to keep upon the safe side of the law. Next day I left for Boston. The fellow had either lost the scent or he did not care to pursue it at that moment. Since my return, which he has in some way or another discovered, he has made sundry efforts to see me, always repulsed by worthy Mrs. O'Rourke; after which he had recourse to the mails, and this morning I received the

sample of his epistolary style which I am about to show you."

Removing the letter from its envelope, John Vorst laid it before Phileas, who read its contents.

XX.

JOHN VORST remained silent while Phileas read the following paragraph of the offensive letter:

"William Gross writes these presents to warn you of a snake that has crossed your path, and who bears the ugly name of Fox. A red-headed shyster of a lawyer, he is trying to get the better of you, in conjunction with the old woman in Monroe Street. He was seen more than once at her house, and is understood to be engaged by her, because he is so young and so unknown that he could be trusted to do any dirty work. He plays fair to deceive you, and one of your Romish priests is in the deal."

"That first part of the letter you may pass over, if you wish," laughed Mr. Vorst. "It is a little bit the reverse of complimentary, and, of course, would not have given me a thought. But it is the latter portion of the precious epistle that I thought might be worth considering."

Phileas who had colored sensitively at the allusions to himself, though he laughed too, and met the kindly glance of Mr. Vorst with

a steadfast one from his own blue orbs, gave his attention again to the document. It was written legibly enough, in a round, clerkly hand.

"You've insulted me and ill-treated me for many a year," read Phileas from the paper; "but I'll do you a good turn now at the last, and spite that miserable cur of a lawyer that's plotting to take away your property. I know, and my father before me knew, that John Vorst, senior, left a will, and in it he willed everything to yourself, and nothing to them that claimed a portion on account of a previous will; and, more than that, he wiped out the whole ground of litigation, and cleared up the title that's been in dispute. And no one should know better than my father, since he witnessed the document."

"A pair of scoundrels, father and son!" cried Phileas. "They knew of the existence of that will and kept it secret."

John Vorst was momentarily silent; Phileas remembered that another had known of its existence and refused to testify to that knowledge.

"He and his father probably stole the will between them, so as to be revenged on you."

"It seems likely," agreed Mr. Vorst. "But we must not jump too hastily at conclusions. The will certainly disappeared in the hours following upon my father's death. He himself had informed me of having signed such a document, and deposited it in the library safe. I did not know its contents, nor did I inquire; but, from the tenor of my father's remarks, I believed that it was such as this fellow has now stated. I understood that he had revoked certain provisions which he had made two years previously, on the occasion of my marriage. He was, however, a reticent man about his affairs, and did not care to be questioned. But he also gave me to understand that he had made some arrangement by which the informalities in the original sale, and which had already led to litigation, had been amended. In that final will he left everything to me, but, as it were, in trust for the other heirs, and that each might receive a due share."

"And it was these wretches," observed Phileas, "who have caused these interminable lawsuits, and kept you out of your property!"

"You are determined to charge everything upon them," said the elder man, laughing; "and they certainly were the cause of much

mischief, in the sense that they might have given evidence in my favor. But as to the rest, we must have some charity even for the William Grosses and—their fathers.”

“We shall have justice for the son, in any case,” replied Phileas, angrily. He could not think nor speak patiently of the miscreant, especially after what he had just heard.

“And to all this I am prepared to swear,” continued the letter; “and to bring forward other evidence, in order to circumvent that villain Fox and to frustrate his schemes. I warn you to turn him out next time he calls on you, and to treat him in all respects as he deserves.”

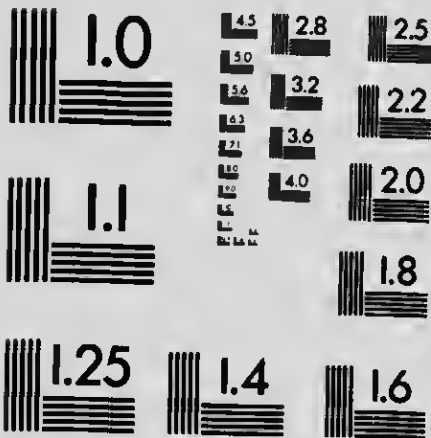
“He little knows,” said Phileas Fox, chuckling, “that he has done me, and us all, an immense service in smoothing the way for a final settlement of an intricate affair.”

“You may well call it an intricate affair,” mused John Vorst; “and of course that arose, as I presume you have long since discovered, from the fact that Martha Spooner was not only mentioned in my father’s former will as my wife, but as having had a prior claim to the Monroe Street property through her mother’s family, who were the original owners of the dwelling—or at least the ground on



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which it was built,—and once again through her distant kinship with my father's family."

"My client explained those different points to me in our various interviews," said Phileas.

"Which makes it unnecessary to go into those matters at present," said Mr. Vorst, with evident relief; "though, of course, at any time I shall be glad to clear up any difficulty that may exist in your mind. But what steps shall you take with regard to this letter?"

"Our object must be to get possession, if possible, of that will, if it be still in existence; or at least to obtain such evidence as the rascal may be induced to give. He little knows the rod that the District Attorney's office has in pickle for him. I have been asked this very day to assist in procuring his conviction. If this matter of the will can be brought home to him, it alone will be sufficient to send him up for some years."

"Remember, my dear fellow," objected John Vorst, with an involuntary smile, "that this William himself could have had no hand in the actual abstraction of the will, since he was not even born at the time of my father's death."

"By his own showing, he was aware of the

existence of the document, and probably of its abstraction. His father had evidently made him privy to the fact."

"I think I should be glad to fasten that particular crime upon him,—I mean upon the elder Gross," said John Vorst, slowly.

And Phileas, looking at him, realized what it must have meant to this man to have had during all those years a doubt, which very probably he would scarcely admit to himself, that some one else—some one who had a more direct interest in the transaction—might have abstracted the paper. The young man, therefore, did not ask any question, but waited in silence while Mr. Vorst went on:

"Otherwise, I have no special desire to see the wretch punished. As we grow older, we realize that the hour of punishment, lesser or greater, is coming for everyone of us; and we are disposed, as far as we are personally concerned, to leave even the most desperate offenders to the last tribunal."

"But the good of society must be considered," argued Phileas, with the hot zeal of youth. "This ruffian is a menace to every decent citizen."

"I suppose so,—I suppose so," agreed John Vorst; "and it will be your duty to convict

him if you can, instead of leaving him to the last Grand Assizes. But, oh, I can find it in my heart to pity such as he, who have never known one generous impulse, one inspiration toward good!"

"But think of his victims," said Phileas.

"Yes, I acknowledge that they must be thought of, and such an offender must be put out of the way of doing evil. I was merely thinking of my personal feelings, you inexorable man of law!"

And Phileas could not help wondering a little, since the man before him, of all others, had reason to complain of the machinations of this Gross, or Trowbridge, and, as it appeared, likewise of his father.

"Of course," the lawyer said, waiving any further discussion of the abstract part of the subject, "the will can be obtained from him—if indeed he possesses it—only through you."

"Through me?" echoed John Vorst, shrinking back in repulsion; then, almost immediately bracing himself, he added: "But I must be brave, and do whatever is required of me."

"Were I to act," said Phileas, "he might destroy the will and refuse to give evidence.

In fact, it is certain that such would be his procedure. You must, therefore, approach him in person, or, possibly, through your attorney. Of course there is the other alternative of causing his immediate arrest on some one of the other indictments which we hope to bring against him, and striving to force him, through the production of this letter, to divulge his knowledge of the whole matter. But I believe the former course to be preferable."

"Come and dine with me this evening, and we can discuss the affair at our leisure," said John Vorst. "My cab is waiting, if you care to come now; you can call for me at your convenience, and we can decide on whatever hotel you modern man of the day may select."

This being agreed upon, Phileas met and accompanied his newly made friend to one of the great hostleries which have made the name of Manhattan famous, and there they debated the question in all its bearings. They finally decided that the matter should be arranged through John Vorst's solicitor, who should interview the miscreant, and obtain from him a full confession of the affair, and, if possible, the missing document. John Vorst stipulated only one thing: that such confession

and the missing will, even if procured, should not be brought in evidence against the wretch, provided that his conviction could be otherwise procured.

"I have very little doubt," said Phileas, "that we can get all the evidence we need against him in other quarters."

And so, in fact, it proved. It would require many chapters to describe the emotions of that past-master of villainy when, after giving up the will, and freely confessing, under promise of immunity, the share which he himself and his father had taken in those transactions of the past, he discovered that he had unwittingly befriended the lawyer with the red hair and predatory cognomen, against whom he had vowed an everlasting vengeance.

Almost tragic in its intensity was the scene when that discovery was made, and, face to face with Phileas Fox—the latter stern, menacing, and representing the full majesty of the law,—he learned of the fatal mistake that he had made, and of the relations in which Phileas really stood both to plaintiff and defendant in the famous suit.

Phileas was not yet hardened enough to receive with equanimity the storm of invective

which was poured out against him by the miscreant. With a cold and deadly malignity more terrible than the fiercest rage, the wretch cursed him and called down the most awful maledictions upon his head. The young attorney could not repress a shudder; and that fearful scene often recurred to him long after the villain, convicted upon one of the numerous other indictments against him, was sent for a term of years to the inferno of dangerous criminals in the innocent-looking village of Sing Sing.

XXI.

SOMEHOW, during the first days following upon Mrs. Wilson's illness, and in the press of work that had coincided therewith, Phileas had been forced to neglect John Vorst, in whose company he had, nevertheless, found an ever-growing charm. From the occasion of that dinner wherein they had discussed the affair of Jason Trowbridge, he had not seen him at all. But after that memorable interview with Isabel, when Love, overleaping the barriers of reserve, had thrown down the gage of battle to unpropitious Circumstance, the lawyer, in view of the girl's warning, had felt uneasy. It seemed incumbent upon him to communicate to the old man the intelligence which he had hitherto sedulously guarded from him,—that of Mrs. Wilson's condition. Isabel's pessimistic view of the situation seemed to justify some preparation of John Vorst for a summons that Phileas felt might be sent to him. Therefore, he took his way to the lodging-house, where he was greeted by Mrs. O'Rourke, with a look of reproach upon her worn face.

“I'm glad you have come at last, Mr. Fox,

sir," she said. "The old gentleman has missed you sorely, and he seems kind of down like these few days back."

"It was not my fault that I did not come sooner and oftener," the lawyer answered, as he was ushered into the front parlor, where he found John Vorst seated as usual in his chair near the window. There was in his attitude some trace of despondency, which he instantly threw off when the visitor appeared.

Phileas was oppressed by the consciousness of the mission upon which he had come. He felt persuaded that John Vorst should know, and yet he found it very hard to broach what might be called the intimate and personal part of the business between husband and wife. Hitherto, it had not been thought necessary to acquaint the old man with the facts concerning Mrs. Wilson's seizure. She had either been unconscious or too weak for even the smallest excitement; while, on the other hand, the physician had assured Phileas that the patient might linger for a considerable period in the same state. Isabel's opinion had, however, brought home to the lawyer the responsibility of permitting John Vorst to remain in ignorance of his wife's

condition; and, moreover, there was the possibility, amounting almost to a certainty, that Mrs. Wilson might ask to see John Vorst.

As the young attorney sat constrained and uncomfortable, the experienced man of the world beside him was observing his perturbation with eyes that were keen for all their gentleness. He wondered what was amiss with his frank and ordinarily interesting visitor. He made no remark, however; but with his perfect tact, waited for the other's explanation. At last Phileas, taking his courage in hand, blurted out:

"There is something I want to say to you, Mr. Vorst, and I find it hard to make a beginning."

The older man turned to him instantly, with the exquisite sympathy that all his life through had won friends for Mr. Vorst.

"My dear boy," he replied, "I have always found that when anything painful had to be said or done, the safest rule was, the sooner the better. If what you have to say concerns me, remember that I am too well inured to trials of all sorts to flinch now. If it concerns you,—why, you must know me well enough by this time to be certain of my sympathy."

"The former supposition is the correct one," said Phileas.

"Then it does concern me?" John Vorst exclaimed quietly, and for the merest instant he bowed his head; and Phileas fancied he was praying. When he looked up again, Mr. Fox was struck with the brave, bright expression of the face. It was such as a soldier might have worn going into battle.

"Old age," he said, "makes cowards of us all. Forgive the paraphrase, and go on with what you have to tell me."

"In the various conversations I have had with you concerning the case of *Spooner vs. Vorst*, or *Vorst vs. Spooner*, I have avoided as much as possible what might be called the personal side of the affair."

"I appreciate your delicacy," said John Vorst, with a slightly perceptible stiffening of the figure.

"The interval since my last visit to you," continued Phileas, "has been one of painful anxiety at the house in Monroe Street. Its mistress was attacked by a seizure of some sort, and has been very seriously ill."

The face of the listener, seeming to grow tense in every line, slowly blanched; while an almost painful brightness centred about the eye.

"She is better," the young man added hastily; "though I have been told by one who has closely followed her case that she is not likely to survive very long."

Still John Vorst gazed at the speaker, maintaining the same rigid attitude, and with an expression of keenest suffering; but he spoke no word.

"Under these circumstances, certain business affairs have been necessarily interrupted," the lawyer went on. "But I feel it only right to tell you that they shall have to be terminated speedily, and that your attention to them will now be necessary."

"Oh, it can not be necessary," cried John Vorst, vehemently, "to disturb a dying woman by details of business!"

"It may be necessary to a certain extent," Phileas said gravely.

"I can not, *will not*, force such details upon her," persisted John Vorst.

"That is entirely my own feeling," said Phileas. "Even though acting in the capacity of her attorney, I have taken no steps and made no suggestion since her seizure. Nevertheless, I believe that she may wish to see straightened out certain matters that may necessitate your co-operation. You will under-

stand that, in the whole affair, a grave responsibility has been placed upon my shoulders; and I can not entirely rid myself of that burden without at least acquainting you with my client's wishes. She was so painfully anxious that justice should be done to everyone concerned."

"Poor Martha,—poor Martha!" murmured the white lips, so softly that it seemed merely the whisper of the breeze passing the window frame.

"It was her hope and prayer," said the lawyer, earnestly, "that God would permit her to repair all wrongs,—to complete what she called her expiation. Therefore, Mr. Vorst, at the risk of seeming hard, I must respect that trust she has reposed in me, and relieve her mind by complying with the few remaining formalities that are absolutely necessary. You will help me in this, will you not?"

"It is a difficult and delicate question," answered Mr. Vorst; "and all my instincts are against any introduction of business at the present juncture. But still, if it could afford her the slightest comfort and relief, of course you must do what you think expedient."

His voice became so broken as to be inaudible; but he rallied and said firmly.

"May God direct you! Already, at the outset of your career, you are discovering that the right thing is very often that which is at variance with one's feelings. I can not advise, but I beg of you to spare my poor Martha all you can; and if you see any other means of accomplishing her wishes, do so. For myself, I am totally indifferent to the result. My course is nearly run. In a few short months, or years at best, I shall have followed her into the shadows, and in the meantime I have sufficient for my actual needs."

"But consider, Mr. Vorst," urged the lawyer, "that as matters now stand, if these affairs are not settled before my client's demise, the estate must be divided between her next of kin, to whom she is altogether indifferent, and that act of justice which it is her desire to do must remain undone. And remember that besides yourself there are the other heirs for whom you have hitherto contested."

"Yes," assented John Vorst; "there are the other heirs for whom all these legal battles were fought unavailingly."

"For their sakes, then," said Phileas, "but still more for my client's sake, we must make this last effort."

"Do whatever you think best," agreed the old man, in a tone in which there was only infinite weariness.

Phileas felt the tears rise unbidden to his eyes. The tragedy of this life, once so rich in promise, wrecked by no fault of his own, but by the multiplied wrong-doing of another, smote upon the young man with full force at that moment. As he began to realize something of what that other had suffered, his wrath rose and burned fiercely against one who, now as plaintiff, now as defendant, had waged a bitter warfare. But even in the midst of his anger something like pity welled up within him for that other life, so much more surely wrecked than this; and for the old woman who was expending the last of her strength in a pitiful striving after reparation.

"You forgive all?" whispered Phileas.

"Forgive!" cried John Vorst, turning those brilliant and unnaturally distended eyes upon the speaker. "Have you never heard the saying, 'Love is stronger than death. It forgives all, it understands all'? O my dear

boy, my whole heart goes out to her, lying alone amongst the shadows! If you could have seen her as I saw her, young, gay and beautiful, you would feel the pathos and the pity of it. Nothing else appeals to me now."

Phileas did not interrupt that retrospect even by a single word. Only partially could he understand the varied emotions that were rending the strong frame before him with an agony too deep for adequate expression, but which yet had loosened that long silent tongue and given voice to the thoughts of years. Phileas, therefore, sat still, while the clock ticked away the slow moments. That complete forgiveness upon the part of one deeply wronged appeared to him most marvelous, especially when he looked around the lodging-house parlor, and considered the sordid surroundings wherein this man had been glad to find a refuge from legal persecution. He finally roused his friend from a painful reverie to say:

"It seems probable to me, Mr. Vorst, that you might be sent for, should the danger become imminent."

"And I shall most willingly go," said the old man, "if only I can feel assured that my presence shall not be unwelcome."

"I believe that my client may even express a wish to see you."

"I shall be ready at any moment. God forbid that I should refuse any request of hers!"

"And remember, sir," added Phileas, "that you may command me at any time. I am altogether at your service."

The hand-shake exchanged between the two men was strong and cordial, and John Vorst said:

"I thank you from my heart. I will be guided by whatever you and Father Van Buren may think best. But I beg of you, my dear Fox, to make everything as easy as possible for—your client, and to consider me personally not at all."

Phileas went away, pondering deeply upon that first impression which he had got from reading dry legal documents, and thinking how completely the order of things, as they then appeared to him, had been reversed, just as in the successive lawsuits plaintiff had changed places with defendant, and defendant with plaintiff. He further reflected, in the unwontedly solemn tone of thought that had been induced by his late experiences, how often those legal phrases twist and rend

the deepest fibres of human nature and make men's hearts their playthings.

In the midst of his moralizing, Mr. Fox smiled to remember the exaggerated precautions which Mrs. Wilson had at first taken to insure secrecy concerning his visits to the house in Monroe Street; and the subsequent measures to be adopted, until reassured by him on that point. For the poor soul had seemed to forget that greater New York goes on its way unheeding, caring little for what occupies the atoms composing its population.

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XXII.

THE summons for which Phileas had prepared his new friend was not very long in coming. A note in Isabel's hand was brought to the office by Cadwallader. Phileas was busy at the time, and the old Negro had to take his place in the ante-chamber behind the curtain, and wait his turn with two or three others, each of whom was on pins and needles until admittance was gained into the office and an interview with the lawyer obtained.

When at last Phileas was at liberty, and wondered why the next client did not appear, he drew aside the curtain and discovered Cadwallader asleep, his gray-besprinkled hair having fallen upon his breast. Phileas laid a hand gently upon the old man's shoulder, and Cadwallader awoke with a start, brimful of apologies, and quite bewildered by his surroundings.

"I guess it was all a dream," he said ruefully; "but I saw a lot of folks together that I used to know. But where am Cadwallader now?"

He looked up into the lawyer's face with pitiful eyes.

"You're all right, Cadwallader," said Phileas, soothingly. "Don't you remember Mr. Fox?"

A dawning smile of recognition began to play over the old man's face, and the smile broadened till he showed every tooth that was left in his shrivelled gums.

"Why, of course, Mr. Fox, sah,—why, of course I recollect you, most certainly! You must excuse my falling asleep, 'cause I've been up every night for a week."

"Don't mention it at all," said the lawyer. "The heat alone is enough to make you drowsy."

The Negro meanwhile began to feel in his pockets.

"I got here for you," he said at last, "a note from the sweetest young lady in the world."

There was upon the Negro's countenance a subtle recognition that he knew these words of praise would be agreeable to the young practitioner. He had observed a chain of very small and unimportant happenings between those two; he had seen them walking under the trees, and had marked, with a keenness of vision which time had scarcely impaired,

the episode of the blossom which Phileas had picked up.

The conscious blood flew up into the lawyer's face, and he felt a thrill of pleasurable emotion at sight of the familiar caligraphy upon the envelope. He also experienced a very friendly feeling toward the old Negro, who had thus put into words the idea that had penetrated into his own inner consciousness.

"From Miss Ventnor!" he said, with a faint smile hovering about the corners of his mouth.

"Yes, sah," said the Negro; "from Miss Ventnor, sah. And she asked me to bring an answer."

Mr. Fox, taking the missive from the messenger's hand, withdrew behind the curtain, placing Cadwallader at an open window, where the old man amused himself by observing with childish delight the panoramic movements of that huge commercial machine to which he was a stranger, and which had sprung into existence since he had arrived in New York as a pickaninny.

Phileas opened the note with a new feeling, delicate and tender, as though this caligraphy of his love was something exquisitely sacred.

The note was no longer from Mrs. Wilson's companion, a delightful girl whom he had from the first admired. It was from a personage who might one day stand in the closest of all relations with himself, to whom he had addressed words of ardent affection, and who had not discouraged him, but answered in a subtly captivating but enchantingly womanly manner, which had left him hoping, fluctuating, and yet uncertain.

He opened the letter, with an almost absurd hopefulness. It was, however, brief, and without the faintest suggestion of feeling, save perhaps in the postscript.

"MY DEAR MR. FOX:—Mrs. Wilson, who is somewhat stronger and better, expresses a wish to see you upon an important matter. Is there any one else whom it would be well for her to see? I would not advise you to delay. Come to-day, after your office hours, if possible.

"Sincerely yours, ISABEL.

"P. S.—It has been a little bit lonely these last days: poor Mrs. Wilson still keeping her room, and no one to talk to, or even to argue with under the trees in the park."

Having read over this epistle for the third time, Phileas set about answering it:

"DEAR ISABEL:—I am bold enough to call you by that name, for I never think of you by any other; and you know I have pledged myself to try to win the right to call you by a nearer and dearer one. If you are angry, forgive me. A lover is always foolish, and I am your lover now and forever, whether you respond or not. This is a sorry attempt at a business letter; but when I am thinking of you, business flies out of my head. Do you know what Cadwallader called you just now in my office? 'The sweetest young lady in the world.' He and I are fully agreed upon that point.

"May I ask your indulgence? This is a lull in a busy day, and the arrival of your letter and the sight of your hand upon the envelope were as the sweet fragrance of a garden. Did that postscript mean that you had missed me ever so little, or that you would be glad to see me? Why did you not say one word to cheer me? A man's life and his day's grind are so dull and commonplace without a woman's thought to raise him up! May I own that until I met you I was satisfied to work and work alone? *Now* I am always seeing your bright face before me and wishing that I were rich. Of one thing I am satisfied,

dearest: that you are poor,—*very* poor. It will be such a happiness when I can make you at least comparatively rich.

“I should like to go on writing and writing, putting down all the thoughts that occur to me about you, only that I fear you would not read them; and, besides, I must not tire out poor old Cadwallader. And better a thousand times than writing is the thought that I shall see you soon again.

“What you say about Mrs. Wilson partly spoils my pleasure in hearing from you. I am truly sorry; but perhaps she may pull through, after all, and be with you until—until—but you have promised nothing, and I must not be too presumptuous. Only you can not keep me from hoping. Each busy day in the office brings me nearer to the possible realization of that hope. For if you had hated me, or found my offer altogether distasteful, you would have told me so at once—would you not?—and so have put me out of suspense and relegated me to my proper place, merely as Phileas Fox, Attorney.

“P. S.—I am reversing the order of your note, and referring business to a postscript. I shall be with you as soon as I can leave the office,—probably about half-past five; and

my interview with Mrs. Wilson shall decide on the next step to be taken, and whether she wishes to see one whom I think it advisable that she should see."

This epistle Phileas sealed and delivered to the Negro. And it was read by Isabel with varied emotions, in which displeasure was not uppermost.

"It is absurd how he mixes up all that love-nonsense with business!" she commented; and then she fell to wondering whether if she had merely met Phileas Fox in the ordinary round of society, or if Mrs. Wilson had not fallen ill and so brought the young man into such intimate relation with herself, she should have found him so wonderfully interesting and have looked forward so much to his visits. She had to give up the fascinating problem, since one set of circumstances can not be judged by another; and the fact remained that Phileas Fox had become a very important factor in her daily life.

She put the letter away in her workbox and began to arrange her hair, presently arraying herself in a particular gown which had been considered very becoming. When her toilet was thus completed, she regarded herself in the mirror with a swift feeling of

compunction; and then she satisfied her conscience by the reminder that Mrs. Wilson liked even yet to see her carefully dressed, and would have remarked at once if her costume were sombre.

"So that I should have put on this blue dress all the same if the lawyer had been a graybeard," she explained to herself, as though another person had been present.

One thing was certain, however: that the said graybeard would not have been expected with the same pleasurable excitement that, despite Isabel's best efforts, filled her mind as she waited in the library, and saw the young man entering at the gate. As she sat there, she recalled, too, as if in justification for her own sentiments, how much Mrs. Wilson had liked the young man, and how Father Van Buren had so often become enthusiastic in his praise.

When Phileas entered, he shook hands gravely with the young girl; and, after an inquiry as to the invalid's condition, he asked if she had been angry at her letter.

"Why should one be angry where no offence is meant?" Isabel replied evasively.

"May I write again?"

"If it should be necessary."

"And even if it shouldn't?"

"Why, I thought you were very busy."

"So I am; but while my head and hands are busy my heart is busy too, and it would give me so much pleasure to write."

"Sit down now and be sensible!" cried Isabel.

"Is it so very foolish to have fallen in love with you?"

"Since you ask me, I think it is. There are so many rich girls."

"Let who will marry them," Phileas answered. "I know you are thinking that I should not talk about these things now, and you are quite right. Ouly I lose my head somewhat when I see you, and I am always saying or doing something that I promised myself not to say or do. If I find Mrs. Wilson well enough this afternoon, may I make a full confession to her?"

"It seems so incongruous," objected Isabel.

"But, after all, why should it be? If you were Mrs. Wilson's daughter or any near relative, there might be some force in your objection; but you are merely her companion; and, should she suddenly become worse, you will be left, as you tell me, alone and friendless. Is there any harm, then, in seeking to gain

your promise and her countenance in a matter that will insure your future?"

"You are a very obstinate man," she said, with a ghost of her old happy laugh.

"Was there ever a lover worthy of the name who was not?"

"I don't know much about them and their peculiarities," smiled Isabel. "But surely they are not all such men of one idea."

"Oh, yes, they are!" Phileas assured her. "The same idea is always there, and you can't imagine what it does for a man. But I shall feel better satisfied if Mrs. Wilson knows my sentiments."

"Tell her whatever you please," said Isabel; "but I shall reserve my judgment. You must not promise anything for me."

"No?" asked Phileas,— "not even that you will take my case under consideration as the legal phrase is?"

"Oh, that I can't help doing, since you are always talking about it!"

"Then I shall put it this way: I have fallen so deeply in love with Miss Ventnor that she threatens to interfere with all my legal work. She promises nothing, but she has not driven me off; and until she does, have I your consent to win her if I can?"

"Come," said Isabel, without giving any answer to that proposition. "Here is Cadwallader to say that you may go up."

From that moment Isabel might well have been satisfied with the young man's professional gravity. He ascended the staircase carpeted in inch-deep velvet carpet, of a pattern long since vanished from the looms. He passed the cage where the parrot, strangely silent, pirouetted upon his perch, and cast a malevolent glance at the stranger; and all the time Phileas did not even look toward his companion. In a few moments he stood upon the threshold of a large and lofty bedroom, so dark that at first sight he could scarcely distinguish objects. It needed but a glance to convince Phileas that Isabel's worst forebodings were likely to be realized, and a wave of genuine emotion passed over him.

He advanced to the bedside, whence Mrs. Wilson gave him a smile of greeting, pointing at the same time to a chair. In the conversation that ensued, Phileas found his client's mental faculties almost painfully acute; while in her voice and manner were traces of the old imperiousness, and a strained eagerness to be certain that he understood every point at issue between herself and John Vorst and

the other heirs, for whose sake had been chiefly carried on that contest, wherein the principal combatant now desired nothing so much as a peaceful settlement of all difficulties. She went into the subject with a force and clearness that were astonishing, considering her situation. She caused the ink to be brought; and, with a hand that had grown painfully tremulous, signed the last of those papers for which, so far as could be foreseen, her signature would be required; calling in Isabel and Cadwallader as witnesses.

Despite his firm resolution to the contrary, Phileas found no opportunity of explaining his sentiments in Isabel's regard. To the old woman every moment was so precious that she was wholly occupied with matters which she held to be of vital import, and from which her attention could not be distracted. Any attempt that Phileas made in the direction of his own affairs, that imperious will waved aside as of no importance. And perhaps it was as well to add no further burden or perplexity to that sorely tried mind, struggling thus painfully against the last mortal foe.

It is possible, indeed, that the old lady's conservative turn of thought would have

recoiled from the prospect of giving Isabel, whom she had regarded as her daughter, to any young and unknown man who had nothing more to offer than his own sterling personality; such an idea might have been merely disturbing to her dying moments. In any case, Phileas soon abandoned the effort to bring his view before her, and sat for the most part in silence beside that melancholy bed,—unless, indeed, his client asked for his opinion. He was surprised at the strange affection which he felt for this old woman who had so deeply sinned and so generously atoned.

From time to time, as she showed signs of exhaustion, the lawyer urged her to rest, suggesting that he would come again at any time.

“No, no!” she cried earnestly. “I must not omit anything important. At my age, even in ordinary health it would be dangerous to delay.”

As last, however, she let her head fall back upon her pillow.

“This weakness is stronger than I am,” she said, with a smile that was piteous in the extreme. “But everything of importance is done. There are a few points which I

would wish to have explained to you, as, for instance, about Isabel. Should I see you again, I will explain all. But in any case, I want you to promise me one thing."

She fixed Phileas with her piercing eyes as she continued, scarcely waiting for the young man's assurance that he would do whatever she might desire.

"That you will not let me die without seeing John Vorst."

XXIII.

VERY soon Phileas had reason to congratulate himself upon having prepared Mr. Vorst for his summons to the dwelling in Monroe Street.

"Come as quickly as you can," was the message he received from Isabel. "The doctor and Father Van Buren think that Mrs. Wilson is now sinking fast."

This announcement gave Phileas a shock. It was not that he was unaccustomed to death. He had lost his mother before he was out of his teens; his father had died while he was still at college; and he had seen other relatives dropping round him like leaves in autumn weather. Nevertheless, this sudden news temporarily unmanned him. He had begun to identify himself so closely with the house in Monroe Street that he almost felt as if he were one of the family. The personality of the old woman, despite all that he knew to her disadvantage, singularly interested him; and he had learned to look forward to his visits to the mansion, even apart from the potent attraction which he had found in Isabel. But, all unwittingly, he had anticipated a considerable interval

during which matters would remain at a standstill, and he should enjoy his present footing of intimacy,—always with the hope that he should be enabled ultimately to win the girl whom of all others he desired for his wife. It had never occurred to him as possible that death should so swiftly tumble this house of cards about his head.

His promise to Mrs. Wilson immediately recurred to him, and he resolved to lose not a moment in putting it into execution. In a very few seconds after the receipt of Isabel's message, he was in his street apparel and hastening toward the elevated train, which he believed to be the quickest means of transport to his destination.

He was admitted by the lodging-house servant, and not by Mrs. O'Rourke herself; which Phileas held to be a fortunate circumstance, precluding the idea of delay. He found Mr. Vorst seated, as was his wont, near the window; and when the young man entered the room he laid aside the "Imitation" which he had been reading,—placing it, as the visitor noticed, upon a table, with a Rosary that had likewise been in use.

"This is an early visit, sir," said Phileas, gravely, taking the chair indicated.

"Early or late matters little to an old hulk like myself, who is merely existing in the sunshine," said Mr. Vorst; but even as he spoke he looked keenly into the other's face, and saw there what caused his own face to pale.

"Mr. Vorst," observed Phileas, leaning forward and laying a hand gently upon the old man's arm. "I have just heard from the house that our patient is still weaker to-day, and I think it is time to fulfil a promise which I made since I saw you last."

John Vorst did not ask what that promise was: he simply waited till the younger man explained:

"I promised *her*, sir, that I would not let her die till she had seen you."

"And has it come to that? O my God, has it come to that?"

There was a wail in his voice,—the deep, awful wail of an uncontrollable anguish. He rose, however, in a bewildered way, and said:

"We must not lose any time, Mr. Fox. We had better go at once, if only you will help me a little with my toilet. I am shaken somewhat, my hand trembles, and I don't see as well as usual."

He shook, in fact, as one who has a chill,

while Phileas gave him the desired help in putting on his garments for the street.

Ten minutes later the two were seated in a coupé, which the lawyer had summoned from a neighboring stand. As they drove along, there was silence between them. The old man gazed out of the carriage window, his face drawn and pinched, his whole mind and soul back in those days when he had been young and had first met Martha Spooner, then scarcely out of her teens.

When the carriage reached the iron gates, Phileas made the driver a sign to stop there. Alighting first, he offered his arm to the old man, and so the two passed through the gates. John Vorst was trembling more than ever,—quivering with the stress of that emotion which threatened to overpower him as his feet trod once again those long familiar ways.

The door of the house stood open, and the pair, ascending the steps, entered. Before they had proceeded far, they were met by Cadwallader, who greeted Mr. Fox grimly and solemnly, oblivious at first of his companion. Then all of a sudden he stared, seeming to blanch under the ebony of his

skin; his knees shook; he trembled from head to foot.

"Massa Vorst!" he cried, with such a look as he might have given to a ghost, clasping and unclasping his hands as though he were praying. "Massa Vorst!" His face worked, his eyes rolled, and he broke into a very paroxysm of sobs.

"Cadwallader, old friend!" Mr. Vorst said; and, extending his hand he seized that of the ancient servitor in a warm grasp.

At that very moment, with a bounding of the heart, Phileas saw, as a gleam in that dark valley of the shadow, Isabel Ventnor descending the stairs. Her face, too, was paler and graver than he had ever seen it. She shook hands with him, and cast a look of troubled inquiry at his companion.

"I have brought," said Phileas, in answer to the look, "some one whom Mrs. Wilson has desired to see before the end."

Isabel glanced again at the courtly old figure and the finely featured face, upon which were evidences of deep emotion. She merely said, however, as she returned the old man's courteous salutation:

"I will go and let her know that you are here, Mr. Fox, and that you have brought

some one to see her. Will you please wait in the library?"

The men did not enter the room, but waited in the hall; for Isabel was gone only a moment.

Mrs. Wilson, on hearing her tidings, had cried out with unexpected strength:

"Go and bring them here at once!"

Isabel, appearing upon the stairs, made Phileas a sign; and he, offering his arm to Mr. Vorst, led him up those stairs which his feet had so often trod with the buoyant step of youth. Presently they reached that same massive room which Phileas had visited before, with its furniture of carved mahogany, and its deep-set windows, from one of which the heavy curtains were now drawn back.

There, upon the high four-post bed, lay Martha Spooner Vorst. She wore a dressing-gown of pale heliotrope, which emphasized the ghastly color and emaciation of her face. Her hair, smoothed back from the forehead, showed snow-white in the darkness. Her hands, skeleton-like, lay outside the coverlet.

Phileas was quick to perceive the change for the worse that had occurred even since his last interview, and rejoiced that he had wasted no time in the fulfilment of his

promise. He advanced first, as if to prepare the occupant of the bed, who greeted him in a faint but perfectly distinct voice:

"Has everything been done, Mr. Fox? Or is anything more required of me?"

"I think everything has been done," said Phileas; "and the recovery of the will, of which I informed you in my letter of last week, has simplified matters, so that you need not have any anxiety."

"So that everything will be right for *him*,— for them?" she asked.

Her voice was strangely calm and hushed, as one speaking from a distance. It had lost all the strained eagerness of the former interview.

"There are so many things that I wanted to explain to you," she continued; "but there is no time now. I never even told you about Isabel. She is John Vorst's niece, the daughter of his only sister."

Even in the solemnity of that moment Phileas felt as if he had received a blow, so unexpected was that announcement. But the eyes of the dying woman were already travelling past him to the door, and she made a movement almost as if she would push him aside.

"Mrs. Wilson," said Phileas, "I have kept my promise: I have brought *him* to see you."

A smile parted the lips, there was a suggestion almost of youthfulness in the countenance. As the lawyer drew back, his companion advanced, trembling.

"Martha!" he cried,—*"Martha!"*

"John!" said the old woman. "Forgive!—forgive!"

In her voice was only the calmness of the great silence into which she was about to enter and a gladness more pathetic than any tears.

Phileas softly rose, and, choking with an emotion that threatened to overpower him, he stole out. In the corridor he met Isabel, and they passed downstairs in silence. Apart from the effect produced upon him by the solemn scene which he had just witnessed, Phileas felt Isabel to be henceforward at an immeasurable distance from him. Mrs. Wilson's companion, whom he had wooed and almost, as he hoped, won, had been suddenly transformed into an heiress, a girl of high station, and of a position to which he could not aspire. His manner was, therefore, so cold and formal as to occasion in Isabel a swift movement of surprise.

"She has taken the place of my mother, who died a few years ago," said she. "I feel now as if I were altogether alone in the world."

Phileas' reply was cold and studied. He made no effort to take her hand or to utter any word of comfort. The only thing he could think of to say was:

"I am sure you will find other relatives."

It was only when the Negro, trembling and gasping with emotion, summoned them to the apartment above, where that great reconciliation had been effected that Isabel, gasping Phileas convulsively by the sleeve, cried:

"Who is that you brought?"

And Phileas, thrilling with love and pity, and deeming the need for concealment over, said, looking down upon her:

"That is Mr. John Vorst."

Following upon Mrs. Wilson's death, were some busy weeks for Phileas, in settling up that long-disputed estate. It is true that the case never went to the courts (as at the first blush had seemed probable), nor given the young man that forensic opportunity for which he had hoped. But before the final

arrangements had been concluded, notwithstanding the efforts of the deceased to put everything in order, Phileas had been brought into communication with half a dozen or more prominent legal firms, and had made quite a name amongst them as an honest, energetic, capable attorney, and one who was determined to maintain the highest professional standards.

Mr. Vorst meanwhile took up his abode in the dwelling at Westchester, with Susan O'Rourke as housekeeper. She had agreed to give up lodgers, and she and her children were located in a small cottage adjoining that of the German's. Cadwallader likewise accompanied "Massa Vorst," as did also Isabel. Phileas had a cordial invitation to spend his Sundays with them, and to visit there as often as possible. But he rarely availed himself of the privilege, save when he was compelled to hold personal communication with John Vorst.

One Sunday, however, he had run out to Westchester to confer with Mr. Vorst on some legal point that had arisen during the week, resolving to return by the noon train, and to spend the afternoon in town. He could not find the master of the house any-

where on the groundfloor; nor could he meet with Cadwallader, by whom to send a message. He, however, encountered Isabel, seated upon that portion of the veranda where he had held the colloquy with the Teuton. Her plain black dress fitted her to perfection; its sombreness was relieved only by white muslin collar and cuffs, daintily finished by the girl herself, in drawn-work. Her complexion was less bright than he had seen it formerly; and her manner was somewhat cold, or so the lawyer thought; and he held it to be a further indication that she was now aware of the difference in their relative positions. "As if she thought me capable of the meanness," he reflected bitterly, "of taking advantage of my position as family solicitor to win an heiress!"

Isabel laid down her book, and, looking at him gravely, said:

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Fox? My uncle has not come down yet."

"Perhaps he would see me in his room," Phileas suggested. "I have to catch the noon train back to town."

"Busy even on Sunday!" Isabel said, with a gleam of her old merriment in her eyes.

Phileas reddened and bit his lip. He

remembered how he had told her that he always enjoyed the Sunday rest. He muttered something about an engagement; and, though he was still standing, he lingered.

"Mr. Vorst (that is Uncle John) keeps remarkably well; don't you think so?"

Isabel asked the question a little anxiously, and Phileas answered:

"Yes, perhaps, as regards his bodily health; but I find him much aged and broken since my first meeting with him."

"Oh, I had forgotten that you knew him before!" said Isabel; and then there was once more a silence. "I suppose you *are* always busy?" she added presently.

"Why, yes," Phileas answered, "I have been pretty steadily upon the grind. But I like work. It braces a man's mind much as athletics do the body. But I must really try to find Cadwallader, and send a message to Mr. Vorst, or I shall miss my train."

"I think Cadwallader is in the garden, gathering lettuce for luncheon; but you can either find him there yourself, or I—"

"Oh, of course I shall find him! Don't disturb yourself. I have interrupted your reading too long already. So good-bye, if I do not see you again."

"Good-bye!" said Isabel. "The garden is over that way, just beyond that clump of trees."

"Oh, I shall find it easily!" he replied.

But before he had gone many steps he was perceived from an upper window by Mr. Vorst, who called out:

"I say, Fox, is that you? I thought I heard your voice. You're not thinking of going, surely! Can't you stay and have a chop with us?"

"I was not going without seeing you, of course," said Phileas. "I was trying to find Cadwallader to send you a message, sir. But I just ran out, you see, after eight-o'clock Mass, and I thought of catching the noon train back into town."

"Take the afternoon train instead," urged the old man from the window. "I have wanted to see you, and you never come near us except you are furnished with wings. Go and talk to Isabel till I come down."

Phileas had, therefore to turn his steps backward, and to say awkwardly:

"I hope you heard Mr. Vorst's commands from the upper window?"

"Oh, yes, I heard!" said Isabel. "And I think it very much wiser for you to wait,

so that you will have time for a long talk."

There was the same unsmiling gravity about the mouth as she thus spoke, but Phileas caught a gleam of repressed humor in the eyes.

"I was going to say," continued the young man, "that if you had not heard, you would be forced to conclude that I was as unstable as water in my resolves."

"What any one else thinks doesn't matter very much, does it?"

Her eyes rested a moment upon his face, and then wandered out over the vast expanse of water.

"What *you* think will always matter to me. That you must know and believe, whatever else happens."

"You seem to be taking the matter very seriously," said Isabel, looking at him with the same calm expression.

"Some matters have to be taken seriously. There is no other way."

Isabel did not ask him why the subject of staying to luncheon should be taken seriously, though the words trembled on her lips. She leaned back in her chair and laughed lightly. But she was as conscious as he of the slight and invisible barrier which had arisen between them. She was accus-

tomed to hear the young man's praises sung daily by her newly-found relative, as they had been sung before, though in more measured terms, by her late patroness. In the latter instance she had heard those eulogiums without annoyance, even with pleasure; but it was not so in the former case. She even heard Mr. Vorst's opinions with a distinct resentment.

While Phileas sat beside her in the chair which he had perforce accepted pending the descent of Mr. Vorst, he was pondering whether some form of explanation might not be due to Isabel, after what had already passed between them. For, as he reflected, the question between them was higher than any mere difference of wealth or any other convention. He loved her, and had told her so; while she had met his confession of love in such a manner that perhaps, after all, it behooved him to introduce the subject once more before it was laid aside forever.

"Since chance has thrown this opportunity in my way," Phileas said, after an awkward pause, "perhaps I had better speak of things upon which I had resolved to keep silence—"

"Silence is golden," interrupted Isabel softly, under her breath, thinking that his remark

sounded very much like an Irish bull; though she, too, was agitated, and guessed that he was about to refer to those passages of love between them."

"Of course you remember certain things which I said to you in those days preceding the illness and death of Mrs. Wilson?"

"Yes, I remember you used to be much more communicative than you are at present," said Isabel, deliberately misunderstanding him.

"I was more than communicative," said Phileas, gravely: "I was perfectly frank in all that concerned myself, and remarkably foolish and indiscreet where you were concerned. Indced—"

"Indced!" exclaimed Isabel, and this time there was no doubt about the humorous expression in her eyes. "And it is not everyone who so promptly discovers the error of his ways."

"The discovery was forced upon me by circumstances," responded Phileas, his face pale, his eyes scintillating. "I saw that I had been foolish, and what the world might consider worse than foolish."

"I fail to see what the world has to do with the matter," commented Isabel.

"It has this much to do: it can take away

a man's reputation for honor and integrity, and lower him in his own self-esteem."

"Just for being foolish?" asked Isabel.

"Just for being weak enough and mad enough to feel as I did, above all to *speak* as I did."

The color rose into Isabel's cheeks, softly, captivately, as the young man thought, and spread upward till it reached the very hair that lay in soft ripples upon her temples.

"I am not going to remind you," he continued, with the traces of deep emotion in his voice, "of what I then said. God knows every word of it was genuine and came from my very heart."

Some of those words Isabel chanced to remember, and the color deepened, while her hand that still toyed with the book trembled.

"But whatever I said was spoken under a misapprehension, and I want to ask your forgiveness that it was spoken at all. I should have found out the true state of affairs—"

His voice broke, and he turned away, looking out over the waters in an effort to recover his composure.

"I want to ask your forgiveness," he repeated; "and also to make you feel certain

that I never knew, never guessed that you were any other than Mrs. Wilson's companion "

"It would have been hard for you to know when I didn't know myself," said Isabel quickly.

"That does not necessarily follow," Phileas declared frankly. "For Mrs. Wilson had made me acquainted with so much of her history that it might have seemed probable—"

"What?" demanded Isabel, somewhat abruptly. "What might have seemed probable?" she asked again, and for the first time the lawyer's gaze faltered before her resolute glance.

"Why, it might have been reasonably supposed that my client had told me what, in fact, she promised to tell on my return from Boston,—the relation in which you stood to her, or rather to Mr. Vorst. You will believe, however, upon my definite assurance, that she never did give me such information until that last moment when I accompanied Mr. Vorst to her deathbed."

"I do not quite see," said Isabel, who had but imperfectly caught the young man's meaning, "what particular difference all this would make."

"But don't you see—or perhaps in your

inexperience you do not see—what the world would say, what it would think of an attorney who had abused his position as confidential adviser to further certain interested views of his own?"

Phileas spoke thus from the height of that experience which he had gained during his brief sojourn behind the newly-varnished sign. But a few weeks before he had been well-nigh as inexperienced as the girl herself in the crooked windings of a wicked world, and in the carping criticisms that pursue men upon every step of their career. He ventured again:

"Even you yourself—"

"You had better stop there," said Isabel, imperiously, "and do not charge me with thinking so meanly of one whom I regarded as a friend. I could never believe that of you."

"Thank you!" said Phileas, with a glance that, despite his best efforts, was more eloquent than any words could have been, and which touched a responsive chord in the heart of the girl who had been very lonely and desolate, despite the kindness of her new-found relative.

"As for any words that you may have

spoken on the impulse of the moment," she added, "they had better, indeed, be forgotten; there is little use in recalling what is past. But for any deliberate calculation on your part as to my prospects, I entirely acquit you of *that*."

"It is a great weight off my mind," he said, disappointed, nevertheless, at her indifferent tone. "I am glad I had the courage to speak, so that I know you understand, and that I can think of those days and hours—the happiest of my life—without a sense of bitter mortification and humiliation. I shall never forget myself again—you need not be afraid,—and I shall continue to stand in the same relation to Mr. Vorst as I did to Mrs. Wilson, but without intrusion upon you."

"I see no reason why we should not continue to be friends," said Isabel. She held her head very straight, and she looked at the lawyer with frank eyes; for she had a pride and a courage of her own, which would not permit her to show either annoyance or displeasure, much less any sign of weakness.

Phileas interrupted her almost sternly.

"I can not promise you that," he cried, and his face looked pale and worn in the

strong sunlight. "For the present, at least, friendship would be a very meaningless term on my part. I should be deceiving you were I to let you suppose otherwise."

"Well, that must be as you please, of course," Isabel said quietly, though there was a touch of the old humor in the expression of her face. "I suppose I shall have to cultivate a special manner for Uncle John's attorney."

"Make it as cold and distant as you can, then," said Phileas, stung by her jesting; "let it be even disdainful and abrupt,—anything you will, in fact, that will keep the attorney in his proper place and help him to forget a foolish and impossible dream."

Mr. Vorst was at this moment heard descending the stairs, and Phileas went forward to meet him, while Isabel sat smiling at what had passed. She did not by any means resent Mr. Fox's rejection of her offers of friendship; nor did she at all desire that her whilom lover should forget that dream which had been dreamed under the trees beside the old mansion,—a spot that she loved dearly with a warm and tender affection, because it had been the scene of that first love-making.

XXIV.

EVEN while Phileas Fox, with a resolute and manly pride, disclaimed that past which the girl so vividly remembered, she could hear in every vibration of his voice the sentiment that was stronger than his resolution, greater than his pride; and she had never been half so certain that he really loved her as now, when he almost indignantly repudiated the idea. He had *not* forgotten, let him say and do what he would; and the thought caused the blue air of the summer day to palpitate with a new feeling, and the beautiful scene thereabout to shine with an added lustre. Isabel had a secret conviction that the young man's pride and his sensitive honor would yield in the end to that deeper feeling which, even in the finest natures, so frequently carries all save conscience before it.

She laughed as she had not done for many a day when she saw Cadwallader coming out of the garden, and nearly drop his basket of lettuce in his joy at sight of Phileas, who reminded him, as he said, of "ole Missis." Nor was her amusement lessened when the German came hurrying up to complain that

the "black man" had let the pigs into the garden.

During the delightful luncheon that followed, the old servitor waited with special assiduity upon "Massa Fox," and even provoked a smile from the others.

"It is really touching," said John Vorst, when Cadwallader had retired to the pantry, "what a faithful, affectionate heart exists under that dusky exterior!"

"I fear he and the German will come to blows some day," laughed Isabel. "I have been called upon to mediate between them a good many times already. And it is all sheer jealousy for the favor of Uncle John—"

"And the 'sweet young lady,'" said John Vorst, with that smile of his which, since the late events, Phileas found to be sadder than any tears.

During the meal Phileas found Isabel, in some unaccountable way, more attractive than ever. The shadow which sorrow had given to the conspicuous brightness of her face added to its charm, and the lawyer felt that the chains which bound him were being more securely riveted than ever. He almost regretted having revived a past that should be irrevocably dead, and stirred chords that

should be silent. He mentally vowed that he would never again trust himself within this girl's reach. For he realized that she possessed a far more subtle and dangerous power of attraction than even he had hitherto supposed; and her very presence, though they conversed but little during the progress of the meal, constituted a grave danger of causing him to forget his excellent resolutions.

Almost immediately after luncheon Isabel left them, saying:

"I think I shall take a stroll by the water, Uncle, and leave you with your attorney."

There was a mischievous gleam in her eyes as they encountered those of Phileas, and she held out her hand.

"In case I should not see you again," she said calmly, "I shall say good-bye."

Phileas took her hand, but almost immediately relinquished it. Then he silently watched her walking downward through the long grass, with that same erect and graceful carriage he had always admired. Beside him sat John Vorst, leaning back in the chair, and gazing out over the landscape and at Isabel's retreating figure. Presently the old man fell into a reminiscent vein of talk, touching upon vanished scenes, and, for the first time since

her death, mentioning the name of Martha Spooner. She seemed to exist for him now as she had done in those old days. All else was apparently forgotten. In death, the strong, indissoluble bond that had once united her to him was whole and inviolate once more.

Suddenly Mr. Vorst remarked to Phileas:

"You have been so good, so helpful to me in all those troubles! No money can ever repay you for your delicate consideration, your thousand and one kindnesses, as well as your able settlement of these intricate affairs."

"I was very glad to be of use to you," said Phileas, with a sincerity and warmth that went to his listener's heart.

"If I had a son of my own," continued John Vorst, "he could not have been kinder to me than you have been. You have far, far exceeded all that your professional duties required."

There was a considerable pause again, when John Vorst said:

"Will you forgive an old man's freedom? But I had sometimes fancied, with regard to Isabel, that there had been something more than friendliness."

He stopped; and Phileas, painfully embarrassed, knew not what to say.

"You see," the old man went on, "I already love this dear niece of mine as a daughter. I have no desire to intrude upon your private feelings; but the circumstances of this case are peculiar, and I had thought with gratification, that there might be something between you."

"Mr. Vorst," said Phileas, flushing to the very roots of his despised red hair, "I will not conceal from you that there was, and is, a great deal more than friendliness on my part. I was thrown by circumstances very constantly into Miss Ventnor's society, and I lost my head and judgment. From the first she attracted me; before many weeks had passed I was deeply and truly in love with her."

The old man nodded and smiled. "I am not surprised," he said. "She is an unusually charming girl."

"There was one excuse for me," said the attorney, following out his own train of thought.

"What excuse should you need?" asked Mr. Vorst. "I think the better of you that you are not one of the cold, cynical type of young men that seem to abound in these days."

"I fell in love, as I said," Phileas went on sternly, as though he were judging another; "and I had the presumption to tell Miss Ventnor of the fact. I have just been begging her pardon for that folly."

"It is a folly that most women will forgive," replied the old man, smiling. "But was there so very much to pardon?"

"Under ordinary circumstances, not so very much, I grant you; and I made that declaration in all good faith, believing her to be—a companion. When I discovered the truth I was bitterly ashamed of my conduct."

"When you acted in good faith, why should you be ashamed?" said John Vorst. "You see, it pleased Martha to keep up a certain mystery concerning Isabel. When her mother died abroad, I was notified of that circumstance; but, in answer to my inquiries concerning the surviving child, I was merely informed that she had been adopted by a wealthy lady—a devoted friend of her late mother,—had returned with her to New York; for it chanced that Martha was on the Continent at the very time that Isabel lost her mother. My subsequent inquiries failed to elicit any further information, since Martha had purposely arranged to keep her secret. It was

not until my visit, with you, to my former home in Monroe Street that I discovered the truth."

"It was exactly the same with me," Phileas declared; "but my position as attorney, as confidential adviser to the deceased, would inevitably leave me open to the gravest suspicions. It might be readily inferred that I had known of Miss Ventnor's prospects and her true position even before she was aware of them herself."

For a moment John Vorst looked thoughtful.

"Yes, I see," he assented; "that might be the world's verdict." Then he leaned forward and laid a kindly hand on Phileas' shoulder. "But we are living in Elysium here," he said. "We have got rid of the world, its pomps and vanities, and its misconceptions. I trust you fully and unreservedly. I know that if you love Isabel, it is solely for herself. To my mind, there is only one point to be considered. Does my niece return your affection? Has she given you any encouragement?"

"The whole matter was left in abeyance, owing to the late event. And when I spoke to-day, it was to apologize for my mistake and to withdraw my petition."

"If it be true that she responds to your sentiments," said John Vorst, slowly, "I should regard it as the most honest and straightforward course for you to proceed as though circumstances were such as you had believed. For, after all, what do you or I care for the opinion of a world that we know to be, in great measure, base and heartless? A true affection, a real union of hearts, is one of those gifts which life but rarely bestows, and ought to be sought eagerly, and securely grasped when found. My span of life can not be very long. I want to see Isabel married to a good man, and above all a practical Catholic, who will make her happy, and in whose hands I can confidently leave her future. I shall have to go back after a time to the old house and live there, according to Martha's dying request, and I shall sorely need company. You have been so much identified with its latest developments that, somehow, you will seem to have a place there. And meantime," the old man said, smiling into the young man's embarrassed but radiant face, "what so delightful a place to spend a honeymoon as here in Westchester? It would seem to bring back the past, in so far as I am concerned, and make me feel happier than anything else could now do to

know that two whom I love as my own children were happy in this house as once I was."

Looking keenly at his friend to see the effect, the old man went on:

"You might be married at once, always providing that Isabel sees matters as we do, and that on your part nothing more than a scruple stands in the way. Father Van Buren, who is your enthusiastic friend, and has told me all about you and your family, could perform the ceremony. You two could spend the autumn here, and rejoin me at the old place before the holidays. And you see, my dear boy, that would be the final settlement, in love and happiness, of the famous case of *Spoooner vs. Vorst.*"

Phileas had meanwhile turned red and pale, and pale and red again; the light of a great happiness shining out of his eyes, and surging up in his heart so as to sweep away all those obstacles which pride and conventionality still opposed.

"Will you promise, my friend," said John Vorst, affectionately, "to realize this waking dream of mine,—to become the strong staff of my old age, and the guardian of my new-found treasure?"

"God knows," cried Phileas, "in a voice hoarse with emotion, "it would be too great a happiness, if Miss Ventnor is willing to throw herself away upon a struggling attorney, and if you think it right!"

"Right!—right! Why of course it's right!" said the old man. "The finger of Providence is in the whole business. But there is Isabel down yonder, walking beside the water. Run and overtake her, and find out if she is really fond of you and will consent to be your wife."

"But," Phileas stammered, "I have just told her that I should never again intrude upon her with such confession."

"At lovers' perjuries they say Jove laughs," quoted John Vorst, now all eagerness and animation for the success of his scheme. "If she cares for you, my dear boy, she will overlook the inconsistency; and if she does not, things will be no worse than before."

And so Phileas went, all on fire with this new resolve, his blue eyes flashing like steel, as when he had a difficult case in the law to overcome. John Vorst, watching him, smiled to see him leaping fences, and, as it were, clearing away obstacles between him and the object of his attachment.

"That is a young man after my own heart,"

he reflected; "a fine, generous, impulsive nature, with energy and determination and remarkable brain power, as all the old stagers of the law assured me. Isabel is a lucky girl, if she has sense enough, as I believe, to appreciate him."

Phileas soon stood beside the girl, all glowing with the exercise he had taken, and the new hope and ardor which had inspired him.

Isabel looked at him with quiet eyes, in which there was some astonishment.

"You will think me a fool," he began; "but the only real question between us is, do you love me enough to throw yourself away upon a struggling attorney?"

"You are nothing if not sudden," said Isabel, laughing her old merry laugh, partly to hide her confusion.

"Mr. Vorst has argued out the whole matter for us," cried Phileas; "and made me feel like a poltroon to heed what the world says, and to be afraid to tell you that I love you a thousand times more than I did before, even if you *are* an heiress."

Time slipped away swiftly between the two after that, for there was so much to explain and to recall and to question; Isabel laughed

to scorn the idea that she could ever have suspected Phileas of plotting to secure her wealth.

"And that may sound very conceited," she said; "but it is not of my charms I am thinking, but of what I know of your character."

During the interval John Vorst, out of whose face had died the fire and animation, dozed peacefully in his chair, while the old ardent words once spoken in that place were being repeated under the same blue sky and amongst the waving grasses, the Sound flowing swiftly upon its way as it had done during the successive generations; and the lover of old times started from his sleep, to greet the lovers of the present with a—

"Bless me, how the afternoon has passed! Eh, what? Oh, yes, I remember! Come here, my dear Isabel, and give me a kiss. I can see by your face that you have made up your mind to make us all very happy by marrying—"

"Phileas Fox, Attorney!" interrupted Isabel, with a laugh.

.
It was the cheery Christmas-time in New York. The shops were fairly radiant, dis-

playing their masses of rich and costly gifts. Christmas was in the air. It rejuvenated the great city, growing old in its mercantile wisdom; and over its rush and its roar, over its merchant princes with their palaces, and the crowded masses of the poor, arose the soft radiance of the Star of Bethlehem. Its influence for the time was paramount. With its subtle, compelling force; it arrested the Titanic world of business, the financier and the trader, infidel and Jew; and for the time it said to them: "Deny as you may, scoff as you may, but this day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. In your own despite, He makes you pause in your headlong career of materialism, and infects you with the cheerfulness and warmth, the hope and joy, that He brought into a saddened world. He will triumph, if it be but for a day, over your new paganism, and will give you glimpses of the light that broke over the Shepherds on the Oriental hillside, and that has shone through the darkness of the centuries, and shall shine unto the end."

On the morning of Christmas Eve Phileas Fox, hastening to the office, found the elevator crowded with office-holders in that huge human hive of a many-storied building. Each one,

with a particularly hearty and jovial expression of countenance, cried out: "A merry Christmas to you!" Even those who had never spoken before, disregarded conventional forms and gave the greeting.

Arrived at his sanctum, where the sign was no longer conspicuously new, and all within began to show those symptoms of wear that denote prosperity, Phileas found that the whole place had been decorated with a most wonderful display of evergreens by his young factotum. The latter's countenance was radiant, and became more so on the receipt of a substantial sum of money as a gift, and on being dismissed with the news that a hamper from Washington market for his widowed mother, with sundry other remembrances, was on its way to his dwelling from the presiding genius of the mansion in Monroe Street.

Left alone, Phileas looked around him at the familiar four walls, the desk, the office chairs, and the folios. He paused an instant before that one containing the case of *Spooner vs. Vorst*, which plunged him into a retrospection. A deep thankfulness, a wonder at his good fortune—or, rather, at the providential direction that had been given to his affairs,—

seized upon him. In that bulky volume had been the first link of a chain that had turned to gold in his hands. Presently the chimes of old Trinity began to play a gladsome carol, and to sound and resound in his ears like actual words.

After having at last settled his mind to read and to answer half a dozen letters, Phileas stood before the little mirror behind the curtain, brushing his red hair, which had once been so sore a grievance, especially when the thought of Isabel had begun to give a particular direction to the dreams of youth. He could have cried out in amazement at all that had happened. "Can this indeed be I, a poor and obscure attorney, who has in so brief a space won so enviable a position and the love of so charming a girl?" For, visionary as it would have appeared a short time before that he should be installed in the mansion in Monroe Street, which was now his real home, it seemed to him more wonderful still that he should have won the desire of his heart. And, with the enthusiasm of a genuine first love, he counted all the rest as little in comparison with the fact that Isabel was really his, and that, till death came to sever

their union, they should pursue the path of life together.

At the familiar iron gates, though he had been passing them every day for the last three months, he stopped with a whole new set of emotions, his eyes lighting at thought of her who had been for these twelve full weeks the one ray of love and hope in his struggling life; and dimming again as the remembrance forced itself upon his mind of the pathetic figure in the library chair, at whose call he had first come to this dwelling. The trees waved in the wind, bereft now of their luxuriant foliage; and the lawn, sere and brown, still bore here and there vestiges of the autumn leaves. But the chill desolation of nature had no power to depress the soul of Phileas Fox. He saw rather the sunshine, the brightness of the sky, and the cheerful glow that came forth from a grate fire burning in the house.

Scarcely had he rung when Cadwallader threw open the door with alacrity, though the frosts of age had seemed of late to settle upon his limbs. He greeted his "young Massa," as he now called Phileas, with a kind of subdued cheerfulness. As he took

possession of the young man's greatcoat and hat, he remarked:

"It looks as if we were goin' to have heavy snow for Christmas. At least that's my own opinion, sah. And, sure enough, thar's a bitin' frost in the air. Mebbe you don't feel it; but when we've done grown old, that's the time the cold strikes us. Ole Missis, she used to say: 'Cadwallader, you and I is growin' old, and we feel kind of chilly in our bones.'"

As the old man thus talked, the parrot, roused by the voices, raised its own, more cracked and querulous than ever, with its everlasting cry of "John Vorst!" followed by some unintelligible muttering, as though it were striving to acquire new names, with a faculty of imitation that time had dulled.

At the library door appeared Isabel, smiling and joyous, though her cheerfulness was tempered by that which had befallen the household. Her black dress showed off her figure to advantage, as well as the fresh color of her complexion and the tints of her hair. She had been very busy for some time previous. There had been all sorts of preparations to be made for the festival. Christmas cheer and Christmas presents of various kinds

had gone forth from the mansion in Monroe Street to many indigent homes. A packing case had been dispatched to Mrs. O'Rourke, now permanently established in Westchester; and the contents of that case were calculated to bring joy to the hearts of her children and many a smile to her own countenance, which had lost its careworn and haggard expression, and put on almost a semblance of youth. Nor was the German forgotten. His fireside likewise felt the radiance emanating from the newly constructed household in Monroe Street.

"I'm glad you are home early, Phileas," said Isabel; "for we haven't half finished the decorations. And," she added in a lower tone, "I want to make everything particularly cheerful because of all the sadness; for I am sure *she* would have wished that uncle's first Christmas after the home-coming should be as happy as possible."

Somehow, as Phileas crossed the library threshold that day, there recurred to his mind with compelling force the look of that room as he had seen it first. In that chair which had been so often occupied by the late mistress of the mansion sat John Vorst. On the table stood the silver gong which was now seldom used, and which caused the young

observer to reflect how the smallest inanimate object will so often survive the strongest and most forceful human personality. In the safe in the corner, toward which involuntarily his eyes wandered, he seemed to see again the rows of jewel-cases as they had been revealed to him at an imperious command, and the glittering contents of which had been displayed in a weird and ghastly fashion during Mrs. Wilson's delirium. Phileas was aware that the greater portion of them were to be bestowed upon Isabel next day as a Christmas gift from John Vorst; but to him they should always preserve, he felt, that character of mystery with which they had been primarily invested.

John Vorst had aged considerably, the young man thought, as he noted him there in the glow of a fire which Isabel had caused to be enkindled upon the hearth. It was evident that the grief which had befallen him in the recent death had far outweighed the sorrow, the bitterness, the privations of years; for the more noble, the more generous the nature, the speedier the forgiveness and the more unimpaired the original attachment. The old man's eyes lighted at the sight of Phileas, for whom he had a warm and ever-growing

regard. He began at once to talk of matters of common interest to both, while Isabel hovered about, busy in making wreaths.

As John Vorst talked, his gaze wandered often to the portrait of Martha Spooner Vorst,—for so in his own mind she was always designated. This portrait, now brought to the light of day, was the very same which had been shown to Phileas by the original herself. It represented her as she had been when the bride of the handsome young man whose portrait now hung beside hers, and when she had been flitting about the old house and dominating it with her energetic character. It seemed as if she were once more amongst them, erring and fiercely proud no longer, but clothed as with a garment in her best attributes. Oh, how sweet to think that blessed Christmas Eve that all was forgotten and forgiven, and that, in the mercy of God, full compensation had been made ere that weary soul appeared before the tribunal of Divine Justice!

Isabel held up a completed wreath of freshest evergreens, entwined with holly, whose berries, vividly scarlet, gleamed in contrast. "This is for the portraits, Phileas," she said.

And, standing upon a chair, he at once

placed it; while John Vorst bent his head, the unwonted tears falling from his eyes; and Isabel softly quoted from the most genial of novelists. "Lord, keep my memory green!" The pictured face, gay and youthful, smiled upon the three as if to assure them of her presence, and of her sanction of all that had been done.

"If the dead can know," thought Phileas, "how glad she would be to see John Vorst seated there!"

Isabel now strove to divert the old man from what was painful and to remind him of the pleasant to-morrow, when Father Van Buren had promised to dine with them,—or, at least, to look in upon the festivity. But the old man's thoughts were still with the past, and presently he uttered aloud the sentiment which was very much in accord with the thought of the lawyer:

"Poor Martha, if only she could be with us! How pleased she would be to see the happy outcome of the long-contested case of *Spooner vs. Vorst!* And," he added, taking a hand of each of the young people, whom he now regarded as his children, "nothing could please her better than to see installed amongst us one whom she had learned to

value so highly, and who was a chief factor in this fortunate settlement."

"I remember so well," laughed Isabel, trying, through tears, to give a lighter tone to the solemnity of the moment, "the first time he came to this house, and I thought 'Phileas Fox' so ominous a name for a lawyer."

