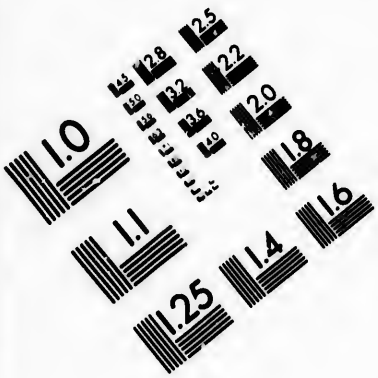

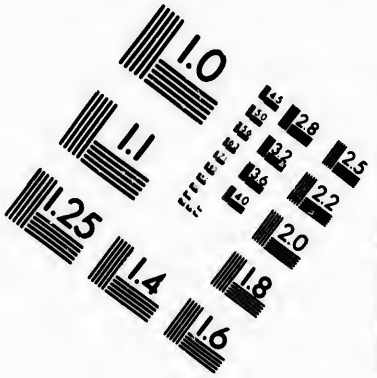

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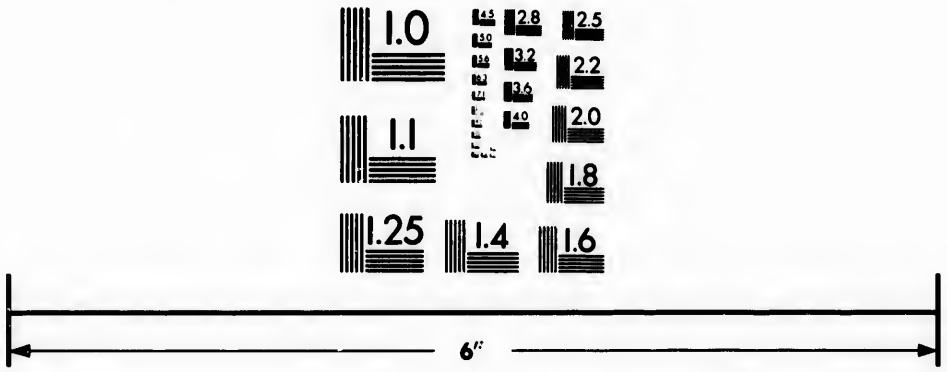

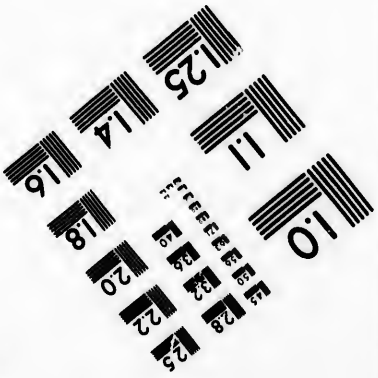

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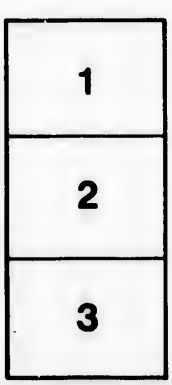
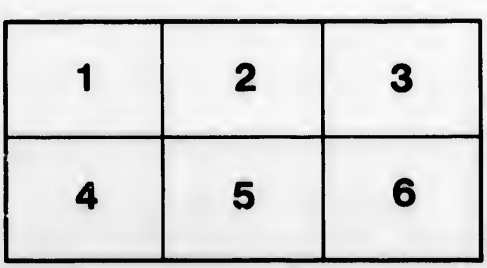




RT

SYLVIA ARDEN.

A NOVEL.

BY

OSWALD CRAWFURD

MONTREAL:
JOHN LOVELL & SON,
23 ST. NICHOLAS STREET.

SYLVIA ARDEN.

CHAPTER I.

GREGORY MORSON.

I AM not a person of any consideration or importance in the world. I have led a life of adventure abroad and nothing has come of it. I have achieved nothing. I am one of the failures in life. I have had my chances, and I have missed them; anyhow I have missed fortune. I have not gained a single one of those objects which men chiefly set themselves to gain; neither money nor useful friends, nor recognition and consideration and a position of my own among my fellow-men. In short, I am the rolling stone that has gathered no moss. I have lost my own small fortune in various unfortunate enterprises in every corner of the known world, and I have just managed to scrape together the barest competence. Yet I cannot say that my conscience greatly pricks me; I have never shirked hard work, and I have tried every chance that seemed to offer.

When the event occurred which begins this story, I had been away from England for nearly ten years, my age being thirty, and I was sitting alone in the stalls of a London theatre, a stranger among strangers, and feeling not a little lonely and, though it is against my habit and principles to repine, not a little bitter.

Certainly there is nothing like a crowd of this sort for making a man feel lonesome. I declare that I have felt far less of a longing for human companionship and human sympathy than I did at this moment, as I have lain camped out by night in the Andes, scores of miles from any sound or sight of a human being, the black vault of heaven above me, set with the desolate stars.

I was in the act of making the reflections which I have set down above, and I was beginning to speculate why it is that some men, in the battle of life, always fail and fall, and others, apparently no better equipped, invariably succeed. What is the winning faculty?

At this moment the unoccupied seat next to me was taken by the very man who, if I had pursued my train of thought, would naturally have occurred to me as the typical successful man. He and I are of an age, were playmates as children, schoolfellows afterwards, and with, so far as I could foresee, equal chances in life. His father and mine, squires in the western part of the country, and neighbors, had done that very thing which friends, squires, and neighbors should never do—they had gone to law over a bit of land. My father had been ruined first, and most of my patrimony went to the lawyers; but my father maintained to his dying day, which was but a year or two afterwards, that he should have won had he been able to afford to carry his appeal up to the House of Lords. His adversary came as near almost to ruin as himself; so was it that we two boys had been thrown on the world early. Both of us had since our boyhood traveled over the world, seeking after fortune. Gregory Morson had found favor with that fickle divinity, how I hardly knew, but rumors of his prosperity and his great wealth had reached me from time to time in my own wanderings in various remote regions of the earth. His very face and manner and appearance to-night announced his prosperity. His air breathed contentment and satisfaction with the world as he greeted me.

"I am glad to see you, Bearcroft; but what is the matter? Have you had a fever? You are very thin—your eyes are like saucers—you look pulled down. My dear fellow, you are more like Don Quixote than ever! What is it? Down on your luck?"

Then, without giving me time to answer, he told me of his own doings and plans for the future.

"I am living at Scarfell Towers now. I have smartened the old place up; you would hardly know it again. You must come and see me there, will you? Say next month? By-the-bye, I can give you a job there if you like."

"You are very kind."

"I can, really. You are the very man I want. You are still in the mining line, I suppose?"

I should observe that I had last met Morson in Asiatic Turkey. This was over five years ago. I could never discover what had taken him there. It was not to make his fortune, for he lived in some state and luxury, owning a steam yacht, which met him from time to time on the coast with supplies, traveling with horses and tents and a retinue of servants from place to place, and, as he alleged, for pleasure. My own business in that country was mining. I had tried my hand at various things, and this seeming to promise best I had persevered, and at last the very small measure of my success had been the discovery of a fairly productive lead mine in Asiatic Turkey. My modest income was derived wholly from this source.

"What do you call yourself now?" asked Morson. "What is your profession?"

It had not occurred to me before that a man in a civilized country, unless indeed he be a mere drone, must ticket himself in some way, and I mentally ran through my titles to a profession. After a term of service in the army, which had left me with my company, I had owned a sheep station in Queensland and ten thousand sheep; I had held a great cattle farm in the Plate; had tried being a lawyer in the state of Arkansas; but I had lost my cattle through Indians, my sheep by drought, and my clients I should have lost too, had I ever had any to lose.

"Only a rolling stone," I said, "and I have been one all these years; but if I know about anything at all well it is mining. I have explored and prospected, and failed and tried again, pretty nearly all over the world, and so I shall call myself a mining engineer."

"Good. You are just the man I have been looking for. I can give you work."

"Where?"

"At Scarfell Chace. I think there is something in your line to be done there. I want a man I can trust to look at the place. I have come to the conclusion there is gold there."

I shook my head. "Played out, my dear Morson. There is not much gold-mining to be done in this country. All the good things were worked out centuries ago, when gold was dearer and labor cheaper. Trust me."

He was curiously persistent. "Come down, I know you are a practical man; you shall tell me where you think the lodes lie."

"'Lodes' is a big word. I would bet anything you like there is nothing of the kind on Scarfell Chace."

Then he began to talk somewhat vaguely about rock formation and quartz veins, and so forth; but I declined to give any opinion till I had seen the place again myself.

"You know all about it, I see, and I don't. You must positively come down." Then he abruptly changed the talk. He now began to inquire, with some apparent interest, as to my past and my future plans. I told him I had but just come to England, and having transacted my business would depart again to Turkey.

"And stay there for good?"

"Yes, I suppose so. I have my mine to look after."

"And you have not many friends in town, I suppose?"

"Not many that I know of. After ten years one finds——"

"And you are here to-night all alone?" he asked, looking about him.

"Yes; just as you are, I suppose."

"I? Oh, I am not alone. I saw you here in the stalls as I came into the theatre, and I came to have a talk with you."

"Ah!" I said; "to get a professional opinion?"

There was now, as there always had been, something antagonistic between Morson and myself. We had the faculty of rubbing each other up the wrong way, as people say, and we had a disagreeable way of putting unfriendly constructions on what the other said.

"You need not be so infernally sharp," he said, laughing.

I saw he did not want to take offence.

"Look up there," he said, "that is my party, but I have not been near them yet;" and he nodded towards a large box near the stage in the first tier. "Do you see that girl in front—the thin, fair girl smiling and moving her fan—in black, with a lot of brown, rough hair?"

"She is extraordinarily pretty."

"You don't find her a little thin, do you, and her hair rather untidy?"

"Not a bit; she is wonderfully pretty."

"Glad you think so! I am going to marry her."

I laughed, thinking it a particularly bad joke. "Then why are you not in her box?" I asked; "I see there is room."

"Well," he answered, with a quite detestable self sufficiency, "to tell you the truth, English women bore me. I suppose I have lived too long in the East. They are too independent, and mostly far too sharp. That girl there is a great deal too sharp to please me."

There was at times a disagreeable frankness about Morson which invariably put me out of temper, though, as a matter of fact, my temper happens to be a singularly good one, and his cynicism had this bad effect now.

"Then why the devil do you want to marry her?" I asked, with something of his own plainness of speech.

"I don't."

"I should imagine she can't want to marry you!"

I looked at him critically, and was by no means sure I was right in hazarding this suggestion. He was certainly extremely good looking; a strongly built, six-foot man, black-bearded and handsome in something of a red-cheeked, red-lipped, well-to-do, full-blown way. He was not actually stout as yet, but the lines both of his face and figure had the genial curves which denote prosperity.

He laughed. "There is a refreshing coolness about you, Bearcroft, that has always fetched me; I remember you were like that at Eton. No, I hardly suppose she can want to marry me, except that most women are fools."

"Don't talk like that of a woman you are going to make your wife."

"Bosh!"

When Morson and I were boys, conversation between us when it reached such a point as this was generally adjourned to an open space, and continued otherwise than by word of mouth, and with a ring of spectators round us.

In the angry pause which followed Morson's last expletive, and adjournment for the aforesaid purpose being out of the question, I contented myself with remarking to myself, "As great a brute as ever!" Then I glanced to the box where the girl sat. She was looking curiously at us, and for the moment seriously, wondering perhaps at our suddenly darkened faces. Then seeing our look upon her, she smiled again, easily and pleasantly. Dwelling upon what Morson was I felt sorry for this woman, whose name even was unknown to me. Morson seemed to read my thoughts; he recovered his patience first.

"Money, my dear Bearcroft; of course it is money.

She is an heiress. Look at that big man behind her chair! That is her brother."

"Not the stout man with the black moustache? impossible!"

"That is Miss Arden's brother, but he is not stout; it is all muscle. Wait till he stands up and you will see he is about the tallest, biggest-shouldered man you ever saw in your life. Why did you say 'impossible' when I told you he was her brother?"

"Because he is so unlike Miss Arden in face, in figure, in everything. I don't fancy that man at all. It is a hateful face. He looks like a prize-fighter with that jaw and bull neck, and some one has broken his nose. I am glad of it, but it doesn't improve his looks!"

"What a fellow you are, Bearcroft!" said Morson, laughing. "Now you have offended me, John Arden is my dearest friend; we are almost like brothers. You must have heard of him in Turkey—Colonel Arden, in the Turkish Service."

"Yes; I'm afraid I have heard of him. So you are going to marry Arden's sister?"

"Only his half-sister. She is her mother's heiress—owns half Scarfell Chace. Poor Arden hasn't a penny."

At parting with Morson at the end of the performance—he did not leave the stalls till it was over—he repeated his invitation to me: "Come down to Scarfell Towers next month," he said; "we shall have rather a lively party there. Arden and his sister are coming, and I want to talk to you about the mine."

CHAPTER II.

SCARFELL CHACE.

SCARFELL CHACE, in the midst of which I passed some of my schoolboy days, is one of the strangest and wildest districts in this country. It is an isolated region lying on the western coast; a deep and rapid river cuts it off from the land side, and a chain of hills, not lofty but exceedingly steep, blocks all approach to it along the coast from the north, except by one narrow road through the defiles and

passes of the hills. Consequently the whole district, extending to some nine or ten miles in length and breadth, is inaccessible, for there is neither boat nor bridge on the river, nor ford, for the whole ten miles of its course along Scarfell Chace.

The Towers, an old house of no very great size, but with four pinnacled round towers at the four corners of an inner quadrangle, belongs to the Morsons, who have from time immemorial possessed manorial rights over the Chace.

I was glad to accept Morson's invitation to Scarfell Towers, far less to see him, or his home, or his friends, than to visit again a part of the country which has always held a very distinct place in my memory. As the time came round for my departure, I grew impatient to see the old place, and the idea occurred to me to run down by a late train the night before, to sleep at the inn of a little town about nine miles from the Towers, and to take a conveyance to the house as early next morning as it was light. It was already November, the daylight late and the weather wintry,—so that I proposed to myself to make my appearance at the house only at dinner-time. By this arrangement I might spend the whole day in exploring the Chace, and thus be in a position to give Morson, on my arrival, the information he sought as to its mining capabilities.

I was little prepared for the surprise that awaited me when I reached the inn in the town of Luxton, the nearest point to the Chace, and ordered a conveyance to take me to Scarfell Towers. The ostler asked if I had written permission from the owner. I told him I had not, but was going there by Mr. Morson's invitation.

"It can't be done, sir," said the man; "the road through the hills is blocked."

He explained to me what I already knew, that there was but one way to the Towers, and indeed to the whole district of Scarfell Chace, in which the house is situated, and this was the private carriage-road thereto. Mr. Morson, he told me, had built a lodge at a point where the only pass over the hills runs between steep and lofty cliffs. The approach passes through an opening in a high wall built across the road in this place, and this opening was now kept closed by a heavy wooden portal, which the lodge-keeper was forbidden to open except upon a written order.

All this was very unaccountable and perverse in Morson. Was the man simply mad, or puffed up by prosperity and an unsociable disposition into this eccentric exclusiveness? For the moment I was inclined to resent Morson's conduct in inviting me down without acquainting me with this obstacle by the way, until I remembered that he had bidden me telegraph to let him know by what train I should arrive. No doubt he had meant to have me met at the station in the ordinary hospitable fashion of well-to-do hosts, and it was my own fault if I had baulked his intentions. Still I was vexed; and when the people of the inn suggested the obvious course of sending a message to the lodge in the hills, whence, no doubt, word could be forwarded to the Towers, I would not condescend to accept the suggestion and await the return of a messenger. I formed another plan, which was to hire a carriage that should convey my portmanteau to the lodge, with a written message to Morson to be forwarded thence to the Towers, while I myself would be set down at the river's side which separates Scarfell Chace from the tamer agricultural district on the land side. I would walk down the river bank, the whole length of its course to the sea if necessary, and judge with my own eyes if my boyish recollection as to the inaccessibility of the Chace on that side were correct. I made no doubt I should find a ferry or a fisherman's boat, perhaps a ford, or stepping-stones, or a plank bridge. The river, I remembered, was narrow.

Accordingly I was taken down to the river's bank.

"You can't get across anywhere," the driver had said to me, when I told him of my intention to get over the river somehow into the Chace.

"Then I'll walk down to the sea and get a boat at the Culvers," naming a little cluster of fishermen's huts which I remembered at the mouth of the river.

"There ain't no Culvers now," he said. "Leastways, there ain't no fishermen there. 'Twas Mr. Morson's property, and he has broke up the village."

"Then I will walk on to Stanhoe, and get a boat there."

To this the driver made no objection beyond a doubtful shake of the head. As I started on my walk, the man, seeing that I knew something of the place, observed—

"I doubt, sir, but you'll find things mainly changed hereabouts!"

I reached the river and found it, as I expected, narrow —narrower than I had supposed even, for it is seldom that memory does not magnify one's childish impressions; but I had not exaggerated the impression that had then been made of the current's strength and swiftness. It was so narrow a stream that I could jerk a pebble across anywhere without exertion; but my experiences in wild countries of the earth told me at once it was not a river easily to be crossed by man. The water was deep, and rushed along with swirl and tossing of foam and spray against its jutting rock ledges down a very steep channel. Even if an exceptionally strong swimmer should win across, he might fail to make good his landing, for the rocks on the further side rise sheer and tall and cliff-like from the water's edge, in the form of what, in this part of the country, we call "scars."

I walked along, seeing nothing of the mysterious Chace beyond the continuous scar by the river's further edge. This verge of cliff rose everywhere eighty or a hundred feet, and only at one place, where there was a break in the sky-line, could I catch a glimpse of the wild country beyond. Half-way to the sea, on the highest point of the scar, and close to its very edge, are the ruins of a large church. I remembered it in ruins; and though there was still a roof both to the nave and belfry tower, the church was, even more than I remembered it, covered and the stonework hidden by a mantle of ivy, so thick and close that hardly a sign of the mullioned tracery of the windows was visible. I wondered again, as I remembered often to have wondered before, why so large a church had ever been erected in so inaccessible a position, and amid a population which must always have been so scanty.

Walking on to the sea, I discovered no change in the character of the river, no break in the wall of rock on its further bank. Arrived at the Culvers, I found the houses, as the driver had led me to expect to find them, unroofed and tenantless. A fisherman's lug-sailed boat was in the offing, half a mile to sea. I signaled to the men on board with my handkerchief; and when they neared me, I hailed them and asked them to put me across the mouth of the river and land me on Scarfell Chace. The men brought their boat to land, and I had speech with them.

When I offered them quite a handsome fee for this small

service, they unaccountably hung back, and asked if I should want to be taken off again.

I said I should not.

They still hesitated; and one of the two men observed that there was a roughish set of people on the Chace.

"Are they rougher than they used to be?" I asked. "I knew them pretty well once."

The men stared. "How long ago might that be, sir?" said one man.

"Well, perhaps fifteen years."

"Lord, sir! That lot is all gone."

"Gone!"

"Ay, stock and lot, father and son mother and daughter—all left the place."

"When?"

"Ever since Squire Morson came from abroad. He turned 'em out."

I had no wish to inquire into my host's affairs, strange as I thought it all; but it seamed to concern myself to ask, "Who are the rough people you speak of?"

"The squire's men. There ain't many besides his yacht's crew, and they're foreigners, I've heard say."

"What do they do ashore?"

"God-a-mercy knows, sir. Some say it's keepers' work they do. I guess 'tis more likely poachers'! We see them going to and fro on the Chace there from our boats. I don't expect they're after much good. We gives them a wide berth."

"Well, put me ashore anywhere; that's all I ask you."

They hesitated still, for no reason that I could discover, and the man spoke again, "You'll excuse us, sir, but this here Scarfell Chace ain't over well spoke of just now. There's stories afloat, as a man may say."

"What stories?"

The man gave no direct answer. "There was three men, strangers to us, came to Stanhoe, down the coast, and hired a boat to land on Scarfell Chace."

"Poachers?"

"They had nets, guns, and a dog. Anyhow, they never returned back no more. That was just four years ago, come Christmas—the year Squire Morson came from abroad."

"They were drowned at sea, I suppose, among the rocks and currents."

"Maybe so; but that boat was never seen no more—not so much as a stick of her."

"She might have drifted out to sea."

"She might, sir. Two years ago there was a gentleman came to Stanhoe. He gave my mate here and me a sovereign to put him ashore on the Chace, and wait to take him off again. We did wait, sir, till it was dark, and came off the point again at daybreak; but neither sight nor sound of that gentleman was ever got again."

"Was no search made?"

"There was, sir. There was much talk about it among us along the coast, and the magistrates sent round through the hills to the Towers to inquire for the gentleman. Mr. Morson had heard nothing about him."

"The man might have lost his way among the dells, might he not, and wandered at dark to the scar, and so slipped over into the river and been drowned; or he might have fallen into one of the disused shafts? I remember there used to be several on the Chace from the old mining times."

"'Twas thought so at the time, and there was a search made by the county police. Mr. Morson offered a reward, and they got ladders and went down into as many as a dozen of them shafts. But, bless you, sir, there's dozens more among them hills and dells, many overgrown with brush and bramble, that a man might fall into and never be heard of again."

"They found nothing?"

"No, sir, they found nothing; but one of the policemen nearly got smothered in the foul air at the bottom of one shaft. He lay there in a swound till they got him up the ladder, with just a dangle of life still in him. After that they looked no further, and thought the gentleman must have fallen over the scar and been carried out to sea; but some of us considered the thing deeper, and didn't think that was the gentleman's end."

I asked no further questions; and telling them I was a friend of the squire's and expected at the Towers, they made no further difficulty but carried me in their boat across the mouth of the river. We had to sail some way along the coast before we found a creek, where a little stream issued between two high cliffs, through which we pushed the boat. I landed, and the boatmen lost no time

in punting their boat out through the inlet and making off hastily to sea, while I scrambled with some exertion up the steep face of the rock and found myself upon the tableland of Scarfell Chace.

I began this narration by saying that I had led a life of adventure; it had as yet been fruitless of good to myself and barren of any consequences.

I have carefully set down the aforesaid seemingly trivial circumstances of my meeting with Morson and his affianced bride; of our talk; and, above all, the almost trifling incidents of this day, because now, looking back, I perceive that each single occurrence, and even each single spoken word, was a necessary link in the chain of events that were to make or mar my own life and that of three other persons.

CHAPTER III.

THE OLD MINERS.

At last I had succeeded in gaining an entrance to this well-guarded and mysterious Scarfell Chace, and could look about me. I was struck at once by the extreme desolation of the scene. It was a cheerless day in mid-November—dull overhead, with a cold wind that ever and anon whirled a few last snowflakes in its eddies. The air was too cold for a hard snowfall, but the rocky ground of the Chace was whitened still, and only the rock peaks and points showed brown through the thin covering of snow.

Scarfell Chace is a treeless moorland waste; a maze of low, stony hills intersected with deep dells or ravines, in which a stranger might easily lose his way. Though the earth was mostly snow-covered, I could see enough of it to perceive that it was a region possessing great subterranean wealth. It seems to be a law of nature that when the soil is rich in mineral below the surface, it is poor and sterile above ground. To my eyes, long practised in observation of this kind, the shape of the hills, the "lay" of the rock strata where the surface showed through its carpet of snow, told a plain story. The structure of the hills, their irregular contours, the nature of the stones at my feet, the white

quartz crytals glistening here and there, all told me, as plainly as if I had seen and touched the precious metal itself, that these barren hills bore or had once borne gold in their wombs; but the futility of Morson's dream of a gold mine on his property was evidenced quite as plainly by what was around me.

The work of extraction had, I clearly perceived, been accomplished long ago, and every little valley was encumbered by mounds of stony rubbish, moss and lichen covered and overgrown by weeds and brambles, and, to an unpractised eye, simulating natural hillocks; but in truth these artificial mounds were the former contents of vast galleries that I knew must run into the hills, and of long-abandoned shafts sunk vertically into the ground connecting with vaults and chambers that must exist subterraneously, unseen.

When this fact had become clear to me, when I had walked for many miles over the Chace and found everywhere the same barren, pathless wilderness of dell and fell, dingle and jagged hill top, and everywhere the same signs of immense mining labor in some long-past-away century, I could only wonder that the story of the former wealth and present poverty of the place was not as clear to an unprofessional eye as to mine. How could Morson, living here, fail to see what was so apparent to me? How could he have formed the foolish scheme of seeking for gold here, when it was obvious that the whole district was simply a long-abandoned gold mine?

My work was accomplished. I could now report to Morson with confidence. I could save him from the folly of spending money in an adventure that must be fruitless. But those who are not versed in these matters are not easily turned from their own opinions by bare facts, with whose scientific bearing they are not conversant. I should have been glad of some such evidence of the correctness of my theory as should appeal to a non-geological person. Such a piece of evidence I was lucky enough to discover. As I continued my walk along a narrow valley, through which the rough moor ponies which run wild on the Chace had beaten out a narrow pathway with their hoofs, I was struck by the circumstance that the snow had melted in one place upon the side of the valley in front of me, forming a dark path upon the surrounding snow. Below this

spot, on the declivity of the hill, lay one of the many piles of stony rubbish I had already noticed. The heap, half snow-covered as it was, showed discoloration by long exposure, and the sharp edges of the stones were weathered and rounded by time, while bushes and brambles were growing strongly from their interstices in the mould accumulated by centuries of decay.

Such a melting of the snow as this could betoken but one thing—that behind it lay the opening of the gallery or adit from which the *débris* in my sight had been removed and the mouth of the adit was probably only hidden by a thin covering of fallen stones. The body of warmer air inside would clearly cause the snow to melt. I clambered over the rocks, and began to loosen the flat stones that I guessed must conceal the mouth of the subterranean passage, and presently, as I dislodged them and sent them sliding down into the valley, I verified my surmise. I had soon discovered a narrow opening into the hillside, which I enlarged sufficiently to enable me to creep through. I found myself at once in a broad and lofty cavern, whose roof I could just make out by the light that came through the entrance, but whose extremity was lost in darkness. It was dry inside, drainage being provided for by the slope outwards of the floor, and, in contrast to the cold without, the air struck warm and pleasant against my face.

Walking on a dozen paces, I found myself in complete darkness. I struck a match, and in a moment the light was thrown back upon me from countless crystals of quartz embedded in the walls and in the roof that hung overhead in a huge vault. It was a startling transformation from the cold, bleak, dull hillside to this bright, warm, spacious palace resplendent with light. I marveled at the suddenness and strangeness of this sight, and the thought came to me that I alone, perhaps, through all the long centuries, had burst into this fairy palace left by the ancient miners. I walked several paces forward, still carrying the burning match till it went out, and I was again in total darkness. Turning round, the entrance of the cavern showed as a round disc of light some twenty or thirty yards away from me.

I was preparing to strike another match, and to make a further exploration of the cavern's recesses, when I was taken aback by the sound of men's voices, so loud, that at

first I did not doubt but that they were in the cavern itself. A moment's reflection convinced me that this could not be, and enabled me to guess at the cause of the loudness of the sounds that came to my ears. The vault of the cavern, with its narrow entrance, had acted the part of the famous "ear of Dionysius," and the speakers' voices had no doubt been doubled in sound by the acoustic properties of the cavern. The sound was, indeed, extremely loud, but so confused by reverberation, that I could not distinguish a word of what the speakers were saying. Going to the cavern's mouth and looking forth, I saw two men standing not far below me in the little dell.

They were roughly dressed in the ordinary garb of English fishing folk. To judge from their dress, they were certainly not Morson's yacht sailors. One of them carried a double-barreled gun in his hand. One thing struck me about this man—his huge size. He was a black-bearded man—and in bulk and height one of the very tallest and biggest men I have ever seen.

I was about to issue from the gallery and address them, but I changed my mind. The taller of the two men was pointing to the ground, and I did not doubt from his action, his eager manner, and from the gun in his possession, and after what the fishermen had told me, that these men were poachers. They spoke together, but their voices, now no longer made louder by the cavern roof, only reached me as a murmur. I had noticed many tracks of hares in the fresh-fallen snow, and had started several from their forms during my walk. It was obvious that the two men were upon the track of one of these animals. I did not wish to be a spy upon them and to have to report upon them to Morson; therefore I waited a few minutes till they had passed on, resolving to say nothing of my having seen the men.

Presently they had gone round a corner of the hill and were out of sight. I came forth, and, replacing some of the stones over the mouth of the adit, left them in as natural a condition as they had been in before I touched them. I myself, used as I am to the sight of mining work, should have been puzzled to detect the entrance, had it not been for the melted snow that marked the place.

I resolved to bring Morson next morning, and show him

this proof positive that his fancied treasure-house had been violated; but certain events which were to happen that very day prevented me from ever making this communication to him.

CHAPTER IV.

A CRIME.

It was already long past noon, and the task I had set myself was concluded. There was now nothing left for me to do in the two or three remaining hours of daylight but to take a general survey of the place, of which I found I had retained only a boyish and imperfect recollection. Climbing to the top of the nearest tall hill about me—it was but five or six hundred feet in height—I had the whole of Scarfell Chace spread out before me: to the north, the slopes of the mountains which barred it from the rest of the world; to the east, the scar cliffs, with the impassable river at their foot; to the west, the sea.

Close to the mountain slopes in the north I could see the four turrets of Scarfell Towers, five or six miles from where I stood, and, hard by the house, the little sheltered cove where Morson's steam yacht lay at anchor. In the east, upon the very edge of the long line of scar, was the ivy-covered ruined church which I have mentioned. No other sign or token of human presence was there in all this land. I saw nowhere either crop, or fenced field, or hayrick, or cornstack, or barn, or orchard tree, or hedgerow, or any habitation of man; only here and there on the waste I could perceive signs of where a shepherd's or moorman's cottage had once stood, but unroofed, and the very walls for the most part thrown down, as if man's own ruthlessness and not the lapse of time alone had done the work of destruction.

The day was now a little brighter. The snowfall had ceased, the wind gone down, and the sun at times cast uncertain, misty rays through the cloud rifts; but still the air was very cold.

I searched the hills and valleys for a sign of the two poachers. They must have been hidden by the inequalities

of the ground, for I saw nothing of them. The desolation of the place was oppressive; not a sound broke the stillness save the cawing of a string of carrion crows winging their way over the fell, from sea to river, and the far-off breaking of the waves upon the rocky shore. The white snow covering everywhere dazzled my eyes. I took my way towards the ivy-covered church on the river cliff; it was the only green and living thing visible round the whole horizon.

The river makes a sudden bend close to the church, washing the foot of a projecting portion of the continuous cliff or scar already mentioned. At this point the church stands, on a headland whose summit is level with the upland country behind it. On its south side, in an angle formed by the wall with the belfry tower, is a narrow rocky platform, protected from the north and easterly winds, whence a wide prospect is obtained across the river that rushes and boils beneath, and over the quiet agricultural country of hedgerow and meadow, and croft and wood, that lies to landward of Scarfell Chace. Here I stood for a few minutes at the edge of the precipice, enjoying the view of the soft landscape in such contrast, half snow-covered though it was, to the dreary wilderness at my back, while the noise of the river current at my feet filled my ears.

Presently I turned sharply round, half thinking I heard approaching steps amid the confusing rush of the waters, and I was startled to see approaching me the being whom of all others I least looked to see in such uncongenial weather and in so unlikely a place—a girl riding on a mountain pony. She came nearer, smiling perhaps as she saw my surprise in an odd, half-shy, half-confident manner. I remembered the face, and still better the smile. It was the young lady affanced to Gregory Morson, whom I had seen at the theatre. Her hair was blown by the wind over her face, and I recalled Morson's unkindly remark about its untidiness. Her habit, her general appearance, her hat, her gloves, and her pony's shaggy coat and unkempt fetlocks, were such as would probably have called forth further criticism of the same cynical kind from her future husband.

She came near and spoke, but her voice was low or weak, and the noise of the waters in my ears so great that I did

not hear her. It was not till her pony's head 'most touched me that I could distinguish her words.

"I am glad you turned round at last," she said. "Did you mind my coming up behind you?"

There was still the odd smile, the same look, partly assurance, partly diffidence. It was a trivial, almost childish remark, and our talk went on in a not very serious tone. Mostly she talked paradox, as women not unused to the world of so-called clever talk love to do.

Now that I saw her without the adventitious help of gas-light and evening dress, I perceived she was less pretty than I had supposed. Pretty, however, she still was, in an unconventional way, with irregular features, large clear grey eyes, and with a queer, taking, eager, questioning expression of face. A girl altogether of the modern type; quick to take impressions, sharp to retort; thoughtful, but with no long continuance of connected thought; the woman that London has made—the London of clever, educated men and women;—who is happiest in London, but at home everywhere; who can venture to think wisely and talk well, and is not ashamed, when the humor takes her, to talk the most utter nonsense.

She said, "I see you are Captain Bearcroft. We have been expecting you at the Towers. I did not know you had come; Mr. Morson expected you later, I think. I have heard so much of you from my aunt—Lady Raby, you know—oh yes, you only knew her as a boy; but she often talks of you. Is she not a distant cousin of yours, or your father's, or your mother's? I think so. You must have arrived since I went out for my ride."

Miss Arden was good enough to save me the trouble of answering her questions and surmises by mostly answering them herself.

She had brought her pony so near the edge of the precipice that I was alarmed at the thought how, if he were startled, a step would carry him over. Unconsciously I laid my hand on the animal's head.

"Are you afraid?" she asked; and before I could answer her, she had made the somewhat sweeping remark that she did not consider anybody had any right to be afraid of anything under any circumstances whatever.

I told her that this was not my own theory of life, and that I was continually afraid of something or somebody.

She looked at me in some surprise. "Dear me," she said, "you rather astonish me. I said all that partly to please you; I thought it was quite your ideal of life. I have heard so much of you from Mr. Morson. He seems to think you a sort of——"

"Of idiot?" I suggested.

"Oh no! or rather, not quite. A sort of Don Quixote. Do you mind my saying so?"

"Pray go on."

"Well, I myself rather like people to tilt at windmills. Mr. Morson laughs at that sort of thing. To me it seems a point of heroism."

It occurred to me that if Morson had had the drawing of my portrait, it would be far from a flattering one. Something in my look allowed this sharp young person to discern my thought. Women of her type love mischief rather than malice, and often have a rudiment of conscience somewhere. She laughed, and was quick to try to repair the small injury she thought she had done.

"I don't much trust men when they talk of other men," she said.

"No," I said, "we are not very generous to each other."

The spirit of mischief and *espièglerie* was never quiescent for long in Miss Arden. She looked at me curiously. "I wonder whether one thing he says of you is true. It comes so oddly from him, that I can't help wondering."

"Well?" I asked.

"He says you have the most violent temper possible—quite awful, he says, so sudden, and so——" She laughed, not finishing her sentence.

"I a bad temper! Why, of all calm, placid, well-regulated—— But no!" I said, laughing too, "you won't believe me."

"I wonder if it is true after all? You don't defend yourself at all seriously, so I suppose it is. It must be, too, because Mr. Morson is so calm and dispassionate himself, is he not?"

"Yes," I said; "almost too mild."

"Quite a saint, is he not?"

"Oh, an angel."

"Ah!" I thought to myself, remembering Morson's hard speech about her over-cleverness, "if she allows her-

self this liberty of cynical speech with him, he will never endure her, if I know the man."

Miss Arden was not one of those people who ever care to dwell long on a subject. "I wonder if you will like my brother," she said suddenly. "I suppose you have seen him. I am sure you will admire him."

I was in no hurry to admire the extremely unpleasant-looking person I had seen in her company at the theatre. "Have you more brothers than one?" I asked.

"No."

"Then I saw Colonel Arden in your box that night at the theatre."

"He is quite as nice as he is nice-looking," she said, with some enthusiasm.

"I can well believe it," I said, and added hastily, fearing she should suspect me of irony, "I have not met him here yet, nor Morson, nor even been to the Towers. I did not come through the hills."

"But you did not come in the yacht? She has not stirred from her moorings."

"No; I landed there," pointing to the cliffs, "in a boat, two hours ago."

I had at last said something to produce silence in Miss Arden. She stopped to consider a little before she asked, "Does Mr. Morson know you have come this way?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"Then you had better not tell him," she said.

It was my turn to be surprised, and even a little put out. "Of course I shall tell him," I said, rather more forcibly than I need have. "I came here to please Mr. Morson. I came to examine his land for mineral—for gold. I have been doing that all the morning. Of course I shall tell him how I came, and report to him."

"It is my land we are on, you know," she said very gently, as if in deprecation of my impatience. "I wish you would report to me. Won't you? I have great interest in knowing. Please tell me!"

It struck me that this was a very remarkable young lady, with a quiet way of saying surprising things. Morson had told me part of Scarfell Chace was hers. She was certainly entitled to know all I had discovered.

Seeing me hesitate, she waved her hand round the southern horizon. "All this land, south of a line down

from the church to the river," she said, "is mine. A dreary wilderness, is it not?"

"Half of Scarfell Chace."

"Yes," she said, "about half. It is my only fortune; and Mr. Morson has a lease of it. Is there any gold in the land?"

"Not a bit," I said very positively. "It has all been carried away."

"By the old miners?" To my surprise, Miss Arden looked quite pleased at my bad news. "I can't tell you how glad I am. Perhaps some day I may explain why. You will tell Mr. Morson this, will you not?"

"You seem to know all about the old miners," I said.

"Yes," she said; "and I found it out for myself. Only the other day I discovered a sort of cave where they had dug—I suppose for gold or silver. In the dell there, under that hill."

She pointed with her whip to the very spot where I had made my discovery of the great adit.

"You found the opening?" I said.

"Yes; I had got off my pony to get a fern on the hill-side. I moved a flat stone, and found an opening behind it. Then I pushed back more stones and I went inside, but only a little way, for I got frightened; and I closed the hole again with stones."

"I found it, too, and went inside not half an hour ago."

I told her about my discovery, and explained all that it meant.

"I spoke to Mr. Morson about the cave," she went on, "and, do you know, he was quite annoyed. I have seldom seen him so angry. He was very anxious that I should promise never to mention it. I would not, though he kept saying, 'Promise! promise! promise!' But I would not promise—why should I? Though, perhaps," she said, laughing, "I should not have mentioned it to you if I had remembered in time how anxious he was. So perhaps you had better not say anything about my telling you. I don't know why I say that, only I am so puzzled by it all." She took out her watch, hanging by a short gold chain against her habit, and consulted it. "Good-bye! I must go home. We shall meet at dinner, and you will speak to me, will you not? Good-bye!"

She cantered off on her pony, turning to look back once

more before she passed into the dell and was hidden from my view. I said to myself, as I saw the last of her, what nine men out of ten would have said, "What a nice girl!"

I watched for her reappearance, but the high ground was everywhere very stony, and her road homeward must have been along the bottoms of the narrow dells which intersect the Chace in every direction, and where traveling is easier.

I fell to thinking of the strangeness of her engagement to Morson. Could there be any love between these two most incompatible people? I felt certain there was none on Morson's side. No man could speak so brutally of any woman as Morson had done to me of Miss Arden, and love her. Again, if he were marrying her for her fortune, as he very plainly told me he was, he was committing an act of gross stupidity. I had learned, both from her and from him, that her estate was the half of this dreary waste around me. Its mineral value I could assess at absolutely nothing; she was an heiress only in name. Nor could the agricultural rent of the whole Chace amount to a hundred pounds a year. From where I stood I could take in the whole expanse of rocky hill and barren moorland. The snow had now partly melted from the hillsides, and I could judge better; there was not bite enough in its whole extent for a dozen head of cattle and two score of sheep. One has not owned a sheep station without knowing something of such matters.

Now, it struck me, here was I, who hate to meddle with other people's affairs, compelled against the grain to interfere, for good or ill, whether I intended it or not, between this pair of ill-matched engaged lovers. If I opened Morson's eyes to the folly of expecting a fortune with an heiress who could bring him only a dowry of barren rocks, he would probably break off his engagement with Miss Arden. To be sure, I should be saving her from a loveless marriage, and a husband the most brutal in thought and ways, in mind and manners, of any man I had ever encountered anywhere. But would she thank me? I might be breaking her heart by acting Providence in this way. She might love the man in ignorance of his nature; nay, she might, womanlike, love him in spite of his nature. Perhaps, too, I myself might be mistaken about Morson; but I had seen too much of him, heard too much of him, and witnessed too many of his actions to have any doubts on that score.

My meditations were interrupted at this point by the far-off report of a gun, and looking toward where the sound came from, I saw the smoke rise from a valley a mile or more away. "A hare!" I guessed. I did not doubt that the shot proceeded from the poachers I had seen, and my guess was confirmed by the cry of the animal the moment afterwards. Surely the cry of a wounded hare is the most pitiful sound uttered by any beast of the chase—a long, wailing, weak, human-seeming cry, like that of a child in extreme terror and pain. "The brutes!" I said to myself, "they have only wounded it!" Then a second shot seemed to have put the creature out of its misery, for the crying stopped suddenly, and I was glad.

I waited, sitting on the hill, for an hour or more, in no haste to see my host, almost sorry I had accepted his bidding to come to his house; and putting thoughts of Scarfell Chace and Morson's engagement to Miss Arden aside as being troublesome and perplexing questions, I dwelt only on the pleasant ways of the girl who had just left me, her quick apprehension, her odd humor, her always ready smile, sometimes mocking, mostly sympathetic, never ungentle.

By this the shadows were lengthening fast, and there had come a stillness over the whole place, the wind having gone down. It was cold, though a sober light from the westering sun gleamed over the snow. I rose to walk to the Towers. It happened that I did not pick my way along the smoother winding dells, but crossed the hill ridges in a straight path. Even this seemingly trifling link in the concatination of events this day was destined to connect the whole chain of circumstances that were at last to end in so strange a catastrophe.

Going forward, my notice was attracted by the unusual movements in the air of a flight of four or five carrion crows in front of me. They were circling and hovering low down over one spot, a deep-lying dell, into which one or other of the birds would now and then swoop, and again rise suddenly from it into the air. As I came near the crows did not fly off, as is the wont of these birds, and I got so near, that at times, as one would skirt the hillside in side-long flight, I could see each black feather of its wing, like the teeth of a comb, separate against the snowy ground. Such unusual tameness, and such unaccustomed move-

ments, betoken, as I knew from experience abroad of these and other such ill-omened birds, some recent disaster either to one of the larger animals or to man himself. I looked about me from the hill whereon I stood, but could see nothing. Then, filled with a sudden foreboding, I ran down hastily into the dell below.

The sight that met my eyes overcame me for a moment with horror. Lying on the ground at full length on her face, her outstretched hands grasping the snow-sprinkled rock, was the body of Miss Arden; her hat had fallen from her head, and the masses of her brown hair lay confusedly upon the ground. Where they touched the snow there was a deep, broad stain of her blood.

Dead? I lifted her from the ground. The heart-pulse had stopped, her face was deadly pale. I could not doubt that this was death. The blood was congealed upon the side of her head and clotted in her hair. Moving aside the thick hair, I found a wound on the right temple, and probing it with my finger as well as I could, I found it did not extend at all deeply, and was rather the long cut of laceration than the ordinary deep-reaching wound of a bullet. It was not enough by itself to account for death. A ray of hope came to me. I took out my spirit-flask, still half full, and holding it to her lips, forced a few drops between them. There came back a glimmering of life, the eyelids quivered; a beginning of color crept over the white face. There was, close to where she lay, a drip of water from the rock. I held my closed hands under the icicle that had formed, and when they were full, dashed the half-frozen water upon her face. She drew a long, slow breath, and lay panting for life. I gave her a few more drops from my flask, and she was revived, breathing regularly, but still quite unconscious. Then, seeing that her wound began to bleed afresh, I tore my handkerchief into strips, and, making one of them into a tight pledget, I placed it over the wound on her temple and bound it round very tightly with the remaining strips. She lay with the life come back, but still senseless.

Then I remembered the two shots I had heard, and what I now knew must have been the girl's cry of fear and pain. She must have been struck by the first discharge when she cried out. I looked for the wound. Blood was upon her left arm. I thought at first it had come from the

wound on her head; but now seeing the blood flow afresh in this place, I was guided by this sign to two tiny bullet or slug holes in the tight sleeve of her habit. The bullet had entered and passed out. The bone of the arm was not broken, and the hurt was but a trifling flesh-wound.

Now I began to be relieved, and to have full hopes of her recovering. She was still deprived of all sense of outward things; but the great shock, I knew, and the sudden terror and the loss of blood, would fully account for this senselessness. Then I undid a silk handkerchief from her neck and tore it, as I had torn my own, into strips. As I took it, I saw that her watch and chain, which I remembered to have noticed, had been so forcibly snatched from their place that the cloth where they were fastened had been torn away. With the strips of her own handkerchief I now bound up the wound in her arm and stopped the bleeding. I sprinkled her face again with water, and again tried to make her drink from the spirit in my flask. While I still wondered at the reason of her continued senselessness, she opened her eyes and saw me; but she seemed to have lost all memory of what she had gone through. Only the sight of my face recalled her last words with me; she had forgotten all else. She smiled upon me with something of an attempt at the same gay, odd smile with which she had parted from me an hour before.

"It is time for me to go," she said; "we shall meet to-night, and then you must speak to me."

With that she fainted again, and lay back unconscious, but still the smile did not leave her lips. I have seen this odd, winning smile on the face of no other woman.

While again I was trying to recover her, I looked about for signs of the villains who had committed this crime, which clearly showed they had meant to be murder.

There were but few footmarks, though those there were showed plainly in the snow. I saw the hoof-prints of the pony as he had galloped off at the shot, and I could see the mark in the snow where Miss Arden had fallen; then I could perceive the tracks of the feet of one man. Clearly he had run up quickly, for there were impressions only of the toes of his boots, and they led from what I supposed was his hiding-place among the rocks some twenty yards away, and then followed the path the pony had taken.

There were but three or four prints of the whole of the man's foot close to where Miss Arden lay.

I was struck at once by the great size and breadth of these footprints. They must have been made by a man of unusual size, and the foot must be unusually broad, even for a big man. I remembered the taller of the two poachers whom I had seen, the one who carried the gun. It must certainly have been this man who had fired the shots.

It seemed clear that after firing he had come to the girl to rob her of her watch; that finding her fallen upon her face and, as he no doubt thought, dead, he had raised her, torn the watch and chain from their place, and letting her body fall forward again in the snow, had immediately fled. The story of this crime was thus most clearly printed upon the white page of snow that lay before me. As I watched the girl's pale face and saw her slowly and painfully coming back to consciousness, saw the pain wrinkles on her forehead growing deeper as she awoke to the smart of her wounds, I was seized with a fierce anger and indignation that almost overmastered my pity; and in my rage I swore an oath to myself that I would never rest, never lie content for an hour, till I had discovered the authors of this cruel wrong and avenged it upon them.

CHAPTER V.

ACROSS SCARFELL CHACE.

WHEN I had bound up Miss Arden's wounds, and she had come to her full senses, her first impulse was to cry out most piteously. She was now confusedly aware of the attack that had been made upon her, and in terror at the thought that her assailants were lurking near by.

I tried to compose and comfort her.

"They have gone, Miss Arden, they have run away. You have nothing more to fear from them. I will stay by you, and take care of you, and get you home."

She was so beside herself with the shock, with pain, and with weakness, that it was best, I thought, to speak to her as to a child frightened beyond its reason.

She was easily quieted, being, as I could see, a brave girl.

She asked me where she was, what had happened.

"Do not want to know anything yet. Trust yourself quite to me for a little. You are not so much hurt as you might have been. Drink some of this to keep your strength up, and let me get you home before you grow chilled."

She had begun to shiver. She did my bidding, and drank a spoonful or two of the spirit.

"I am better," she said. "If you will give me your arm, I could walk."

She was certainly very brave. I helped her to her feet, but she could not stand, and would have fallen down but for my support.

"I must carry you." And she resigned herself to my doing so without any words, being indeed, from the exertion of trying to stand, almost in a swoon again.

She was very light, not seemingly the weight of a child of fourteen. I carried her from the valley across the hill top, and as we breasted it the fresh breeze from the north revived her. She lay patiently in my arms, with her eyes shut, not speaking, and I went on. Light as she was, I doubted if I could carry her the whole distance to the Towers without long rests and delay that might be dangerous to her.

I was glad to see that the movement did not hurt her, and that some color was coming back into her face. She even spoke a word or two, as I went on as fast as I could walk with my burden.

"You are quite sure they won't come again?"

"Quite sure. They have gone away."

She was reassured.

"How good you are to me," she said presently, "how very good! I must be so heavy."

"No," I said, "you are as light as a feather: but you must not talk, it will do you harm."

I carried her some way, but the very lightest young lady is a heavier load than can be carried for very long up and down steep and stony hills. I had not gone far before I felt back and arms beginning to fail me.

I was thinking that I must set down my burden for a time and rest, or run the risk of stumbling from fatigue,

when to my great relief I perceived Miss Arden's runaway pony in the [illegible] elow me grazing, the saddle still on his back, and [illegible] idle rein entangled in his fore-feet. I walked up to him, still bearing Miss Arden in my arms, and the creature was so tame that he hardly raised his head from the ground as I set the girl gently in the saddle. I knotted the reins on his neck, placed her foot in the stirrup, and she was strong enough to sit up with her accustomed riding seat, holding on by the pommel of the saddle, with little help from me. Then leading the pony and walking by her side, we went forward at a quicker pace.

It was dusk by the time we got in sight of the house. The sight of it, and perhaps the feeling that she was hidden now by the falling shadows of night, seemed to reassure her, and she ceased to cast furtive, anxious glances to right and left as if expecting every moment to see her assailants rush out upon her. As we came nearer the house, the gleam of the window lights comforted her still more, and with her accustomed light-heartedness, which at the moment seemed almost levity, she began to forget all her past terror and her griefs.

"I wonder," she said, "if we shall get in without being seen? I hope we shall. They have all gone out in a boat to see the sea caves. I wouldn't go. I hate the sea, don't you?"

"I wish to Heaven you had gone too," I said.

"I should not have made your acquaintance," she said, trying to laugh; but the attempt was a failure.

"We must not talk," I said. "I am afraid you will be very ill to-morrow. You hardly know what an escape you have had. If the bullet that struck your head——"

"My head!" she cried, and put her hand up to the bandage. "I did not know I was struck there; I thought the pain was from my fall."

Her voice trembled. As often happens with such wounds, the sudden swoon following upon it had blotted all memory of the event just preceding it from her mind. I would not speak of it.

"Tell me," she said, "did that man really try to kill me?"

"Do not speak of it yet."

"But I remember now. Two men, and one with a gun

—a very tall man with a black beard. A voice called to me to stop, and because I went on he fired his gun, meaning, I thought, only to frighten me; but something struck me here," she touched her arm. "Then I cried out, and suddenly there was a great noise, and then everything grew dark before my eyes, and when I saw again you were near by and helping me."

"Come on quickly," I said. "I am afraid you will faint again."

As I walked by her side, I had laid my hand on her gauntleted wrist to secure her in her seat. I felt her tremble. For the first time it had come home to her that she had barely escaped with her life from a murderous attack. I feared she would faint again outright, and I gave her again a drop or two of the spirit. She revived. She was, I could plainly see, a very brave woman indeed.

Presently we found ourselves at the entrance of Scarfell Towers. A groom came from the stables, and two servants appeared at the door. I took her off the pony, and we passed into the hall, she walking weakly and leaning heavily on my arm.

"Send at once for the housekeeper," I said, "and Miss Arden's maid;" and while one of the men ran to execute my order, the girl, who had sunk at once into a chair, asked the other man, in a weak voice, if the guests had returned.

He answered that they had not.

I noticed that the man was a foreigner; indeed, all the male servants, and some of the women, at the Towers were Italians or Greeks—Levantines whom Morson had brought with him from the East.

When the housekeeper and maid appeared, I told them that Miss Arden was very seriously hurt, that she was to remain as quiet as possible; and, turning to the butler, I bade him send a mounted man for the nearest doctor.

The man hesitated, muttered that he could do nothing without orders from his master. No one, he said, was allowed to pass the gate in the hills without orders from the *padrone*, the master; and if he could send, it would be three hours at the earliest before a doctor could be procured. But, if I liked, he would venture to send word to the doctor on board the yacht.

"Of course!" I cried. "Send for him immediately!"

Soon the doctor arrived, an Italian in Morson's employ. Immediately afterwards the house party returned with Morson himself from the sea shore. I took him aside into the dining-room, and hurriedly told him what had happened. He seemed stunned by my news, turned pale, and almost reeled to a chair. Then, without a word to me, he walked hastily to the sideboard, and pouring himself out half a tumbler of brandy, drank the greater portion of it at one swallow.

"Will she die?" he asked, fixing bloodshot eyes upon me.

"Die! Why, did I not tell you the hurts are nothing? The wound in the arm is a trifle, and the bullet or slug has only glanced where it struck the head."

"Glanced! How could it glance, if it hit at all?"

I stared at him, not answering. He seemed beside himself, and his wits wandering.

"Did you see the men plainly? Should you know them again? Where were you? Were you near them? Did you speak to them?"

"I saw one of them at least, so plainly that I should know him anywhere—a very big man, with a beard, a black beard."

Morson seemed to turn faint again, and drank more brandy. I was astonished to see a man of his known courage so moved. "I wronged him," thought I; "he cares more for the girl than I supposed."

"Don't fear for Miss Arden," I said; "she is neither much hurt nor frightened. She is the pluckiest woman I ever saw. It was enough to frighten any one, though the wounds are nothing; in two days she will be all right."

He stared upon me as if the words conveyed no sense to him at all. Seeing how helpless he was, I suggested his taking some steps to search for the men; his communicating at once with the county police.

"Who do you suppose these men are?" he asked suddenly.

"Who can they be but strangers, landed on the Chace from the sea—fishermen, perhaps. They could only come by way of the sea, could they?"

"I don't know."

"Well, they could not come across the hills? You have barred the only road, and the cliffs are unclimbable anywhere."

"I suppose so."

"And there are no people living on the Chace, are there? You have turned them all off?"

He nodded his head.

"Then of course these villains must have come by sea, and either they are still in hiding on Scarfell Chace, or they have gone off in the boat they came by."

He seemed dazed still.

"For God's sake, rouse yourself, Morson! Do something, or let me!"

"What can we do? Damn it! don't be a fool!"

By a very great effort I restrained the desire in me to break out upon him for venturing so to address me; but I made allowance for him, and passed his ill-temper by.

"You had better, Morson," I said very calmly, "put that brandy bottle away, and consider what is to be done."

"There is nothing to be done, that I can see."

"You must have the whole place searched—that is the first thing."

"Well, that can't be done to-night; it is pitch dark already, and there is hardly any moon."

"Then you must telegraph a description of the two men down the coast, have a search made at Stanhoe" (this was the large fishing village, already mentioned, nine or ten miles south of Scarfell Towers), "and at all the other villages north and south. Have you a steam launch on the yacht?"

"Yes."

"You had better have her out early to-morrow, and go in her along the Scarfell cliffs and look in at every cove and inlet."

"All right," said Morson; "you shall do that yourself, the first thing."

Presently he went, as he said, to give his orders and send his telegram to the police. When I saw Morson again, it was after the doctor had gone, and he had perfectly recovered his self-possession.

The doctor, he said, had pronounced Miss Arden in no sort of danger; she would be afoot again in a day or two. "I told him," said Morson, "to make no fuss about this business. I told him it was an accident, and he agreed. Don't you think it best to put it that way?"

"I don't see any reason for telling a lie about a plain fact."

"I am sure her brother would agree with me," said Morson.

"How can the doctor think it an accident? Doesn't he see the poor girl has been shot through the arm and on the head?"

"He says the hurt on Miss Arden's head is only a graze, and looks as if it were caused by falling against a jagged rock."

"And the wound in the arm?"

"'A punctured wound,' he says, 'of no importance whatever.'" Morson pinched his lips together and looked at me curiously.

"Your doctor must be an ass!"

"An ass! Why, he is a man of science, and has a Paris and an Edinburgh diploma; besides which, he knows whom he has to do with. We think, her brother and I," he went on, "that in Miss Arden's interest it is best to set it all down to an accident, and not to say otherwise to the people staying here."

"Very good; you know best, I suppose."

"We can make our inquiries all the same, or all the better so. If you will go, as you suggested, down the coast to-morrow morning, I will drive round with Arden to see the police at Luxton. You must give me a written description of the man for the inspector." Morson paused in thought. "One thing I must ask you particularly—don't speak to Arden of what has happened to his sister."

"What! not let him know his sister has been half-murdered? But, of course, he knows already?"

"No; I have let him think it was an accident. In time I shall tell him, of course."

"Why, I thought, from what you said just now, you and he had put your heads together and agreed——"

"You put a wrong construction, or I spoke without thinking. You don't know Arden as I do. If we let him know the whole truth at once, there will be no keeping him in hand. Trust me, Bearcroft, in this, and do what I ask you."

I agreed, but I thought it odd.

CHAPTER VI.

GREGORY MORSON'S WAY OF THINKING.

When we met at dinner, two hours later, there was nothing in the bearing and behavior of the guests to show that one of our party had come into peril of her life that very afternoon, and was lying at the moment in pain and fever from gunshot wounds.

The house party was composed of very much such ladies and gentlemen as I should have expected to find in Morson's company. He objected to his country neighbors: he would have none of them. Their narrowness, he said, made him angry; their dulness tired him; their conventionality was more than he could endure. "I get my friends," he said, "from London, like my clothes; I could no more stand a country friend than a country tailor."

London, however, is a big place, and there is a large choice of acquaintances to be had there. Morson's friends were men and women of the world indeed, but not, I thought, of quite the right world. Of the men, some were rowdy; of the women, though all were pretty, some were conspicuous by their dress, some by their manners, some by their talk. As such people are dull company to each other without a butt at whom to set their rather uproarious wits, Morson had procured a gentleman who answerd this useful purpose, in the person of a young *savant* of real eminence in the world of science, but a very simpleton in all the realms of daily life. One lady of greater age and far superior, as I thought, in every way to the rest, acted in some sort as chaperon and companion to her niece, Miss Arden. This was Laby Raby, whom I had known as a boy. But this lady did not appear at dinner; she was nursing her niece.

Over these ladies and gentlemen Morson asserted his supremacy with very little of the common courtesy of a host. They laughed with him and at those among the men who it pleased him to make fun of, and took each man in

his turn to be derided, laughed at, and made of no account generally; humoring their host in every way. He was overbearing or contemptuous with his male guests; he used a mock gallantry with the women, which struck me as the more offensive behavior of the two.

Among the guests, one only interested me in any degree —Colonel Arden. I perceived at once that he was altogether different to the men about him, as well in manners as in character. I noticed that Morson spoke respectfully to Colonel Arden, and the other guests were careful to take no liberties with him. Indeed, they used a particular deference when they addressed him. His face was certainly the reverse of handsome, but there was nothing sinister in his ugliness. I too often judge by first impressions, but the bad impression that I had formed, when I saw him from a distance, wore off almost immediately. It disappeared when I heard him speak. There was in his voice, in his manner, in his expression as it lighted with speech, an indescribable boyish simplicity that gained upon me at once. He spoke little, taking no part in the boorish, pointless gaiety of the men; and his tone and manner to the women was marked by a true chivalry, of which there was no sign among the others, or in our host. It came back to me, indeed, that Colonel Arden's reputation in the countries where he was most known was none of the best. I could not recall what I had heard against him, but certainly he had been spoken of very hardly in my presence. What I could remember in his favor was that his fame stood high as a faithful servant of the Sultan his master, and as a soldier of great daring and ability; but his name was in my memory, too, connected with some deeds of a very high-handed, tyrannical kind. I determined to draw the circumstances from Morson himself. In the meantime, Colonel Arden's talk, reserved as he was, and his manner, entirely drew me to favor him.

It seemed to be the usage of the house for the men to indulge in a rough, bad sort of banter with one another, and Morson seemed to find sport in letting his companions go as near to real quarreling with each other as was possible, short of an actual outbreak; then he interposed with a sharp word, to keep the peace. It was queer company to be in. I have often made acquaintance with a rougher and more loutish set of men in my wanderings, but never

before among people in the coats and white ties of civilization. I now began to understand why I had found Miss Arden riding about Scarfell Chace alone instead of consorting with the other guests.

I very soon got a proof of Morson's roughness and his ascendency over the men about him. One gentleman, a member of my own Service, too, thought to fall into the humor of the party by addressing me, a stranger, across the table with a stupid and impertinent familiarity which it would have been impossible not to resent; but Morson was beforehand with me, and rated his guest into decent behavior as a huntsman rates a hound that is running riot.

"Come, Cockton," he called out, "you had better drop that with Bearcroft. He's just the man to skin and eat a fool like you."

I had not often listened to so startling a remark from host to guest; and it was impossible not to join the laugh of all the guests at the sudden discomfiture of poor Captain Cockton.

Morson's ascendency was more than the ascendency of a strong will, or than that of rough manners over men basely willing to be subservient to a host who entertained them sumptuously. He was clearly a man of strong brain power. I had always remembered how well he could talk almost as a boy. Later in life I used to consider him only as the uttery of clever paradoxes; but, like many other able men with surroundings too conventional for their liking, he often put forth as a paradox what were in fact his settled opinions.

He had lived much abroad, and among rough and lawless people. The most law and order reverencing Englishman, when he gets among the wilder regions and peoples of the earth, must, if he wishes to hold his own at all, put aside some of his respect for established and methodical processes of law and government. I quite hold to that principle of life myself: I have always acted upon it. Some of us proceed on this line with a latent respect all the time for civilized methods, and relapse kindly into observance of the conventional modes of equity when we have the chance of living under them again. But it was not so with Morson. He had always at heart been for absolutism and the mastery of the

strongest and shrewdest. "If a man can show himself a better man than me, let him rule me; if he can't, I shall rule him." That was a saying of his I remembered from early days. When he found himself in contact with the East and amid its very wildest and most fanatic races, he found himself living among those with whom this principle was in favor. He did not shrink from the practice of it in others, and he could at last practise as freely as once he had preached.

When I met him in Turkey some five or six years ago, I had lost sight of him for a long while before. He was changed in one respect only. I had left him as I thought a poor man with a patrimony lessened, as I have said, by a protracted lawsuit, inheritor of nothing but a few thousand barren acres. I found him again, apparently a millionaire, and with all that wealth and luxury imply in Eastern countries; trains of servants, dragomans, horses, tents, and a large steam yacht; and he enjoyed the prominence and importance which such things bring to their owner nowhere so surely as in the remoter East.

Morson was not communicative about the sources of his great fortune, I had not known then whence it came, and I did not know now. I only perceived that there were signs of wealth everywhere at Scarfell Towers. Everywhere except where English country gentlemen are mostly given to showing it. There was very great luxury everywhere within the house, rich hangings and furniture, objects of art of immense value, and so forth; but out of doors there was nothing hardly, neither grounds, nor gardens, nor any semblance of a park. The rocky, barren moorland of the Chace reached up almost to the very walls of Scarfell Towers, and the first step from the front door was upon rock and heather. Behind the house rose, sheer and bare, the cliff-like hills that barred the way to the outer world. Every man of the crowd of servants in the house, including the two or three grooms (for Morson had but a poor stud), was a Levantine, Greek, or Italian, and as in the foreign manner, men did some of the work of maid-servants with us. Those among the women servants who were not foreigners too were Irishwomen, and, like Morson himself, Roman Catholics. In everything, he loved to follow the fashions of the East; and so far as it could be, Scarfell Towers and the Chace itself, all the

stretch of land that lay between the cliffs, the river, and the sea, was as much under Morson's despotic rule as any district within reach of the British postman, policeman, and tax-collector could well be.

He loved to boast of his claims and right to absolute sway. As a rule, in the England of to-day a man can hardly proclaim his belief in a purely despotic government without laying himself open to be thought a fool, an impostor, or at best a pretender to eccentricity. Certainly Morson was neither of the three.

He was debarred by no considerations of modesty from declaring his opinions. As soon as the ladies had left the dining-room he began to hold forth very frankly.

"There are men," he told us, "who by right of natural pre-eminence are exempt from the common restraints that bind common men. I am one of them. What! tell me that I am to be governed by the pack of fools and hypocrites who have set up the laws of this contemptible little island! I know I am above the idiots in everything that makes one man better than his neighbor; why should I obey the laws these miserable curs have made to guard their wretched purses and their wretched skins?"

I looked at Colonel Arden, rather wondering how he would take such violent doctrine. He laughed, but said nothing. Perhaps he had heard similar paradox too often to be much interested. Perhaps he had himself been too long among the Turks, and was too much wedded to their ways, to hold much with formal law. The guests loudly applauded the sentiment. I was vexed with their subservience, and with Morson.

"Why, Morson, what utter rubbish you are talking! If you act up to your talk you will find yourself in the hands of the nearest policeman some day, and it will serve you right."

"Shall I? I think not!" he said slily. "I fancy I shall always be able to set my wits against fools, who can be outwitted, or knaves, who can be bought."

But seeing perhaps that his boast was lost upon me, and knowing he had a better weapon by him than idle vaunting, he used it and talked of "general principles." He talked eagerly and hotly, as if the point was seriously worth argument.

"Come, Bearcroft, let us reason it out. Surely you will

grant that if one man of malevolent or even of merely harmful impulses interferes with the well-being of a number of right-doers, it is within the right of the right-doers to restrain him, and, if need be, slay him. Is not all law and government founded on this?"

"Certainly."

"But in these over-civilized countries we are so beset and puzzled with all sorts of absurd restrictions and complications, that we lose sight of this principle altogether, and the wrong-doer gets off. All that I do is to go back to the first principle."

"You are to be judge, jury, and hangman?"

"Certainly I am, if your judge, jurymen, and hangmen are in a conspiracy of imbecility to do nothing or to do wrong. That is just my point; the community having failed of their duty, I step in. You know what lynch law is. I fancy you've helped to lynch a scoundrel before now?"

"Of course I have; but that is the community stepping in to punish crime, not the individual taking the law into his own hands."

"Bosh! There is always one man at the back of the community—the strong man. He sets the thing going, and shelters himself behind the crowd as the man hangs. It is he, though, who has slain him; it is not the idiotic, clamorous crowd who pull the rope over the tree branch and string the fellow up. Well, I dispense with the crowd. I take the responsibility upon myself. If I think it well for the community that the man should hang, hang he does."

"Nonsense! and as for lynch law, I have seen something of it, and I think a good deal of it. I think it much better than no law, and rather better than bad law. I would lynch you, Morson, at a moment's notice, if I thought you deserved it, or any of you gentlemen present; particularly here in Scarfell Chace, where, I understand, our host does not let the Queen's writs run very easily."

Colonel Arden, a man of a large and tolerant nature, smiled at my personal application of the law of Judge Lynch. Morson frowned at the implied liberty with his own sacred neck, and the rest of the guests, seeing their host angry, resented my presumption towards him and themselves by frowns and murmurs.

I was quite pleased to find that I could so easily vex a set of men of whom I was beginning to entertain the very lowest opinion, and I had to restrain myself not to laugh outright as I went on—

"Don't be offended, gentlemen; there is really nothing personal in the thing at all. Our host wished me to reason the thing out, and I am doing so to please him. The fact is, I am rather more with him than he imagines, if I can judge by the expression of his countenance at this moment. It is, as he says, generally one man alone who is at the back of prosecutions by lynch law, or two or three at the outside, and that is just what makes the whole thing often so very doubtful a blessing."

"Well," said Morson, still angry, "let's have it out."

"I will tell you," I said, "a little story about the lynching of a horse-stealer down in Gap Springs, Arkansas. I took a hand myself at the trial. It will prove my case. Here was a fellow of assumed 'malevolent impulses,' as Morson calls it, before us, and the trial went forward smoothly and pleasantly. The man's guilt seemed so plain that most of us quite lost interest in the proceedings, and while the prisoner was adding some last words to his speech for the defence, the counsel for the prosecution and two others of us, his judges ('right-doing men,' of course, as you would call them), impatient of the law's delay, were beginning to slip the noose round the fellow's neck. By a mere accident I looked closely at these men, and happened to remember that I had seen the whole three of them, a year before, sentenced to a term of imprisonment in the court house at Little Rock. I made a speech mentioning this, and the crowd, who were very sharp, saw the whole thing at a glance. These three men were trade rivals of the prisoner's, and had got up the trial to rid themselves of him. I never saw a crowd so amused. Of course we took the rope off the prisoner at once. The three scoundrels instantly bolted through the woods, with the bullets of our revolvers following them. I forget if we winged any of them, but I fancy not, for we were all laughing too much to shoot very straight. You see, Morson, it is not so easy to administer justice, even when you are not bothered with any absurd forms and pleadings."

"It seems to me," said Morson, "that you bungled the whole thing shamefully, and if I had been there I should have strung up the whole four."

There was a certain breadth in Morson s conceptions that often interested me.

"Yes," he went on, "there is always about our race here, or in the United States, that absurd notion about the sanctity of human life that stands in the way of justice and of everything great. I never possessed the notion myself. You must come back to my principle at last. Simplify law, abolish juries, do away with the abuses that always creep in, foolish forms, and the popular vote. Let one man be sole, unquestioned judge, and if he has in him the power of life and death, he must have mastery in other matters. He must be indemnified for condescending to trouble himself with the paltry lives and deaths of paltry men. I assume to myself that privilege," said Morson, with his loftiest air, "and I may condemn a life for other reasons than crime."

"What sort of reasons, pray?"

"The man may stand in my way," said Morson gloomily and suggestively, "and I may choose to put him to death."

The guests, I noticed, were getting a little uneasy. Morson had already drunk deeply; his face was flushed; his eyes, that had seemed bloodshot to me before dinner as he swallowed glass upon glass of raw brandy, now glared round the table like those of a maddened bull. I had in former days always taken a particular pleasure in goading Morson when he arrived at this point of disputation, and I found the temptation still strong upon me. Besides which, I had found something not unlike a challenge to myself personally in his monstrous assumptions. I thought I perceived Colonel Arden's eyes upon me, as if to hint at the wisdom of letting an angry man alone.

I did not consider it necessary to take the hint. Really the provocation was too monstrous, even for a temper so calm as my own.

"Ah, I see!" I said, "the old melodramatic business—no one is to cross your path. Really, at this day, Morson, we can't stand such rubbish as that!"

He was not to be drawn into further argument to-day, and he only muttered words I could hardly catch. "Perhaps you will find your mistake, as others have," I thought I heard him say. Then he fell into gloom and silence.

Colonel Arden made a move and the party broke up.

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE TRACK.

I WOKE before it was light the following morning, and lay for some while considering the strange events of the day before: the murderous, seemingly premeditated attack upon the girl; Morson's unaccountable behavior when I had told him of it; the way he had insisted upon hushing up the adventure. I recalled Morson's unseemly brutality, and rough, inhospitable treatment of his guests; his foolish excitement over purely abstract theories of his own starting.

What did an innocent and gentle girl like Miss Arden do in a house like this? Was the explanation simply that which explains so much that is paradoxical in men's actions, and so much more in women's? Was she in love with this man? Was she taken with his good looks, his brilliant rush of talk, his prosperity, his general masterfulness? Had she, for the sake of his manliness, forgiven his coarse selfishness and his want of any approach to chivalry; or had she no need to forgive what love too much blinded her to perceive? This might account for the girl's conduct; but what could justify her brother—a gentleman refined in manner and speech, and, unless I greatly mistook him, one in heart and feeling too—in letting his only sister engage herself to a bully, a boor, and, to judge from last night, a drunkard?

All these were problems that I could not solve in any way. The question, however, to which I was most urgent to find an answer was, who were Miss Arden's assailants of the day before, and how was the crime to be traced to them? I had sworn to myself I would leave no stone unturned to track these men, who certainly had meant her murder, and to avenge their crime upon them. I was very hotly set upon this purpose, and I waited impatiently for the dawn that I might begin some sort of investigation.

Piecing my own observations together, I had already

much to go upon. I had seen two men, one bearing a gun, in the neighborhood of the attack, and just before it. I had heard muttered voices that sounded harsh and strange in my ears, though I could distinguish no words, the sound having come to me confused by reverberation from the vaulted roof of the cavern I stood in. That these men were Miss Arden's assailants was made certain by her own words to me before I cut short her speaking. Of the two men I had seen plainly that the one who bore the gun was a very tall, big man, his face covered with a short black beard. It was he who had pointed to the ground, indicating, as I had thought, the track of a hare to his companion. That companion's face, in the instant of time that the men had remained in my sight, I had not seen plainly enough to remember. I could not even recall whether he was bearded or not. I could only remember the appearance of the two men as they walked from me, the smaller build and lesser stature of the one man contrasted with the broad-shouldered giant who walked beside him. These two dark figures, outlined against the snow, had remained as a clear-drawn picture to me. The last piece of evidence was the strongest of all,—the impression of the man's foot in the snow. It was a huge footmark, longer and broader than it seemed quite natural that even so tall and big a man would make—the largest human footmark I had ever seen. I had noted, too, a further point: how each step in the snow bore clear nail-marks, set in a rather unusual manner, so plainly that I had easily counted them. Even in my haste and anxiety I had counted them: four nail marks set four-square in the left shoe-print; in the right five, of which four were set in a similar square, the fifth in the square's centre, making altogether a quincunx. All this was at this moment as plain in my memory as it had been yesterday in my sight. Now a sudden reflection came to me. To give its full importance to this evidence of the footprints, I must have an actual record of them. Unless it had snowed heavily or thawed in the night, I should still, I hoped, be in time to take a transcript of the footmarks in the snow.

I lit a candle. In a short time the day would break. I dressed hastily, and when I looked from my window the first streaks from the east were stealing over the landscape. I rejoiced to find the snow still lying on the ground. No

one was yet astir, and I had to draw back locks and bars to let myself out. It was colder than ever, the sky clouded overhead, while a cutting north wind drove a few scattered snowflakes in eddies through the air as I went forth.

In half an hour I reached the valley where I had found Miss Arden lying in the snow, wounded and insensible.

Early as it was, some one had been on the spot before me, and clearly for no honest purpose. The footmarks had all been carefully obliterated. It was obvious how it had been done. Twigs and fragments of furze lay about, and branches of this shrub had evidently been used to sweep the snow together and hide the footprints. Not a sign of one was visible anywhere. My coming, I thought, had been in vain. The person who had been before me had brushed over not only the tracks I had seen the night before, but those made by himself in coming and going. I should have returned, but that I noticed that the dry and powdery upper coat of snow which seemed to have fallen upon the ground in the night was being carried hither and thither by the strong wind that blew, over the harder frozen snow beneath it. In one place I thought I could perceive part of a footprint either left unobliterated by the person who had preceded me, or now newly uncovered by the wind.

Picking up a bit of the furze that lay about, I lightly brushed away the upper snow in this place, and had the satisfaction of laying bare the perfect footprint I had seen the evening before. It was of the right foot, and contained the five nail-marks, set quincunx fashion, I had already noticed. The pressure of the man's weight had caked the snow under his foot, and the mould, as it were, of the shoe sole upon the ground was very distinct, with five indentations where the nails had left their marks. I knelt down, and, laying a piece of paper upon the hardened snow, marked length, breadth, and shape in pencil outline; then, running the point of a pencil through the sunken nail-marks, I had a perfect copy of the footprint of the man who I knew had done the deed. Presently I found the impress of the left foot, and transferred it likewise to paper.

Now there remained but to discover who had concealed the footprints of the intending murderer. Was it the criminal himself? I set myself to find this out. I had

retained in my memory more or less the situations of the snow imprints I had seen the night before. Here it was where Miss Arden had fallen, moved once or twice, and then lain still; here were the pony's hoof-marks as he had come along the valley bottom; regular alternate marks, suddenly swerving twice at the shots, then with disturbance and scattering of the snow, showing plain signs of galloping flight; here were my own steps as I had run up. All had been lightly powdered with the still falling snow, but all were either still visible or I could remember their places. I looked elsewhere for where the snow was disturbed by the brushing of it by the person who had preceded me. Here I knew I should find his own tracks, covered up; and I did find them.

It was not the shoe-mark of the criminal; it was a narrower foot. I measured it as I had the others. I found the right foot and the left, and made accurate measurements of both, with the places of the transverse rows of nails across the soles. To my very great surprise the length was identical with that of the unusually large footmark of the criminal—identical to the fraction of an inch. This coincidence gave me much food for thought. Were the footmarks not made by one and the same person, wearing at different times a different foot covering? It was hardly likely that two men should possess feet of such abnormal size. Unless a man be deformed and disproportioned, his foot and hand are in size always according to his height. I am myself over six feet, and I could therefore use my own foot as a measure and a standard. I found it lay easily within either of these two different footprints. It was much narrower than the broad one, and it was nearly an inch shorter than either. Nothing was clearer, then, that the men whose footprints marked the snow in this spot were men of most unusual stature—giants. Assuming that my calculation of proportion between height and foot size was correct, they could not be less than six feet four inches in height. Now even in England, the land of tall men, such a man is as one in thousands, and I must therefore imagine a coincidence so strange as that two men, each of such rare proportions, had trodden upon the same square yard of Scarfell Chace, each working in support and confederacy of the other in the commission and concealment of a crime—a most im-

probable, nay, an impossible coincidence. Certainly the footprints belonged to one and the same person.

There was but one difficulty in arriving at this conclusion. One set of footmarks were remarkably broad and flat, those of a splay-footed person, the other was the imprint of a narrow foot. In one case the whole shoe touched the ground and made its imprint; in the other there was a space bearing no mark between the heel and the ball of the foot, as of a person with a well-arched instep. It required, however, only to suppose that the person, whoever he was, in the interval between his two visits had, for obvious purposes of concealment, exchanged the shoes of a fisherman or a sailor, such shoes as the men I nad seen in fishermen's dress would naturally wear, for well-fitting, tightly laced shooting boots, just such a boot as a gamekeeper, who has to walk fast and far, would wear, or even such as a gentleman would use in the country.

This hypothesis was inconsistent with the conclusion I had arrived at from the first, which I had suggested to Morson, and which he too had accepted; namely, that the would-be murderer, whom I had seen in the garb of a fisherman, had just landed from a fishing-boat in the offing. If the two sets of footprints were made by one man, they could hardly be those of a fisherman or sailor landed on the Chace, for where, and how, and why should the man have changed any part of his seaman's dress? Fishermen or sailors use flat-soled shoes or equally flat-soled seaboots, never the tight-fitting heavily nailed boots which had left the second imprint. These latter, then, must be a disguise.

There was evidence therefore, it seemed to me, of these men being seafaring men indeed, but not men who lived on the sea and who had only effected a temporary landing on the Chace; for had it been so, assuredly they would have put to sea again immediately after the commission of the crime. Flight would have been their only object, flight with the fruits of their robbery.

If I were right in my present conjecture, the assailants of Miss Arden must still be on Scarfell Chace. The place had been depopulated by Morson. No respectable person that I knew of either lived upon the Chace or ever passed over it. Morson preserved no game, there could there-

fore be no keepers or watchers ; nor could there be idlers from the neighboring hamlets, for the district was inaccessible. I did not suppose that this remote and dispeopled moorland would be even traversed by an occasional rural constable; if a police officer should come hither in the course of his duties, he must pass through the strictly guarded road across the hills, and that only after obtaining Morson's authority. Remembering Morson's antipathy to every form of British law, I did not think any constable would twice perambulate Scarfell Chace.

It seemed to me, therefore, quite probable that so deserted a place might well be the haunt of bad characters from the neighborhood. The Chace was so full of hollow dells and shelter nooks among the rocks, that I thought it likely enough that a couple of outlaws from civilization, arriving by sea and yet not seamen, might take up their abode here, where they might defy even such a search of the place as the fishermen had told me was once made by a *posse* of constables and their followers. It even occurred to me that if by some chance, like that which had led both Miss Arden and myself to do so, they had hit upon the opening of one of the old mining galleries, they would be provided not with a hiding place only, but with lodging. This theory fitted in with all the requirements of my last-formed guess.

If they had landed on the Chace from the sea, they must, however, have brought their boat with them. It must therefore be now laid up in one of the few narrow inlets which pierced the cliffs along the sea coast of Scarfell Chase. It could not have been dragged inland ; for the height and steepness of the sea rocks forbade it. I remembered, however, that as a boy I had more than once been taken by boat to shoot the wild pigeons that haunt the tall sea rocks on this coast. The coast can be approached in two or three places only, so high and precipitous are the cliffs, and sometimes when an entrance can be effected through what seems a creek formed by some opening of the rocks, the creek ends only in a sea cave, vaulted overhead by solid rock and floored with the green sea water. From these caves there is no opening or approach landwards. It was perhaps in some such cavern that the men had made their retreat.

Now it was natural to suppose that these imagined denizens of Scarfell Chace, whom I had concluded to be the assailants of Miss Arden, would reach it through some one of these inlets of the sea, and, if so, the boat they came by must certainly be hid in just such a sea cavern as I remembered to have seen. To make such a thing feasible it was only necessary to suppose that some access to land was to be gained over or round the rocks where one of the caverns lay. What would seem to a boy the inaccessible face of a sea-cliff, might perhaps easily be climbed by a grown man. If the villains were seafaring men, which if they came by sea they were likely to be, they would find less difficulty than other men; sailors are the boldest and best of cragsmen.

I resolved to use the yacht's launch that day to search thoroughly every cave along the coast of Scarfell Chace.

CHAPTER VIII.

FURTHER DISCOVERIES.

MORSON had shown so curious a disinclination to take any active steps for an inquiry into the attack upon his future bride, that I was fully prepared when I got back to the Towers to find he had not even started for the town. It was past ten when I returned, and I found the guests at breakfast. Morson did not appear.

Very little was said about the accident—so it was spoken of—to Miss Arden. Lady Raby was with her niece upstairs. To the question which I addressed to him, Colonel Arden replied, speaking cheerfully and pleasantly, "My sister has passed a feverish night, but towards morning she got some sleep. She is nearly out of pain, and going on capitally, the doctor says; I have just seen him."

I said nothing about my doings that morning; and though it would have been natural to consult the girl's brother as to further proceedings, I remembered Morson's urgent request to me to say nothing to Colonel Arden. I therefore held my peace towards him, as I had done with the others.

After breakfast, I told Colonel Arden that I had arranged

with my host overnight to go down the coast in the steam launch, but that I doubted if any orders had been given. I could not well give any myself. Would he?

Certainly he would, he said. He rang, and writing a line or two in pencil on a sheet of notepaper addressed to the yacht's captain, folded it, and gave it to the servant, with orders that it should be carried at once on board.

"The yacht lies in the cove," he told me, "about half a mile off, and the launch can come up the creek to within three hundred yards of the house."

Nothing could be more frank, simple, straightforward and pleasant than Colonel Arden's manner. I much wished to speak to him of what I had done and discovered and conjectured that morning as to the assault upon his sister; but again I remembered Morson's particular injunction against doing so. There was that to happen before the close of this day which made me congratulate myself heartily that I had not yielded to this desire.

"Morson is not very lively this morning," said Colonel Arden, laughing a little; "he is not himself at all. He w put out by this accident to my sister, and I don't wond I never knew him to be so excited. He drank a little more, I suppose, than was good for him. But you must not think that is Morson's way; he is rather an abstemious man, so far as drink goes."

Colonel Arden seemed resolved upon making the best case he could for Morson. "I am really sorry," he went on, "that you saw him in that excited state last night, and I know he will be sorry too. I don't think there is any one in the world whose good opinion he holds to so much as yours, Captain Bearcroft. He has spoken to me very often of you. I think you must be his very oldest friend. Morson always likes the men best who won't give in to him."

There was something so open, genial, kindly, and even generous about Colonel Arden's manner and his way of speaking of his friend and of myself, that I would defy the most churlish person in the world not to have been gained by him and to like him. I was beginning to feel, too, quite ashamed of the harsh judgment I had formed of Morson.

The butler came in and asked for some direction as to I forget wh . Colonel Arden gave the order and dismissed the serva

As the man left the room Colonel Arden looked at me with something of a deprecating smile. "I hope you don't think," he said, "I am giving myself airs of mastership here; but you see the people must have some one to look to—when Morson is seedy or—or away."

"Is Morson's health bad?"

"Well, no; it is rather good than otherwise. He is a strongish man, but he has lived a hard life, and—well, he has times of depression, when he is not himself. I tell you this now, for you are sure to notice it yourself sooner or later. Then sometimes he has to go away suddenly on business of some kind. I don't inquire; but when a man is rolling up such a pile, such a very big fortune, as Morson, his time of course is not his own, and every now and then he bolts—rather mysteriously, I must admit—and stays away for a day or two."

"Oh!" I said, "I see."

"Well, then," said Colonel Arden, "some one must look after these fellows while he is away. They are not like English servants; they are always wanting some one to tell them what to do. You see, I have been Morson's friend for a good many years now, and I know his ways well, perhaps as well as you do." He looked at me inquiringly.

"Better, I am sure, for I don't really know him at all. I never could make him out since he was a boy, and we used to fight together and make it up, and fight again."

Colonel Arden being so very much of a fighting man himself, this picture of our boyish friendship seemed to amuse him. He laughed.

There was a particular ease and pleasantness in all Colonel Arden did and said, and his face, which was strong always and stern in repose, relaxed almost to gentleness when he smiled. Altogether, this geniality of manner in a man of his strong character and of his reputation for adventurous prowess was extraordinarily pleasant and taking.

"Morson is a very good fellow, indeed," said Colonel Arden, quite seriously this time; "but he requires to be understood. He and I are to be brothers-in-law, too, some of these days. He told me you knew of the engagement, and I am glad of it, in every way."

"Yes, Morson told me of it;" as Colonel Arden seemed to be pleased, I added, "and I congratulate you."

"Thank you. He is really a good fellow; and what is more, and may surprise you, he is a very religious man."

"You don't say so!"

"He is indeed. I wish I was more like him in this; but somehow it was never in my line."

"Was Morson always—given to this sort of thing? I don't somehow remember anything of the kind."

"He was always a good Catholic; but only, I fancy, as you and I are good Catholics. It is only within the last five or six years that he has become what one might call a devout one. I make a point of telling you, because otherwise you might—if the thing came upon you suddenly, you know—be a little hard upon him, or perhaps laugh at him."

"Good Heavens, no! I should never think of doing that. I can't tell you how I respect him for it. Of course, knowing Morson as I do, I am a little taken aback; but really I respect him immensely."

"I thought you would, and I am glad I told you. Morson does a lot of good among the poor all about here. He is very charitable."

"Well," said I, unable to resist the criticism, remembering what I had heard from the fishermen, "I fancy some of it is charity of the sort that does not exactly begin at home. Has he not turned off all the poor people on Scarfell Chace? I see their cottages are unroofed everywhere."

Colonel Arden was not offended at my cynicism. "Quite so," he said; "but then Morson had his reasons. The land was poor—too poor for them to live upon; the people couldn't thrive. They could neither pay rent to their landlord nor make two ends meet for themselves. To live at all they had to thieve. They were a curse to their neighbors and to themselves. Morson had helped those who would take help out of the country."

How easily a plain story can upset a malicious report! Here was Morson growing into a hero before my very eyes.

"I suppose you have heard of the Augustinian monastery at St. Ambrose? The old abbey is a few miles from here across the river—you may remember the ruins in your time. Well, Morson has restored it and endowed the church. It is now a full monastery, with an abbot, twenty-

two monks, and as many lay brothers. It is connected with the great House of the Order at Naples, and Morson has been all along the principal benefactor."

The more I heard of Gregory Morson the more I found that was extraordinary and contradictory. Colonel Arden went on telling me of his friend's enormous fortune, his munificence, his modesty that feared to have any of his generous actions known, till at last my only feeling about Morson was wonder that I had all this time misjudged him so completely. What had I been about? Where were my wits?

Colonel Arden walked with me down to the creek, where the launch was waiting for me with her steam up.

"I should like to go with you," he said; "but I mustn't leave Morson till he is all right again. He is ill—lying down, and I am waiting for him to get up."

"But does he not mean to go to Luxton, to see the magistrate?"

"Not that I know. Why should he?"

I remembered Morson's rather incomprehensible injunction as to keeping the whole affair a secret from Colonel Arden. I said nothing.

I made a sign to the engineer. We started, and presently shot into the little land-locked cove where Morson's fine two hundred ton yacht was lying. We passed under her stern. She was a pretty, ship-shape boat. A dozen of her crew were leaning upon the taffrail; clean shaved, sailor-looking men, trimly dressed, as the best sort of yachtsmen always are, in the extreme fashion of a man-of-war's blue-jackets.

We had three hands on board the launch, an engineer, a steersman, and a boy, all Italians. I spoke a word or two to them in their own language.

"Are they all your countrymen on board there?" I asked.

The steersman answered me. He was the only spokesman; but he was not voluble after the manner of his people. He told me they were all Italians. He contented himself with a civil answer to my questions, yes or no. Morson had evidently schooled his men not only to look like English yachtsmen, but to behave like them. It said a good deal, I thought, for the discipline.

"I want you," I said, "to run down as close to the rocks as you can steer. Let the boat go at half-speed."

"Yes, signor."

So we went on for some two miles, our course lying not a hundred yards away from the shore. When we came to the first apparent opening, I caused the boat's head to be turned inwards and speed to be reduced; but we found again and again that what looked like an opening was but a cleft in the solid cliff, leading a little way in but having no entrance to the land. The great breakers that dashed everywhere against the wall of continuous cliff broke into these little bays with great force, sending spray and foam into the air nearly to the crests of the rocks.

We had gone five miles before we found the creek I remembered. When I told the men I intended to enter it, they assured me that this was impossible. There was no approach to land that way, and no cavern. The launch would be dashed to pieces upon the rocks. I insisted. They began to mutter among themselves, and it was with no little difficulty that I got my way.

We entered the creek very slowly and cautiously, not without some risk, for, though the wind was not from the sea, a heavy ground-swell lifted and let fall our boat dangerously among the rocks. The creek ran in further than any we had yet come to; and where it ended, the constant rush of water had tunneled a low and narrow entrance for itself under the rocks and formed a sea cave. We watched till a large wave passed in, and then in the wake of it, and when the water level was lowest, we shut off steam, and using a pair of oars we had brought with us fetched the boat in. The cavern broadened as soon as we got within it, and its height was lost in the shadow and darkness inside. It was now about half an hour past the time of dead low water, and it was therefore obvious that the cavern could be entered and left for a very short period during each day. Till the next low tide its mouth would be under water.

A few great jagged rocks lay, fallen from the roof, inside the entrance. On them the force of the incoming breakers spent itself, and the water behind was smooth. We steered round these rocks. The water was deep, transparent, and of a glassy green. Our coming had disturbed a dozen cormorants perched upon the peaks of the fallen rocks, and they circled once or twice in the space overhead, then flew down and out through the narrow opening. We felt

the wind of their pinion-strokes upon our faces, and the sound of their flying was reverberated through the hollow vaulted recesses with a resounding noise. This loudness and the far away echoes of the sound told me, for the first time, how vastly these unseen recesses must extend. We rowed up some distance, our eyes gradually getting used to the twilight within the cavern. Seeing that there was a margin of clean silver sand on either side of the water, I left the boat, bidding the men await my return, and walked upon the sand, wondering much to find that the cavern reached so far. It wound now to one side, now to another, but neither narrowing, nor the roof growing lower, nor the water shoaling.

I had walked some way in, still finding no change in the cavern, before it occurred to me that this was, perhaps, no true sea cavern at all, but only such another mining gallery as I had found the day before, or a cave begun by the sea and worked further by the hand of man; for it did not seem likely that the sea, whose wave-force would be lost by rushing against the sides and roof, could have scooped so long and regular a passage as this into the very bowels of the earth. Without doubt the usual mould of *débris*—the contents thrown out in the course of excavating the gallery—had once existed at its sea-mouth, and had, I guessed, been long ago carried to sea by the action of the waves. The question at once occurred to me, had this long, tunnel-like cavern a land exit? Did it pierce the cliff and open upon the moorland behind it? If so, and if it were known to the outlaws who I suspected haunted Scarfell Chace, they could hide there when they had a mind to, or escape away to sea at their will. There wanted but one proof to make my guess a certainty: it was to find a boat in the recesses of the cave, or some sign of men's presence.

Unfortunately the light reflected from the water surface and from the walls and sides, which had reached a good way in, had now failed, and I was groping my way on in nearly complete darkness, seeing nothing plainly but the water, in whose clear depths the sunlight outside was still dimly reflected. I had omitted to bring matches or a candle, and was regretting my oversight and imagining the cavern to extend into unknown recesses, which I must needs refrain from exploring, when, peering anxiously into

the unseen distance, I caught sight of a pair of eyes watching me out of the darkness. There was no mistake about it; all about was blackness, but into these two eyes were concentrated the last feeble rays of the far off light-circle at the entrance to the cavern's mouth.

While I waited irresolute, I reflected that from the position in which I stood, with my back to the entrance, my own eyes must be unseen by the eyes which were still staring fixedly upon me. The outline of my form in the blackness of the cavern was perhaps as invisible to him as his, if it was a man's, was to me; only my whereabouts must have been faintly indicated by the sound of my footsteps in the soft sand. I stood still and listened for his first movements. Not the faintest sound broke the silence. Then only for the first time I heard that low continuous whispering in the air which is ever heard in sea caverns, like to, and as faint as the breathing that comes from the hollow of a seashell held against the ear.

Suddenly the silence was broken. Out of all the recesses of the cave came a fearful sound, the like of which has never before or since assailed my ears. The whole air was filled with a roaring of the most unearthly kind; it echoed along the vaulted roof, was protracted in its full loudness for a time, died away, and then recommenced. In the midst of this terrible sound, some heavy object fell or was thrown into the water, and the drops that splashed up struck against my face. Then, in a moment, all was still again.

I drew back against the cavern wall, expecting to be assailed by I knew not what, but nothing came; and when I looked again at the place where I had seen the watching eyes, I could perceive nothing. Presently the wave circles that had risen on the water fell back into smoothness, and again there was a dead silence in the darkness of the cavern.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RUINED CHURCH.

I WAITED for some little time with my back against the rock, expecting every minute to be attacked by the man who, I supposed, had been watching me from the dark recesses of the cavern; and when nothing happened, and no further sound broke the deep silence of the place, I walked some twenty or thirty steps further in towards the dark end of the cavern without finding any sign of its termination. Then, being in complete darkness, for by the winding of the tunnel I had now lost sight of the circle of light at the opening, I picked up a stone that my foot struck against and flung it with all my strength into the darkness. A considerable time elapsed before I heard it strike twice against the rocks far away, and into the water.

I feared to lose my way if I ventured further into the vast recesses of the cavern, and turned back towards the launch I had left inside the sea entrance. As I advanced again towards the light and came in sight of the boat, the unearthly yelling or roaring recommenced, and I now perceived the very simple cause of it. It proceeded from the three boatmen, who were calling to me that it was time to leave by the way we had come in. Their voices, which they had raised to the utmost in their anxiety that I should hear, carried along the water and confused, re-echoing back upon me and redoubled by the rocky vaulted roof, had lost all semblance to human utterance, being raised to the loudness almost of thunder.

As I got near enough to distinguish the meaning of their cries, I learned that they were telling me that the tide was rising rapidly, and in a few minutes more the cavern's mouth would be under water. We hurried out, and found no small difficulty in getting away, so quickly did the entrance diminish with the incoming flood tide.

When I thought over my adventure, I came to the

obvious conclusion that the eyes I had seen could not be the eyes of a man at all, but those of some large animal, a sea otter or seal, which I had startled from its lair. The creature had no doubt plunged into the water on seeing me, and dived through the channel to the open sea. The men, indeed, had seen nothing; but they had heard a very strange noise, and a great splashing of the waters. I asked them if they had ever entered this cave before. They shook their heads. Did they still maintain that they had not known there was a cave ending to this creek? I asked. They looked from one to another before answering, and then told me they had known nothing of it.

These men were not of the class of Italian sailors whom it is usual to encounter either in Italy or the Levant, who are gay, frank and outspoken; nor were their faces at all pleasant to look upon. There is the talkative, easy-going Italian, and there is the rarer Italian of the reserved and sullen kind. It is among these latter that are to be found the ruffians and criminals who fill the gaols of the seaports in the East. It struck me that if all Morson's yachtsmen were as my boat's company was, he must have shipped a very rough and rascally crew.

When I perceived what kind of men I had to deal with, I very quickly took a rougher tone with them, and found their manner somewhat mend under the treatment; but still they were surly and unmannerly dogs, with scowling, scoundrel faces.

We ran down the coast till we reached the river which bounds the Chace to the south, across whose mouth I had been ferried the day before in the fishermen's boat. I had examined every creek on the way, and tried every apparent opening. There was but one other sea cavern. Access to it was easy; and it was thither, as I knew, that the party from the Towers had made their boating excursion the day before. This cave was light throughout, the entrance being high and wide, and I easily satisfied myself that there was no passage from it landward, nor any possibility of climbing the precipitous cliffs near by. I landed at the little creek between the rocks where I had been put on shore the previous day. My own tracks in the snow were still faintly visible, powdered over by the few flakes that had fallen in the night. No one had been there since myself.

The fishermen had already assured me that there was no access to land except by this little creek, and through the cove to the north, where the yacht lay. Unless, therefore, a cave or a creek existed in the coast line of Scarfell Chace which I had not found, and I did not think it was possible, I had almost proved that no departure from the Chace had taken place by sea. It followed, then, that the criminals whose trace I was following were still at large, and upon Scarfell Chace itself.

I had now but one more piece of work to do, which was to examine the land well behind the great sea cavern I had endeavored to follow to its termination, and which I now knew ran subterraneously a long way inland, and which if, as I shrewdly suspected, it was the work of the ancient miners, must communicate with some such opening as I had already accidentally discovered on the hillside. The presence of a seal, if it were one I had disturbed, in the far recesses of the cave, seemed to me to prove that it had not been lately or habitually resorted to by human beings, for no creature is so shy and so shuns neighborhood with man as this animal. I had fully convinced myself that the men whom I had seen, and to whom I had brought home the commission of the murderous attack upon Miss Arden, must possess the means of access and escape ; and though I was convinced they had not yet escaped, there seemed to be some likelihood that the huge subterranean cavern, with its recesses as yet unexplored by me, was their secret haunt, and probably contained the boat they had used to come and go by.

I went ashore at the little creek I have mentioned above, having, as I guessed, a walk of a mile and a half or two miles in the direction of the Towers before I could reach the rocks at the back of the great sea cavern.

In looking back, as I narrate the events of these two days, I am struck again and again by the interchaining and interdependence of many very small circumstances. Certain it is that but for one very trifling incident which now happened, I should never have hit upon a discovery in regard to the crime whose history I was following up, which was to outweigh in importance every other I had yet made.

It had been my intention on landing to allow the men to return to the yacht without me. The day was cold, they had already been with me for several hours, and the dis-

tance overland to the Towers was not more than six or seven miles—a pleasant walk. I had no wish to keep the three men waiting for me in the sharp sea air; but they were ill-advised enough as I was leaving the boat to mutter together sullenly, and their spokesman, who had taken the helm, made a sulky demand that I would dismiss them.

I think I have taken occasion to remark before, what I am desirous of again asserting very distinctly; namely, that I am the fortunate possessor of a temper whose calmness almost nothing in the various vicissitudes of human contrariety can ruffle. If, however, any one circumstance in life might have power to do so, it is perhaps a disposition on the part of those with whom I am brought into contact to take advantage of the serenity of my disposition and play upon its mildness; but even that is seldom sufficient, and the extraordinary provocation of the boatmen towards me on this occasion did not stir me in the least. But incivility in individuals of a nation where incivility is the exception should be repressed at once; being, it seems to me, of far more import than the boorishness of people with whom boorishness is, so to say, inborn and inbred.

It was on this account only that I saw fit to resent the men's ill-behavior. I allowed them to suppose I was greatly enraged with their insubordination, and, using a sharp expression to them, I very peremptorily bade them stay in the boat and not venture to stir from it till I came back.

The reader will presently perceive what consequences were to flow from this accidental and trifling change in my plans.

When I had got to the cliff at whose sea foot the cavern I had entered was situated, I discovered that on its landward side was high ground, a high and comparatively flat table land, like the whole region of Scarfell Chace; but at this spot the land was less intersected with dells and with ridges of hard rock than elsewhere, rising up indeed here in something of a hog's back shape, as if a great wave of rock had flowed from the sea inland and grown solid. It was clear, as soon as I had a glance of the land from the first eminence, that I should find no exit from the sea cavern in the shape of such an opening to a gallery on a hillside as I have described in a previous chapter. Yet a very casual inspection of the ground confirmed me in my

belief that the tunneling in the cavern might be extended a long way inland, and might lie anywhere beneath where I was now walking.

Since I had come ashore a thin drizzling rain had been falling, half fog, half rain, cold and cheerless enough but warmer than the snowy air through which it fell, and the warmth and wet combined immediately dissolved the thin snow-covering that had whitened the earth. Seeing better than before the rock shapes and rock coloring, I could now arrive at more exact conclusions as to the mineralogy of the district.

So much that is important in this narration of events turns upon exactitude on this point, that I will ask leave of my reader for once to express myself in the terms of my profession. I can be short, and I think I can be clear. This whole region, which I knew to be auriferous, was mainly composed of granitic rock, the hill ranges running, but not very regularly, from north to south, parallel, that is, with the coast line, and intersected here and there with igneous rock, trachyte, or greenstone, in dykes. Running at right angles to the direction of the main ranges were veins of quartz, these being, I made little doubt, the matrix of the gold. The ancient miners must have followed the strike of the quartz veins across the hills. Now, apart from the evidence which the artificial formation of the sea cavern afforded me, taken with its quartz-spangled roof, I had noticed imbedded in the precipitous sea face of the cliff, far above the cavern's mouth, a broad patch of quartz crystals, no doubt the termination of a gold-bearing vein which must run straight into the hills. The miners had not been adventurous enough to work at it on the cliff's sea face; they no doubt reached it from within. And this would help to account for the height and width of the tunnel at this spot

When I got upon the land, I made little doubt but that I should discover indications of some sort of the workings below; either I should find that access had been made by adits, or *drifts* as we term them, wherever the galleries reached the level of the ground on a hillside, or I should find, if the mining had been continued at a great depth, that shafts or pits had been sunk down upon the *levels*. In either case I should see, I made sure, great heaps of broken stone from the workings.

I found neither adits nor shafts. It is true there was no valley, and therefore no declivity of the ground where I should expect to see the mouth of an adit and its *talus*, or thrown down heap of rubbish. The ground was indeed, in this spot, as I have already explained, a table-land, almost on a level with the summit of the sea cliff, and which extended across the whole Chace from sea to river, and therefore I could not expect to find any such signs of the workings coming level with the surface. The non-appearance of any shafts accorded less with my theory of the extension of subterranean mining. I could only suppose therefore that the mining had been carried on at such a depth underground, that it had been found easier to carry the stuff excavated to the sea opening, there to be removed by the waves, than to bring it to the surface.

The reason for my entering into these somewhat technical details will be apparent later on in this narration.

My investigations had carried me quite across the Chace, and I found myself near the old ruined church and standing in the same sheltered nook, formed by the angle of its belfry tower, where I had met Miss Arden less than twenty-four hours before. I stood looking down upon the torrent beneath me.

My eyes, tired of the grey wilderness of rock, roamed as they had the day before, with something of relief, over the nearer landscape across the river, with its green fields, hedgerows set with pollarded elms, its farmsteads and rickyards. At less than two miles as the crow flies stood the repaired ruins of St. Ambrose Abbey, embowered in trees, and half hidden by them. The sound of a bell calling the monks to prayer came to me across the fields and through the noise of rushing waters.

This peaceful scene, with its shaven hedges and well-trimmed corn ricks, the sleek, slow-grazing cattle in the fields, the regular tolling of the convent bell, all telling of order, regularity, and the decorous usages of civilized life, somewhat jarred upon me from its very contrast to the wild country behind me, where a savage crime of blood had taken place almost under my eyes, and no voice but my own had been raised in protest, no foot or hand, save my own, had moved an inch to avenge the victim.

In my impatience I resolved to wait no longer before taking the action that I told myself I ought to have insisted

upon with Morson long before. I would go straight to him, and, ill or not ill, I would break in upon his apathy, and if he would not move himself, I would myself lay the whole matter before the police.

Filled with this resolution, I turned hastily on my way homeward. My plans were again to be interfered with by an unlooked-for circumstance.

As I passed by the old ruined church there came to my ear, amid the noise of the torrent hard by and the whistling of the wind through the breaches of the dismantled tower, the faint murmur of a human voice within the building.

I stood still to listen. It might well, I conjectured, be the voice of one of the men whose trace I was upon, using the old church as a refuge from the weather.

I approached one of the windows. The stone tracery of its mullions was so overgrown and enwrapt with ivy that I could see nothing inside till I had first moved aside some of the falling sprays. To my great astonishment, instead of finding the window a ruined breach, and an opening through it to the church, the casement was intact, the panes of glass in their places. As I approached my ear to listen, the low muttering voice I had heard ceased, and the building was filled with the strain of several strong voices chanting in unison.

I knew that I must be listening to the celebration of High Mass, but who were the officiating priests and acolytes? How had they got to what I had supposed was a church ruined, desecrated, and open to the winds and rains of heaven? I went round to the doorway, and a new surprise awaited me; it was fast locked, so also was the only side door.

I returned to the window and peered in. The celebration of Mass was going forward in due order. I could take in nearly the whole of the nave and aisles of the church. There was, so far as I could perceive, but one person there besides the priests, whom I could not see. So far from being a ruin inside, as it was to casual inspection from without, the church was in perfect order—well roofed, all the windows glazed, and the pavement decently swept and in order. Though all the lower windows were obscured by a thick growth of ivy, the interior of the edifice was well lighted by a row of clerestory windows above. I

could therefore distinctly see the solitary person who apparently comprised the congregation in himself. It was the kneeling figure of Gregory Morson. He was somewhat hidden from the high altar by a column ; and if there was, as I believed, no other worshipper than himself, he would suppose himself altogether unobserved.

Never have I seen on the face of any human being so rapt, so exalted, so intense an expression of devotion ; the head bowed, the fingers of the two hands intertwined strongly, and the arms held down with something of a convulsive contraction. The whole attitude spoke so solemnly, and to me so sacredly, of a being absorbed in adoration, in prayer, or in self-abasement before its Creator, that I felt it was a profanation even to have looked and seen. I replaced the hanging sprays of ivy I had moved aside, and walked away.

My thoughts, as I took my way towards the boat I had left on the beach, were very fully occupied with this strange confirmation of what Colonel Arden had told me of Morson's strong religious convictions. I felt almost humbled when I remembered how hardly I had judged him ; and yet when I remembered his lawless, outrageous talk of the night before, the kind of men and women he had brought together to meet the girl he was to marry, his uncourteous, violent, almost tyrannical treatment of the men at his own table, and his unchivalrous behavior to his women guests, I could find no sort of agreement, no sort of compatibility, between the man I had seen so behaving, seen at his own table the night before, overcome with wine, brutal, rude, and stupid, and the devout, simple-hearted, contrite, and seemingly conscience-stricken man who had just knelt before me. Which of the two was the real Gregory Morson?

CHAPTER X.

FOUL PLAY.

At some little distance from the church I saw the tall figure of Colonel Arden standing on the hill-top. I presumed he had come with his friend to the church and, not wishing to enter, had left him there. This proved to be the case.

He seemed not to have ascribed any motive to my expedition in the launch beyond curiosity to see the coast, nor was he apparently surprised at now finding me again on land; being a man, as I conceived, of a laudable incuriosity as to the affairs of his neighbors. It was clear from the way he spoke that Morson had not even yet informed him of the exact nature of the mishap to Miss Arden. I had some little time before resolved, in indignation at Morson's supineness, to ignore his injunction to the contrary and to tell Colonel Arden the whole truth of the matter; but now the revelation of this last new phase of Morson's character had worked a revolution in me. A man, I conceived (not very logically, perhaps), who was capable of such deep, concentrated, earnest and devout emotion, should not have his deliberately expressed desires lightly set aside.

I told Colonel Arden, however, of how I had been accidentally made aware of the celebration of mass in the old church.

"It was one of Morson's whims," he said, "to restore the interior of the church, and leave the outside in ruins. His yacht's crew and his servants are mostly Catholics, and he has morning mass for them on Sundays and Saints' days. This is his own Saint's day, the 17th of November, the festival of St. Gregory of Nyssa, as you know, and this is a special Mass for himself. I don't think there is a soul besides the priests and Morson inside."

"Where do the priests come from?"

"From St. Ambrose."

"But it is twelve miles off, round by the hills."

"They come across the river, and that way it is only two."

"In a boat, across that torrent?"

"Yes; it is simple enough. Morson has only copied a system they have of ferrying over rivers in Turkey. Perhaps you never saw the plan in your part of the country. There is a chain made fast to a rock on either side—it lies hidden at the bottom of the river when you don't want it; when you do, you set the chain taut, and the men in the boat haul the boat across by it, hand over hand, as in any common rope ferry."

"But I saw no boat when I walked down the river side yesterday."

"You would see nothing. It lies always on this side, and they drag it up and hide it in a hole under the cliffs."

"Certainly Morson has odd notions!"

"Yes, he is original; I suppose one might say, eccentric. But when a man has twenty thousand a year, he must be allowed to carry out his ideal."

"It amuses him and it hurts no one," I said, laughing.

"Well, that is just the question I ask myself sometimes. Does it hurt no one?"

It was the first time Colonel Arden had come so near to a criticism of his friend's peculiarities.

He looked at me, as he spoke, so inquiringly, that I knew some difficulty had presented itself to his mind at the moment, some problem that he found it hard to solve. He seemed on the point of appealing to me to help him in the solution, but he changed his intention, if he had meant so to speak, and turned the talk, as he had once before, upon Morson and his virtues.

"I owe Morson," said Colonel Arden, "more than I owe any man in the world. Some day I will tell you the story. I was in a tight place once—by no fault of my own, though. By Jove," he said, setting his mouth hard, "I *was* in a tight place that time! And Gregory Morson pulled me through. Yes," he said reflectingly, in a low tone almost as if he was thinking to himself, "he pulled me through, and I would go a pretty long way to do Morson a good turn."

When I told Colonel Arden that I was going back to the Towers up the coast in the launch, he said he should like to go with me, and would leave Morson to find his way home alone.

We got into the boat, and I bade the engineer put on all steam and take us to the Towers.

I remarked to Colonel Arden that I had rarely come across worse specimens of Italians than our boatmen. Their sullen and lowering gaze upon us at this moment confirmed my words. Colonel Arden looked at them carelessly.

"They about match their shipmates," he said.

"What! are the rest of the *Lucifer's* crew as bad a lot?"

Colonel Arden was a man not given to strong expletives or to hard words of his neighbors, but he spoke out now.

"They are simply the most infernal set of scoundrels going; not a man of them but I would string up to the *Lucifer's* yard-arm with pleasure."

Colonel Arden lay back in the boat, half sitting, half reclining, in front. What a singularly well-made man he was! Long-limbed, sparely formed, wiry and strong. When a man is something of an athlete himself, with a certain modest pride in his own thews and sinews, he not unnaturally takes a particular interest in contemplating the right proportions of another strong man. A professional aspiration, too, formed itself in my mind, and I fancied the delight of leading a regiment of such giants in a charge. With what weight we should strike! What destruction we should carry through the ranks of the enemy!

As I considered the length of limbs so carelessly extended, I speculated upon their owner's actual height in inches. A perfectly shaped and proportioned human being is always taller than he seems to be.

"You must be a taller man than I, Colonel Arden," I said.

"I think not," he said modestly. "I don't stand quite six foot four."

"You beat me by more than an inch, and I fancy you can't often find yourself with a taller man than yourself."

"Well, not often; but, oddly enough, there is a man on board the *Lucifer*, a Greek too, Dimitri Klistos, who runs me pretty close. There can't be the breadth of a piastre between us."

"A Greek, and as much as six foot four?"

"Yes, he can't be less, and he is a strong, well-built fellow too, and I think just about the biggest ruffian of the whole crew. I fancy he is from Northern Greece, a Wallachian—they are a tall people, and a roughish lot."

I let the conversation drop, for a sudden thought flashed through my brain. Was this exceptionally tall man he who had left the huge footprint I had seen in the snow on the scene of the crime? Was he the intending murderer of Miss Arden?

"Does this man, Dimitri," I asked, "wear a beard?"

Colonel Arden looked at me for a moment as if he was surprised at my question. There came a singular expression upon his face which I could not understand at the moment. When I recalled this look afterwards, I thought I could interpret it.

"No," he replied, after a moment's pause, and very calmly, "he wears no beard. Why do you ask? All the men on board Morson's yacht are clean shaven like English sailors. Why do you ask?"

I was beginning to shape out some evasive answer. To give a true one would have been to tell him the whole story.

"I thought——" I said, "I fancied I had noticed——"

I broke off abruptly, for even as I spoke I saw that which suddenly arrested all speech in me and every thought. As Colonel Arden sat in front of me in the bows of the launch, half sitting back and half reclining, my eyes happened to rest upon the soles of his boot, upturned towards me. They bore three rows of nails set transversely across the ball of the foot. I had the very counterpart on the paper tracing in my pocket—the shape, the unusual size, the exact position of each nail—there was no possibility of a mistake. The man who sat carelessly before me was, beyond all doubt, he who had preceded me that morning at the spot where Miss Arden had been fired upon. It was Colonel Arden, then, who had attempted to conceal the evidence of the footmarks in the snow. It was he who for some secret reason had tried to blot out his own tracks as well as those of the intending murderer; who must have been cognizant of, even if he had not actually connived at, this cowardly and savage assault.

This discovery came upon me so suddenly, so overset all my previous calculations, was so fraught with hideous possibilities of crime and treachery, that it was only by a very strong effort I could use self-restraint enough not to interrupt the thread of my talk with the calm, pleasantly smiling person who was lazily reclining in the boat before me.

Did he suspect anything amiss? Did any change of manner in me awake his suspicion, in spite of my efforts, and tell him that I had guessed some part of his secret? He looked at me searchingly as I hesitated for a second in my answer to his question, for my discovery and my vague surmises had all passed through my mind in the very moment of answering him.

"Why," said I, collecting my thoughts and fearing to say too much, "this Greek, this unusually tall man, I

thought, as you were talking of him, it might have been a fellow I had seen on the Chace yesterday."

"Whereabouts on the Chace did you see him?" he asked.

"It was just before the—the accident to Miss Arden," said I, watching his face closely, "and not far from the place where the—accident took place."

Colonel Arden maintained a perfect composure. It was clear his nerve was not easily to be shaken. But he looked very serious as I spoke.

"But you said the man you saw had a beard.'

"Yes, he was a bearded man."

Colonel Arden considered a moment or two, still with a very grave expression, but he said no more, and presently drew the conversation on to ordinary topics, to which I willingly followed him.

By this we were entering the little cove of the sea where the yacht lay. We passed under her quarter. A dozen of the same scowling, dark visaged men as I had seen in the morning were gathered on the deck and watched us as we went by. Then we steamed up the little creek, and presently landed at the wooden pier whence I had started in the morning.

We got out, and as we walked to the house along the pathway, which was now smooth and wet after the disappearance of the snow, Colonel Arden stopped suddenly and pointed with his stick to a very distinct impression that the soft mud had taken of the foot of a recent passer-by. I recognized immediately the broad footprint I had now proved to belong to Miss Arden's assailant. The five nail-marks set quincunx fashion were as plainly marked in the mud as upon the paper upon which I had copied them.

"That," said Colonel Arden, "must be the big fellow I was telling you of. Look!"

As he spoke, he placed his own foot in the print in the mud. His foot was, as I well knew, narrower, but identical in length. "Do you see?" he said; "we are about of a size. This is the man I told you of."

I looked full in Colonel Arden's face.

"I have seen that footstep before," I said.

"Have you?" he asked carelessly, "Where?"

"In the snow, close to where your sister was shot yesterday. The man whose step is there fired the shot."

I spoke these words in my unreflecting indignation. They had hardly passed my lips before I bitterly repented my impulsiveness and my folly.

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. GARRELL ON THE WAY OF THE WORLD.

I HAD no opportunity of knowing how Colonel Arden would take my most imprudent speech, whether he would receive it with surprise or with indignation, or whether he would endeavor by some evasion to persuade me it was absolute news I was telling him. At this moment Morson, who had returned before us, came along the path by the creek side with several ladies and gentlemen from the house on their way to the seashore. They interrupted further talk between Colonel Arden and myself, and it was confirmation enough of what already had been stronger than mere suspicion in my mind that Colonel Arden permitted this interruption to put an end to our conversation. Had what I had told him of the attack upon his sister been in any true sense a revelation to him, it was, I well knew, inconceivable that he should not wish for further speech with me.

He did not wish it. I gave him the opportunity, but he made no move to hear more.

I put my hand on Morson's arm and took him aside. "I have something to say to you at once," I said. "Come to the house."

"Arden," said Morson, "will you take my place and show our friends the seal rocks? We were on our way to see them."

Colonel Arden looked at us rather dubiously, I thought, as if not quite liking, so, I judged, to leave Morson and myself together.

"I don't know the way," he said, and he looked round; "but Professor Webb does."

The professor, however, at that moment was not available, for he was nearly out of earshot, standing on a slippery ledge of rock, and causing us all some anxiety for his safety, for he walked in stout goloshes, carried an umbrella in one

hand and a geological hammer in the other; he had on a respirator and a red comforter, and wore blue spectacles, his sight being very weak; and, though a young man, he was neither strong nor active. We shouted to him to mind his way, and go back from the precipice. The ladies could not wait for his return in the cold wind, and as they insisted strongly upon having their walk, and upon their host, Colonel Arden, and myself accompanying them, we did so. So far as I was concerned it was very unwillingly. Yet the ladies of the party were agreeable women. Had I been less preoccupied by the sudden and startling revelation that had come upon me, I should have found Mrs. Garrell, whom it was my pleasant task to help over the slippery places, a most delightful companion.

She was a young married lady with fair hair; very pretty and well dressed; with a brilliant complexion and equally brilliant conversation. I was struck at once by the remarkable seriousness of this lady, by the complete absence in her of that frivolity which is the too frequent stumbling-block of clever women of the world—the frivolity which those only of us can consider delightful who are ourselves wanting in the higher intellectual gravity, such as, I greatly fear, I am myself conspicuously deficient in.

She was, as she made haste to inform me, a Londoner who frequented the most interesting and the cleverest society in London. I told her I was delighted to hear it, for my own society education had been at an absolute standstill during the last ten years, and I was in truth little better than a wild man of the woods. She smiled agreeably for an instant, and recovered her seriousness to observe that unless I had told her so she would never have discovered the fact for herself. I summoned all the gravity at my own command, and thanked her heartily for the neatness and readiness of her compliment, which I said I was sure was in the best and latest London manner.

Mrs. Garrell looked at me inquiringly for a moment and, seeing that I held my countenance, said, with only a half-smile, "I don't think that is chaff;" and as I continued to look as serious as I could, she went on, "No, I am sure it is not. The fact is that among the very best people chaff is such 'bad form' now. The very word is dreadful, is it not? We leave it to quite commonplace and frivolous people. We ourselves are so persuaded of the importance

of life in all its more serious aspects and with all its perplexing problems, that we have no inclination at all to smirk and smile over such questions."

"That is well put," I said, "and, of course, I agree with you; but is it not possible that very serious people, even though they are as clever as you are, for instance, may sometimes be very ignorant, and that a little laughing at them may do them good and even help to set them right?"

"Indeed I do not think so," she replied; "one should use reason to set people right, not laughter and mockery."

"To be sure, after all, one should; only it takes longer."

"I am glad to see you agree with me," said Mrs. Garrell. "I was sure you would, from what I have heard about you. You are not in the least a commonplace person."

"Thank you again."

Mrs. Garrell further informed me that the intellectual circles in which she moved were essentially receptive of fresh ideas. That, on the other hand, the unfailing mark of the Philistine was his inability to take in any new doctrine, and his constancy to the prejudices he was born with. Her own particular friends were the very opposite to all this.

"But," I said, "you must change your opinions pretty frequently in your set, must you not?"

"Well, in a certain sense of the word we do; but would you not admit that one may entertain an opinion without actually holding it, or that one may absorb a doctrine without wishing to go to the stake for its orthodoxy?"

"It is a fine distinction, but it certainly is a useful one; and if one were only playing at having opinions, one might be as glad to part with some of them as when one plays at a round game and wants to throw away the small cards in one's hand."

"Very good; and it really comes to that, particularly, I think, with women. A woman should, above everything, cultivate her receptivity. I do; and you cannot think what a number of plausible beliefs I have taken up and parted with in the last few London seasons. After a time one positively hungers after something new; and you will be surprised to see how people are welcomed who can say anything fresh and startling and eloquent,—like Gregory Morson, for instance."

"His views do not shock your prejudices at all, I suppose?"

"Oh dear me, no!" she said, laughing. "In our own circle we have—absorbed—yes, absorbed—so much strange doctrine lately of every kind, from simple constitutionalism to the wildest socialism, from agnosticism and materialism to the most transcendental idealism, that nothing could well shock us any more."

"Mr. Morson must have been a positive godsend in your circle."

"He was, so far as he condescended to be seen or heard among us; but he has too large a nature for the constraints of society, however intellectual."

I remember thinking that Mrs. Garrell possessed a faculty for cross-examination which a barrister in a criminal court might have envied. She wanted to know about everything I had done or achieved, and meant to do or achieve; and if I had been willing to satisfy her curiosity, I should have supplied her with a full autobiography. She was just as curious to hear all I knew about Morson, about Colonel Arden, and about his sister. When I said I could tell her nothing about any of the three, she volunteered to inform me, and was quite as free in imparting information as in asking for it.

"A sweet girl, Miss Arden. But oh, Captain Bearcroft, she is *not* the wife for Gregory Morson! No; if you knew her as well as I do, you will see it as plainly as I see it. She is a dear girl—pretty, taking, very popular in London, and goes everywhere; but life has no seriousness for her. Now, *is* that the woman for Gregory Morson to marry? In the first place, she is too young for him; she is not three and twenty. That might pass if she were not so—shall I say frivolous? I am afraid I must! You know him; you know his enthusiasm, his earnestness, the strength of his character, the audacity of his views of life, which even to me are startling in their originality. *Is* he the husband for Sylvia Arden, I ask you,—is *she* the wife for him?"

The rapidity of Mrs. Garrell's talk made it difficult to stem the torrent of it at any given moment; but as I did not wish to discuss my host's affairs with her, I tried to divert the stream which I could not stop.

"Have you heard how Miss Arden is to-day?" I asked.

"Poor child! she is better. She is to come down to

breakfast to-morrow. It was not anything more than a bad shaking she got, but it might have been so very serious; and, dear girl! it was so extremely imprudent of her to insist upon going about alone among all those rocks and precipices. I had warned her myself of the danger ten times over. Now, please tell me all you know about it. Was she insensible when you found her? Where was it? How had she fallen? What did you do? How did you get her home? I hope you scolded her well?"

I hastened to change the conversation again.

"Have you known Colonel Arden long?"

"No; but I have heard an immense deal about him and his adventures in the East. He seems to be a perfect hero of romance,—a sort of Giaour, or Corsair, or Don Juan. Which is it?"

"Or Bride of Abydos?"

She smiled reprovingly and went on: "That sounds almost like chaff; but I know it is not, from you. Yes; Colonel Arden really is a hero. He has done quite wonderful things in Turkey. They say he has killed more people with his own hand——"

"Enemies, I hope?'

"Oh yes, of course, in battle,—with his own hand than any living man; and then, of course, you know the great story about him? It is horrible; it will make you shudder; but it has a particular grandeur of its own. Shall I tell it you?"

"No, please don't!"

"Well, then, you know, he was married to a lovely Circassian when he commanded the Janissaries or Mamelukes —I forget which, but you know, I dare say—at some great siege."

"Oh!"

"Yes, really; and they began to mutiny when he wanted to lead them to the assault, because they said he was so much in love that he cared no more for his soldiers. Then he appeared before them one day with a leather bag——"

"Yes, I know the story now;—and it had his wife's head in it."

"Of course you have heard the story, living as you do in Turkey."

"I have; only it was told of some one else, and some time ago; but never mind."

"And he threw the head down before them, saying, 'See how I love the Circassian!' Then they raised a great cry of enthusiasm and delight, and said he was their dear leader, and they would follow him anywhere. Is it not positively blood-curdling?"

"Yes; but grand and heroic. We think almost nothing, though, of these little sacrifices in the East, and a sense of duty overcomes all our natural feelings."

"Of course, if a man has several wives, it makes a difference, I suppose."

"Just so. He can behead one or two and hardly feel it."

"But then, you know, Colonel Arden, being a Christian, would have only one wife, which of course makes it——"

"Even more heroic, you think, to cut her head off. But does it?"

"Oh yes! could it fail to? Mr. Morson, who told us this story one morning at breakfast before Colonel Arden came down, begged us not to allude to it before him, for he said Colonel Arden still felt his unavoidable loss very keenly. How different things must be in the East from anything we imagine at home!"

"They are, indeed!"

"Oh, Captain Bearcroft, what I like about you is that you are so much in earnest. Colonel Arden himself, with all his awful antecedents and those memories of his—heroic, of course, as you say, but still from our women's point of view terrible—even he is rather frivolous sometimes and laughs at quite serious things; and even Mr. Morson, in the midst of his enthusiastic aspirations for the cause of humanity, can sometimes jest and mock at people."

"It is strange, but I suppose the strain upon—his intellect is sometimes too great. You would hardly believe it, Mrs. Garrell, but I almost feel like that myself at times."

"Do you, really?"

"Yes; it is a sort of infirmity, I am afraid, but I actually do."

CHAPTER XII.

GREGORY MORSON'S SUSPICIONS.

WHEN our party got back again, and as soon as it was possible for me to get Morson and myself free from the others, I took him aside.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I have found out who the man is who shot Miss Arden. It is the tall Greek on board your yacht. You must lose no time in setting the police on him."

"Impossible! I won't have the fools here."

"Do you want to punish the man who tried to murder this poor girl, your guest, and whom you are going to marry?"

"Of course I do, and of course I will punish him, but not by the laws of this country. The man who did this thing, whoever he is, shall answer for it to me alone. What evidence have you?"

"I saw him with a gun an hour before the shot was fired. I saw his footprint close to where Miss Arden fell. It corresponds with that of the man I saw, and now I see his footmark, quite recent, in the soft mud near the landing-stage. He is on board your yacht at this moment."

Morson considered.

"Do you say you saw this man?" he said.

"I did, quite plainly."

"And you would know him again? How?"

"He was very tall, as I told you before; a dark bearded man."

"We have no bearded man on board the yacht," said Morson quickly.

I was staggered for the moment.

"Why, then," I said, "he must have worn a beard as a disguise."

"Nonsense, man! A sailor from my yacht masquerading on Scarfell Chace! Whom should he want to hide from? Why, there is not a soul on the place."

It certainly seemed odd, but then my evidence too clearly

pointed to this particular man for me to be shaken—his remarkable height, his peculiar footprint in the snow. Then I remembered the second footmark and the concealment of the tracks.

I told Morson all I had done that morning—how I had observed a second print on the scene of the crime, and made since its commission, and how I had found it to be identical in every respect with Colonel Arden's own footmark.

We had now come to the house, and were sitting down facing each other across the dining-room table. It was here that I had, the night before, told Morson of what had befallen Miss Arden; and as he had lost his nerve then, so did he again now. As I spoke of this further discovery he leant his elbows on the table and covered his face with his hands. When he looked at me again there was the same pallor upon him that I had seen before. He gazed at me for a moment without a word. There was a growing horror in his look. At last he spoke, casting as he did so a furtive glance towards the door and the window. Had he been a man of less nerve and proved courage, I should have said he showed signs at this moment of actual fear.

"Good God! Bearcroft, this is an awful thing you tell me. Arden's footmark there!"

I saw that the same nameless, horrible suspicion was passing through his brain which had already occupied mine.

He was looking at me with a strange, furtive, questioning expression, as if he were willing rather to read the suspicions as they formed themselves in my mind than daring to array them in definite shape in his own.

"But you never actually saw Arden there," he said, "and you were there as early as it was light? You must be mistaken. He could not possibly have gone there in the dark."

My answer was to take out the two pieces of paper on which I had marked the separate shapes and imprints of the feet.

"Here," I said, "is Colonel Arden's footmark, and there is the Greek sailor's. He must have gone after midnight; there was moonlight enough then to see by."

"Bearcroft," said he, in great anxiety of mind, "do you not see what all this means? Do you not see where it

leads to? You can't surely have thought it all out, or you would not dare to cast such a fearful imputation on—on an honest and loyal man."

We looked at each other for a time, not speaking.

"You see, Bearcroft, though I know Arden to be all this, there are stories against him, imputations upon his character. You know of them yourself."

"No, I know nothing positive; I have only a vague memory of something long ago. What imputations?"

"I am ashamed to repeat them. I won't repeat them; it would be unfair of me to, particularly at this moment."

"Did you tell Arden," I asked, "what I had told you —that his sister had been fired upon, and where it happened?"

"No; I made a particular point of not telling him. I asked you not to, you may remember? And I begged Miss Arden herself not to speak to him."

"Then," I asked, "how could he possibly know that the thing took place in that particular valley where I found his tracks, nearly two miles away from here?"

Morson looked at me blankly, giving no answer.

"Could he, perhaps," I suggested, "have followed our tracks in the snow by the light of the moon?"

Morson seemed at first to catch eagerly at the suggestion; but presently he shook his head.

"No," he said, "he could not. On a cloudy winter's night he could not do it; and there was but very little moon. It would have been impossible to see tracks in the snow. And why should he have attempted it? He knew nothing but that his sister had fallen from her pony. What should have taken him out two miles into the snow on a winter's night?"

"You are sure Miss Arden did not tell him that she was shot at?"

"I am sure she never even saw him yesterday."

"Morson, what reason had you for keeping back the truth from Miss Arden's brother? It seems an unaccountable thing to do."

He would give no straight answer to my question. Yet he looked uneasily at me, as if the answer was on his lips and he dared not give it. A reply did come at last, and its strangeness took me aback.

"He is only her half-brother," he said.

"For Heaven's sake, don't trifle with me."

"I am speaking seriously;" and there was no resentment in his voice at the sharpness of my tone. He went back of his own accord to what was, after all, the vital question in all this.

"How was it, if Arden knew nothing of it at all before—how was it he went by night to the place? Why, going there, did he so carefully cover the footmarks, his own, and—and the other man's?"

There was but one answer to these questions, and neither I nor Morson would make it in plain language.

"Bearcroft," he said presently, "do you wonder now that I hesitate before appealing to the law? Do you wonder that I dare not put into words the horrible suspicion that has come to us both?"

When I recalled all that had passed since I broke the news of the event to Morson the night before—the strange emotion by which he was overcome, an emotion that seemed to me excessive, when compared to the cause for it, his excited behavior at dinner, when he seemed to wish to drown his reflections in noisy speech, in stupid argument, and in drink; when I remembered the scene in the church, and its evidence of the deep stirring of his better nature, and again his obvious distress just now, when what I told him must have seemed to confirm his worst suspicions; when all this passed in rapid review before me, I no longer found strange or unaccountable, conduct which till now I was beginning to believe could proceed from nothing short of madness itself.

We each deliberated in silence, each knowing but too well what were the thoughts of the other.

"Some excuse," said Morson—"no, not any excuse, but perhaps some allowance is to be made for Arden. His life has been a very hard one. He has lived from a boy in countries where a man has to right himself against injustice, and certainly he has suffered from injustice in all this."

"Injustice! Good God! Think what you are saying, Morson. What injustice? Is this the same kind of philosophy you were giving us last night?"

"No, no; you misunderstand me. I am putting the thing from his point of view only. You don't know Arden as I do. Arden is a man absolutely destitute of

any form of conscience or principle. It may seem—I know it does seem—to him an unjust thing that he, older than his sister, as he is—she is his half-sister only, remember—should be an absolute pauper; he a man with luxurious tastes, while she—well, she is an heiress from whom he would inherit."

"For Heaven's sake, hold your tongue, Morson, or you will tempt me to go out and shoot the scoundrel down where he stands, like a mad dog!"

Morson looked at me with the same curious watching glance that I had noticed once or twice before.

"You are too hasty, Bearcroft. You are likely, I am afraid, to do something impetuous and absurd—to bring a very great mischief upon us."

"Whom do you mean by 'us'?"

"I mean Sylvia Arden and myself. For her sake, Bearcroft, and for mine, I entreat you to be prudent, to restrain yourself, to watch, and to give no sign, and to consult with me before you take any action. Will you promise me that?" he asked.

"I promise," I said; "but I will only keep my promise if you do something yourself at once. I won't be a party to your sitting still and doing nothing."

"You won't, won't you?" said Morson meditatively, and with something of a half-smile on his face. "We shall see!"

"There is the Greek sailor on board the *Lucifer*. At least we can arrest him, police or no police."

"The Greek sailor? What Greek sailor?" he asked, with, as I thought, a return of the fit of the exasperating irresolution I had only just persuaded myself to overlook.

"Why," I cried, "the tall Greek—the fellow who is six foot four, whose marks in the snow I have noted down. We have evidence enough to bring the crime home to him, at any rate. He must be on board your yacht at this moment. Come with me, and we will take him ourselves."

"My dear fellow, you are mad! There is no Greek sailor on board my yacht. No man of the crew is six foot four in height, or anywhere near it."

"But the man's footprint? I tell you there can be no mistake whatever about it. There it is before you." I pointed to the two large but differing patterns drawn upon the paper.

Morson took the papers in his hands and examined them carefully. Then he threw them down upon the table, and there was a pained look in his face as he gazed upon me, and he spoke with a cynical bitterness.

"You forget the old school axiom, 'that the greater contains the less.'"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that the same foot trod in both these marks."

"Surely you don't suspect——"

"I mean that there is no use in looking for any would-be murderer on board the *Lucifer*. It is not *there* he is to be found."

CHAPTER XIII.

LADY RABY'S OPINIONS.

In undertaking to trace to its authors the mysterious crime of all whose circumstances and surroundings I alone had had full cognizance, it was evident to myself that I had before me a task for which I of all men was least fitted. In the first place, ten years of a life not exactly solitary, but whose solitude was only at times interrupted by the company of the rough adventurous men chance had thrown in my path, men all whose motives, even when they were set upon brutal, criminal, or cruel courses, were at least simple, straightforward, and obvious, had somewhat blunted my perception to the conduct of the men and women of the more highly endowed and cultivated class whose motives, whether they themselves be swayed to right or to wrong, are never obvious and never uncomplicated. Then, again, I will frankly admit at once what the reader has perhaps already perceived, that I am given to trust to first impressions, to give credit for singleness of purpose and generosity to those whom, if I studied them more deeply, I should perhaps discover to be intending evil ends along tortuous courses. To complete my confession, I must admit that my imagination often absurdly magnifies and mystifies homely facts; that, to put it plainly, I too often make mountains of molehills and hold the real mountains of small account; that I cross my sword with

shadows and pursue them with a mistaken impulsiveness, while the substance escapes me; in short, that Gregory Morson rightly described me to Miss Arden as a nineteenth-century Don Quixote, who sees the world under an impossible glamor, and whose shrewdness and clear vision are chiefly conspicuous to himself alone.

Such, reader, is the person in whose hands you are, and who is endeavoring to unravel for your benefit a skein entangled seemingly beyond the winding off by far cleverer hands.

I now began to perceive the mistake I had already made. Colonel Arden's apparent simplicity and his almost boyish candor had taken me at once. I had immediately overlooked the first feeling of repulsion which his very plain features and stern, not to say saturnine, expression of countenance had aroused in me, and I had forgotten the reports against his good fame which Morson had now hinted at. On the other hand, Morson's overbearing manners and his expression of exaggeratedly advanced opinions had wholly blinded me to the good that I now knew was in him; his delicacy of soul and the generosity—carried, I could not help seeing, to the verge of excess—of his mistaken loyalty to his friend.

I had unfortunately committed myself to some extent with Colonel Arden; in my imprudence I had let him see how much I knew. I could perceive, clearly enough now, that I should have bided my time, should have watched events and held my peace. That course I would now pursue.

I will take this opportunity of saying that my ardor in following up the clues I had obtained was unabated. I was more hotly resolved than ever upon avenging the crime committed almost in my sight. An image of the girl's pale, unconscious face, as I had raised her from the ground, was ever before me, distracting me with the fear that I might be letting the pursuit of her assailants grow cold; and when the vision of this inanimate face grew to that of the same face awakening to consciousness and convulsed with pain and terror, when her despairing cry rang in my ears, when I saw her blood on the snow—that blood was red, day and night, before my eyes, and there was a hunger-pang within me for instant, complete, and terrible vengeance.

I would bide my time, however, patiently, watching and waiting. For once I would check my own hasty impulses. I would let time work with me, and surely in the end I should avenge the grievous wrong done to Sylvia Arden.

It was the dinner hour again, and it fell to my lot to take in Mrs. Garrell, while on my left sat Lady Raby, Miss Arden's aunt and chaperon.

I reflected how completely my opinion had altered in regard to the chief actors in the drama which was playing itself out to some sort of climax in my presence, though, as in most domestic dramas, not one of the actors seemed to be aware that there was a spectator present following out every movement of the plot.

We were only twelve at dinner, and the conversation after a little while became general.

Lady Raby is the widow of a Yorkshire baronet, whose *forte* was cattle-breeding and his foible science. She is a very distant connection of my mother's; and having often stayed with us in my boyhood, I could remember her well. I had even received kind and pleasant letters from her in the course of my various wanderings. She professed an interest in me from her relationship with my people, and claimed me as a kinsman at our present meeting.

Lady Raby was, at first judging, a dry, hard, critical woman, despising most people a little and most things, and laughing at them, though not ill-naturedly, and she was far from despising, as I soon gathered, the conventional opinions and prejudices of the world. Her husband had been a F.R.S., with, as the malicious had been used to say, a worse title to append those letters to his name than his clever, well-informed wife, who could talk on scientific subjects as well as or better than himself.

She struck me as a shrewd, rather commonplace woman of the world, agreeable in spite of her cynicism and of her being somewhat of a valetudinarian. The most cynical, however, and the hardest of mankind, and still more of womankind, have a soft spot somewhere, and even I, the most unobservant of created beings, could not help noticing the sudden softening of Lady Raby's expression as she spoke of her niece. Sylvia Arden, I perceived, was the soft spot in which all her woman's tenderness was concentrated.

"Poor child!" she said, "when I think of what might have happened if you had not come by! She would have lain there in the snow and died."

Her voice trembled as she spoke, and I saw the tears standing in her eyes.

"Ah, Captain Bearcroft, you can hardly know the gratitude I feel to you; and Sylvia feels as I do. She wants to thank you herself."

"Why," I said, "there is really nothing to thank me for. What did I do, beyond what any other man would have done? You really must not thank me."

Lady Raby laughed with rather a hard laugh, as if she had unbent for a moment into unaccustomed tenderness and were glad to get back to her normal self.

"I said we were grateful, and so we are. I dare say you have heard gratitude described as a lively sense of *future* favors;—well, perhaps that is the kind of gratitude Sylvia and I feel."

I laughed too. "If I could do anything to serve you or Miss Arden I should be very glad indeed."

"Do you really mean that?" she asked quickly, with a significant look. "Are you in earnest?"

"More perhaps than you have any idea of."

We looked at each other for an instant, searchingly, seriously. No words passed between us, only this look of intelligence; but thenceforward I knew that I was no longer working alone on Sylvia Arden's behalf. I had a confederate.

"Captain Bearcroft," said Lady Raby presently, dropping her voice, "I trust you; and when I say that, I say what Sylvia herself said to me when I spoke to her about you—'I can trust him.'"

"Miss Arden is much better, is she not? Gregory tells me she has a capital doctor in that Italian from the yacht."

"A very clever one,—but——"

"But what?"

"Well, I cannot say of him what I said of you. I cannot trust him. Take care!" she said, with a suddenly assumed smile; "we are all such terrible conspirators here! Look at John Arden's eyes, and I think you will see they are upon us; and so are our host's, too."

There was a good volume of sound in the room of people talking and laughing, yet it was clear that these two men were, as Lady Raby said without turning her own head to look at them, carefully observing us.

Lady Raby did not allow her expression to grow serious again, and fell easily into commonplace talk with me.

"Have you made Professor Webb's acquaintance?" she asked me. "He is a man who has made his mark in the world, and is worth talking to."

"Is he really an original thinker, or only a man with a memory who appropriates other men's ideas?"

"Dear me!" said Lady Raby, smiling pleasantly. "How do you know all that? I did not think you had been behind the scientific scenes."

"Don't suppose I know anything or anybody in the scientific world, for I do not. I only want you to tell me."

"Well, then, I tell you that Professor Webb does really think for himself. More than that, he thinks what no one else ever thought before, or will perhaps ever think again. If he would let you travel over his mind you would make some very queer discoveries. Let me advise you to make the attempt."

"I am afraid he would be too deep for me."

"Oh yes, he is too deep for any one, even for himself, and it is the pleasantest thing in the world to hear him say so, for the professor is as honest as day."

"How very nice of him! I always imagined that philosophers were best pleased when they puzzled us most."

"So they are, as a rule—as if they were always saying, 'If you were only as clever as I am, you would understand it all, as I do.'"

"And he has none of that sort of conceit?"

"No, none of *that* sort. The fact is, he goes a long way beyond it. He says, 'Dear me! what a stupendous thing the human intellect can be! My own, for instance. Here is my intellect which has worked out so grand and complicated a system of cosmogony that even my own understanding fails to grasp and comprehend it!' And they talk, Captain Bearcroft, of women's vanity!"

"Do you think he would insist on talking his cosmogony to me if I spoke to him?"

"I am afraid he would. Philosophers always will talk about their philosophies, and authors about their books—it is the worst of knowing such people; but the professor's cosmogony is only a material one, and does not go very far, and if you would like to know it I will tell you in six words. It may save you something in time, for the professor might easily take six hours."

"Pray tell me," I said; "but I shan't understand. I can't even do a compound rule of three sum."

"It is not necessary. Professor Webb has simply discovered, what Newton overlooked, a new motion of the world, a second axial rotation. I hope I am clear?"

"Perfectly. I mean, fairly."

"Well, you have only to suppose the poles to be at the equator, and to make an imaginary pole run through the centre of the earth from west to east. Have you imagined?"

"I have. And then?"

"Are you making the earth turn on its new spit?"

"I am."

"But much faster than that, please! Very good. Then don't you see that instead of the flattening of the earth at the poles, there comes a sort of equatorial bulge there, while the equator is visibly sinking?"

"And what is to come of it all?"

"Only that you produce fearful disturbances and account for all sorts of phenomena."

"How?"

"Nobody knows; for that is just where even Professor Webb's stupendous understanding breaks down."

"Thank you. This really is science made easy. But what a fool he must be!"

"No. What a *savant!*"

"I hear Morson has asked him here for an opinion about Scarfell Chace and its minerals."

"Yes, and he has got it. The place is full of gold, he says. Professor Webb has been all over the Chace in his goloshes and with his blue spectacles, his umbrella, and his geological hammer. I really wonder the poor man has not broken his neck or his nose. That is what he reports, that the rocks are rich in gold."

"Indeed! and I have just come to the opposite conclusion."

"So Sylvia told me, and I was delighted."

"Is it possible? But I don't understand why you should be, for is it not telling you that your niece's estate is worth nothing?"

Lady Raby gave me a keen look. "Yes," she said, "it is, and I hope with all my heart that you may be right and the professor wrong. I have known so many *savants*, that really I have strong hopes he may be quite wrong."

"I believe we may be both right," I said. "The gold was here once: it is gone now."

"Thank God!" said Lady Raby, in a tone so heartfelt and earnest as quite took me aback.

In some little time I was to obtain the clue to this mystery.

"Pray talk a little to your neighbor," said Lady Raby, "and then give me the opportunity of saying one other thing to you before we ladies go. Don't be too much fascinated by Mrs. Garrell and forget to let me tell you!"

"Why," I said, "I have been fascinated all the afternoon. I have had almost——"

"Almost too much fascination?"

"I will not say that exactly; but I would much rather hear the *one other thing* now?"

"No," said Lady Raby; "do you think I could venture to endure that pretty woman's black looks at me all the evening if I monopolized you? Please talk to her. Besides, I have not made up my mind yet whether I dare say it to you at all. I must think. Let me think please, whether I can trust to your—chivalry."

I looked a little harder upon Lady Raby than perhaps I should have looked at my neighbor at a dinner-table; that last word somewhat ruffled me. It came perilously near to a sort of affront with which through life I have had to put up. I turned to speak to Mrs. Garrell, and I was sorry to change from the hard, honest, cynical, shrewd, middle-aged woman, who saw through an unsophisticated being like myself and still had a touch of human kindliness under her plain speech, to the very pretty, soft, easy-going, and extremely absurd enthusiast on my left.

I must here take occasion to say that I have never liked enthusiastic people, and there exists something of a personal reason with me for this dislike; it having happened that I have myself lain all my life long under a very false imputation of undue enthusiasm, quixotism, and so forth. I resent it. I know myself to be a plain, common-place, common-sense person. My imagination may at times play me tricks, and I may be hasty in coming to conclusions; that I have already admitted; but I am without one spark of enthusiasm, false or true—the very reverse of a Don Quixote,—this being, nevertheless, the foolish nickname given me from my boyhood. If I am hasty in arriving at conclusions, I am not hasty in other respects, possessing, as I think I have men-

tioned before, the boon of a most sweet and compliant temper. While it vexes me to think how very inappropriately the nickname has stuck to me through life, it amuses me too to recall how many broken heads it caused in my schoolboy days, and how many hard words and quarrels it has provoked since, in spite of a degree of patience in me which astonishes myself. It will now be plain why I was inclined to be vexed by what seemed to me somewhat affronting in Lady Raby's aforesaid remark as to a leaning in myself to an absurd chivalry.

The reader must please put up with this disgression into what I am afraid may seem to him pure egotism. It is not egotism. I have my story to tell him, and unless he exactly understands the kind of person its teller is, he will not easily understand the story itself, for reasons that he will presently be the first to perceive.

I will venture so far further only in the direction of egotism as to remark that if there is by common admission a habit of mind more contrary to such a foolish gushing quixotism as has been imputed to me, it is one which I regret to say I am given to,—the reprehensible and indeed very ungenerous one of mocking my neighbors. I mention it now, somewhat in shame and against the grain, only to show how very remote my temperament is from quixotism and so-called chivalry. I can indeed talk by the hour on the most serious topics and in the most serious manner with people whose honesty I believe in and whose wisdom I regard, such as this very Lady Raby; but if their seriousness seems to me hollow and their beliefs a sham, then a devil of contrariety enters into me, a mocking devil of the most ungenial character. Practice indeed has somewhat helped me to conceal my vice under the form of a civil irony, but too often I am detected; and I trace a great deal of my failure in life to this foolish and unsociable habit. Here again the reader must please accept what I say of myself as of importance only to the future telling of my story.

I turned to the pretty neighbor whom I had not yet addressed, and considering the deep interest I knew she took in the more abstruse aspects of life, I thought I could do no kinder thing to her than to serve up for her benefit the scientific dish to which Lady Raby had just helped me. I therefore imparted to her the theory of Professor

Webb's axial rotation in Lady Raby's own lucid words. Mrs. Garrell did not seem to be so much impressed as I had expected. I asked her if she accepted the proposition, or had only "absorbed" it.

"I have only absorbed it," she said.

Seeing that science after all was not a topic she greatly cared for, I tried more mundane ones with far better success; but I was too much occupied with anticipation of what Lady Raby was to tell me to be a very cheerful talker.

As the moment drew near for the ladies to rise and depart, I reminded Lady Raby of her promise.

CHAPTER XIV.

LADY RABY'S REVELATION.

Lady Raby fixed her eyes very closely and very gravely upon my face. "Captain Bearcroft," she said, "I am going to do what in the view of the world I live in would be thought rash beyond all words, but I have considered the thing carefully, and I am resolved."

She paused, and I could say nothing, so much did this opening surprise me. She went on as if seeking to find some justification for her determination.

"You are, of course, not by any means a stranger to me. I remember you, better I dare say than you remember me, when you were quite a boy. Your mother was my dearest friend, and I have often talked of you with her. Then, too, I have heard much of the story of your life and of your adventures through the whole world nearly. And though you are certainly the worst correspondent I ever knew, you cannot say of me that I am not a very good one. Well, you interested me when you were a boy, and I find you to-night what I knew you to be then, and what I know you always will be,—honorable, single-hearted, loyal, and trustworthy!"

I smiled at this pleasing exordium. "I feel," I said, "as if I were reading my own epitaph. I should like to hear more. Pray go on!"

Lady Raby, however, just now was far too seriously inclined even to smile, and she put my levity aside.

"I could not tell you what I am going to, were I not sure I could appeal to your chivalry."

"Lady Raby," I said, interrupting her, "you are entirely mistaken; I am not that sort of person at all! You have taken me at second-hand. The very word chivalry is an abomination to me!"

She seemed astonished at my warmth, and for the first time smiled a little.

"Ah! I had forgotten one thing; but I don't mind it."

"Pray what had you forgotten?"

"Part of the epitaph."

"Tell me."

"I dare not, if you look at me with those fierce eyes."

"Yes," I said, laughing with her, "I see what you were thinking of; I see you are amused yourself at the idea of my——"

"Of your having a quick temper. Yes, I am; but it is all over directly, I see, just as it used to be."

"But, Lady Raby, forgive me for saying that you are entirely mistaken. It is an absurd delusion of my friends or of my enemies. Why, my temper is only too easy! I often wish it were hotter. I am too compliant and good-natured. I put up with everything. It is a weakness,—I am ashamed of it; people take advantage of it."

"I am sure it must make you almost angry sometimes that people should be so unreasonably mistaken."

"*Almost* angry! Lady Raby, it makes me furious! It fills me with indignation! It makes my blood boil!"

Lady Raby nodded and smiled, then regarded me curiously, and a serious look came into her face. "I feel certain now I was quite right to think of confiding in you. Yes, I have no doubt whatever about it now."

"By all means confide in me," I said, "but do not, please, count upon my chivalry, for I don't possess the quality, and do count upon my excellent temper."

Lady Raby sat back in her chair and looked at me in silence, and allowing herself for a single moment to smile, "I will do both," she said; then immediately recovering her previous gravity of face and voice, she went on thus, "You alone, Captain Bearcroft, besides Gregory Morson and myself, know the truth about Sylvia Arden,—that she was fired upon by one who meant to murder her. I have

reason to be sure that you are trying to find out the truth. I know it, not from anything I have been told, for Gregory tells me and Sylvia nothing; but I know it because I know you, and, being what you are, and having seen what you have, you could do nothing else. I know, too, that you have kept apart from the other people here, and I know it has been because you have been on the track of this crime."

"Yes; you are right."

"Have you found out anything?"

"I have discovered enough to make me suspect a great deal. But I must ask you a question. You say you, Morson, and I are the only three who are aware of the murderous assault upon Miss Arden. Why was her brother not told too?"

Lady Raby seemed to hesitate. "There was no good reason—none at least that seems good to me; and yet when you see more of Colonel Arden you will perhaps understand why Sylvia did not speak openly to him of the attack upon her."

"Gregory Morson asked her not to, so he told me."

"That is reason enough for my niece. You know they are engaged. Gregory is everything in the world to Sylvia Arden."

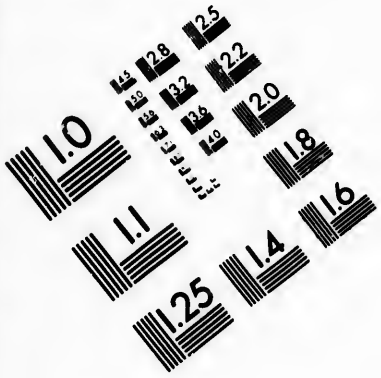
I saw that there was pain to Lady Raby in this reflection, something inexplicable that oppressed her, and I hastened to change the subject.

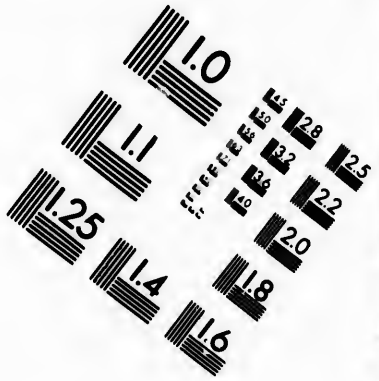
"I have discovered," said I, "enough to make me suspect a very great deal."

"I had supposed you would. It is impossible," said Lady Raby, "you should not have formed suspicions. Do not speak to me of them now, there is no time, and I guess but too well what they are. To-morrow you will see Sylvia Arden; she is well again now, and she wants to see you. You must not alarm her; her nerves are shaken, far less by what has happened than by what she foresees in the future. Hear what she says, talk to her, comfort her, console her, but make no betrayal to her."

"Betrayal! But of whom?"

Her only answer was to turn her eyes to the part of the table where sat John Arden and his host, with only one chair—a lady's—between them. The eyes of both men were upon us. It was now time for the ladies to leave,





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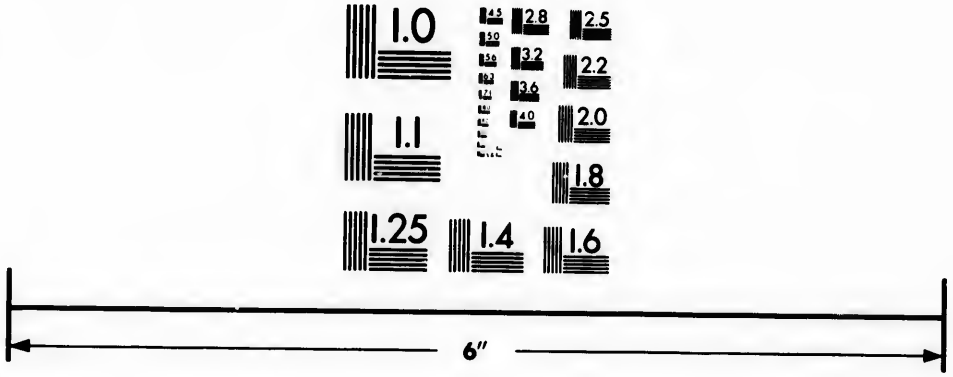

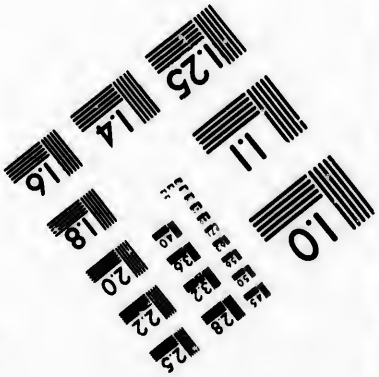

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and there was a temporary silence in the room. It was Lady Raby, as hostess, who had to give the sign of departure and make a move. She rose, and we men were left together. As I stood up near her, she said in a low tone as she passed me, "Be on your guard, watch well, and give no sign."

It was the best advice possible; indeed, I had already resolved upon doing this very thing. I was anxious to see how Colonel Arden would demean himself after the communication I had made to him. I was anxious to see how Gregory Morson, possessed as he was of the facts I had laid before him, would treat his future brother-in-law.

There was much in Lady Raby's speech to me to give me thought, yet her words were vague. Only this I knew for certain from their tenor, that a conviction of some treachery done against Sylvia Arden had been arrived at in her mind as it had been in mine. Each of us, however, had reached this conclusion by different roads; yet her reasoning and mine had finally converged upon this same point, this same conclusion that Sylvia Arden was the victim of a foul and cruel conspiracy, that she had been betrayed treacherously, would have been betrayed to certain death, but for an accident.

By whom betrayed? My glance almost unconsciously traveled across the table, where Lady Raby, by a motion of her eyes, had bid me seek for an answer to this question, and I saw John Arden looking across the table to me. Again was I forcibly impressed with the expression of this man's strange, stern face. Stern and strong in repose only, but when he spoke, still more when he smiled, changing immediately into a kindly, genial, almost gentle expression.

I cannot but dwell upon this peculiarity or, it may be, this faculty in him, for it actually robbed me for a moment of my sobriety of judgment. Here was a man whom my reason had most plainly condemned for, at the very least, connivance with a most cruel, treacherous, and cowardly crime, and I would defy any one to look into his face and not discern therein loyalty, singleness of purpose, and honesty. It was not merely that the change in his features was enough to make an observer oblivious of the fact that he was looking upon a dark, strong-jawed face, made almost repellent by a disfiguring sword-cut scar across the

eyebrow and the bridge of the nose ; it was that its habitual strength and sternness, and even ugliness, were suddenly converted into an expression which was pleasant to look upon, which was at once trusting and inviting trust. I have never seen quite such a look as this on a man's or even upon a woman's face, yet I have seen it, and against the grain as it is with me to say where, I will do so ; I have seen it looking out through the eyes of a faithful dog, when he watches the master he loves. How was I to judge this look? Was it the expression of an honest, open mind, or the mask of a cunning hypocrisy, too vile, perverse, and devilish almost to be human?

Colonel Arden rose and, with his napkin in one hand and his wine-glass in the other, made a move with the obvious intention of crossing the room and taking the vacant place at my side. I felt a sudden repulsion at the thought of him being near me, and I was glad when I saw Gregory Morson lay his hand on his friend's arm. He said something to him, but the words did not reach me, and Colonel Arden sat down again by his host's side. Morson, however, I noticed, had apparently nothing very particular to communicate to his guest, for he spoke but a word or two, and then he made his conversation general.

I had expected one of two things from Morson after the statement I had made to him, the suspicions I had aroused in him, and the excitement he had already displayed that afternoon. I had expected either to see him repeat before his guests the same ungoverned, violent, overbearing behavior of the evening before, or else I expected to see him weighed down and oppressed and silent under the terrible communication I had made to him.

He was neither of these two things. He was easy, pleasant, genial and attentive to every one at his table. To-night there was nothing of the dictatorial, domineering tone that had so offended me the evening before. He led the talk, indeed, for his fluency was greater, and his power of originating ideas infinitely greater, than those of the men about him. The conversation falling upon politics, I noticed in all he said the stamp of his own peculiar views as to absolutism, and the despotic rule of the individual over the masses ; but to-night there was in his tone and utterance that which before had not characterized his speech. He was almost tolerant of divergent views, reticent

in pushing his opinions to extremes; in short, he was what he had not been before, he was well-bred. Assuming that such views as his come within the category of sane and tenable opinions for an Englishman, they were well and sanely, and even moderately expressed.

He tried more than once to draw me into talk, using some insistence in his endeavors; but I would not respond. I kept to the part I had determined to play. I listened and I watched.

I have said that Lady Raby's words to me had been vague. In one respect they were not vague; and one casual sentence of hers came back to me again and again: "*Gregory is everything in the world to Sylvia Arden.*" These words rang in my ears, and they did so with a very painful sound.

Looking closely now upon this man, his earnestness, his strength, the grace and ease of his talk, his sufficiency in every attribute of right and availing manhood, I said to myself, "I was mistaken in this; being a woman, she could not fail to love this man."

CHAPTER XV.

AN UNEXPECTED LIGHT.

"SURELY," I thought, as I listened to Morson's cheerful, persuasive, and pointed talk to his men guests after dinner, and when I recollected the heavy secret, so newly imparted, that must be oppressing him—"surely," I said to myself, "a more finished actor, a man more capable of hiding his real feelings and playing a telling part in the comedy of life, does not exist. Either it is this, or it is an insensibility that is hardly human."

I sat back in my chair, evading every attempt he made to draw me into the circle of his talk, though in speaking he again and again addressed himself to me alone; but I answered every time against my wont, with a nod only of half assent, or a word that meant nothing. I was watching him, studying him, trying to probe the depths of his mind and meaning, with an interest I had never felt before, and always with reference to the refrain of that

sentence of Lady Raby's, "Gregory is everything in the world to Sylvia Arden;" and to every completed utterance of his my comment ever was, "It must be so; it could not be otherwise."

Men's after-dinner talk too often runs upon politics, and is mostly personal talk. We soon get out of our depth, or are apt to find ourselves too much at variance with each other, if we venture upon abstract views on this subject; and if we are not deep and do not happen to differ, we are pretty sure to be dry. Morson disliked personal gossip about politics, chiefly from the very great contempt he entertained for the ability and honesty of the politicians themselves. He either would not perceive, or more probably he absolutely refused to entertain, the fact that, as a condition precedent to being a statesman in a representative system, a man must of necessity be a pledge-maker more or less honest, and a perorator more or less popular; and that to make his way, his code of morals must be such as in daily life would send him to Coventry, or bring him into the county court.

That, talking as abstractedly as he did, he was not too dry to interest us was partly owing to his talking very well and partly owing to the startling nature of his views, which yet he expressed to-night with a restraint he had not cared to use before.

"I believe in an aristocracy," he said, "but certainly not in an aristocracy of birth, nor even in an aristocracy of intellect, but I do believe in an aristocracy of energy, or, better still, in these two last combined. The fact is, you English have lost your backbone as a nation; you are a nation of molluscs, not of men." It was a peculiarity of Morson's to look upon himself as an impartial outsider, and always to speak of England as "your country," and his own countrymen as "you." The peculiarity was to me exceedingly irritating, but I had resolved that to-night nothing should provoke me into comment or contradiction.

"Yes," he went on, "you have been leading too easy a life; you want a master, and I am afraid you will get one some day whom you won't like. In the mean time," he said, laughing, "you have fallen under the mastery of your own sentimentalism."

He still seemed desirous, for some reason of his own, to bring me into discussion with him. Certainly a quarter

as much provocation as this would have drawn me some way into a quarrel with him at any other time, but now I only gave a half-approving nod, and, no one else objecting anything, he continued—

"Sentiment is a very pretty thing, and I love it myself —in books, you know—but, by Jove, sir!" frowning a little upon me, as if I had made myself the champion of this particular folly, "you can't rule a nation by it. This country of yours just now is crammed with a foolish sentimental humanitarianism that is undermining everything, and if there comes a crisis you will go by the run. Why, there is a shout of horror through your press and your platforms if a policeman hits a man in a crowd which has been pelting him with mud and stones and foul words for hours! This softness will be your ruin, and when the crash comes, and you string up a score or two of the traitors, whom in your heart you know to be traitors, but can't find pluck enough now to call worse names than fools and fanatics—when you do string them up, it will be too late."

There was certainly a moderation to-night about Morson's talk (or perhaps my own newly imposed self-restraint made me find him moderate) which gained it acceptance from some among us.

Colonel Arden had taken the place next me while Morson was talking. He made no allusion to what had passed between us before, and we conversed as if nothing had been said by me.

"You must not take Morson's theories quite seriously," he said.

"To-night I almost go with him."

"He is a one-sided man, you know, and, by Jove!" he said, laughing, "a barbarian in many of his ideas."

"But is he always in earnest?"

Colonel Arden looked serious himself as he answered, "Yes, that is the worst of it; he is terribly in earnest. He goes straight to his point, and ignores everything that has been thought out and accepted by civilized people in modern times."

"It seems to me he has got to think as the Turks he has lived among think."

"It is just that. Many men do. He once proposed seriously to me, as a solution of the Irish difficulty, to

enslave the whole population of south and central Ireland, or to deport them to South Australia, buy the landlords out, and re-people Ireland with Scotch and English yeomen farmers, abolish the press in Ireland, trial by jury, and representative government, codify the law, and appoint a despotic governor. One can hardly suppose such nonsense is in earnest; but it is."

I laughed. "Why," I said, "I rather like that in him. Anyhow, it shows some idea of building up; it shows he has thought of it. Most of his kind are only smashers. They want everything down on the ground and in pieces. They never reflect that any fool can pull down, and that setting up is the hardest thing, and takes centuries to do. Even such bosh as this is better than that. Does he think like that about Ireland now?"

"Try him."

It is never difficult in these days to get any one to talk on the Irish question; and I said simply, "Morson, how about Ireland? What would you do there?"

He suddenly stopped in the full flow of his talk, looked at us both doubtfully, almost suspiciously, and to my surprise gave no certain answer.

"Ah!" he said, "that is a big question;" and he left the subject.

I waited till the current of talk had gone on again, then I said to Colonel Arden—

"You see, he did not mean that Irish nonsense in sober earnest."

"He certainly did, and he certainly does," said my neighbor very positively. "But to-night he is too——"

"Too what?"

"Too cunning," he answered.

The word seemed to me, at the moment, ill-chosen, and gave me an unpleasant impression of Colonel Arden.

While I spoke with my neighbor my regard was still upon Morson, and it seemed to me that he was uneasy, for some reason that I could not divine, at my talking to his friend. He was himself in conversation with the men on his side of the table, while we two were a little apart and out of earshot. The matter they were on was therefore unknown to me, and I had no curiosity to ascertain it. While I still watched him, Colonel Arden's voice, in a tone hardly

louder than a whisper, came to my ears in these words—"I must see you alone as soon as possible."

"What for?" I asked, still looking, not at him, but at Morson.

"You can help me to bring home what has happened to the man who did it."

His voice was passionless. It seemed to me an unnatural tone for a man to speak in of an attempt to murder his sister; but perhaps the emotionless voice he employed, and his curious avoidance of any name or word indicative of the crime, might be designed to defeat the watchfulness of Morson. Imagining this to be his object, I followed suit, and spoke too with a studied carelessness.

I had been asking myself how far Colonel Arden believed me to be acquainted with the facts of the attack upon his sister, how much he knew or suspected of what I had discovered of his own proceedings. Did he guess that I had detected his own footsteps in the snow at the scene of the crime; and what explanation was he prepared to give of this most suspicious fact? I determined to bring my suspicions to the test.

"Perhaps," I said, "you will tell me what you yourself found out this morning, when you were on the spot where the men tried to murder Miss Arden?"

I turned round and faced him as I spoke these words. I was prepared at the least to find him taken aback, and perhaps off his guard, at the suddenness of my question, but he did not change countenance in the least.

"I saw nothing," he said, "except the footprints of the tall Greek, mixed with your own; but there was nothing to prove that the man had not come there afterwards, and from curiosity. I saw nothing then that was inconsistent with its having been an accident to my sister."

I was myself taken aback by this view of the thing; for, in truth, it had never occurred to me that the presence of the footmarks, to any one but myself, who had come immediately upon the scene, would not evidence more than what Colonel Arden suggested. There remained, however, cause for more than suspicion in Colonel Arden's actions, and I asked him—

"Pray, why did you go at all to the place where you merely supposed your sister had fallen from her horse?"

"Because when I came in I saw her, she being then very

weak and nervous and half fainting. Her hurts and the state she was in seemed more than a fall would cause, and I suspected——"

"You saw your sister, then, yesterday? Morson told me you had not seen her."

"Certainly I saw her."

"And she told you she was fired at?"

"She told me nothing at all. Lady Raby told me she had fallen from her pony. My sister, when I asked her about it, only told me where it had happened. I did not care to question her, she was so upset; and then in the night, as soon as the moon was up, I went to the place, determining to judge for myself."

Why had Morson told me positively, and twice over, that Arden had not seen his sister, and could not, therefore, know of the spot he had visited? Did Morson not know that Colonel Arden had spoken to her, or did he purposely take me in? Was Colonel Arden now deceiving me in saying this? No. It is difficult to express it in words; but there was ever in Colonel Arden's lightest word and most casual look something which precluded all idea of deceit or concealment.

"May I ask you," I said, after a pause, "why you covered up the man's footsteps and your own?"

Colonel Arden hesitated for the first time.

"Are they covered up," he asked. "I did not know it. The scoundrel must have returned at dawn, or before it, between my going and your coming, and done this thing himself."

It was a simple and easy solution of the problem I had put to myself; yet it was far from satisfying me.

All these momentous sentences, confusing as they did all my previous conclusions, had been exchanged between Colonel Arden and myself in a low voice, and with a tone and in a manner which we each strove to make as light and indifferent as possible. In spite of this, Morson had appeared for some time to be uneasy; I could see that he was absent-minded in talking with the other men, and he seemed unwilling, for some reason of his own, that Arden and I should speak together any longer. Intending it or not with any certain motive, he raised his voice and, pointedly addressing myself, forced us to join in the general conversation.

The talk seemed to have been for some time on a subject which I had never heard Morson approach without his saying something to offend me. When he spoke he was laying down a general proposition which he might, perhaps, be right in considering a little too abstract for Captain Cockton and the two or three other gentlemen, whose names I have forgotten, and as making too great a call upon social and human experiences for Professor Webb. He addressed this remark to me, and I ought to have guessed what his object was in doing so. I ought to have guessed that, having failed again and again to draw my attention to himself, and away from my neighbor's talk, he determined to introduce a topic on which he knew from experience he could certainly stir me to indignation and remonstrance. He judged rightly, if he so judged.

"In your country, Bearcroft, every one is in a conspiracy to make women seem of more importance than they are. Your poets and your novelists are the ringleaders, while the fools among the men, and the whole crowd of women themselves, are willing accomplices."

I laughed, but I was beginning to feel impatient. "Of course we know, Morson, you are a Turk and a benighted Mussulman. You haven't arrived beyond women having no souls. Do please leave them alone till you get more sense."

He was not going to do anything of the kind. He had apparently gained his point at last. He had made me speak, and he went on, "Yes; that dogma about women having no souls must be rather a stumbling-block for you Europeans. My dear fellow, your gross Western intelligence will never catch the subtle meaning it conveys."

"Good Heavens!" I cried, more amused still than angry, "can I hear such folly, and let you live?"

"Now, Bearcroft, you are a sensible man when your temper is not up, and I will try to make the doctrine clear to you. You must see that it is not to be taken quite literally; it only means to warn us men that if we fall in love with women, regarding them as sentient, soul-bearing, responsible beings, we commit a very grievous error, and deserve all the grief we shall inevitably come to."

"And pray, you damned fool," I cried, at last roused, "how do you regard them?"

I had lost patience with him now, and was stupidly

angry with him, for it seemed to me a gross and outrageous affront to the girl he was engaged to marry, and who I knew now for certain loved him, that he should so obviously include her in this insult to her sex.

Colonel Arden, sitting next to me and a little in my rear as I leant forward in my anger to address Morson, touched me lightly on the arm, and I heard his voice, sunk to nearly a whisper: "Don't let him rile you," he said. "Don't you see he wants to? Keep cool!"

Morson answered my question readily and fully, and without show of temper. "Why," he said, "I'll tell you. Women should be looked upon as no more than what they are—mere points in space round which our imagination raises visions with a glamour on them. As the point travels on in its orbit, the glamour goes and the vision fades. When that happens, people are stupid enough to call it inconstancy." Then he added, in a lower tone, "Yes, men are mostly fools, and women something between fools and devils."

He certainly was striving to irritate me. My own overstrong language of the moment before to himself had not seemed to stir him to any anger, but he showed a particular pleasure in the neat and specious expression of his outrageous sentiment. He leant back in his chair and laughed long and loudly. There is laughter wherein is no merriment, which has a touch and even more than a touch of malignity in it, and Morson's was of this kind. It was a hard, mocking laugh, half brutal and, as I thought, half nervous.

I had been on the point of saying a sharper thing to him than before, but the strange sound of his unsympathetic laughter had a sobering effect upon my temper. At the moment of speaking, too, I caught sight of Colonel Arden's face. If he could listen unmoved to a remark that touched his own sister, why should I, a stranger to her, resent it?

Colonel Arden had left his place, unobserved by me, and was now again sitting in the chair next to Morson, facing me full. He was leaning back, his arms folded. There was a calm, sombre, pained look upon his face which arrested my attention immediately, and his eyes were fixed upon me, his brow slightly knitted with the intentness of his gaze. Again I saw in his eyes that in-

tense, almost non-human look—the look of those creatures who, lacking speech to utter their feelings, must speak through their eyes.

The angry word died at once on my lips, and there was silence in the room, save for the continuing of Morson's uncanny laugh, for none were so subservient among his subservient guests as to join in his merriment. Morson laughed on alone while we all sat by with grave faces.

He seemed almost convulsed with the violence of his senseless laughter, and he leant his elbows on the table, burying his face in his hands, while his shoulders heaved with this false merriment. Then suddenly he looked up at us, now with quite a serious countenance, frowning and seemingly vexed at our grave, unsympathetic scrutiny.

CHAPTER XVI.

LADY RABY'S COMMUNICATION.

NEITHER Lady Raby nor Miss Arden came down to breakfast next morning, and there was talk among the ladies as to Miss Arden not being so well as she had been the day before. I therefore supposed that the interview I was to have with her was not to take place for some time yet. I had speculated a good deal upon this meeting to be had between us, wondering much as to what its nature and object could be, and what a young lady whom I knew so slightly could have to impart to, or to ask of me. What I was now assured of as to the relations that existed between herself and her affianced husband made me unwilling for the meeting, unwilling even to see Miss Arden again, and I was therefore not sorry that our coming together was postponed. Perhaps, later on, the necessity for our meeting at all might pass away.

I had even gone so far, in the light of Lady Raby's communication to me, as to ask myself if it would not be wiser in me to depart at once from Scarfell Towers. Yes, undoubtedly, on my own account and for my own comfort of mind, it would be best; but suddenly the memory of what I had seen on the hills came again before me—the fallen, fainting figure of the girl, the snow stained

with her blood, her pale face, and her piteous waking look of pain and terror. This crime must and should be avenged, and by myself alone, for justice, as clearly perceived, would never be done by other hands than mine. The hands of those nearest and dearest to the girl were tied and benumbed through some *fainéantise* in them, the cause of which I could not fathom. It was for me to execute the vengeance I burned to take, and I knew that my heart and my conscience would never be quiet if I went from the Towers now, this vengeance untaken.

As these thoughts were passing through my brain, a letter was put into my hands from Lady Raby. It was a short note, begging me to visit her and Miss Arden at once in their rooms. Miss Arden, she said, was now all but quite well again, but she did not wish to appear as yet in public.

Lady Raby had a suite of rooms permanently set apart for her in her nephew's house. It was her own servant who had delivered the letter to me, and I followed the maid at once to her mistress' rooms. Lady Raby and Miss Arden occupied one of the four towers of the house, and I reached their drawing-room after making three circuits of a winding stone stair. This part of Scarfell Towers belongs to the ancient times in which the house was built. The walls of the four round towers are of great thickness, intended for defence, and the tower inhabited by Lady Raby, preserving its ancien character, is scantily lighted by narrow loopholes in its lower portion. The dwelling rooms were therefore in the very top of the tower, and from their windows a wide view is had over the barren hills and the stony dells and dingles of Scarfell Chace.

I found myself in a small and very beautiful drawing-room, or rather boudoir, essentially a ladies' room ; the air pleasant and cheerful with fire warmth and lightly scented with cut hothouse flowers. Here Lady Raby was waiting for my arrival. Her first speech startled me.

"I have asked you to come to us, Captain Bearcroft, because we are in extreme peril, and in a predicament from which I can see no escape."

No doubt I looked as puzzled as I felt, and Lady Raby continued—

"I don't know how much you guess of what is going

on here, but something, I am sure, you must have noticed."

"Noticed? Yes, I have noticed a great deal that seems strange and inexplicable; but to speak fairly, I don't know that I ought to say I can guess at anything, so many of my guesses lately have come wrong."

She looked at me silently, as if considering how far she could confide in me, or perhaps whether I was to be trusted at all.

"Let me know," I said, "what you would like me to do, or to have done, for you. I believe I could help you better in that way than in guessing what I know so little about."

She looked at me for a further moment, and when she spoke it was rather as if she thought aloud than addressed me.

"You look helpful, and I am sure you are kind. Yes, it is only necessary to see you to know that."

I smiled. "What do you want done?" I asked.

She answered abruptly, "To be taken away, and to have Sylvia Arden taken away, from this place. I am in terror for her."

"But what hinders your ordering the carriage and driving to the nearest station?"

"Everything. You cannot understand. I do not see how you can, and it is so hard for me to have to tell you."

"Please tell me," I said, "just as little as you think well, and then let me know what I can do to be of use to you and Miss Arden."

Lady Raby was evidently distressed and nervous.

"Every word you say proves how well I did to appeal to you,—to follow Sylvia's advice, and appeal to you. Oh, Captain Bearcroft, can you not see how to a conventional woman like myself, coming from a very conventional world, it is against all my accustomed ideas, contrary to all the ways of the people among whom we live, to speak to any one about things which I must now try to tell you?"

"Let me first," I said, willing to distract her mind a little from the thought of the violence she was doing to these principles of hers, "let me just tell you, or rather remind you, how I myself stand in all this, and then you will perhaps see clearly how far you need confide in me, and in what I can help you. I am, as you know, not what

you would consider a 'society person' at all; therefore you need not mind speaking to me quite plainly. I come from a distant part of the world, for a little time only, and presently I shall go back to the wilds. I find myself here by a sort of accident, at the house of an old friend. By another accident, I am all but an eye-witness to a most cruel assault made upon an inmate of this house. I tell the master of it, what I have seen and know, expecting him to take immediate steps to put the law in action to punish a foul crime and avenge the woman he is going to marry; and he does nothing. He is almost overwhelmed at what I tell him, but he does nothing. When I expect him to be taking some right action, I find him praying in a chapel. He tells me not to mention the fact of the assault upon Miss Arden to any one; and when, in a moment of indignation at a terrible suspicion that suddenly enters my mind, I speak to Colonel Arden of the attack upon his sister, having reason to suppose that he knows more of it than I do, he also shows the same suspicious apathy and unconcern as Gregory Morson. Under ordinary circumstances I should communicate all the discoveries I have made, and all the evidence I have obtained, to Colonel Arden and Gregory Morson; but after the way they take it I must work by myself, and I must take the law into my own hands."

"You nave evidence?" asked Lady Raby eagerly. "You think you can bring this dreadful thing home to some one?"

"Yes; I know who fired the shot." But I checked myself, for I remembered the strangely divergent declarations of Arden and Morson as to the tall bearded man whom I had tracked in the snow. "I all but know the criminal, and I thought till a few hours ago that I knew his accomplice."

Lady Raby listened to me as I said this with the deepest interest. It was evidenced in her question, for her voice came from her almost broken.

"Can you say whom you suspect to be the accomplice—not the doer, the instigator?"

I hesitated. "No," I said, "I cannot tell you that. I am utterly perplexed. I can give you no answer yet. Do not ask me that yet."

We did not speak for a moment or two, and it struck me

that perhaps through the minds of each of us were passing similar suspicions and similar doubts.

"What do you propose to do now?" she asked.

"To take the advice you gave me last night, Lady Raby: to watch, to wait, to be on my guard; and then to act."

"Yes," she said anxiously, "you must be on your guard; be very careful, very cautious. You have really set yourself to find out the doer of this cruel deed?"

"I am resolved upon that, for I think no one else means to; and I am set and determined upon this, too: when I have found the man out, I will exact from him the full penalty of his crime."

Lady Raby bowed her head and said nothing for a minute. Then she spoke, almost solemnly, "Captain Bearcroft, you are right in this. I thought once it might be avoided. I will help you."

CHAPTER XVII.

REVELATIONS.

"In the meantime, Lady Raby," said I, "it seems to me that the simplest and best thing I can do for you and Miss Arden will be for me to order the carriage to the door after lunch and go with you in it to the station and there put you into the evening express for London. I will stay on here myself till I have discovered everything."

Lady Raby's only answer was a despondent shake of the head, and the remark, "Gregory Morson would oppose our going. You little know him!"

"Know him! But he is your host and mine. Do you think he would dare to stand in the way of your wishes, or even of my wishes?"

"You set your face hard, Captain Bearcroft, and you look as if you would and could force your way through every obstacle; but you will change your mind when you know what these obstacles are. Listen to me patiently, and I will try to make it plainer to you. In the first place, you have known something already of Gregory's character—his self-will, his violence, his overbearing and domineering temper, his obstinacy in his one-sided and fanatical

opinions. Well, prosperity and the habit of having his own way unquestioned, in the East, have confirmed him in all these faults. He is more selfish and more overbearing now than when you saw him five years ago. Are you quite fully aware what a little kingdom, and what a tyranny in it, he has set up here at the Towers and in Scarfell Chace? In this quiet, well-ordered England of ours we always assume that things will go on in orderly, methodical ways; and men like yourself, who come from wild parts of the world, can't believe what exceptions there are to this propriety, and how much one individual with a long purse, a shrewd head, a strong will, a violent temper, and an eccentric disposition, can do to break through it all. Over Scarfell Chace not a breath of public opinion blows. England comes no nearer to us here than the cliffs of the river which cuts us off from the rest of the Island, and the hills which are not to be passed except through Gregory's own gates. Then, remember that every male servant on the place is a Levantine, an Italian, or a Greek, who can neither speak nor read a word of English; that they are his creatures, whose only law is his word, and who recognize no law at all but the law of the strongest and the most cunning. You talked of driving through the gates in the hills. Why, even if you could persuade the grooms to harness the horses and the coachman to drive us, we should find the gates closed. Gregory has more than once boasted openly to Sylvia and me that his gatekeeper would not have the slightest compunction in obeying his orders and shooting down any one who should try to force the gates, either coming in or going out."

"Why, Morson must be out of his senses, Lady Raby. Is he mad?"

"He is mad as I suppose every fanatic is mad, no otherwise. He is insane only as any headstrong man is who can see a thing from one point of view alone, and is deaf to every argument that goes against his own will and his own passions."

Lady Raby was silent, and I stopped to reflect. The knowledge of how things stood at Scarfell Chace had already come, as it were, bit by bit to my apprehension, but some of it depended upon the testimony of casual and perhaps interested outsiders; some came from my own observation, and some of the knowledge rested upon the

cynical and outspoken assertions of Gregory Morson himself. Therefore, though Lady Raby's statement was not actual news to me, it was the confirmation by a very shrewd, cool, and well-informed observer of evidence which I had already gathered but had stopped short of fully accepting from the very strangeness of the whole thing, the really monstrous audacity and eccentricity of the man who had imported such wild surroundings into the midst of our tame, conventional English existence. On two points Lady Raby's information gave me special grounds for thought. First, how did this plain declaration by his own relative of Gregory Morson's character and disposition bear upon the inquiry I was set so hotly upon into the attack upon Miss Arden; secondly, how was it that Lady Raby, knowing Gregory Morson's character, his violent and fanatic opinions and outrageous behavior, could trust to him the happiness of the person she held dearest on earth?

I looked at Lady Raby, and she seemed to read the query that had formed itself in my mind.

"It is this man, Captain Bearcroft, with these antecedents, with this future before him, with this vicious temper and detestable character, whom Sylvia Arden is engaged to marry."

"Then," I broke out, "why, in the name——" But I stopped short in my outburst. I interrupted the current of my words, and before I spoke again I changed their very sense, struck suddenly by the baseness it would be in me to prejudice the nearest relative of Sylvia Arden against the man she loved. "Lady Raby," I said, "you must take the good with the bad in Gregory Morson. I really think you must make some allowance. I have known him a long time; I admit he is a man of strong, masterful temper, and perhaps if there had been more of give and take in his life, if things had not always been so easy for him and he had not found every one always so willing to give way to him, he would be pleasanter to deal with now. Give him time to rub off this nonsense he has taken up in the East, let him have a little time among sensible English people, and he will give it all up. He has the making of a very good fellow; he has any number of good points, he is very honest, and very straightforward."

Lady Raby shook her head. She smiled a little. This

woman seemed to read my innermost thoughts like a book.

I went on. "At any rate, he is outspoken, and makes no secret of what he thinks. In talk he seems a hard and heartless man, wrapped up in himself, but in practice he is kind and charitable; he does good to people in a way you probably never hear of, and he is what I only wish I was myself—a thoroughly religious man."

Lady Raby nodded assent, and she looked at me for a moment with a curious expression, one that I should have qualified at another moment as amused.

"Granting all that," she said, "it helps us very little." She rose from her seat. "I think," she said, "it would be well now if you spoke to Sylvia. She is waiting to see you."

"Pray stay a little first," I said. "I do not clearly understand what you wish done, and it seems to me that it may be better and easier for me to talk to you on what is really rather a delicate subject; I mean——"

"You mean," said Lady Raby boldly, "the bringing about of a separation between my niece and the man she is engaged to marry?"

"Yes, I mean that. Surely it is better for me to talk to you than to her about such a matter?"

"I think not," said Lady Raby.

"You must not suppose that I shirk doing so from any indifference, or wish to avoid trouble or responsibility, or —anything of that kind. I want to help you, and I will help you; but let me advise you first. Then if you reject my advice I promise to take yours."

Lady Raby sat down again. "I agree," she said; "but before you advise me you must know the facts. Now, please imagine I am a witness in a court of law, and that you are cross-questioning me. Will you begin? Ask me anything and everything, and I will speak out the truth so far as I know it."

It was a disagreeable and awkward position, and as I faced it there flashed upon me that which I had hitherto tried to disguise from myself—the interest, the strong personal interest that I had begun to take in Miss Arden. I had tried to persuade myself that this feeling was nothing more than the natural pity a man could not but feel for a woman whom he had seen and conversed with at one

moment in the careless enjoyment of her life, her youth, her beauty and all the charm of her sweetest girlhood, and in the next has seen cruelly struck down by an unknown hand, suffering and helpless, and whom chance has enabled to succor in her pain and her need. It had been easy to delude myself with the thought that my feeling was no other than natural pity. Now, as Lady Raby spoke to me, seeming desirous of putting me in the place of arbitrator of Miss Arden's fate and judge over the man she loved, I saw how dangerously near I had come to being tempted to do the very basest thing a man can do to his fellow. Just before, with some sudden instinctive repulsion in me for the meanness of agreeing with Miss Arden's guardian in her depreciation of the man who was in a fashion my rival, I had hastily entered into a defence of him, and I was shocked to see what poor unconvincing lip-talk it was, and how, instead of converting Lady Raby, it had left her more persuaded than ever of her own opinion.

"You do not begin your cross-examination," she said, looking upon my face with a curious, observing expression. "You have some reason, have you not, for not wishing to question me?"

"Yes," I said; "to speak frankly, I have. A very strong one."

"Ah!" said Lady Raby, "I guess it; and yet," said she, looking at me through shrewd and kindly eyes, "I have mistaken you if you do not put your objections aside and help this poor girl in her great trouble."

"Lady Raby," I said, "am I the right person to consult with Miss Arden and help her, when her own brother is here?"

"It is out of the question to consult with him, for he has just sent to say that he is called suddenly to London, and may be away for a day or two."

"He is gone already?"

"Yes. Sylvia said at once it was Gregory's doing."

"She had wanted to speak to him of all this?"

"Not at all," said Lady Raby unhesitatingly; "she trusts entirely to you. John Arden is the very last person whom his sister or I would think of asking help from or taking counsel with, even if he were here."

"I cannot see why. He seems to me loyal, strong, kind, and sensible."

"He is every one of those things except the last. John Arden is not a sensible man, and cannot do a sensible thing. He is as near an approach to a hero of romance as any one can be in this century: a modern Bayard. Loyal, chivalrous, brave, single-minded; a man without fear and without reproach."

"Lady Raby, I think I ought to say that that is not the character which his own friend, Gregory Morson, gives him. So far at least as this, that in talk with me he has not only allowed Colonel Arden to lie under the imputation of the foulest disloyalty, treachery, and cruelty—I cannot yet tell you how or why—but he has distinctly confirmed to me the truth of the vague charges which I had heard long ago against Colonel Arden, and which Morson was obliged to admit were infamous."

Lady Raby looked impatient and astonished as I spoke.

"Is it possible that Gregory can have sunk so low as to have done this? And for what possible reason? Surely, Captain Bearcroft, you know yourself how baseless these reports are?"

"I know nothing, except very vaguely."

"Then I will tell you; for it is infamous in Gregory not to have given you the true story. Colonel Arden was once put in charge of a *Villayet* in Asia Minor. I forget the name of it, but it was somewhere in the mountainous parts. The district had been shamefully mismanaged, and the people pillaged, tyrannized over, and ground down in every way by the Pashas and their officers, who were in league with bands of brigands, by whom they were bribed, and who robbed, tortured, murdered, and outraged the poor peasants. It was a reign of terror. There went up from them at last a cry of agony and despair. The government heard, and put John Arden in charge. In a few months he brought order, peace, and plenty. The poor people blessed him, and of course the friends of the Turkish officials, whom he had banished, and of the brigands, whom he had punished, made an outcry against his sternness and his cruelty. The Opposition here at home happened at the time to be against the Turks, and the foreign correspondents of some of the Opposition newspapers—you know what sort of men some of them are—pretended to believe the wretches who were abusing John

Arden, and so made a political victim of him. No doubt you read some of their tirades?"

It came back to me now. I had; and I had forgotten for the moment what political honesty in England is. I had been simple enough to believe they were telling the truth.

"Yes," said Lady Raby, "John Arden is stern, but he is just, and loyal, and kindly. He has only one fault—he is mentally blind."

"Blind to what?"

"Blind to everything and everybody except the idol he has set up and whom he worships."

"And who is that idol?"

"Can you ask? Can you fail to see that it is Gregory Morson? Is it possible that John Arden has been with you and not told you the story of how Gregory once saved his life?"

"He referred to it once. He told me that he owed very much to Gregory, and would do not a little to serve him. I could see how strongly he felt the obligation."

"He does. His gratitude has the strength of a ruling passion. In his eyes Gregory can say or do no wrong. At Gregory's bidding he would give everything he holds dear —life, fortune, if he had any, and, I almost think, honor itself. Now you must see that such a man cannot help us in this; for he would think me insane to wish to remove my niece from the influence of the man whom he considers perfection. He would think it a cruel injustice, too, to her. There is this simple issue before him—'My sister,' he says, 'loves the man whom I know to be perfect. Nothing shall come in the way of their marrying each other.' He could never be brought to understand that she no longer feels towards Gregory Morson as he knows she once did."

"But," said I hastily, and speaking on the impulse of the moment on the very point I had formed a resolution to avoid, "what, then, does Miss Arden now feel towards Gregory Morson?"

"Absolute aversion and horror!"

CHAPTER XVII

FURTHER REVELATIONS.

"LADY RABY, do you remember that you told me—I asked you nothing, but you told me—that Gregory Morson was 'all the world,' those were your own words, to Miss Arden?"

"And you think it something like a contradiction now when I say she looks upon him with aversion and horror?"

"Naturally I do."

"Naturally you do, and yet it is no contradiction at all. You judge us logically, reasonably, as a man judges women. It is not the way to come to right conclusions about our sex, nor, if I know anything of the world, Captain Bearcroft, about your own."

"You puzzle me very much."

"No doubt. I am dealing with another person's secret, and therefore cannot speak out. I hoped you would learn, or perhaps guess, something of the truth from my niece herself."

"That is quite impossible," I said hastily; "it is quite out of the question. I could not do that."

"I wish it were possible that you should know, or that you could guess, without my telling you anything; but that would be one of the illogical processes that, being a man, you would object to. I cannot tell you how very much against the grain it is to me to speak upon these matters; nothing but the extreme urgency of the case and my entire trust in you——"

She stopped and looked at me. "Sylvia Arden wants, as I have said, to speak to you. I do not myself quite understand her wish. I have almost imagined, from her anxiety, that she has some secret; that the knowledge of something terrible has come to her, which she fears to shock or frighten me by speaking of to me. Her nerve is entirely gone, poor child! She is like a person who has

seen a ghost. She says, again and again, 'I must see him, I *must* see him!' Can I trust you to be gentle with her, Captain Bearcroft? Remember, she is a weak woman, broken now by her fright and the pain and fever of her wounds. Do not be rough with her; and pray bear with her, even if you do not quite understand her. To you I fear she may seem a poor weak, hysterical girl. Do not judge her hastily, that is all I ask. She is not weak; impressionable and romantic, perhaps, but not weak. Remember that just now she is upset—her nerves are unstrung by all this trouble. Be patient with her, please, and gentle."

I bowed my head in shame, humiliated to think that my roughness of manner, or some show of haste or irritability, should have made it seem necessary to Lady Raby to warn me to be patient with a sick girl, care-stricken, terrified, and oppressed.

"Do I understand you to mean that Miss Arden is herself willing to leave the Towers?"

"She wishes to go, and she does not wish. I cannot truly tell. It may seem odd in me to say so, but I trust to you to discover her real mind."

I suppose I looked perplexed, for Lady Raby went on: "I think I must try to make it clear to you, before you see Sylvia herself, how things stand and have stood between her and Gregory, and how I reconcile the fact that the poor girl is, or perhaps only has been, desperately in love with Gregory Morson, and yet that she lives in horror of him. They are cousins, as you know, and they met in London two years ago. You have seen Miss Arden; she told me you and she had an hour's talk on the hill that day before you found her in the snow, wounded and fainting. I don't know if you saw enough of her to perceive what a bright, pleasant, clever girl she is. Perhaps your acquaintance latterly with the ordinary young lady of English society has not been enough to let you see how different she is to other girls."

"Yes," I said, with perhaps unnecessary warmth, "I saw the greatest possible difference. It was a revelation to me to find any one so bright and so very—delightful."

Lady Raby gave me an agreeing look, smiled, nodded, and went on.

"It was then Sylvia's third season in London; and by

that time she had arrived at the conclusion, which in my experience most girls with minds and hearts above the common do reach in their third season at latest, that the London society of the very young, of balls, and of parties, is a foolish and frivolous society, in which the girls and the young men are only shadows of men and women, only counters in the game of society; the men especially being as little to be distinguished one from the other as grains of wheat in a bushel."

I laughed. "I really think, Lady Raby, you are hard on us. I was one of the grains in the bushel myself not so very long ago, for I spent two or three years in London before I went abroad, and I can assure you——"

"I dare say you were hardly to be distinguished from the others—whatever time and travel may have done for you since, Captain Bearcroft! A boy fresh from Eton and Oxford is not a man. These things are, believe me, at best, only the makings of men. They must go out into the real world before they can take rank with men, and find out what there is in them, and win their spurs. But I am only telling you all this to explain why my dear niece, like other girls of any mind or spirit, was getting tired of these vapid young people in white ties, when Gregory Morson appeared before her. You may imagine what a contrast she found him to the others. He was in a way a revelation to her, to use your own word."

"I dare say."

"You must admit," Lady Raby went on, "that there is no want of originality or strength of character in Gregory?"

"Certainly there is not."

"And he talks so very well and winningly when he pleases. I think," she said, addressing a questioning glance at me, "you have perhaps hardly an idea how very pleasant Gregory can be with women."

"I have not the slightest doubt that he can."

"I thought," said Lady Raby, with almost an innocent air, "that you looked rather doubtingly when I praised his pleasantness."

"Not at all. Pray go on."

"Do not be impatient with me, Captain Bearcroft! Then, I think even you will agree he is good-looking."

"Even I! Why do you say, 'even I'? Of course I agree. He is very handsome indeed."

"There I think you go too far," Lady Raby said, in a mildly argumentative manner; "his face has a little too much color for a man; besides which I find a growing fulness in his figure that——"

"Let us agree then to say that he is quite good-looking enough for a man."

"I am saying all this and talking of Gregory's pleasantness only that you may know how it happened that—in short, these two——"

"Fell in love with each other. Yes; and then?"

"But, my dear Captain Bearcroft, why do you frown so terribly upon the idea of two people falling in love, as if you were yourself out of the reach of such accidents, and thought it almost a crime? I am afraid you are a philosopher, or perhaps a puritan, or a—well,—please sit down again and let me go on.

"Then there was an engagement, and things went on very smoothly for a little while. For some years past, as I think you know, I have had these rooms at the Towers. I used to come here from time to time when Sylvia was a child, before Gregory came home. I am Gregory's nearest relation, and Sylvia's too, and her guardian; she being, as you know, an heiress. Latterly there has been something wrong—I know no more what than you do—but I have noticed Sylvia's unwillingness to come here. Gregory's temper has at times been quite unbearable, and his treatment of his other guests such as I am astonished at their submitting to. All this, you may say, makes a common story; so it does, and I would not think of asking for your confidence and telling you our family secrets but for what has occurred lately. Before you came down, before the attack upon Sylvia, I had endeavored to arrive at an explanation with Gregory. I told him that his treatment of her in public and in private was such that I could not allow her to stay a day longer under his roof. He stormed and raged. I told him I would leave the house and take my niece with me. He openly refused to allow me. After that came this mysterious attack upon Sylvia. He talks vaguely of having taken legal measures to discover the authors of it; but, so far as I know, he has done nothing."

"Have you ever written to any of your friends, or communicated with the outer world in any way?"

"I have told him I would, but you may suppose I am

very cautious as to doing anything of that kind. In the case of a young girl like Sylvia, it is beyond everything necessary that she should not be talked about. Gregory knows this well enough. He dared me to appeal to the law in any way. Now, Captain Bearcroft, you know the facts—will you advise me?"

I considered the thing very seriously. "I can advise but one thing, and I advise it strongly. It is that you should let me speak to Gregory. Let me remonstrate with him. I will put the matter very strongly to him."

"Could you really venture to?"

"Could I venture?—Lady Raby, do you suppose for one moment——"

"Now, please be calm. I did not mean to offend you, but you can really have no idea how Gregory's violence and tyranny—for really I can call it nothing else—have destroyed my own nerve and courage."

"I promise you," I said, "that Gregory shall do as I bid him."

"If you look at him," said Lady Raby, with a return to something like a smile on her face, "as you are looking at me at this moment, I really think you will make him do anything you tell him to." Lady Raby seemed to be regaining courage. "You are quite wonderful," she said. "Next to Gregory himself, I think you are the most extraordinary person I know. I am so glad I spoke to you. You give me such confidence. But you must not beard him yet; it will be like pulling the string of the shower bath. You must speak to Sylvia first. She is waiting to see you alone. Will you consent now to speak to her?"

"Yes," I said. "After what you have told me there is nothing for me but to see her."

Lady Raby left the room to fetch Miss Arden.

CHAPTER XIX.

SYLVIA ARDEN'S STORY.

MISS ARDEN came by herself into the drawing-room, where I was waiting to receive her.

I was shocked to see the change that had come over

her. Her face was pale and wan and transparent. She was dressed simply in a trailing, close-fitting dress of some soft cream-white woollen stuff, serge or cashmere, and from head to foot of her was no spot of color save the brown of her rippled hair, her arching eyebrows, and her brown eyes. She bore no traces of her wounds, no bandage or sling. She came in and stood for an instant with her back to the closed door, a startled, restless stare in her eyes that first glanced round the room, then fixed themselves upon me, wide opened. She did not speak. Her air, her carriage, her gaze, her speechlessness, all were pure tragedy.

I was alarmed by this change from her light-hearted girlish ways when first I had conversed with her, the careless cheerfulness which not even the pain of her wounds, and her terror when she had recovered from her fainting, had wholly eclipsed. I took her hand and spoke out in the impulse of my own anxiety.

"What have they done do you, Miss Arden? How have they brought you to this?"

She held my hand in hers that trembled, and she looked full at me; there was a vague horror depicted in her face. All the natural timidity and shyness of a young girl had departed. Her boldness, I thought, was that of some hunted wild creature that shelters itself from its pursuer in unwonted company.

"You have saved my life once—oh! will you try to save me again? They want to kill me!"

Why had not Lady Raby prepared me for this? Why had she not warned me that the great shock had overset the poor girl's reason? I tried to soothe her.

"Sit down, Miss Arden, and let us talk quietly about it. I promise to take care of you. No one shall come near you or hurt you."

She glanced round to the door. "Can nobody come in now, or see you here with me? They would know I was asking you to protect me. They are afraid of no one except you—I heard them say so. They don't mind John at all. He is so simple—he sees nothing, he guesses nothing."

I remembered Lady Raby's injunctions to lay aside for once my unfortunate uncouth ways with women, and to bear with and be gentle to her, but there was no need to remind myself of this advice, for my very heart bled for the

poor girl; yet I labored hard to subdue the natural roughness of my manners, and not to frighten or daunt her.

"Do not talk, Miss Arden, till you are stronger. It is not good for you. It excites you."

She did my bidding and was silent for a few moments, sitting in the chair to which I had led her, her eyes still fixed wistfully upon me. Presently there came the faintest beginning of a smile upon her face, the odd, pleasant smile that I had never forgotten, revealing her true self half disguised for the moment under the tragic mask of her present terror, and revealing too the odd, womanly discursiveness in her that could not, even in her unreason, dwell too long in her tragedy mood.

"That is just what you said on the hill, when you carried me over the snow. You said I was not to talk. I thought it was very impertinent of you; but I have thought, too, so often since, how kind and gentle you were to me that day."

"Well," I said laughing, and wishing of all things to encourage her in her changed mood, "I think my best friend would hardly call me that! You should have heard Lady Raby just now begging me not to be quite such a boor as usual when I talked to you."

She made no answer and looked at me intently, and her next speech was not an agreeable one.

"I think you are almost as simple as my brother John. My aunt must have thought so, too, when she said that. But could she really have said so?"

"She did say it, though not in so many words, of course; but that is what she meant."

"My aunt thinks you—well, I hardly like to tell you all the things she thinks you; certainly she does not think you rough."

I went on with this trivial talk, hoping to divert her from the sort of nightmare that I saw was oppressing her.

"Lady Raby is, I know, a very clever person; the only mistake she makes about me is to suspect I have a quick temper. I saw several signs in her just now that she did."

The odd smile came back again to Miss Arden's face. She did not answer my remark in any way, but she looked at me with a sort of curious interest.

"Decidedly," she said presently, "you and my brother ought to be dear friends. You are so like in some things."

Suddenly the smile died out of her face again, "It is so pleasant to talk nonsense with you," she said, "I could go on for ever; but I must not do that now." This struck me as an odd and not over complimentary digression. "You lead me on, you make me do it. Why? Do you think, can you think, that my mind is—that I am still in a sort of delirium, as I was all that first night? Oh!" she said, with another of those sudden transitions of mood that were in her character, "do not think that! If you only knew what I have gone through, these last days—it is enough to have turned one's brain!" Then wringing her hands and very piteously, "Oh! it was terrible! terrible! He stood by my bedside watching the effect of what they had done, wanting me to die, and I would not die!"

She dropped her head upon her hands, to hide her face and her tears.

"Miss Arden," I said, standing by her side and touching her hand to endeavor to recall her to her right mind, "please do not give way, do not think of these things. It was a dream, believe me, a delirious dream. Does not Lady Raby tell you so, too?"

She looked up at me with a wondering gaze, her eyes still full of tears. "You do not think, do you, I could speak of it to my aunt? She could not bear it, it would frighten her so. You don't know how terrible it would be to her if I told her the whole truth about Gregory. I have borne it alone, resolving to confide in you. I have no one else. Listen! Gregory Morson has found out that I have got to hate him, and he wishes me to die."

The sick, the distracted, and young children are as one, and we are fain to treat them alike. I spoke to her now as I would have done to an unreasoning child.

"Do not say you hate Gregory Morson, for you know it is not true; you love him very dearly."

She shook her head, and when she spoke again it was more calmly. "It seems so strange that I can talk of these things; it seems so odd, too, that you, of all people, should speak as you have to me; but I owe it to you to tell you quite clearly that there is nothing of the kind you

imagine between Gregory Morson and myself. How else could I ask you to help me in my trouble?" She blushed deeply as she said this.

Her manner was quiet, curiously quiet and collected for a young girl speaking of such a matter to a man nearly a stranger to her; and what she said was after all rational and logical, allowance being made for the most strange circumstances that had gone before, and assuming that she was right in interpreting them as she did.

"But you are engaged to Gregory Morson?" I said. "Gregory himself told me so, your aunt told me, your brother mentioned it, and the guests here speak of it openly."

"Gregory spoke falsely. He is false—oh, so false, and so hard and cruel!" She wept. "Will you really save me from him?"

"Yes, yes, of course I will. Did I not say I would?" Then I tried to argue the point with her. "If you are engaged, as you certainly are, there is no falseness in Gregory's saying so, is there?"

"Our engagement is broken off," she said. "I could bear it no longer. I told him so; I told him I would not marry him. I told him this the day before you came. He begged me not to mention it for forty-eight hours; and, oh! in my grievous folly and short-sightedness, I promised, and then——"

She did not finish her sentence, she only looked at me fixedly, seeming to wish to convey some dread, unspeakable meaning by looks, not words. Never have I seen so intense a concentration of meaning upon a human face as now on that of this poor distracted girl.

"You told him," I said, "you would not marry him, and then?"

Still she looked with the same intense expression, not speaking for a while. "Oh! I cannot, cannot tell you—but guess! Will you not guess, and save me from saying it in words?"

She had used no words to tell me, but her gaze upon me had already said too much. No! I could not so interpret her; I must put from me the suspicion of treachery and iniquity she thus raised in my mind. Sure, it was the distempered fancy of a sick girl! It could not be true!

She had stood up, and now was looking earnestly upon me, longing seemingly that I should take in the meaning her brain was bursting with, and which her lips dare not utter. I tried to divert her by speaking of her first mentioned delusion; even that was better, I thought, in its very impossibility than the suggestion which so many small converging trains of reasoning in my own mind were beginning insensibly to strengthen.

"Tell me, Miss Arden, who it was you saw standing by your bedside watching the effect of the draught. Was it a sleeping draught they gave you?"

"No," she said; "they gave me nothing to drink."

I looked at her face, the parted lips, and the vague horror in her eyes as she said this; and I thought to myself, "Now, surely this is madness!" And a deep pity came over me for her in her youth and innocence and sweet womanliness, all thus confounded and despoiled by insanity, and for her exquisite beauty; for even thus, in the distraction of her pale features and luminous eyes, there shone a beauty in her face so tender, so touching as, in my thought, passed all the beauty of most perfect womanhood.

She gazed fixedly at me, and I tried to recall her thoughts.

"Whom is it you mean when you say 'they' watched you? Whom do you call 'they'?"

"Gregory and the Italian doctor. And I heard what they said. They thought I was asleep, and they talked together in whispers. But I was not asleep; I was only benumbed by what they had done to me."

"Was your aunt not there?"

"It was very late. She had gone; the doctor told her to. He would stay on a little to watch by me, he said. My maid was in an armchair in the corner of the room. I heard them say she was asleep. Then they whispered together for a long time."

"And you could hear their whispering?" I asked. "Or perhaps you only fancied you did?"

"I heard it as distinctly as I can hear your voice now."

"But was it not in Italian they talked?"

"Yes; but I speak Italian too. We have spent so many winters in Italy. I speak it easily."

"And their talk together reached you?"

"Yes; and it was about the effect of the drug. My body was benumbed, I could hardly move; but in my sense of hearing there seemed to be all the life that had left my body. Each whispered word came with a crash of loudness through my ears; it was impossible not to hear. I was not made quite insensible; I was not as yet quite under the effect of the poison."

"Miss Arden! Surely not poison?"

"It was poison. I heard the doctor himself say it was poison."

"Did he speak of it so openly?"

"Yes, to Gregory; thinking I was already too far gone to hear. Ah! you little know what that Italian doctor is! A cold blooded wretch; Gregory's slave—less for gain than to have the chance of working out his terrible experiments in science on human beings. His pale face, and cold, cruel smile—oh! they are frightful!"

"But if you say they had given you nothing, how could they have poisoned you? Is it not an impossibility?"

She shook her head. "This is what I feared; you will not think it possible what I am going to tell you. It is a thing you cannot know of. The doctor, in his cunning, did not give me a poison draught to take, because he knew it would cause suspicion afterwards. Do you know that there are drugs which, laid on a wound, enter the blood and course through the veins, and more certainly kill the life than any poison draught?"

Great God! Could villainy so treacherous and cunning so devilish exist? Yes, I knew too well of this discovery of science, and how medicaments can thus be absorbed into the life blood of man, and thereby work with threefold their common potency. But what evidence could the poor, distracted girl have that this thing had been done to her? She answered my thought.

"I knew nothing then of all this. I did not know such a thing could be till I heard the Italian explain it to Gregory. With my own ears I heard him speak of this terrible thing. He told him he had sprinkled the bandages on my wounds with his drugs. They were even now being absorbed into my body. I should sleep on and die, he said. He spoke with no malice or hardness—in gentle tones. 'I have never before used so little,' he said, 'yet see how strong is the effect. She is insensible. Look!'

'th that he came to the bedside, as I lay benumbed, aised my eyelid and touched the eyeball with his finger. 'She feels nothing. See, she does not shrink, though I touch her eye! She hears nothing; she knows nothing. The spirit is already dead, only the forces of the material life resist a little longer. Strange, is it not, how the infirmity of the body can paralyze the spirit, and yet proceed itself in its existence, a life in death!' Gregory came near, and———"

"Stay, Miss Arden," I said, willing to catch at any hitch or improbability in her story, hoping still to resolve all she had told me to the distraction of a fevered dream. "You say they could touch your eyeball and you felt nothing; your sight must therefore have been paralyzed. How, then, could you see Gregory draw near?"

"I saw nothing," she said. "All around me was black night. My sense of sight was lost to me; it was only my hearing that was left. All senses but that one were benumbed, but that was doubly keen, so that each whispered word resounded like the shouting of men in a great hall, each footfall on the carpet was echoed loudly through the room, and every breath they drew was clearly audible to me. By my hearing it was I knew Gregory drew near; and he said, 'She will wake.' 'No,' the doctor answered, she will never wake again.'"

CHAPTER XX.

SYLVIA ARDEN'S ACCUSATION.

"MISS ARDEN," I said, "have you not perhaps unconsciously imagined this evil character you have given to the Italian doctor; this cold, calculating, scientific and horrible cruelty? You spoke just now of the man's motives as if he had put them into words; but he could not surely have expressed them in your hearing. How, then, could you guess them?"

"From Gregory. Do you not know him, and how openly he speaks out what he thinks—how cynical he is? I used to suppose he said these things to astonish me, to startle me, or perhaps to make me afraid of his power.

Nothing of the kind! They are Gregory's own thoughts, the telling of his own cruel soul."

Every word that Miss Arden uttered was corroborated by something I had seen or heard of in Gregory; and every sentence spoken, in her now quiet and sustained speech, removed me further from my first impression that she was speaking in distraction or delirium. Her picture of the Italian doctor was exact, with the sardonic smile, the cold, saturnine, malignant countenance that had given even me a shuddering and uncomfortable feeling as I had met him from time to time in the hall or on the stairs.

"Yes," she said, "I had heard his character from Gregory himself; and I knew how true it was when I heard him speak. As he spoke to Gregory he seemed to have put aside from him all feeling, all sympathy, all thought of the fearful cruelty and the fearful crime. He spoke with a slow, devilish conviction that his experiment would succeed,—that I should die; and he began to explain the whole action of the drug to Gregory. It was he only who spoke; Gregory listened. He told him how the poison could not fail, what its effects were, how they would begin; and he described the benumbing of the muscles, and the keenness of all the senses at first, which then would sink under a complete torpor, as he said mine had already sunk, to end in death."

The strangeness of her recital was again beginning to shake my newly formed belief in her sanity.

"But, Miss Arden," said I, "I myself know a little of the action of drugs. Every European living in the East has to study the thing. There is no known drug that could take effect precisely in this way."

"Perhaps if you know about drugs you may know this word that the doctor mentioned several times—*meconato*. Is it a known thing?"

"Yes; it is a very powerful drug. The deadliest and subtlest of poisons in skilful hands, the most innocent and inert with those who do not know its right use. Did he say he had used this drug?"

"He spoke of his having discovered the secret of combining it with a certain chemical that strengthened its properties tenfold, and yet altered them. Those were his own very words. I listened, lying there, to every one of them, horror-stricken to hear him tell of this fearful poison

he had given me. He spoke gloatingly of his great discovery in combining the two, how deadly, how secret, how for ever undiscoverable they were in combination."

She spoke now so calmly, so collectedly, so reasonably, that nothing but the strangeness of her story made me hesitate to accept it; hoping as I did against hope and reason that she had mistaken, or that she had dreamt it all in a mad dream and was still demented; and I tried to fortify my scepticism by raising fresh doubts.

"Did Gregory say nothing against this?"

"Nothing against the doing of it; but he was very angry with the doctor for his slowness. He reviled him savagely. He said he had bungled the matter; he wanted no experiments; he wanted the thing settled at once."

"The thing? What thing?"

"My murder," said the girl, looking at me with blanched face and eyes strained wide open.

Still the very horror of it all forced me to hesitate; and again I sought to shake her testimony by questions and objections.

"Did you hear the name of the other drug you have mentioned?"

She readily gave me the name of one which at the time of these occurrences was rarely used. It is even now, some years afterwards, little known except in professional circles that the union of this drug with that particular alkaloid of opium to which Miss Arden had given its Italian name forms the most potent, concentrated, and death-dealing narcotic when, applied hypodermically, that is, under the skin, or as the Italian doctor had, as she said, applied it to her, which is known in the whole range of toxicological science.

That Miss Arden could have become aware of this secret of science otherwise than as she told me it had come to her; that, for instance, she should have heard it mentioned, taken in the idea almost unconsciously, and then recalled it in a drug-intoxicated delirium was, it struck me, absolutely outside the limits of possibility. I had now tested her story in every way and in all its bearings. That Miss Arden was in her right senses and that she was the witness of truth, that this devilish thing had been done to her to her own knowledge, that she had herself listened to the methods and devices of these infamous men plotting against

her life; all this was in my mind now set beyond all possibility of question. I had no longer any doubts to interpose or any interruptions to make, and I listened continuously to Miss Arden's tale of the murderous treachery of her lover, and of how she had been enabled to save her life from the cruelty of these men that had come so near to triumph over their victim.

"I lay there," said Sylvia Arden, "as one already dead, having no power in me to move hand or foot, and the shadows of death had already gathered round me. All was black; I had no conscious sense of existence except in my mind, which was never more vigilant, and in the keenness of my hearing, so that every little word and every little sound in the room came to me tenfold loud, and I guessed its meaning with a sort of clairvoyance that I could not have used at other times. Thus, when Gregory was angry at the slow operation of the drug, and the doctor said nothing, I heard the unfolding and rustling of paper as loud nearly as the sound of hands clapped, and I knew what this meant. I knew it was the tacit reply of the Italian.

"'I am sorry,' said the doctor, after a long pause, 'you cannot trust to me enough to let this experiment follow its course; but if you will have it so, here is what will end everything in a few minutes.'

"I knew he had opened a paper pocket of the drug, and was about to apply it to my wounds.

"He came nearer and removed the bandages from my head, talking the while with the slow, unconcerned, pedantic inhumanity peculiar to himself.

"'Science,' said he, 'is humane, whenever it can be, and never more so than when it discovered, in my person, the admirable conjunction of these two drugs. If we are ever cruel, it is with a scientific, laudable curiosity as to nature's secret processes; but here there is not even a particle of so-called cruelty. The subject—I do not call her the patient, for she is already beyond the region of feeling—has already left behind her all the pains and penalties of human life. She is on the brink of annihilation.'

"There was a silence in the room, neither of the two men speaking for a space of time, and both I knew were watching me in my motionless trance. Their silent watching with the murderous intent to let me die, and the

darkness that shrouded me and that I knew would presently be the darkness of death, all this filled me with horror, and I made a very great effort, a desperate striving to rouse my body from its lethargy and to save myself from death; but it was in vain that my spirit called upon it to wake—it slept on inert. I knew that a single spoken word, a single movement almost, would suffice to call the sleeping servant to my side and save my life; but the effort was beyond me. All my will, all the energy of my soul, concentrated into the desire to stir but one hand's breadth, to utter but one word, availed nothing.

"'See,' said the doctor, 'how strange and how powerful is our science, and how subtle the power of this drug! I did but sprinkle, four hours ago, as much as would lie on the extreme point of a penknife, a quantity that the naked eye could hardly perceive, and see the effect; the body is inert, if it be not already dead, only the spirit lives on betwixt life and death, yet the remainder flame of life, having burnt to its last retreat, perhaps burns with a glow that never before was so strong or so conscious of its being.'

"'What do you mean?' Gregory hissed out the words with sudden savage eagerness.

"'I mean that the quantity of the drug I administered was purposely small. I intended to watch the effect. It has not killed, as I supposed it would not. I believed it might take many hours more to kill. Look at the face, it is not pale with death's pallor yet. This is not sleep either, for see how the eyes remain open, showing no sign of pain, only the spirit is not looking through them; the pulse beat is slow and quiet, and the breathing is as regular and easy as a sleeping child's. Yet this is not sleep that is on her, but a trance that the drug has thrown her into. Therefore, when I say that the remnant of life left to her burns with concentrated force and glow, I mean that some one of the senses is heightened at the expense of the others that are dead. If I mistake not, she hears us at this minute; she takes in every word we say.'

"'Great God! how horrible!'

"'Why so?' said the doctor calmly. 'It is only that the drug has caused what we call a temporary hyperæsthesia or heightening of the mental powers and, as I believe, of the hearing. It is in its nature to do so. I guess that she never heard before as she hears at this moment,

while her mind perhaps never perceived so quickly or reasoned so soundly.'

"'Let it end! Let it end!' said Gregory; 'I can bear it all, but not this!'

"'It is needless uneasiness you feel,' said the doctor very calmly; 'a merely superstitious fancy, for what she hears or how she judges us, or how she reproaches us for this, are things of no more account than a sentence written in the sea sand, which the next coming wave will obliterate. So will coming death presently blot out all memory of what we say, of what we have done, and all her present hate and all her present reproaches of us.'

"'But not for ever?' Gregory's whisper was so low that it but just reached me. 'Her testimony will be heard hereafter!'

"The doctor for only answer set himself to sprinkle the wound with more of the drug. I felt nothing, but I heard as a loud crackling the rustling of the paper he had already unfolded, as he now poured out the powdered drug from it, a sound which doubtless would have been quite inaudible to me at other times.

"I do not know if it was the sudden apprehension that all my hopes of escaping murder were gathered into this moment of time, and all my remaining strength concentrated into one last despairing effort, or whether a dose so weak as had been administered was beginning to lose its effect, but suddenly the power of movement responded, as it were, to the call I made upon it. The spell was off me; I could move my hands. I raised them to my head; I lifted myself up, and my own voice, in a long, loud, wailing cry, filled my ears.

"In that moment the whole house resounded with a tumult of sound as of an earthquake, or so it seemed to my sharpened hearing. I heard doors opened and shut with a noise like thunder, and loud, hurrying footsteps approaching, and I knew I was saved."

CHAPTER XXI.

CAPTAIN BEARCROFT'S PLANS.

"I SANK back," said Sylvia Arden, "dizzy and exhausted; but my sight at that moment was again dimly restored to me, and I saw my aunt and the maid standing at my bedside, and the figures of Gregory Morson and the doctor retreating from the room. I implored my aunt not to leave my side; but I could not say more. I was oppressed with fatigue and exhaustion, and the desire for sleep, and I slept for many hours. More I cannot say. I have seen the Italian doctor and Gregory Morson no more."

"And have you said nothing of all this to Lady Raby?" I asked.

"I did not dare to trust her with so awful a secret. She is nervous; her health is weak; she could not have borne it. I feared for her. I determined that I would tell no one till I could tell you. Advise me, Captain Bearcroft; think for me; and whatever you tell me to do, I will obey you in."

So spoke Sylvia Arden; and we remained for a little space silent, she breathlessly watching my face for an indication of how her narrative had affected me, I slowly endeavoring to accommodate my mental vision to this new aspect of affairs.

"Miss Arden, tell me, for you must know, what is this man who has conspired so foully against you? Is he a criminal, or is he a maniac?"

For the first time during this interview her face expressed doubt and hesitation. She gave me no answer for a time. "I cannot tell," she said at last. "I cannot understand him."

"Surely he can have no motive, not even the shadow of a motive, for this attempt against you? Then he is a lunatic."

She shook her head.

"But even if your rejection of him had prompted him

to revenge—stinging his soul with the despair of losing you——"

"You mistake him utterly," she said. "He never—he never cared for me from the first."

I remembered that Gregory himself, with what I had thought a most offensive cynicism, had told me this very thing.

"Then you leave him without any motive for this crime, without even the motive that a madman might consider a motive."

"He has a motive," said Miss Arden gravely and very positively; "one so mean, so miserable, so infamous that I dare hardly put it into words."

"He could surely have had no mercenary interest? Do not suggest that!"

"I have been hoping that perhaps it is insanity that leads him to consider he had an interest in my death."

"But he has absolutely none," I said quickly, and willing to shut out at least this possibility. "He could only have one if he inherited it from you of right, and you know he does not do that."

"He does," said Miss Arden.

"Why," said I "surely you are mistaken in that. It is your only brother, Colonel Arden, who would naturally be your heir. Morson himself told me so."

"That is unfortunately not so. My mother was an heiress; her estate passes after me to her next nearest relation, Gregory Morson; if he dies before me, I inherit from him."

"Then," said I, "Gregory purposely misinformed me." I remembered the talk I had had with him, and how each word he had spoken had purposely and cunningly instilled some corroboration of the suspicion that he had perceived had formed itself in my mind of Colonel Arden. One important statement of his had already proved itself to be false, on Lady Raby's authority; and now came disproof of the crowning lie he had told me in order to weight the charge against the girl's brother into downright assurance.

Yet even in these falsehoods I could read the foolish cunning of a madman rather than the measured treachery of a sane criminal, and I read his insanity, too, in his attaching any importance to the obtaining possession, through crime or otherwise, of Miss Arden's barren and worthless acres.

If I had wrongly suspected Colonel Arden of complicity in the crime on Scarfell Chace, it followed that its authorship could belong to no one but to him who had within a day prompted a still fouler and more treacherous murder. The last shred of hope I had entertained that the attack upon Miss Arden had in truth been nothing but a highway robbery, with attempt at murder, had now quite left me. He who could plan one murder, who had used such pains to mislead me, who had taken no steps to trace the assault upon the Chace home to its authors, was too evidently privy to this attempted crime as well. Did his victim suspect this? I looked at her. She was gazing upon my face, and she seemed to read my thoughts, as more than once she had shown her power to do.

"Captain Bearcroft, I know well now that it was at Gregory's orders I was fired upon in Scarfell Chace."

The last shred of doubt was gone from me. Every separate piece of evidence had now joined to point to Gregory Morson as the only instigator of these crimes. Nothing was wanting to make his action that of an ordinary vulgar criminal, nothing but a cause sufficient to induce him to their commission, for I could not suppose that the motive alleged by Miss Arden for his desperate malignity towards her could have sway with any sane man. I must, then, consider him to be mad, and to be possessed with a homicidal mania, and the whole tenor of his conversation pointed to this. Assuming this, it was enough that the woman he was to marry should throw him over, to determine his distempered brain to plot revenge and even murder against her.

It seemed clear to me on every ground that I must consider Gregory Morson no otherwise than as a maniac; that I had to make my account to deal with a maniac of the most determined and cunning kind—one also who, by reason of the influence he had acquired over the people surrounding him, was of exceptional power for mischief.

The point for me to settle at once was what immediate action was to be taken to save Miss Arden from further attempts upon her life, open or insidious. As a first step it would be necessary for me to denounce Gregory Morson to Colonel Arden on his return from London, and to put the rest of the guests on their guard against Morson as a dangerous lunatic. I had then to consider what I would

do to secure the maniac himself, and by what steps I could obtain the arrest of the Italian doctor and the two men I had seen upon the hill, as to one of whom at least, the actual intending assassin, I had obtained circumstantial evidence of the most satisfactorily damning kind. These two villains, at least, I was resolved to bring to justice, and to condign punishment for their murderous cruelty.

Under any ordinary circumstances, and in any ordinary place, my course would have been obvious I should have nothing to do but to call in the assistance of the law and let it take its course. At Scarfell Chace this was impossible. All issues from the place were closed, every manservant was a foreigner, ignorant of any law but that of an insane master, and trembling at his slightest command. It seemed an incredible thing that in any corner of this kingdom, however remote, and in this century of settled order and respectability, such a thing could be as that a man with the full use of his limbs and his brain should have to take counsel with himself how to communicate with the officers of the law, put them upon the track of the crime, and invoke their protection for the victim of that crime, but so it was; and it is perhaps a testimony to the masterfulness and sufficiency of Gregory Morson that the full monstrosity of his outrage upon law and order had never come quite fully home to me or caused me the feeling of indignation mingled with helplessness that it did now.

I must now set my own sane wits against Gregory Morson's insane cunning, and break through the lines that he had so diligently woven round his domain.

I resolved to escape from this prison, and return with a magistrate's warrant and a sufficient number of constables for its execution. I thought at first of departing, as I had come, by a fisherman's boat, but I reflected that I might wait a whole day before I saw one near enough to signal to, and that even if I did, so bad was the reputation of the Chace, the crew might fear to come ashore on the invitation of any denizen of the place. I thought of climbing the hills to the north of the Chace, but I am not much of a cragsman, and they are steep and difficult. I knew no certain pass across them, and I might spend the whole day in finding one and traveling along it. Apart from which, the scarped hillsides were in full view from the house and its neighborhood. As a last and rather des-

perate resource, there was the river. If it came to the worst, I thought, I could choose the smoothest bit of the current and cross it by swimming. While I was contemplating this not very pleasant expedient, I remembered my conversation with Colonel Arden and his mention of the ferry boat kept hidden in a hole of the rocks near the church on the hither side of the stream. I resolved to lose no time in making my way to the river and finding this boat. In the meantime Miss Arden had been intently watching my face. She could, I think, to some extent follow the workings of my mind. She said—

"I see that you have determined on what you mean to do, but you make me afraid."

"That is not like you, Miss Arden; I thought nothing could do that!"

"Yes, I am afraid," she said simply, "and on your account. You are going into greater danger than you think. You little guess how terrible Gregory can be. Yes, I fear for you."

I told her my plans; I told her that I could treat his conduct no otherwise than as that of a lunatic; that I was resolved to speak out clearly to her brother when he came back.

She shook her head. "You will find it very hard to persuade him. He is blind about Gregory."

"And to the other guests."

She blushed to the roots of her hair. "Must my story be made public?"

I remembered what Lady Raby had said about the importance, in the case of a young girl like Miss Arden, of her name not being on men's or women's lips. Yet how could it be avoided? She was not safe, I told her, here at the Towers, under the same roof with a dangerous lunatic.

Miss Arden's comment on this struck me.

"Yes," she said, "he is dangerous; he is very dangerous and very malignant, but do not think him a lunatic. It is true, I have doubted, so terrible are his doings; but no, he is not mad."

I could not wait to discuss this point. "I only know," I said, "that he has sought your life, and I cannot let you stay here in his house."

Then I told her of my intention shortly. I could see she had some strong objection to it, and I waited to hear

her express it, but she did not. She restrained the words that were on her lips.

"No,—I will place myself unreservedly in your hands. If you think my being talked about can't be helped, then let it be so."

I stopped to reflect. "If you thought there was any use in my speaking to Colonel Arden, and I could induce him to think with me, he and I together could easily secure Gregory and the Italian, and make the servants do as we pleased; but if your brother should take Gregory's side, of course that would be impossible. Then, again, he is away; there is no time to lose, and I must act at once."

She seemed to find some cause for fear in my proposal to consult with her brother. "No, do not that!" she cried. "It is not on John's account. He is loyal, and perhaps he could not fail to be convinced, if he knew everything;—it is not because of that, but——" she hesitated, "because of the great danger. You don't know Gregory's resources. You cannot take him by surprise, do what you will. As long as he knows you and John have not confided in each other, he knows he is safe."

I remembered Morson's uneasiness the night before as Colonel Arden and I had talked together, and I was struck by Miss Arden's shrewd guess.

"He knows," she said, "that John and you cannot meet to-day, and so far he feels he is safe from discovery for the time."

"For the time, yes; but surely he must guess, he must know, that it is only for the very shortest time. You are right in supposing he does not want your brother and me to confide in one another. He tried hard to interrupt us last night, and at last he managed to, but he can't suppose we shall never meet and talk of him. Therefore he must know he has only a short respite before his crime finds him out. He knows that a word from you, or Lady Raby, or Colonel Arden would be enough to shew me how he has tried to throw me off the scent, to expose the falseness of what he has told me. Why," I said, "he must know that at this moment I am with you."

"Can he know that?" she said, and as she spoke there came into her eyes a new look,—one I had not seen before. Almost till now she had shown no symptom of personal fear. This fearlessness in a young girl threatened with

imminent and mysterious death had astonished me beyond words to express; and yet now, when there was less need, I supposed, than before for fear, when she had persuaded me of the truth of her story, and when I could promise her succor and a near chance of escape from her persecutor, some hidden cause for apprehension seemed to oppress her. She looked at me with terrified, haggard eyes, trembling.

"Can he know that you are here now?" she said. Her gaze went round the room. "Oh, Captain Bearcroft, even now you do not know all that this man can do and will dare! Do you not see that your life is in his hands while you stay in this house?"

"My life! But it is yours that concerns me. If I thought that by going I left you unprotected, I would not go."

She considered a little, and then spoke very eagerly. "No," she said, "there is no danger for me whatever. I shall not stir from this room. I shall not be alone and unprotected for one moment, my aunt and my maid will be here. I shall be quite safe,—perfectly safe. You must go, you must go immediately—don't you think so?—and then you will come back this very night, perhaps, with people, and open the way for us to escape."

There was still the same look and manner of nervous apprehension.

I looked in the girl's face and smiled on her a little. "Why," I said, "I really believe, Miss Arden, that you, who have been so brave about yourself, are actually beginning to be afraid for me, a mere stranger to you."

"No," she said, "I don't think I am really afraid at all —about you. How could I be? But you will go at once, please, will you not?"

CHAPTER XXII.

SYLVIA ARDEN.

MISS ARDEN and I agreed that it would be better to hold back from Lady Raby the tale of Gregory Morson's villainy or lunacy. She was an invalid, and, though a woman of

shrewd sense and far from being a nervous or timid one, her age and her ill-health warned us not rashly to make her acquainted with the appalling conduct and designs of her relative.

When she came back into the room, therefore, I took upon myself to explain to her so much as I thought it expedient she should know of my plans, and to advise her as to what she should do till my return. For the present, and until she and her niece should be able quietly to leave Scarfell Chace, I had resolved to do nothing to bring Miss Arden's name forward. My plan now was to find the nearest magistrate and to tell him in confidence so much as would induce him to stir vigorously in protection of the two ladies. The head-quarters of the police for the county are at a town not ten miles away from the place where I expected to cross the river. My family had formerly been well acquainted with the magistrate; as a boy, I myself had known him, and I had little doubt but that he would accept my evidence unhesitatingly. I expected him to send me in his carriage to the county town, and thus get word of mouth with the Chief Constable with very little delay, and probably induce this official at once to send a sufficient body of police to force Gregory Morson's hand. I said nothing to Lady Raby of the terrible crimes we had traced to him. I undertook that in a few hours a carriage should be at the Towers to carry her and her niece away; and I promised that Morson should offer no opposition whatever to their departure. I asked her for the present to seek to know no further, and to trust to my care for her and Miss Arden. She looked enquiringly at her niece, and seeing that there was a full understanding between us, and that the girl was full of hope and resolution, she was contented.

"My dear," said the old lady, "I want nothing better than that you and Captain Bearcroft should be agreed."

So I laid my plans, forgetting, however, that if my story had been accepted by the officers of the law and legal proceedings set in motion, so principal a witness as Miss Arden would never have been allowed to depart. I had, however, not only not taken this point into consideration, but I had left out of account another very important factor. With my thoughts running on the lunacy of Gregory Morson, I had done no sort of justice to his sagacity, his

prevision, and his ability to thwart the schemes I was forming against him. It is not exaggeration, I think, to say that, knowing of my interview with Miss Arden, he exactly guessed what she had communicated to me; that he exactly foresaw what action I should take in consequence; and, clearly perceiving that that action must be counteracted for his own safety, and under penalty of seeing the whole fabric of his dark designs fall to the ground, he had already taken summary and effectual measures to prevent my putting my plans against him into execution.

What Gregory Morson's measures were, the reader shall presently learn. Suffice it to say that I never crossed the river, or had word of a magistrate, or was able to put in motion any legal machinery whatever for the hindrance of this man's fiendish machinations. Thus has it been with me throughout the course of these strange events; what I have most surely purposed to do, that have I invariably failed to accomplish; my speculations as to motives and my forecasts as to events have most of them proved erroneous; my efforts on behalf of others have for the most part turned out unavailing; and the accomplishment of the destiny of the persons with whom I had been brought into contact at Scarfell Chace has been fulfilled by means of which I myself have been the blind and mostly the unwilling instrument.

I rose to take leave of the two ladies. I calculated that in four hours, at longest, I should return to them and effect their release from Scarfell Towers without the disagreeable collision which Lady Raby so dreaded with Gregory Morson.

For a moment I retained Sylvia Arden's hand in mine and looked into her eyes. The horrified expression that I had seen in them as she entered the room so short a time before had departed; the pallor, the tragic air, the startled look, as of one who has encountered a grizzly shape from beyond the tomb—all that had alarmed me for her reason itself, had departed and given place to girlish confidence, and trustfulness, and cheerfulness. I saw that with one of the sudden revolutions of mood which were in her nature, she had quite shaken off the heavy load of her apprehensions and her horror. The color had come back to her cheek, the soft light to her eyes, the girlish smile to her lips. I recalled to myself how, through all the various

emotions naturally aroused in a most sensitive woman's nature by her narration of the story of this fiendish crime against her, her courage had never once been shaken on her own account. She had looked again, indeed, with appalled and horrified eyes upon what her speech to me so forcibly recalled to her, for her humanity shrank in natural abhorrence from the devilish inhumanity of such treachery as Gregory Morson's, but never once with fear-shaken eyes. The nobility in her would not condescend to the baseness of fear; her fortitude, fearing to alarm and unnerve and hurt her aunt, had resisted the temptation to entrust to her the terrible secret. Once only had she been moved by fear, as I could see—it was when I, who was all but a stranger to her, towards whom she could be moved by no feeling but of gratitude for my proffered help, had seemed to her to stand in some personal danger. Then, for a moment, she had shown the fearfulness of a timid woman. Such fortitude in a man would have touched me, for it is a quality that to see in others has always been an inexpressible delight to me; but in a woman so sweet and soft and innocent as Sylvia Arden, could it do less than stir and thrill me to the very heart?

I could do nothing but dwell upon this rare thing, marveling how, through all the terrible ghastliness of what she had undergone, she had maintained this brave and constant spirit. That she was shocked, horrified, nerve-shaken, and unstrung by contact with the cruelty and baseness of the traitorous act against her was true, but in all her emotion, in all that had so shaken her weak woman's nature was not one thrill—not one shadow, of base fear.

She was a very brave woman: this had always been the predominating impression in me, almost from my very first meeting with her near the ruined church, when the charm of her girlish gentleness was still upon me. When I had seen her struck down and slowly regaining consciousness from the stroke of her assailant, that which had at once so surprised me in her, so touched me, and so won me to her, was her courage. What can be fairer or nobler than this, that a woman should possess all a woman's sweet compliant softness and, behind it, the resolute soul to endure and the fearless spirit to dare?

So it was that looking upon Sylvia Arden's face, and its beauty that had now been so fully bared and revealed by

the stress of sorrowful emotion within her, in this very moment when my thoughts were carried a hundred ways by designs of a vengeance against her enemy, protection for her endangered life, and pity for her weakness and innocence, I yet loved her with all the force and passion of my soul.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ITALIAN DOCTOR.

I WENT from Lady Raby's room with a comparatively light heart. The issue before me was simpler than I had imagined. If my vague suspicions as to Gregory Morson had been confirmed into a certainty more terrible than my worst apprehensions, a new light had been thrown upon the conduct of Colonel Arden, and I was rejoiced to know that I could now look upon him as kindly as my instinctive sympathy towards the man had already drawn me to regard him. Yet this was not enough to account for the new delight that suddenly had sprung up within me, that made me walk, and breathe, and think, and feel, with a renewal of the pleasure of mere life, as one who has struggled onwards with leaden steps, heavily burdened, and is suddenly lightened of his burden. This burden that had so oppressed me, that I had not ventured to name to myself, was the thought that Sylvia Arden was bound by love to this man who was plotting against her life. Now an unlooked-for revelation had come. With her own lips she had declared that she was not bound; she was free. The burden was lifted, and I could dare tell myself that I loved this woman with all my soul, and perhaps could soon tell this to herself.

A new strength was in me, a new capacity to think, to act, to endure. All that was before me to go through with this day mapped itself out in my thoughts. I considered and weighed and thought over each successive step I was to take for Miss Arden's deliverance with a carefulness that I had never dreamt of using when I had embarked upon adventures that concerned myself alone.

I looked at my watch, and found to my surprise that

nearly four hours had elapsed since I had entered Lady Raby's rooms. It was long past the hour of lunch, but that mattered less, as the whole party, including, as I had supposed, our host, had set out shortly after breakfast for a driving expedition through the hills, and had not meant to lunch at home. It would be some hours before I could return, and I had a walk of several miles before me. Though I intended, if I could, to cross the river by the boat which Colonel Arden had spoken to me about, I had very little hope of finding it; nor did I think it likely, if I did find it, that I could use it and the ferry chain he had spoken of single-handed. It was probable, therefore, that I should in the end have to cross the river by swimming. I shuddered to think of my failing, of an under-current perhaps carrying me down, or, as was more probable, of my reaching the further bank perished with cold, exhausted, and unable to go a step further. What would Lady Raby and Miss Arden do, waiting through the long hours in an agony of expectation, when I never came; despairing, helpless, in Gregory Morson's hands?

Yet I did not for one moment doubt that I could cross the river, even without the help of a boat. I am not a bad swimmer, and have been forced to get over streams stronger and broader than this one. It is not so difficult a matter as it may seem to those who have not tried. A man must calculate how far down the current will carry him, and choose an easy landing, so that when at last he has swum across, tired, it may be, with his efforts, chilled with the cold, and breathless from the foam and spray of the river breakers, he may not have a further struggle, beyond his strength, to win to dry land. He must not fight against the strength of the current where it is resistless, and he must put out his full strength only in the slacker streams. These are the main points. I thought it out, and knew it was a long and tiring operation, but not, I believed, a very risky one. What I feared was to be chilled by the coldness of the water, swollen as it now was by the melting of snow in the hills, and to reach the other bank half fainting perhaps and incapable of the long walk there would still be before me.

I have lived much among the Spaniards of South America, and I have come to agree with them in their belief that to an ordinarily abstemious man, alcoholic spirit is as a staff

to him who is about to undergo great fatigue. I have seen a native, unfortified by food, go forth in the strength of one large draught of brandy, and easily outlast on an arduous journey the well-fed European who stops a dozen times by the way to eat and drink and rest.

Knowing by experience the efficacy of spirits so used, I resolved to prepare myself in this way for what might turn out, on this midwinter day, a rather formidable task. I went to the dining-room in search of brandy. On the sideboard I could see no decanters either of wine or spirits, and as I was too much hurried to ring for the servants, I went to the library, which was likewise Morson's writing-room, where, too, we men met to smoke and talk, and where I remembered there always stood a case of spirits.

The library is an old-fashioned apartment at the base of one of the already mentioned four towers of the house. The narrow loopholes preserved from ancient days in the lower portions of the three other towers had been replaced in this one by a large bay, and the room is lighted by stone mullioned windows in its recess. Across the recess thus formed curtains can be drawn. I went into the room, found the spirit case, and pouring myself out a small wineglassful of brandy, drank it off. I then bethought myself of my spirit-flask, and resolved to fetch and refill it and carry it with me. After swimming the river, I should certainly want it to put life and warmth into me. As I turned to go, I caught sight of Morson's revolver lying upon the mantel-shelf. It served to remind me of my previous conjecture that bad characters existed upon the Chace. What if I were stopped by one of them on my way to the river? What if I were attacked? My mission would be summarily ended, and what might not be Sylvia Arden's fate? I knew now what Morson was, and I thought it extremely probable that if he had guessed, as it was not unlikely he would, that Miss Arden had confided in me, and that I should take some measures for her succor, he would employ some treacherous action against me. I would borrow his revolver, and I resolved to pass warily along the Chace to the river. It was a handsome, serviceable weapon, the regulation cavalry arm, silver-mounted. It was unloaded, but a box of cartridges stood on the mantel-piece by its side. Nine men out of ten who love arms would, I fancy, do exactly what I did with a weapon they had not handled

before. Finding the five chambers empty, I raised the pistol, pointing it towards the light, and aimed at an imaginary enemy in the window. I drew the trigger and snapped the lock loudly.

Much to my surprise, a person started from behind the curtain half drawn across the embrasure of the window I was aiming towards, with every symptom of trepidation, holding out his hands as if in terrified entreaty.

It was the Italian doctor.

"What the devil are you doing here," I asked.

He was pale with fear, and muttered some words I could not understand. He made some sort of weak attempt to escape from the room. It was evident the man was in actual fear of his life. It was some while before I guessed that he must have supposed I had made a real attempt to shoot him, and my rough words, I suppose, had little in them to reassure him.

I stepped between him and the door, the Italian stood still, nervous, irresolute, white with terror. I remembered all Miss Arden had told me of the man's villainy, and forgetting for a moment that I was in law-abiding England, and that there were better ways to reach the scoundrel, the impulse was strong upon me to slay this cruel minister of a vile crime; but I governed and subdued the impulse. I reflected that I must not only do nothing to punish the wretch, but in Miss Arden's own interest I must do nothing even to let him suspect that I knew anything against him. It was hard to dissemble; I had to do great violence to myself; but I succeeded. I let neither my words nor my manner betray me. If he guessed what I knew and what were my intentions, Sylvia Arden was, I felt sure, lost.

"Doctor," I said in my gentlest voice, "I must apologize to you. I had not the remotest notion you were there; you were behind the curtain and I could not see you. But," I said, "see, the pistol is not loaded."

As I spoke, I unlocked the weapon and showed him the empty breech, and proceeded to fill the chambers with cartridges.

"I had never had this pistol in my hand before," I said, "and I was only trying the aim."

The Italian came forward, reassured no doubt, bowing with hypocrite lip-motions, glancing sidelong at me, as fearing to meet my gaze, and with eyes that showed the whites like a vicious horse.

"You are nervous, I see," said I.

He found his voice at last, but through his pale lips his words came weakly, and he shivered as he spoke, as if from cold.

"Yes, I am nervous; I cannot look unnerved upon death. I am too—tender-hearted."

"And you a doctor! That is curious. Is it the death of others that affects you, or only the possibility of your own?"

As I spoke I looked into his currish eyes, fingering the revolver the while, cocking and uncocking the hammer with a click, and thinking how gladly I could take his punishment into my own hands. Perhaps my scrutiny into his face was harder and more cold-blooded than I meant, for the man writhed and trembled under my eyes. Certainly he was a cur and a coward. He found his voice, after a little contest with his nervousness, turning and twisting his body with a show of deprecation that was most offensive to me, and wringing his hands like an hysterical woman. His face, habitually pale, was now, from 's recent terror, almost of a chalky white. I found great culty in hiding from him my loathing.

"I was reading," he said. "Look! here is my book, if you doubt it."

"Doubt it! Why should I doubt it?" I asked, trying my best to smile upon the man.

"And I saw you come in, and you poured out a glass of wine——"

"Of brandy."

"Indeed! of brandy, and you drank it. Yes, you drank it all off."

"Naturally I drank it. What else should I have poured it out for?" Was the man a fool, or too nervous to talk sense? I wanted to leave him with an impression that I suspected nothing, and I spoke on.

"I am going," I said, "on to the Chace, and as Mr. Morson tells me there are bad characters about, I take this with me," showing him the revolver. The man's face was hateful to me; there was a damnable malignity in it which I could hardly look upon with patience, and he was regarding me now with an odd, almost impertinent, curiosity.

"You will hardly need it, Captain Bearcroft," he said, and still his lips were contorted into the sinister smile

which had offended me, even before Miss Arden had told me anything.

"I may, or I may not need it."

"I hardly think you will go very far on the Chace to-day," still smiling and rubbing his hands in a deprecating way.

"You think so? Why?"

"It is late; you have little time before you."

"Late! Why, it is hardly past two."

"You have very little time left before you."

I looked at him, not seeing his drift. Still he smiled with his loathsome, deprecating smile, contorting his limbs and his features most hatefully. Then he shrugged his shoulders and said no more, but still his eyes were on me, watching me.

I remembered that in a sense he was right; I had but little daylight for all I meant to do that day, and I turned to go upstairs to fetch my flask and to fill it with brandy. I counted the hours till I should return and see the constable's hand-cuffs slipped over the wrists of this arch villain. There was a rare elation in my spirits; the task before me seemed light and easy now; and I was possessed of a clairvoyant prevision, so only can I describe it, as to every step I was to take, every word I was to speak; it all came clear and vivid to my fancy. As I foresaw it all in my mind's eye, even the villain himself seemed to lose his repulsiveness, or rather my fear of him on Sylvia Arden's account grew less, I felt so sure of triumphing over his and over Morson's machinations.

I little guessed that these two men had already set their net, and that, unknown to myself, I was already caught in its meshes.

I had wasted more precious time with the man than I had meant, yet not perhaps, I thought, wholly wasted either; for I conceived I had succeeded in lulling any suspicions that might have been aroused in his mind.

I left the library and went up to my room to fetch the flask. I was a little time finding it, and when I did find it, it was lying where I had first sought it. I could not but stop to reflect upon the oddness of this, and to consider how it had happened that I should have overlooked it. As I stood still for a moment, the room seemed to grow darker. I thought the weather must have turned gloomy, but glancing at the window I saw there was no

change ; the trees still cast pale shadows from the wintry sun. This, too, struck me as singular.

There was an odd confusion in my mind, a rush of ideas that hindered connected thought. I had to stand still to consider if I had everything I required. The flask that I was to fill, where was it? It was in my hand. The revolver that I was to take with me, had I left it in the library or had I brought it with me? I could not remember. I felt the pocket of my coat—it was inside. The clairvoyance, the vividness of thought that I fancied I possessed a few moments before, was still present with me, but it was a clairvoyance that affected remote objects and, as it were, abstract ideas ; it was like that which comes to us in a vivid dream. There were the quick-thronging fancies of a dream, but, as in dreams, it was only with an effort that I could control thoughts of the immediate present, or bring facts to my memory.

What was it that was on me? Never had I felt anything like this before. I was sure it was a passing giddiness, yet I could think of no cause for it, near or far off. I had no time to lose, that was certain. I hastened downstairs. I must fill the flask and depart.

As I descended the stairs the light seemed to fail more and more. I almost groped in darkness for the library door.

I entered. The Italian doctor was still standing by the window, and as I opened the door he advanced towards me. He spoke when he came close up. I could but just see the motion of his bloodless lips in the darkness, but I heard his voice with unusual distinctness. In the dimness of the room nought was clearly visible to me now but the pale, still smiling face of this man. It was as an unearthly thing to me, it was before me as a white disc hung against the darkness ; and this darkness rapidly grew deeper. Of nothing else was I conscious, of no sound and of no sight, for he spoke but a sentence and that of no import, only the white face, hung before me as a picture on a dark wall, contorted with its vile hypocritical smile. Then I knew he had triumphed over me ; I had drunk the poisoned liquor the villain had set for me. But by this I was helpless ; a deeper night seemed to come before my eyes ; I seemed to slide gradually and slowly down, deep down, into the nothingness of night and oblivion.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH.

I KNOW nothing of how long I lay there, or what was done to me. When I woke, it was not to actual waking consciousness, it was to the consciousness that I was in a dream. As sometimes between sleeping and waking we have vivid dream fancies which yet we partly suspect to be nothing but figments of the brain, so did I wake to the imagination that I was living through events which ever and anon I told myself were phantasms only. Everything that had so recently occurred, everything up to the moment when I formed the intention to seek assistance from across the river, was within my knowledge: Sylvia Arden's danger, Morson's treachery against her, the urgent necessity for help from outside. I had set out, so it seemed to me; I had passed the ruined church; I had reached the river. For what seemed an interminable period I had searched in vain beneath the cliffs for the boat. Then I had stood at the edge of the stream. The torrent was in full flood, turbulent at my feet; the cold wind blew strongly down its course from the mountains, carrying into my face spray from the broken waves, and to my nostrils the rank smell of flood water. I chose my place to cross; I plunged in and swam.

My struggle with the torrent lasted long. Now I was turned round and twisted from my course in a whirlpool; now sucked below the current and half choked by the muddy water; now I was carried, unable to resist, towards the bank I had left and flung against a half-sunken rock; now my strength was rapidly failing, and I could fight no more. And all the while a fearful din of contending waters was in my ears. Then, in my fancy, I was prevailing against the current's force, my knees touched the ground, I was in shoaling water, my outstretched hands gripped the jutting rocks, and I dragged myself painfully from the stream and fell forward upon dry land.

I was exhausted to near fainting, weak as a child, but not insensible. The rush of waves breaking over the rocky river-bed was louder than ever, and now it seemed as if I was surrounded by a shouting multitude. Men's voices mingled with the roar of the breakers, and presently the voices grew articulate, while the thunder of other sounds grew distant and grew less.

I distinguished the deep voice of Morson, the smoother tones of the Italian; then I woke to the consciousness of my actual situation. I had only dreamed. I had never passed from the house; I had crossed no river. My memory went back at a bound to the moment when I had drunk the poisoned draught; to when I had seen the evil eyes of the Italian fixed upon me, and had not guessed what his watching meant. The struggle through the waters of the river was only the dream transfigurement of the struggle in me between life and death. The poison had torn and rended the life within me, and I had hardly won through the struggle to recovery.

I knew it all now. The two villains had not dared to let me go forth to publish their crime and deliver their victim. They had drugged me with some form of that narcotic poison under which Sylvia Arden had already lain enthralled and come so near to her death. Its effects upon me were just such as she had told me of. I lay now, as she had lain, with every sense in abeyance but that of hearing, darkness before my eyes, and no power to stir hand or foot, no feeling in all my body, no knowledge of where I was or how I lay. Whether it was still day or if night had come, to me it mattered nothing, so black a night was spread around me. Yet my mind was never so wakeful; the understanding part of me was clairvoyant beyond my experience, as it had been already with me just before the drug had begun to take its full effect; and, what was stranger, the natural apprehension of my danger did not affect me. The horror that I was helpless in the presence and in the power of two men who were resolved upon taking my life was perceptible to me as a horror, but it was an abstract horror only; it did not touch me closely. The drug had benumbed all natural fear of death, all natural striving to preserve my life, as it had benumbed all motion of my limbs. I knew these murderers were here, and I did not fear them; the thought of them was nowise

horrible or fearful to me. I was indifferent, as we are in dreams when we stand in imminent peril and yet feel no sense of peril.

They spoke, no doubt, in low tones, but their voices came redoubled to my ears; in whispers even sometimes, as I now am certain; for now and again, when they spoke of things against my life that to be overheard by an eavesdropper would have been death to them by the law, their voices sounded in my ears—so did my drug-distempered fancy liken the sound—as the loud hissing of serpents that filled all the air, and yet the sound resolved itself to my ears into articulate human speech.

"He drank," said the doctor, "too little of my drug, but it was enough to overcome him for the time."

"Then he will not die?" said Gregory Morson.

The words came in a whisper, but made overpoweringly loud through my sharpened hearing, I tried to distinguish any accent of pity or remorse, but I could not.

"No, he will not die; he has been near to death. It was curious, before you came in, to watch the strong fight in him between life and death. He has passed through it, and even now he is coming back to life."

"He hears us, then, as the girl did?"

Morson's whisper came to my ears raised to almost a shriek. The doctor's answer must have been an assenting nod, for I heard nothing.

"But that is an awful thought! Don't you see yourself, you damned, cold-blooded villain, that it is an awful thing that my own friend should lie there, brought to death by my doing, helpless to resist, and reproaching me in his heart with my treachery?"

Again no answer, but in the pause I could imagine the cold smile and the accustomed cynical shrug of the shoulders. Then the Italian spoke—

"The dying and the dead are as one."

"But he is not dying, you say; he is recovering."

"I wait your orders only, and he will not recover."

"You fool! Am I to commit murder upon murder on him, because you have bungled and your drugs are weak?"

"A strong man may take two stabs to slay him. You have invoked science to help you, Mr. Morson, and science can only work in its own way. Had I put more of my drug into the brandy, he would have noticed its taste. He

drank but little, and yet that little was enough to bring a strong man down to this; see how the teeth are still clenched and the lips set. Now I must bring about the end otherwise than by a draught. With this hollow needle —thus—I pierce the skin of his wrist; I inject hardly more than a drop of the poison into the blood, and already, while I speak, the liquid is divided infinitesimally and courses through every vein and artery. It is done! You are freed from him. Look upon him now as dead already. See, I withdraw the needle, and not a mark shows where I have stabbed him with a weapon deadlier than any stiletto!"

I had felt nothing, and I knew nothing of what the Italian, in the cold, leisurely exposition of his scientific cruelty, said he was doing. Presently, however, I perceived that a wave, as it were, was passing along the whole current of my life-blood, a fluctuation that seemed to carry with it a warm, tingling sensation to the furthest extremities of my body. With this came a renewed lightening of my whole being, a strengthening and refreshing of the life within me, and again a redoubling of that singular clairvoyance of the perceptive faculties which I had noticed soon after I had first drunk of the poison. And still I had no fear; still there was in me a perfect apathy and indifference to the near-coming death—strangely so, I could not but think, for never had the lamp of life burned with such strength and clarity, never had the joy of mere living been so present within me as now, when certainly I was gliding along the smooth rush of waters that was hurrying me to the torrent's brink, where all existence would end.

"Leave us!" cried Morson; "your work is done, and may God curse you for having done it!"

The Italian doctor said no word, and I heard his departing footsteps across the floor; I heard the door open, and I heard it close again. There was silence in the room; then Gregory Morson spoke.

"Bearcroft, you are conscious; you know what has been done to you. You know you are being done to death by me, and you know why it is. I warned you that a man could not safely come between me and my purpose. You have tried to interfere with me, and to save the woman I had doomed to die. It has availed nothing for her; and to you it is bringing death."

There came another long pause, and it was filled for me by the dream-fancy, the dream-thought, that it was in company with Sylvia Arden I was being carried swiftly down the smooth current that led to death. It was with no manner of regret that I dwelt on this thought. I felt no compassion, no sorrow for myself, nor even for the woman I loved. They who arrive so near to inevitable death as I had come, regard life and its ending face to face and in their true aspects. The glamour upon life and upon the world has gone for them. When they have once been drawn into the whirlpool of death, they have no wish for themselves or for them they love best to escape back upon the troubled sea of life.

Life was no longer sweet or desirable, yet it was still strong in me. The triumph of my enemy over me stirred my anger, and in the new energy within me I felt strong to rise and, through the darkness that was around me, to seize him by the throat and strangle the murderer with my hands.

All my body seemed to myself to sway to and fro and to be convulsed by the huge effort I was making. In truth, I moved no smallest fraction of an inch. I knew it by Morson's words that interrupted me in the very climax of my imagined struggle with the apathy of coming death.

"I know you hear me. I know you do, though your body lies there benumbed and motionless."

The murderer continued, in accents that testified how deeply he was stirred, "Bearcroft, you know my reason for slaying her and you. You know I am not as other men. You cannot go from here now and accuse me as a murderer before the judgment-seat of God! You know I had no true murder in my heart. Our hearts will be judged, not our actions, in that day, and then—then it will be known that I had pity for her, and sorrow for you, who were my friend. Why was I compelled to take her life? Why did you force me, knowing me so well, to take yours? We are not masters of our actions. I did not mean to kill her or you. I had to act according to the light of my reason and the guiding of the nature implanted in me."

He broke off suddenly and used another tone.

"Thou, God, Who art above me, art alone responsible, not I, for this fearful thing, that my own friend lies here before my eyes, murdered by my own hand!"

His voice, as he spoke these last awful words, was raised

to a sharp cry of agony which pierced my ears. I did not consider, even in this supreme moment of my life, whether this man was responsible for his crime, or but a homicidal lunatic. In truth, I cared not at all. The drug, which had so strangely sharpened one sense in benumbing others, had quickened some faculties, while it had deadened much of that part of the humanity in us which cares for mere continuance of existence, and strives, often so stupidly, to preserve it at all costs. Strange to say, my prevailing sentiment at this moment was not hatred towards him or loathing for him; it was an exaggerated form of that which, from long ago, had been my dominant feeling towards Morson—an angry opposition to and contempt for him; in a word, derision of the man, his thoughts, his ways, his views.

It was, no doubt, some subtle acting of the drug that, deadening all else in me, left this feeling supreme above those others which might seem more natural to the situation I was in.

Morson had ceased from speaking, and now, to my astonishment, he wept. I heard nothing in the room but the loud sobbing of the murderer who stood beside me.

Apathetic to whatever might befall me, my mind was too curiously awake and active not to be stirred by this new and grotesque phase of the situation. There came vividly to my memory a long forgotten passage in some ancient travel-book wherein it recorded that fable of the crocodile of Egypt, who, when he has killed a man and devoured his body, will weep over his head for grief that he has slain a man, and then eat up the head too. These quaint words of the old writer came to me to the accompaniment of Gregory Morson's tearful sobs, and I was moved, I will hardly dare to say to internal laughter, in this so solemn moment of my fate, but to some irresistible emotion not very far removed therefrom. The bitter humor that could still be stirred by such monstrous incongruity had not yet died within me.

Then, still listening to the sound of the murderer's heart-broken sobs, they grew less and less audible. It was my hearing that was growing feebler. Presently all sound and all feeling departed, and as they went, my spirit passed from conscious waking to dreamful sleep, and thence to sleep with no dreams in it, and that passage, I told myself, was death.

CHAPTER XXV.

NIGHT AND NOTHINGNESS.

WHAT happened on the rest of this eventful day I afterwards learnt from the relation of others. I have already mentioned that Colonel Arden had left for London that morning on business of his own, which Morson had begged him to postpone till this day, for reasons which we now well know, and that the guests were away on an expedition. They did not return till long past nightfall. They were informed, on their return, that I had been seized with a fit and was now lying dead. It was represented to them that their host was so overcome with grief at the loss of his oldest friend as to be unable to appear before them. They unanimously resolved to do what indeed they had no alternative but to do, namely, to leave the house in a body by the first train on the following morning. They saw nothing of their host either that night or before they left next morning. The Italian doctor brought them news of his complete prostration under the sudden shock of his friend's death. Lady Raby also, the doctor told them, was too deeply affected by the loss of her kinsman to leave her apartments.

In truth she, Miss Arden, and their servants were virtually kept prisoners that night, and were not even aware that I had failed to leave the house on my mission to seek for assistance from the outer world. All that night they had most anxiously expected my return, and they only guessed what had happened when, at midnight of the following day, the monks of St. Ambrose gathered in the courtyard of Scarfell Towers. From their windows in the tower Lady Raby and Miss Arden saw the long procession of monks and acolytes form in the courtyard, and pass, bearing torches and tapers and chanting the Office for the Dead, slowly over the Chace by the winding path that leads to the ruined church.

In their midst was the bier, on which my body lay in an open coffin.

They were still in doubt as to the person for whom these obsequies were being held, till, by the glare of the torches born aloft against the blackness of the night, Sylvia Arden recognized my face. Then she knew that I had worked for her in vain, and that our enemy had prevailed against me.

I had now for nearly a day and a half been under the spell of the Italian's poison, lying, as I afterwards learnt, from the midnight following the crime, for twenty-four hours to all human seeming cold and dead, with the glare of a hundred wax tapers upon me, and watched and prayed over day and night by monks from the monastery across the river.

That I survive to complete this narrative, that I did not fall a victim to the plotting of Gregory Morson and to the scientific malignity of the Italian minister of his crime, is owing, in the first place, to this man's practical stupidity (not an uncommon thing in scientific persons) in misjudging the strength of the deadly combination of drugs he had discovered. In the second place, my escape from death is due to the fact that the monks of St. Ambrose, drawn together from similar confraternities in the south of Europe, and employing the ritual and observances of southern nations, had followed in my case the custom which prevails among some of these nations of carrying the dead to burial fully dressed and in uncovered coffins.

These two circumstances would not have sufficed in themselves to save me, and I owe my preservation from the malice of my enemies to that which I shall presently have to relate—to that which in my eyes is more extraordinary than anything I have yet had occasion to set down in this narration.

It was only when I was carried into the open air, and the wind of the hills blew cold upon my face, that I awoke to renewed consciousness. For a time I knew and guessed nothing of what had occurred. I thought I had drawn but one breath since I listened to the lessening sound of Morson's voice, felt the apathy of departing life, and said to myself, "This at last is death;" and when now I awoke, though thirty hours had passed in the interval, I but thought, "It is not to be quite yet."

Then very slowly, with the movement probably over the rugged path and the keenness of the fresh air, I woke to

life, and now that which had come from the action of the drug, the extreme sensibility of my hearing and the suppression of all other sense, had gone, for my ears now were no longer pierced with every trifling sound, and I only faintly caught, as if coming from very far off, the measured tread of a walking company of men, and with their rhythmic tread their rythmic chanting of the Psalm, "*Ad Dominum cum tribularer clamavi;*" and as they ended came the intoned words, "*Requiem æternam dona ei, Domine.*" Then, upon the tinkle of a bell, followed the numerous responses of rough voices in unison. It seemed to me, too, that my eyes, no longer blinded as they had been, caught now and again faint glimmerings of moving lights; and on the breeze from afar, as I thought, came the faint odor of incense. Then I was aware that a solemn funeral, with the full rites and observances of our Church, was passing by, but very far off, as it seemed, and in my half-waking, half-dream reasoning, I resolved to abide where I stood, and join it when it should come up to me.

Presently all these sights and sounds grew more present; I was surrounded with them. Methought I was walking with the procession, and I wondered that no one, as is the custom, had offered me a lighted taper to carry.

Louder and louder grew the voices of the monks singing the *Miserere*, and as they sang their strong voices vibrated close to my ears. I was in their very midst, but I knew not as yet whose body they were carrying to the grave. Then it was, through my half-closed eyes, that I saw distinctly the red glow of the burning torches and their smoke carried streaming down the wind; but the faces of those who walked by me I could not distinguish, so dim still was my sight. Yet I could see the silver censer swinging round me in the torchlight, and the puffs of incense smoke came from it against me, so close to my face that I felt the heat from the live coals within, and the strangeness of this overcame me for a moment; but still I suspected nothing of the truth till I felt upon my face and hands the sprinkling from the aspergill in the priest's hands.

Then suddenly with the shock I awoke to full consciousness, and I knew all. It was I myself upon whose face and crossed hands the holy water had fallen, by the priest's pious ministrations; it was round me that the acolyte had swung his thurible; for me that this *Requiem* was being

chanted. This solemn funeral procession, with tapers and torches and music of psalm and antiphon, was bearing my body to the grave!

I became at once as wakefully conscious as I am at this moment and as I write these words. No hallucination or dream-fancy was on me. I knew that all my senses were alive and acute now, as well as my reason awake. The thraldom that the drug had occasioned had passed away, and that apathy which had led me before to disregard the terrors of coming death had left me too. The full horror of it was upon me. I made an effort to raise myself and to cry aloud that I was alive.

I could not stir, I could not speak; the drug was still potent to paralyze all movement in me, all voluntary effort whatsoever. I must resign myself to be carried conscious and unresisting to the grave.

By this the procession of monks was entering the church, and the voice of the priest was intoning the antiphon, *Exultabunt Domino*, which marks the passage of the bier into the sacred precincts. I listened to the responsory of priest and monks while I was carried in, and laid down in front of the high altar. Never before had I so dwelt on every laud, nocturne and canticle, prayer and responsory in our solemn Office of the Dead, hoping against hope that perchance, in the long-drawn solemnity of the rite, time might be given me to recover power to make one movement to show I lived, to utter one audible appeal to my living brother-men around me. Never had these pious voices sounded to me as they did this night. Most sweet, most grateful were the voices of living, breathing men to me who in a few short moments must lie down for ever in the silent tomb.

Now suddenly there came to me a memory that had some touch of respite in it, if not of reprieve, to my inevitable fate. I remembered what Colonel Arden had once told me of the burial of members of the Morson family, that their embalmed bodies lay in a vaulted chamber in the crypt beneath the church. Should I be laid in this vault, or had a grave been dug for me, and should I be buried therein? If so, immediate death awaited me; if my burial was to be in the vault and the heavy iron gates were closed ere I could cry out, then death would come as surely, but prolonged, and in still more terrible form.

A full mass was celebrated, then the Office for the Dead was proceeded with, and while the appropriate antiphon was sung, the bier was carried down a set of steep steps, the opening to which was covered by a trap-door, and which led from a side chapel in the northern aisle of the church, through solid iron gates, which I learnt afterwards were just below the foundations of the walls of the church. Along a short gallery the procession passed, and finally, through a second set of iron gates, into the burial vault of the Morsons. Into this the monks crowded, and standing along the walls lifted up their long tapers and lighted the great vault from floor to roof. The bier was deposited on a low altar-like stone table in the centre of the vault, which was itself excavated in the living rock. On either side were narrow niches or recesses cut into the stone sides of the vault, and in these niches stood a number of open coffins like that in which I lay. From my position I could distinctly see, by the light of the tapers and between the rows of monks as they stood, the mummied bodies of the dead.

The service was now all but ended. I had resolved to repress all my energy, to husband all my strength till nearly the last moment, till I should hear the *Kyrie eleison* recited ; then I would gather all my long-restrained forces and concentrate them into one huge final effort for liberty and life.

The time came. The priest in slow solemn accents that rang through the vault invoked the compassion of the Almighty upon me. "*Kyrie eleison*," he said, "*Christe eleison*." I was dumb, I was motionless. "*Kyrie eleison !*" he cried aloud again, and still I could make no sign, and now at last the bitterness of the terrible death that was so near came full upon me.

The few remaining sentences of the Office which are spoken by the side of the grave went on. "*Requiem æternam dona ei*," the priest said, and the monks in unison responded "*Et lux perpetua luceat ei.*"

Then came the final *Amen ;* and the monks, two by two, defiled with their tapers from the vault and left me alone in darkness. As they departed, I heard the first iron gate close with a clang, then the second one with a more remote and lesser sound. I shut my eyes in the extreme anguish of my soul, praying now for nothing but for the ending of the life which I had been struggling so hard to preserve.

I do not know for how long I remained thus, but the concentration of my agony made it seem an age; yet it could not have been more than three or four minutes, for I could still hear, through the roof and pavement, the monks in the church above me chanting the *De profundis clamavi* which ends the Office for the Dead. It came to me in faint tones barely audible, and seemingly from an immeasurable distance. It was the voices of men upon the earth, busied with its affairs. For me those affairs had no longer any concern; I was lying in the tomb.

CHAPTER XXVI.

RESCUE.

It is not to be wondered at that the sudden hopelessness caused in me by abandonment in this dark habitation of the dead, and by my weakened bodily state, and the remaining influence of the narcotic drug, threw me once more into the trance from which my late eager expectation of rescue from death had temporarily awakened me. I lay between trance and sleep, in a torpor in which presently I dreamed that I again heard a voice near by and fancied again I saw the glare of lights in my eyes. The voice was too dear, too sweet in my ears for me not to wish to dream on listening to it, and I forced myself to believe the dream could last while life lasted, for the voice was that of Sylvia Arden, and methought she said this in low, soft, and measured tones—

"You lie here, Julian Bearcroft, who have died to save me from death, and never more shall I hear your voice or look again on your face; and all the years of my life shall be years of mourning for you, and no one shall hear from my lips what you only, of all living men, should have heard, if you had cared to hear;—and now, farewell for ever!"

While these words were spoken, the fall of tears was upon my face, still, as I thought, in my dream, and when the words ended I felt the pressure of soft lips upon my forehead, and then my mouth was kissed by Sylvia Arden.

Suddenly the form that in my dream I felt to be there started back, and a loud scream filled the vault.

"He lives!" she cried out. "Save him! save him! He is alive!"

I had lain silent and inert and helpless; but now the touch of her lips and her cry woke me suddenly to full life, to speech, and to motion.

Sylvia Arden, indeed, stood before me, a black hood falling back from her bare head, her face pale and wan, her eyes strained open in her sudden amazement, speechless, bearing in her hand the lighted taper whose light I thought I had seen only in dream-fancy. As I rose, weak and staggering, to my feet, the voices of the monks in the church above us rose and fell, and in an interval of their chant I heard the grating of the bolts in the lock of the great outer gate of the vault. We both heard it, and we neither of us attached its true meaning to the sound. We supposed it was the sacristan of the church opening the outer door, and about to re-enter the passage leading to the vault in order to shoot the heavy bolts of the inner of the two iron doors. In truth he had already done so, but we had not heard him. We listened for a moment, and then we heard the fall of the iron trap in the church floor above, then all sound from the outer world was deadened almost to nothing.

Sylvia Arden, guessing more quickly than I did what had happened, rushed to the door of the vault. It was locked. As she ran, she dropped the taper from her hand; it lay flickering on the ground for a moment, then the flame went out and we were in darkness. In that instant of time I had cast a hasty glance round the vault and saw the utter hopelessness of our situation. We raised our voices; we beat with our hands upon the iron door. It was in vain. The sound of a hundred strong voices singing in unison could hardly reach us in our subterranean prison; how then could we hope to be heard? Presently the girl's overstrained emotions caused her to give way, and I heard her fall heavily on the stone pavement. She had fainted and lay motionless, cold, and as one dead.

Long I waited for her recovery, dreading to have to say that I could give her no hope of release, and almost wishing she might never recover consciousness again, rather than linger out the rest of her young life in this horrible dungeon; but I had no occasion to comfort her.

She was very brave. I have never in all my life known or even imagined a woman so full of courage as Sylvia Arden. Of us two I think she was the more resigned, I had almost said, the more cheerful.

So soon as she had recovered from her swoon, I began to consider if indeed our situation were absolutely hopeless. In the momentary glance of the place I had had by the light of Miss Arden's taper, I had noticed, standing against one far corner, some tools such as might be used in such an underground burial place as this, and which might well have been left by some previous grave digger or sexton, or perhaps were now put here to be in readiness to dig out a niche in the rock for the reception of my own body whenever the sexton should have leisure. I groped my way to the place; it was in the end furthest from the door, this end being, as I had seen, a portion of the solid rock, though it was not already occupied with niches for the reception of the open coffins.

I set my back to the iron entrance-door, and trying to keep a straight direction I walked forward. Every now and then my outstretched hands touched the walls on either side of me, and I withdrew them each time with a shudder, fearing to rest them unawares on the ghastly corpses I had seen.

I counted twenty-seven paces before I came against the end of the vault, while its width was, as I afterwards ascertained, not more than four short steps. I felt for the tools and found them—a shovel, a pickaxe, and a short, strong crowbar. I called to Sylvia Arden, whom I had left lying down by the iron door. My voice sounded hollow and ghostlike.

"Let me know where you are, Miss Arden," I said, "so that I can walk straight towards you."

She spoke to me in her soft, low, clear voice, and again I was astonished that any woman could be so calm amid such terrible surroundings.

I had not the faintest hope or expectation of being able to produce any effect with the tools upon a solid iron door locked from the outside, and without the smallest gleam of light to help me in my work, but if it only served for a time to distract the poor girl from the horrors of her situation, it was something gained.

I set down the tools and felt over the door with my

hands; it was perfectly smooth and close fitting, and the hinges of such enormous size as proved that the door was of great thickness and solidity. These hinges did not work in jambs of stone, as I had hoped, but were riveted into huge slabs of iron which in their turn were carried far into deep grooves cut into the solid rock. The bolts from the lock on the other side evidently shot into a corresponding iron plate, fitting likewise into the hard rock of the vault, so that this whole extremity of the vault was blocked with iron. I tried to insert the point of the pickaxe in the interstice between the door and the jamb above the lock, but the door was fitted with an overlapping flange that made it impossible.

When I had felt and examined the door very attentively, I perceived that my only chance was to begin to force back the flange with repeated blows of the pick, and then to insert its point into the interstice. For half an hour I worked in the endeavor to do this, and when, with the greatest exertion, I had succeeded, I found that neither the point of the pickaxe nor of the crowbar would fit into the space between the door and its jamb.

In the weakness of my long fast I was tired, and sat down to rest.

"We must try again presently," I said.

"We shall have plenty of time," said Miss Arden.

She spoke sadly but quite resignedly. Clearly she had thought it all out, and had seen that her inevitable fate was to live a few hours in this awful place and then to die. It came upon me with a particular horror that she too must die.

"It must have been the sexton of the church who came to bolt the two doors," I said. "Does he live near the church?"

"No sexton lives here; it was the sacristan from the monastery. I saw him with the keys at his girdle. No one lives here at all—there is no house. He must have locked the doors and then gone back to the monastery. He will not come for a long time, because the river has come down in flood and they have to go round by the road."

It was my last hope. The girl had evidently thought it all out before me. She seemed resigned to her fate with a fortitude beyond my understanding. I was ashamed that

I, a man, was more unnerved than this young girl. It was the slow prolongation of the agony of a lingering death for us both that I could not face. I don't think I am a coward; I may say I have met death so often that I know I am not; yet now I stood in cold terror of death.

"I can hardly bear this," I said. "If it were I alone, I could perhaps set my heart against it. But to see you die too—you whom——"

I did not finish. Even to speak at all seemed so futile and purposeless a thing; spoken words seemed so vain in presence of the awful fate that awaited us in a few hours.

She also did not speak, and for a very long time we remained silent. I was sitting on the ground very close to her. I knew she was almost touching me, by the nearness of her breathing. I put out my hand and took hers in mine; she did not draw it away, and when I pressed it she returned the pressure.

In the presence of near-coming death, all the conventionalities and small diffidences of our ordinary lives had vanished.

"Sylvia," I said, "I love you. You are to to me more than my life."

The pressure of her hand upon mine increased, but for a little time she said nothing.

"I know it," she said, and after a while more she added, "You are very dear to me."

I raised her hand to my lips and kissed it.

We had hardly raised our voices above a whisper, and for a long time neither of us spoke again.

In the midst of these horrible surroundings I could dwell upon nothing but the sweetness of this woman's words.

Suddenly the fire burned within me and I started up. "It can never have been designed by the merciful God above us that this great happiness should come so near me only to be taken away! Let me work again, let me think, let me concentrate my whole thoughts upon the discovering of some means of coming again to the light of day."

I buried my face in my hands and set myself to go again over every particular I had noted of the place of our burial.

Suddenly a strange thought came to me and I welcomed it as if it were a messenger from heaven, bringing hope on its wings. Yet it was nothing but a vague surmise, a possibly mistaken guess.

This long and narrow vault, surely it had not the usual shape of a burial vault? Was it not unnecessarily long and unusually narrow? Might it not therefore be a portion of one of those long mining galleries, which I knew honeycombed the Chace, and which had been converted into a burial place?

The moment this conjecture occurred to me I found two circumstances to corroborate it. The door did not hinge upon the solid rock, but upon the broad jambs of iron aforesaid, which filled in one whole end of the vault; and, again, no niches for sepulture had been cut in the further end. They existed only, as I had seen, in the sides of the vault. Of what, then, was the further end composed? Did the vault terminate there, or was it separated by a wall only from the rest of a gallery which perhaps communicated with a labyrinth of other underground passages?

I rose again and walked with outstretched hands through the darkness to the termination of the vault. My pulses beat fast with anxiety.

With opened palms I felt what I had fondly hoped might be a built-up wall. My heart sank. The surface was smooth and hard, without any sign of brick or stone; but just as I had given up all hope, it occurred to me that the stone was far smoother than that which formed the sides and roof of the rest of the excavation. I felt first one, then the other. The end portion was much smoother; it was also, I thought, less cold to the touch. Without doubt it was cement. Had it been spread over the rock, or over such a rough wall as I had supposed might have been built there? I went back for the pickaxe and crowbar, not daring to say a word of my conjecture to Miss Arden. The first stroke told me I had guessed right. The pickaxe pierced through an inch or two of very hard cement; with two or three more blows I had brought a great flake of it to the ground, and laid bare what I could feel was a joint between two large stones. Into this I inserted the crowbar, and in ten minutes I had brought down a square yard of wall; the crowbar went through and found no resistance, and a rush of fresh warm air came in from outside.

I came back again to Miss Arden. She was lying where I had left her. The noise of falling stones had hardly roused her to an interest in what I had been doing, so

fully convinced was she, after my long labors in vain upon the door, that nothing could save us, that our fate was inevitably sealed.

"Sylvia!" I said, and I took her hand in mine.

"What is it?" she cried. "Why do you tremble so? There is new hope in your voice."

"I think," I said, hesitating from fear of saying too much, "I think we may still be saved."

She uttered a little cry and rose to her feet.

"Come!" I said, still holding her by the hand and leading her to the opening I had made. "Let us leave this awful place."

I went through first, still holding her by the hand, and she followed me.

We stood for a moment or two undecided. We were in utter darkness. I knew not whether to go forward or turn to the right or left, but a rush of hope came to us both with the freer, warmer air that fanned our faces. We had escaped from the oppression of the tomb, from the cold, damp air of death's own prison house and from the awful presence of the dead.

The sudden revulsion of feeling was too great for Sylvia Arden, and she who had so bravely faced the prospect of a lingering and cruel death, now wept audibly like the weakest of her sex, while her body shook and was convulsed, as I held her in my arms and kissed her wet eyes and trembling mouth.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A STRUGGLE FOR LIBERTY.

We went slowly forward for more than an hour over ground that was for the most part level, and through a passage that from side to side was little broader than the outstretch of my two arms. I could not tell in the complete darkness whether our course had trended to right or left, though it seemed to me that we had not greatly departed from a straight line. There was certainly a sharp slope of the gallery downwards, and so uncertain was I as to the points of the compass, that for a moment I doubted whether the

old miners had not been burrowing a tunnel beneath the river; but I presently concluded, from several indications, that this could not be the case. A gallery mined under water is invariably damp, but the air here came in a steady set against us, warm and dry, leading me to believe that the gallery reached to a vast depth into the earth. Then, again, the ore-bearing rock formation had seemed to me to terminate at the river cliffs. Thirdly, the descent was not, I believed, sufficiently sudden to carry us under the river, which, as I have said, follows its course at the foot of tall cliffs, on whose summit the church is built.

To a professional miner certain problems present themselves which may not seem, to unprofessional persons, to require solution at all; and I asked myself now, what had become of the enormous masses of stone dug from the bowels of the earth in excavating this great tunnel. This point bore so directly upon the possibility of our escape, that I considered it very closely. I had seen no mound of stone anywhere near the church; the land, though high-lying, is here smooth and bare of hillock or inequality for a quarter of a mile all round the building. This I had noticed on the first day, when I sought diligently for indications of miners' work below ground. There was, then, but one answer to the question I had asked myself. The gallery we were in must have been continued to the river cliff. It would there have ended. To judge by its depth below the church, one exit must be about half-way down the cliff. The useless stone and rubbish had no doubt been cast into the river below, whose torrent in a very short space of time would have carried the whole into the sea. It was clear, then, that we were advancing towards the sea, either directly or indirectly.

This theory, and this one only, would account for our not having as yet come upon any sign of a shaft; and it was a comfortable theory, for I had feared above everything to find one, seeing that every shaft I had examined on the Chace was blocked with immense fragments of disintegrated rocks, fallen from its own sides. A shaft would therefore mean the barring of our path, perhaps would represent an impassable obstacle; and our having broken from the tomb would after all avail us nothing.

We had already, as I guessed, traveled nearly two miles, walking slowly in utter darkness, when I was startled

to see, apparently at a great distance ahead of us, the twinkling of a tiny light—a mere pin's head in size, but unmistakably a light.

We advanced very cautiously, sometimes losing sight of it altogether. At times it seemed to grow larger and brighter; sometimes to recede and grow to a doubtful speck. Remembering how I had supposed the underground caverns on the Chace might be the secret haunt of men living in defiance of the laws, I at first conjectured that this light might be theirs. Yet its smallness, its uncertain appearances and disappearances, and its seeming to recede and then to grow nearer, looked less like a lamp or candle moved by human agency than one of those moving bodies of incandescent vapor which are sometimes seen in caverns and disused mines, and are akin in nature to those which above ground are known as "Wills o' the Wisp."

When we got close to the light we saw that it proceeded from neither of these causes, but had a still more singular origin. The gallery was entirely blocked by great stones at this place, and a pale greenish luminosity, like that which radiates from a glowworm among grass or leaves, was cast from one single point, and shone over the stones, the floor, the roof and the sides of the gallery. Looking more closely, I perceived that the illumination proceeded from a number of quartz crystals imbedded in a piece of fallen rock. They could reflect no other light than that of the moon, which I knew, from what Miss Arden had told me as to the hour of the night, must now be above the horizon; but I knew also that the moon could not possibly be so high in the heavens as to cast her light to the bottom of a deep and narrow shaft. It was clear, then, that the gallery at this point came near to the surface, and either its roof had fallen in, causing a depression of the earth's surface through which the moon could shine, or else we had reached the further end of the tunnel, and another such opening as the one I had already entered on the hillside, or else there was a shaft so short and shallow, perhaps so broken down by time, as to allow sidelong rays from the moon to enter through the loose fragments of broken rock. The first supposition proved to be correct; there was no shaft, but the tunnel was near the surface in a deep dell of the Chace, and the roof had fallen in and blocked our way.

Had we come to such an obstacle in the dark, it might well have barred our road altogether; but the faint light which streamed through the interstices of the fallen stones enabled us to see that some of them had fallen in the form of an arch. By carefully removing the stones beneath it with the pickaxe, which I had brought with me, a very little labor served to make an opening, through which we easily made our way. The neighborhood of the blessed light was too refreshing to our eyes, that had been strained so long in search of it, to be left at once, and we lingered near it after we had passed the obstructions. Along one wall of the gallery, on the further side of the obstruction, was a low heap of small squared blocks, piled up to the height of a foot or more, and upon this convenient seat we rested. My success in so easily passing by this obstacle, which I had feared might prove so serious, elated me. Miss Arden had now fully conquered her emotion. We rested for a considerable time and talked.

She told me how it had happened that she had come into the vault. It appeared that, at Gregory Morson's orders, two of his Italian servants had stood all day long at the stairs leading to the tower in which she and her aunt had their rooms. These men would allow no one to come in and no one to go out during the whole of the day following my disappearance; but when the monks of St. Ambrose gathered in the courtyard, and the funeral procession set out with lights and chanting, and the servants of the Towers followed, the two men placed as guards forgot their orders, or thought the occasion for them was gone by. They left their post. Miss Arden threw a dark shawl over her head, and, mingling with the group of similarly hooded women-servants in the courtyard, followed the funeral, taking a taper into her hands as the others did. When the monks had finally gone from the vault she alone had made her way inside, unperceived by any one. The iron doors were shut to, but not locked. The subsequent barring of the inner door by the sacristan must have taken place at the exact moment when she discovered that I still lived. Her excitement at the discovery, her cry, and the chanting of the monks overhead, had no doubt prevented her from hearing the locking of the door of the vault, and when the trap-door in the church had once fallen, no sounds from the vault could possibly have reached those who were in the building.

I now began to consider how we were to manage our escape into the regions of day. The gallery did not end here, as I had hoped. It might, for all I could tell, continue along subterranean regions, through which we might wander till we died of starvation. Seeing how near we were to the surface at this spot, I thought it might be possible to remove the whole of the stones, rocks and earth which had fallen from above, and so reach the upper air, knowing, as I have said, that the thickness of earth above us could not be very great; but after ten minutes' work I perceived that the task was far beyond my strength, exhausted as I still was by the action of the Italian's drug. The fallen fragments were inextricably wedged and dovetailed together by the weight that had fallen from above. I saw that I might exhaust my remaining strength and effect nothing. I had strained my muscles in vain against the larger fragments; should I succeed in the moving of these, I might, I feared, bring down the whole mass in a dangerous avalanche. It seemed better for us to go forward and trust to find an exit further on, level with the surface of the ground. My labor had, unintentionally, effected one thing only; I had brought down stones and earth enough to fill up the interspaces through which the moon-rays had streamed in, and now again we were in pitch darkness.

It was now that we made a most startling discovery—one which was to throw a new light upon the strange events that had already occurred at Scarfell Chace, and to have an immediate influence upon all that was to follow.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE SECRET OF THE CAVERN.

We were again, as I have said, in complete darkness, and I stood for a minute or two to rest. The pickaxe was in my hand, but before going forward I must seek the crowbar, which I had brought too, and which I had laid down. For some little time I searched for it in vain in the darkness. It was necessary to carry it with us, I thought, lest we should encounter another obstruction, and have to force our way through. In my search I happened to move

aside one of the blocks forming the pile on which we had been sitting, and which, when I had looked at it in the very faint reflected moonlight, seemed to be a heap of small squared stones, or of very thin bricks set edgewise. I was struck immediately by the extraordinary weight of the supposed stone, as I moved it in my groping search for the crowbar.

No stone could possibly be so heavy ; no metal even could be, save lead—or gold. It was certain that I held in my hand an ingot of one or the other of these metals. Lead it could hardly be, for the rock is not such as to carry any ore of that metal ; nor is lead, for obvious reasons, ever run into such small ingots as this. Could it then be gold? I felt and examined and tested it with my fingers in the pitchy darkness of the cave. The heap of ingots had lain so long near the opening into the open air that particles of dust had accumulated on its upper surface into a thick film, compacted, as I could feel, with some mossy or lichenous growth, which the scant light had promoted. I could strip this covering off like a piece of cloth, and the sharp edges of the ingot underneath were sensible to my touch. The ingot was, as I felt it in the dark, less in size than a common brick cut in two in the direction of its length, but longer ; I judged its weight in my hand as well as I could, and thought it could not be less than eight or nine pounds, perhaps more. This, I knew, was neither the shape, nor the size, nor the weight into which ingots of gold are cast at the present day. Had we chanced upon a hidden treasure of the ancient Roman miners, lost to the world perhaps for seventeen or eighteen centuries?

"It can only be gold!" I said aloud.

Sylvia Arden took the piece in her hand.

As I moved I touched the lost crowbar with my foot. I took it up and struck it heavily against the side of the heap of ingots. A distinctly ringing, metallic sound was given out. Beyond all doubt it was a heap of ingots of gold, each one of which could not be worth less than several hundred pounds.

"It is gold," I said. "The men who dug it out of these galleries stored their treasure here and left it. Here is inestimable wealth, yet I would give it all away to buy your safety, Sylvia!"

She did not answer for awhile ; she was thinking deeply. She asked—

"Could Gregory Morson have known that this gold was here?"

"I believe he did not know of this particular store," I answered. "Certainly he would have taken it away if he had known. Perhaps he has found other stores hidden underground; perhaps it is by this he has become so rich."

As I made these conjectures I thought I had found a solution of very much that till now had seemed problematical in the conduct of Gregory Morson. It was clear that the ancient miners had left this treasure owing to some sudden attack upon and conquest of them, and perhaps to their wholesale massacre. Concealment of the gold ingots in the mines themselves would be easier to accomplish in a sudden emergency, and more complete and less liable to be suspected than any *cache* above ground. If the miners had been killed, or carried into captivity, the secret of the hidden gold would necessarily die and be lost with them; and our now finding it was proof that it had lain untouched throughout the long duration of the centuries.

That Morson should have discovered some at least of the buried treasure seemed to be now almost a certainty. How otherwise could he, a man like myself, with a beggared patrimony, without land, mines, or any ostensible source of wealth, suddenly have had the spending of a huge income? Assuredly he had found some of the buried treasure. For what other reason should he have dispossessed his tenants of their holdings, have turned the Chace into a wilderness, and have thereby deprived himself of his sole visible revenue, unless it were that he had reason to believe in more gold lying still undiscovered, and that he would have no one about to spy upon him in his search after the buried treasure, perhaps to search for it and find it for themselves?

This would account for the presence of his yacht, and for the mysterious comings and goings of the Levantine sailors on the Chace—men too well accustomed to his eccentricity to wonder at any vagary, too ignorant to speculate as to his proceedings, too brutal to flinch from the most criminal task, too well used to arbitrary rule to do anything but obey implicitly. If Morson desired to frighten away strangers from the Chace, as strangers, I knew, had been frightened away or got rid of; if he wanted men to carry his treasure to the yacht and tell no tales; if he wanted a conveyance to London for his gold, he could not

do more wisely than to depopulate his estate, and to bring his yacht and his desperado Greeks and Italians to Scarfell Chace.

Now I understood why he had been anxious to have my professional assistance to examine the ground and tell him where lay the lodes of gold-bearing rock. Knowing this, he would have a sure guide in seeking for the galleries. He had himself, I knew, no practical knowledge of mining, and he feared to take into his confidence any one who might betray him. It was for this reason doubtless he had consulted Professor Webb, who, as a savant, could tell him and had told him that the rocks were gold-bearing, but could not give him the precise indications he wanted. It had seemed to me extraordinary that any one with common eyesight and observation could fail to guess the existence of the mining galleries below ground by the indications on the surface; but it was clear that I had underrated the keenness which long practical experience had given to myself. The Professor, with his profound scientific knowledge, who had examined the whole region with thorough theoretic acumen, had yet failed to perceive, from what he himself told me, that the lodes had ever been worked. It was not, therefore, extraordinary if Morson, quite ignorant as he was, should have found but one or two of the passages among the whole labyrinth of subterranean galleries.

The existence of gold on that part only of Scarfell Chace which belonged to Miss Arden—for there were few marks of workings on the half of the Chace nearest the Towers, and which was Morson's own—raised other and more serious thoughts. I had hitherto sought in vain for a motive, however remote, for the perpetration by Morson of the horrible double crime against Miss Arden. Now I had found one.

Miss Arden herself, indeed, who knew the man far better than I did, had without hesitation told me that the motive was nothing less base than cupidity. I had rejected this as a possible motive, not because I then doubted Morson's capacity for any vileness, but because I could not bring myself to suppose that so quick-sighted a man had failed to perceive, what indeed I had told him positively, before even seeing the ground, that the existence of gold was a chimera; that I remembered enough of the Chace to know that gold had existed in its rocks, had been

mined for, and was gone. Now I saw that he had known a great deal more than I did, or guessed he did. He knew the gold had been mined for, but he knew it was not gone. He knew it still lay, a fortune for its lucky finder, under the land of the girl he did not love but had schemed to marry. Then came her rejection of him. He must have seen the fortune he had counted on slipping from his hands. Immediately afterwards came the foul attempts at murder.

Gregory Morson was now no longer in my eyes a possible maniac, but a cool, calculating, base and treacherous murderer. For him and for his accomplices there should be no shred of mercy or pity. They should be hunted down and destroyed like wolves red with the blood of the flock.

We went on into the darkness. The pickaxe and the crowbar I carried with me; they were certain to be wanted again, but I hesitated about burdening myself with the useless gold ingot. On second thoughts, however, I resolved to carry it, and if its weight inconvenienced me I could throw it away at any moment. It was fortunate that I so resolved, for this lump of gold was in a very short time to be of inestimable service to us.

We had gone but a short way further from the shaft, before my outstretched hand encountered a smooth wall, which stopped our way again. It was precisely such a hard cemented surface as had formed one end of the sepulchral vault, and I have now no doubt both were built across the gallery by the same hands, and for the same purpose of concealing treasure. With the tools I had brought I easily pierced a hole through it large enough for us to pass through.

Going first, and turning round as I did so to help Miss Arden to follow, I did not perceive, until we both got to the further side, that we stood in the red glare of a wood-fire, burnt down now to a flameless mass of glowing embers. It was made at a spot where the gallery widened into a sort of chamber, and not twenty yards from the wall which we had just broken through.

My first thought was that makers of the fire, whom I imagined to be the persons I had long believed to be the denizens of the Chace, on hearing my strokes upon the other side of the wall, had retreated from their fire into

the darkness of the tunnel beyond, and were now waiting to see what strange thing was about to issue from the rock. I guessed that these men were armed. and were prepared to fire upon us.

I lost not a moment in getting Miss Arden back through the opening, bidding her wait, while I walked on, fearing at every moment to hear the sound of a shot. As I passed the fire, I saw a double-barreled gun leaning up against the side of the tunnel. This reassured me, for I thought that men flying in alarm would not have left this weapon behind. I noticed, too, that there were the remains of a meal by the fire—a loaf of bread and a flask of what might be wine. There were signs that men had lived here for some time, and even slept here. There were also the belongings of the sea-going boat, as oars, a short mast, boat sails, ropes and blocks, all piled against the cavern's sides or lying about in confusion. I snatched up the gun and walked quickly forward into the darkness.

For about two hundred yards I went on. There was an indistinct murmuring sound in the air. I stood still to listen. There came to me the reverberated, confused voices of men, and I was relieved, for I did not think they would talk if they suspected the presence of strangers.

The voices grew louder as I advanced, and as I got past a turn in the tunnel I found myself within the glare of half-a-dozen torches, fixed against jutting corners of the rock. For a little time my eyes, unused to so strong a light, could make nothing out distinctly, except the dim figures of two men moving about in the tunnel, which, I could perceive, had now opened out into a vast cavern, high and broad. I made out a dark, smooth band or belt, extending along the centre of the cavern floor towards its farther extremity. So black was it that at first I did not recognize it as water, although the colder air after we had passed the last barrier, and the fresh, briny smell, to say nothing of the oars and sails of a boat, might have prepared me for the near presence of the sea. The boat itself I now saw, moored to the peak of a rock some way beyond where the men were employed. As my eyes grew used to the light I saw that the men were drawing a net, one on each side of the stream of sea-water, which I could easily perceive, by its action against the net and the force they used, was ebbing with a strong current to the sea.

It was obvious that the men had no knowledge of my presence, and that they were taking advantage of the running out of the tide to use their net.

Suddenly it flashed upon me that I must be in the very sea-cavern entered by me in the launch three days before. When I had thrown a stone that day into the dark abyss beyond me, I must have thrown it into the very portion of the cavern now lighted up by the fishermen's torches. I could not indeed recognize it as such, for light had failed me before I advanced so far; but my careful examination of the coast that day had proved to me that no other entrance into such a cavern existed along the whole sea-coast of Scarfell Chace. Perhaps the eyes I had seen on that occasion staring upon me through the darkness were those of one of the men now before me. Perhaps it was he who had plunged into the water, to delude me into thinking I had disturbed a sea animal.

The question for me to resolve was, who were these two men? Were they fishermen from the neighborhood who had discovered the secret of this sea approach—poachers who lived here in defiance of the owners of the Towers, or were they Morson's own men, by him secreted in these subterranean recesses to carry out what I now surmised were his orders on Scarfell Chace? Was one of the men before me he who had fired murderously upon Miss Arden and brought her so near to death? Perhaps the gun I held in my hand was the very weapon with which the treacherous deed had been done.

I crouched to the ground and crept nearer as these suspicions came to me. I was still fifty or sixty yards from the men, and could see them as yet but indistinctly.

They were both stripped to the waist for their work in the water. I had now got within twenty yards of them. I knelt behind a rock close to the water, and in the shadow of the torches I could see them plainly. One was a man of ordinary height and size; the other towered above him in stature—a broad-shouldered man. He seemed a giant by his companion's side. Both were clean-shaven men. Without any manner of doubt they were the men I had seen from the cavern's mouth upon the hill.

I hastily ran through all the evidence I had accumulated against these men, and I noted the extraordinary height and size of the one. I heard the voices, the shouted

orders of the tall man to his companion. He spoke in Italian, but with the accent of a foreigner. He was the Wallachian Greek Arden had told me of, Dimitri Klistos, for I heard his companion call out his Christian name. It was the villain whom I had tracked in the snow where Miss Arden had fallen, whom she and I had seen disguised with a beard. He was the emissary of Gregory Morson: he it was who had committed this foul and cruel crime.

I waited for a moment to consider. If I did not now take the law into my own hands, was there any chance that this scoundrel and his companion would ever be brought to justice? How was it possible for Miss Arden and for me to escape with our lives if I did not strike first? The ruffian had come within fifteen yards of me as I knelt in the shadow of the rock. It was an abominable deed I had to do, but there was no alternative. I stooped low and unlocked the chambers of the gun to examine the cartridges, which I had already seen were in the breech of the gun.

They were empty. The gun had already been fired.

CHAPTER XXIX.

DOINGS IN THE SEA-CAVERN.

In all the many crises of my life I had never felt relief so great as when I found that it was out of my power to slay the criminal whom I supposed I had held at my mercy. Reason, the great law of self-preservation, and that equitable desire for vengeance which is but another name for justice, above all, anxiety for the safety of his victim, all bade me kill this man, and they do still tell me that I should have done well to kill him there and then; but when I discovered that I could not fire the shot which should rid the world of a foul villain, it was as if a heavy load had been lifted from me. My heart was light and rejoiced with an unreasoning joy; so awful is the necessity of having to slay an undefending man in cold blood, even to execute a righteous sentence upon one unprepared to resist and while one's own life is not imperilled.

I had to wait some minutes, and until the men were drawing in their net, before I could venture to leave my hiding-place and creep back to the darkness I had come from. I looked back when I got into the full shadow again, and saw that the two men were preparing for another haul of their net. I went back to where I had left Miss Arden, undecided for the moment how to act. We had some considerable time before us; they had perhaps half an hour's work at the very least. They were not armed, I was sure. They were hardly clothed, having stripped for their wet job to their seamen's canvas trousers, and those tucked up to the knee. I noticed that they wore shoes to protect their feet from the sharp rocks. I went to the fire, threw on a few pieces from a heap of dry wood and made a blaze. Then I lit one of a bundle of rope torches that stood near, and proceeded to look for cartridges for the gun; but first I ate of the bread and drank of the wine, for I was weak and almost faint from long fasting.

Then I formed a plan. I would load the gun, and, with Miss Arden, walk boldly up to them, pass them, defying them to interfere, embark in their boat, and go out through the cavern's mouth into the open sea, leaving the two men imprisoned in the cave. Then we would hail a fishing-boat and be taken down the coast to Stanhoe. If I could not find a fishing-boat we would land to the south of the river, and return with the police to arrest the prisoners in the cavern.

One only difficulty I saw to this plan. I did not for a moment doubt that my sudden appearance armed would daunt them; and if it did not and they attacked me, I should not hesitate to use the gun; but what I feared was that they would escape into the tunnel by the opening I myself had made.

I lighted a torch and went back to where the wall had been built across, wondering whether I could so repair the gap we had escaped through as to make it impassable to them without tools. I found, what I had not noticed in passing through, that the obstruction had been so left on the seaside, by the rough piling together of great fragments of uncemented rock, as to look to an ignorant eye exactly like the natural termination of the gallery, the place where the miners had finished their excavation, and left a piled-up heap of rock fragments.

Doubtless the frequenters of the sea-cave had never suspected that the gallery continued for miles beyond; still less that a great store of hidden gold had lain within a few yards of them.

By replacing three or four large stones, and filling up the interstices with smaller ones, I easily effaced all trace of our passage. I then smoothed over the marks of our footsteps, and no sign remained of the way we had come.

I happened to be holding the torch aloft, the better to inspect the tracks we had made, when I saw again, staring me, as it were, in the face, the huge, well-remembered footprint of the tall Greek. A thin coating of wood ashes had been thrown down in one place, and here was a distinct imprint of the shoe mark I had seen where Miss Arden had fallen, the impression of the broad-soled shoe, and the indentation of the quincunx of nails.

I had, indeed, no need of this additional proof, the evidence against Dimitri Klistos had been so absolutely strong before, but the sight of it gave me a keen pleasure. I had run my enemy to bay. Vengeance was very near.

It was time to depart. I explained hastily to Miss Arden what my project was. I thought it well to tell her that the men were those who had assailed her. Had she been of less courage I should not have dared to tell her this, but I should have feared to execute my plan at all had I not fully counted upon her nerve. I did right to trust her; she did not flinch.

I had asked her to eat some bread with me, and drink a little wine. I foresaw that she, too, would be sorely tried by hunger and fatigue.

In the meantime I had searched everywhere for cartridges. The gun was a double-barreled one of recent make, of fine finish, one such as a gentleman would use—a breech-loading gun, that would carry nothing but cartridges, and none were forthcoming. I searched for them in vain along both sides of the walls of the tunnel, and not thinking it prudent to delay any longer, I was about to break the useless weapon to pieces against the rocks, when it occurred to me that I might threaten and intimidate the men as well with an unloaded as with a loaded weapon. I had noticed a little hollow in the tunnel's floor, in which I laid the crowbar and pickaxe, and covered them with stones. The gold ingot I was about to throw into the same hole

but again, by a happy chance, I resolved not to leave it behind. Lying in the circle of the firelight, the gold shone with little of the tarnish of time upon its redness, and had a sort of fascination for me. I took it in my hand and carried it with us.

The two men were in the act of taking out the fish they had caught in their net, and, looking down on the ground, they did not see us or hear our steps on the sand. I touched the taller of the two with the muzzle of the gun.

"Dimitri Klistos," I said in a stern voice, "the time for your punishment is at hand!"

My design was to terrify him, and I thoroughly succeeded. He dropped on his knees, probably supposing that nothing but a supernatural visitant could have found him in this secluded cavern; but when I drew back, and he saw plainly that I was no ghostly vision, he rose to his feet and fled swiftly, calling to his companion to follow him. I remembered the boat, and knowing by the fast ebbing of the waters that it must be near the turn of the tide, when only the cavern's mouth could be passed through, I feared they might get away by sea and deprive us of all chances of our own escape. I hurried after them through the tunnel. The men had been using their net near to where the salt-water creek ends, and a distance of only about fifty yards intervened between them and the place where they had moored their boat. Unencumbered with dress as they were, carrying nothing, and knowing their way in the half-darkness, they got to the boat before I could overtake them. They entered her, cast off her moorings, and, helped by the current, were swiftly punting down the narrow channel towards the sea. The creek widens at every yard, and I did not see how I was to stop them, the water being deep. I threatened them with the gun, but they did not stop. We were now come within sound of the waves outside, and into the light of early morning. At one point ahead of us the creek narrows as it passes between jutting rocks. I ran forward, and, standing upon the rocky ledge some three feet above the water, called to them to stop. They paid no attention. I saw that if they succeeded in getting by me, all hopes of our escape were gone. I poised the heavy gold ingot high above my head, and as they passed beneath I hurled it with all my force into the boat. It crashed through the bottom boards as if

they were made of egg-shell, and instantly the boat began to fill with water and to sink.

The shorter man leapt ashore and ran towards the sea. The Greek raised the oar in his hand and struck at my head; but the weapon was too unwieldy, and I easily parried the blow with the gun I held. Clubbing it, I struck down upon him, and, as he moved aside, caught him heavily on the knee. The force of the blow was enough to separate stock and barrel, and I thought I had disabled the man altogether; but he managed to scramble out of the sinking boat, and lay upon the sand, badly hurt and unable to stand.

In the meantime I pursued the other man, and with some difficulty caught and closed with him. As I still carried the barrels of the gun without the stock, and the man was without a knife or other weapon, the struggle was an unequal one, and I had very soon got him down on the ground, and tied his wrists tightly behind him with a piece of rope that lay upon the sand.

Leaving him secured and lying upon his face, groaning and cursing his fate, I turned my attention to the boat. It had drifted down with the current some little distance, and had grounded. I drew it with some difficulty on to the sand, only to discover that one of the oars had floated away and the other was broken. Through the bottom was the hole I had made with the ingot, almost as clean cut as if a very small cannon-ball had passed through. The boat could easily be made sea-worthy by the closing of this hole. I went back for the sail I had seen near the men's fire, and for a pair of fresh oars and the rudder of the boat, bidding Miss Arden stay in the cavern's entrance to watch the man I had bound; and if he made any attempt to release himself, I bade her call to me.

The other man I did not take into account; he was, I believed, disabled by the heavy blow he had received, and I expected, as I walked back towards the dark end of the cavern, to find him still lying near to where I had left him; but he had disappeared. Some of the torches were still burning in the cliffs of the rock where the men had set them to do their fishing by. I took one in my hand and went forward into the dark. The passage winds more than once; and as I turned one such corner, I encountered the tall Greek creeping slowly towards me as he dragged his dis-

abled leg along the sand. We were not five yards apart, and I saw at the first glance that the man carried in his hand a large single-barreled horse pistol. He raised himself a little from the ground and aimed at me, the torch I carried affording him a perfect sight. I cast the blazing torch at him, and, as I did so, leapt to one side to distract his aim; but it was too late to do more than save my life, for, as I leapt, the discharge of the pistol rang through the cavern, and I felt the sharp sting of a bullet on my ankle. I fell heavily to the ground with a painful wound.

CHAPTER XXX.

DIMITRI KLISTOS.

My torch had fallen upon a ledge of rock overhanging the water several feet beyond where the Greek lay stretched along the ground; it was not extinguished, and still cast a dull uncertain light through the cavern. We were lying within five or six yards one of the other. My first anxiety was to know whether he had another pistol or more ammunition; but he had not. Doubtless, while I was engaged in securing his companion, he had crept on hands and feet to fetch his gun, and, finding it gone, had brought back this other and only weapon from some hiding-place I had failed to discover.

Neither of us moved or spoke. On seeing me fall at once to his shot, he must have concluded my wound was in some vital place. He could not have guessed that I was only slightly hurt. Indeed, I was far from being so much disabled as he was himself, for I found that if I did not rest on the foot or use it the pain was quite endurable.

I watched him, and presently I perceived that he was gradually, slowly, almost insensibly, creeping towards me. Nearer he came to me, till I could hear his labored drawing of each breath with the exertion of dragging himself over the ground. I measured his vast bulk with my eye, and for a moment a feeling came to me of the hopelessness of my chance in the struggle that was forthcoming. The burning torch cast its flare upon the naked muscles of his back, and lit up and showed their undulations as he moved

along the ground, still creeping snakewise towards me. In another moment we should be locked in a wrestle for life or death. At any time this man would be a match, and perhaps a good deal more than a match for me, but now I was weakened by what was equivalent to an illness, and by want of rest and sleep. I am a pretty strong man, and my hands are large and their grip strong, but to-day I felt that I should be a weakling in the grasp of this giant. I saw myself choking in the hug of those long, muscular arms, and Sylvia unavenged. I foresaw the terrible peril she stood in if I were killed.

The Greek crept nearer and nearer to me, as I lay crouched down on the ground.

Then I formed my plan. I fixed my eyes on his throat; I saw the great knotted muscle there, triple, strung as tight as the whipcord on a bent bow, stretching from behind his ear to the massive bulk of his naked shoulders. I saw the blood throb through the artery in this place. Here it was I would have him; on this vital spot I would fix my hold, and never let go while life was in me.

He glared upon me with reddened, bloodshot eyes; his hideous features distorted with rage and pain. This was the man who had looked with these same brutal eyes upon Sylvia Arden to murder her. In the fraction of time still left to me, the girl's pale face was before me again as I first saw her lying in the snow; I heard again her first cry of terror and pain as she awoke to consciousness. Then the blood-thirst came upon me strong.

He never ceased to move towards me, and I made no sign. I reserved all my strength; I relaxed and rested all my muscles; I took long, sweet, full inspirations of air, nursing strength, breath, and all my cunning for the coming fight.

Suddenly he half reared himself up from the ground, and, with a roar like a wild beast's, sprang upon me. I rose towards him, and in a moment we had seized each other and had fallen together to the ground.

I found myself within the embrace of his huge, ape-like, hairy arms. My ribs bent under the compression, and I had perforce to stay my breathing, like one who dives beneath the water. The pressure grew unendurably heavier every moment. I felt my strength going, I felt the waning of my very life; but in the agony of nearing

death, and when darkness was already before my eyes, the thought of vengeance yet untaken came back to me. The grip which at the very outset I had fixed with both hands on my enemy's throat did not relax; it tightened.

We were rolling together, now upon the rocky ground, now upon the sandy margin of the creek, now in the shallow water, as he flung me to and fro upon the rocks, and as I lay in the hug of his arms. His aim was to suffocate me in his grasp, and to bruise the life out of me against the rocks; mine, only to give to his wrestling, to let my body swing to his most violent efforts, and to concentrate all my force and all my endurance on the grip which had fastened upon his throat.

At last the strain upon his windpipe told; his breathing labored and grew loud, and suddenly an agony of breathlessness came over him. He made a convulsive effort to release himself, and seeing that he could not, he relaxed his hold of me and, knotting his right fist, struck blow after blow furiously upon my chest.

The sound of the blows resounded through the hollow cavern.

I breathed again a long, full breath as soon as his grasp was off me, and I tightened my hold upon his neck. The darkness that had so nearly closed over my eyes was lifted, and I saw the ruffian's face contorted and blackening to near death.

His head fell forward; all force left him; I knew that his life was measured by seconds, and that, still holding him tightly by the throat, I was killing him.

Suddenly the thought came to me that this death I was giving him was too honorable, too quick, and altogether too sweet and merciful for a wretch so black in crime and cruelty. I freed his throat of my grip.

At this moment the torch which had been burning on the ledge of rock above us, fell from the rock into the water and was extinguished. We were in perfect darkness. My late adversary did not move, but I could hear his breathing.

Presently I tried to rise, and found that my wound gave me less trouble than I had expected. By supporting myself against the wall of the tunnel I could limp forward. When I reached the fire I examined the hurt, and discovered that the bullet had glanced off the bone. I bound

the wound up tightly with a strip of sailcloth, and found that I could walk without much pain or difficulty. I took the sail, the mast, a pair of sculls, a knife, and a few other things I should require, and, lighting another torch at the fire, made my way again towards Miss Arden

I saw several pistol cartridges scattered on the sand, and this explained to me why the Greek had not loaded and fired a second time. In his haste to return he had dropped them. I picked up two or three and went forward.

When I came to where the Greek had been lying, I found that he had rolled himself, no doubt in the effort to escape from me as he heard me move, into the shallow creek. His body lay in it face downwards. I dragged him quickly from the water. The man was drowned. If he had fallen in when I left him, as I supposed he did, he must already have been ten minutes in the water. I raised him against the rocks ; his head fell to one side. He was a dead man. I picked up his pistol from the ground and went on.

When I reached Miss Arden, I found her unquiet at my long absence, but she had no suspicion of its cause ; the noise of the waves in the mouth of the cavern where she sat were so loud that she had not heard the pistol shot.

I perceived by the lowering of the water in the creek, that the time was at hand for our passage out from the cavern, which, as I have already explained, can take place only during about half an hour at dead low water. I had brought back with the other things for the boat, a hammer, nails, and what was needful to stop the hole in the boat's bottom. I plugged the leak with a tight pledget of sailcloth, and nailed pieces of canvas over all, inside and outside.

Then I ran the boat into the water, lifted the bound man, and dropped him, still cursing and groaning, face downwards into the bows. I picked up the broken barrels of the gun, and laid this handy weapon in readiness upon the thwarts, having first allowed the ruffian to feel it once or twice sharply across his shoulders ; and I informed him that if he so much as moved again, I would use it still more effectually upon his head. I treated him thus roughly with a purpose for I designed presently to get something in the nature of a confession from him.

When all was ready I helped Miss Arden into the stern-sheets. She took the helm, and I sculled slowly through the entrance into the open sea.

The light outside dazzled us at first. A soft, dry, warm, southerly breeze was blowing; the sky was a misty blue, studded high up with innumerable little fleecy clouds, and everywhere the rippling waves caught brilliant points of light from the sky. Nature herself seemed to be welcoming us back to her beauty, her warmth, and her light, who had passed through the darkness of the cheerless tomb, and forgotten for a time how kindly is the face of day.

When our eyes had got used to the intense light, we looked about us for any sign of fishing-boats. There was a little fleet of five or six, some miles away in the offing to the south-west, and we also made out to the north, further off in point of distance but much nearer in regard to time, the smoke of the yacht's steam launch. I guessed that they were taking advantage of the turn of the tide to enter the cavern and to communicate with those inside.

I immediately stepped the short mast, set the spritsail I had brought with me, and stood out to sea on a short board to the westward. By doing this we were approaching the fishing-boats in a slanting direction, but the launch was nearing us directly and much faster. I then ran up a little makeshift flag to the peak of our sprit, dipping it three times, which I remembered to have heard signifies a signal of distress among the fisher-folk of these coasts.

The signal was quickly responded to; first one, then a second, then the whole of the little fleet, to the number of five, bore down upon us with the wind abaft and traveling very fast through the water. We were presently to discover the reason of this readiness to answer our call for help.

In the meantime the launch, going at full speed, was rapidly overhauling us. It was clear she must be upon us long before we could get within reach of help from the fishermen. Seeing that she was steering west to cut us off on the port tack, I went about sailing very free on the starboard tack: by so doing we increased our pace and considerably prolonged the launch's stern chase of us. We were pleased to see that the fishermen felt our manœuvre at once, and steered two points more to the south, trim-

ming their sails instantly to their new course. It was certain they were watching us closely and had their suspicions roused as to the people in the launch.

I calculated that we had still a good quarter of an hour or twenty minutes before us, and I used the time to get from our prisoner some evidence that I thought would be useful if we escaped.

I went to him, and pulling him over a little on his side —for till that moment he had lain as I had left him, face down—but so that he still lay like a log at the bottom of the boat, "I am going," I said, "to have you punished for the murder you tried to commit on Scarfell Chace."

The man groaned. "It was not I," he said.

"I know it was not you. I know it was Dimitri Klistos who fired the shot, but you were with him, for I saw you. I saw him point to the ground, and he said, 'She has passed here.'"

The fellow muttered an invocation to the Saints; he would have crossed himself, had his hand been free. Evidently he considered some supernatural interference had helped me to know this.

"Now," said I, "if you tell me the whole truth I may not press you very hardly. By whose orders did you try to kill the young lady?"

"By the doctor's."

"He told you to go from the cave, to take your gun and murder the young lady when she came by on her pony?"

"He told Dimitri, not me, but I heard him."

"And you went with Dimitri Klistos?"

"Dimitri said I must. I was afraid to go. I was afraid to stay. I was afraid to disobey Dimitri. I went."

"And the doctor said, 'Go and kill this young lady'—nothing more?"

"He said the master wished it—it was the master's orders—the *Padrone's* and he gave Dimitri Klistos money to do it. He told him where he must watch."

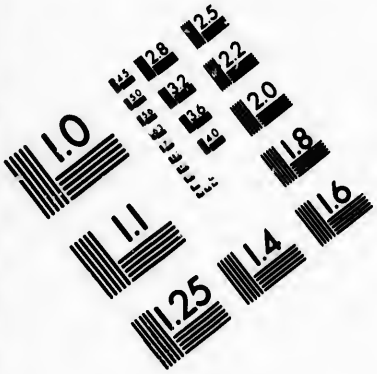
"The *Padrone?*—Mr. Gregory Morson?"

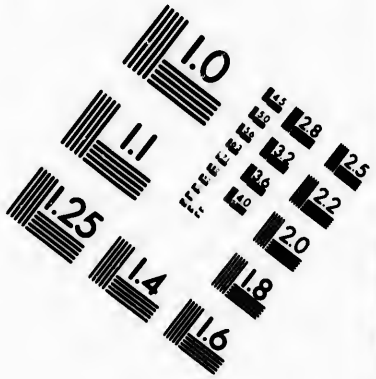
"Yes; he is the *Padrone.*"

"You and Dimitri Klistos lived there in that cavern?"

"Yes, for days sometimes, when there was work to do for the *Padrone* on the Chace."

"And the doctor came and gave you Mr. Morson's order in the launch?"





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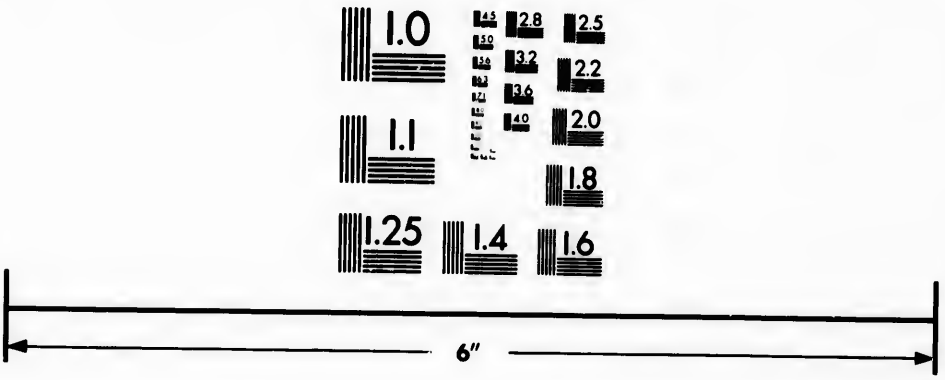

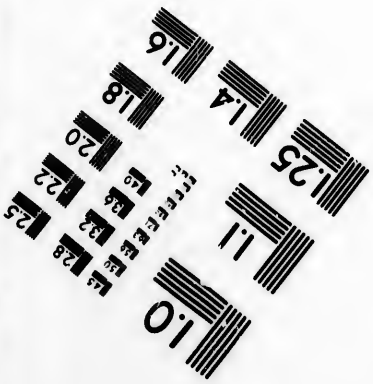

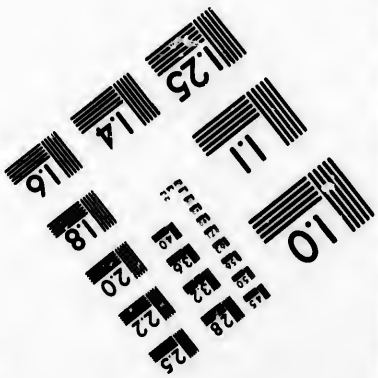

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"Yes; we were never to stir from the cavern unless by his or the master's orders. But Your Excellency knows everything."

"You expected the doctor this morning?"

"Yes; at the turn of the tide."

The launch was now within hail of us; in a very few minutes she would run into us, while the fishing boats were still over a mile away to windward.

I thought of what might still give us a chance of escaping them, or at least delay their overtaking our boat. I put the tiller in Miss Arden's hands; took a knife, and cut the cord that bound the prisoner's wrists. I left him to himself for one or two minutes to recover the use of his limbs; then I bid him stand on the thwart. I held the barrels of the gun in my right hand, while the pistol was in my left. He looked round the horizon and saw the five fishing boats bearing down upon us, and the launch, which, by this, was close in our wake. Then he looked at me, speculating perhaps as to his chance if he should make a fight for it; but, seeing me prepared and armed he gave way and his countenance fell currishly.

"Jump overboard!" I cried.

He hesitated. The miscreant, who had abetted an attempt to murder an unresisting girl, feared to risk his life in the water. I rose and struck him again across the back with the iron barrels. The man feared to use the chance I was giving him for his liberty, but as I raised the weapon again, he leaped with a groan into the sea and struck out strongly. The coast was within a mile of us, the sea calm, the wind and current with him, and in strict justice I felt that I was dealing too leniently with the rascal in giving him so fair a chance of getting free.

My expectation, however, was that his fellows in the launch might stop to pick him up, and so give us time to get a little nearer to our friends. The men in her seemed to hesitate, but presently stopped their way and picked their shipmate up, and then came after us again. The delay gave us another three hundred yards, but presently they were upon us again and within a hundred yards, and I could see them distinctly, three men in the launch, and at the tiller I made out the white, malignant face of the Italian doctor.

My apprehension was that they had firearms with them, though of this I saw as yet no sign.

As a precaution, I made Miss Arden lie down in the bottom of the boat.

The fishing fleet had now come within less than two furlongs of us, and the leading boats were racing up with all the speed of oars and canvas. I glanced round, reserving my action to the very last moment. The launch hailed us to stop; they were within fifty yards. I paid no attention; we were carrying on steadily, and still sailing so free in the light wind that our rate of going was considerable. I kept my left hand on the tiller, and in the steady breeze, I had ventured to make the main sheet fast. The launch was within thirty yards of us—now twenty—now fifteen.

"Stop!" cried the Italian, "or I fire!" and he leveled a revolver at my head.

My answer was to aim at the villain as he stood up in the stern sheets; I covered him, and fired. As I did so, I saw the smoke from the discharge of his own pistol.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE ITALIAN'S FATE.

THE motion of the boat, or the excitement into which the sudden sight of this hateful wretch had thrown me, caused me to miss my aim. My bullet did not reach him—so far, at least, as I could judge by his movements. I felt the ball from his revolver pass through the hair on my temple, as I stood up bareheaded in the boat. The very moment afterwards half a dozen shots were discharged from the leading boats of the fishermen, now not sixty yards from us. I heard the whistle of slugs or bullets pass my ears, and saw the Italian doctor spring a yard into the air and fall back across the gunwale of the launch. For a moment he lay there motionless; then, in the last convulsions of death, his body slid over the gunwale into the sea and immediately sank like a stone,

The men in the launch turned her head from us, and steamed quickly back towards Scarfell Towers.

Presently the fishing-boats had come up, and I recognized among the men the two who had put me across the mouth of the river.

Sylvia Arden was saved at last. She rose up from the bottom of the boat. She had heard the sound of shots and the whistling of bullets overhead, but she knew nothing of the cause. Now she saw the danger was past; her enemies were in flight, and around her none but the friendly faces of the fishermen.

They crowded round us in their boats, and were eager to hear the reason of our flight and of our signals for help. From what they told me, this bit of the coast had for years been a terror to all of their trade. They could not come within gunshot of it without the risk of being fired upon by some generally unseen person among the rocks, of being chased by the steam launch, and of being scared away by the firing of the men on board her. A boat and its crew had been lost and never heard of again, and it was shrewdly suspected the men had met with foul play from the squire's Italian sailors. The fishermen had become exasperated by this treatment, and had lately themselves carried arms, and had exchanged shots more than once with the crew of the launch. This explained why they so readily understood our signals of distress, why they so quickly came to the rescue of a boat evidently escaping from the launch, and it explained, too, their volley in our defence.

"My men," I said, "you have knocked over the biggest villain in Great Britain, and you have saved this young lady's life; for most certainly, if you had not killed him, he would have killed her and me."

I said I could not tell them at present more than this—that there had been very foul play on the Chace; that the man they had seen me throw overboard, to give us a chance of coming up to them, was one of two who had waylaid Miss Arden on the Chace five days before, and tried to murder her.

One of the fishermen asked me if the other was a very tall man, as tall as or taller than myself.

I said he was.

They told me in a breath he was the most murderous villain of the whole gang. They knew him well by sight, having seen him scores of times on the rocks with a gun, on the look-out for them. He had fired upon them from the launch, and they knew almost for a certainty that he had murdered some of their people who landed on the Chace.

"Well," I said, pointing to my wounded ankle, "this is the last shot he fired, and he will never fire another. Now," I said, "listen to me, and tell me if you can help us. When I got away with this young lady, my thought was to take that rascal whom I had with me in the boat to the police at Stanhoe, tell my story, and get help; but that would have taken a whole day, and time pressed, so I made him go overboard. I don't know what these scoundrels may not do at the Towers, and there is a lady there who is in danger. Well," I said, looking about me on the honest faces round us, "what say you to this? Here are a good dozen of you with guns, not counting boys, who can stay with the boats. Will you land with me at the creek here? I'll lead you to the Towers, and the devil's in it if, being Englishmen, we don't turn the whole crew of rascally foreigners off the Chace in no time. What say you to that?"

They said not a word, good or bad, but they looked at me awhile with a dazed, uncomprehending gaze; then they turned to Sylvia Arden's sweet, appealing face, and they brightened up somewhat. I watched them very anxiously. Then they looked at one another, and their rough features relaxed into a smile. Then they broke suddenly with one accord into a cheer, but never a word did they speak. I confess it plainly, that when these big, broad-shouldered, stern-featured, slouching fellows gave this sudden hurrah, the sound rang out to me like the voice of a friend. It may be that it was having lived so many years away from England that made my heart warm to these honest, hearty countrymen of mine.

They called out to the poor down-hearted girl to "Cheer up, miss!" And one young giant in a blue jersey, who happened to be holding on to the gunwale of our boat, brought his hand down on my shoulder with a thump that was meant to encourage me, but was liker to a knock-down blow: "Never you fear for us, sir, only you show us the way!" That was every word that was spoken by the men, and the others assented with nothing more than an "Ay! ay!" or a nod of the head.

Ah! It needs to have passed ten years amid the deafening, jabbering incompetence of Southerners to know the good there is in this silent reserve of the strong, stern man who, when he means working or fighting, means it with all his heart, but wastes not a breath to say so.

Not a syllable more did they say to me or to each other, but each boat's crew set to work to get their own boat before the wind. One man hauled on the lugsail halyards; another boomed out the sails before the light wind that blew direct to land; the third man took his place at the helm.

I ran up the peak of my spritsail again, and, being the lightest boat of them all, went ahead and led the little squadron to the sandy creek where the fishermen had first put me ashore on Scarfell Chace. some hours less than five days before.

When we landed and I counted my men, I found I had fourteen, eleven of whom carried something in the way of a gun; one carried a huge long-barreled pistol with a flint lock; two who had no firearms would not be left behind, but brought each a stretcher from his boat and shouldered it like a musket.

I did not expect any opposition on the Chace itself, but I thought it likely that as by this time the launch would have returned to the yacht, Gregory Morson, if he were at the Towers, might be already apprised of what had occurred, and prepared, with the help of his crew of ruffianly sailors, to resist us if we landed in any force. I was resolved, however, at all hazards to force our way into the house, if for no other reason, for the protection of Lady Raby.

As had happened all through the course of these events, that which did actually take place differed as far as was possible from what I had foreseen and forecast.

My desire was to reach the Towers so quickly that our coming should take the dwellers there by surprise. I meant to travel along the narrow path which winds among the hillocks and dells and, avoiding the rougher ground near the sea, passes within a few hundred yards of the ruined church.

My wound had become stiff in the boat, and I had to lean upon the shoulder of one of the fishermen as I walked; but with this help I could get forward as quickly as the others.

We soon reached the high land near the church, and could thence look towards the Towers over the lower and more broken country that intervened. I was a little surprised to see a body of men in the distance, in the dress

of blue-jackets, and carrying firearms. We could count them; they numbered sixteen; that is, as I imagined, they were the whole available crew of the *Lucifer*. They were coming forward in no regular order, but in a cluster, very much indeed as we ourselves were marching.

We should naturally, on our way to the Towers, have left the church some distance to our right, but now I resolved to make straight for it, and place Miss Arden within the shelter of its walls, while we men could deal with the yacht sailors, with whom some sort of collision seemed imminent. While we made this change in our course the Italians, too, diverged to their right, and made for a bit of rough high ground within less than a quarter of a mile of the church, and commanding a full view of the building and the cliffs hard by.

Two things struck me: first, that they knew nothing of the rudiments of fighting, for they advanced even after they were aware of our presence, in a group, into which a volley from us, had we possessed rifles, would have carried destruction; and secondly that, though superior to us in numbers and, as I was certain in arms, they seemed by their movements by no means greatly bent upon showing fight.

As soon as I supposed they were within rifleshot of us, I deployed my people as well as I could into line, with a good interval between each man; and in this order we marched towards the church.

We were within fifty yards of the smaller door of the building, at the angle formed by it with the ruined belfry tower, which itself stands on the very verge of the cliff, at the foot of which flows the river. This was the very spot where I had first spoken to Miss Arden. She and I were now walking some few paces in front of the line of fishermen, while I had on my left the man on whose shoulder I was obliged to support myself.

As we drew near, the door was suddenly thrown open. A solitary figure came forth and stood for an instant gazing upon us with a bewildered air. It was Gregory Morson.

I raised my hand to the men behind me in sign to them to halt.

For a moment we stood thus face to face. He looked at me, whom he had thought murdered by his own command, whom he had seen with his own eyes carried down

into the tomb; at the girl who had disappeared and left no trace, and who, as he doubtless must have thought, had escaped from him only to die by her own hand. He saw behind us the array of stern-faced, armed men; and in that instant his reason departed from him. No other explanation of what then occurred can I give, or can I find.

For one moment he stood before us. Then he covered his face with his hands to shut out the awful vision that his remorseful imagination must have conjured up. All the material laws that his vile philosophy had taught him to trust to had been broken; the grave had given up its dead, his murdered victims were walking the earth to seek him out and avenge their cruel fates upon him. The God whom he had never ceased to believe in and to worship, but whose Law he had consistently outraged, had in His anger commanded His creatures whom he had murdered to haunt and to punish him.

I gave the signal with my hand, and we began to close in upon him.

He suddenly uncovered his face, and saw that the visionary figures had not vanished; they were slowly coming nearer and nearer. We were so close upon him that we could see his face. It was ghastly,—contorted with fear and horror. He raised his clenched hands above his head and uttered one long, awful, despairing cry, the unmistakable shriek of insanity. Then he rushed to the edge of the precipice and leapt into the boiling torrent below.

We hurried to the edge of the cliff, whence we could see the whole course of the river, now in full flood, far below us. Amid the swirl of tumbling waves we could at first distinguish nothing, while the din of the rushing water filled our ears.

Presently two arms were thrust above the waters. We could see nothing more, nothing of his body, so dark and untransparent was the flood water. None of us could hear the other speak, the waters were too loud; but the fishermen lining the cliff pointed silently to the two emerging arms; and the men's pointing fingers, following the course of the hidden floating body, moved with it as the current bore it along hither and thither, turning it round in its eddies, but always hurrying it downwards towards the sea.

As it went on, the arms were slowly drawn down lower and lower, till only the hands were visible, and they clenched as if in the agonies of death. At last they, too, went under, though the men still followed with their pointing forefingers what they supposed was the body's hidden course beneath the current, and fancied now and again that they saw something in the water; but neither then, nor ever after, did any man again see the body of Gregory Morson.

So engrossed had we been by this tragedy that we had almost forgotten the group of Italian sailors on the hill close by. From the elevation where they stood they must have seen the action of their master; they must have seen his frenzied rush to the precipice, and his leap over its edge. Though they could not, from their position, have seen the river, they must have learnt very clearly from the pointing hands of the fishermen what was the fate of him they had seen take this desperate leap.

The cliff at this point is too steep to be descended, and the river is not anywhere to be reached within a mile from the church. We could therefore do nothing but watch from where we stood for the reappearance of Gregory Morson's body; and when some minutes had gone by, and we saw nothing but the swirls of brown water, and the waves dashed into foam against the rocky banks, we knew for a certainty that he was drowned, and was being dragged, even as we stood by looking on, a senseless corpse, tumbled over and rolling and smitten and bruised, along the stony bottom of the river, and swiftly carried by its current towards the sea.

CHAPTER XXXII.

CONCLUSION.

THEN we turned our eyes and thoughts to those whom we knew to be our immediate and living enemies. I debated with myself whether to march my men to the house, paying no attention to the Italians, who were now by their own action removed from our path; that is to say, it was possible to reach the Towers by a way which followed the

river, without coming any nearer to them than we were at this moment. This course had one objection to it, that though they had showed some disinclination to attack us, they would no doubt pluck up the heart to do so if we showed any symptoms of being afraid of them. They might follow us and harass us by their fire. We guessed they had much better arms and of longer range than our own, and Miss Arden would thus be exposed to great danger, for we must needs take her with us.

There seemed, therefore, no alternative but to attack them on their hill and destroy them, or put them to flight, much as it went against the grain with me to waste the precious time. When I explained the matter to the men they were entirely of my way of thinking; indeed, it would have been a great disappointment to the poor fellows to deprive them of the chance of a brush with the scoundrels who had so long molested them.

I put it to them that, though I had no doubt they would be well able to give a good account of the villains when they should come to close quarters, they must bear in mind the chance of the Italians being better armed than themselves; therefore they must creep up to the enemy under cover of the broken ground, and not fire at all till they got to the top and were within a range of fifty yards of them, keeping their breath for a last charge. Then they were to fire a volley, not waiting to load again, and run in immediately, clubbing their guns and trusting to finish the Italians with the butt-ends alone.

We had held our little council of war in the angle of the wall with the tower, and out of sight of the enemy; and when the men had taken in the plan of attack, and I had placed Miss Arden in safety inside the church, we formed into the same open order as before, and our line began to advance across the level ground towards the hill. I thought I had never seen men who so little meant fighting as the Italians, or, if they did, took a worse way to set about it. They were still gathered in a group on the very summit of the hill, and we could see they were gesticulating one to the other in a very contemptible manner.

When we reached the broken ground at the foot of the hill, we extended our line still further and advanced our flanks so as half to surround it; then we set about making the ascent. The climb was easy, and the hill so low and

bare towards the top that we had a full view of the enemy all the way up.

They had seemed in some doubt as to our intentions, and quite in two minds as to their own; but when they perceived this deliberate advance of armed men upon them, they hesitated not a moment longer. Three or four of them leveled their pieces at us and fired with more malignity than aim, and the bullets whistled harmlessly over our heads. The moment after, they and their comrades incontinently took to their heels, and ran as fast as they could down the opposite side of the hill.

I was better pleased, I dare say, at this inglorious ending of the affair than any of my men. I called them together, and while two of them went to the hill-top to watch the Italians, the rest of us took our way back to the church, brought out Miss Arden, and proceeded on our way to the Towers as fast as we could go. I feared that the ruffians, seeing how their master had died by his own act, and feeling free of all control, might do some evil deed there—sack and burn the undefended house, for aught I could guess—and therefore we pressed on. We were presently to learn that they had conceived a more daring piece of villainy still.

When we had gone about a mile, and had come to more broken ground, we halted and recalled our scouts from the hill, who told us that the Italians had not gone to the house at all, but to the left, towards the creek where lay the *Lucifer*. In their haste they were throwing down their weapons by the way. They were running still, the men said.

When we reached Scarfell Towers no one was in sight, and everything wore its quiet, everyday aspect.

We rang and knocked as if we were ordinary visitors, and as usual two of the foreign servants came to the door. They cried out and crossed themselves when they saw my face, whom they had seen carried to the grave, and I was not surprised that they ran back in alarm. Presently seeing Miss Arden, whose mysterious disappearance on the night of the funeral was of course known to them, curiosity got the better of their fright, and they came forward again. By this time the fourteen fishermen had entered the hall.

Miss Arden asked immediately after her aunt. She was confined to her rooms, the servants said, and ill. Miss

Arden went at once to her, to inform her of what had occurred.

The servants also told me that Colonel Arden had not yet returned from London, but was expected every moment.

I then informed the Italian servants of their master's death not two hours ago; and I told them that the mistress of Scarfell Towers, and their own in future, was Miss Arden.

I could trust so little to the discipline of the *Lucifer's* crew that I thought well to ask the fishermen to stay at the house till we could get protection from the law. They willingly consented, and I took them to the servants' quarters, and had food and drink given to them, leaving them to tell the English-speaking servants the circumstances of Gregory Morson's death, and the events in which they had themselves taken part.

I let some time pass before I interrupted Lady Raby and Miss Arden. I found Lady Raby ill, but not so seriously ill as I had feared. She was bewildered by all that had occurred, and suffering from anxiety rather than actual illness. She had been in terror at the mysterious disappearance of her niece. Her only hope had lain in the return of Colonel Arden. She had bitterly reproached herself for not having taken him into her confidence long before. Miss Arden had given her a full account of our extraordinary escape, and the strange adventures that had since been crowded into a very short period. As we were still talking, Colonel Arden walked into the room. He had heard the story of Gregory Morson's death from the servants, who had now learnt all the particulars from the fishermen; but beyond this he knew absolutely nothing, not even of my supposed death, and of his sister's disappearance. I left him with the two ladies. I was, in truth, exhausted with fatigue, faint with hunger, and in considerable pain from the wound in my ankle.

I had not been half an hour in my room before John Arden knocked at the door. He came in, took my hand, pressed it warmly; then sat down by the bed on which I was lying. For a little space of time he said nothing; I was the less surprised at this, seeing that he is a very reserved and silent man, but when he speaks out he speaks to the purpose.

"Bearcroft, my dear fellow," he said, "I have been a damned fool all through this business."

I made some sort of a deprecating murmur.

"Yes, that scoundrel had blinded me. I believed everything he told me. It would have been my fault entirely if he had murdered you and my sister. I was under a spell. He had done me a great service once, and that blinded me; but now that I know all this, my eyes are opened—I see him as he was."

I lifted myself on my elbow and looked at him. "Tell me this, Arden: was this man mad or was he not?"

"He was never mad, unless it was at the very last moment of his life, when he jumped into the river; and even that I doubt. He was a man with wild notions of life, and he let them carry him away. He never knew what justice was or what mercy was, unless they came from himself. Two things that keep some men straight were wanting in him: he had no prudence, and he had no fear; but he had the selfishness and the cunning of the devil, so he followed his own devices to the bitter end, through all risks and all opposition."

"But," I said, "is that not insanity? Does not all this make him a madman?"

"No; it made him a criminal who deserved death. He is dead, and damned. Let us never mention his name again."

While he spoke the servants came running in to say that the crew of the yacht were taking her out of harbor.

I got up, and, with Arden's help, I walked to the creek, and found that the sailors had got out the launch and two boats, and had already nearly succeeded in towing the *Lucifer* out of the creek. We saw that the engine fires were lit, and as we looked on, helpless to interfere, the screw gave the first turn in the water. Then the men rowed back to the yacht, the boats were hauled to the davits, while the revolutions of the screw gradually increased in number, and the yacht slowly glided out to sea.

Arden and I walked forward a hundred yards, to the point of the little headland which forms the mouth of the harbor. We were in time to see the *Lucifer* steaming very fast to the southward. We watched her for some time, neither of us having uttered a word, till she was a mere speck in the distance.

"Are you sorry?" asked John Arden. "I am not."

"No; it saves us trouble with the police. These scoundrels knew the game was up; bolting was their only line."

It was as a matter of form, rather than from necessity, that we communicated with the police; but we told them no more than that Gregory Morson had committed suicide, and that the crew of the *Lucifer* had been guilty of an act of piracy in running off with the vessel. A long search was made along the river banks and by the seashore for the body of the master of Scarfell Towers, but it was never found.

I have almost nothing to add to this narration of the series of events at Scarfell Chace. The very thorough exploration which we made of the underground galleries led to the discovery of no fewer than five secret deposits of gold ingots, some of them of astounding richness. The size and shape of the bars proved clearly enough that they were Roman, and certain letters and figures on their sides showed them to belong to the third or the earliest part of the fourth century of our era. I may mention, for the curious, that we found twenty or twenty-two of them, carried pannier-wise, a sufficient load for a moor pony, each ingot weighing a little over nine pounds and a quarter and representing therefore a value of over £470.

Six months after the events recorded in these pages, we received news that the crew of the yacht *Lucifer* had been arrested at Smyrna, charged with a series of particularly barbarous acts of piracy among the small coasting craft, Greek and Italian, in Levantine waters. With the summary and very unconventional equity of the Turkish tribunals, the whole of their number had been put to death within three days of their apprehension.

I had occasion to visit European Turkey shortly afterwards, and I succeeded, by making certain declarations, and paying a few fines to the authorities, in recovering the *Lucifer* for her rightful owner.

The name *Lucifer* recalling some unpleasant memories, we changed it to the *Sylvia*, the name of my wife.

THE END.