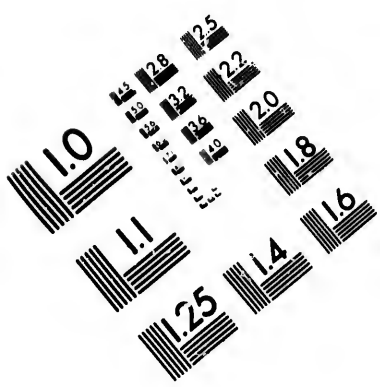

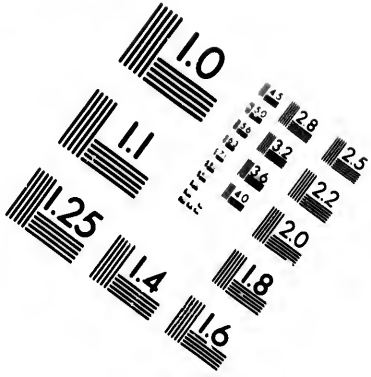

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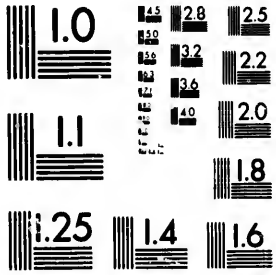

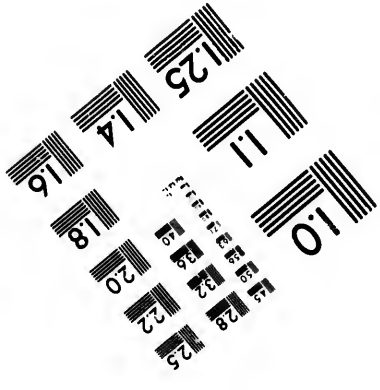

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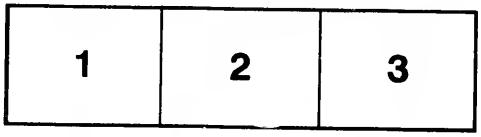

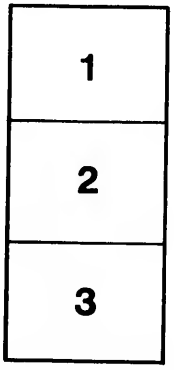

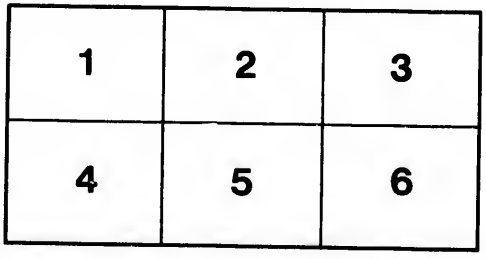

AN ODD MAN'S STORY.

BY

ISIDORE G. ASCHER,

AUTHOR OF

'An Old Maid's Confession,' 'A Miser's Story,' 'Voices from the Hearth,' etc.

'I will a round, unvarnish'd tale deliver
Of my whole course of love.'

SHAKESPEARE.

LONDON:
ELLIOT STOCK, 62, PATERNOSTER ROW.
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1889.

Enscribed

TO

MY TRUEST CRITIC AND BEST FRIEND,

MY WIFE.

AN ODD MAN'S STORY.

CHAPTER I.

I AM what people call an odd man. I firmly believe that I have nothing in common with any other living person on this 'great globe we inhabit.'

There are peculiarities in my appearance and character unlike anyone else's. Men often think that they possess idiosyncrasies not shared by their neighbours; but, as a rule, this fact is only apparent to themselves. Nobody else seems aware

of it; but my case is different, for everybody designates me an odd man.

Some of my eccentricities are natural, whilst others have grown out of certain episodes in my life, which will form the subject of this narrative.

Let me introduce myself. Fancy a tall, ungainly, oldish-looking man, whose general appearance is slovenly, and whose clothes give one the idea that they do not belong to him, but to someone else very unlike him, and you have a rough etching of my exterior.

Imagine a brown-skinned, weather-beaten, care-scarred, big-featured face, covered with wiry, gray hair; an irregular, white beard, solemn brown eyes and a somewhat large, though well-shaped mouth, hardly visible through the thick moustaches; and you may then form a faint idea of my visage.

In the house, I always wear a particular old coat, somewhat patched and greasy, preserved with sedulous care through many years, the lining of which hides, not bank-notes, but something which I shall mention in its place. Although this garment alone would be sufficient to give any civilized being of the nineteenth century an odd aspect, still certain other singularities in my dress make me appear still more peculiar. I always wear a stock, fitting closely to my throat and reaching to my chin. I may observe here, that I can well-afford a better coat; nor have I any throat disease to warrant the use of the stock. Yet, the whim that once urged me and still urges me to adopt so strange a dress is by no means a causeless whim. Instead of the 'apparel proclaiming

the man,' my story shall proclaim the apparel.

In order that my appearance may not mislead my readers into wrong impressions as to what I am, let me inform them that I am not a miser, nor an old-clothes man ; nor am I a decayed soldier or sailor in receipt of a munificent pension allowed by a grateful Government for long and tried services.

My name is Timothy Dunn. I am a solicitor, and I am now living upon a very moderate independence secured by my past industry. Nevertheless, I have an office in Crooke Court, leading out of one of the main streets in the City of London, and I also possess a very pleasant suburban retreat, not many miles from Richmond.

My household is not very large ; altogether, we number seven living creatures,

which include a parrot, a canary, a cat, and a dog. Besides myself, there are two human beings, a very old servant, and a young lady who is so dear to me that I hardly like to profane my feelings for her by giving then. expression in print.

Yet, she alone gives a reality to a past which, without her, would only be a distempered vision. Her living presence takes the dark out of Time's waning memories, until its aching sorrows become transmuted into sacred joys.

Life to me would only be as a 'sleep and a forgetting' without her.

She keeps together the leaves of the by-gone years, which otherwise would have long ago crumbled into dust. She binds me to those days which I would fain forget, but whose remembrance now,

hovering wherever she is, seems almost to have become 'a trailing cloud of glory.'

These words may seem enigmatical, but the pages that are to follow will elucidate them.

Of course, we are all very companionable. The old servant, a very angular-looking creature, with terrible, assertive front teeth, has lived with us so long, and has served us so faithfully, that she seems like one of ourselves. We bear with her faults, submit to her gossip, and allow her to do as she pleases.

Our household pets, the birds and quadrupeds have also a very fast hold on us. In fact, I could not endure existence without them.

Sometimes, on a winter's evening, when all in the house are at rest, and I linger

over the fire, the dog crouching at my feet seems to know my thoughts; and in his honest, glowing eyes, I can read his suppressed sympathy.

And when I doff my coat, and place it on a chair, Fido at once scampers to keep 'watch and ward' over it, as if the brute's fine instincts had divined its contents. The parrot is also a special object of my regard; but as these birds always take more kindly to men than to women, I have to thank its instincts rather than myself for being its favourite.

It is not a bit like 'Poe's raven,' or 'Buchanan's starling;' for it is neither a croaker nor a misanthrope. The very flutter of its wings, as it flies towards me and perches on my shoulder, is a pleasant sound; nor do I hear any discord in the voice that screams the various odd sentences

I have taught it, such as 'Tim wake up!' 'Tim never regret!' and so on.

Of course the canary is Mary's pet, and Bridget McWaddle, the old servant, neglectful as she is of us sometimes, never forgets to minister to the wants of the cat, a magnificent, large, sleek, black creature, with splendid, green shining eyes. Such is my household—and now to my story, which I narrate for Mary's benefit, in order that she may have a full and complete knowledge of certain matters which, I dare say, by this time she may only have partially guessed.

CHAPTER II.

I was born in a little village on the Devonshire coast. I am the younger of two sons. I have hardly any recollection of my mother, whom I must have lost when I was very young.

My father I shall never forget.

Our memory does not always obey our behests; it often hoards forms which we would rather 'devouring Time' had destroyed. On the other hand, it sometimes generously keeps images which, impalpable as they may be, only die with ourselves.

May the remembrance of my father never fade! In the silence of my thoughts

my mental vision sees him now very distinctly: a man under the middle height, of a spare, wiry, active temperament, with bright, genial hazel eyes, thin compressed lips, and thick masses of iron-gray hair.

I have often thought that, for a man, there was too much tenderness in his eyes and that his mouth was too refined.

Of a large-souled and tolerant nature, he sometimes carried kindness to excess, which often made him weak when he ought to have been strong. And yet, on forming a strong impression, no power on earth could eradicate it; so that his dogged obstinacy would sometimes make his kind nature unjust and merciless. Unfortunately, I have good reasons to remember this trait.

My brother Godfrey, unlike my father or

myself in appearance or disposition, was the former's favourite.

I must speak of him now as I recollect him when we were boys. As a lad, he must have inherited our mother's delicate charms of person, grace of manner, and gentleness of speech, which no doubt accounted for my father's strange fondness for him, evincing itself in an over-indulgence for his whims, and in a forgetfulness of his faults.

There was quite a chasm of difference between my brother's disposition and my own. I was an odd-minded boy; he was an even-minded one.

I not only felt I was differently constituted to those around me, but I always endeavoured to make this difference apparent. Determined to have a conduct of life of my own, I resolved I would never be the

slave of conformity. On the other hand, my brother, taking his cue from the world, always abjectly bowed to its rules and usages. In fact, he was one 'whose sole word, thought, and deed, are built on what the world may say of him.'

In consequence, then, of our dissimilar dispositions, we did not fraternize; and as there was not much in common between my father and myself, I did not force myself on his notice. Thus, at the age of eighteen, I was estranged from my family, and lived a somewhat lonely and moody existence.

CHAPTER III.

My father was a doctor of medicine, and having an excellent practice in and around the neighbourhood of the sea-port town where we resided, he had amassed a small fortune before I had attained my majority. At certain times, when he was disposed to be generally communicative to me, he would say :

'I never advise anyone to choose my profession, as to be a successful physician one must be an arrant humbug. Half the ills of mankind are imaginary ; when we don't cure we humour, and when we can't cure we also humour. I divide my patients

into two classes—those who think themselves ill, and those who want themselves to be ill. To the former I administer the restorative of pleasant talk and innocuous pills; to the latter, the balm of encouragement and innocuous draughts; and I can assure you, that by thus skilfully administering to the fanciful ailments of my kind, I can command the esteem and admiration of my patients.'

I never could quite understand this facetious satire, for his really wonderful cures were proverbial, and consequently, his success was well merited.

For my own part, I always looked upon the medical profession as an ennobling one—since it incited the physician 'to preserve life, by curing life's ills.' It never occurred to me then, that to be a successful doctor one must be somewhat of a charlatan, and

that complete success in any of life's walks always calls forth qualities of mind and dispositions independent of the calling itself.

After I left college, I lived a purposeless and desultory life. I had vague ambitions, which took no definite outline, never shaping themselves into clear purposes. My father's means enabled me to do as I liked; my own inclinations led me to do nothing. And yet I was not idle; I acquired a smattering of one or two Asiatic languages; I had a partial knowledge of botany and natural history; I dabbled in metaphysics; I formed a theory of life on paper.

During all this time, I held aloof from my brother's companionship, and my father seemed always too much engrossed in his practice to devote himself to me. So my loneliness fostered my odd pursuits.

Godfrey, in his way, was also a trifler and an idler: he lolled away his hours with boon companions, and wasted his golden days in frivolities. His society was courted by the neighbouring families; he reigned supreme at balls, picnics and assemblies; and his affable presence and witty converse made him a favourite everywhere. Of course, he was an expert at riding and billiards; while he often severely exercised his mind in endeavouring to stake successfully upon a favourite horse.

Giving my brother his due, I must say he was very generous, particularly with other people's money. His purse was always open, and was therefore generally empty.

Our father made him an excellent allowance, which he managed to spend, besides being always in debt. He often

lent to the undeserving; rigidly paid his gambling debts, and lived in happy ignorance of the amount of his tailors' bills, and of the time they had been running. In short, he was one of those careless spendthrifts who never seem to know the value of money.

CHAPTER IV.

'To his faults a little blind,
To his virtues very kind.'

THESE lines express my father's feelings towards my brother. He yielded to his whims, and was not cognizant of his faults; and to crown all, he allowed him to choose a profession, the very worst for one of his temperament and disposition. My father bought him a commission in her Majesty's —th regiment, then quartered in the town of Woodcombe, in Devonshire, my native place, and where the incidents of this story took place.

For my own part, as my father would

not permit me to impose upon the credulity of mankind by endeavouring to cure their bodies; and as I earnestly believed that attempting to cure souls might be very laudable, but at the same time must prove a very complex and difficult undertaking, I resolved to mystify mankind: to reanimate doubtful wrongs, stultify harassed minds, confuse knotty questions by attempting to loosen them, propound solutions upon nothing at all, learn the conjuror's art of hair-splitting; in short, I made up my mind to thread the never-ending mazes of the law.

Accordingly, I was articled and entered the office of Messrs. Bobbins and Henly, solicitors.

I have not a distinct recollection of Henly—a meek, unobtrusive man, never forcing himself on any one's notice. But I have a vivid remembrance of Bobbins—

a fussy, uneasy-looking person, who had a nervous twitch in his eyes, and a restless jerk in his shoulders. He always seemed to me a jagged, crooked creature; not that his limbs were distorted, but all his motions seemed aslant. There was no harmonious development in his person, speech, or manner; his conversation made one nervous; his jerky movements made one feel ill at ease.

One evening, after I had been about a month in the office, I was informed that my father desired particularly to see me. As he had never made me his confidant I could not conjecture the reason of this especial interview. I was summoned into his surgery. The lapse of many years has not effaced the memory of that interview. The whole scene is plainly photographed on my mind as I now write.

The darkened, small room, with its bay-curtained window, overlooking a smooth, well-trimmed lawn; the half bookcase, half escritoire, littered with well-thumbed volumes, and odd scraps of paper dotted with the hieroglyphics of prescriptions; broken pens, an odd bottle or so, evidently there by accident; piles of books so shut in as almost to be out of sight; the laboratory of bottles on shelves; phials of all sizes, filled with various coloured compounds; a pestle and mortar, odd pill-boxes strewn about; and my dear father himself standing against the fireplace, looking more serious than his wont. All this flashes upon me now, as vividly as if I had seen it an hour ago.

'Tim,' my father commenced, 'Mr. Henly says you are doing very well.'

As I considered that these words were

only a prelude to something else I made no answer.

'Tim, my boy,' and my father's tones suddenly changed, 'I hope you don't heed every gossiping remark you hear.'

At a loss to understand the full purport of his speech, I merely remarked—

'I never gossip, sir.'

'No, I don't suppose you do,' continued my father. 'Only we must not believe all we hear. And, Tim,' and here my father's hazel eyes glimmered with a sad tenderness, 'we must endeavour to still these nasty reports about Godfrey, for, of course, they are not true.' And this apparent falsehood was uttered so gently. 'Certainly he might have told me before he left his regiment; but I suppose he lacked the courage. And Tim, don't you heed what is said; and when your

brother's fair fame is attacked, defend him and tell the folks they gossip without reason. This is all I have to tell you, Tim.'

Quite overcome with astonishment at my father's word, I left his presence, merely bowing assent to his wish.

I soon learnt what the 'rash things' about my brother meant.

This new life in the army had encouraged his follies. Always careless with his money, he had become a downright prodigal, until his debts outstripped his means of paying them.

He had drawn on his father for very large sums, and had used the proceeds of the bills, without settling his liabilities. And Doctor Dunn had not only paid all his creditors, but had also endeavoured to screen his conduct.

Of course I was very much incensed against my brother. We all

> 'Compound for faults we are inclined to,
> By damning those we have no mind to.'

Perhaps I condemned my brother's faults all the more, because my own temperament led me to avoid them. Had I been prone to err like him, I might easily have condoned them.

CHAPTER V.

My odd story dates its commencement from the time my prodigal brother left his native place, and when I was making myself master of 'cases,' 'tenures,' and 'tricks,' as Shakespeare calls them.

Some weeks after the conversation referred to, I received the following note:

'Dear Tim,

'For once in the way, I am acting oddly in your style. I am leaving for London without apprising anyone of my intention: nor can I even inform you of the very serious business which has taken

me there. You will know it in good time. Give any excuses you like to my friends. I have arranged with Dr. Gumpy to look after my patients. I shall not write, nor need you do so.—With love, your affectionate father,

'TIMOTHY DUNN.'

A few days after the receipt of this letter, my father returned, but his journey seemed to have suddenly aged him. There was a droop in his gait; a wan haggardness in his looks, and a melancholy meaning in his smile; and I afterwards discovered what had caused this change. The honour of our family had been outraged; a pampered son had taken advantage of an indulgent father. I need not enter into particulars: the history of my brother's doings in London—that hotbed of vice

and folly, — his wild extravagance, mad follies, riotous living, and wanton excesses of every kind amongst those whose business it is to entice and rob youth. The history of all this is recounted every day by heart-stricken parents. My father's visit had just been in time to save my brother's name from lasting disgrace in the eyes of the world. Many years afterwards, I learnt how the dear Doctor had taken my brother's acceptances out of the hands of those men whose riches flow from the misfortunes and despairs of their fellow beings, whose gains are derived from the tears and blood of humanity—the usurers. I can picture my father among those cold-blooded men, not bandying compliments to their fawning speech, but politely paying principal and usurious interest to the uttermost farthing. Is it any wonder then, that his

susceptible nature received a shock that saddened that kind face? Yet he never told me all these things: his pride made him silent even to me, and I think my father's reticence distressed me more than my brother's follies. I yearned for, but did not like to seek his confidence, and therefore this shadow of wrongdoing so dulled my life as to affect the routine of my tasks and recreations. Always capricious in my moods and changeable in my humours, the oddities of my manner and conduct increased about this period. Time, which generally smooths the ruts and breaks in life, did not, in my case, efface this shadow; instead of which, another event broke like a flash of lightning on my days.

CHAPTER VI.

A YEAR must have elapsed since the occurrences mentioned in the last chapter. When intent one evening over the laws of bailor and bailee, and endeavouring to make notes thereon, in a manner peculiarly my own, I was startled by a loud and energetic tap at the door. In answer to my 'Come in' there entered, a tall, slim, finely proportioned young woman, with a graceful carriage and affable manner; she was dressed with a due regard to fashion, and her face was deeply veiled.

With rapid steps she walked to where

I was sitting, and said very decidedly: 'So Mr. Henly is not in—when do you expect him?'

There was a mild, authoritative tone in her voice, as if she had a right to know his movements. I stammered out an answer; she then said,' So *you* are Mr. Timothy Dunn, jun.!' There was a pleasant familiarity in her tones, as if she had a right to make this remark. I can hardly remember the purport of my reply now. Then, quietly, without being asked, she took a seat, and commenced to read a newspaper. Before doing so, she removed her veil, which disclosed one of the most beautiful and fascinating faces. Vainly I endeavoured to confine my attention to a nice, though rather mystified case arising out of certain laws regulating bailor and bailee; but my attention refusing to be arrested on

the case, asserted itself in gazing on my beautiful visitor. She was a brunette, with a dark searching and glowing face, harmony in every feature: in the outline of the forehead, in the arch of the eyebrows, in the dimples of her cheeks, in the pouting curve of her lips, and in the splendid wreaths of rich black hair; but above all, it revealed itself in the fervid lustre of her eloquent eyes. In these, my fancy seemed to read music—deep passionate strains, to move and subdue and conquer. Pardon the raptures of an odd man, who cannot help recalling now, when the feelings which that face evoked has passed away, all that loveliness, as it then impressed him. I averted my gaze from her, and strove to ponder on another interesting point of the law I was studying; but I only saw the flashing

light of those wonderful eyes, coming between me and my book like a sudden glory!

I kept on reading as a madman or a drunkard might read, when his wandering mind can only invoke disturbed sense and scan incoherent thoughts. I strove to understand the intricate reasoning of my book, but instead I only conned a jumble of words over and over again.

I closed the book, hoping to hear her speak. She put aside the paper, and said:

'I will call another time,' and rose to depart.

I looked at her with an admiring wonder, as she stood erect, amidst the shadows of the room, casting a trail of light over its sombre gloom, as she left it.

There is a bright, red flower called a

zinnia, which in shadow looks like a flame. In the gathering darkness as I then beheld her, she seemed this human flower. I had not the courage to bid her remain longer to await Mr. Henley's arrival, and I only watched her descend the dark stairs, and heard her shut the door sharply and quickly, quietly bidding me good-day before doing so.

When she had gone, a strange feeling took possession of me, which I cannot transcribe into words. It was not a hopeful nor a happy sensation; it was hardly a desponding or a sad one; it was a sort of vague, wondering, and yet a *dread* feeling. I was bewildered, excited, startled, and, more than all, I was *depressed*. Had I suddenly fallen in love with this beautiful face? if so, how could the spell which she had strangely exorcised arouse feelings at

variance with love? Did the coming future cast its shadow before me then, to warn me? Did a subtle intelligence within me keener than sight, deeper than imagination, truer than reason, arouse a premonition or a presentiment?

On arriving home, I could not banish her remembrance. She floated through my thoughts like a weird, haunting strain of music. At night, when the house was still, her remembrance filled the silence. She came between me and the darkness to charm away sleep; she sank into my dreams, and rounded them with direful beauty. Yet somehow, she always appeared as an appalling loveliness to oppress, never to brighten or glad.

CHAPTER VII.

And yet, resisting the influence she cast upon me as much as possible, with the usual contradiction of my odd nature, I longed to see her again; and my wishes were destined to be soon gratified; for a few days after her appearance at the office, I met her at a ball given by the Mayor of our town. I was not very fond of the gaud and glitter of a ballroom, and yet on this particular evening, I allowed myself to be carried away by the gaiety of the scene. The rhythmic beat of the music incited me to dance. I yielded without reserve to the allurements and attractions

of the place. And in doing so, I endeavoured to throw off the spell which had taken possession of me. I hardly attempted to converse with any of the fair enslavers whom fashion had given me the right to whirl round in mazy figures. The sensuous delight of the dance was sufficient enjoyment. Once during the evening, being on the look-out for a partner, I asked my hostess to present me to one, and to my surprise I found myself suddenly confronted by my beautiful visitor, who was introduced to me as 'Miss Gwendoline Effingham.'

After we had mutually bowed, according to the usual inane manner on these occasions, she gently took my arm, and having exchanged some vapid commonplaces, I found myself whirling my enchantress through the wild

evolutions of the modern waltz. On a former occasion I had only stolen a glimpse of her loveliness; now, in close proximity to me, I could revel in it. How well I remember the dress she wore on that evening, a pale, maize-coloured satin, trimmed with tulle of a deeper tint, and dotted here and there with dark crimson roses; her magnificent hair gathered into a massive coil and entwined with pearls; the rounded outline of her shapely form, graceful in every undulating movement; the strangely tender light of her flashing eyes looking into mine; the touch of her hand, the thrilling tones of her modulated voice—all maddened and intoxicated my senses.

Under no apparent constraint, with a perfectly easy manner, she smiled complacently whenever I addressed her,

and answered me with perfect affability.

Later in the evening, she danced a quadrille with me. More and more, and to the detriment of my dancing, I yielded to the weird fascination of her company. How I bungled through the figures, turning in the wrong place, moving when I ought to have stood still, gazing on her instead of bowing to my *vis-à-vis*, and how relieved I was when the dance was over and I could lead her to a seat and endeavour to interest her in conversation—all this is vividly impressed on my mind. She did not speak much, but somehow, all my pent-up conversation, stagnant during the evening, burst its channels and overflowed. To please her, I dare say I said lots of silly, vapid things. At the same time I must have grown passionately earnest in my serious

remarks. I tried, and perhaps did not fail, to interest her; and if no responsive, sympathetic replies fell from her lips, the unspeakable lustre of her eyes and the exquisite light of her smile were enough, were more than sufficient bliss for me. It was only when I had said good-night to her and when I was left alone with my own thoughts, that the reaction came. I was dazed under the potent spell of her beauty, and I thus easily succumbed to its influence.

Away from her, all the dread feelings which her former visit had aroused possessed me anew, with fuller and greater power. I could not shake them off. They followed me in the shadows of the night as I returned homewards. They haunted me as I laid my head on my pillow. Resistless as the ocean came this

surge of doubt and mistrust to break on my love dream! I battled with its influence, but I could not overcome it: and thus the influence which this woman was to have on my life asserted itself after the evening of the ball, as it had done on the day of her visit to the office.

CHAPTER VIII.

The days wore on. I tried vainly to apply myself to my daily tasks with diligent zeal; for the vision of Miss Effingham would, in spite of all my efforts to banish it, obtrude itself on all occasions, until secretly I felt quite ashamed of myself. And in proportion as her image filled my mind, so the unpleasant impressions which had grown out of it partially vanished, and in their place there only arose the remembrance of her loveliness, and I longed to see and talk to her again. Dare I renew the acquaintance without being asked to do so? Could I

muster courage enough to call on her? Dare I trust myself to be near her again? I was not certain of my own feelings towards her, and I was also in entire ignorance of hers, but a certain infatuation linked her memory with every passing thought; and often from the misgivings which assailed me, from the doubts which tortured me, a sudden, strong resolve would often arise, a resolve at all hazards to prove and test her feelings towards me. I might, or I might not, have acted on these resolutions, when again Fate, or Chance—choose your own word—decided for me. I was spending the evening at a mutual friend's house, when the servant announced Miss Effingham. The sombre tints of her evening dress seemed to add to her stateliness and beauty. She smiled ravishingly on everybody present;

advanced to me, shook hands, and spoke with a pleasant assurance as if she had determined, even against my will, to set me at my ease; and, strange to say, she almost succeeded. There were not many guests present, but her appearance amongst them at once acted like a charm. The usual dulness of a friendly evening in a country town suddenly vanished, and a spirit of liveliness and pleasantness prevailed. At once, silent tongues became agreeably voluble; matter-of-fact conversations were charged with point and brilliancy, and merry laughter filled every pause and break. And Miss Effingham seemed quite unconscious of being the cause of all this change.

She never attempted to lead any conversation nor endeavoured to thrust herself forward to provoke merriment, and yet

she alone diffused the pleasantness around us. Everyone acknowledged her bright influence, and I felt convinced of it. By-and-by, she went to the piano and played Schumann's 'Novelette,' that mystic piece, full of unaccountable changes and weird modulations.

Nowadays, as a rule, a lady's performance on the piano is only a signal for a babble of noisy voices; in order to preserve a record of the politeness of the guests assembled on this particular evening, I am glad to say, that a discreet and universal silence reigned when Miss Effingham played. Of course everyone listened attentively and applauded generously; for my own part, I was somewhat disappointed with her playing. Certainly, her rendering of the music was marked with severe correctness, and her execution was rigidly

clear, but there was an absence of *abandon* in her playing which lacked light and shade, and all those nameless graces which constitute what is termed musical expression. In short, her interpretation of the music lacked that which alone renders all art beautiful, namely, *soul*. After awhile, I had an opportunity of a *tête-à-tête* conversation with her, and any restraint which I might have felt at being with one whose remembrance now had become 'a portion and parcel' of my present life was completely banished by her extreme self-possession. As the hours imperceptibly glided away in her company, I felt positively assured of one thing, that, being still uncertain of the extent of my feelings towards her, I still could not resist the magnetic influence of her presence. In the meantime, the guests were all departing

one by one, and Miss Effingham showed no sign of taking her leave. For the first time she glanced uneasily at her watch.

'I can't make out,' she said, 'why father has not called for me; I hope he is not ill.'

'Detained on some business, doubtless,' I chimed in; 'I would not worry myself if I were you.'

'But father is precision and regularity personified,' she answered; 'and since he promised to call for me and has not done so, I am afraid there is something amiss,' and a shade of anxiety filled the depths of her dark, lustrous eyes.

I tried to soften the edge of her disquietude, when she exclaimed, 'I cannot wait any longer; I must go.'

Whereupon I offered to escort her home.

'Under the circumstances, I gladly accept your offer,' she said unhesitatingly.

And so we left the house.

It was a fine moonlight night, and the quaint streets of our old-fashioned town were quite deserted.

I experienced the rapture of feeling her arm cling to mine; the joy of being able to allay her anxiety was mine; and despite the long, jagged shadows which the buildings cast before us, the dark glow of her lovely face, so near my own, was the light that fed my hopes.

'I trust I am not taking you out of your way,' was her first remark.

This useless and purposeless phrase, as she uttered it, appeared to me to have a sweet signification of its own.

'If you only knew how I like a walk, especially under these circumstances,' I replied, 'you would not apologize for taking me out.'

'I suppose my father is detained somewhere,' she said, the subject being evidently uppermost in her mind.

'I hope you will find him on your return home,' I continued, hazarding a hope for her sake.

'I hope so too,' she answered; 'but you don't know my father, Mr. Dunn.'

'I certainly have not that honour.'

'He never breaks an appointment. He is such a high-principled man in this respect.'

'He can't be otherwise if he is the father of such a daughter,' I was about to say. On consideration, however, I thought this might only seem a ridiculous compliment; and so I asked a question instead: 'Does he intend to reside here permanently?'

'We have not quite made up our minds; but we shall stay, at any rate, some little time.'

'I am glad you are not going away yet; our small social gatherings won't like to part with their favourites so soon.'

'Nonsense!' she answered. 'People are not missed much in this world, even if they happen to be favourites, which may or may not be the case in our instance.'

'Without speaking in the name of our community, let me speak for myself. *I* shall miss you.'

'*You!* miss me—and I have only seen you three times, to my knowledge!' And she laughed, not unkindly, and yet not pleasantly.

'Yes, Miss Effingham. Is it a matter of so much wonder that I should miss you? Are you displeased because I am so frank as to tell you I shall certainly miss you?'

I was approaching a dangerous subject, and I was getting rather earnest.

'Mr. Dunn,' she replied, 'I am not displeased, and I suppose I ought to believe all you tell me; but never mind sentiment —it is getting late, and I am rather anxious about father.'

I certainly had experienced a rebuff. My rising ardour was suddenly chilled. For a while I said nothing; afterwards, we conversed about indifferent subjects: but the conversation was as unsatisfactory as my state of mind. It approached and veered about many subjects, and rested on none. And when it died out altogether, as it often did, the joy of being alone with her made me still happy, despite her apparent indifference. I therefore secretly wished that our walk would lengthen itself out—that the happy moments would linger

and linger, before the irrevocable 'good-night' was spoken. But the words came at last. As I doffed my hat and pressed her hand, I think I reverently raised it to my lips. And her clear utterance of 'Thank you very much, Mr. Dunn,' seemed to ring through the night air like a dying chord of music.

* * * * *

Was it, then, my fancy? or did a human shadow suddenly appear to emerge from the darkness into the moonlight—hovering near where she passed! For an instant I saw it. It then disappeared. But its remembrance seemed to haunt me on my way home, and exorcised that vague, dread feeling which sooner or later seemed always to associate itself with her remembrance.

CHAPTER IX.

AGAIN, when I sought sleep, incoherent and unpleasant visions surrounded me. In my restlessness I could not shake them off. Their very unreality dazed and startled me. Monstrous shapes and unnatural sounds were the stuff that composed my dreams, all of which seemed to crush and torture me. And strange to say, every shape that haunted me bore some impalpable, indefinite likeness to her! and every sound that rang in my ears seemed false echoes of the music she played!

I was glad when the daylight banished

these distempered visions. But these impressions still clung to me in the busy moments of my working day. How could anything so lovely as my idol provoke distorted dreams? How could anything so soul-subduing as Schumann's music evoke discordant sounds? I pondered upon the mystery; but my common sense could not furnish any clue to it. But then, you perceive, as an odd man, I was destined to undergo odd experiences. At one time I felt as if I should like to shake off these fancies for ever: to rend asunder the ties that bound me to the life I was leading, by emigrating. Some subtle influence, over which my mind had no control, seemed to bid me take this step. Would that I had done so!

Again, who were these people that had so suddenly come in our midst? No one

knew anything of their antecedents or their business beyond the fact that Mr. Effingham had brought a letter of introduction to the Mayor, which at all events proved his respectability. Miss Effingham had certainly won golden opinions from everybody: the charm of her person and society had taken our circle by storm. But her father, as yet, was a mystery; he seldom made his appearance in public, and evidently lived in the strictest seclusion with his daughter. She had once spoken of him to me as a man of a speculative turn of mind. Did she mean that he was a speculator by profession? If so, were his transactions confined to the turf, the Stock Exchange, mines, or companies? And what speculative business had brought him to our village?

Whilst I was wondering about all these

matters, Mr. Bobbins expressed a wish to see me; and accordingly, I found myself in the private office of the head of the firm. His enormous table was crowded with legal cases in rolls of parchment; folios of papers lay thickly around him, and there was a pen behind each of his ears. Immersed as he was in his business, he rose when I entered, and welcomed me. As he did so, the nervous twitch in his eyes and the horrible jerk of his shoulders, so significantly apparent, made me as uncomfortable as possible. When he spoke, his voice halted before it reached the end of the sentence, and then, after a pause, seemed as if it were a long way off, uttering the concluding word with a spasmodic jerk, as if to keep it close and prevent it escaping.

'I have noticed lately, Mr. Dunn,' he said, 'that you have been rather preoccu-

pied, so that your work has fallen into—ahem — disturbance. I hope there is nothing amiss: nothing of a serious nature which has disturbed your—ahem —equanimity.'

Colouring a little, and feeling rather under a certain restraint, I assured Mr. Bobbins that there was nothing amiss. I may as well mention that this gentleman, in his frantic, though silent mental endeavours to find an appropriate word to finish a sentence, often chose an inappropriate one.

'I am pleased to hear it,' he continued. 'Perhaps there is a distraction; if so, distractions are fatal to legal work, and often conduce—ahem—to idle hands. If you wish to dream away your time, do so in the open air, and let physical exertion of some kind be the concomitant of the—ahem—visionary.

Assuring Mr. Bobbins that I was not

given to distractions, I waited for the continuation of his remarks.

'Under these circumstances,' he proceeded to say, 'and bearing in mind the high esteem in which I hold you and your valuable services, I should recommend a two weeks' holiday to refresh your spirits, taking care not to forget the open air—physical exercise.'

Then Mr. Bobbins, having evidently said all he intended to say, jerked his shoulder in his usual unnatural manner, and resumed his occupation.

And as I was convinced that in my unsettled state of mind a holiday devoted to physical sports would prove beneficial to me, I thanked Mr. Bobbins, and resolved to take his advice.

CHAPTER X.

As I was a law student, and not a paid clerk, Mr. Bobbins was very indulgent to me, and consequently, proposed this holiday for my special benefit. And I determined that his thoughtful hints should not be thrown away. Accordingly, I resolved to take lots of exercise. If anything can banish the cobwebs of the brain, it is fresh air, a game of cricket, a row on the water, a ride on horseback, or a long ramble away from monotonous streets to a breezy down or wooded lane, or on precipitous cliffs, within sight of the solemn ever-

changing sea, and within reach of its mysterious sobbing voice.

Our little town, called Woodcombe, was situated within the shadow of chalk hills, that stretched themselves onward till they reached the sea. It was a lazy-looking little place, crowned on nearly all sides by majestic heights. Had it been nearer the sea, it might have gradually fashioned itself into a modern watering-place; as it was, we were spared the infliction of bathing machines, lodging-houses, and idlers who thrive materially during the winter on the spoils of those unhappy families who seek uncomfortable recreation at the seaside during the summer. When once you could summon courage to ascend these hills, and pursue your way beyond them, scenery, very diverse in its aspects, rewarded the effort. There were wooded

knolls, pleasant paths, where the trees interlaced themselves over your head; in many places there were plantations of brushwood and young pines, that you might fancy were interminable, or situated in the heart of a forest. Escaping these, a stretch of rich upland and undulating woods surprised you; while in another direction, the heights that bordered the town lessened themselves gradually for several miles, till the sea burst upon you. I had always enjoyed aimless rambles for their own sake, and I treasured their remembrance not as fleeting impressions, but as lasting pleasures. It so happened I was destined to keep a still more indelible recollection of them. A week elapsed. In my own way, I enjoyed my holiday. I thoroughly tired myself with outdoor pastime; and I

heard nothing of the woman who had so strangely captivated me. But, as she had not honoured me with an invitation, I felt I had no right to call and see her. Reviewing over in my mind everything that occurred, one conviction always arrested my thoughts, which was the conviction that we were destined to meet again.

On the eighth day of my holiday, I walked far beyond the usual confines of my rambles. Leaving behind me the magnificent reach of champagne country, I already caught a glimpse of the seashore. A mystic silence reigned around me, broken only by the far-off, dying cadences of the ceaseless waves. Engrossed entirely in my own thoughts, I hardly noticed anything, until two human figures in the distance arrested my attention. At first they seemed like specks, then like shadows,

until their outline took form and substance. As they approached, and gradually neared me, I found myself face to face with Miss Effingham, who was leaning on the arm of a strange-looking and remarkable old man.

I beheld a broadly-built, big-limbed, tall man, who walked with a straight soldierly tread, and whose pronounced features struck me as being of almost chiselled regularity; whilst his thick eyebrows, moustaches, and snowy white beard, clipped close almost gave his face an artist-like aspect. But his eyes, of a cold gray, without expression, and not in keeping with his other features, were rather disappointing, whilst his forehead, narrow, and almost retreating, seemed to contradict the pleasing intellectual expression of his face. As far as I could trace, there was

not the faintest likeness to her, who, on meeting me, introduced her companion as her father.

She hesitated as she did so, watching very closely the effect the introduction would have on him.

'This is Mr. Timothy Dunn, father; don't you recollect my speaking to you about him?'

There was a sweet reverence in the tones of her voice as she said these words, a rare smile mantling her lovely face, and adding a fresh lustre to her eloquent eyes.

The old man doffed his hat, and merely said:

'I am pleased to make this gentleman's acquaintance.'

Then I hesitated as to whether I should leave them, or walk with them. Did they

desire my company or not? I at first wavered, as I had done all along, but soon yielded to her influence. And so we all three proceeded towards the town.

'Yes, child, I am convinced that the silence of the country aids me materially in my pavement project.'

He spoke slowly and resolutely, but his remark completely puzzled me. What did he mean by a 'pavement project'?

Luckily she came to my aid.

'Father's plans,' she remarked, 'contain so much research, and are so involved, that the quiet contemplation of nature aids them: doesn't it, father?'

Uttering these words, she pressed his arm so confidingly, and sought his gray, absent eyes with such ardent sympathy in her own, that I wished I was her father at that moment.

'Yes, child,' he replied to her, apparently ignoring me altogether. 'The tranquillity around me develops and strengthens my ideas, and I may almost say completes my pavement project.'

My curiosity being rather aroused, I questioned him about this project.

'Young man,' he retorted at last, and his speech, which hitherto had lacked earnestness, now seemed to become violently animated, 'we live in a world of mistakes, and the study of my life is to rectify these mistakes. I come here to your trumpery little town—what do I find in it? Why, everything wrong; bad drainage, bad water-supply, bad ventilation, and bad pavements—horribly bad pavements. I nearly broke my leg, sir, treading your horrible streets. Now, what was my duty under these circumstances? Why, to remedy

this defect : and I have devised a scheme, a glorious scheme, to repave your town at a very trifling cost.'

I did not know whether he was in jest or in earnest, but I sought her eyes, asking her in my glance to solve my doubts.

'I see father surprises you,' she said; 'his plans may seem impracticable to *you*; to *me* they are clear, and easily carried out.'

During our return walk, Mr. Effingham, always in silent dreamy thought, never interrupted our converse, which touched on many subjects, and the rapture of again being in her company awoke every tender feeling which the magic of her presence had formerly evoked.

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CHAPTER XI.

THE town of Woodcombe possessed what is common to every other similar one in the United Kingdom, namely, public-houses of early and recent date. One of these—originally an old inn—called the 'Bell,' had lately been purchased by one of our townsfolk, who had made a tidy sum as a butcher, and had invested some of it in the purchase of this hostelry, which he had refurnished and redecorated, with a view of making it a profitable concern. Since his purchase it had almost assumed the significance of an hotel. There was a wing attached to it which contained a spacious

coffee-room and billiard-room very much frequented by the time-killers of the place. The house, in fact, had grown so important as occasionally to lodge distant travellers who honoured our sleepy town with their lively company. It had even been whispered that some distinguished archæologists—on an exploring expedition to discover the ancient fossils of pre-adamite man, supposed to be hidden somewhere in the excavations of an old and decayed church, had on the memorable occasion of their visit engaged all the serviceable and redecorated bedrooms for a week, and had expressed themselves so gratified with their lodgings as to present the proprietor of the inn with a flattering but unsubstantial testimonial in the form of *a letter of appreciation* immediately on their departure, which he took good care to show

boastfully to everybody. On the day following the meeting I have described, contrary to my usual habits, I assumed the character of an idle lounger, and dropped into the billiard-room of the Bell.

This room presented an appearance characteristic of all billiard-rooms—there were lounging men who smoked and drank and looked on at the game, and lounging men who smoked and played; there was the usual cadaverous-looking boyish marker who scored the game, and an oppressive atmosphere of smoke and buzz of conversation quite sufficient to disconcert one unaccustomed to indulge in this favourite pastime of idle youth. I talked to several men I knew, smoked, and for the nonce, I was one of the idle loungers who looked on. Not taking very great interest in the game, I soon grew tired and was about to leave,

when some person whom I had not previously noticed called my name.

'Timothy, my boy, is that you?' and before I was aware my brother Godfrey, whom I had not seen for a long time, heartily grasped my hand.

I hardly knew him, he was so altered; the refined-looking, handsome boy had developed into a somewhat coarse, yet fine specimen of manhood: to my mind his person had improved and yet deteriorated. Tall, with a dashing manner, dressed in the height of the then prevailing fashion, with fine features and searching eyes, with a winning smile that played over his well-shaped mouth, and at times lighted up a face stamped with a look of hard resolve; all this would have made him a remarkably attractive man everywhere; and yet there was a certain

sensualism combined with cynicism in his appearance which may not have been observed by others, but was nevertheless singularly apparent to me.

I returned his greetings as affectionately as possible, and asked him what had brought him to Woodcombe.

'Just for a change, old fellow, and to have a peep at the governor,' was his reply; and he laughed heartily, showing a splendid set of teeth as he did so; though why his visit should have furnished any jocular idea to him was amazing to me. Then he asked me about all the news, and I informed him about the recent arrivals. He did not seem to take much interest in them or in anything else, but treated every subject lightly, and seasoned his remarks with pleasant raillery. In fact, he looked at everything from a mirth-

ful point of view, as if life and its belong ings could be nothing to him but a prodigious joke. Of course, I did not make him a confidant of my feelings towards the strangers. In the state of my mind it would have seemed like a sacrilege to have done so. My love-dream was my own. No one could share it with me. It was too hallowed to be made a jest of by my brother.

Accordingly, we took a walk and spent a portion of the next day together, and before parting he informed me that he would return to London on the following morning. The recollection of my meeting with Godfrey on this occasion is a pleasant one. His affability thawed my reserve. His *bonhomie* called forth reciprocal thoughts, and his mirth-provoking converse often evoked merri-

ment even from such an odd-minded, serious character as myself. Could I only have peeped into the horoscope of the near future, my impressions of him would have been charged with other meanings.

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CHAPTER XII.

My holiday was approaching its end. Intent upon meeting Miss Effingham, I had hopelessly wandered in the direction where I had previously met her. My solitary walks then did not afford me the same pleasure as of yore. Nature and self-communion were wont to be my usual solaces; now the restless longing to be again with her destroyed them. The spiritual hunger of my soul could only be appeased by her smile. Those unsatisfied yearnings, belonging to dreamers, poets and lovers, were mine. Who can define that state of rapturous being which comes

even to the most prosaic person—at any rate, once in a lifetime—which is called love?

Yes, I had to admit the fact at last, I was madly in love with Gwendoline Effingham. Had I any reason to hope she was aware of my feelings, or that she returned them? Her behaviour as yet had given me no clue. Besides, I was not clever enough to solve the mystery of a woman's heart. The suspense of doubt was torture to me already; and therefore, I inwardly resolved when next I met her to know my fate.

Chance again favoured me.

Threading my way one morning through the interstices of the leafy woodlands spoken of, the well-beloved figure of my dreams accosted me, and to my pleasurable surprise, she was *not* accompanied

by her father. The shadows of the trees as they fell on her supple form and eloquently lustrous face seemed to make her loveliness more visible! A faint delicious wind shook the branches and lightly stirred the leaves of the trees, which sounded to me like the sighs of my anxious heart! Weighed down almost with the burden of my thoughts, and yet calm in the steadfastness of my resolve, I still could hardly summon courage to speak to her. I warmly grasped her hand, gazed upon her ardently, and stood in silence by her side.

The tranquillity of the tangled wood, hardly broken by the rustle of the trees, all favoured me, and yet I had no words to say to her. To know she was near me, and to hope she might be mine to love and protect for ever, was rap-

ture! I was dumb with excess of emotion.

A few dear moments of quietude elapsed, when, woman-like, she came to my aid.

'Well met, Mr. Dunn. Precious weather like this we should make the most of. And I see it has invited you as well as myself to this charming spot.'

As usual, there was an absence of all restraint in her fluent speech, which at once strengthened my waning courage.

'Yes, I am fond of this neighbourhood, Miss Effingham, and lately I have wandered about here more than ever.'

'You could not have chosen a prettier spot,' she answered. 'Lots of people walk here for a purpose—to seek specimens, or paint scenes. Are you one of these, or merely an aimless wanderer like myself?'

Was this a chance question, or was she deliberately leading my thoughts?

'I used to roam about aimlessly—proceeding where my whim dictated me—merely for the joy of holding converse with Nature: to feast my eyes on her beauties. Lately, however, I have wandered with a purpose, with a growing, eager purpose. Can you not guess it?'

Exultant in my speech, as I was depressed in my silence, I waited for her reply.

A radiant smile spread over her face as I asked this question, and she laughingly answered:

'I am such a poor hand at guessing that you must answer your own question.'

Her words, coupled with her request, inspired me with fresh courage.

'I have been here every day, hoping

anxiously to see *you* again ; to hear you speak ; to see you smile ; to be with you—near you. Can you not guess the rest ?—I must tell you—I cannot live without you —I love you.'

I said this wildly and passionately, and in my fervour I did what any other man in a similar situation to my own would have done. I madly grasped her hands, and strove to draw her to me.

At first her face blanched and then reddened, till hastily freeing herself from my grasp, she stood before me in her speechless loveliness, resolute in her angry defiance.

'Mr. Dunn—you forget yourself.'

'Forgive me,' I answered. 'Let my earnestness plead for me ; let my great love excuse me ; only let me—hope!'

I think my fervour softened her anger ;

for her speech was somewhat subdued as she replied:

'Mr. Dunn, you positively frighten me. I am not accustomed to such strange ebullitions of feeling. You speak thoughtlessly.'

Hating myself for having allowed feeling to master reason, I said:

'How could I speak without thought, when all my thoughts are bound up in you? I may have been premature in disclosing them, but sooner or later my pent-up feelings for your sake would be certain to overpower me.'

'Altogether a young man's fancies,' she answered, 'which may soon fly away.'

'If everything on earth was as real as my love for you, Gwendoline, there would be no such word as fancy. Let my devotion plead for me. Give me one word of encouragement.'

As I said these words, her defiant look fled, and in its place appeared that inexpressibly sweet expression which had so often charmed me.

'Well, Mr. Dunn, I'll forgive you if you promise me to talk about something else.'

'Is there no hope at all?' I asked. 'May I not ask you again?'

'I cannot promise you anything. I have other matters to think of besides love and marriage; so do not recur to the subject—and let us be friends as before.'

And then she shook hands warmly with me. The touch of her hand was forgiveness; her rare expressive voice whispered hope, and the warm radiance of her glance shone on my heart like a sun-ray brightening an arid spot!

I fortified myself with the thought that

though she had not accepted me, still she had not absolutely refused me. Doubtless, I had been precipitate, and had merited her anger; and I was sure excellent reasons must have urged her to silence my love-making.

Reasoning thus, like a hopeful lover, I was almost confident that my love was requited. Accordingly, our conversation ran into other channels; and on leaving me she gave me an invitation from her father to call on them.

You can well imagine that I resolved to accept it with as little delay as possible.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE Effinghams had taken a small furnished house, situated on the outskirts of the town. On approaching it, you left the narrow, tortuous little streets so far behind, that the house was even separated from the vicinity of the last new public-house and the latest new church. It stood alone, off the road, and was sheltered from the view of vulgar gazers by the thick fir-trees which gave it a dark, solemn appearance. It was hardly a cottage *orné*, and it certainly was not a pretentious villa, but was an odd, antiquated tenement. Its rooms were small and low,

and its staircases spiral, and the furniture rather the worse for wear. Hardly the dwelling-place of so bright a creature as Gwendoline; it seemed set in shadow, and had a disconsolate, dull look.

When I called, a painfully minute servant dressed in a sombre print of a chess-board pattern opened the door, and on my inquiring if the inmates were at home, bade me walk in.

'I'll see, sir,' said the minute servant.

I entered the sitting-room, which was hardly a cheerful, and yet not an entirely comfortless apartment. Evidently its present occupant had done her best to brighten its somewhat shabby look, and had signally failed in her efforts.

There were some fresh-cut flowers in a disconsolate-looking green vase on the table, a cottage piano, and a bird-cage in

a corner; but the bird was a bullfinch who piped 'Old Dog Tray' in dolorous and very irregular accents.

'Miss Effingham and master will be here soon, sir,' said the tiny maiden. 'Please wait.'

Accordingly I waited.

I glanced around until my eyes rested on an old tapestried picture over the fireplace—subject, wretched-looking Jonah, very red in the face, asleep under the unwholesome gourd. Admiring Jonah's magnificent black beard, my ears were assailed by the two first bars of 'Old Dog Tray.' A pause ensued, and the unhappy bird ineffectually commenced to sing this delicious melody again. And still no one made an appearance.

I gazed upon another old scriptural picture opposite the fireplace, which

was a brown Hagar in a green wilderness.

Wondering where these works of art were purchased, and who were the artists, again the doleful bullfinch grew almost frantic in its endeavours to reach the third bar of 'Old Dog Tray'; and still there was no sign of my friends.

To be kept waiting for no ostensible reason is never pleasant, and now my anxiety to see Gwendoline again made me quite impatient.

A half-hour passed, and I was still alone.

If they were out, why was I not told so? If they were at home, why was I kept waiting so long?

Disconcerted, and almost annoyed, I was actually about to ring the bell when a noise outside of footsteps grated on my ears, and

suddenly the door was opened by Mr. Effingham.

Although his figure stooped, he walked with a stately, martial tread, and welcomed me in his usual dreamy manner.

Looking around him, he appeared puzzled.

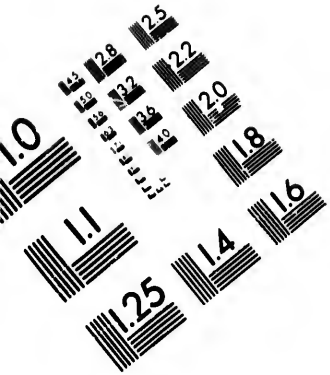
'Why, I thought Gwendoline, my daughter, was here!'

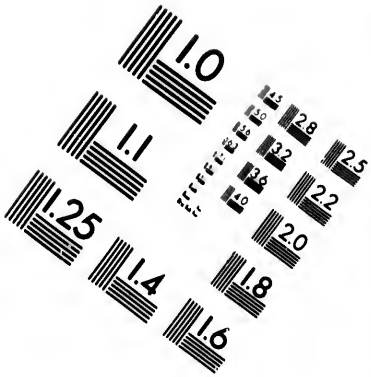
'I have not yet had the pleasure of seeing her,' I answered.

'Most extraordinary! Why, I made sure she was here. Really, Mr. Dunn, you must pardon our apparent rudeness,' Mr. Effingham remarked.

'It does not at all matter,' I rejoined. 'Miss Effingham will, I presume, be here presently.'

Then he opened the window and looked out, and having directed an absent gaze





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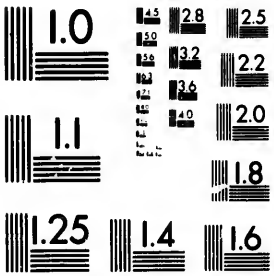
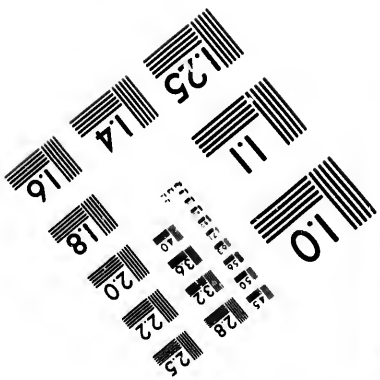




upon the picture over the fireplace, he immediately asked me the following question:

'Do you take an interest in sanitary appliances?'

On assuring him, for the sake of politeness, that I did so, he commenced:

'Well, sir, I have invented an appliance—a tangible appliance, to ventilate every house in the United Kingdom. The necessity of such an invention is paramount. If there is a proper ingress for the sweet air, why should there not be a proper egress for the foul air? What are the consequences of breathing a tainted atmosphere?—headaches and discontent. What happens in a purer atmosphere?—headaches and happiness.'

As on our first meeting, at first his speech was broken and careless; but the

interest taken in this subject soon imparted, as before, warmth and energy to his words. He descanted very lengthily on this project, until I grew very weary and impatient. Only anxious to see her, I could not brook this delay. But the time sped on, and the interminable ventilating subject progressed.

I was getting so impatient that I resolved to go — when I am positive I heard the tread of feet, a rustling sound, and the banging of an outside gate.

Just then the door was opened and the subject of my thoughts and hopes made her appearance.

There was a flurried, troubled look about her face. But in a moment my annoyance vanished as I rose to meet her. Despite the efforts to appear at her ease, an un-

usual absence of her wonted self-possession was very apparent.

Secretly wondering what had disturbed her, I still did not betray any curiosity; instead, I strove by every possible means to amuse and interest her.

Of course she soon regained her natural calm demeanour, so that there were no traces of the disturbing influences which had evidently taxed her. Nevertheless, I soon brought my visit to an end, feeling that it had disappointed me.

* * * * *

The next day I was astonished to receive the following letter:

'DEAR MR. DUNN,

'Papa sends his compliments, and wishes to have another chat with you. So come to-morrow evening and take tea with

us, and don't be surprised to hear that I have a favour to ask of you.

'With kind remembrances,

'Believe me very truly yours,

'GWENDOLINE.'

I read these lines with avidity, with all the rapture of a lover who has received the first note from the woman he adores. The words were mental honey to me, full of delicious meanings and unknown joy. Above all, its friendly tone made me exultant. Her wishing to ask a favour of me delighted me, and at the same time also set me wondering. What was it? What was its nature? How could a non-entity like myself be of use to such a glorious creature? Hopelessly I racked my brain with extraordinary guesses. And this note released my mind of any doubt as

to her not returning my love. Indifference could never have urged such confidence on her part.

In the joy that possessed me then, the disappointment of my visit also passed away, and all my hopes were set again in renewed brightness.

CHAPTER XIV.

I TAKE an odd man's privilege to pause now in my narrative; not that there is any break in it. Inditing these recollections in the calm atmosphere of my present home, I strive to verify all the events as they occurred in their natural order. The record may seem strange, but realities as well as fancies are sometimes startling. Do I falter already? Do I lack courage to proceed?—Well, if not for my own, this revelation has to be made for another's sake—let me continue.

* * * * *

As you may suppose, I joyfully accepted

the invitation accorded me in the note. I was not kept waiting this time. To my surprise, Gwendoline opened the door herself, and led me into the room with the freedom of an old friend. Never had her loveliness appeared more radiant than when she welcomed me with a smile that seemed to thrill me.

'Papa is very tired with a long day's work and is taking a nap. He desired me to make his apologies to you—I know you will excuse him, won't you?'

In my gratitude I secretly blessed Providence for the mercy of his absence. Looking around me, I perceived the room had undergone some indefinable transformation since last I was in it; the exasperating bullfinch had vanished, there were water-colour paintings on the walls, which

I evidently had not noticed before, flowers had been arranged in baskets, and everything around wore a certain air of neatness and refinement.

As yet she had not alluded to the favour, and my curiosity had not dared to shape itself into an inquiry.

'Do you know,' she said, 'that papa has been very busy to-day?'

'Indeed,' I answered; 'and I suppose you take an interest in all his schemes?'

'Naturally I enter into them thoroughly and understand them perfectly.'

I was about to say, 'That is more than I do;' but I suppressed the remark.

'Does he ever carry them into practice?' I ventured to ask.

'He generally sells his patents, and other people reap the profits. I dare say you have heard of his ventilating apparatus; it is

nearly finished, but he can't perfect his idea.'

'What a pity,' I said; 'are the difficulties so insurmountable?'

'Oh dear no; his scientific brain can overcome all obstacles; in fact, he has finished it, but he has devised a plan now to make the idea a profitable one, and he requires some assistance to do it.'

At last the idea dawned on me that my aid might be required. This, then, was the favour.

'Let me know all particulars,' I said; 'perhaps I may be of use.'

'Yes, Mr. Dunn, you can.'

The scheme as she explained it was as follows:

Mr. Effingham was about to form a company for the purpose of giving the public the use and benefit of his great invention.

It was to be called 'The Effingham Patent Ventilating Co., Limited.' A long-headed monetary genius from London had commenced to finance it. A list of high-sounding directors, including the Mayor of our town, had already been enrolled. There were to be five thousand shares at ten pounds each, which the public would take up. Some capital was required at once to commence operations, just as earnest money, and four thousand five hundred pounds had been found. But another five hundred pounds was wanted. Such was the scheme in its bare outlines.

'Papa intended to have explained all this to you, but as he is asleep I know he will be pleased that I have performed the duty for him,' said Miss Effingham.

She did not apply to me in vain, for at

once I gave my undivided attention to her lucid explanations.

The subject of ventilation, which had not yesterday interested me in the slightest degree, suddenly appeared the most important question under the sun, and before I left that evening I was master of every detail, and I promised to help her by every means in my power, and so I determined to leave no stone unturned to procure this money; I assured her that her interest or her father's was my interest, and that she could not have tried my devotion better than by allowing me to do her this service.

The next day I was in a desperate hurry to carry out my purpose. I took another week's holiday. I explained the project to several influential and wealthy men in our town; but who somehow did not view it

as hopefully as they might have done. Ventilating schemes were hardly required by the public, they said; besides, where was the security for the money? You must remember the inhabitants of our old-fashioned town had limited ideas of expe iments, and were hardly venturesome enough to meet the requirements of modern, expanding ideas of business. The security seemed all right to me, although I could not have satisfactorily expla ned what it consisted of. It was quite sufficient for me that she wanted the money to aid her father's scheme. And would she not eventually be my wife? Certainly, she had not positively accepted me; but the mere fact of her having enlisted my services in her behalf forged a new link between us. Her father's success was hers, and her success was mine—was most assuredly mine.

Reasoning thus, I determined to sell out a portion of the small property bequeathed to me by my mother, the interest of which had helped me to live, and to lend the five hundred pounds myself, and I also determined to keep the matter a profound secret.

'Can I ever thank you sufficiently for this?' she said to me, her lovely face beaming with gladness, when on a later occasion I handed her the money.

'Don't speak of thanks,' I replied; 'to know that I have been of some little use to you has sweetened my life. In reality, you have benefited me; so say nothing more about it.'

But she said lots more about it. With a masterly knowledge of the details of the scheme, she proved to me how the five hundred pounds would yield me twenty

per cent., and that at any time I could have the capital returned. I did not entirely grasp the idea. The dry calculation of profits hardly interested me; but her sweet speech and sunny glances elated me instead. I cursed the arithmetic, but I blessed the chance that bound me to her side.

And yet at her earnest solicitation, despite a refusal on my part, she forced me to write a receipt, which she signed for her father.

'I insist upon giving you this acknowledgment,' she said; and accordingly, I had to reluctantly accept it. I then wrote it out for her to sign. On reading it, she remarked in a very low tone: 'How extraordinary!'

'What is extraordinary?' I asked, surprised at her ejaculation.

'Why,' she unhesitatingly replied, in the old sweet, subdued voice, 'the fact of our sudden acquaintance and the kindness of your service.'

'How could it be otherwise?' I rejoined; 'my good fortune directed my steps towards you, and fate has ordained all that has happened or may happen!'

I did not know then that this utterance of mine, in every sense a prophetic one, would possess a meaning which I could not then foresee.

CHAPTER XV.

WEEKS sped on, and I saw Gwendoline every day. It was a happy time for me. And yet sometimes, in the midst of a pleasant conversation, some chance remark of mine would suddenly silence her speech, and for a moment summon a look of dismay or sadness. At other times, at the close of some fanciful sentence or droll exposition, a faint sigh would unknowingly escape her lips. And often these changes of mood broke on my supreme happiness and somewhat jarred it. It never occurred to me that there was anything unusual in them. No shadow of doubt came between

us to dull my intense happiness. The loyal reverence I paid her had no room for any misgiving.

One evening I screwed my courage up to the sticking-point, by making a frank avowal of my love.

'I can't help breaking my promise,' I said; 'I can wait no longer; give me the right to call you mine.'

She did not this time withdraw her hand, but held it kindly for a moment before she dropped it.

'Don't speak to me of engagements or marriage,' she said somewhat sadly. 'Let us be dear friends for a little while longer; and, besides, *you* have to pass your examinations, and all *my* time is devoted to father.'

Her will was law to me and I yielded to it.

Am I dwelling too long on my love episode? Do I linger too fondly on this portion of my narrative? When you read what is to follow you will readily excuse these long-drawn-out confessions. Would that I could now close them! But the sequel was not in my hands, and I must pause no longer in my narrative.

* * * * *

Being under the impression that our engagement was only deferred, I had now a further incentive to work at my studies with unflagging energy. My love-dream seemed more of an assured joy than it ever had been. My infatuation had received its response; and so nearly every evening was passed with Gwendoline. On one of these occasions, I ventured to ask her how the Ventilating Company was progressing.

'Not so well as might have been expected,' she replied. 'We are again in want of funds.'

'How is this?' I answered.

'One of our friends, on whom we depended, unfortunately died when everything was near completion; and but for this *contretemps*, the company would have been launched.'

'I am so sorry,' I said; 'but the scheme must not die out for the want of a hundred or two, more or less. Let me help you again.'

As I deemed myself Gwendoline's husband in the future, I felt bound to aid her in the present. How could I help doing so? Besides, even with my limited knowledge of the subject, it certainly seemed a profitable speculation. And how could I resist the influence of her words? The spell she had woven around

me had grown stronger now that she was almost my own for life. At first she refused my proposed assistance, nor could I persuade her to accept the two hundred pounds in cash. After some discussion, the matter was compromised by her consenting to receive my promissory note at three months for the amount, in lieu of the money. Before it matured, I was assured that the undertaking would be in full swing, so that the amount would be refunded to me. In my secret thought, I resolved that Gwendoline should become my wife before the bill became due; and doubtless, the consciousness of this resolve urged me to give this bill. It is sometimes difficult to guess one's secret motives. Anyhow, I was the slave of her whims and wishes; and accordingly, I did what any man, placed in my position, would

have done. She gave me a receipt for the bill which I hastily put in my pocket. The next day I arranged it all. And afterwards, placing business matters on one side, I chatted to her in true lover fashion of my hopes, plans, intentions and prospects. The remembrance of that evening, even now, after the lapse of very many years, haunts me. The joy of those hours still lives as I strive to transcribe their impression; the recollection has lost none of its sweetness in its portrayal. The mirror of the future then only reflected rosy hopes, and no breath of possible shadows dulled its surface.

CHAPTER XVI.

On the following day, looking in my pocket, I missed the receipt; but I thought nothing more about it at the time. Afterwards, I was summoned on some office business, requiring my personal attention, to a town about sixty miles distant from Woodcombe. Knowing that the business would occupy me some time, I wrote to Gwendoline, informing her of my departure and of the date of my probable return.

'Even a few days' separation is torment to me,' I wrote in my note; 'all my feelings are merged into one hope, the hope of again being with you.' And I begged her

to write to me to the post-office of the town where I was bound. In due course I received a reply, which, although couched in affectionate terms, did not altogether satisfy me; it seemed restrained and forced, lacking the ring of genuine fervour. Still, as lovers are often *exigeant*, I may have been so in this instance. On my return, my first thought was to pay her a visit, and accordingly I set out immediately with this intention. On arriving at the house, and in the act of ringing the bell, to my utter consternation the following placard on the walls met my gaze:

'HOUSE TO LET.'

In my wild dismay I seemed rooted to the spot, my sight almost failing me as I read the ominous 'House to Let.' And

then I hardly believed the evidence of my own senses.

Was it possible that Gwendoline, my promised wife, would have left the place suddenly without a word of notice or explanation?

'It cannot be! there must be some mistake, I mentally argued. To satisfy myself, I went to the nearest house-agent. It so happened that the house in question had been let by him to Mr. Effingham, and I learnt that it had been given up at the expiration of six months. Of course the agent did not know their movements. I therefore could glean nothing about them from him.

Still I buoyed myself with a hope that their sudden flight would be explained by letter.

But no letter awaited me. And days

passed on, and still no word from her. What did it all mean? Were they suddenly summoned to London on unforeseen business? If so, why did she not write? Had troubles arisen in connection with the financial plan which had urged their immediate departure? If this was the cause, I, of all people, ought to have been appealed to at this juncture. Ought she not by this time to have been assured of my friendly aid in any possible trial? Had my loan and the proceeds of the bill been swallowed up in some unforeseen pecuniary calamity? Even then, what did it matter? What was even the possible loss of my money in comparison with the lack of confidence in me, proved by her extraordinary departure? It was more than unkind on her part; it was positively cruel.

Perhaps, these were only idle conjectures. Had the sudden illness, or death, of some absent relation or friend summoned them away? Perhaps she was suffering whilst I was idly brooding about her; and this idea was more terrible than all the others. I knew not what to think; I was perplexed and anxious.

And the weary days sped on, and still no written word of explanation reached me. I made all possible inquiries. I tried to trace them by every means in my power; but all to no purpose. Then I felt certain that some dreadful calamity had overtaken them, and, for some inexplicable reason, I was not to be told of it. And in the meantime, suspense was torturing me, since I could positively do nothing to ascertain the mystery of their sudden and unexplained flight.

Then a misery which I could not banish gradually and imperceptibly crept into my heart. My situation seemed utterly hopeless. I seemed overwhelmed with a calamity whose very mystery crushed me. But often, from the depths of my dark despair, there would arise a hope that the pictures of misfortune I had conjured up might have no foundation. Perhaps, after all, they might only be distorted visions, and one day or the other the revelation of the truth would prove on what a baseless fabric they rested. And in the meantime I could only ardently long for that day to arrive, and could do nothing now but wait and hope. And yet, as I afterwards found, my wildest fears were as far off from the truth as is the brilliant sunset from the black night that afterwards enshrouds it.

Every hour that passed was like a dis-

tempered dream, and there was still no word from the fugitives, no break in my suspense, no calm to my anxiety. I bravely strove to wrestle with this, my first great trouble in life. But I could never wholly shake off the feelings of unrest and despair that clung to me, like sullen wintry mists clasping the earth. And now the shadow which had commenced to fall on my life, hovering near the love which had beautified it, assumed terrible proportions.

I had just tasted of the cup of misery ; I was destined to drink it to its very dregs.

CHAPTER XVII.

SHORTLY after my strange experience, on my way to the office one morning, a servant from my father's house accosted me.

'Please, sir, I have a message from Dr. Dunn, who wishes to see you at once, and he begged me to tell you not to lose a moment's time.'

I had been brooding gloomily over late events when this message reached me, and somehow its urgent tone flurried and alarmed me.

'Is the Doctor ill—is anything wrong?' I asked.

'The Doctor is quite well, sir; but he wished me to tell you to come to him at once,' was the servant's reply.

I could not account for this hasty summons. And as I hurried to obey it, a strange, indefinable dread seized me. A fear of some unexplained horror shaped itself within my mind, which made me almost stagger when I found myself within the Doctor's sanctum.

He presented the same aspect as on a former memorable occasion, when he summoned me to his side for the purpose of hushing up my brother's delinquencies, only his looks were sterner and sadder. As I approached him to shake hands, to my utter consternation, he refused.

'Timothy,' he said coldly and strangely, 'I have sent for you to save your honour and your name. I forget, I can't save one

or the other, as they are both irretrievably disgraced; but I wish to save *my* name and *my* honour.'

Utterly astounded by these extraordinary words, I could hardly summon courage to ask what in Heaven's name he meant by them.

'You have behaved worse than your profligate brother,' he replied; 'you have disgraced yourself, and by so doing have heaped disgrace on me. Don't stand there feigning astonishment; hear what I have to say, and go.'

My bewilderment now changed into anger.

'I do not know what you mean; your words are enigmas. Be so good as to explain,' I answered.

'You do not know what I mean!' retorted my father, angry in his turn. 'Your

effrontery is worse than your wickedness. If you wanted money, why did you not apply to me? I would have beggared myself sooner than see you in the position you have placed yourself in. A profligate son is bad enough, but a forger is a thousandfold worse.' Even these words brought no suspicion of the truth, as I hotly answered:

'How dare you apply this vile term to me? *I a forger!*—you must be mad to say so.'

'I mean what I say,' he answered; 'a bill signed in imitation of my handwriting was discounted at my banker's last week. The clerk, on looking at it more closely, had some doubt as to the exactness of the signature, then sent for me, and I at once detected it as a forgery. As this might again be attempted, and the next time may be for a larger amount, a

detective was at once set to work to find out the forger. By degrees the bill was traced into the possession of a *woman*. As she had disappeared, all trace of it seemed lost, when, as chance would have it, I found the receipt for the identical bill in the public library in this town. This receipt was addressed to you, sir, my son, the forger of his father's name.' As this narrative proceeded, a horrible light flashed on me; I grasped in an instant its apparent truthfulness.

My own bill which I had given to her; the identity of my own name, Timothy, with my father's; the complete resemblance of our caligraphy; its negotiation as my father's instrument by someone; and now the climax of this dismal business, marking me as its victim—all these things in an instant broke luridly over my

vision, and rendered me speechless with horror.

'Your silence accuses you as well as my words,' continued my father vehemently; 'you have nothing to say; let me then tell you what I have to say before you leave this house for ever.'

But I felt no shame, because I had done no wrong. My father's words had stung me; but I resolved to hear them, to bear all consequences, for Gwendoline's sake. She had never, I felt assured, wilfully placed me in this terrible position; to confess the truth would be to blame her. When I had heard *her* explanations, then, and then only, would I tender my own. Until then, my lips should be sealed. Alas! when the time came to explain, it was too late to reinstate myself in my father's favour. I could only during our

interview assure him, on my honour, that I was accused falsely, that I had never tampered with his signature; I implored him to trust me, and wait until I could prove my innocence. It was of no use; he was obdurate.

'I don't wish to save your name, but I must endeavour to save my own; I shall certainly stifle inquiry, so that no accusing hand shall ever be pointed at you. In the meantime, go; never let me behold your face again.'

These were my father's words.

'You misjudge me, father,' was the answer I gasped. 'God help you; the day will come when you will recall your unjust words, and your love. I obey you. Good-bye.' And I hurried from the home of my childhood, heart-broken and yet buoyed up with a resolve to suffer

for her sake. It might not be for long. The shadow that hovered over me would soon depart; and was not my beloved one worth this resolution? I was mad or foolish, you will exclaim, to make myself a martyr for her sake; perchance I can plead guilty to both these accusations. And the thought of my passion for Gwendoline seemed now to throw a halo over the misfortune that dogged my footsteps. Accordingly, although I rushed from my father's presence bewildered, feeling almost that all hope had fled from my life, stricken with a despair which seemed to blight everything around me, I nevertheless felt assured that the tangled skein of these untoward circumstances would one day be clearly unravelled; that the clear wind of truth would destroy the web of mystery that held me in its meshes. And the

self-same love which caused me this misery would in due course banish it and surround me with happiness. Alas! the climax to my misfortune was yet to come, in a manner unthought-of by me. In the meantime, should I face the ordeal of public contumely which might await me? In the event of my father accidentally revealing my supposed guilt, strong in my own innocence, conscious of my own rectitude, what had I to fear? And would not my father for his own sake keep his promise? On the other hand, how could I ever prove my innocence without compromising Gwendoline?

I liked travelling; a trip to France would be a change, so I resolved to start for Paris without delay.

CHAPTER XVIII.

In the excitement of travelling, I tried to throw off the wretchedness that compassed me; and when I reached the beautiful capital of France, the impression it made on me stirred into fresh activity all those feelings which always arise on beholding new scenes. I had left a dull, sleepy town, and now Paris in all its witchery of architectural beauty shone on me! The boulevards astonished me with their bright grandeur, their splendid extent, their superb display of all that charms the eye and rivets the senses.

Everything around me seemed so light,

pleasant, and aerial! Every house looked like a palace; all the shops like wonderful emporiums, where only fairy gifts were displayed! The sumptuous cafés always looked inviting, while the monster hotels almost awed one with their ornate beauty! And life, amusement, gaiety and mirth pervaded the atmosphere: every day was a gala day, and everyone seemed to take existence merrily and easily.

But the delight of being in this magical city did not drive care and gloom away—I wandered about excited and enthralled, and yet depressed and heartbroken; for when the impressions of the hour somewhat wore off, then my thoughts dwelt bitterly on the misery of the past, on the uncertainty of the present, and on the mystery of the future. It seemed as if love had thrown a curse around me—

as if its spell had only produced evil, and its sweetness—bitterness.

I had fled from my home in apparent disgrace, allowing myself to be vilely accused, without being able to prove my innocence. My father's heart was steeled against me, believing me a hardened reprobate. I was a wanderer, with a criminal brand upon me—alone, in a city of revelry and mirth and beauty.

When would it all be cleared up? When should I hear the explanation that I craved for from her lips, which would set everything right again? or else receive the letter which would exculpate everybody and even disarm suspicion.

Burdened with these hopes, doubts, and misgivings, one evening, I was seated in one of those pleasant restaurants, in a favourite arcade, enjoying my dinner,

and sipping my Margaux. The room was partitioned off into little compartments, each one having its own table, which was screened from the other by curtains. I was in that mood when the noise of boisterous laughter and excitable discourse, peculiar to the place, jarred painfully on me. And as the people in the next compartment were asserting these peculiarities in a very marked degree, I asked the garçon to remove my wine and dessert to another table. I followed him, and sat down, when a murmur of voices in dispute, in the next compartment, caught my ear and arrested my attention.

Had my wretchedness made me demented?—for surely I recognised the tones of those voices! I listened in a wild tremor of maddening thoughts. Yes, there could not be any mistake—the English words

that assailed my ears, like the sounds of hissing serpents, were as familiar to me as my own senses. Stupefied, as if magnetized to the place, I strove with all my might to listen to the conversation.

'How cruel of you,' said the woman's voice, 'not to tell me this before!'

'You must allow me to manage things my own way. What was the good of *his* bill? And how could we live without money!' answered the man.

'It was enough to deceive him as I did,' she replied; 'but I never told you to add to the wickedness. Good God! what must he think of me! In his eyes I must be a perjurer—a liar, and my infamy may be his ruin.'

'What the devil do I care what he thinks of you! What is he to you, or

you to him?' he replied in hot and angry accents.

'Hush!' she retorted. 'Don't bring the horrible past before me. Pity me! If I am degraded in my own eyes, I ought to be sacred in yours. If I have disgraced my womanhood, it has been for your sake. If I craftily plotted, it was all on your account. If I have sacrificed all that ennobles my sex, it has been for you, and you know it. Yes! and you know it—only too well.'

And then, in answer to these words, I heard what seemed to me only a savage, merciless laugh.

I did not catch his reply; for they rose from their seats and left the place.

But I could contain myself no longer. Wrought up to a frenzied pitch of rage at what I had heard—my blood on fire with

the madness of the terrible discovery—I rushed from my table, threw down a piece of gold to the *garçon*, and followed them. I soon confronted them. In the glare of the fitful gaslight they stood revealed—*Gwendoline Effingham* and *my brother Godfrey*. She turned as white as a corpse, and clung closely to his arm, as if involuntarily seeking protection from me. He looked at me with a most surprising unconcern and with the old leer on his lips.

'Where on earth have you sprung from? What in the world brings you to Paris?' And he asked the question in his usual jaunty manner.

'On what pretence are you with my future affianced wife?' I asked. And I strove by all means in my power to calm the hot vengeance that leapt within me like a flame.

'*Your* future affianced wife?' replied Godfrey mockingly, repeating my words. 'You are dreaming. This lady can't be anything to you—she is *my wife*.'

'You lie!' I retorted. 'You have decoyed her!' And then in an agony of despair I placed my hand on the arm of the woman I once and still so frantically loved.

'Heaven help me! Tell me, Gwendoline, that this man is making sport of me; assure me that his words are false.'

But she neither moved nor spoke.

'Tim, you have been drinking a little too much French—so called—light wines. I don't want a scene, and I have no wish to make you acquainted with a *sergent-de-ville*. Take my advice and go home.'

On hearing these words, the frenzy that was gradually mastering me asserted itself.

With a spring I rushed on him with all my force. I planted a blow on his forehead. Then I was conscious of his defending himself. A flash of light passed before my eyes—I felt a grasp on my throat—I heard a piercing shriek—and afterwards I lost all consciousness of everything and everybody.

CHAPTER XIX.

My first, dim return of consciousness brought with it a succession of vague and horrible dreams. All the scenes of the past, and the beings who peopled them, crowded in a phantasmagoria upon my half-suspended senses, assuming dreadful shapes and horrible proportions, and over all of them hovered her figure, no longer beautiful but wearing the look of a fiend, and the lurid shadow of evil which on former occasions oppressed me, in the first stages of my intoxicating love, now blackened the atmosphere of my visions; then the darkness seemed to rend and choke me,

until, partially awaking to the physical sensations of bodily pain, I again felt the hideous nightmare grasping me like a vice. Sometimes the personages assumed odd disguises. I saw my father denouncing me, but his face wore the aspect of Godfrey's when he mocked and taunted me outside the restaurant. I beheld my brother, but his features bore a strange resemblance to Gwendoline's father when he was propounding his schemes. And all the scenes of the past were hideously transformed as well as the actors in them, and she followed me everywhere like an appalling horror. I tried to shake her presence off; I tried to fly from her; I implored her to let me alone; I shrieked, I raved—but she was merciless and relentless—until I felt a grasp around my throat and awoke as before, lacerated

with physical torture. Then total oblivion ensued. As I gradually recovered, I could not realize the fact of my own existence. I did not know where I was; but the remembrance of the distempered visions somewhat paled, as I found myself in a high bedstead in the alcove of the quaint and tasteful bedroom of my French hotel, whilst a gentle figure of a sister of mercy, in quiet attendance on me, sitting near my bedside, soothed and comforted me. I afterwards ascertained that on my being brought senseless to the hotel, my brother having almost strangled me in the fierce struggle between us, the kind landlord had sent for the best doctor and the best nurse.

The mental shock I had sustained, combined with the physical injuries, threw me into a delirious fever, and for many weeks

my life was despaired of. As I grew gradually convalescent, my mind soon recovered its equipoise; but the terrible ordeal which I had faced, culminating in the bitter quarrel with my brother, left its impress on my memory, which to this day has never been effaced, and worse than this, that Cain-like grasp on my throat imprinted an indelible seal. When afterwards I tried to throw off the dread mental impressions, I resolved to hide this horrible mark by wearing the *stock around my throat* to which I have alluded in the first chapter of my narrative.

CHAPTER XX.

I THEN calmly reviewed the situation in which an unhappy concatenation of circumstances had placed me. I had been duped, betrayed and deceived. The woman I had idolized, and whom I had hoped to make my wife, belonged to another. I had evidently been a tool in her hands, to serve a long-concocted and well-matured design. The conversation I had listened to on that fatal night left no possible doubt of this. Whether her father was privy to the plot or not, I did not know; though his sudden, unexplained departure almost proved that he

had conspired with her to rob me of my happiness and honour. Certainly, all the circumstances, particularly the matter of the forged bill, were not perfectly elucidated; still, the fact of my having been betrayed by the one dearer than life to me, was very palpable; there was no mystery in this, and yet, such is human nature, that although so grievously wronged, I still made excuses for her; imagining that perhaps she had fallen a victim to my brother's villainy, and that he had cajoled and enticed her to evil. Perhaps he had blackened my character in her eyes, for who can fathom the depth of man's treachery to attain his own ends? In the past I had almost hoped against hope that all mystery in connection with her would be clearly explained; in the present, even with the

damning evidence of her falseness before me, I still hoped, that if ever brought face to face with her again, she would by some means, which I could not then fathom, be able to clear her own conduct. Alas! I must have loved her still.

This may seem strange to you, gentle reader, but did I not tell you on the first page of this record that I was an odd man? and I shall remain an odd man to the end of my life. And now I felt I was a wandering outcast, my life blighted, for no fault of my own, nor could I battle with the crowning misery which had reached its climax on that fatal night. With whom or with what could I combat? I could never undo the mischief of the past. I could not transform falsehood into truth. The love I had foolishly lavished had turned into a curse; the very thought of it was torture.

She was now only associated in my mind with him. And his very remembrance was a bane, a haunting evil to rack me anew with revengeful desire! No, on no account would I track their footsteps; never again would I face his mocking leer, his defiant gibes. I could never forgive him; and so I strove to drown my maddening thoughts in forgetfulness.

Should I at once return to my native town, and proclaim the truth as far as I knew it, and by so doing vindicate my honour in my father's eyes? No! I could not undertake this; my vindication would be *her* aspersion and shame. By righting myself, I should only vilify her. What need, then, to parade her guilt? If my love-dream had been shattered, why should I scatter the fragments about? If I had been foolish enough to love so unworthily,

of what use was it to bare my folly, when my confession would only heap ignominy on the one I had loved and lost ?—and my love embraced so wide a limit that it had ample space for pity and pardon.

A few weeks after my complete restoration to health, I received a letter from Mr. Henley, the contents of which threw me into an agony of despair. It informed me of the sudden death of my dear father. 'I saw him before he died,' wrote Mr. Henley ; 'and I am sorry to say he never mentioned Godfrey's nor your own name. I knew your brother had incurred his severe displeasure, but I did not guess that you were also in his bad books ; I always imagined you were his favoured son. This eccentric conduct towards you both has puzzled me ; for, with the exception of a

few trifling legacies, he has bequeathed all his money to a charitable institution. A letter addressed to you in his handwriting was found amongst his papers, which I now enclose you. I write all this to you with a sad heart. I have never performed a more unpleasant duty during the whole course of my legal career, than inditing this letter; still, you are young, and you must be brave; never mind the loss of a competence; do as I have done, make a competence for yourself—"*Labor omnia vincit.*" These are trite, but very true proverbs, my friend; I know you well enough to be assured that they will form the *substrata* of your future career. In case you feel reluctant under present circumstances to return to Woodcombe, I enclose you two letters of introduction to correspondents of mine in London. You can finish

your curriculum with either of these two gentlemen, when you will be able to pass your examination and start for yourself. If you decide to adopt this course, be certain to write and inform me of your progress.'

The letter from my father, which I have not the heart to copy, was concise and unloving; it informed me that the unfortunate bill had been honoured by him, and that the matter remained a profound secret to everybody; it assured me of his forgiveness; it implored me to keep away from evil ways and evil companions and to *repent in time*. When I had finished it, a new despair seized me, and the agony of this fresh trouble almost bereft me of reason, for I had no one to solace or soothe me In the solitude of my lonely chamber, within sight of the bright and beautiful

streets, within hearing of the mirthful stir and light revelry of the queen of cities, I sat desolate and hopeless. I did not grieve because my father had disinherited me; but I felt a bitter despair in the thought that his only memory of me should have been a memory of my supposed guilt. Whilst he lived, there always remained the hope that I might eventually clear my character in his eyes; never more now, on this side of eternity, could I do so. This thought worked like madness in my brain, It obtruded itself on all occasions. The gay city only seemed to mock me. The light revelries around me were hollow echoes of my misery.

In the calm of the present, dispassionately reviewing those days of the past burdened with so much pain, I wonder now to myself how I lived through them;

how I could have passed through their terrible ordeal unscathed, or why I did not seek refuge from my woes in death, seems a mystery to me now. And what turned me from suicide, saved my reason, stole like a sun-ray through the darkness of the present, and renewed my interest in life? Only a little note left at my hotel by some unknown person, and written by the one who had betrayed me.

'If ever you think of me again, do so with forgiveness; consign my name to obloquy and oblivion if you will, but try and pity me, for I am not altogether to blame.'

This note to a certain extent relieved my mind, since it assured me that she had not wilfully betrayed me. And without wishing to know more, I felt I could give her what had been withheld from me

—forgiveness; and, as I ungrudgingly pardoned her, with a dim consciousness in my mind of her terrible suffering as yet unrevealed to me, perchance greater than my own, I summoned fortitude to live and conquer my bitter fate, and seize opportunities to make me try and forget the past. Thus I wrestled with despair, and, thank God, I vanquished it.

Carrying my resolves into immediate action, I left Paris for London. I presented my letter of introduction, which Mr. Henley had kindly furnished me, to a celebrated firm of solicitors, and set to work again in real earnest. Knowing that my future success depended now, since I had no fortune to expect, on my own resolute perseverance, I must acknowledge that my industry was indefatigable. Besides, I soon felt convinced that there is no panacea for

a rooted sorrow, like hard work. And after a while I finished my course of studies satisfactorily, passed my legal examination with éclat, and established myself as a solicitor in Crook Court, already mentioned in the first chapter of this narration. Let me record here that I owe my first successes entirely to Mr. Henley, who handed his London business over to me; *au reste*, I prospered in my career for many and sufficient reasons—I always took advantage of every possible opportunity, I served my clients well, I nearly always won my actions because I never took up a doubtful case. In the fray of a lawsuit, instead of being relentless as a victor, I was so moderate and gracious to the defeated opponent as to often enlist him afterwards as a client. Again, I often acted as a mediator between

hostile men, and thus often settled a case without the expensive and complicated machinery of the law.

I was thus looked upon as a kind of Solon, and a bill of costs which would have certainly been grudged to anyone else in a long-delayed and perhaps unfortunate lawsuit, was freely and pleasantly accorded me, after settling a tangled dispute to everyone's satisfaction. Accordingly, you perceive that my practice of law was *odd*, befitting the character of the man I have represented myself to be.

CHAPTER XXI.

And now the fresh interest I took in life was solely confined to mental toils and duties. My only pleasure was my daily work. I fought and overcame all obstacles that beset my path; and I was often surprised at my own unflagging zeal and untiring industry. I was respected, and even envied, by numerous influential patrons, and yet I made no friends and few acquaintances. Cruel circumstances had frozen all the geniality in my nature, and thus no one sought my companionship; I felt I was an acrid,

flavourless individual, whose oddities only invited repulsion ; my best sympathies were dead. And so, I held no communion with my kind ; as to womankind, they were beyond the pale of even my thoughts — I preferred the frown of a man to the smile of a woman. The former could only provoke indifference ; the latter awakened the bitterest memories. And after a few years, when I leased, and eventually purchased, a snug and pleasant villa retreat, bordering on the beautiful winding Thames, not for a moment did I ever dream to tenant it with a mistress. The very idea of a wife was hateful to me; the mere suggestion of a helpmate, made by a chance acquaintance, would fill me with indignation. A trustworthy servant, recommended to me by a client going

abroad, presided over my house, and attended to my wants, which were few and simple. During many months of the year I lodged in town, but all through the leafy summer-time, after my hard day's work, I found solace and peace in my country surroundings. And often languidly stretching myself on the grassy banks of my garden, sloping towards the river, with all its pleasant sights and musical sounds; the graceful swans sailing by, the willows caressing the waters, the swift careering of boats past me, the lulling splash of the graceful waves —all soothed and ministered comfort to my often jaded brain and always tired heart. And thus, the years flowed onwards, like the river's wavelets towards the ocean of eternity, when the calms of my existence were again suddenly broken.

Leaving the office later than usual one evening, I was accosted by a shabby-looking man, without a collar, attired in a buttoned-up, threadbare frock-coat, who, after inquiring whether I was Mr. Dunn, hastily thrust a note in my hands, and then left me before I had time to question him. The handwriting of the note at first was not familiar to me, as the letters were indistinct and blurred, but afterwards I gradually recognised it. Its contents ran as follows :—

'Come to me at once, I want you. Do not delay ; grant my last favour.

'GWENDOLINE.'

Like the chemical acid that vivifies the shadowy photograph, so did these words recall at once a remembrance which of late years had almost faded away. I

had banished it from my life. I had plucked it from my heart. It was as if she was dead. In my tribulation I had forgiven her; but I had no wish to seek her to express my forgiveness. For what reason did she summon me to her side? I did not care to go. I did not wish to revive the misery of the past, and yet I had not the heart to refuse. Her wish was so urgent, and she was evidently in some trouble. So I relented, and resolved to visit her at the address given me in the note.

It was unusually late for me to leave the office, as I had to superintend some pressing work which had to be finished. It was a calm summer's evening, the burden and heat of the day had subsided, as I wended my way, wrapt in melancholy, troubled with a sadness, that

comes to all of us sometimes, without any palpable reason. Alas! in my case there was reason enough.

The almost silent and deserted streets were full of the twilight shadows that fall before the darkness; a few straggling, tired workers were hurrying homewards, anxious to meet the smiles of love, or to snatch the welcome caress of affection, whilst I, bent on some unknown errand of mercy, would soon face the one who had blighted my existence, and had mercilessly hedged my days with the curse of a barren loneliness.

Was it any wonder, then, I almost faltered in my purpose, as I threaded my way through the sinuous bye-streets that led to her dwelling-place, encompassed with a load of memories that depressed me? On my way through a foul court,

reeking with poverty and misery, I arrived at an unwholesome-looking, tumbled-down tenement, knocked at the door, which was answered by a sallow, but kindly-faced woman, who told me to ascend the stairs until I reached the fourth story. Arriving at my destination, the door of a room was opened by a child who of her own accord led me by the hand into an apartment (parlour and bedroom in one), scantily furnished, denuded of all comfort, bare and cheerless in its aspect and surroundings, and yet preserving some indefinable air of neatness and order.

'Me so dad you've come. Ma's been crying,' said the child. With the earnestness of some inexplicable interest, I scanned the little figure by my side, dressed in black, and I noticed a sweet serious face, bright with a childlike in-

telligence, and whose wonderful lustrous eyes at once reminded me of hers.

'Take me to ma,' I whispered to the child. I then stole silently to the bed where she lay. She appeared to be in a deep, uneasy, feverish sleep; her features had grown sharp and attenuated; a deathly pallor had crept over the face once so lovely in its perfect outlines, and suffering had given it an almost haggard aspect. The dreadful change I saw, for a moment, silenced emotion. I felt stunned, as if with a sudden blow. I stood amongst the shadows of the room, like one in a dread dream. I watched the grave-looking child approach the bed, smoothing the pillows with her deft, loving little hands and I waited anxiously until she awoke.

Presently she opened her eyes, and called my name—not in the old voice

that once had maddened my pulses, but softly, and with an apparent effort to be heard, and then I approached her noiselessly, knelt by her bedside and gently grasped her hand.

'Oh, Gwendoline, Gwendoline my dear, dear love,' I almost sobbed, and then I knew, as I uttered these words, that any slight memory of her perfidy had vanished as completely as the last shadow before the dawn; and in the agony of beholding her, in her speechless suffering, the mighty tenderness of my love returned with renewed force.

'Forgive me, Tim; I owe you so much reparation. I have been so cruel; I have been waiting for you, to hear you say "I forgive," before I go from you for ever.'

'I have always forgiven you truly and freely, since I have always felt it was not in

your nature to have consciously wronged me,' I answered.

'I *have* consciously wronged you. I must confess the truth now to you—now, when the chills of death are seizing me.'

'Hush, don't talk of death,' I retorted in my own mental agony, but nevertheless feeling conscious that I saw unmistakable signs of the destroyer in that terribly blanched face and wasted form. 'Live on, if only to know that the misery of the past is blotted out, that only comfort and peace shall sweeten your future.' She opened those eyes of strange splendour that had once thrilled me, and which still shone with an indefinable lustre, until they met my own.

'Is there sufficient goodness in me left to thank you and bless you, you who do not even ask me for explanations or excuses?'

'Oh, Gwendoline dearest, banish every distressing thought of the past and live still for a bright future, and remember I shall always be your staunch friend.'

'Still tender and thoughtful to the last, ah! I don't deserve it, and yet I ask you to grant me a dying favour.' As she uttered these words the figure of the sad-looking child forced its silent way to the bedside, and her mother, clasping its tiny soft hand, placed it in mine. Unconsciously I retained it. 'I have summoned courage, before I part with you for ever, to ask you to promise me one service. I am alone now; he has been taken from me; I have no one in this world to whom I can confide my child. Rear her for me, take charge of her, and perchance the love which I was sinful enough not to requite, may be lavished on you by a child's

grateful tenderness;' and the little creature, not understanding her mother's words, and yet, with some wonderful instinct, divining their meaning, folded her arms around me and crept to my heart, as she has since crept into my life. And I returned the endearing caress, kissed the sufferer's marble-looking hand, and promised to love and guard her child while God granted me life; and then, weary with the effort of talking, she could only murmur, 'God bless you!'

Then I reverently bowed my head, and left her bedside. And a solemn awe filled the chamber, as if the great shadow of death, which was noiselessly approaching its vestibule, was impressing me with its dread sanctity; and with the child still in my arms fondling me in its sleep, all through that night I waited in

that solemn chamber, until I knew that my love had tranquilly passed away from the land of shadows into everlasting peace.

CHAPTER XXII.

After the funeral, at which I and the poor little child were the only mourners, a parcel of MSS. was found addressed to me in her handwriting. On the inside cover I read the following inscription—

For Mr. Timothy Dunn.

'To be opened after my death, for his private perusal. To be sedulously and sacredly taken care of.'

I took these papers home; and in order to preserve them carefully, after I had read them through twice, I sewed them in

the lining of an old coat which I lock up in the morning and put on in the evening. And it is an odd fancy of mine, to which I have alluded in the first chapter of this story, always to have these relics of the past about me.

The manuscript contained the diary of Gwendoline's life, written with admirable perspicuity.

I have deemed it necessary, in order to suit the exigencies of this narrative and elucidate certain points which may still seem somewhat mazy to my readers, to cull several extracts from it; at the same time I shall only quote what is absolutely necessary for my purpose.

Its early pages described the history of her birth, parentage and education. Her mother was an invalid, who died when she was quite a child. As she grew

up, she had to keep house for her father, and minister to his wants, comforts and amusements. Nature and an expensive education had pre-eminently fitted her for this duty; and her training and musical accomplishments made her home very attractive; besides this, as you are aware, she inherited from some remote ancestor, certainly not from her mother, the fatal gift of a luxuriant and fascinating loveliness. Having no rival sisters to outshine her, and being possessed of those qualities of mind which so readily charm and command homage, it is not to be wondered at that she reigned supreme at home and amongst her visiting circle; so that even her own father was a secondary personage in his own house, being always subservient to her will.

I gleaned for the first time, on perusing

the folios of Gwendoline's diary, many particulars concerning her father, Mr. Effingham. It seems he was by profession an architect, and up to a certain time had evidently been so successful as to have amassed some wealth. In the pages there were certain evidences of a splendid home, and an entire absence of petty household cares produced by a narrow income.

By-and-bye, Mr. Effingham grew ambitious. Not contented with comparative affluence, he wanted to become immensely rich; accordingly, his mind, soaring from what seemed to him the narrow grooves of his calling, busied itself in inventions and improvements to benefit mankind. Schemes of this sort, even if practicable, require capital to ensure their success. In the first instance chance favoured him. A small but astute capitalist, of a specu-

lative turn of mind, joined him in furthering one of his schemes, which proved successful in every respect; and by which they netted several thousand pounds. However, with men of Mr. Effingham's sanguine temperament, temporary success very often begets recklessness and consequent failure. It is not then to be wondered at, that Mr. Effingham imprudently embarked all his means in another project, and this time without the aid or co-operation of an astute partner. The public, however, would have nothing to do with it. The consequence was, it egregiously failed, and its originator unfortunately failed with it.

Accordingly, Mr. Effingham was reduced from comparative affluence to absolute poverty. The sudden loss of fortune and position unhinged and almost shattered his

fine mind. At one time his life and reason were both despaired of, and when the former was restored, the latter remained a wreck; and for ever after, his helpless intellect was a slave to one idea, the staple of which consisted of plans and projects no longer possible or practicable, but instead, incoherent and illusory.

In this terrible affliction, what a comfort and support Gwendoline must have been to him—tending his wants, subduing his fretfulness, humouring his fancies, and, above all, working to maintain him by teaching music and languages.

As I read the record of her struggles, privations, endurance, and unselfishness for her afflicted father, I wondered how such an affectionate nature could ever harbour an erring or culpable thought!

About this time, an event happened

which not only completely influenced her life and character, but was also destined to react on my own.

At one of the houses where she was giving lessons, *she met my brother Godfrey, and at once,* as she confessed in her diary, *fell in love with him.* With everything in his favour to captivate women—fine features, a *distingué* air and dashing manners, he completely captivated Gwendoline.

The only advantage he took of his conquest at first, was to play at love ; but after a while the subtle power of her loveliness enthralled him, in the same way as later on it did me. In the beginning he feigned adoration ; in the end, he worshipped in earnest. A grand, passionate nature like Gwendoline's must either love 'all in all' or 'not at all.'

Unfortunately, he was not worthy of her

love, but she found out her mistake too late. The irksome slavery of her daily life about this time, with its multitudinous petty cares, vigilant, wearisome duties, and hard parsimony, found her all the more prepared to receive the vivid impressions of a first love.

She conquered without stooping; but her victory only secured a profligate husband. Self-reliant by nature, with a helpless and weak-minded father who could not advise her, it is not surprising that she married as soon as possible.

About this time, my father, as you know, had paid Godfrey's debts, and all his means of support were derived from the small income left him by his mother, and billiards and cards made up the rest. In justice to his memory I do not say that he was a professed cheat at these latter

accomplishments. He was merely a sharp adept at them, being one of those men who always manage somehow to play with an unwary or unskilful opponent, in order to snatch a certain profitable result.

Gwendoline soon discovered the real character of the man with whom she had linked her fate; and, with the power of unchangeable love, she strove to wean him from his dissolute habits. But with all her mastery of will and energy of purpose, her efforts were not crowned with success.

And, as the unskilful card-players were not constantly at her husband's elbow, the ways and means of how to live were not always apparent. Therefore, Gwendoline's lot was already becoming anything but an enviable one. For my brother had spent

the small fortune his mother had left him, long since.

I shall now copy those extracts from Gwendoline's diary which immediately concern this painful history.

CHAPTER XXIII.

'*Saturday, May 7th*, 18——Godfrey complains to me about his being in need of funds. He wants to go down to Woodcombe, to make the "governor" "stump up," as he puts it. I am rather against this move, and I wish he would inform his father of our marriage, but he says this would he detrimental to his future interests. So I must wait patiently.

* * * * *

'*Woodcombe, Tuesday, May 10th.*—Godfrey's father won't assist him; I expected as much. Shall I insist upon his introducing me? My presence might

soften his obduracy and make him relent.

* * * * *

'*May* 11*th.*—Godfrey is obstinate as usual. He won't introduce me. What is to be done? Our funds are so low that I don't believe we have sufficient money to take us back to London. Godfrey thinks he can borrow money on some little property which he hopes to inherit. He wishes me to consult Messrs. Bobbins and Henley about it, to see if it is possible. But why should I go? It is his place to do so.

* * * * *

'*May* 13*th.*—As usual, I have yielded to my husband; I called on the solicitors, but Mr. Henley, who attends to this branch of the business, was not in. Whilst I waited, I saw Godfrey's brother,

who I knew was pursuing his studies there. He looked very hard at me; I wonder if he has ever met me before? I don't suppose so. How he would start if he was aware of our relationship. I have not had much experience in men's glances, but his seemed certainly full of admiration.

* * * * *

'*May* 14*th*.—It is impossible to raise the money. We now stand on the verge of penury. I feel down-hearted and depressed. That glance of Godfrey's brother haunts me; it has made me gloomy; I seem to have lost my old spirits. I can't bear to think of the future. Let me try and banish despondency. I must hope, for the sake of my poor father and my husband. What can ever destroy my affection for the one, and

love for the other? Nothing, nothing but death!

* * * * *

'*May* 15*th*.—Godfrey has brought home some money; where he got it from I don't know. For some reason or other he wishes me to remain passive; I do wish he would be more confiding and let me help him in some way. Oh, that he would show me that love which I am assured he feels for me. Never mind position, comfort, or toil; as long as I am assured of this, I am ready to encounter any self-sacrifice. But, O my darling husband, can't I make you more worthy of yourself?

* * * * *

'*May* 16*th*.—We have taken a small furnished house, and the mayoress has asked me to a ball. Godfrey left yester-

day for London. No one knows I am married. Everyone calls me Miss Effingham. My husband insists on my keeping our marriage a secret from everyone until his father has assisted him; I am therefore sailing under false colours. I don't like it. I don't wish to be anybody but myself. And yet, what does it matter for a while?

* * * * *

'*May 26th.*—The ball was a great success. As Miss Effingham I was courted and admired. A votive throng always surrounded me. And I know, I *felt*, I looked my best. My dress fitted perfectly and showed my figure off to advantage, and the colour suited my complexion; so I think I made a very presentable appearance. Is there any luxury in this world like the luxury of admiration? Is there any joy

on this earth comparable with a tumultuous waltz ?

'Amongst others, I was formally introduced to Godfrey's brother, Timothy, who not only caught the infection of the rest, but also evinced a superlative amount of admiration on his own account. I felt somewhat guilty at hearing my maiden name pronounced so often by him. I even longed to undeceive him. I am sure he would not have betrayed my secret. But a promise to a husband is the most inviolable of all promises. I can't say his dancing was perfect, and his bungling through one quadrille rather amused me, but his discourse was certainly charming. It is so easy to draw out a reticent nature, if one only knows how to do it. When Mr. Dunn grew earnest, he reminded me of Godfrey, and this is the reason why I

liked to hear him talk; only I hope I have not over-captivated him.

* * * * *

'June 3rd.—If there is anything in this world I like to do, it is to stir up a torpid assemblage, to arouse dulness, and enliven the reticent. I had a rare opportunity of doing this yesterday evening. Mrs. Dugold, a morose-looking Scotchwoman, very partial to church-going, hard bargains and backbiting, had a gathering of intimates at her house—people who dropped in, in a friendly way, a discreet assemblage addicted to drinking weak tea, and—silence. But I think I woke them up a bit. I played for them; yet I felt my audience was not *en rapport* with my music, as all heart was taken out of it and out of *me*, my thoughts being elsewhere, and my wandering over the keys

was therefore, after all, but a "sad mechanic exercise."

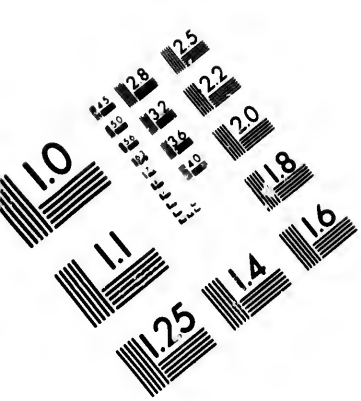
'I had a pleasant conversation with Godfrey's brother. I dare say he wonders why I am so friendly. If he only guessed the reason he would not wonder. One *can* be familiar with one's brother-in-law.

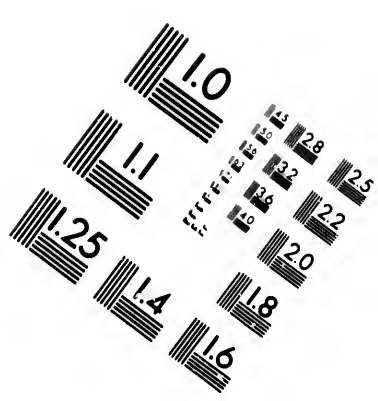
'It was getting late, and I was rather distressed that father had not arrived to take me home. I don't like to leave him for any length of time, in case he gets a return of his old attacks. Tired with waiting, I accepted Mr. Dunn's escort. Somehow, from some chance remarks he let fall, I fancy I have made an impression on his evidently susceptible nature. I did not want to do this, and I am annoyed with myself, and with circumstances, for allowing him to address me so warmly. I, however, cut him short in the midst of a senti-

mental speech; afterwards I was sorry I did so; but I don't wish him to suppose I am leading him on. Accordingly, I made up my mind at all hazards to tell him the truth. No good ever came yet from an implied falsehood.

'When he left me near my home, to my great surprise, Godfrey, who had suddenly returned, was waiting for me. I don't think Timothy recognized him, and yet he must have noticed his shadow, if he did not discern his features. How lucky it is that they did not meet.

'This evening I had a serious talk with my husband. I begged him to disclose our secret, if only to his brother. He was obstinate and obdurate, and would not do so. We had angry words about it. What could I do? I dare not spoil our chance for the future. I then implored him to take





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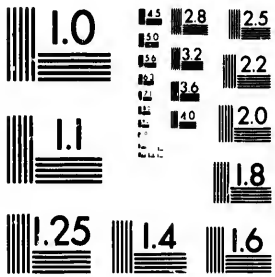

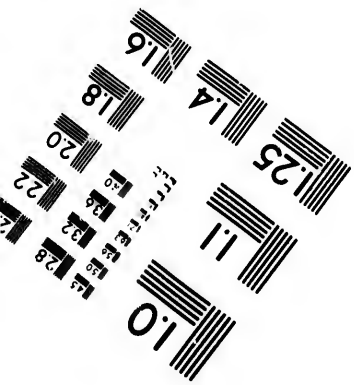

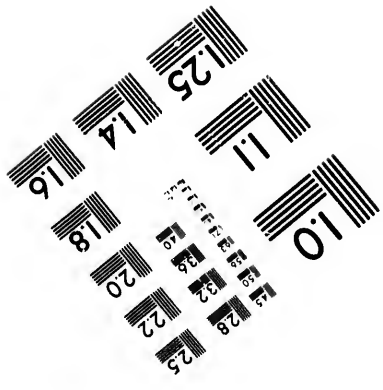

me back to London; he would not grant my wish, and therefore I must remain passive Miss Effingham still for a while.

* * * * *

'*June 14th.*—The monotony of this country existence wearies and maddens me. Even the old occupation of teaching would be a relief to me now. Oh, for the activity of an earnest pursuit amidst the busy haunts of men! The country is all very well for poets, dreamers and idlers, but give me the eager excitement, noisy stir and the supreme restlessness of London.

'Yesterday, in company with my father, I met Timothy Dunn, and I had to introduce them. He must have wearied Mr. Dunn with a recital of his sad projects. I used all the tact in my power to cover his remarks with a natural explanation, so that his unfortunate calamity might not be made

apparent. Dear, loving old man, I owe you much, and the least I can do is to endeavour to hide your infirmity!

'In this truthful record of my life, I must note down what I should like to leave out. I perceive that Timothy Dunn has fallen in love with me. Unknowingly, I have lured him on to disappointment. Already my false position threatens mischief. I must, and will, put an end to this dubious state of things.

* * * * *

'*June* 17.—The opportunity to do so came yesterday. I met him wandering about in a dreamy, contemplative mood. Resolving to undeceive him at once, I opened fire. He evidently mistook my meaning and must have thought I was leading him on to a declaration. I must say I was surprised how quickly he availed

himself of my unintentional encouragement, as I certainly judged him to be a timid personage.

'I have now learnt, from yesterday's experience, that a timid man may easily become a rash one. I expected the usual stereotyped love declaration. Instead of this, his language grew frightfully amorous, while he took upon himself to outrage all sense of dignity and decency by actually clasping me in his arms and kissing me! I was not prepared for a terrible avowal like this; and I told him plainly that he had forgotten himself. Unfortunately for him and for me, my anger was short-lived. The poor man was so fondly earnest, that I forgave his audacity and secretly pitied him. Besides bitterly accusing myself for deceiving him, I felt I owed him some reparation. I therefore

soon made him forget his mortification; and I asked him to come and see me, resolving to explain matters.

'I may misjudge human nature, but his seems a grand one—capable of the noblest feelings. How dare *I* trifle with them? Such a love as he has to bestow is not to be lightly thrown away. It ought to bless and exalt any woman! I feel a great interest in him, and, come what may, I will tell him everything the next time I meet him.

'I feel angry and self-humiliated at not having done this before. I cannot tell what possessed me not to have carried out my intention with Timothy, and why I did not undeceive him when I had the opportunity. After all, I must be a very weak and foolish woman.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

'*June* 21.—Alas for human resolves! I have had to break them—to shamefully break them. Let me disguise nothing; let me extenuate nothing. My nature may not be altogether truthful; but this record shall be true; no lie shall sully these pages.

'Timothy called to see us. I kept him waiting for some time, in consequence of an altercation with my husband respecting my determination to reveal the truth to his brother. I pressed my point; but I did not gain it. And Godfrey left me in a huff. The interview with my husband must have flurried me, so that when I

welcomed Timothy, I had great difficulty in appearing at my ease. I am sure he must have noticed my recent agitation. I am glad he did not stop long, as I wanted to think matters over. When Godfrey returned he greeted me with these words:

'"I wish to discuss an important matter with you." "You must borrow five hundred pounds for me, Gwendoline. If I don't have it this week, I am ruined. My father won't lend me a penny."

'I was startled at this announcement.

'"*I* borrow five hundred pounds! From whom can I borrow it? and how can you be ruined if you don't get it?"

'"I owe it. I played, and lost; and I borrowed it, and gave bills for it, and they all fall due this week. You *must* help me."

'I knew my husband gambled, but I was not prepared for this disclosure. In my supreme devotion to the man I loved, I longed to be of service to him. But how could *I* help him?

'"Borrow it from Timothy; we'll pay him back one day," rejoined my husband.

'"What!" I answered, starting up. "Are you mad? Would you have me ask a favour of your brother, when you won't even let me tell him that I am your wife? Would it not be best for you to ask him yourself?"

'"My brother is not in love with *me*, and so he would certainly refuse *me*; but, as he is in love with *you*, your request would at once be granted. As Mrs. Godfrey Dunn he would not listen to you. As Miss Gwendoline Effingham he would be overjoyed to serve you."

'At last the truth burst upon me. This was why my marriage was not to be disclosed to Timothy. My better nature recoiled from this wickedness. As long as there was no palpable harm in my deception I succumbed to it; but I would not use it as an unworthy means for an end, although the end might be to save my husband from ruin. I revolted at the act. I refused to do Godfrey's bidding.

'"I will work for you; I will starve for you; I will bear penury and mortification for your sake; I will consent to any self-sacrifice for your well-being; but I won't disgrace myself by doing what you now wish."

'My sense of what was right mastered every other feeling—even sweeping away for a moment that great love for my husband, which eclipsed all else!

'"Think it over, Gwendoline, and don't decide in a hurry," said Godfrey. "Don't assist me!—and what will happen? My honour and yours will be gone. We shall be despoiled of the little we have; your father and all of us will be cast into the streets. But you can avert it all. And it will only be a question of borrowing the money. We shall positively pay it back, so what can it matter?"

'I hesitated. Godfrey, perceiving this, at once pursued his advantage.

'"Gwendoline, my true wife, by the love you cherish for me, help me! and do not consign me to despair—to death."

'And he folded me in his arms and kissed me. I had refused his bidding; but I could not refuse his appeal to our love. The all-compelling power of this subdued my resolve—my own undying

love for him made me a supine instrument to his will.

'As I pen this diary—the record of my sin, I pray to the supreme Searcher of hearts to pardon me!

* * * * *

'At my husband's dictation, I wrote a letter to Timothy asking him to call on me, as I had a favour to ask of him.

'Like an evil thing I crouched in my chamber that night. I felt so utterly lost, so contemptible in my own eyes, that sometimes I regretted my promise; but I had not sufficient courage to turn back. At one time I thought to fly from my misery.

'Anywhere, anywhere out of the world! A moment afterwards, I remembered my husband, whom I had vowed to love, honour and obey.

'On the morrow his brother would be

here. Oh, that some chance might prevent his coming!

* * * * *

'I had now to rack my brain to find a reasonable excuse to borrow the money. My woman's wit served me. I found the excuse. My dear father's addle-headed schemes must assist me. The money must be wanted to form a company to carry out a scheme. I consider this rather an ingenious device.

* * * * *

'Oh, my poor dear father, must even your harmless, visionary schemes be dragged in to carry out my tangible, wicked one?

* * * * *

'*June 22nd.*—I cannot now comment at length on all that has happened. Timothy called, and I cajoled him into a speedy

promise to comply with my request. Of course he thinks I favour his suit, and he must remain under that impression.

* * * * *

'*June 27th.*—The horrible plan has succeeded, and already my husband has the money. I would not touch it. The crisp bank-notes were hateful to me. Timothy made out a receipt, and I signed it. I noticed that *his handwriting was exactly similar to his father's*, and I almost betrayed this fact to him. Luckily, I turned the conversation off into another direction; I could not tell him that I knew his father's handwriting. Of course I remembered it, as Godfrey keeps all his father's letters, which I have often seen.

* * * * *

'*June 30th.*—Timothy has made another declaration to me. I expected he would

do so. He has certainly *now* a right to make any number of proposals. This time, instead of being governed by any wild impulse, his words were moderate and discreet. I felt quite sorry for him, and I had to appear a pleased listener to his recitals. And therefore, he thinks that our engagement is only a question of time. I am now a heartless coquette, as well as a perfidious woman and a decoy. And I have done all this for his sake—for my husband's sake. Oh! if I could only have loved him less, I might have avoided temptation and wickedness.

* * * * *

'*July 9th.*—I have sunk lower still into the gulf of perdition and humiliation.

'Godfrey made a mistake as to the amount he wanted. He informed me that he must have two hundred pounds more.

He solemnly swore to me that this sum would clear his debts. And I believed him.

* * * * *

'*July* 13*th.*—It is over for the second time. I have made Timothy a tool to serve my purpose. Instead of money I took his bill; I gave it to my husband, who can get it discounted, and thus turn it into cash. My heart smote me, my conscience pricked me, after I had concluded this dastardly piece of business. Oh, heavens! that I should have sunk so low in my own estimation! What scorn is so terrible as one's own scorn! And I had to wear the mask of deceit whilst Timothy was innocently unfolding his plans for the future with me. And I, guilty and base, was inwardly despising myself, hating my own identity! But I have done this vile thing

for Godfrey, and his love must atone for it. We are now free from debt. Can I not make him a nobler and better man? Only I lack the power to do this on account of my unworthiness. He would not listen to such a guilty creature. But my love shall plead for him.

'We must repay our pecuniary debt by some means or other. But can anything condone my falsehood and deceit? O God, nothing! And I must carry the burden of my wickedness for evermore, to the grave.

* * * * *

'*July 17th, London.*—We left Woodcombe in a hurry; my husband insisted on it, and he would not give me any reason for this haste. As he is not a creature of whims, there must be some weighty reason for our secret and abrupt flight, and I

must have an explanation of it. Timothy will now surmise that there is something wrong. Perchance he already execrates me. Well, I deserve his curses. I have wronged the most true-hearted man in existence. Oh, that we had never met!

* * * * *

'*July* 19*th*, *Hôtel de* ——, *Paris*.—We have left father in our old lodgings in London, and have located ourselves in this city "for a change," as my husband says. I did not want to go. I had no heart for enjoyment. And how can we afford to spend money? Godfrey asserts that my nerves require the tonic of travel. Perhaps he is right.

* * * * *

'*July* 24*th*.—I have been trying to banish the terrible remembrance of the past, by casting my hopes on the future;

striving to influence my husband, to wean him from bad company, to arouse his brighter nature and to make him a nobler man. But, in the meantime, my own trials have increased, and a Nemesis has already avenged my perfidy. I am stricken down again. I am humiliated afresh. I have learnt the reason of our flight. I have met the man whom I have wronged. I have heard his just, accusing voice. I have listened to his denouncing accents. Let me relate calmly, if I can, how it happened. Let me try and collect my thoughts; but I am afraid the whirl of excitement of the last few days has prostrated me. Let me summon courage to continue this diary.

'We were dining at a restaurant, and Godfrey, who had been drinking rather freely, was disposed to be communicative,

so I thought it was an excellent opportunity to discover the reason of our sudden visit here. To my horror, I ascertained that Godfrey, not being able to discount his brother's bill, had passed it off as his father's, the handwriting being nearly the same, and so, dreading discovery, had left London hurriedly for Paris. Immediately, then, the truth dawned upon me, that all the consequences of this deception, of which I was the yielding dupe, would fall on Timothy.

'Accordingly, in my anger, I launched accusations at my husband. He retorted in a cruel manner, throwing all the blame on me. In the midst of our quarrel outside the restaurant, the one man whom I dreaded most to meet confronted us. I can hardly recollect what took place; I only know that resentful language and bitter

epithets passed between the brothers. I remember that Timothy struck my husband, who, in his turn, grasped his assailant by the throat, and that I rushed between them to prevent bloodshed. I saw Timothy fall, and a crowd immediately collected around us. With the help of one of the bystanders, I managed to hail a *voiture*, and was driven to our hotel. I found that my husband had received some severe contusions, but which I am happy to say were not serious.

'I wonder what became of Timothy. My first impulse was to go to him, but I did not know where he was to be found.

'I cannot collect my thoughts to write further about this sad quarrel; but I shall always to my dying day accuse myself as being the cause of it. The excitement

which I have undergone lately has shaken even my hardy physical frame. I can't write all I intended to. I am too tired to hold my pen.

* * * * *

'I have at last discovered the hotel where Timothy is staying; to my sorrow, I hear that he is only now recovering from a severe illness. Poor fellow, how keenly I feel for him! I have managed to send him a note asking his pity and forgiveness. I want no more.'

CHAPTER XXV.

I HAVE bared the contents of Gwendoline's diary as far as it is necessary for me to do so. After which a blank ensued. From this, I surmised that illness must have prevented her from continuing the record.

The diary now became scant and somewhat irregular. Let me transcribe, as briefly as possible, what I gleaned from the remaining pages: In the first place, Gwendoline's persistent attempts to reform her husband, whom she loved too well, must have proved unsuccessful. And

this broke her spirit and ultimately her health. By imperceptible degrees, the reckless gambler became the brutal drunkard, and, in the natural course of events, his love, that paled at first, was succeeded by indifference, in its turn to be followed by ill-usage. Wrongfully as I had been used, my heart bled for her when I read the painful confession of her misery and sufferings.

The only joy that broke upon her gloom was the joy of becoming a mother. And the birth of a child, on whom she now lavished all her love, made her hopeful and almost bright-hearted, amidst the straitened circumstances and usage that blunted her nature.

What a hard life she endured, working at her old occupation of teaching, supporting a drunken husband and an in-

firm father! Devoting herself entirely to nursing him during his last illness, she spent her hard-earned savings, and had to face the grim spectre of want. Then her husband died, and she was left alone with the child of her misery and penury, the only solace she had to reconcile her to life.

Bravely she faced her trials and tried to overcome them. I read the confession of her battle with misfortune. '*Peccavi!*' was her bitter cry: 'My tribulation is my punishment.' And in her pride, although she longed to seek me, to ask my pardon, she never accomplished her purpose.

I still think she would have managed to support herself and little Mary, had not illness laid her low. Then she would silently pray to the Supreme

that her child might be spared her hard fate. Trying to live down my own wrong, and to obliterate her memory in hard work, I could not dream of her misery.

Had I only sought her before, I might still have imparted some sweetness to that wretched, wasted life! But it was not to be. The 'divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them as we may,' shaped hers and mine. And it was only when she knew her days, her very hours were numbered, that she sent for me, to implore my forgiveness, and to ask me to minister to her child.

How grateful I am to know she had the courage to do this, and that she could understand my nature well enough to be conscious that I would grant her dying

wish, and fulfil my sacred promise with all my soul!

* * * * *

And my darling Mary—my more than child—can testify to this. For does not her presence beautify the past and transfigure the fleeting present? Has she not *her* eyes, so fondly earnest? Does she not possess *her* smile, so ravishingly tender? The old love, with all its darkness, doubt and despair, has fled, and its shadow will return never more; but her fresh young love, so reverential, so unspeakably tender and true, comes to shine upon the Indian summer of my old age, spanning the hours like a rainbow arch—a certain blessing, beyond my boyish dreams and my manhood's understanding.

I can lay down my pen now, and thank Heaven for the shadows, since they brought

forth this enduring radiance; for the misery, since it has evoked this abiding joy; for the despair, since it has wrought this hallowed peace!

THE END.

Elliot Stock, Paternoster Row, London.