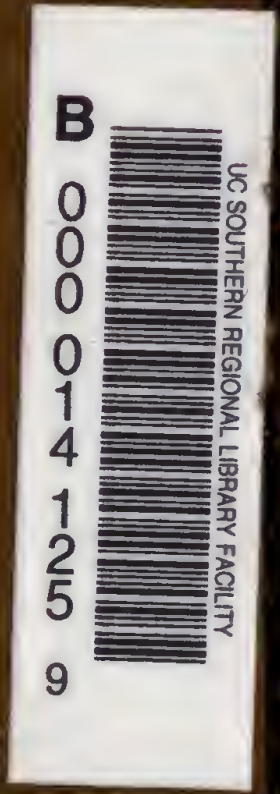

THE STILLWATER TRAGEDY.

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BY

THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH

AUTHOR OF 'THE QUEEN OF SHEBA,' 'MARJORIE DAW,' 'PRUDENCE PALFREY,' ETC.

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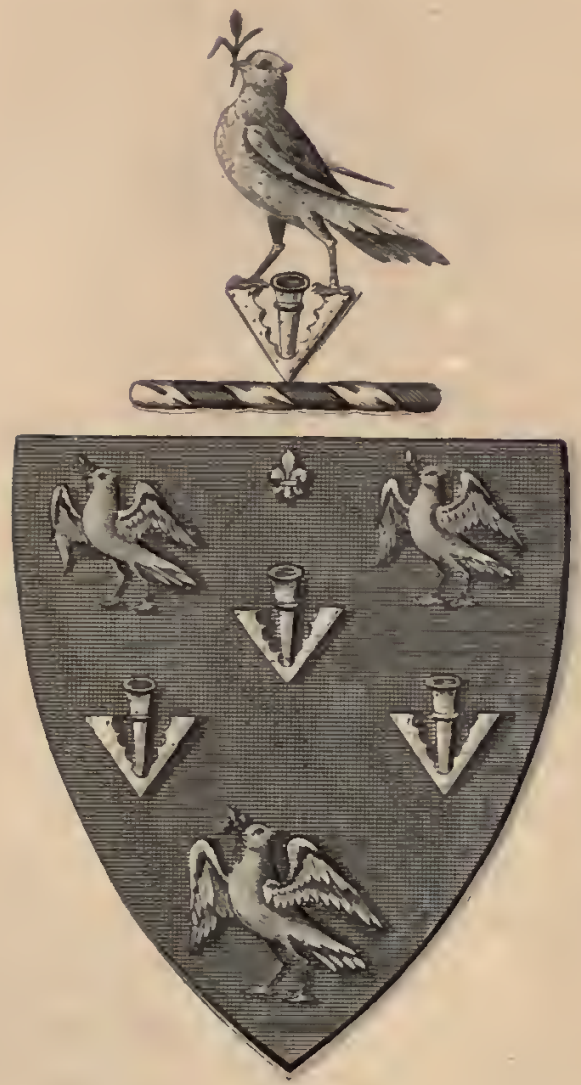

Frederic Ernest Allsopp.

THE STILLWATER TRAGEDY.

XIV.

ON the third morning after Torrini's expulsion from the yard, Mr. Slocum walked into the studio with a printed slip in his hand. A similar slip lay crumpled under a work-bench, where Richard had tossed it. Mr. Slocum's kindly visage was full of trouble and perplexity as he raised his eyes from the paper, which he had been re-reading on the way upstairs.

"Look at that!"

"Yes," remarked Richard, "I have been honoured with one of those documents."

"What does it mean?"

"It means business."

The paper in question contained a series of resolutions unanimously adopted at a meeting of the Marble Workers' Association

of Stillwater, held in Grimsey's Hall the previous night. Dropping the preamble, these resolutions, which were neatly printed with a type-writing machine on a half letter sheet, ran as follows :—

Resolved, That on and after the First of June proximo, the pay of carvers in Slocum's Marble Yard shall be $2.75 per day, instead of $2.50 as heretofore.

Resolved, That on and after the same date, the rubbers and polishers shall have $2.00 per day, instead of $1.75 as heretofore.

Resolved, That on and after the same date, the millmen are to have $2.00 per day, instead of $1.75 as heretofore.

Resolved, That during the months of June, July, and August the shops shall knock off work on Saturdays at five P.M., instead of at six P.M.

Resolved, That a printed copy of these resolutions be laid before the Proprietor of Slocum's Marble Yard, and that his immediate attention to them be respectfully requested.

Per order of Committee M. W. A.

"Torrini is at the bottom of that," said Mr. Slocum.

"I hardly think so. This arrangement, as I told you the other day before I had the

trouble with him, has been in contemplation several weeks. Undoubtedly Torrini used his influence to hasten the movement already planned. The Association has too much shrewdness to espouse the quarrel of an individual."

"What are we to do?"

"If you are in the same mind you were when we talked over the possibility of an unreasonable demand like this, there is only one thing to do."

"Fight it?"

"Fight it."

"I have been resolute, and all that sort of thing, in times past," observed Mr. Slocum, glancing out of the tail of his eye at Richard, "and 'have always come off second best. The Association has drawn up most of my rules for me, and had its own way generally."

"Since my time you have never been in so strong a position to make a stand. We have got all the larger contracts out of the way. Foreseeing what was likely to come, I have lately fought shy of taking new ones. Here are heavy orders from Rafter & Son, the Builders' Company, and others. We must decline them by to-night's mail."

"Is it really necessary?" asked Mr. Slocum, knitting his forehead into what would have been a scowl if his mild pinkish eyebrows had permitted it.

"I think so."

"I hate to do that."

"Then we are at the mercy of the Association."

"If we do not come to their terms, you seriously believe they will strike?"

"I do," replied Richard, "and we should be in a pretty fix."

"But these demands are ridiculous."

"The men are not aware of our situation; they imagine we have a lot of important jobs on hand, as usual at this season. Formerly the foreman of a shop had access to the order-book, but for the last year or two I have kept it in the safe here. The other day Dexter came to me and wanted to see what work was set down ahead in the blotter; but I had an inspiration and didn't let him post himself."

"Is not some kind of compromise possible?" suggested Mr. Slocum, looking over the slip again. "Now this fourth clause, about closing the yard an hour early on Saturdays, I don't strongly object to that,

though with eighty hands it means, every week, eighty hours' work which the yard pays for and doesn't get."

"I should advise granting that request. Such concessions are never wasted. But, Mr. Slocum, this is not going to satisfy them. They have thrown in one reasonable demand merely to flavour the rest. I happen to know that they are determined to stand by their programme to the last letter."

"You know that?"

"I have a friend at court. Of course this is not to be breathed, but Denyven, without being at all false to his comrades, talks freely with me. He says they are resolved not to give in an inch."

"Then we will close the works."

"That is what I wanted you to say, sir!" cried Richard.

"With this new scale of prices and plenty of work, we might probably come out a little ahead the next six months; but it wouldn't pay for the trouble and the capital invested. Then when trade slackened, we should be running at a loss, and there'd be another wrangle over a reduction. We had better lie idle."

"Stick to that, sir, and may be it will not be necessary."

"But if they strike——"

"They won't all strike. At least," added Richard, "I hope not. I have indirectly sounded several of the older hands, and they have half promised to hold on; only half promised, for every man of them at heart fears the trades-union more than No-bread —until No-bread comes."

"Whom have you spoken with?"

"Lumley, Giles, Peterson, and some others,—your pensioners, I call them."

"Yes, they were in the yard in my father's time, they have not been worth their salt these ten years. When the business was turned over to me I didn't discharge any old hand who had given his best days to the yard. Somehow I couldn't throw away the squeezed lemons. An employer owes a good workman something beyond the wages paid."

"And a workman owes a good employer something beyond the work done. You stood by these men after they outlived their usefulness, and if they do not stand by you now, they 're a shabby set."

"I fancy they will, Richard."

"I think they had better, and I wish they would. We have enough odds and ends to keep them busy awhile, and I shouldn't like to have the clinking of chisels die out altogether under the old sheds."

"Nor I," returned Mr. Slocum; with a touch of sadness in his intonation. "It has grown to be a kind of music to me," and he paused to listen to the sounds of ringing steel that floated up from the workshops.

"Whatever happens, that music shall not cease in the yard except on Sundays, if I have to take mallet and chisel and go at a slab all alone."

"Slocum's Yard with a single workman in it would be a pleasing spectacle," said Mr. Slocum, smiling ruefully.

"It wouldn't be a bad time for *that* workman to strike," returned Richard, with a laugh.

"He could dictate his own terms," returned Mr. Slocum soberly. "Well, I suppose you cannot help thinking about Margaret; but don't think of her now. Tell me what answer you propose to give the Association,—how you mean to put it; for I leave the matter wholly to you. I shall

have no hand in it, further than to indorse your action."

"To-morrow, then," said Richard, "for it is no use to hurry up a crisis, I shall go to the workshops and inform them that their request for short hours on Saturdays is granted, but that the other changes they suggest are not to be considered. There will never be a better opportunity, Mr. Slocum, to settle another question which has been allowed to run too long."

"What 's that?"

"The apprentice question."

"Would it be wise to touch on that at present?"

"While we are straightening out matters and putting things on a solid basis, it seems to me essential to settle that. There was never a greater imposition, or one more short-sighted, than this rule which prevents the training of sufficient workmen. The trades-union will discover their error some day when they have succeeded in forcing manufacturers to import skilled labour by the wholesale. I would like to tell the Marble Workers' Association that Slocum's Yard has resolved to employ as many apprentices each year as there is room for."

"I wouldn't dare risk it!"

"It will have to be done, sooner or later. It would be a capital flank movement now. They have laid themselves open to an attack on that quarter."

"I might as well close the gates for good and all."

"So you will, if it comes to that. You can afford to close the gates, and they can't afford to have you. In a week they'd be back, asking you to open them. Then you could have your pick of the live hands, and drop the dead wood. If Giles or Peterson or Lumley or any of those desert us, they are not to be let on again. I hope you will promise me that, sir."

"If the occasion offers, you shall reorganise the shops in your own way. I haven't the nerve for this kind of business, though I have seen a great deal of it in the village, first and last. Strikes are terrible mistakes. Even when they succeed, what pays for the lost time and the money squandered over the tavern-bar? What makes up for the days or weeks when the fire was out on the hearth and the children had no bread? That is what happens, you know."

"There is no remedy for such calamities,"

Richard answered. "Yet I can imagine occasions when it would be better to let the fire go out and the children want for bread."

"You are not advocating strikes!" exclaimed Mr. Slocum.

"Why not?"

"I thought you were for fighting them."

"So I am, in this instance; but the question has two sides. Every man has the right to set a price on his own labour, and to refuse to work for less; the wisdom of it is another matter. He puts himself in the wrong only when he menaces the person or the property of the man who has an equal right not to employ him. That is the blunder strikers usually make in the end, and one by which they lose public sympathy even when they are fighting an injustice. Now, sometimes it *is* an injustice that is being fought, and then it is right to fight it with the only weapon a poor man has to wield against a power which possesses a hundred weapons,—and that's a strike. For example, the smelters and casters in the Miantowona Iron-Works are meanly underpaid."

"What, have they struck?"

"There's a general strike threatened in

the village: foundry-men, spinners, and all."

"So much the worse for everybody! I did not suppose it was as bad as that. What has become of Torrini?"

"The day after he left us he was taken on as forgeman at Dana's."

"I am glad Dana has got him!"

"At the meeting, last night, Torrini gave in his resignation as secretary of the Association; being no longer a marble worker, he was not qualified to serve."

"We unhorsed him, then?"

"Rather. I am half sorry, too."

"Richard," said Mr. Slocum, halting in one of his nervous walks up and down the room, "you are the oddest composition of hardness and softness I ever saw."

"Am I?"

"One moment you stand braced like a lion to fight the whole yard, and the next moment you are pitying a miscreant who would have laid your head open without the slightest compunction."

"Oh, I forgive him," said Richard. "I was a trifle hasty myself. Margaret thinks so too."

"Much Margaret knows about it!"

"I was inconsiderate, to say the least. When a man picks up a tool by the wrong end he must expect to get cut."

"You didn't have a choice."

"I shouldn't have touched Torrini. After discharging him and finding him disposed to resist my order to leave the yard, I ought to have called in a constable. Usually it is very hard to anger me; but three or four times in my life I have been carried away by a devil of a temper which I couldn't control, it seized me so unawares. That was one of the times."

The mallets and chisels were executing a blithe staccato movement in the yard below, and making the sparks dance. No one walking among the diligent gangs, and observing the placid faces of the men as they bent over their tasks, would have suspected that they were awaiting the word that meant bread and meat and home to them.

As Richard passed through the shops, dropping a word to a workman here and there, the man addressed looked up cheerfully and made a furtive dab at the brown-paper cap, and Richard returned the salute smilingly; but he was sad within. "The

foolish fellows," he said to himself; "they are throwing away a full loaf and are likely to get none at all." Giles and two or three of the ancients were squaring a block of marble under a shelter by themselves. Richard made it a point to cross over and speak to them. In past days he had not been exacting with these old boys, and they always had a welcome for him.

Slocum's Yard seldom presented a serener air of contented industry than it wore that morning; but in spite of all this smooth outside it was a foregone conclusion with most of the men that Slocum, with Shackford behind him, would never submit to the new scale of wages. There were a few who had protested against those resolutions and still disapproved of them, but were forced to go with the Association, which had really been dragged into the current by the other trades.

The Dana Mills and the Miantowona Iron-Works were paying lighter wages than similar establishments nearer the great city. The managers contended that they were paying as high if not higher rates, taking into consideration the cheaper cost of living in Stillwater. "But you get city prices for

your wares," retorted the union; "you don't pay city rents, and you shall pay city wages." Meetings were held at Grimsey's Hall and the subject was canvassed, at first calmly and then stormily. Among the moulders, and possibly the sheet-iron workers, there was cause for dissatisfaction; but the dissatisfaction spread to where no grievance existed; it seized upon the spinners, and finally upon the marble workers. Torrini fanned the flame there. Taking for his text the rentage question, he argued that Slocum was well able to give a trifle more for labour than his city competitors. "The annual rent of a yard like Slocum's would be four thousand or five thousand dollars in the city. It doesn't cost Slocum two hundred dollars. It is no more than just that the labourer should have a share—he only asks a beggarly share —of the prosperity which he has helped to build up." This was specious and taking. Then there came down from the great city a glib person disguised as The Working-man's Friend,—no working-man himself, mind you, but a ghoul that lives upon subscriptions and sucks the senses out of innocent human beings,—who managed to set

the place by the ears. The result of all which was that one May morning every shop, mill, and factory in Stillwater was served with a notice from the trades-union, and a general strike threatened.

But our business at present is exclusively with Slocum's Yard.

XV.

"SINCE we are in for it," said Mr. Slocum the next morning, "put the case to them squarely."

Mr. Slocum's vertebræ had stiffened overnight.

"Leave that to me, sir," Richard replied. "I have been shaping out in my mind a little speech which I flatter myself will cover the points. They have brought this thing upon themselves, and we are about to have the clearest of understandings. I never saw the men quieter."

"I don't altogether admire that. It looks as if they hadn't any doubt as to the issue."

"The clearest-headed have no doubt; they know as well as you and I do the flimsiness of those resolutions. But the thick heads are in a fog. Every man naturally likes his pay increased; if a simple fellow is told five or six hundred times that

his wages ought to be raised, the idea is so agreeable and insidious that by and by he begins to believe himself grossly underpaid, though he may be getting twice what he is worth. He doesn't reason about it; that's the last thing he'll do for you. In this mood he lets himself be blown away by the breath of some loud-mouthed demagogue, who has no interest in the matter beyond hearing his own talk and passing round the hat after the meeting is over. That is what has happened to our folks below. But they *are* behaving handsomely."

"Yes, and I don't like it."

Since seven o'clock the most unimpeachable decorum had reigned in the workshops. It was now nine, and this brief dialogue had occurred between Mr. Slocum and Richard on the veranda, just as the latter was on the point of descending into the yard to have his talk with the men.

The workshops—or rather the shed in which the workshops were, for it was one low structure eighteen or twenty feet wide, and open on the west side—ran the length of the yard, and with the short extension at the southerly end formed the letter L. There were no partitions, an imaginary line

separating the different gangs of workers. A person standing at the head of the building could make himself heard more or less distinctly in the remotest part.

The grating lisp of the wet saws eating their way into the marble boulder, and the irregular quick taps of the seventy or eighty mallets were not suspended as Richard took his stand beside a tall funereal urn at the head of the principal workshop. After a second's faltering, he rapped smartly on the lip of the urn with the key of his studio door.

Instantly every arm appeared paralysed, and the men stood motionless, with the tools in their hands.

Richard began in a clear but not loud voice, though it seemed to ring on the sudden silence :—

"Mr. Slocum has asked me to say a few words to you, this morning, about those resolutions, and one or two other matters that have occurred to him in this connection. I am no speech-maker ; I never learned that trade——"

"Never learned any trade," muttered Durgin inaudibly.

"——but I think I can manage some

plain, honest talk, for straightforward men."

Richard's exordium was listened to with painful attention.

"In the first place," he continued, "I want to remind you, especially the newer men, that Slocum's Yard has always given steady work and prompt pay to Stillwater hands. No hand has ever been turned off without sufficient cause, or kept on through mere favouritism. Favours have been shown, but they have been shown to all alike. If anything has gone crooked, it has been straightened out as soon as Mr. Slocum knew of it. That has been the course of the yard in the past, and the Proprietor doesn't want you to run away with the idea that that course is going to be changed. One change, for the time being, is going to be made at your own suggestion. From now, until the 1st of September, this yard will close gates on Saturdays at five P.M. instead of at six P.M."

Several voices cried, "Good for Slocum!" "Where 's Slocum?" "Why don't Slocum speak for himself?" cried one voice.

"It is Mr. Slocum's habit," answered Richard, "to give his directions to me, I

give them to the foremen, and the foremen to the shops. Mr. Slocum follows that custom on this occasion. With regard to the new scale of wages which the Association has submitted to him, the Proprietor refuses to accept it, or any modification of it."

A low murmur ran through the workshops.

"What 's a modificashun, sir?" asked Jemmy Willson, stepping forward, and scratching his left ear diffidently.

"A modification," replied Richard, considerably embarrassed to give an instant definition, "is a—a——"

"A splitting of the difference, by——!" shouted somebody in the third shop.

"Thank you," said Richard, glancing in the direction of his impromptu Webster Unabridged. "Mr. Slocum does not propose to split the difference. The wages in every department are to be just what they are,—neither more nor less. If anybody wishes to make a remark," he added, observing a restlessness in several of the men, "I beg he will hold on until I get through. I shall not detain you much longer, as the parson says before he has reached the middle of his sermon.

"What I say now, I was charged to make particularly clear to you. It is this: In future Mr. Slocum intends to run Slocum's Yard himself. Neither you, nor I, nor the Association will be allowed to run it for him. [Sensation.] Until now the Association has tied him down to two apprentices a year. From this hour, out, Mr. Slocum will take on, not two, or twenty, but two hundred apprentices if the business warrants it."

The words were not clearly off Richard's lips when the foreman of the shop in which he was speaking picked up a couple of small drills, and knocked them together with a sharp click. In an instant the men laid aside their aprons, bundled up their tools, and marched out of the shed two by two, in dead silence. That same click was repeated almost simultaneously in the second shop, and the same evolution took place. Then click, click, click! went the drills, sounding fainter and fainter in the more distant departments; and in less than three minutes there was not a soul left in Slocum's Yard except the Orator of the Day.

Richard had anticipated some demonstration, either noisy or violent, perhaps both;

but this solemn, orderly desertion dashed him.

He stepped into the middle of the yard, and glancing up beheld Margaret and Mr. Slocum standing on the veranda. Even at that distance he could perceive the pallor on one face, and the consternation written all over the other.

Hanging his head with sadness, Richard crossed the yard, which gave out mournful echoes to his footfalls, and swung to the large gate, nearly catching old Giles by the heel as he did so. Looking through the slats, he saw Lumley and Peterson hobbling arm in arm down the street,—after more than twenty-five years of kindly treatment

"Move number one," said Richard, lifting the heavy cross-piece into its place and fastening it with a wooden pin. "Now I must go and prop up Mr. Slocum."

XVI.

THERE is no solitude or silence which comes so near being tangible as that of a vast empty workshop, crowded a moment since. The busy, intense life that has gone from it mysteriously leaves behind enough of itself to make the stillness poignant. One might imagine the invisible ghost of doomed Toil wandering from bench to bench, and noiselessly fingering the dropped tools, still warm from the workman's palm. Perhaps this impalpable presence is the artisan's anxious thought, stolen back to brood over the uncompleted task.

Though Mr. Slocum had spoken lightly of Slocum's Yard with only one workman in it, when he came to contemplate the actual fact he was struck by the pathos of it, and the resolution with which he awoke that morning began to desert him.

"The worst is over," exclaimed Richard,

joining his two friends on the veranda, "and everything went smoother than I expected."

"Everything went, sure enough," said Mr. Slocum gloomily; "they all went,—old Giles, and Lumley, and everybody."

"We somewhat expected that, you know."

"Yes, I expected it and wasn't prepared for it."

"It was very bad," said Richard, shaking his head.

The desertion of Giles and his superannuated mates especially touched Mr. Slocum.

"Bad is no word; it was damnable."

"O papa!"

"Pardon me, dear; I couldn't help it. When a man's pensioners throw him over, he must be pretty far gone!"

"The undertow was too strong for them, sir, and they were swept away with the rest. And they all but promised to stay. They will be the very first to come back."

"Of course we shall have to take the old fellows on again," said Mr. Slocum, relenting characteristically.

"Never!" cried Richard.

"I wish I had some of your grit."

"I have none to spare. To tell the truth, when I stood up there to speak, with every

eye working on me, like a half-inch drill, I would have sold myself at a low figure."

"But you were a perfect what 's-his-name, —Demosthenes," said Mr. Slocum, with a faint smile. "We could hear you."

"I don't believe Demosthenes ever moved an audience as I did mine!" cried Richard gaily. "If his orations produced a like effect, I am certain that the Grecian lecture-bureau never sent him twice to the same place."

"I don't think, Richard, I would engage you over again."

"I am sure Richard spoke very well," interrupted Margaret. "His speech was short——"

"Say shortened, Margaret, for I hadn't got through when they left."

"No, I will not jest about it. It is too serious for jesting. What is to become of the families of all these men suddenly thrown out of employment?"

"They threw themselves out, Mag," said her father.

"That does not mend the matter, papa. There will be great destitution and suffering in the village with every mill closed; and they are all going to close, Bridget says.

Thank Heaven that this did not happen in the winter!"

"They always pick their weather," observed Mr. Slocum.

"It will not be for long," said Richard encouragingly. "Our own hands and the spinners, who had no ground for complaint, will return to work shortly, and the managers of the iron-mills will have to yield a point or two. In a week at the outside everything will be running smoothly, and on a sounder foundation than before. I believe the strike will be an actual benefit to everybody in the end."

By dint of such arguments and his own sanguine temperament, Richard succeeded in reassuring Mr. Slocum for the time being, though Richard did not hide from himself the gravity of the situation. There was a general strike in the village. Eight hundred men were without work. That meant, or would mean in a few days, two or three thousand women and children without bread. It does not take the wolf long to reach a poor man's door when it is left ajar.

The trades-union had a fund for emergencies of this sort, and some outside aid might be looked for; but such supplies are

in their nature precarious, and soon exhausted. It is a noticeable feature of strikes that the moment the workman's pay stops his living expenses increase. Even the more economical becomes improvident. If he has money, the tobacco shop and the tavern are likely to get more of it than the butcher's cart. The prolonged strain is too great to be endured without stimulant.

XVII.

DURING the first and second days of the strike, Stillwater presented an animated and even a festive appearance. Throngs of operatives in their Sunday clothes strolled through the streets, or lounged at the corners chatting with other groups; some wandered into the suburbs, and lay in the long grass under the elms. Others again, though these were few, took to the turnpike or the railroad track, and tramped across country.

It is needless to say that the bar-room of the tavern was crowded from early morning down to the hour when the law compelled Mr. Snelling to shut off his gas. After which, John Brown's "soul" could be heard "marching on" in the darkness, through various crooked lanes and alleys, until nearly daybreak.

Among the earliest to scent trouble in

the air was Han-Lin, the Chinaman before mentioned. He kept a small laundry in Mud Lane, where his name was painted perpendicularly on a light of glass in the basement window of a tenement house. Han-Lin intended to be buried some day in a sky-blue coffin in his own land, and have a dozen packs of fire-crackers decorously exploded over his remains. In order to reserve himself for this and other ceremonies involving the burning of a great quantity of gilt paper, he quietly departed for Boston at the first sign of popular discontent. As Dexter described it, "Han-Lin coiled up his pig-tail, put forty grains of rice in a yallar bag,—enough to last him a month!—and toddled off in his two-story wooden shoes." He could scarcely have done a wiser thing, for poor Han-Lin's laundry was turned wrong side out within thirty-six hours afterwards.

The strike was popular. The spirit of it spread, as fire and fever and all elemental forces spread. The two apprentices in Brackett's bakery had a dozen minds about striking that first morning. The younger lad, Joe Wiggin, plucked up courage to ask Brackett for a day off, and was lucky

enough to dodge a piece of dough weighing nearly four pounds.

Brackett was making bread while the sun shone. He knew that before the week was over there would be no cash customers, and he purposed then to shut up shop.

On the third and fourth days there was no perceptible fall in the barometer. Trade was brisk with Snelling, and a brass band was playing national airs on a staging erected on the green in front of the post-office. Nightly meetings took place at Grimsey's Hall, and the audiences were good-humoured and orderly. Torrini advanced some Utopian theories touching a universal distribution of wealth, which were listened to attentively, but failed to produce deep impression.

"That 's a healthy idea of Torrini's about dervidin' up property," said Jemmy Willson. "I 've heerd it afore ; but it 's sing'ler I never knowd a feller with any property to have that idea."

"Ther' 's a great dale in it, I can tell ye," remarked Michael Hennessey, with a well-blackened Woodstock pipe between his teeth and his hands tucked under his coat-tails. "Isn't ther', Misther Stavens?"

When Michael had on his bottle-green swallow-tailed coat with the brass buttons, he invariably assumed a certain lofty air of ceremony in addressing his companions.

"It is sorter pleasant to look at," returned Stevens, "but it don't seem to me an idea that would work. Suppose that, after all the property was divided, a fresh ship-load of your friends was to land at New York or Boston; would there be a new deal?"

"No, sur! by no manes!" exclaimed Michael excitedly. "The furreners is counted out!"

"But you 're a foreigner yourself, Mike."

"Am I, then? Bedad, I 'm not! I 'm a rale American Know Nothing."

"Well, Mike," said Stevens maliciously, "when it comes to a reg'lar division of lands and greenbacks in the United States, I go in for the Chinese having their share."

"The Chinase!" shouted Michael. "Oh, murther, Misther Stavens! Ye wouldn't be fur dividin' with thim blatherskites!"

"Yes, with them,—as well as the rest," returned Stevens dryly.

Meanwhile the directors and stock-holders

of the various mills took counsel in a room at the rear of the National Bank. Mr. Slocum, following Richard's advice, declined to attend the meeting in person, or to allow his name to figure on the list of vice-presidents.

"Why should we hitch our good cause to their doubtful one?" reflected Richard. "We have no concessions or proposals to make. When our men are ready to come back to us, they will receive just wages and fair treatment. They know that. We do not want to fight the moulders. Let the iron-mills do their own fighting;" and Richard stolidly employed himself in taking an account of stock, and forwarding by express to their destination the ten or twelve carved mantel-pieces that happily completed the last contract.

Then his responsibilities shrunk to winding up the office clock and keeping Mr. Slocum firmly on his legs. The latter was by far the more onerous duty, for Mr. Slocum ran down two or three times in the course of every twenty-four hours, while the clock once wound was fixed for the day.

"If I could only have a good set of Waltham works put into your father," said

Richard to Margaret, after one of Mr. Slocum's relapses, "he would go better."

"Poor papa! he is not a fighter like you."

"Your father is what I call a belligerent non-combatant."

Richard was seeing a great deal of Margaret these days. Mr. Slocum had invited him to sleep in the studio until the excitement was past. Margaret was afraid to have him take that long walk between the yard and his lodgings in Lime Street, and then her father was an old man to be without any protection in the house in such untoward times.

So Richard slept in the studio, and had his plate at table, like one of the family. This arrangement was favourable to many a stolen five minutes with Margaret, in the hall or on the staircase. In these fortuitous moments he breathed an atmosphere that sustained him in his task of dispelling Mr. Slocum's recurrent fits of despondency. Margaret had her duties, too, at this period, and the forenoons were sacred to them.

One morning as she passed down the street with a small wicker basket on her arm, Richard said to Mr. Slocum—

"Margaret has joined the strikers."

The time had already come to Stillwater when many a sharp-faced little urchin—as dear to the warm, deep bosom that had nursed it as though it were a crown prince—would not have had a crust to gnaw if Margaret Slocum had not joined the strikers. Sometimes her heart drooped on the way home from these errands, upon seeing how little of the misery she could ward off. On her rounds there was one cottage in a squalid lane where the children asked for bread in Italian. She never omitted to halt at that door.

"Is it quite prudent for Margaret to be going about so?" queried Mr. Slocum.

"She is perfectly safe," said Richard,—"as safe as a Sister of Charity, which she is."

Indeed, Margaret might then have gone loaded with diamonds through the streets at midnight. There was not a rough man in Stillwater who would not have reached forth an arm to shield her.

"It is costing me nearly as much as it would to carry on the yard," said Mr. Slocum, "but I never put out any stamps more willingly."

"You never took a better contract, sir, than when you agreed to keep Margaret's

basket filled. It is an investment in real estate—hereafter."

"I hope so," answered Mr. Slocum, "and I know it 's a good thing now."

Of the morals of Stillwater at this time, or at any time, the less said the better. But out of the slime and ooze below sprang the white flower of charity.

The fifth day fell on a Sabbath, and the churches were crowded. The Rev. Arthur Langly selected his text from S. Matthew, chap. xxii. v. 21 : "Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's." But as he did not make it quite plain which was Cæsar,—the trades-union or the Miantowona Iron-Works,—the sermon went for nothing unless it could be regarded as a hint to those persons who had stolen a large piece of belting from the Dana Mills. On the other hand, Father O'Meara that morning bravely told his children to conduct themselves in an orderly manner while they were out of work, or they would catch it in this world and in the next.

On the sixth day a keen observer might have detected a change in the atmosphere. The streets were thronged as usual, and the idlers still wore their Sunday clothes, but

the holiday buoyancy of the earlier part of the week had evaporated. A turn-out on the part of one of the trades, though it was accompanied by music and a banner with a lively inscription, failed to arouse general enthusiasm. A serious and even a sullen face was not rare among the crowds that wandered aimlessly up and down the village.

On the seventh day it required no penetration to see the change. There was decidedly less good-natured chaffing and more drunkenness, though Snelling had invoked popular contumely and decimated his bar-room by refusing to trust for drinks. Brackett had let his ovens cool, and his shutters were up. The treasury of the trades-union was nearly drained, and there were growlings that too much had been fooled away on banners and a brass band for the iron men's parade the previous forenoon. It was when Brackett's eye sighted the banner with "Bread or Blood" on it that he had put up his shutters.

Torrini was now making violent harangues at Grimsey's Hall to largely augmented listeners, whom his words irritated without convincing. Shut off from the tavern, the men flocked to hear him and the other

speakers, for born orators were just then as thick as unripe whortleberries. There was nowhere else to go. At home were reproaches that maddened, and darkness, for the kerosene had given out.

Though all the trades had been swept into the movement, it is not to be understood that every workman was losing his head. There were men who owned their cottages and had small sums laid by in the savings-bank; who had always sent their children to the district school, and listened themselves to at least one of Mr. Langly's sermons or one of Father O'Meara's discourses every Sunday. These were anchored to good order; they neither frequented the bar-room nor attended the conclaves at Grimsey's Hall, but deplored as deeply as any one the spirit that was manifesting itself. They would have returned to work now—if they had dared. To this class belonged Stevens.

"Why don't you come up to the hall, nights?" asked Durgin, accosting him on the street one afternoon. "You 'd run a chance of hearing me hold forth some of these evenings."

"You 've answered your own question,

William. I shouldn't like to see you making an idiot of yourself."

"This is a square fight between labour and capital," returned Durgin, with dignity, "and every man ought to take a hand in it."

"William," said Stevens meditatively, "do you know about the Siamese twins?"

"What about 'em,—they're dead, ain't they?" replied Durgin, with surprise.

"I believe so; but when they was alive, if you was to pinch one of those fellows, the other fellow would sing out. If you was to black the eye of the left-hand chap, the right-hand chap wouldn't have been able to see for a week. When either of 'em fetched the other a clip, he knocked himself down. Labour and capital is jined just as those two was. When you've got this fact well into your skull, William, I shall be pleased to listen to your ideas at Grimsey's Hall or anywhere else."

Such conservatism as Stevens's, however, was necessarily swept out of sight for the moment. The wealthier citizens were in a state bordering on panic,—all but Mr. Lemuel Shackford. In his flapping linen duster, for the weather was very sultry now, Mr. Shackford was seen darting excitedly

from street to street and hovering about the feverish crowds, like the stormy petrel wheeling on the edges of a gale. Usually as chary of his sympathies as of his gold, he astonished every one by evincing an abnormal interest in the strikers. The old man declined to put down anything on the subscription paper then circulating; but he put down his sympathies to any amount. He held no stock in the concerns involved; he hated Slocum, and he hated the directors of the Miantowona Iron-Works. The least he hoped was that Rowland Slocum would be laid out.

So far the strikers had committed no overt act of note, unless it was the demolition of Han-Lin's laundry. Stubbs, the provision dealer, had been taught the rashness of exposing samples of potatoes in his doorway, and the "Tonsorial Emporium" of Professor Brown, a coloured citizen, had been invaded by two humourists, who, after having their hair curled, refused to pay for it, and the professor had been too agitated to insist. The story transpiring, ten or twelve of the boys had dropped in during the morning, and got shaved on the same terms. "By golly, gen'l'men!" expostulated the pro-

fessor, "ef dis yah thing goes on, dis darkey will be cleaned cl'ar out fo de week 's done." No act of real violence had been perpetrated as yet; but with bands of lawless men roaming over the village at all hours of the day and night, the situation was critical.

The wheel of what small social life there was in Stillwater had ceased to revolve. With the single exception of Lemuel Shackford, the more respectable inhabitants kept indoors as much as practicable. From the first neither Mr. Craggie nor Lawyer Perkins had gone to the hotel to consult the papers in the reading-room, and Mr. Pinkham did not dare to play on his flute of an evening. The Rev. Arthur Langly found it politic to do but little visiting in the parish. His was not the pinion to buffet with a wind like this, and indeed he was not explicitly called upon to do so. He sat sorrowfully in his study day by day, preparing the weekly sermon,—a gentle, pensive person, inclined in the best of weather to melancholia. If Mr. Langly had gone into arboriculture instead of into the ministry, he would have planted nothing but weeping-willows.

In the meantime the mill directors con-

tinued their deliberations in the bank building, and had made several abortive attempts to effect an arrangement with the leaders of the union. This seemed every hour less possible and more necessary.

On the afternoon of the seventh day of the strike a crowd gathered in front of the residence of Mr. Alexander, the superintendent of the Miantowona Iron-Works, and began groaning and hooting. Mr. Alexander sought out Mr. Craggie, and urged him, as a man of local weight and one accustomed to addressing the populace, to speak a few words to the mob. That was setting Mr. Craggie on the horns of a cruel dilemma. He was afraid to disoblige the representative of so powerful a corporation as the Miantowona Iron-Works, but he equally dreaded to risk his popularity with seven or eight hundred voters; so, like the crafty chancellor in Tennyson's poem, he dallied with his golden chain, and, smiling, put the question by.

"Drat the man!" muttered Mr. Craggie, "does he want to blast my whole political career! *I* can't pitch into our adopted countrymen."

There was a blot on the escutcheon of

Mr. Craggie which he was very anxious not to have uncovered by any chance in these latter days,—his ancient affiliation with the deceased native American party.

The mob dispersed without doing damage, but the fact that it had collected and had shown an ugly temper sent a thrill of apprehension through the village. Mr. Slocum came in a great flurry to Richard.

"This thing ought to be stopped," said Mr. Slocum.

"I agree to that," replied Richard, bracing himself not to agree to anything else.

"If we were to drop that stipulation as to the increase of apprentices, no doubt many of the men would give over insisting on an advance."

"Our only salvation is to stick to our right to train as many workmen as we choose. The question of wages is of no account compared with that; the rate of wages will adjust itself."

"If we could manage it somehow with the marble workers," suggested Mr. Slocum, "that would demoralise the other trades, and they 'd be obliged to fall in."

"I don't see that they lack demoralisation."

"If something isn't done, they'll end by knocking in our front doors or burning us all up."

"Let them."

"It's very well to say let them," exclaimed Mr. Slocum petulantly, "when you haven't any front door to be knocked in!"

"But I have you and Margaret to consider, if there were actual danger. When anything like violence threatens, there's an honest shoulder for every one of the hundred and fifty muskets in the armoury."

"Those muskets might get on the wrong shoulders."

"That isn't likely. You do not seem to know, sir, that there is a strong guard at the armoury day and night."

"I was not aware of that."

"It is a fact all the same," said Richard; and Mr. Slocum went away easier in his mind, and remained so—two or three hours.

On the eighth, ninth, and tenth days the clouds lay very black along the horizon. The marble workers, who began to see their mistake, were reproaching the foundry men with enticing them into the coalition, and the spinners were hot in their denunciations

of the moulders. Ancient personal antagonisms that had been slumbering started to their feet. Torrini fell out of favour, and in the midst of one of his finest perorations uncomplimentary missiles, selected from the animal kingdom, had been thrown at him. The grand torchlight procession on the night of the ninth culminated in a disturbance, in which many men got injured, several badly, and the windows of Brackett's bakery were stove in. A point of light had pierced the darkness, — the trades were quarrelling among themselves!

The selectmen had sworn in special constables among the citizens, and some of the more retired streets were now patrolled after dark, for there had been threats of incendiarism.

Bishop's stables burst into flames one midnight,—whether fired intentionally or accidentally was not known; but the giant bellows at Dana's Mills was slit and two belts were cut at the Miantowona Iron-Works that same night.

At this juncture a report that out-of-town hands were coming to replace the strikers acted on the public mind like petroleum on fire. A large body of workmen assembled

near the railway station,—to welcome them. There was another rumour which caused the marble workers to stare at each other aghast. It was to the effect that Mr. Slocum, having long meditated retiring from business, had now decided to do so, and was consulting with Wyndham, the keeper of the greenhouse, about removing the division wall and turning the marble yard into a peach garden. This was an unlooked-for solution of the difficulty. Stillwater without any Slocum's Marble Yard was chaos come again.

"Good Lord, boys!" cried Piggott, "if Slocum should do that!"

Meanwhile, Snelling's bar had been suppressed by the authorities, and a posse of policemen, borrowed from South Millville, occupied the premises. Knots of beetle-browed men, no longer in holiday gear, but chiefly in their shirt-sleeves, collected from time to time at the head of the main street, and glowered threateningly at the single policeman pacing the porch of the tavern. The Stillwater Greys were under arms in the armoury over Dundon's drug-store. The thoroughfares had ceased to be safe for any one, and Margaret's merciful errands were necessarily brought to an end. How the

poor creatures who had depended on her bounty now continued to exist was a sorrowful problem.

Matters were at this point, when on the morning of the thirteenth day Richard noticed the cadaverous face of a man peering into the yard through the slats of the main gate. Richard sauntered down there, with his hands in his pockets. The man was old Giles, and with him stood Lumley and Peterson, gazing thoughtfully at the sign outside—

NO ADMITTANCE EXCEPT ON BUSINESS.

The roughly lettered clapboard, which they had heedlessly passed a thousand times, seemed to have taken a novel significance to them.

Richard. What 's wanted there?

Giles. [*Very affably.*] We was lookin' round for a job, Mr. Shackford.

Richard. We are not taking on any hands at present.

Giles. Didn't know but you was. Somebody said you was.

Richard. Somebody is mistaken.

Giles. P'rhaps to-morrer, or nex' day?

Richard. Rather doubtful, Giles.

Giles. [*Uneasily.*] Mr. Slocum ain't goin' to give up business, is he?

Richard. Why shouldn't he, if it doesn't pay? The business is carried on for his amusement and profit; when the profit stops it won't be amusing any longer. Mr. Slocum is not going to run the yard for the sake of the Marble Workers' Association. He would rather drive a junk-cart. He might be allowed to steer that himself.

Giles. Oh!

Richard. Good morning, Giles.

Giles. 'Mornin', Mr. Shackford.

Richard rushed back to Mr. Slocum.

"The strike is broken, sir!"

"What do you mean?"

"The thing has collapsed! The tide is turning, *and has washed in a lot of dead wood!*"

"Thank God!" cried Mr. Slocum.

An hour or so later a deputation of four, consisting of Stevens, Denyven, Durgin, and Piggott, waited upon Mr. Slocum in his private office, and offered, on behalf of all the departments, to resume work at the old rates.

Mr. Slocum replied that he had not ob-

jected to the old rates, but the new, and that he accepted their offer—conditionally.

"You have overlooked one point, Mr. Stevens."

"Which one, sir?"

"The apprentices."

"We thought you might not insist there, sir."

"I insist on conducting my own business in my own way."

The voice was the voice of Slocum, but the backbone was Richard's.

"Then, sir, the Association don't object to a reasonable number of apprentices."

"How many is that?"

"As many as you want, I expect, sir," said Stevens, shuffling his feet.

"Very well, Stevens. Go round to the front gate and Mr. Shackford will let you in."

There were two doors to the office, one leading into the yard, and the other, by which the deputation had entered and was now making its exit, opened upon the street.

Richard heaved a vast sigh of relief as he took down the beam securing the principal entrance.

"Good morning, boys," he chirped, with

a smile as bright as newly minted gold. "I hope you enjoyed yourselves."

The quartet ducked their heads bashfully, and Stevens replied, "Can't speak for the others, Mr. Shackford, but I never enjoyed myself worse."

Piggott lingered a moment behind the rest, and looking back over his shoulder said, "That peach garden was what fetched us."

Richard gave a loud laugh, for the peach garden had been a horticultural invention of his own.

In the course of the forenoon the majority of the hands presented themselves at the office, dropping into the yard in gangs of five or six, and nearly all were taken on. To dispose definitely of Lumley, Giles, and Peterson, they were not taken on at Slocum's Yard, though they continued to be, directly or indirectly, Slocum's pensioners, even after they were retired to the town-farm.

Once more the chisels sounded merrily under the long shed. That same morning the spinners went back to the mules, but the moulders held out until nightfall, when it was signified to them that their demands would be complied with.

The next day the steam-whistles of the Miantowona Iron-Works and Dana's Mills sent the echoes flying beyond that undulating line of pines and hemlocks which half encircles Stillwater, and falls away loosely on either side, like an unclasped girdle.

A calm, as if from out the cloudless blue sky that arched it day after day, seemed to drift down upon the village. Han-Lin, with no more facial expression than an orange, suddenly reappeared on the streets, and went about repairing his laundry, unmolested. The children were playing in the sunny lanes again, unafraid, and mothers sat on doorsteps in the summer twilights, singing softly to the baby in arm. There was meat on the table, and the tea-kettle hummed comfortably at the back of the stove. The very winds that rustled through the fragrant pines, and wandered fitfully across the vivid green of the salt marshes, breathed peace and repose.

Then, one morning, this blissful tranquillity was rudely shattered. Old Mr. Lemuel Shackford had been found murdered in his own house in Welch's Court.

XVIII.

THE general effect on Stillwater of Mr. Shackford's death and the peculiar circumstances attending the tragedy have been set forth in the earlier chapters of this narrative. The influence which that event exerted upon several persons then but imperfectly known to the reader is now to occupy us.

On the conclusion of the strike, Richard had returned, in the highest spirits, to his own rooms in Lime Street; but the quiet week that followed found him singularly depressed. His nerves had been strung to their utmost tension during those thirteen days of suspense; he had assumed no light responsibility in the matter of closing the yard, and there had been moments when the task of sustaining Mr. Slocum had appeared almost hopeless. Now that the strain was removed a reaction set in, and Richard

felt himself unnerved by the fleeing shadow of the trouble which had not caused him to flinch so long as it faced him.

On the morning and at the moment when Mary Hennessey was pushing open the scullery door of the house in Welch's Court, and was about to come upon the body of the forlorn old man lying there in his night-dress, Richard sat eating his breakfast in a silent and preoccupied mood. He had retired very late the previous night, and his lack-lustre eyes showed the effect of insufficient sleep. His single fellow-boarder, Mr. Pinkham, had not returned from his customary early walk, and only Richard and Mrs. Spooner, the landlady, were at table. The former was in the act of lifting the coffee-cup to his lips, when the schoolmaster burst excitedly into the room.

"Old Mr. Shackford is dead!" he exclaimed, dropping into a chair near the door. "There 's a report down in the village that he has been murdered. I don't know if it is true. . . . . God forgive my abruptness! I didn't think!" and Mr. Pinkham turned an apologetic face towards Richard, who sat there deathly pale, holding the cup rigidly within an inch or two

of his lip, and staring blankly into space like a statue.

"I—I ought to have reflected," murmured the schoolmaster, covered with confusion at his maladroitness. "It was very reprehensible in Craggie to make such an announcement to me so suddenly, on a street corner. I—I was quite upset by it."

Richard pushed back his chair without replying, and passed into the hall, where he encountered a messenger from Mr. Slocum, confirming Mr. Pinkham's intelligence, but supplementing it with the rumour that Lemuel Shackford had committed suicide.

Richard caught up his hat from a table, and hurried to Welch's Court. Before reaching the house he had somewhat recovered his outward composure; but he was still pale and internally much agitated, for he had received a great shock, as Lawyer Perkins afterwards observed to Mr. Ward in the reading-room of the tavern. Both these gentlemen were present when Richard arrived, as were also several of the immediate neighbours and two constables. The latter were guarding the door against the crowd, which had already begun to collect in the front yard.

A knot of carpenters, with their tool-boxes on their shoulders, had halted at the garden gate on their way to Bishop's new stables, and were glancing curiously at the unpainted façade of the house, which seemed to have taken on a remote, bewildered expression, as if it had an inarticulate sense of the horror within. The men ceased their whispered conversation as Richard approached, and respectfully moved aside to let him pass.

Nothing had been changed in the cheerless room on the ground floor, with its veneered mahogany furniture and its yellowish leprous wall-paper, peeling off at the seams here and there. A cane-seated chair, overturned near the table, had been left untouched, and the body was still lying in the position in which the Hennessey girl had discovered it. A strange chill—something unlike any atmospherical sharpness, a chill that seemed to exhale from the thin, pinched nostrils—permeated the apartment. The orioles were singing madly outside, their vermilion bosoms glowing like live coals against the tender green of the foliage, and appearing to break into flame as they took sudden flights hither and thither; but within all was still. On entering the chamber Richard

was smitten by the silence,—that silence which shrouds the dead, and is like no other. Lemuel Shackford had not been kind or cousinly; he had blighted Richard's childhood with harshness and neglect, and had lately heaped cruel insult upon him; but as he stood there alone, and gazed for a moment at the firmly shut lips, upon which the mysterious white dust of death had already settled,—the lips that were never to utter any more bitter things,—the tears gathered in Richard's eyes and ran slowly down his cheeks. After all said and done, Lemuel Shackford was his kinsman, and blood is thicker than water!

Coroner Whidden shortly appeared on the scene, accompanied by a number of persons; a jury was impannelled, and then began that inquest which resulted in shedding so very little light on the catastrophe.

The investigation completed, there were endless details to attend to,—papers to be hurriedly examined and sealed, and arrangements made for the funeral on the succeeding day. These matters occupied Richard until late in the afternoon, when he retired to his lodgings, looking in on Margaret for a few minutes on his way home.

"This is too dreadful!" said Margaret, clinging to his hand, with fingers nearly as icy as his own.

"It is unspeakably sad," answered Richard, — "the saddest thing I ever knew."

"Who—who could have been so cruel?"

Richard shook his head.

"No one knows."

The funeral took place on Thursday, and on Friday morning, as has been stated, Mr. Taggett arrived in Stillwater, and installed himself in Welch's Court, to the wonder of many in the village, who would not have slept a night in that house, with only a servant in the north gable, for half the universe. Mr. Taggett was a person who did not allow himself to be swayed by his imagination.

Here, then, he began his probing of a case which, on the surface, promised to be a very simple one. The man who had been seen driving rapidly along the turnpike sometime near daybreak, on Wednesday, was presumably the man who could tell him all about it. But it did not prove so. Neither Thomas Blufton, nor William Durgin, nor any of the tramps subsequently obliged to

drop into autobiography could be connected with the affair.

These first failures served to stimulate Mr. Taggett; it required a complex case to stir his ingenuity and sagacity. That the present was not a complex case he was still convinced, after four days' futile labour upon it. Mr. Shackford had been killed—either with malice prepense or on the spur of the moment—for his money. The killing had likely enough not been premeditated; the old man had probably opposed the robbery. Now, among the exceptionally rough population of the town there were possibly fifty men who would not have hesitated to strike down Mr. Shackford if he had caught them *flagrante delicto* and resisted them, or attempted to call for succour. That the crime was committed by some one in Stillwater or in the neighbourhood Mr. Taggett had never doubted since the day of his arrival. The clumsy manner in which the staple had been wrenched from the scullery door showed the absence of a professional hand. Then the fact that the deceased was in the habit of keeping money in his bedchamber was a fact well known in the village, and not likely to be known

outside of it, though of course it might have been. It was clearly necessary for Mr. Taggett to carry his investigation into the workshops and among the haunts of the class which was indubitably to furnish him with the individual he wanted. Above all, it was necessary that the investigation should be secret. An obstacle obtruded itself here: everybody in Stillwater knew everybody, and a stranger appearing on the streets or dropping frequently into the tavern would not escape comment.

The man with the greatest facility for making the requisite researches would of course be some workman. But a workman was the very agent not to be employed under the circumstances. How many times, and by what strange fatality, had a guilty party been selected to shadow his own movements, or those of an accomplice! No, Mr. Taggett must rely only on himself, and his plan was forthwith matured. Its execution, however, was delayed several days, the co-operation of Mr. Slocum and Mr. Richard Shackford being indispensable.

At this stage Richard went to New York, where his cousin had made extensive investments in real estate. For a careful man, the

late Mr. Shackford had allowed his affairs there to become strangely entangled. The business would detain Richard a fortnight.

Three days after his departure Mr. Taggett himself left Stillwater, having apparently given up the case; a proceeding which was severely criticised, not only in the columns of *The Stillwater Gazette*, but by the townsfolks at large, who immediately relapsed into a state of apprehension approximating that of the morning when the crime was discovered. Mr. Pinkham, who was taking tea that evening at the Danas', threw the family into a panic by asserting his belief that this was merely the first of a series of artistic assassinations in the manner of those Memorable Murders recorded by De Quincey. Mr. Pinkham may have said this to impress the four Dana girls with the variety of his reading, but the recollection of De Quincey's harrowing paper had the effect of so unhinging the young schoolmaster that when he found himself, an hour or two afterwards, in the lonely, unlighted street he flitted home like a belated ghost, and was ready to drop at every tree-box.

The next forenoon a new hand was taken on at Slocum's Yard. The new hand, who

had come on foot from South Millville, at which town he had been set down by the seven o'clock express that morning, was placed in the apprentice department,—there were five or six apprentices now. Though all this was part of an understood arrangement, Mr. Slocum nearly doubted the fidelity of his own eyes when Mr. Taggett, a smooth-faced young fellow of one and twenty, if so old, with all the traits of an ordinary working-man down to the neglected finger-nails, stepped up to the desk to have the name of Blake entered on the pay-roll. Either by chance or by design, Mr. Taggett had appeared but seldom on the streets of Stillwater; the few persons who had had anything like familiar intercourse with him in his professional capacity were precisely the persons with whom his present movements were not likely to bring him into juxtaposition, and he ran slight risk of recognition by others. With his hair closely cropped, and the overhanging brown moustache removed, the man was not so much disguised as transformed. "I shouldn't have known him!" muttered Mr. Slocum, as he watched Mr. Taggett passing from the office with his hat in his hand. During the

ensuing ten or twelve days Mr. Slocum never wholly succeeded in extricating himself from the foggy uncertainty generated by that one brief interview. From the moment Mr. Taggett was assigned a bench under the sheds, Mr. Slocum saw little or nothing of him.

Mr. Taggett took lodging in a room in one of the most crowded of the low boarding-houses, a room accommodating two beds besides his own: the first occupied by a brother neophyte in marble-cutting, and the second by a morose middle-aged man with one eyebrow a trifle higher than the other, as if it had been wrenched out of line by the strain of habitual intoxication. This man's name was Wollaston, and he worked at Dana's.

Mr. Taggett's initial move was to make himself popular in the marble yard, and especially at the tavern, where he spent money freely, though not so freely as to excite any remark except that the lad was running through pretty much all his small pay,—a recklessness which was charitably condoned in Snelling's bar-room. He formed multifarious friendships, and had so many sensible views on the labour problem, advo-

cating the general extinguishment of capitalists, and so on, that his admittance to the Marble Workers' Association resolved itself into merely a question of time. The old prejudice against apprentices was already wearing off. The quiet, evasive man of few words was now a loquacious talker, holding his own with the hardest hitters, and very skilful in giving offence to no one. "Whoever picks up Blake for a fool," Dexter remarked one night, "will put him down again." Not a shadow of suspicion followed Mr. Taggett in his various comings and goings. He seemed merely a good-natured, intelligent devil; perhaps a little less devilish and a trifle more intelligent than the rest, but not otherwise different. Denyven, Peters, Dexter, Willson, and others in and out of the Slocum clique were Blake's sworn friends. In brief, Mr. Taggett had the amplest opportunities to prosecute his studies. Only for a pained look which sometimes latterly shot into his eyes, as he worked at the bench, or as he walked alone in the street, one would have imagined that he was thoroughly enjoying the half-vagabond existence.

The supposition would have been erron-

eous, for in the progress of those fourteen days' apprenticeship Mr. Taggett had received a wound in the most sensitive part of his nature: he had been forced to give up what no man ever relinquishes without a wrench,—his own idea.

With the exception of an accident in Dana's Mill, by which Torrini's hand had been so badly mangled that amputation was deemed necessary, the two weeks had been eventless outside of Mr. Taggett's personal experience. What that experience was will transpire in its proper place. Margaret was getting daily notes from Richard, and Mr. Slocum, overburdened with the secret of Mr. Taggett's presence in the yard,—a secret confined exclusively to Mr. Slocum, Richard, and Justice Beemis,—was restlessly awaiting developments.

The developments came that afternoon when Mr. Taggett walked into the office and startled Mr. Slocum, sitting at the desk. The two words which Mr. Taggett then gravely and coldly whispered in Mr. Slocum's ear were—

"Richard Shackford."

XIX.

MR. SLOCUM, who had partly risen from the chair, sank back into his seat. "Good God!" he said, turning very pale. "Are you mad!"

Mr. Taggett realised the cruel shock which the pronouncing of that name must have caused Mr. Slocum. Mr. Taggett had meditated his line of action, and had decided that the most merciful course was brusquely to charge young Shackford with the crime, and allow Mr. Slocum to sustain himself for a while with the indignant disbelief which would be natural to him, situated as he was. He would then in a manner be prepared for the revelations which, if suddenly presented, would crush him.

If Mr. Taggett was without imagination, as he claimed, he was not without a certain feminine quickness of sympathy often found

in persons engaged in professions calculated to blunt the finer sensibilities. In his intercourse with Mr. Slocum at the Shackford house, Mr. Taggett had been won by the singular gentleness and simplicity of the man, and was touched by his misfortune.

After his exclamation Mr. Slocum did not speak for a moment or two, but with his elbows resting on the edge of the desk sat motionless, like a person stunned. Then he slowly lifted his face, to which the colour had returned, and making a movement with his right hand as if he were sweeping away cobwebs in front of him rose from the chair.

"You are simply mad," he said, looking Mr. Taggett squarely and calmly in the eyes. "Are you aware of Mr. Richard Shackford's character and his position here?"

"Perfectly."

"Do you know that he is to marry my daughter?"

"I am very sorry for you, sir."

"You may spare me that. It is quite unnecessary. You have fallen into some horrible delusion. I hope you will be able to explain it."

"I am prepared to do so, sir."

"Are you serious?"

"Very serious, Mr. Slocum."

"You actually imagine that Richard Shackford— Pshaw! it's simply impossible!"

"I am too young a man to wish even to seem wiser than you, but my experience has taught me that nothing is impossible."

"I begin to believe so myself. I suppose you have grounds, or something you consider grounds, for your monstrous suspicion. What are they? I demand to be fully informed of what you have been doing in the yard, before you bring disgrace upon me and my family by inconsiderately acting on some wild theory which perhaps ten words can refute."

"I should be in the highest degree criminal, Mr. Slocum, if I were to make so fearful an accusation against any man unless I had the most incontestable evidence in my hands."

Mr. Taggett spoke with such cold-blooded conviction that a chill crept over Mr. Slocum, in spite of him.

"What is the nature of this evidence?"

"Up to the present stage, purely circumstantial."

"I can imagine that," said Mr. Slocum, with a slight smile.

"But so conclusive as to require no collateral evidence. The testimony of an eye-witness of the crime could scarcely add to my knowledge of what occurred that Tuesday night in Lemuel Shackford's house."

"Indeed, it is all so clear! But of course a few eye-witnesses will turn up eventually," said Mr. Slocum, whose whiteness about the lips discounted the assurance of his sarcasm.

"That is not improbable," returned Mr. Taggett gravely.

"And meanwhile what are the facts?"

"They are not easily stated. I have kept a record of my work day by day, since the morning I entered the yard. The memoranda are necessarily confused, the important and the unimportant being jumbled together; but the record as it stands will answer your question more fully than I could, even if I had the time—which I have not—to go over the case with you. I can leave these notes in your hands, if you desire it. When I return from New York——"

"You are going to New York!" exclaimed Mr. Slocum, with a start. "When?"

"This evening."

"If you lay a finger on Richard Shackford, you will make the mistake of your life, Mr. Taggett!"

"I have other business there. Mr. Shackford will be in Stillwater to-morrow night. He engaged a state-room on the Fall River boat this morning."

"How can you know that?"

"Since last Tuesday none of his movements have been unknown to me."

"Do you mean to say that you have set your miserable spies upon him?" cried Mr. Slocum.

"I should not state the fact in just those words," Mr. Taggett answered. "The fact remains."

"Pardon me," said Mr. Slocum. "I am not quite myself. Can you wonder at it?"

"I do not wonder."

"Give me those papers you speak of, Mr. Taggett. I would like to look through them. I see that you are a very obstinate person when you have once got a notion into your head. Perhaps I can help you out of your error before it is irreparable." Then, after hesitating a second, Mr. Slocum added, "I may speak of this to my daughter? Indeed, I could scarcely keep it from her."

"Perhaps it is better she should be informed."

"And Mr. Shackford, when he returns to-morrow?"

"If he broaches the subject of his cousin's death, I advise you to avoid it."

"Why should I?"

"It might save you or Miss Slocum some awkwardness,—but you must use your own discretion. As the matter stands, it makes no difference whether Mr. Shackford knows his position to-day or to-morrow. It is too late for him to avail himself of the knowledge. Otherwise, of course, I should not have given myself away in this fashion."

"Very well," said Mr. Slocum, with an impatient movement of his shoulders; "neither I nor my daughter will open our lips on this topic. In the meanwhile you are to take no further steps without advising me. That is understood?'

"That is perfectly understood," returned Mr. Taggett, drawing a narrow red notebook from the inner pocket of his workman's blouse, and producing at the same time a small nickel-plated door-key. "This is the key of Mr. Shackford's private workshop in the extension. I have not been able

to replace it on the mantel-shelf of his sitting-room in Lime Street. Will you have the kindness to see that that is done at once?"

A moment later Mr. Slocum stood alone in the office, with Mr. Taggett's diary in his hand. It was one of tho costly little volumes—gilt-edged and bound in fragrant crushed Levant morocco—with which city officials are annually supplied by a community of grateful taxpayers.

The dark crimson of the flexible covers, as soft and slippery to the touch as a snake's skin, was perhaps the fitting symbol of the darker story that lay coiled within. With a gesture of repulsion, as if some such fancy had flitted through his mind, Mr. Slocum tossed the note-book on the desk in front of him, and stood a few minutes moodily watching the *reflets* of the crinkled leather as the afternoon sunshine struck across it. Beneath his amazement and indignation he had been chilled to the bone by Mr. Taggett's brutal confidence. It was enough to chill one, surely; and in spite of himself Mr. Slocum began to feel a certain indefinable dread of that little crimson-bound book.

Whatever it contained, the reading of those pages was to be a repellent task to

him; it was a task to which he could not bring himself at the moment; to-night, in the privacy of his own chamber, he would sift Mr. Taggett's baleful fancies. Thus temporising, Mr. Slocum dropped the volume into his pocket, locked the office door behind him, and wandered down to Dundon's drug-store to kill the intervening hour before supper-time. Dundon's was the aristocratic lounging-place of the village,—the place where the only genuine Havana cigars in Stillwater were to be had, and where the favoured few, the initiated, could get a dash of hochheimer or cognac with their soda-water.

At supper, that evening, Mr. Slocum addressed scarcely a word to Margaret, and Margaret was also silent. The days were dragging heavily with her; she was missing Richard. Her own daring travels had never extended beyond Boston or Providence; and New York, with Richard in it, seemed drearily far away. Mr. Slocum withdrew to his chamber shortly after nine o'clock, and, lighting the pair of candles on the dressing-table, began his examination of Mr. Taggett's memoranda.

At midnight the watchman on his lonely beat saw those two candles still burning.

XX.

MR. TAGGETT'S diary was precisely a diary—disjoined, full of curt, obscure phrases and irrelevant reflections,—for which reason it will not be reproduced here. Though Mr. Slocum pondered every syllable, and now and then turned back painfully to reconsider some doubtful passage, it is not presumed that the reader will care to do so. An abstract of the journal, with occasional quotation where the writer's words seem to demand it, will be sufficient for the narrative.

In the opening pages Mr. Taggett described his novel surroundings with a minuteness which contrasted oddly with the brief, hurried entries further on. He found himself, as he had anticipated, in a society composed of some of the most heterogeneous elements. Stillwater, viewed from a certain point, was a sort of microcosm, a little inter-

national rag-fair to which nearly every country on earth had contributed one of its shabby human products. "I am moving," wrote Mr. Taggett, "in an atmosphere in which any crime is possible. I gave myself seven days at the outside to light upon the traces of Shackford's murderer. I feel him in the air." The writer's theory was that the man would betray his identity in one of two ways: either by talking unguardedly, or by indulging in expenditures not warranted by his means and position. If several persons had been concerned in the crime, nothing was more likely than a disagreement over the spoil, and consequent treachery on the part of one of them. Or, again, some of the confederates might become alarmed, and attempt to save themselves by giving away their comrades. Mr. Taggett, however, leaned to the belief that the assassin had had no accomplices.

The sum taken from Mr. Shackford's safe was a comparatively large one,—five hundred dollars in gold and nearly double that amount in bank-notes. Neither the gold nor the paper bore any known mark by which it could be recognised; the burglar had doubtless assured himself of this, and

would not hesitate to disburse the money. That was even a safer course, judiciously worked, than to secrete it. The point was, Would he have sufficient self-control to get rid of it by degrees? The chances, Mr. Taggett argued, were ten to one he would not.

A few pages further on Mr. Taggett compliments the Unknown on the adroit manner in which he is conducting himself. He has neither let slip a suspicious word, nor made an incautious display of his booty. Snelling's bar was doing an unusually light business. No one appeared to have any money. Many of the men had run deeply into debt during the late strike, and were now drinking moderately. In the paragraph which closes the week's record Mr. Taggett's chagrin is evident. He confesses that he is at fault. "My invisible friend does not *materialise* so successfully as I expected," is Mr. Taggett's comment.

His faith in the correctness of his theory had not abated; but he continued his observations in a less sanguine spirit. These observations were not limited to the bar-room or the workshop; he informed himself of the domestic surroundings of his comrades. Where his own scrutiny could

not penetrate, he employed the aid of correspondents. He knew what workmen had money in the local savings-bank, and the amount of each deposit. In the course of his explorations of the shady side in Stillwater life, Mr. Taggett unearthed many amusing and many pathetic histories, but nothing that served his end. Finally, he began to be discouraged.

Returning home from the tavern, one night, in a rather desponding mood, he found the man Wollaston smoking his pipe in bed. Wollaston was a taciturn man generally, but this night he was conversational, and Mr. Taggett, too restless to sleep, fell to chatting with him. Did he know much about the late Mr. Shackford? Yes, he had known him well enough in an off way,—not to speak to him; everybody knew him in Stillwater; he was a sort of miser, hated everybody, and bullied everybody. It was a wonder somebody didn't knock the old silvertop on the head years ago.

Thus Mr. Wollaston grimly, with his pores stopped up with iron-filings,—a person to whom it would come quite easy to knock any one on the head for a slight dif-

ference of opinion. He amused Mr. Taggett in his present humour.

No, he wasn't aware that Shackford had had trouble with any particular individual; believed he did have a difficulty once with Slocum, the marble man; but he was always fetching suits against the town and shying lawyers at the mill directors,—a disagreeable old cuss altogether. Adopted his cousin, one time, but made the house so hot for him that the lad ran off to sea, and since then had had nothing to do with the old bilk.

Indeed! What sort of fellow was young Shackford? Mr. Wollaston could not say of his own knowledge; thought him a plucky chap; he had put a big Italian named Torrini out of the yard, one day, for talking back. Who was Torrini? The man that got hurt last week in the Dana Mill. Who were Richard Shackford's intimates? Couldn't say; had seen him with Mr. Pinkham, the schoolmaster, and Mr. Craggie,—went with the upper crust generally. Was going to be partner in the marble yard and marry Slocum's daughter. Will Durgin knew him. They lived together one time. He, Wollaston, was going to turn in now.

Several of these facts were not new to Mr. Taggett, but Mr. Wollaston's presentation of them threw Mr. Taggett into a reverie.

The next evening he got Durgin alone in a corner of the bar-room. With two or three potations Durgin became autobiographical. Was he acquainted with Mr. Shackford outside the yard? Rather. Dick Shackford! His (Durgin's) mother had kept Dick from starving when he was a baby,—and no thanks for it. Went to school with him, and knew all about his running off to sea. Was near going with him. Old man Shackford never liked Dick, who was a proud beggar; they couldn't pull together, down to the last,—both of a piece. They had a jolly rumpus a little while before the old man was fixed.

Mr. Taggett pricked up his ears at this.

A rumpus? How did Durgin know that? A girl told him. What girl? A girl he was sweet on. What was her name? Well, he didn't mind telling her name; it was Molly Hennessey. She was going through Welch's Court one forenoon,—may be it was three days before the strike,—and saw Dick Shackford bolt out of the house,

swinging his arms and swearing to himself at an awful rate. Was Durgin certain that Molly Hennessey had told him this? Yes, he was ready to take his oath on it.

Here, at last, was something that looked like a glimmer of daylight.

It was possible that Durgin or the girl had lied; but the story had an air of truth to it. If it were a fact that there had recently been a quarrel between these cousins, whose uncousinly attitude towards each other was fast becoming clear to Mr. Taggett, then here was a conceivable key to an enigma which had puzzled him.

The conjecture that Lemuel Shackford had himself torn up the will—if it was a will, for this still remained in dispute—had never been satisfactory to Mr. Taggett. He had accepted it because he was unable to imagine an ordinary burglar pausing in the midst of his work to destroy a paper in which he could have no concern. But Richard Shackford would have the liveliest possible interest in the destruction of a document that placed a vast estate beyond his reach. Here was a motive on a level with the crime. That money had been taken, and that the fragments of the will had been carelessly thrown

into a waste-paper basket, just as if the old man himself had thrown them there, was a stroke of art which Mr. Taggett admired more and more as he reflected upon it.

He did not, however, allow himself to lay too much stress on these points; for the paper might turn out to be merely an expired lease, and the girl might have been quizzing Durgin. Mr. Taggett would have given one of his eye-teeth just then for ten minutes with Mary Hennessey. But an interview with her at this stage was neither prudent nor easily compassed.

"If I have not struck a trail," writes Mr. Taggett, "I have come upon what strongly resembles one; the least I can do is to follow it. My first move must be to inspect that private workshop in the rear of Mr. Slocum's house. How shall I accomplish it? I cannot apply to him for permission, for that would provoke questions which I am not ready to answer. Moreover, I have yet to assure myself that Mr. Slocum is not implicated. There seems to have been also a hostile feeling existing between him and the deceased. Why didn't some one tell me these things at the start! If young Shackford is the person, there is a tangled

story to be unravelled. *Mem:* Young Shackford is Miss Slocum's lover."

Mr. Slocum read this passage twice without drawing breath, and then laid down the book an instant to wipe the sudden perspiration from his forehead.

In the note which followed, Mr. Taggett described the difficulty he met with in procuring a key to fit the wall-door at the rear of the marble yard, and gave an account of his failure to effect an entrance into the studio. He had hoped to find a window unfastened; but the window, as well as the door opening upon the veranda, was locked, and in the midst of his operations, which were conducted at noon-time, the approach of a servant had obliged him to retreat.

Forced to lay aside, at least temporarily, his designs on the workshop, he turned his attention to Richard's lodgings in Lime Street. Here Mr. Taggett was more successful. On the pretext that he had been sent for certain drawings which were to be found on the table or in a writing-desk, he was permitted by Mrs. Spooner to ascend to the bedroom, where she obligingly insisted on helping him search for the apocryphal plans, and seriously interfered with his

purpose, which was to find the key of the studio. While Mr. Taggett was turning over the pages of a large dictionary, in order to gain time, and was wondering how he could rid himself of the old lady's importunities, he came upon a half-folded note-sheet, at the bottom of which his eye caught the name of Lemuel Shackford. It was in the handwriting of the dead man. Mr. Taggett was very familiar with that handwriting. He secured the paper at a venture, and put it in his pocket without examination.

A few minutes later, it being impossible to prolong the pretended quest for the drawings, Mr. Taggett was obliged to follow Mrs. Spooner from the apartment. As he did so he noticed a bright object lying on the corner of the mantel-shelf,—a small nickel-plated key. In order to take it he had only to reach out his hand in passing. It was, as Mr. Taggett had instantly surmised, the key of Richard's workshop.

If it had been gold, instead of brass or iron, that bit of metal would have taken no additional value in Mr. Taggett's eyes. On leaving Mrs. Spooner's he held it tightly clasped in his fingers until he reached an

unfrequented street, where he halted a moment in the shadow of a building to inspect the paper, which he had half forgotten in his satisfaction at having obtained the key. A stifled cry rose to Mr. Taggett's lips as he glanced over the crumpled note-sheet.

It contained three lines hastily scrawled in lead pencil, requesting Richard Shackford to call at the house in Welch's Court at eight o'clock on a certain Tuesday night. The note had been written, as the date showed, on the day preceding the Tuesday night in question—the night of the murder !

For a second or two Mr. Taggett stood paralysed. Ten minutes afterwards a message in cipher was pulsing along the wires to New York, and before the sun went down that evening Richard Shackford was under the surveillance of the police.

The doubtful unknown ground upon which Mr. Taggett had been floundering was now firm under his feet,—unexpected ground, but solid. Meeting Mary Hennessey in the street, on his way to the marble yard, Mr. Taggett no longer hesitated to accost her, and question her as to the story she had told William Durgin. The girl's story was undoubtedly true, and as a piece of circum-

stantial evidence was only less important than the elder Shackford's note. The two cousins had been for years on the worst of terms. At every step Mr. Taggett had found corroboration of Wollaston's statement to that effect.

"Where were Coroner Whidden's eyes and ears," wrote Mr. Taggett,—the words were dashed down impatiently on the page, as if he had sworn a little internally while writing them,—"when he conducted that inquest! In all my experience there was never a thing so stupidly managed."

A thorough and immediate examination of Richard Shackford's private workshop was now so imperative that Mr. Taggett resolved to make it even if he had to do so under the authority of a search-warrant. But he desired as yet to avoid publicity.

A secret visit to the studio seemed equally difficult by day and night. In the former case he was nearly certain to be deranged by the servants, and in the latter a light in the unoccupied room would alarm any one of the household who might chance to awaken. From the watchman no danger was to be apprehended, as the windows of the extension were not visible from the street.

Mr. Taggett finally decided on the night as the more propitious time for his attempt, —a decision which his success justified. A brilliant moon favoured the indoor part of the enterprise, though it exposed him to observation in his approach from the marble yard to the veranda.

With the dense moonlight streaming outside against the window-shades, he could safely have used a candle in the studio instead of the screened lantern which he had provided. Mr. Taggett passed three hours in the workshop,—the last hour in waiting for the moon to go down. Then he stole through the marble yard into the silent street, and hurried home, carrying two small articles concealed under his blouse. The first was a chisel with a triangular piece broken out of the centre of the bevel, and the other was a box of safety-matches. The peculiarity of this box of matches was—that just one match had been used from it.

Mr. Taggett's work was done.

The last seven pages of the diary were devoted to a review of the case, every detail of which was held up in various lights, and examined with the conscientious pains of a

lapidary deciding on the value of a rare stone. The concluding entries ran as follows :—

"*Tuesday Night.* Here the case passes into other hands. I have been fortunate rather than skilful in unmasking the chief actor in one of the most singular crimes that ever came under my investigation. By destroying three objects, very easily destroyed, Richard Shackford would have put himself beyond the dream of suspicion. He neglected to remove these dumb witnesses, and now the dumb witnesses speak ! If it could be shown that he was a hundred miles from Stillwater at the time of the murder, instead of in the village, as he was, he must still be held, in the face of the proofs against him, accessory to the deed. These proofs, roughly summarised, are :—

"*First.* The fact that he had had an altercation with his cousin a short time previous to the date of the murder, a murder which may be regarded, not as the result of a chance disagreement, but of long years of bitter enmity between the two men.

"*Secondly.* The fact that Richard Shackford had had an appointment with his cousin on the night the crime was committed, and

had concealed that fact from the authorities at the time of the coroner's inquest.

'*Thirdly.* That the broken chisel found in the private workshop of the accused explains the peculiar shape of the wound which caused Lemuel Shackford's death, and corresponds in every particular with the plaster impression taken of that wound.

"*Fourthly.* That the partially consumed match found on the scullery floor when the body was discovered (a style of match not used in the house in Welch's Court) completes the complement of a box of safety-matches belonging to Richard Shackford, and hidden in a closet in his workshop.

"Whether Shackford had an accomplice or not is yet to be ascertained. There is nothing whatever to implicate Mr. Rowland Slocum. I make the statement because his intimate association with one party and his deep dislike of the other invited inquiry, and at first raised an unjust suspicion in my mind."

The little red book slipped from Mr. Slocum's grasp and fell at his feet. As he rose from the chair, the reflection which he caught of himself in the dressing-table mirror was that of a wrinkled, white old man.

Mr. Slocum did not believe, and no human evidence could have convinced him, that Richard had deliberately killed Lemuel Shackford; but as Mr. Slocum reached the final pages of the diary, a horrible probability insinuated itself into his mind. Could Richard have done it accidentally? Could he—in an instant of passion, stung to sudden madness by that venomous old man—have struck him involuntarily, and killed him? A certain speech which Richard had made in Mr. Slocum's presence not long before came back to him now with fearful emphasis:—

"*Three or four times in my life I have been carried away by a devil of a temper which I couldn't control, it seized me so unawares.*"

"It seized me so unawares!" repeated Mr. Slocum, half aloud; and then with a swift, unconscious gesture, he pressed his hands over his ears, as if to shut out the words.

XXI.

MARGARET must be told. It would be like stabbing her to tell her all this. Mr. Slocum had lain awake long after midnight, appalled by the calamity that was about to engulf them. At moments, as his thought reverted to Margaret's illness early in the spring, he felt that perhaps it would have been a mercy if she had died then. He had left the candles burning; it was not until the wicks sunk down in the sockets and went softly out that slumber fell upon him.

He was now sitting at the breakfast-table, absently crumbling bits of bread beside his plate and leaving his coffee untouched. Margaret glanced at him wistfully from time to time, and detected the restless night in the deepened lines of his face.

The house had not been the same since

Lemuel Shackford's death; he had never crossed its threshold; Margaret had scarcely known him by sight, and Mr. Slocum had not spoken to him for years; but Richard's connection with the unfortunate old man had brought the tragic event very close to Margaret and her father. Mr. Slocum was a person easily depressed, but his depression this morning was so greatly in excess of the presumable cause that Margaret began to be troubled.

"Papa, has anything happened?"

"No, nothing new has happened; but I am dreadfully disturbed by some things which Mr. Taggett has been doing here in the village."

"I thought Mr. Taggett had gone."

"He did go; but he came back very quietly, without anybody's knowledge. I knew it, of course; but no one else, to speak of."

"What has he done to disturb you?"

"I want you to be a brave girl, Margaret, —will you promise that?"

"Why, yes," said Margaret, with an anxious look. "You frighten me with your mysteriousness."

"I do not mean to be mysterious, but I

don't quite know how to tell you about Mr. Taggett. He has been working underground in this matter of poor Shackford's death,—boring in the dark like a mole,—and thinks he has discovered some strange things."

"Do you mean he thinks he has found out who killed Mr. Shackford?"

"He believes he has fallen upon clues which will lead to that. The strange things I alluded to are things which Richard will have to explain."

"Richard? What has he to do with it?"

"Not much, I hope; but there are several matters which he will be obliged to clear up in order to save himself from very great annoyance. Mr. Taggett seems to think that—that——"

"Good Heaven, papa! What does he think?"

"Margaret, he thinks that Richard knew something about the murder, and has not told it."

"What could he know? Is that all?"

"No, that is not all. I am keeping the full truth from you, and it is useless to do so. You must face it like a brave girl. Mr. Taggett suspects Richard of being concerned directly or indirectly, with the crime."

The colour went from Margaret's cheek for an instant. The statement was too horrible and sudden not to startle her, but it was also too absurd to have more than an instant's effect. Her quick recovery of herself reassured Mr. Slocum. Would she meet Mr. Taggett's specific charges with the like fortitude? Mr. Slocum himself had been prostrated by them; he prayed to Heaven that Margaret might have more strength than he, as indeed she had.

"The man has got together a lot of circumstantial evidence," continued Mr. Slocum cautiously; "some of it amounts to nothing, being mere conjecture; but some of it will look badly for Richard, to outsiders."

"Of course it is all a mistake," said Margaret, in nearly her natural voice. "It ought to be easy to convince Mr. Taggett of that."

"I have not been able to convince him."

"But you will. What has possessed him to fall into such a ridiculous error?"

"Mr. Taggett has written out everything at length in this memorandum-book, and you must read it for yourself. There are expressions and statements in these pages, Margaret, that will necessarily shock you very

much; but you should remember, as I tried to while reading them, that Mr. Taggett has a heart of steel; without it he would be unable to do his distressing work. The cold impartiality with which he sifts and heaps up circumstances involving the doom of a fellow-creature appears almost inhuman; but it is his business. No, don't look at it here!" said Mr. Slocum, recoiling; he had given the book to Margaret. "Take it into the other room, and read it carefully by yourself. When you have finished, come back and tell me what you think."

"But, papa, surely you——"

"I don't believe anything, Margaret! I don't know the true from the false any more! I want you to help me out of my confusion, and you cannot do it until you have read that book."

Margaret made no response, but passed into the parlour and closed the folding-doors behind her.

After an absence of half an hour she re-entered the breakfast-room, and laid Mr. Taggett's diary on the table beside her father, who had not moved from his place during the interval. Margaret's manner was collected, but it was evident, by the

dark circles under her eyes, and the set, colourless lips, that that half-hour had been a cruel thirty minutes to her. In Margaret's self-possession Mr. Slocum recognised, not for the first time, the cropping out of an ancestral trait which had somehow managed to avoid him in its wayward descent.

"Well?" he questioned, looking earnestly at Margaret, and catching a kind of comfort from her confident bearing.

"It is Mr. Taggett's trade to find somebody guilty," said Margaret, "and he has been very ingenious and very merciless. He was plainly at his wits' end to sustain his reputation, and would not have hesitated to sacrifice any one rather than wholly fail."

"But you have been crying, Margaret."

"How could I see Richard dragged down in the dust in this fashion, and not be mortified and indignant?"

"You don't believe anything at all of this?"

"Do *you?*" asked Margaret, looking through and through him.

"I confess I am troubled."

"If you doubt Richard for a second," said Margaret, with a slight quiver of her lip, "that will be the bitterest part of it to me."

"I don't give any more credit to Mr. Taggett's general charges than you do, Margaret; but I understand their gravity better. A perfectly guiltless man, one able with a single word to establish his innocence, is necessarily crushed at first by an accusation of this kind. Now, can Richard set these matters right with a single word? I am afraid he has a world of difficulty before him."

"When he returns he will explain everything. How can you question it?"

"I do not wish to; but there are two things in Mr. Taggett's story which stagger me. The motive for the destruction of Shackford's papers,—that 's not plain; the box of matches is a puerility unworthy of a clever man like Mr. Taggett, and as to the chisel he found, why there are a hundred broken chisels in the village, and probably a score of them broken in precisely the same manner; but, Margaret, did Richard ever breathe a word to you of that quarrel with his cousin?"

"No."

"He never mentioned it to me either. As matters stood between you and him, nothing was more natural than that he should have

spoken of it to you,—so natural that his silence is positively strange."

"He may have considered it too unimportant. Mr. Shackford always abused Richard; it was nothing new. Then, again, Richard is very proud, and perhaps he did not care to come to us just at that time with family grievances. Besides, how do we know they quarrelled? The village is full of gossip."

"I am certain there was a quarrel; it was only necessary for those two to meet to insure that. I distinctly remember the forenoon when Richard went to Welch's Court; it was the day he discharged Torrini."

A little cloud passed over Margaret's countenance.

"They undoubtedly had angry words together," continued Mr. Slocum, "and we are forced to accept the Hennessey girl's statement. The reason you suggest for Richard's not saying anything on the subject may suffice for us, but it will scarcely satisfy disinterested persons, and doesn't at all cover another circumstance which must be taken in the same connection."

"What circumstance?"

"His silence in regard to Lemuel Shackford's note,—a note written the day before the murder, and making an appointment for the very night of it."

The girl looked steadily at her father.

"Margaret!" exclaimed Mr. Slocum, his face illuminated with a flickering hope as he met her untroubled gaze, "did Richard tell *you?*"

"No," replied Margaret.

"Then he told no one," said Mr. Slocum, with the light fading out of his features again. "It was madness in him to conceal the fact. He should not have lost a moment, after the death of his cousin, in making that letter public. It ought instantly to have been placed in Coroner Whidden's hands. Richard's action is inconceivable, unless—unless——"

"Do not say it!" cried Margaret. "I should never forgive you!"

In recapitulating the points of Mr. Taggett's accusation, Mr. Slocum had treated most of them as trivial; but he had not been sincere. He knew that that broken chisel had no duplicate in Stillwater, and that the finding of it in Richard's closet was

a black fact. Mr. Slocum had also glossed over the quarrel; but that letter!—the likelihood that Richard kept the appointment, and his absolute silence concerning it,—here was a grim thing which no sophistry could dispose of. It would be wronging Margaret to deceive her as to the vital seriousness of Richard's position.

"Why, why did he hide it!" Mr. Slocum persisted.

"I do not see that he really hid it, papa. He shut the note in a book lying openly on the table,—a dictionary, to which any one in the household was likely to go. You think Mr. Taggett a person of great acuteness."

"He is a very intelligent person, Margaret."

"He appears to me very short-sighted. If Richard were the dreadful man Mr. Taggett supposes, that paper would have been burnt, and not left for the first comer to pick up. I scorn myself for stooping to the suggestion!"

"There is something in the idea," said Mr. Slocum slowly. "But why did Richard never mention the note,—to you, or to me, or to anybody?"

"He had a sufficient reason, you may be sure. O papa, how ready you are to believe evil of him!"

"I am not, God knows!"

"How you cling to this story of the letter! Suppose it turns out to be some old letter, written two or three years ago? You could never look Richard in the face again."

"Unfortunately, Shackford dated it. It is useless for us to blindfold ourselves, Margaret. Richard has managed in some way to get himself into a very perilous situation, and we cannot help him by shutting our eyes. You misconceive me if you imagine I think him capable of coolly plotting his cousin's death; but it is not outside the limits of the possible that what has happened a thousand times may have happened once more. Men less impulsive than Richard——"

"I will not listen to it!" interrupted Margaret, drawing herself up. "When Richard returns he will explain the matter to you,—not to me. If I required a word of denial from him, I should care very little whether he was innocent or not."

Mr. Slocum threw a terrified glance at his

daughter. Her lofty faith sent a chill to his heart. What would be the result of a fall from such a height? He almost wished Margaret had something less of that ancestral confidence and obstinacy the lack of which in his own composition he had so often deplored.

"We are not to speak of this to Richard," he said, after a protracted pause; "at least not until Mr. Taggett considers it best. I have pledged myself to something like that."

"Has Richard been informed of Mr. Taggett's singular proceeding?" asked Margaret freezingly.

"Not yet; nothing is to be done until Mr. Taggett returns from New York, and then Richard will at once have an opportunity of clearing himself."

"It would have spared us all much pain and misunderstanding if he had been sent for in the first instance. Did he know that this person was here in the yard?"

"The plan was talked over before Richard left; the details were arranged afterwards. He heartily approved of the plan."

A leisurely and not altogether saint-like smile crept into the corners of Margaret's mouth.

"Yes, he approved of the plan," repeated Mr. Slocum. "Perhaps he——" Here Mr. Slocum checked himself, and left the sentence flying at loose ends. Perhaps Richard had looked with favour upon a method of inquiry which was so likely to lead to no result. But Mr. Slocum did not venture to finish the suggestion. He had never seen Margaret so imperious and intractable; it was impossible to reason or to talk frankly with her. He remained silent, sitting with one arm thrown dejectedly across the back of the chair.

Presently his abject attitude and expression began to touch Margaret; there was something that appealed to her in the thin grey hair falling over his forehead. Her eyes softened as they rested upon him, and a pitying little tremor came to her under lip.

"Papa," she said, stooping to his side, with a sudden rosy bloom in her cheeks, "I have all the proof I want that Richard knew nothing of this dreadful business."

"You have proof!" exclaimed Mr. Slocum, starting from his seat.

"Yes. The morning Richard went to New York——" Margaret hesitated.

"Well!"

"He put his arm around me and kissed me."

"Well!"

"Well?" repeated Margaret. "Could Richard have done that,—could he have so much as laid his hand upon me—if—if——"

Mr. Slocum sunk back in the chair with a kind of groan.

"Papa, you do not know him!"

"O Margaret! I am afraid that that is not the kind of evidence to clear Richard in Mr. Taggett's eyes."

"Then Richard's word must do it," she said haughtily. "He will be home to-night."

"Yes, he is to return to-night," said Mr. Slocum, looking away from her.

XXII.

DURING the rest of the day the name of Richard Shackford was not mentioned again by either Margaret or her father. It was a day of suspense to both, and long before nightfall Margaret's impatience for Richard to come had resolved itself into a pain as keen as that with which Mr. Slocum contemplated the coming; for every hour augmented his dread of the events that would necessarily follow the reappearance of young Shackford in Stillwater.

On reaching his office, after the conversation with Margaret, Mr. Slocum found Lawyer Perkins waiting for him. Lawyer Perkins, who was as yet in ignorance of the late developments, had brought information of his own. The mutilated document which had so grimly clung to its secret was at last deciphered. It proved to be a recently executed will, in which the greater part of

Lemuel Shackford's estate, real and personal, was left unconditionally to his cousin.

"That disposes of one of Mr. Taggett's theories," was Mr. Slocum's unspoken reflection. Certainly Richard had not destroyed the will; the old man himself had destroyed it, probably in some fit of pique. Yet, after all, the vital question was in no way affected by this fact: the motive for the crime remained, and the fearful evidence against Richard still held.

After the departure of Lawyer Perkins, who had been struck by the singular perturbation of his old friend, Mr. Slocum drew forth Mr. Taggett's journal, and reread it from beginning to end. Margaret's unquestioning faith in Richard, her prompt and indignant rejection of the whole story, had shaken her father at moments that morning; but now his paralysing doubts returned. This second perusal of the diary impressed him even more strongly than the first. Richard had killed Lemuel Shackford,—in self-defence, may be, or perhaps accidentally; but he had killed him! As Mr. Slocum passed from page to page, following the dark thread of narrative that darkened at each remove, he lapsed into

that illogical frame of mind when one looks half expectantly for some providential interposition to avert the calamity against which human means are impotent. If Richard were to drop dead in the street! If he were to fall overboard off Point Judith in the night! If only anything would happen to prevent his coming back! Thus the ultimate disgrace might be spared them. But the ill thing is the sure thing; the letter with the black seal never miscarries, and Richard was bound to come! "There is no escape for him or for us," murmured Mr. Slocum, closing his finger in the book.

It was in a different mood that Margaret said to herself, "It is nearly four o'clock; he will be here at eight!" As she stood at the parlour window and watched the waning afternoon light making its farewells to the flower-beds in the little square front-gardens of the houses opposite, Margaret's heart was filled with the tenderness of the greeting she intended to give Richard. She had never been cold or shy in her demeanour with him, nor had she ever been quite demonstrative; but now she meant to put her arms around his neck in a wifely fashion, and recompense him so far as she could for

all the injustice he was to suffer. When he came to learn of the hateful slander that had lifted its head during his absence, he should already be in possession of the assurance of her faith.

In the meanwhile the hands in Slocum's Yard were much exercised over the unaccountable disappearance of Blake. Stevens reported the matter to Mr. Slocum.

"Ah, yes," said Mr. Slocum, who had not provided himself with an explanation, and was puzzled to improvise one. "I discharged him,—that is to say, I let him go. I forgot to mention it. He didn't take to the trade."

"But he showed a good fist for a beginner," said Stevens. "He was head and shoulders the best of the new lot. Shall I put Stebbins in his place?"

"You needn't do anything until Mr. Shackford gets back."

"When will that be, sir?"

"To-night, probably."

The unceremonious departure of Blake formed the theme of endless speculation at the tavern that evening, and for the moment obscured the general interest in old Shackford's murder.

"Never to let on he was goin'!" said one.

"Didn't say good-bye to nobody," remarked a second.

"It was devilish uncivil," added a third.

"It is kind of mysterious," said Mr. Peters.

"Some girl," suggested Mr. Willson, with an air of tender sentiment, which he attempted further to emphasise by a capacious wink.

"No," observed Dexter. "When a man vanishes in that sudden way his body is generally found in a clump of blackberry bushes, months afterwards, or left somewhere on the flats by an ebb tide."

"Two murders in Stillwater in one month would be rather crowding it, wouldn't it?" inquired Piggott.

"Bosh!" said Durgin. "There was always something shady about Blake. We didn't know where he hailed from, and we don't know where he's gone to. He'll take care of himself; that kind of fellow never lets anybody play any points on him." With this Durgin threw away the stump of his cigar, and lounged out at the street door.

"I couldn't get anything out of the pro-

prietor," said Stevens; "but he never talks. May be Shackford when he——" Stevens stopped short to listen to a low, rumbling sound like distant thunder, followed almost instantly by two quick faint whistles. "He's aboard the train to-night."

Mr. Peters quietly rose from his seat and left the bar-room.

The evening express, due at eight, was only a few seconds behind time. As the screech of the approaching engine rang out from the dark woodland, Margaret and her father exchanged rapid glances. It would take Richard ten minutes to walk from the railway station to the house,—for of course he would come there directly after sending his valise to Lime Street.

The ten minutes went by, and then twenty. Margaret bent steadily over her work, listening with covert intentness for the click of the street gate. Likely enough Richard had been unable to find any one to take charge of his hand-luggage. Presently Mr. Slocum could not resist the impulse to look at his watch. It was half-past eight. He nervously unfolded the *Stillwater Gazette*, and sat with his eyes fastened on the paper.

After a seemingly interminable period the heavy bell of the South Church sounded nine, and then tolled for a few minutes, as the dismal custom is in New England country towns.

A long silence followed, unrelieved by any word between father and daughter,—a silence so profound that the heart of the old-fashioned time-piece, throbbing monotonously in its dusky case at the foot of the stairs, made itself audible through the room. Mr. Slocum's gaze continued fixed on the newspaper which he was not reading. Margaret's hands lay crossed over the work on her lap.

Ten o'clock.

"What can have kept him?" murmured Margaret.

"There was only that way out of it," reflected Mr. Slocum, pursuing his own line of thought.

Margaret's cheeks were flushed and hot, and her eyes dulled with disappointment, as she rose from the low rocking-chair and crossed over to kiss her father good-night. Mr. Slocum drew the girl gently towards him, and held her for a moment in silence. But Margaret, detecting the subtle com-

miseration in his manner resented it, and released herself coldly.

"He has been detained, papa."

"Yes, something must have detained him!"

XXIII.

WHEN the down express arrived at Stillwater that night, two passengers stepped from the rear car to the platform: one was Richard Shackford, and the other a commercial traveller, whose acquaintance Richard had made the previous evening on the Fall River boat.

There were no hacks in waiting at the station, and Richard found his politeness put to a severe test when he saw himself obliged to pilot his companion part of the way to the hotel, which lay—it seemed almost maliciously—in a section of the town remote from the Slocums. Curbing his impatience, Richard led the stranger through several crooked, unlighted streets, and finally left him at the corner of the main thoroughfare, within pistol-shot of the red glass lantern which hung over the door of the tavern. This cost Richard ten good minutes. As he

hurriedly turned into a cross-street on the left, he fancied that he heard his name called several times from somewhere in the darkness. A man came running towards him. It was Mr. Peters.

"Can I say a word to you, Mr. Shackford?"

"If it isn't a long one. I am rather pressed."

"It is about Torrini, sir."

"What of him?"

"He 's mighty bad, sir."

"Oh, I can't stop to hear that," and Richard quickened his pace.

"The doctor took off his hand last Wednesday," said Peters, keeping alongside, "and he 's been getting worse and worse."

Richard halted. "Took off his hand?"

"Didn't you know he was caught in the rolling-machine at Dana's? Well, it was after you went away."

"This is the first I 've heard of it."

"It was hard lines for him, sir, with the woman and the two children, and nothing to eat in the house. The boys in the yard have done what they could, but with the things from the drug-store, and so on, we couldn't hold up our end. Mr. Dana paid

the doctor's bill, but if it hadn't been for Miss Slocum I don't know what would have happened. I thought may be if I spoke to you, and told you how it was——"

"Did Torrini send you?"

"Lord, no! He 's too proud to send to anybody. He 's been so proud since they took off his hand that there has been no doing anything with him. If they was to take off his leg, he would turn into one mass of pride. No, Mr. Shackford, I came of myself."

"Where does Torrini live now?"

"In Mitchell's Alley."

"I will go along with you," said Richard, with a dogged air. It seemed as if the fates were determined to keep him from seeing Margaret that night. Peters reached out a hand to take Richard's leather bag. "No, thank you, I can carry it very well." In a small morocco case in one of the pockets was a heavy plain gold ring for Margaret, and not for anything in the world would Richard have allowed any one else to carry the bag.

After a brisk five minutes' walk the two emerged upon a broad street crossing their path at right angles. All the shops were

closed except Stubbs the provision dealer's and Dundon's drug-store. In the window of the apothecary a great purple jar, with a spray of gas jets behind it, was flaring on the darkness like a Bengal light. Richard stopped at the provision store and made some purchases; a little further on he halted at a fruit stand, kept by an old crone, who had supplemented the feeble flicker of the corner street lamp with a pitch-pine torch, which cast a yellow bloom over her apples and turned them all into oranges. She had real oranges, however, and Richard selected half a dozen, with a confused idea of providing the little Italians with some national fruit, though both children had been born in Stillwater.

Then the pair resumed their way, Peters acting as pioneer. They soon passed beyond the region of sidewalks and curbstones, and began picking their steps through a narrow, humid lane, where the water lay in slimy pools, and the tenement houses on each side blotted out the faint starlight. The night was sultry, and door and casement stood wide, making pits of darkness. Few lights were visible, but a continuous hum of voices issued from the human hives, and now and

then a transient red glow at an upper window showed that some one was smoking a pipe. This was Mitchell's Alley.

The shadows closed behind the two men as they moved forward, and neither was aware of the figure which had been discreetly following them for the last ten minutes. If Richard had suddenly wheeled and gone back a dozen paces, he would have come face to face with the commercial traveller.

Mr. Peters paused in front of one of the tenement houses, and motioned with his thumb over his shoulder for Richard to follow him through a yawning doorway. The hall was as dark as a cave, and full of stale, mouldy odours. Peters shuffled cautiously along the bare boards until he kicked his toe against the first step of the staircase.

"Keep close to the wall, Mr. Shackford, and feel your way up. They 've used the banisters for kindling, and the landlord says he shan't put in any more. I went over here the other night," added Mr. Peters reminiscentially.

After fumbling several seconds for the latch, Mr. Peters pushed open a door, and ushered Richard into a large, gloomy rear

room. A kerosene lamp was burning dimly on the mantel-shelf, over which hung a coarsely-coloured lithograph of the Virgin in a pine frame. Under the picture stood a small black crucifix. There was little furniture,—a cooking-stove, two or three stools, a broken table, and a chest of drawers. On an iron bedstead in the corner lay Torrini, muffled to the chin in a blanket, despite the hot midsummer night. His right arm, as if it were wholly disconnected with his body, rested in a splint on the outside of the covering. As the visitors entered, a tall dusky woman with blurred eyes rose from a low bench at the foot of the bed.

"Is he awake?" asked Peters.

The woman, comprehending the glance which accompanied the words, though not the words themselves, nodded yes.

"Here is Mr. Shackford come to see you, Torrini," Peters said.

The man slowly unclosed his eyes; they were unnaturally brilliant and dilated, and seemed to absorb the rest of his features.

"I didn't want him."

"Let bygones be bygones, Torrini," said Richard, approaching the bedside. "I am sorry about this."

"You are very good; I don't understand. I ask nothing of Slocum; but the signorina comes every day, and I cannot help it. What would you have? I'm a dead man," and he turned away his face.

"It is not so bad as that," said Richard.

Torrini looked up with a ghastly smile. "They have cut off the hand that struck you, Mr. Shackford."

"I suppose it was necessary. I am very sorry. In a little while you will be on your feet again."

"It is too late. They might have saved me by taking the arm, but I would not allow them. I may last three or four days. The doctor says it."

Peters, standing in the shadow, jerked his head affirmatively.

"I do not care for myself," the man continued, "but she and the little ones—— That is what maddens me. They will starve."

"They will not be let starve in Stillwater," said Richard.

Torrini turned his eyes upon him wistfully and doubtfully. "You will help them?"

"Yes, I and others."

"If they could be got to Italy," said

Torrini, after meditating, "it would be well. Her father," giving a side look at the woman, "is a fisherman of Capri." At the word Capri the woman lifted her head quickly. "He is not rich, but he's not poor; he would take her."

"You would wish her sent to Naples?"

"Yes."

"If you do not pull through, she and the children shall go there."

"Brigida!" called Torrini; then he said something rapidly in Italian to the woman, who buried her face in both hands, and did not reply.

"She has no words to thank you. See, she is tired to death, with the children all day and me all night,—these many nights."

"Tell her to go to bed in the other room," said Richard. "There's another room, isn't there? I'll sit with you."

"You?"

"Your wife is fagged out,—that is plain. Send her to bed, and don't talk any more. Peters, I wish you'd run and get a piece of ice somewhere; there's no drinking-water here. Come, now, Torrini, I can't speak Italian. Oh, I don't mind your scowling; I intend to stay."

Torrini slowly unknitted his brows, and an irresolute expression stole across his face; then he called Brigida, and bade her go in with the children. She bowed her head submissively, and fixing her melting eyes on Richard for an instant, passed into the adjoining chamber.

Peters shortly reappeared with the ice, and, after setting a jug of water on the table, departed. Richard turned up the wick of the kerosene lamp, which was sending forth a disagreeable odour, and pinned an old newspaper around the chimney to screen the flame. He had by an odd chance, made his lamp-shade out of a copy of the *Stillwater Gazette* containing the announcement of his cousin's death. Richard gave a quick start as his eye caught the illuminated head-lines,—Mysterious Murder of Lemuel Shackford! Perhaps a slight exclamation escaped Richard's lips at the same time, for Torrini turned and asked what was the matter. "Nothing at all," said Richard, removing the paper, and placing another in its stead. Then he threw open the blinds of the window looking on the back yard, and set his hand-bag against the door to prevent it being blown to by the draught.

Torrini, without altering the rigid position of his head on the pillow, followed every movement with a look of curious insistence, like that of the eyes in a portrait. His preparations completed for the night, Richard seated himself on a stool at the foot of the bed.

The obscurity and stillness of the room had their effect upon the sick man, who presently dropped into a light sleep. Richard sat thinking of Margaret, and began to be troubled because he had neglected to send her word of his detention, which he might have done by Peters. It was now too late. The town clock struck ten in the midst of his self-reproaches. At the first clang of the bell Torrini awoke with a start, and asked for water.

"If anybody comes," he said, glancing in a bewildered, anxious way at the shadows huddled about the door, "you are not to leave me alone with him."

"Him? Whom? Are you expecting any one?"

"No; but who knows? one might come. Then, you are not to go; you are not to leave me a second."

"I 've no thought of it," replied Richard;

"you may rest easy. . . . . He's a trifle light in the head," was Richard's reflection.

After that Torrini dozed rather than slumbered, rousing at brief intervals; and whenever he awoke the feverish activity of his brain incited him to talk,—now of Italy, and now of matters connected with his experiences in this country.

"Naples is a pleasant place!" he broke out in the hush of the midnight, just as Richard was dropping off. "The band plays every afternoon on the Chiaia. And then the *festas*,—every third day a festa. The devil was in my body when I left there and dragged little Brigida into all this misery. We used to walk of an evening along the Marinella,—that's a strip of beach just beyond the Molo Piccolo. You were never in Naples?"

"Not I," said Richard. "Here, wet your lips, and try to go to sleep again."

"No, I can't sleep for thinking. When the signorina came to see me, the other day, her heart was pierced with pity. Like the blessed Madonna's, her bosom bleeds for all! You will let her come to-morrow?"

"Yes, yes! If you will only keep quiet, Margaret shall come."

"Margherita, we say. You are to wed her,—is it not so?"

Richard turned down the wick of the lamp, which was blazing and spluttering, and did not answer. Then Torrini lay silent a long while, apparently listening to the hum of the telegraph wires attached to one end of the roof. At odd intervals the freshening breeze swept these wires, and awoke a low æolian murmur. The moon rose in the meantime, and painted on the uncarpeted floor the shape of the cherry bough that stretched across the window. It was two o'clock; Richard sat with his head bent forward, in a drowse.

"Now the cousin is dead, you are as rich as a prince,—are you not?" inquired Torrini, who had lain for the last half-hour with his eyes wide open in the moonlight.

Richard straightened himself with a jerk.

"Torrini, I positively forbid you to talk any more!"

"I remember you said that one day, somewhere. Where was it? Ah, in the yard! 'You can't be allowed to speak here, you know.' And then I struck at you,—with that hand they've taken away! See how I remember it!"

"Why do you bother your mind with such things? Think of just nothing at all, and rest. Perhaps a wet cloth on your forehead will refresh you. I wish you had a little of my genius for not keeping awake."

"You are tired, you?"

"I have had two broken nights, travelling."

"And I give you no peace?"

"Well, no," returned Richard bluntly, hoping the admission would induce Torrini to tranquillise himself, "you don't give me much."

"Has any one been here?" demanded Torrini abruptly.

"Not a soul. Good Heaven, man, do you know what time it is?"

"I know,—I know. It's very late. I ought to keep quiet; but, the devil! with this fever in my brain! . . . . Mr. Shackford!" and Torrini, in spite of his imprisoned limb, suddenly half raised himself from the mattress. "I—I——"

Richard sprang to his feet. "What is it?—what do you want?"

"Nothing," said Torrini, falling back on the pillow.

Richard brought him a glass of water,

which he refused. He lay motionless, with his eyes shut, as if composing himself, and Richard returned on tiptoe to his bench. A moment or two afterwards Torrini stirred the blanket with his foot.

"Mr. Shackford!"

"Well?"

"I am as grateful—as a dog."

Torrini did not speak again. This expression of his gratitude appeared to ease him. His respiration grew lighter and more regular, and by and by he fell into a profound sleep. Richard watched a while expectantly, with his head resting against the rail of the bedstead; then his eyelids drooped, and he too slumbered. But once or twice, before he quite lost himself, he was conscious of Brigida's thin face thrust like a silver wedge through the half-open door of the hall bedroom. It was the last thing he remembered,—that sharp, pale face peering out from the blackness of the inner chamber just as his grasp loosened on the world and he drifted off on the tide of a dream. A narrow white hand, like a child's, seemed to be laid against his breast. It was not Margaret's hand, and yet it was hers. No, it was the plaster model he had made that idle

summer afternoon, years and years before he had ever thought of loving her. Strange for it to be there! Then Richard began wondering how the gold ring would look on the slender forefinger. He unfastened the leather bag and took out the ring. He was vainly trying to pass it over the first joint of the dead white finger, when the cast slipped from his hold and fell with a crash to the floor. Richard gave a shudder, and opened his eyes. Brigida was noiselessly approaching Torrini's bedside. Torrini still slept. It was broad day. Through the uncurtained window Richard saw the blue sky barred with crimson.

XXIV.

"RICHARD did come home last night, after all," said Mr. Slocum, with a flustered air, seating himself at the breakfast-table.

Margaret looked up quickly.

"I just met Peters on the street, and he told me," added Mr. Slocum.

"Richard returned last night, and did not come to us!"

"It seems that he watched with Torrini, —the man is going to die."

"Oh," said Margaret, cooling instantly. "That was like Richard; he never thinks of himself first. I would not have had him do differently. Last evening you were filled with I don't know what horrible suspicions, yet see how simply everything explains itself."

"If I could speak candidly, Margaret, if I could express myself without putting you in-

to a passion, I would tell you that Richard's passing the night with that man has given me two or three ugly ideas."

"Positively, papa, you are worse than Mr. Taggett."

"I shall not say another word," replied Mr. Slocum. Then he unfolded the newspaper lying beside him, and constructed a barrier against further colloquy.

An hour afterwards, when Richard threw open the door of his private workshop, Margaret was standing in the middle of the room waiting for him. She turned with a little cry of pleasure, and allowed Richard to take her in his arms, and kept to the spirit and the letter of the promise she had made to herself. If there was an unwonted gravity in Margaret's manner, young Shackford was not keen enough to perceive it. All that morning, wherever he went, he carried with him a sense of Margaret's face resting for a moment against his shoulder, and the happiness of it rendered him wholly oblivious to the constrained and chilly demeanour of her father when they met. The interview was purposely cut short by Mr. Slocum, who avoided Richard the rest of the day with a persistency that must have

ended in forcing itself upon his notice, had he not been so engrossed by the work which had accumulated during his absence.

Mr. Slocum had let the correspondence go to the winds, and a formidable collection of unanswered letters lay on Shackford's desk. The forenoon was consumed in reducing the pile and settling the questions that had risen in the shops, for Mr. Slocum had neglected everything. Richard was speedily advised of Blake's dismissal from the yard, but, not knowing what explanation had been offered, was unable to satisfy Stevens's curiosity on the subject. "I must see Slocum about that at once," reflected Richard; but the opportunity did not occur, and he was too much pressed to make a special business of it.

Mr. Slocum, meanwhile, was in a wretched state of suspense and apprehension. Justice Beemis's clerk had served some sort of legal paper—presumably a subpœna—on Richard, who had coolly read it in the yard under the gaze of all, and given no sign of discomposure beyond a momentary lifting of the eyebrows. Then he had carelessly thrust the paper into one of his pockets and continued his directions to the men. Clearly

he had as yet no suspicion of the mine that was ready to be sprung under his feet.

Shortly after this little incident, which Mr. Slocum had witnessed from the window of the counting-room, Richard spoke a word or two to Stevens, and quitted the yard. Mr. Slocum dropped into the carving department.

"Where is Mr. Shackford, Stevens?"

"He has gone to Mitchell's Alley, sir. Said he'd be away an hour. Am I to say he was wanted?"

"No," replied Mr. Slocum hastily; "any time will do. You needn't mention that I inquired for him," and Mr. Slocum returned to the counting-room.

Before the hour expired he again distinguished Richard's voice in the workshops, and the cheery tone of it was a positive affront to Mr. Slocum. Looking back to the week prior to the tragedy in Welch's Court, he recollected Richard's unaccountable dejection; he had had the air of a person meditating some momentous step,—the pallor, the set face, and the introspective eye. Then came the murder, and Richard's complete prostration. Mr. Slocum in his own excitement had noted it superficially at the

time, but now he recalled the young man's inordinate sorrow, and it seemed rather like remorse. Was his present immobile serenity the natural expression of an untroubled conscience, or the manner of a man whose heart had suddenly ossified, and was no longer capable of throbbing with its guilt? Richard Shackford was rapidly becoming an awful problem to Mr. Slocum.

Since the death of his cousin, Richard had not been so much like his former self. He appeared to have taken up his cheerfulness at the point where he had dropped it three weeks before. If there were any weight resting on his mind, he bore it lightly, with a kind of careless defiance.

In his visit that forenoon to Mitchell's Alley he had arranged for Mrs. Morganson, his cousin's old housekeeper, to watch with Torrini the ensuing night. This left Richard at liberty to spend the evening with Margaret, and finish his correspondence. Directly after tea he repaired to the studio, and, lighting the German student-lamp, fell to work on the letters. Margaret came in shortly with a magazine, and seated herself near the round table at which he was writing. She had dreaded this even-

ing; it could scarcely pass without some mention of Mr. Taggett, and she had resolved not to speak of him. If Richard questioned her, it would be very distressing. How could she tell Richard that Mr. Taggett accused him of the murder of his cousin, and that her own father half believed the accusation? No, she could never acknowledge that.

For nearly an hour the silence of the room was interrupted only by the scratching of Richard's pen and the rustling of the magazine as Margaret turned the leaf. Now and then he looked up and caught her eye, and smiled, and went on with his task. It was a veritable return of the old times; Margaret became absorbed in the story she was reading, and forgot her uneasiness. Her left hand rested on the pile of answered letters, to which Richard added one at intervals, she mechanically lifting her palm and replacing it on the fresh manuscript. Presently Richard observed this movement and smiled in secret at the slim white hand unconsciously making a paper-weight of itself. He regarded it covertly for a moment, and then his disastrous dream occurred to him. There should be no mistake this time. He

drew the small morocco case from his pocket, and leaning across the table slipped the ring on Margaret's finger.

Margaret gave a bewildered start, and then, seeing what Richard had done, held out her hand to him with a gracious, impetuous little gesture.

"I meant to give it you this morning," he said, pressing his lip to the ring, "but the daylight did not seem fine enough for it."

"I thought you had forgotten," said Margaret, slowly turning the band on her finger.

"The first thing I did in New York was to go to a jeweller's for this ring, and since then I have guarded it day and night as dragonishly as if it had been the Koh-i-noor diamond, or some inestimable gem which hundreds of envious persons were lying in wait to wrest from me. Walking the streets with this trinket in my possession, I have actually had a sense of personal insecurity. I seemed to invite general assault. That was being very sentimental, was it not?"

"Yes, perhaps."

"That small piece of gold meant so much to me."

"And to me," said Margaret. "Have you finished your letters?"

"Not yet. I shall be through in ten minutes, and then we 'll have the evening to ourselves."

Richard hurriedly resumed his writing, and Margaret turned to her novel again ; but the interest had faded out of it ; the figures had grown threadbare and indistinct, like the figures in a piece of old tapestry, and after a moment or two the magazine glided with an unnoticed flutter into the girl's lap. She sat absently twirling the gold loop on her finger.

Richard added the address to the final envelope, dried it with the blotter, and abruptly shut down the lid of the inkstand with an air of as great satisfaction as if he had been the fisherman in the Arabian story corking up the wicked afrite. With his finger still pressing the leaden cover, as though he were afraid the imp of toil would get out again, he was suddenly impressed by the fact that he had seen very little of Mr. Slocum that day.

"I have hardly spoken to him," he reflected. "Where is your father, to-night?"

"He has a headache," said Margaret. "He went to his room immediately after supper."

"It is nothing serious, of course."

"I fancy not; papa is easily excited, and he has had a great deal to trouble him lately, —the strike, and all that."

"I wonder if Taggett has been bothering him."

"I dare say Mr. Taggett has bothered him."

"You knew of his being in the yard?"

"Not while he was here. Papa told me yesterday. I think Mr. Taggett was scarcely the person to render much assistance."

"Then he has found out nothing whatever?"

"Nothing important."

"But anything? Trifles are of importance in a matter like this. Your father never wrote me a word about Taggett."

"Mr. Taggett has made a failure of it, Richard."

"If nothing new has transpired, then I do not understand the summons I received to-day."

"A summons!"

"I've the paper somewhere. No, it is in the pocket of my other coat. I take it there is to be a consultation of some kind at Justice Beemis's office to-morrow."

"I am very glad," said Margaret, with

her face brightening. To-morrow would lift the cloud which had spread itself over them all, and was pressing down so heavily on one unconscious head. To-morrow Richard's innocence should shine forth and confound Mr. Taggett. A vague bitterness rose in Margaret's heart as she thought of her father. "Let us talk of something else," she said, brusquely breaking her pause; "let us talk of something pleasant."

"Of ourselves, then," suggested Richard, banishing the shadow which had gathered in his eyes at his first mention of Mr. Taggett's name.

"Of ourselves," repeated Margaret gaily.

"Then you must give me your hand," stipulated Richard, drawing his chair closer to hers.

"There!" said Margaret.

While this was passing, Mr. Slocum, in the solitude of his chamber, was vainly attempting to solve the question whether he had not disregarded all the dictates of duty and common-sense in allowing Margaret to spend the evening alone with Richard Shackford. Mr. Slocum saw one thing with painful distinctness—that he could not help himself.

XXV.

THE next morning Mr. Slocum did not make his appearance in the marble yard. His half-simulated indisposition of the previous night had turned into a genuine headache, of which he perhaps willingly availed himself to remain in his room, for he had no desire to see Richard Shackford that day.

It was an hour before noon. Up to that moment Richard had been engaged in reading and replying to the letters received by the morning's mail, a duty which usually fell to Mr. Slocum. As Richard stepped from the office into the yard a small boy thrust a note into his hand, and then stood off a short distance tranquilly boring with one toe in the loose gravel, and apparently waiting for an answer. Shackford hastily ran his eye over the paper, and turning towards the boy said, a little impatiently—

"Tell him I will come at once."

There was another person in Stillwater that forenoon whose agitation was scarcely less than Mr. Slocum's, though it greatly differed from it in quality. Mr. Slocum was alive to his finger-tips with dismay; Lawyer Perkins was boiling over with indignation. It was a complex indignation, in which astonishment and incredulity were nicely blended with a cordial detestation of Mr. Taggett and vague promptings to inflict some physical injury on Justice Beemis. That he, Melanchthon Perkins, the confidential legal adviser and personal friend of the late Lemuel Shackford, should have been kept for two weeks in profound ignorance of proceedings so nearly touching his lamented client! The explosion of the old lawyer's wrath was so unexpected that Justice Beemis, who had dropped in to make the disclosures and talk the matter over informally, clutched at his broad-brimmed Panama hat and precipitately retreated from the office. Mr. Perkins walked up and down the worn green drugget of his private room for half an hour afterwards, collecting himself, and then despatched a hurried note to Richard Shack-

ford, requesting an instant interview with him, at his, Lawyer Perkins's, chambers.

When, some ten minutes subsequently, Richard entered the low-studded square room, darkened with faded moreen curtains and filled with a stale odour of law-calf, Mr. Perkins was seated at his desk and engaged in transferring certain imposing red-sealed documents to a green baize satchel which he held between his knees. He had regained his equanimity; his features wore their usual expression of judicial severity; nothing denoted his recent discomposure, except perhaps an additional wantonness in the stringy black hair falling over the high forehead,—that pallid high forehead which always wore the look of being covered with cold perspiration.

"Mr. Shackford," said Lawyer Perkins, suspending his operations a second, as he saluted the young man, "I suppose I have done an irregular thing in sending for you, but I did not see any other course open to me. I have been your cousin's attorney for over twenty-five years, and I've a great regard for you personally. That must justify the step I am taking."

"The regard is mutual, I am sure," re-

turned Richard, rather surprised by this friendly overture, for his acquaintance with the lawyer had been of the slightest, though it had extended over many years. "My cousin had very few old friends, and I earnestly desire to have them mine. If I were in any trouble, there is no one to whom I would come so unhesitatingly as to you."

"But you are in trouble."

"Yes, my cousin's death was very distressing."

"I do not mean that." Mr. Perkins paused a full moment. "The district attorney has suddenly taken a deep interest in the case, and there is to be a rigorous overhauling of the facts. I am afraid it is going to be very unpleasant for you, Mr. Shackford."

"How could it be otherwise?" asked Richard tranquilly.

Lawyer Perkins fixed his black eyes on him. Then you fully understand the situation, and can explain everything?"

"I wish I could. Unfortunately I can explain nothing. I don't clearly see why I have been summoned to attend as a witness at the investigation to be held to-day in Justice Beemis's office."

"You are unacquainted with any special reason why your testimony is wanted?"

"I cannot conceive why it should be required. I gave my evidence at the time of the inquest, and have nothing to add to it. Strictly speaking, I have had of late years no relations with my cousin. During the last eighteen months we have spoken together but once."

"Have you had any conversation on this subject with Mr. Slocum since your return from New York?"

"No, I have had no opportunity. I was busy all day yesterday; he was ill in the evening, and is still confined to his room."

Mr. Perkins was manifestly embarrassed.

"That is unfortunate," he said, laying the bag on the desk. "I wish you had talked with Mr. Slocum. Of course you were taken into the secret of Taggett's presence in the marble yard?"

"Oh yes; that was all arranged before I left home."

"You don't know the results of that manœuvre?"

"There were no results."

"On the contrary, Taggett claims to have made very important discoveries."

"Indeed! Why was I not told!"

"I can't quite comprehend Mr. Slocum's silence."

"What has Taggett discovered?"

"Several things, upon which he builds the gravest suspicions."

"Against whom?"

"Against you."

"Against me!" cried Richard, recoiling. The action was one altogether of natural amazement, and convinced Mr. Perkins, who had keenly watched the effect of his announcement, that young Shackford was being very hardly used.

Justice Beemis had given Mr. Perkins only a brief outline of the facts, and had barely touched on details when the old lawyer's anger had put an end to the conversation. His disgust at having been left out in the cold, though he was in no professional way concerned in the task of discovering the murderer of Lemuel Shackford, had caused Lawyer Perkins instantly to repudiate Mr. Taggett's action. "Taggett is a low, intriguing fellow," he had said to Justice Beemis; "Taggett is a fraud." Young Shackford's ingenuous manner now confirmed Mr. Perkins in that belief.

Richard recovered himself in a second or two. "Why did not Mr. Slocum mention these suspicions to me?" he demanded.

"Perhaps he found it difficult to do so."

"Why should he find it difficult?"

"Suppose he believed them.'

"But he could not believe them, whatever they are."

"Well, then, suppose he was not at liberty to speak."

"It seems that you are, Mr. Perkins, and you owe it to me to be explicit. What does Taggett suspect?"

Lawyer Perkins brooded a while before replying. His practice was of a miscellaneous sort, confined in the main to what is technically termed office practice. Though he was frequently engaged in small cases of assault and battery, — he could scarcely escape that in Stillwater,—he had never conducted an important criminal case; but when Lawyer Perkins looked up from his brief reverie, he had fully resolved to undertake the defence of Richard Shackford.

"I will tell you what Taggett suspects," he said slowly, "if you will allow me to tell you in my own way. I must ask you a number of questions."

Richard gave a half-impatient nod of assent.

"Where were you on the night of the murder?" inquired Lawyer Perkins, after a slight pause.

"I spent the evening at the Slocums', until ten o'clock; then I went home,—but not directly. It was moonlight, and I walked about, perhaps for an hour."

"Did you meet any one?"

"Not that I recollect. I walked out of town, on the turnpike."

"When you returned to your boarding-house, did you meet any one?"

"No, I let myself in with a pass-key. The family had retired, with the exception of Mr. Pinkham."

"Then you saw him?"

"No, but I heard him; he was playing on the flute at his chamber window, or near it. He always plays on the flute when he can't sleep."

"What o'clock was that?"

"It must have been after eleven."

"Your stroll was confined to the end of the town most remote from Welch's Court?"

"Yes, I just cruised around on the outskirts."

"I wish you had spoken with somebody that night."

"The streets were deserted. I wasn't likely to meet persons on the turnpike."

"However, some one may have seen you without your knowing it?"

"Yes," said Richard curtly. He was growing restive under these interrogations, the drift of which was plain enough to be disagreeable. Moreover, Mr. Perkins had insensibly assumed the tone and air of a counsel cross-examining a witness on the other side. This nocturnal cruise, whose direction and duration were known only to young Shackford, struck Lawyer Perkins unpleasantly. He meditated a moment before putting the next question.

"Were you on good terms—I mean fairly good terms—with your cousin?'

"No," said Richard; "but the fault was not mine. He never liked me. As a child I annoyed him, I suppose, and when I grew up I offended him by running away to sea. My mortal offence, however, was accepting a situation in Slocum's Yard. I have been in my cousin's house only twice in three years."

"When was the last time?"

"A day or two previous to the strike."

"As you were not in the habit of visiting the house, you must have had some purpose in going there. What was the occasion?"

Richard hung his head thoughtfully. "I went there to talk over family matters,—to inform him of my intended marriage with Margaret Slocum. I wanted his good-will and support. Mr. Slocum had offered to take me into the business. I thought that perhaps my cousin Lemuel, seeing how prosperous I was, would be more friendly to me."

"Did you wish him to lend you capital?"

"I didn't expect or wish him to; but there was some question of that."

'And he refused?"

"Rather brutally, if I may say so now."

"Was there a quarrel?"

Richard hesitated.

"Of course I don't press you," said Mr. Perkins, with some stiffness. "You are not on the witness-stand."

"I began to think I was—in the prisoner's dock," answered Richard, smiling ruefully. "However, I have nothing to conceal. I

hesitated to reply to you because it was painful for me to reflect that the last time I saw my cousin we parted in anger. He charged me with attempting to overreach him, and I left the house in indignation."

"That was the last time you saw him?"

"The last time I saw him alive."

"Was there any communication between you two after that?"

"No."

"None whatever?"

"None."

"Are you quite positive?"

"As positive as I can be that I live and have my senses."

Lawyer Perkins pulled a black strand of hair over his forehead, and remained silent for nearly a minute.

"Mr. Shackford, are you sure that your cousin did not write a note to you on the Monday preceding the night of his death?"

"He may have written a dozen, for all I know. I only know that I never received a note or a letter from him in the whole course of my life."

"Then how do you account for the letter

which has been found in your rooms in Lime Street,—a letter addressed to you by Lemuel Shackford, and requesting you to call at his house on that fatal Tuesday night?"

"I—I know nothing about it," stammered Richard. "There is no such paper!"

"It was in this office less than one hour ago," said Lawyer Perkins sternly. "It was brought here for me to identify Lemuel Shackford's handwriting. Justice Beemis has that paper!"

"Justice Beemis has it!" exclaimed Richard.

"I have nothing more to say," observed Lawyer Perkins, reaching out his hand towards the green bag, as a sign that the interview was ended. "There were other points I wished to have some light thrown on; but I have gone far enough to see that it is useless."

"What more is there?" demanded Richard in a voice that seemed to come through a fog. "I insist on knowing! You suspect me of my cousin's murder?"

"Mr. Taggett does."

"And you?"

"I am speaking of Mr. Taggett."

"Well, go on, speak of him," said

Richard desperately. "What else has he discovered?"

Mr. Perkins wheeled his chair round until he faced the young man.

"He has discovered in your workshop a chisel with a peculiar break in the edge,—a deep notch in the middle of the bevel. With that chisel Lemuel Shackford was killed.'

Richard gave a perceptible start, and put his hand to his head, as if a sudden confused memory had set the temples throbbing.

"A full box of safety matches," continued Mr. Perkins, in a cold, measured voice, as though he were demonstrating a mathematical problem, "contains one hundred matches. Mr. Taggett has discovered a box that contains only ninety-nine. The missing match was used that night in Welch's Court."

Richard stared at him blankly. "What can I say?" he gasped.

"Say nothing to me," returned Lawyer Perkins, hastily thrusting a handful of loose papers into the open throat of the green bag, which he garrotted an instant afterwards with a thick black cord. Then he rose flurriedly from the chair. "I shall have to

leave you," he said; "I've an appointment at the surrogate's."

And Lawyer Perkins passed stiffly from the apartment.

Richard lingered a moment alone in the room with his chin resting on his breast.

XXVI.

THERE was a fire in Richard's temples as he reeled out of Lawyer Perkins's office. It was now twelve o'clock, and the streets were thronged with the motley population disgorged by the various mills and workshops. Richard felt that every eye was upon him; he was conscious of something wild in his aspect that must needs attract the attention of the passers-by. At each step he half expected the levelling of some accusing finger. The pitiless sunshine seemed to single him out and stream upon him like a calcium light. It was intolerable. He must get away from this jostling crowd, this babel of voices. What should he do, where should he go? To return to the yard and face the workmen was not to be thought of; if he went to his lodgings he would be called to dinner, and have to listen to the inane prattle of

the schoolmaster. That would be even more intolerable than this garish daylight, and these careless squads of men and women who paused in the midst of their laugh to turn and stare. Was there no spot in Stillwater where a broken man could hide himself long enough to collect his senses?

With his hands thrust convulsively into the pockets of his sack-coat, Richard turned down a narrow passage-way fringing the rear of some warehouses. As he hurried along aimlessly his fingers encountered something in one of his pockets. It was the key of a new lock which had been put on the scullery door of the house in Welch's Court. Richard's heart gave a quick throb. There at least was a temporary refuge; he would go there and wait until it was time for him to surrender himself to the officers.

It appeared to Richard that he was nearly a year reaching the little back yard of the lonely house. He slipped into the scullery and locked the door, wondering if his movements had been observed since he quitted the main street. Here he drew a long breath and looked around him; then he began wandering restlessly through the rooms, of

which there were five or six on the ground-floor. The furniture, the carpets, and all the sordid fixtures of the house were just as Richard had known them in his childhood. Everything was unchanged, even to the faded peacock-feather stuck over the parlour looking-glass. As he regarded the familiar objects and breathed the snuffy atmosphere peculiar to the place, the past rose so vividly before him that he would scarcely have been startled if a lean, grey old man had suddenly appeared in one of the doorways. On a peg in the front hall hung his cousin's napless beaver hat, satirically ready to be put on; in the kitchen closet a pair of ancient shoes, worn down at the heel and with taps on the toe, had all the air of intending to step forth. The shoes had been carefully blacked, but a thin skin of mould had gathered over them. They looked like Lemuel Shackford. They had taken a position habitual with him. Richard was struck by the subtle irony which lay in these inanimate things. That a man's hat should outlast the man, and have a jaunty expression of triumph! That a dead man's shoes should mimic him!

The tall eight-day clock on the landing

had run down. It had stopped at twelve, and it now stood with solemnly uplifted finger, as if imposing silence on those small, unconsidered noises which commonly creep out, like mice, only at midnight. The house was full of such stealthy sounds. The stairs creaked at intervals, mysteriously, as if under the weight of some heavy person ascending. Now and then the woodwork stretched itself with a snap, as though it had grown stiff in the joints with remaining so long in one position. At times there were muffled reverberations of footfalls on the flooring overhead. Richard had a curious consciousness of not being alone, but of moving in the midst of an invisible throng of persons who elbowed him softly and breathed in his face, and vaguely impressed themselves upon him as being former occupants of the premises. This populous solitude, this silence with its busy interruptions, grew insupportable as he passed from room to room.

One chamber he did not enter,—the chamber in which his cousin's body was found that Wednesday morning. In Richard's imagination it was still lying there, white and piteous, by the hearth. He

paused at the threshold and glanced in; then turned abruptly and mounted the staircase.

On gaining his old apartment in the gable, Richard seated himself on the edge of the cot-bed. His shoulders sagged down and a stupefied expression settled upon his face, but his brain was in a tumult. His own identity was become a matter of doubt to him. Was he the same Richard Shackford who had found life so sweet when he awoke that morning? It must have been some other person who had sat by a window in the sunrise thinking of Margaret Slocum's love,—some Richard Shackford with unstained hands! This one was accused of murdering his kinsman; the weapon with which he had done it, the very match he had used to light him in the deed, were known! The victim himself had written out the accusation in black and white. Richard's brain reeled as he tried to fix his thought on Lemuel Shackford's letter. That letter!—where had it been all this while, and how did it come into Taggett's possession? Only one thing was clear to Richard in his inextricable confusion,—he was not going to be able to prove his innocence; he

was a doomed man, and within the hour his shame would be published to the world. Rowland Slocum and Lawyer Perkins had already condemned him, and Margaret would condemn him when she knew all; for it was evident that up to last evening she had not been told. How did it happen that these overwhelming proofs had rolled themselves up against him? What malign influences were these at work, hurrying him on to destruction, and not leaving a single loophole of escape? Who would believe the story of his innocent ramble on the turnpike that Tuesday night? Who could doubt that he had gone directly from the Slocums' to Welch's Court, and then crept home red-handed through the deserted streets?

Richard heard the steam-whistles recalling the operatives to work, and dimly understood it was one o'clock; but after that he paid no attention to the lapse of time. It was an hour later, perhaps two hours,—Richard could not tell,—when he roused himself from his stupor, and descending the stairs passed through the kitchen into the scullery. There he halted and leaned against the sink, irresolute, as though his purpose, if he had had a purpose, were escap-

ing him. He stood with his eyes resting listlessly on a barrel in the further corner of the apartment. It was a heavy-hooped wine-cask, in which Lemuel Shackford had been wont to keep his winter's supply of salted meat. Suddenly Richard started forward with an inarticulate cry, and at the same instant there came a loud knocking at the door behind him. The sound reverberated through the empty house, filling the place with awful echoes,—like those knocks at the gate of Macbeth's castle the night of Duncan's murder. Richard stood petrified for a second; then he hastily turned the key in the lock, and Mr. Taggett stepped into the scullery.

The two men exchanged swift glances. The bewildered air of a moment before had passed from Richard; the dulness had faded out of his eyes, leaving them the clear, alert, expression they ordinarily wore. He was self-possessed, but the effort his self-possession cost him was obvious. There was a something in his face—a dilation of the nostril, a curve of the under lip—which put Mr. Taggett very much on his guard. Mr. Taggett was the first to speak.

"I've a disagreeable mission here," he

said slowly, with his hand remaining on the latch of the door, which he had closed on entering. "I have a warrant for your arrest, Mr. Shackford."

"Stop a moment!" said Richard, with a glow in his eyes. "I have something to say."

"I advise you not to make any statement."

"I understand my position perfectly, Mr. Taggett, and I shall disregard the advice. After you have answered me one or two questions, I shall be quite at your service."

"If you insist, then."

"You were present at the examination of Thomas Blufton and William Durgin, were you not?"

"I was."

"You recollect William Durgin's testimony?"

"Most distinctly."

"He stated that the stains on his clothes were from a certain barrel, the head of which had been freshly painted red."

"I remember."

"Mr. Taggett, *the head of that barrel was painted blue!*"

XXVII.

MR. TAGGETT, in spite of the excellent subjection under which he held his nerves, caught his breath at these words, and a transient pallor overspread his face as he followed the pointing of Richard's finger. If William Durgin had testified falsely on that point, if he had swerved a hair's-breadth from the truth in that matter, then there was but one conclusion to be drawn from his perjury. A flash of lightning is not swifter than was Mr. Taggett's thought in grasping the situation. In an instant he saw all his carefully articulated case fall to pieces on his hands. Richard crossed the narrow room, and stood in front of him.

"Mr. Taggett, do you know why William Durgin lied? He lied because it was life or death with him! In a moment of confusion he had committed one of those simple, fatal blunders which men in his circumstances

always commit. He had obliterated the spots on his clothes with red paint, when he ought to have used blue!"

"That is a very grave supposition."

"It is not a supposition," cried Richard. "The daylight is not a plainer fact."

"You are assuming too much, Mr. Shackford."

"I am assuming nothing. Durgin has convicted himself; he has fallen into a trap of his own devising. I charge him with the murder of Lemuel Shackford; I charge him with taking the chisel and the matches from my workshop, to which he had free access; and I charge him with replacing those articles in order to divert suspicion upon me. My unfortunate relations with my cousin gave colour to this suspicion. The plan was an adroit plan, and has succeeded, it seems."

Mr. Taggett did not reply at once, and then very coldly: "You will pardon me for suggesting it, but it will be necessary to ascertain if this is the cask which Durgin hooped, and also if the head has not been repainted since."

"I understand what your doubt implies. It is your duty to assure yourself of these

facts, and nothing can be easier. The person who packed the meat—it was probably a provision-dealer named Stubbs—will of course be able to recognise his own work. The other question you can settle with a scratch of your penknife. You see. There has been only one thin coat of paint laid on,—the grain of the wood is nearly distinguishable through it. The head is evidently new; but the cask itself is an old one. It has stood here these ten years."

Mr. Taggett bent a penetrating look on Richard. "Why did you refuse to answer the subpœna, Mr. Shackford?"

"But I haven't refused. I was on my way to Justice Beemis's when you knocked. Perhaps I am a trifle late," added Richard, catching Mr. Taggett's distrustful glance.

"The summons said two o'clock," remarked Mr. Taggett, pressing the spring of his watch. "It is now after three."

"After three!"

"How could you neglect it,—with evidence of such presumable importance in your hands?"

"It was only a moment ago that I discovered this. I had come here from Mr. Perkins's office. Mr. Perkins had informed

me of the horrible charge which was to be laid at my door. The intelligence fell upon me like a thunder-clap. I think it unsettled my reason for a while. I was unable to put two ideas together. At first he didn't believe I had killed my cousin, and presently he seemed to believe it. When I got out in the street the sidewalk lurched under my feet like the deck of a ship; everything swam before me. I don't know how I managed to reach this house, and I don't know how long I had been sitting in a room upstairs when the recollection of the subpœna occurred to me. I was standing here dazed with despair; I saw that I was somehow caught in the toils, and that it was going to be impossible to prove my innocence. If another man had been in my position, I should have believed him guilty. I stood looking at the cask in the corner there, scarcely conscious of it; then I noticed the blue paint on the head, and then William Durgin's testimony flashed across my mind. Where is he?" cried Richard, turning swiftly. "That man should be arrested!"

"I am afraid he is gone," said Mr. Taggett, biting his lip.

"Do you mean he has fled?"

"If you are correct—he has fled. He failed to answer the summons to-day, and the constable sent to look him up has been unable to find him. Durgin was in the bar-room of the tavern at eight o'clock last night; he has not been seen since."

"He was not in the yard this morning. You have let him slip through your fingers!"

"So it appears, for the moment."

"You still doubt me, Mr. Taggett?"

"I don't let persons slip through my fingers."

Richard curbed an impatient rejoinder, and said quietly, "William Durgin had an accomplice."

Mr. Taggett flushed, as if Richard had read his secret thought. Durgin's flight, if he really had fled, had suggested a fresh possibility to Mr. Taggett. What if Durgin were merely the pliant instrument of the cleverer man who was now using him as a shield? This reflection was precisely in Mr. Taggett's line. In absconding Durgin had not only secured his own personal safety, but had exonerated his accomplice. It was a desperate step to take, but it was a skilful one.

"He had an accomplice?" repeated Mr. Taggett, after a moment. "Who was it?"

"Torrini!"

"The man who was hurt the other day?"

"Yes."

"You have grounds for your assertion?"

"He and Durgin were intimate, and have been much together lately. I sat up with Torrini the night before last; he acted and talked very strangely; the man was out of his head part of the time, but now, as I think it over, I am convinced that he had this matter on his mind, and was hinting at it. I believe he would have made disclosures if I had urged him a little. He was evidently in great dread of a visit from some person, and that person was Durgin. Torrini ought to be questioned without delay; he is very low, and may die at any moment. He is lying in a house at the further end of the town. If it is not imperative that I should report myself to Justice Beemis, we had better go there at once."

Mr. Taggett, who had been standing with his head half bowed, lifted it quickly as he asked the question, "Why did you withhold Lemuel Shackford's letter?"

"It was never in my possession Mr.

Taggett," said Richard, starting. "That paper is something I cannot explain at present. I can hardly believe in its existence, though Mr. Perkins declares that he has had it in his hands, and it would be impossible for him to make a mistake in my cousin's writing."

"The letter was found in your lodgings."

"So I was told. I don't understand it."

"That explanation will not satisfy the prosecuting attorney."

"I have only one theory about it," said Richard slowly.

"What is that?"

"I prefer not to state it now. I wish to stop at my boarding-house on the way to Torrini's; it will not be out of our course."

Mr. Taggett gave silent acquiescence to this. Richard opened the scullery door, and the two passed into the court. Neither spoke until they reached Lime Street. Mrs. Spooner herself answered Richard's ring, for he had purposely dispensed with the use of his pass-key.

"I wanted to see you a moment, Mrs. Spooner," said Richard, making no motion to enter the hall. "Thanks, we will not come in. I merely desire to ask you a

question. Were you at home all day on that Monday immediately preceding my cousin's death?"

"No," replied Mrs. Spooner wonderingly, with her hand still resting on the knob. "I wasn't at home at all. I spent the day and part of the night with my daughter Maria Ann at South Millville. It was a boy," added Mrs. Spooner, quite irrelevantly, smoothing her ample apron with the disengaged hand.

"Then Janet was at home," said Richard. "Call Janet."

A trim, intelligent-looking Nova Scotia girl was summoned from the basement kitchen.

"Janet," said Richard, "do you remember the day, about three weeks ago, that Mrs. Spooner was absent at South Millville?"

"Yes," replied the girl, without hesitation. "It was the day before——" and then she stopped.

"Exactly; it was the day before my cousin was killed. Now I want you to recollect whether any letter or note or written message of any description was left for me at this house on that day."

Janet reflected. "I think there was, Mr. Richard,—a bit of paper like."

Mr. Taggett riveted his eyes on the girl.

"Who brought that paper?" demanded Richard.

"It was one of the Murphy boys, I think."

"Did you hand it to me?"

"No, Mr. Richard, you had gone out. It was just after breakfast."

"You gave it to me when I came home to dinner, then?"

"No," returned Janet, becoming confused with a dim perception that something had gone wrong and she was committing herself.

"I remember, I didn't come home. I dined at the Slocums'. What did you do with that paper?"

"I put it on the table in your room upstairs."

Mr. Taggett's eyes gleamed a little at this.

"And that is all you can say about it?" inquired Richard, with a fallen countenance.

Janet reflected. She reflected a long while this time. "No, Mr. Richard: an hour or so afterwards, when I went up to do the chamber-work, I saw that the wind had blown the paper off the table. I picked

up the note and put it back; but the wind blew it off again."

"What then?"

"Then I shut up the note in one of the big books, meaning to tell you of it, and—and I forgot it! O Mr. Richard, have I done something dreadful?"

"Dreadful!" cried Richard. "Janet, I could hug you!"

"O Mr. Richard," said Janet with a little coquettish movement natural to every feminine thing, bird, flower, or human being, "you 've always such a pleasant way with you."

Then there was a moment of dead silence. Mrs. Spooner saw that the matter, whatever it was, was settled.

"You needn't wait, Janet!" she said, with a severe, mystified air.

"We are greatly obliged to you, Mrs. Spooner, not to mention Janet," said Richard; "and if Mr. Taggett has no questions to ask we will not detain you."

Mrs. Spooner turned her small amiable orbs on Richard's companion. That silent little man Mr. Taggett! "He doesn't look like much," was the landlady's unuttered reflection; and indeed he did not present

a spirited appearance. Nevertheless Mrs. Spooner followed him down the street with her curious gaze until he and Richard passed out of sight.

Neither Richard nor Mr. Taggett was disposed to converse as they wended their way to Mitchell's Alley. Richard's ire was slowly kindling at the shameful light in which he had been placed by Mr. Taggett, and Mr. Taggett was striving with only partial success to reconcile himself to the idea of young Shackford's innocence. Young Shackford's innocence was a very awkward thing for Mr. Taggett, for he had irretrievably committed himself at head-quarters. With Richard's latent ire was mingled a feeling of profound gratitude.

"The Lord was on my side," he said presently.

"He was on your side, as you remark; and when the Lord is on a man's side a detective necessarily comes out second best."

"Really, Mr. Taggett," said Richard, smiling, "that is a handsome admission on your part."

"I mean, sir," replied the latter, slightly nettled, "that it sometimes seems as if the Lord Himself took charge of a case."

"Certainly you are entitled to the credit of going to the bottom of this one."

"I have skilfully and laboriously dam aged my reputation, Mr. Shackford."

Mr. Taggett said this with so heavy an air that Richard felt a stir of sympathy in his bosom.

"I am very sorry," he said good-naturedly.

"No, I beg of you!" exclaimed Mr. Taggett. "Any expression of friendliness from you would finish me! For nearly ten days I have looked upon you as a most cruel and consummate villain."

"I know," said Richard. "I must be quite a disappointment to you in a small way."

Mr. Taggett laughed in spite of himself. "I hope I don't take a morbid view of it," he said. A few steps further on he relaxed his gait. "We have taken the Hennessey girl into custody. Do you imagine she was concerned?"

"Have you questioned her?"

"Yes; she denies everything, except that she told Durgin you had quarrelled with the old gentleman."

"I think Mary Hennessey an honest girl. She 's little more than a child. I doubt if

she knew anything whatever. Durgin was much too shrewd to trust her, I fancy."

As the speakers struck into the principal street, through the lower and busier end of which they were obliged to pass, Mr. Taggett caused a sensation. The drivers of carts and the pedestrians on both sidewalks stopped and looked at him. The part he had played in Slocum's Yard was now an open secret, and had produced an excitement that was not confined to the *clientèle* of Snelling's bar-room. It was known that William Durgin had disappeared, and that the constables were searching for him. The air was thick with flying conjectures, but none of them precisely hit the mark. One rumour there was which seemed almost like a piece of poetical justice,—a whisper to the effect that Rowland Slocum was suspected of being in some way mixed up with the murder. The fact that Lawyer Perkins, with his green bag streaming in the wind, so to speak, had been seen darting into Mr. Slocum's private residence at two o'clock that afternoon was sufficient to give birth to the horrible legend.

"Mitchell's Alley," said Mr. Taggett, thrusting his arm through Richard's, and

hurrying on to escape the Stillwater gaze. "You went there directly from the station the night you got home."

"How did you know that?"

"I was told by a fellow-traveller of yours, —and a friend of mine."

"By Jove! Did it ever strike you, Mr. Taggett, that there is such a thing as being too clever?"

"It has occurred to me recently."

"Here is the house."

Two sallow-skinned children, with wide, wistful black eyes, who were sitting on the stone step, shyly crowded themselves together against the door jamb to make passage-way for Richard and Mr. Taggett. Then the two pairs of eyes veered round inquiringly, and followed the strangers up the broken staircase and saw one of them knock at the door which faced the landing.

Richard's hasty tap bringing no response, he lifted the latch without further ceremony and stepped into the chamber, Mr. Taggett a pace or two behind him. The figure of Father O'Meara slowly rising from a kneeling posture at the bedside was the first object that met their eyes; the second was Torrini's placid face, turned a little on the

pillow; the third was Brigida sitting at the foot of the bed, motionless, with her arms wrapped in her apron.

"He is dead," said the priest softly, advancing a step towards Richard. "You are too late. He wanted to see you, Mr. Shackford, but you were not to be found."

Richard sent a swift glance over the priest's shoulder. "He wanted to tell me what part he had played in my cousin's murder?" said Richard.

"God forbid! the wretched man had many a sin on his soul, but not that."

"Not that!"

"No; he had no hand in it,—no more than you or I. His fault was that he concealed his knowledge of the deed after it was done. He did not even suspect who committed the crime until two days afterwards, when William Durgin——"

Richard's eyes lighted up as they encountered Mr. Taggett's. The priest mistook the significance of the glances.

"No," said Father O'Meara, indicating Brigida with a quick motion of his hand, "the poor soul does not understand a word. But even if she did, I should have to speak of these matters here and now, while they

are fresh in my mind. I am obeying the solemn injunctions of the dead. Two days after the murder William Durgin came to Torrini and confessed the deed, offering to share with him a large sum in gold and notes if he would hide the money temporarily. Torrini agreed to do so. Later Durgin confided to him his plan of turning suspicion upon you, Mr. Shackford; indeed, of directly charging you with the murder, if the worst came to the worst. Torrini agreed to that also, because of some real or fancied injury at your hands. It seems that the implement which Durgin had employed in forcing the scullery door—the implement which he afterwards used so mercilessly—had been stolen from your workshop. The next morning Durgin put the tool back in its place, not knowing what other disposition to make of it, and it was then that the idea of shouldering the crime upon you entered his wicked heart. According to Torrini, Durgin did not intend to harm the old gentleman, but simply to rob him. The unfortunate man was awakened by the noise Durgin made in breaking open the safe, and rushed in to his doom. Having then no fear of interruption, Durgin

leisurely ransacked the house. How he came across the will, and destroyed it, with the idea that he was putting the estate out of your possession—this and other details I shall give you by and by."

Father O'Meara paused a moment. "After the accident at the mill and the conviction that he was not to recover, Torrini's conscience began to prick him. When he reflected on Miss Slocum's kindness to his family during the strike, when he now saw her saving his wife and children from absolute starvation, he was nearly ready to break the oath with which he had bound himself to William Durgin. Curiously enough, this man, so reckless in many things, held his pledged word sacred. Meanwhile his wavering condition became apparent to Durgin, who grew alarmed, and demanded the stolen property. Torrini refused to give it up; even his own bitter necessities had not tempted him to touch a penny of it. For the last three days he was in deadly terror lest Durgin should wrest the money from him by force. The poor woman, here, knew nothing of all this. It was her presence, however, which probably prevented Durgin from proceeding to

extremities with Torrini, who took care never to be left alone."

"I recollect," said Richard, "the night I watched with him he was constantly expecting some one. I supposed him wandering in his mind."

"He was expecting Durgin, though Torrini had every reason for believing that he had fled."

Mr. Taggett leaned forward, and asked, "When did he go,—and where?"

"He was too cunning to confide his plans to Torrini. Three nights ago Durgin came here and begged for a portion of the bank-notes; previously he had reclaimed the whole sum; he said the place was growing too warm for him, and that he had made up his mind to leave. But Torrini held on to the money, having resolved that it should be restored intact to you. He promised Durgin, however, to keep his flight secret for three or four days, at the end of which time Torrini meant to reveal all to me at confession. The night you sat with him, Mr. Shackford, he was near breaking his promise; your kindness was coals of fire on his head. His agony lest he should die or lose his senses before he could make known

the full depth of Durgin's villainy must have been something terrible. This is the substance of what the poor creature begged me to say to you with his dying regrets. The money is hidden somewhere under the mattress, I believe. A better man than Torrini would have spent some of it," added Father O'Meara, waving a sort of benediction in the direction of the bed.

Richard did not speak for a moment or two. The wretchedness and grimness of it all smote him to the heart. When he looked up Mr. Taggett was gone, and the priest was gently drawing the coverlet over Torrini's face.

Richard approached Father O'Meara and said: "When the money is found, please take charge of it, and see that every decent arrangement is made. I mean, spare nothing. I am a Protestant, but I believe in any man's prayers when they are not addressed to a heathen image. I promised Torrini to send his wife and children to Italy. This pitiful, miserable gold, which cost so dear and is worth so little, shall be made to do that much good, at least."

As Richard was speaking, a light footfall sounded on the staircase outside; then the

door, which stood ajar, was softly pushed open, and Margaret paused on the threshold. At the rustle of her dress Richard turned, and hastened towards her.

"It is all over," he said softly, laying his finger on his lip. Father O'Meara was again kneeling by the bedside.

"Let us go now," whispered Richard to Margaret. It seemed fit that they should leave the living and the dead to the murmured prayers and solemn ministration of the kindly priest. Such later services as Margaret could render to the bereaved woman were not to be wanting.

At the foot of the stairs Richard Shackford halted abruptly, and, oblivious of the two children who were softly chattering together in the doorway, caught Margaret's hand in his.

"Margaret, Torrini has made a confession that sets at rest all question of my cousin's death."

"Do you mean that he——" Margaret faltered, and left the sentence unfinished.

"No; it was William Durgin, God forgive him!"

"William Durgin!" The young girl's fingers closed nervously on Richard's as she

echoed the name, and she began trembling. "That—that is stranger yet!"

"I will tell you everything when we get home; this is no time or place; but one thing I must ask you now and here. When you sat with me last night were you aware that Mr. Taggett firmly believed it was I who had killed Lemuel Shackford?"

"Yes," said Margaret.

"That is all I care to know!" cried Richard; "that consoles me!" and the two pairs of great inquisitive eyes looking up from the stone step saw the signorina standing quite mute and colourless with the strange gentleman's arms around her. And the signorina was smiling!

XXVIII.

ONE June morning, precisely a year from that morning when the reader first saw the daylight breaking upon Stillwater, several workmen with ladders and hammers were putting up a freshly painted sign over the gate of the marble yard. Mr. Slocum and Richard stood on the opposite curb-stone, to which they had retired in order to take in the general effect. The new sign read,—Slocum & Shackford. Richard had protested against the displacement of its weather-stained predecessor; it seemed to him an act little short of vandalism; but Mr. Slocum was obstinate, and would have it done. He was secretly atoning for a deep injustice, into which Richard had been at once too sensitive and too wise closely to inquire. If Mr. Slocum had harboured a temporary doubt of him Richard did not care to know it; it was quite enough to

suspect the fact. His sufficient recompense was that Margaret had not doubted. They had now been married six months. The shadow of the tragedy in Welch's Court had long ceased to oppress them; it had vanished with the hasty departure of Mr. Taggett. Neither he nor William Durgin was ever seen again in the flesh in Stillwater; but they both still led, and will probably continue for years to lead, a sort of phantasmal, legendary life in Snelling's bar-room. Durgin in his flight had left no traces. From time to time, as the months rolled on, a misty rumour was blown to the town of his having been seen in some remote foreign city,—now in one place, and now in another, always on the point of departing, self-pursued, like the Wandering Jew; but nothing authentic. His after-fate was to be a sealed book to Stillwater.

"I really wish you had let the old sign stand," said Richard, as the carpenters removed the ladders. "The yard can never be anything but Slocum's Yard."

"It looks remarkably well up there," replied Mr. Slocum, shading his eyes critically with one hand. "You object to the change, but for my part I don't object to

changes. I trust I may live to see the day when even this sign will have to be altered to—Slocum, Shackford & Son. How would you like that?"

"I can't say," returned Richard laughing, as they passed into the yard together. "I should first have to talk it over—with the son!"

THE END.

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